

Practitioner Essay

Navigating Ethnic Hierarchies in Community-Academic Partnerships: A Case Study on Koreatown Community Politics

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Abstract

Based on the experiences of a Koreatown scholar, the executive director of a Koreatown nonprofit, and a longtime resident student, the article advocates for greater attention to the complex and dynamic power structures of ethnic enclaves in community-academic partnerships. We discuss the changing landscapes of Koreatown as the global nexus of the Pacific Rim economy, the city of Los Angeles's urban redevelopment plans, and growing diversity and inequality. Programs that aim to engage effectively with ethnic communities must reassess how knowledge is produced and conveyed, how we structure partnerships within stratified communities, and how to grow from issue-based partnerships to broader communities of interest.

Introduction

Inspired by the various movements for racial empowerment and anticolonialist liberation at the time, Asian American studies as part of ethnic studies first emerged as an established interdisciplinary field during the late 1960s when student-led movements across the nation demanded that colleges and universities incorporate the histories and perspectives of racially marginalized groups into Eurocentric curricula.

These movements were also fueled by greater political awareness of local-to-global issues outside the university—from poverty and gentrification in local Asian American neighborhoods to protests against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War (Umemoto, 1989). Although Asian American student organizations were proliferating across the nation, the movement achieved one of its greatest milestones when a student movement led by the Black Students Union (BSU) and the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strove to redefine the basic tenets of higher education in a five-month struggle at San Francisco State College in 1968 (Chung and Chang, 1998). Spearheading a series of nonviolent strikes and protest demonstrations, the TWLF and BSU demanded a specific set of reform programs to establish ethnic studies, open admissions, equal educational opportunity, and the right of self-representation among Third World people. Overall, the movement led to greater racial and coalitional consciousness among students but more importantly the establishment of the first School of Ethnic Studies in the nation (Omatsu, 1994; Umemoto, 1989).

Despite student efforts to better integrate the concerns of local neighborhoods, Wei (1993) states that sustained Asian American community-academic partnerships were not common during this period except in neighborhoods situated close to a campus. With a few exceptions, those that did establish some working relationship often focused on inviting community members to teach classes and serve on boards or sending students into the community as interns or researchers. These efforts, at best, neglected to create a symbiotic relationship between community and academia and, at worst, dissolved into resentment or conflict because of one-sided relationships.

Since the 1960s, Asian American studies has undergone a series of internal transformations, distancing itself from its initial political roots in radical student and community activism and moving toward greater professionalization of the discipline in the academy. Wei (1993) attributes this transition to the intellectual, cultural, and political disconnect between residents/activists and academics; post-1960s racial backlash against ethnic studies and communities; the privatization of universities that has recentered the discipline around individual professionalism; and the low visibility and credibility of community research in general in universities. Over time, Asian American studies has incorporated new perspectives from the arts and humanities and has begun to explore new and challenging theoretical questions regarding gender/intersectionality, queer theory, and race relations with other minority groups.

In addition, a number of major transformations taking hold around this time complicated the path toward ethnic solidarity and social change by widening the gap within racial and ethnic communities and creating formidable structural barriers to protest and mobility. The first was the elimination of blatantly discriminatory statutes and legalized segregation during the civil rights era, which not only opened the doors to mobility among middle-class Blacks and new immigrants but also heightened class inequality within racial minority groups, removing a common basis for racial solidarity. Second, the civil rights movement coincided with or preceded numerous other identity-based cultural and liberation movements from the feminist movement to black power to queer pride, which triggered heated dialogue about gender, sexuality, and nationalism that continues today. Third, the enactment of the 1965 Immigration Act opened the doors to new immigrants from Asia and the Americas, but the class, gender, and legal status of incoming groups have been much more wide-ranging than the last massive wave of immigration, which has set the backdrop for more internal heterogeneity within communities (Alba, Jiménez, and Marrow, 2014). Lastly, economic restructuring and integration into the growing global economy has created a formidable corporate, government, and economic structure that has privatized education and slashed budgets to the detriment of all branches of ethnic studies, made less clear the main source of oppression, and created barriers to traditional forms of ethnic solidarity and neighborhood protest.

Given all these factors, the article considers how community-academic partnerships may need to readapt to the evolving social and political climate of ethnic neighborhoods and enclave economies in an era of declining neighborhood institutions, increasing racial diversity and generational change, and the steady globalization of the political arena. We ask: How do we restructure community-academic partnerships in a way that acknowledges and navigates the intraethnic hierarchies within communities, while identifying new potential centers for political mobilization, especially in larger, racially diverse Asian American communities? We explore the case of one globalizing and vibrant ethnic enclave economy undergoing urban redevelopment, Koreatown in Los Angeles, to demonstrate how the changing demographics, institutional expansion, and political divisions within this community highlight areas that warrant greater attention as scholars engage with ethnic communities.

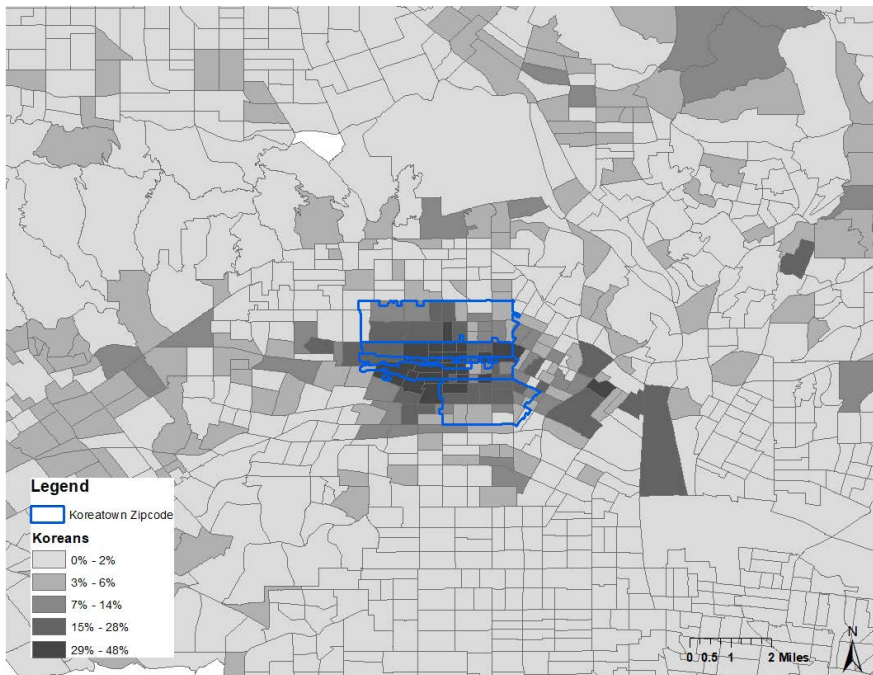
The article brings together the perspectives of Angie Chung's extensive community and organization research on Koreatown; Carolyn Choi's experiences as longtime resident, student, and community volunteer; and Johng Ho Song's insight as executive director of one of the leading Korean American organizations in Southern California, the Koreatown Youth and Community Center (KYCC). Funded by the Stanton Fellowship from the Durfee Foundation, the three co-authors also participated in a small-scale "community-academic partnership" in which we conducted research and discussed over a span of two years how to ensure fair representation in community meetings, identify and implement diverse priorities, and ultimately create a workable community plan for Koreatown's diverse stakeholders. The discussions helped inform some of our thoughts on the experience of community-academic partnerships, recent transformations within the Koreatown community, and the significance of internal hierarchies on partnership work. The co-authors also conducted interviews with staff from KYCC, the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), and other 1.5- and second-generation nonprofits and select Asian American studies instructors and professors who shared their insights based on their prior experience with these partnerships. Lastly, the article draws on secondary sources and some insights gathered on a National Science Foundation-funded research project on the immigrant politics of urban redevelopment.

We begin with a discussion on the changing demographics and socioeconomic profile of Koreatown as a global nexus of the Pacific Rim economy, a site for the city of Los Angeles's urban redevelopment plans, and a social space within the United States that reflects growing diversity and inequality. Highlighting recent struggles over urban redevelopment, we analyze how political leadership and collective activism are fragmented and organized around multiple underlying cleavages based on race and ethnicity, gender, generation, class, and unequal spatial relationships in the case of Koreatown. Recognizing the increasing political complexity of today's ethnic enclaves, we suggest that programs that aim to engage effectively and comprehensively with local ethnic communities must reassess how knowledge is produced and conveyed; how we view and structure partnerships within stratified ethnic communities; and why we need to build from issue-based partnerships that have the potential to impact broader communities of interest.

Diversity and Inequality in Los Angeles's "Koreatown"

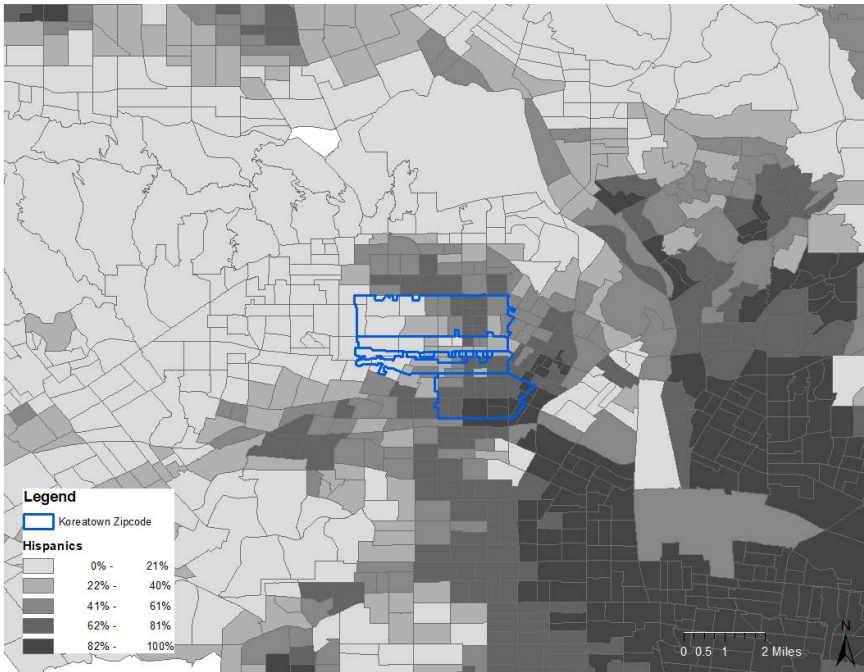
Unlike some of the earlier ethnic enclaves that formed during the heyday of twentieth-century immigration, Koreatown exhibits some unusual demographic traits that challenge our traditional thinking on ethnic communities and enclaves and call attention to the internal hierarchies and cross-border interactions that shape community dynamics. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, Koreatown is located along a key transportation corridor stretching from Santa Monica to downtown Los Angeles—a feature that has made it a strategic target for redevelopment by the city of Los Angeles, especially in the past couple of decades. Although scholars tend to refer to the Zip Code area outlined on the map as "Koreatown," the ethnic connotation of this city-designated name belies the immense racial and ethnic diversity of its residents and community stakeholders both within and along its borders.

Figure 1. Percentage of the Korean population based on Koreatown census tract and Zip Code boundaries



Source: The U.S. Decennial Census 2010. Standard Zip Codes for Koreatown include 90004, 90005, 90006, 90010, and 90020.

Figure 2. Percentage of Hispanic population based on Koreatown census tract and Zip Code boundaries



Source: The U.S. Decennial Census 2010. Standard Zip Codes for Koreatown include 90004, 90005, 90006, 90010, and 90020.

Once a new immigrant gateway of Los Angeles, Koreatown has become home to an established and ever-growing racially and ethnically diverse community, with two out of every three residents born overseas (Sanchez et al., 2012). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the concentration of Korean and Latino residents in Koreatown's census tracts: Koreans are one of the two largest ethnic groups within Koreatown at 22 percent, with the majority comprised of mostly poor, elderly, and transient Korean immigrants. However, Hispanic groups with origins from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and other Latin American countries constitute around 58 percent of the population. The remaining 20 percent includes a mix of whites, African Americans, non-Korean Asian and Pacific Islanders, and others. Asian minorities such as Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Bangladeshis have also grown considerably in the past few decades.

Indeed, the small neighborhood of Los Angeles Koreatown is situated at the dynamic intersection of various multiracial, multiclass, and multilingual residential and business districts. Within its borders, the residential population includes a highly clustered Asian-Latino space extending eastward into West Covina; an overlapping Asian-black section around the Koreatown-West Adams border; a white-Asian region on the northern periphery of Hollywood; and a small multiracial area consisting of black Americans, Latinos, and Asian Pacific Americans (Oliver and Grant, 1995). In terms of business districts, in addition to Korean businesses spread throughout, there is a Bangladeshi commercial district to the north of Wilshire district and an Oaxacan corridor in one of Koreatown's main thoroughfares on Olympic Boulevard. Abutting the enclave is a working-class Salvadoran and Guatemalan commercial square to the east in Westlake; Central Americans have therefore become an integral part of Koreatown's residential population. The diversity of community stakeholders has historically stirred heated conflicts over the enclave's name and territorial boundaries with the Bangladeshi, Latino, and African American communities, among others, which continues to this day (Chung 2007; Galarreta, 2018).

At the center of the largest Korean diasporic community outside of South Korea (Min, 2007), Koreatown has played a historical role in Los Angeles since the early nineteenth century as a first-stop neighborhood for Korean newcomers (Oh and Chung, 2013). Korean immigration grew after the passage of the landmark 1965 Nationality and Immigration Act with Koreatown establishing itself as the nexus of economic and political activity for the greater Korean community in Southern California. Central to this growth was the expansion of Koreatown's mid-scale industrial and manufacturing sector, and the subsequent formation of a large sex entertainment economy catering to immigrant businessmen (Choi, 2017), which later developed into one of the largest nightlife hubs in the region (Navarro, 2004, cited in Choi, 2017). The resulting economic growth facilitated the steady suburbanization of upwardly mobile Korean immigrants out of the urban center to nearby Orange County and the San Fernando Valley for safe neighborhoods and better education (Chung, 2007; Park and Kim, 2008).

Following the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, Koreatown entered a massive phase of redevelopment and economic change, transforming itself from an isolated, immigrant ethnic enclave into a "revived and upscale" commercial district, filled with premium shopping malls, luxury apartments, and multipurpose sports facilities (Oh and Chung

2013; Park, 2012). This transformation was partly fueled by increased South Korean capital investment in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis and new visa options offered by the U.S. government for capitalists wishing to make large investments. South Korean capital flows ensued over the next decade under Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's plans for downtown and mid-Wilshire revitalization. The mayor's international trade missions targeted East Asian transnational investment in Los Angeles, resulting in \$300 million worth of projects from South Korean investors (Watanabe, 2007). His efforts culminated in the building of Korean Air's InterContinental Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, the tallest building west of the Mississippi River (Vincent, 2017). By the late 2000s, Koreatown fully transformed from an ethnic island to a "transnational bubble" with the median home price shooting up to \$847,000—almost twice the price of an equivalent home in Los Angeles County (see Park, 2012).

Despite a vibrant entrepreneurial economy, Koreatown is relatively poor compared with other parts of the city, with nearly half of the population living below the federal poverty line (see Sanchez et al., 2012). A large share of the working poor includes undocumented and transient Korean and Latino immigrants employed in restaurant, grocery, and other service jobs. The other notable low-income group is comprised of nonworking senior citizens, mostly Korean, living in affordable senior housing compounds. The presence of these low-income groups is reflected in larger estimates for median household income in Koreatown, which was \$33,448 in 2010 compared to that of the city \$49,138 (Oh and Chung, 2013).

Economic restructuring and the 2008/2009 global recession had uneven, often polarizing (Kim, 2015) consequences for its residents—the majority of whom are part of the nonpropertied, renter population. Koreatown's residents are also disproportionately employed in low-wage occupations with the largest share concentrated in the restaurant, grocery, and other service sectors and earning less than \$35,000 a year (Sanchez et al., 2012). The working poor has also been on the rise with the percent of working poor increasing from 11 to 17 percent, nearly triple that of Los Angeles County (ibid.). The lack of "decent" jobs is evident in the community's limited access to healthcare with nearly four in every five residents, reporting no health insurance coverage (Watanabe, 2007).

Complicating Political Opportunity Structures

The case of Koreatown clearly demonstrates how the changing social and demographic realities of larger, globalizing ethnic enclaves are requiring a more sophisticated approach to community-academic partnerships—one that pays even greater attention to the nuances, relationships, and divisions that undergird ethnic politics. From Chinatown in New York (Kwong, 1996) to Little Havana in Miami (Portes and Stepick, 1993), larger ethnic enclave economies are becoming central players both in the urban redevelopment plans of the larger metropolis; spaces for production in the global economy; and vibrant centers for entertainment and consumption culture (Lin, 1998). In all cases, scholars are discovering that the greater the resources, the greater the capacity of ethnic organizational structures to cater to an internally diverse population leading to increased potential for both conflict and cooperation (Chung 2007). Yet despite Koreatown's rapid growth, the combination of income inequality, residential instability, and the demographically marginal position of Koreatown within the city of Los Angeles has created significant cultural and structural barriers for leaders seeking to advocate ethnic or residential interests within the larger municipal political structure.

Koreatown's uneven social landscape sets the backdrop for a complicated political power structure organized around different stakeholders, interest groups, and internal hierarchies. Studies on Chinatown, Koreatown, and other enclaves have pointed out the need to explore explanations beyond the scholarly preoccupation with "ethnic solidarity" and examine intraethnic hierarchies built on the dominance of self-appointed community spokespersons, otherwise known as the "ethnic elite" as well as the potential for cross-racial collaboration with Blacks and Latinos (Chung 2007; Kwong, 1996). Chung (2007) discusses how in the case of Koreatown, the ethnic elite was originally comprised of immigrant business owners, church leaders, and Seoul-backed Korean organizations whose agenda centered on pro-Seoul, anti-Communist, and pro-U.S. ideologies carried over from the homeland. A series of events including the 1992 Los Angeles Riots prompted conflict and a generational shift in leadership to incorporate 1.5- and second-generation organizations.

Internal divisions were particularly marked during Koreatown's redistricting phase, which sought to redraw existing district lines for the Korean immigrant population so their influence would not be di-

luted over the four council districts that currently divide Koreatown. Some of the older ethnic elite wanted to keep the small Korean voting population concentrated around the two main districts (Council District 10 and Council District 13) to preserve their ties with incumbent councilmembers, whose campaigns many had funded. The younger generation leaders with fewer political ties and financial capital wanted to redraw the lines into one district so that the Korean community could elect a Korean American council member and address the needs of minority voices in Koreatown. In 2015, a Korean American councilmember, David Ryu, was eventually elected but in a district where Koreans comprised only a small minority of residents.

Because of continued dependency on the resources and networks of immigrant leaders, the political initiatives of 1.5- and second-generation organizations have evolved both in accommodation and in conflict with the old ethnic elite—the outcome of which has shaped the ways these organizations relate to one another based on new political roles and hierarchical relationships. Political issues such as Proposition 187, Korean reunification, voter registration drives, and the “comfort women” issue have helped to foster provisional alliances between the ethnic elite and 1.5- and second-generation leadership not commonly known to work together in the past (Chung, 2007). Despite the significance of interorganizational alliances, immigrant and second-generation leadership have been better known to collaborate with one another on a more informal level because such flexible relationships are easier to sustain in the face of cultural and political differences. Moreover, while intergenerational relationships are an integral feature of ethnic politics, any voyage into the Koreatown community must be constantly mindful of the internal heterogeneity and divided political loyalties among 1.5- and second-generation organizations, which must compete over scarce resources, conflicting political viewpoints, and unequal status within the ethnic structures of Koreatown.

Within this context, the fundamental question students, scholars, and teachers must ask themselves is who are the new players and stakeholders involved in the booming ethnic enclave economies of urban redevelopment and globalization today? Where do we look to study newly emerging centers of grassroots political activity and new modes of collective action and mediums of political discourse (e.g., social media)? How do we incorporate an analysis of cross-racial and intersectional partnerships into our intellectual conceptualization of ethnic communities? How do we structure the partnerships and curricula in a

way that enables us to unravel the political complexity of conflict and cooperation in internally stratified ethnic communities?

When envisioning community-academic partnerships, we must also pay attention to how the changing social and spatial landscape has once more shifted and expanded the political center, creating new interest groups, ethnic hierarchies, and political spaces that complicate our notion of “community.” In the decades following the rebuilding of postriot Koreatown, we are witnessing several major shifts among both the first- and second-generation leadership as the community achieves political maturity. For one, traditional second-generation organizations like KIWA that once had to mobilize aggressively on the fringes of ethnic politics have now become more politically established and, to some degree, professionalized in their approach to labor issues even on the state level (e.g., the movement for a \$15 minimum wage in Los Angeles). Steve Kang, director of external affairs at KYCC, points out that the changing political climate became apparent in the recent demonstrations by Korean Americans against the city’s decision to build a homeless shelter in Koreatown. Second-generation organizations such as KIWA and Korean American Coalition (KAC) teamed up with first-generation organizations like the Korean American Federation as well as high school parent associations to contest local officials’ decision to build a homeless shelter near a high school in Koreatown without direct community input. The Korean Resource Center (KRC), a progressive 1.5- and second-generation organization, was one of the few organizations in Koreatown to come out in support of the homeless shelter, which they viewed as a chance to aid and represent the most vulnerable and disenfranchised members of the Koreatown community. What was most interesting about this conflict is that, first, it revealed underlying political divisions even among progressive second-generation organizations and, second, the issue mobilized community members like Jake Jeong, a lawyer, who had never been involved in organizations, much less community politics. Although it is still early to tell, these developments indicate a possible change in Koreatown’s political scene that is often missed in simplistic portrayals of “intergenerational conflict.”

Another important trend is a shift in the immigrant elite, from traditional immigrant old-timers involved in traditional organizations like the Korean American Federation to more politically savvy and wealthy 1.5-generation individuals, who have amassed small fortunes and real estate investments and worked largely behind the scenes of local growth politics. Two major waves of immigration are worth not-

ing here: the earlier generation of non-English-speaking small business owners in the 1970s, who mobilized mostly personal/family resources to establish successful businesses that eventually branched into chain stores or other larger-scale enterprises (Oh, Chung, and Choi, n.d.). According to one interviewee, these entrepreneurs may have been successful in building small businesses but encountered numerous obstacles when they expanded into large-scale operations, which required better English proficiency, political savvy, and professional management skills. The newer wave of Korean immigrant and 1.5-generation elite are more adept at mobilizing both local and transnational capital using their investment skills, English proficiency, and political networks to expand their investment and real estate holdings beyond the boundaries of Koreatown.

In addition to the traditional immigrant elite, there is a smaller but growing subset of young American-born Korean entrepreneurs, who are catering to the increasingly diverse clientele frequenting Koreatown's restaurant, karaoke, coffee shop, and bar/club industries. Inspired by the traditional night markets of Asia, Ben Kang helped start a two-day food festival, the KTown Night Market, not only to publicize Korean restaurants and food enterprises but also to further promote Koreatown's status as a local pop culture epicenter. Although most of these young entrepreneurs have not yet involved themselves in the politics of redevelopment, it is worth noting visionaries like Roy Choi, the celebrity chef whose vision for the Korean food truck revolution evolved into a larger "master plan" for bringing gourmet food and culture into diverse but race and class-stratified urban neighborhoods like Koreatown and South Central. His approach involves making high-end culture and trendy institutions like his café at the luxury Line Hotel in Koreatown more publicly accessible and highlighting features of modern and traditional Korean culture as a bridging space for the angst of racism and intergenerational conflict (Kang, 2014).

The recent struggles over urban redevelopment projects provide us with some insight on how politics has played out in different ways with the entrance of new Korean immigrant capitalists. Koreatown has been at the center of Los Angeles's redevelopment activity since the aftermath of the riots. While as a "home-grown affair" (DeVerteuil, Yun, and Choi, 2017), Korean immigrant business owners were the first ones to reinvest in the depressed real estate in Koreatown that plummeted after the riots. Increased Asian transnational investment in Los Angeles post-1997 International Monetary Fund bailout combined with the

city's expansion of the metropolitan public transportation system has triggered increased residential redevelopment projects in Koreatown in the form of mixed-use developments and office-to-residential conversion projects.

A number of key battles have taken place over redevelopment at the heart of Koreatown, involving new immigrant and 1.5-generation developers, investors, and architects on one side and, on the other side, 1.5- and second-generation grassroots activists and political leaders. One such heated redevelopment struggle erupted over Mayor Garcetti's approval of large-scale developer Mike Hakim's 27-story high-density mixed-use tower on the corner Catalina and 8th street. Despite great concerns about the destruction of rent-controlled housing and traffic congestion for nearby schools, the mayor made a rare exception to overrule the Planning Commission's decision in exchange for a \$1 million donation to the mayor's affordable housing trust fund and \$250,000 to a fund for community projects in Council District 9. In response, a gathering of Korean and non-Korean local neighborhood association representatives, housing and community activists, and immigrant rights groups rallied together and supported the nonprofit Fix the City lawsuit against the city arguing that "the [City Council] is not above the law (Hamilton, 2016)." They recently won a temporary suspension on the development by a judge until an environmental impact report could be made (Zahniser, 2018).

These isolated movements notwithstanding, neighborhood associations, once considered the nesting ground for slow-growth movements especially in the suburbs of Los Angeles, have become politically fragmented as a result of the changing racial and class makeup of residents, decreasing political influence in a globalizing progrowth arena (Molotch, 1999), and changes in work and family structure that have decreased local involvement in organizations to a small and dying minority (Putnam, 2000). In the city of Los Angeles, neighborhood councils have the potential to exert some influence on redevelopment projects through mechanisms, such as community impact statements. Houston and Ong (2012) find that neighborhood councils with a higher percentage of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander residents (including the Wilshire District–Koreatown Neighborhood Council) do tend to have higher participation rates among stakeholders. However, immigrant redevelopment research by Chung, Oh, and Lin (see note 2) also suggests that the position of the council on growth and developments can vary widely depending on which community stakeholders—

progrowth entrepreneurs or local residents, Koreans or non-Koreans, immigrants or the American born—are elected during a specific cycle. Of course, Asian immigrants in general are not known to get involved in traditional place-based associations and electoral parties in the United States. Because of historical exclusion and discrimination, cultural and linguistic barriers, and political corruption back home, politically disempowered minority and immigrant communities are more likely to create spaces for social solidarity and springboards for political leadership vis-à-vis community-based organizations and cultural institutions. Chung (2007) explains how Korean Americans have maintained some semblance of political solidarity by consolidating their organizational infrastructure despite their limited electoral impact. Almost all major politically active organizations of the ethnic community are thus located in the enclave of Koreatown. Indeed, in one of our research projects, we discovered how vital nonprofit and other community-based organizations are becoming to the political vitality, local empowerment, and collective mobilization of Koreatown residents around growth and redevelopment issues—in some cases, even across racial/ethnic and class boundaries.

Implications for Community-Academic Partnerships

While the current scholarship has focused on individual cases of activism and coalition building in ethnic enclaves, our exploration of Koreatown underscores the need to explore more fully the potential for building community-academic partnerships that address political needs and gaps within the community. This article focuses on how the vision and structure of community-academic partnerships can approach, learn from, and help navigate the internal rifts and power struggles of ethnic and racial groups. These partnerships must incorporate this recognition into the structuring of the partnerships and learning process. For the purposes of the article, we do emphasize implications on more politically oriented partnerships, but also include some discussion on how it may play out in service work.

Restructuring Knowledge Hierarchies

Our many years of observing and engaging in the spaces between academia and community politics have taught the authors of this article new ways of conceiving knowledge production and dissemination. The traditional approach to science in academia is dominated by a privileged Eurocentric male approach that prioritizes the val-

ues of objectivity, logic, task-orientation, and instrumentalism, while marginalizing other working-class, feminist, and cultural perspectives that bring attention to the subjective, empathetic, process-oriented, and inclusive sides of social life. In community-academic partnerships, one of the major risks of limiting our students' perspectives and experiences to rational objectivity, tasks, and outcomes is that it assumes the intellectual superiority of academia from the communities they study. In so doing, it also ironically validates the so-called inferiority of Asian American studies to more "scientific disciplines" by glorifying rigid scientific methods and the concept of the "detached/neutral scientist." Scholars interested in building effective community-academic partnerships must begin by rethinking how we define, produce, and pass on knowledge in ways that equalize our hegemonic relationships with different community participants.

In finding ways for students to immerse themselves and challenge the very processes that shape how these hierarchies are formed, preserved, and contested, students must be taught to exercise self-reflexivity as they navigate their field roles and learn the strategies for communicating across divisions and hierarchies as part of this training. May Lin incorporates a nonhierarchical, holistic approach to teaching her Asian American education class, which allows students to be part of the knowledge-making process not only in the classroom but also by creating a space for students to share their work experiences using their own activities in first-generation, intergroup, and racial/ethnic-specific organizations on campus. Thus, rather than limiting their impact to classroom learning, this pedagogical method enables students to cultivate broader modes of collective learning and student organizing in higher education. This approach also highlights and addresses another logistical challenge for community-engagement projects, which is how to commute to these field sites, especially in cities where public transportation is limited and burdensome especially for working students without cars.

Omatsu (n.d.) advocates for not only a broadened understanding of Asian American studies but also a shift away from the westernized approach to education and learning based on elite intellectualism toward one that treats learning and teaching as a reciprocal, holistic, and reflexive process of engagement between academia and the grassroots community. Drawing on the teachings of the 1960s Freedom Schools, he envisions educators to also include other stakeholders of the community outside the college setting, including "prison inmates, high

school drop-outs, senior citizens, immigrant workers, tenants in inner-city housing projects, housewives, and small business people." The UCLA Asian America Studies Department has historically sought to incorporate this kind of thinking in its program's pedagogy by offering service-learning courses, which introduce students to community organizing and community-based organizations. According to instructor and KIWA organizer Sophia Cheng, after giving students an overview of organizing and approaches to social change, students are organized into service-learning teams and connected with Asian American and Pacific Islander-serving community-based organizations throughout Los Angeles.

Beyond direct participation in community-based organizations, Omatsu has also pointed out new forums and methods of learning, such as town halls, "community lectures and forums,...worker cooperatives, bookstores, newspaper, community drop-in centers, tenants unions, and arts collectives" (2003: 14) as well as "non-traditional schools such as participation in grassroots community struggles for justice, international solidarity movements, and workers' struggles for rights, respect, and dignity" (n.d.). Hyeyoung Kwon has sought to incorporate multiple community centers of learning in her Korean American experience class during her time at Cal State Northridge. As a community ethnography project, students conduct projects not only at community organizations but also within Korean churches, karaoke rooms, and other hangout sites providing different perspectives on community life and the diverse contexts in which relationships, organizations, or social phenomena emerge.

Sometimes, this means going beyond the view of ethnic enclaves as spaces for cultural consumption or entertainment or exoticism toward communities as political entities within which students can act as agents of change. Omatsu (2003) makes this crucial point when he advocates for the promotion of "political tours" where students "review what they had learned in previous classes about specific neighborhoods, such as information relating to socioeconomic factors, political issues, and interethnic relations" (19). As part of a semester-long project for Jack Tchen's Asian American studies course on Chinatown at New York University, Tchen assigns students to different site projects around extended Chinatown in Manhattan, where they are asked to "collaboratively deconstruct received knowledges and facilitate the building of more truthful counter-knowledges" and transform this knowledge into an online map or website that can help document and aid in the

post-9/11 rebuilding of Chinatown (Tchen, 2014).

While a carefully designed research study of a field site may uncover some of the external characteristics of ethnic communities, it is through reflective journals, poetry/literature/art, public editorials, community fairs, and political campaigns/protests that we truly understand the social intricacies of internal ethnic power structures, exercise thoughtful reflexivity on our privileged positionality within the community, engage emotionally with the communities we study, and become true advocates of social change. In partnership with other Asian American and Latinx organizations like Viet Rise and Resilience Orange County, KRC's Leaders of the New School (LNS) program in Orange County has recognized the significance of merging formal education with community engagement by offering hands-on organizing and political education, mobilizing local students in direct actions, and participating in strategic planning with college Development, Relief, Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) centers. Yet the main strength of this program lies in how LNS students maintain ownership over the nature and direction of the social issue campaigns they work on, drawing upon their own communities and lived experiences for inspiration. This year, volunteers put enough pressure through direct action on the city councils of conservative-leaning cities of Westminster, Fullerton, and Brea to oppose efforts by the Justice Department to tear down the state's sanctuary state law protecting local immigrants against Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Even in the case of service work, it is critical that instructors prepare students to rethink and reorient themselves in respect to the type of work they may need to do and the clientele they may be expected to serve from a holistic perspective. For example, one director in charge of social services pointed out that oftentimes when bright students from good universities intern, they have a narrow expectation of what their work should entail—mostly focused on mental health diagnosis, treatment plans, and direct intervention, as opposed to mundane tasks such as clientele outreach, community engagement events, and preventative health and exercise programs. While they may perceive that these latter responsibilities do less to engage their educational training, these activities do expose interns to a more holistic and humanized approach to community engagement that is equally critical to their service-learning experience.

Complicating and Broadening the Community Field

In designing community-academic partnerships, students should not only master the skills they need to build community but also grasp the complexities of power in the political and ideological landscape. For one, scholars, educators, and other pundits tend to treat ethnic communities as decontextualized, isolated islands cut off from the rest of the world in terms of their overall social, political, and economic development. Despite that Koreatown has evolved into an institutional space for not only immigrant entrepreneurs but also new coethnic, panethnic, cross-racial, and transnational alliances that are critical to its political development, there is also a need to reflect on how these ethnic communities may engage with broader concentric or concurrent circles of association beyond ethnicity (e.g., panethnicity, issue-based interracial coalitions, or labor) in a way that is critical to their internal political development.

Chung (2007) points out how role modeling and partnering with other Asian American organizations and progressive groups with a long history of organizing provided them with an alternative space from the more traditional Korean forums. Even prior to the 1992 Los Angeles Riots, both KYCC and KIWA recognized the significance of broadening their reach given the shifting demographics of Koreatown. Both organizations eventually changed their names from “Korean” to “Koreatown” to reflect this changing reality. Song states that KYCC has worked with various Latinx nonprofits and social service agencies such as Para Los Niños and El Centro Del Pueblo on securing grants to help serve the Latino majority community.

However, even beyond the issue of representation, these Koreatown organizations and coalitions teach us that scholars cannot achieve a comprehensive and accurate understanding of Asian American issues without understanding how they are embedded within the broader context of race relations. The Korean American community first gained national visibility during the Black boycott of Korean-owned businesses in the late 1980s/early 1990s and then the 1992 Los Angeles Riots because of their role as “middleman minority” entrepreneurs between corporate suppliers and their poor minority patrons (Bonacich, 1973). The source of tensions and unequal and uneven response of Korean Americans throughout these events make sense only by analyzing their structural location between minority patrons and corporations; by comparing the historical contexts of both Korean and African American oppression; by considering the relationships and interactions vis-à-vis “invisible” minorities, such as their Latino workers; and by observing the day-to-

day routines of all groups. We can apply the same logic to other broader Asian American issues, such as the model minority myth and affirmative action, which make sense only if we understand how they were created as a counternarrative to racism against Blacks in America.

In addition to looking outward, we must also look inward as the conflicts over Korean representation have highlighted. In particular, many instructors overlook the crucial process through which we identify the many different stakeholders of a given ethnic community as well as the players who mediate the power relations among them. This may be because most are already consumed with the complicated task of building on preexisting relationships and activities or do not recognize how much these internal hierarchies reveal about both our own intellectual presumptions and the communities students are asked to explore. Community stakeholders do not just include prominent elite leaders of large organizations and corporations often designated to “speak” on behalf of the ethnic community (e.g., public officials, big business owners, prominent church leaders, young professionals, and executive directors of large nonprofit organizations) (Omatsu, n.d.). Nor are these hierarchies static. The positionality of communities and the various stakeholders within them may also shift across time, space, and situations. KYCC, for example, raised their status after the 1992 Los Angeles Riots because of their prior contracts with government agencies that gave them name recognition and fortunate positionality within racially diverse populations, as well as opening access to grants when the political priorities of institutions shifted after 1992.

While understanding community leadership is important, it is also critical that we identify ways for students to engage in the political processes that form, preserve, and contest the racial and ethnic hierarchies of a community. Community-academic partnerships should be structured in a way that allows students to immerse themselves in the processes through which elitist interests dominate or different stakeholders communicate across divisions. This means having them proactively partake in the processes of designating leaders, identify key “community” issues, mediate different interests, implement prioritized projects, and evaluate the impact of programs on various communities of interest.

Another often-overlooked aspect of this stratified political landscape is the different capacity of small and large organizations to accommodate the time and structure required for community-academic partnerships. In an interview with one of the early advocates of com-

community-academic partnerships, Glenn Omatsu points out that “community projects are easier to set up with larger organizations that already have experience working with student interns. Groups that need the most help are the ones that aren’t as savvy with working with student projects. These organizations don’t have time to build leadership skills among students so the instructor may have to build that into the program (2018).” To do this, program organizers and instructors can initiate small manageable projects led by students and can be accomplished within a semester with little organizational oversight or resources. Larger classes might require students work in teams or committees on parts of a community project.

From Common Issues to Community Impact

While identifying the multiple sources and manifestations of oppression may be part of our task as researchers and teachers, the problem with failing to think beyond inequality and conflict is that it neglects how minority actors within the community can also act as critical agents of change and cooperation at these intersections and reinforces our role as uninvolved outside observers. Getting stuck on a microlevel view of minority competition over a shrinking piece of the pie leaves little room for identifying paths to cooperative resistance and social change.

The challenge that faces not only most academics but also community stakeholders is how to create bridges and common interests across the various racial, class, and gender hierarchies that have widened in the post-civil rights era and in a way that does not marginalize subgroups. For one, in many communities, cultural brokers and community mediators are particularly important agents who can help strike that balance in coalitions. For example, in Koreatown, the increasing size and complexity of the ethnic political structure has prompted the rise of 1.5-generation “cultural brokers”—or mediators educated in both Korea and the United States, who may support progrowth agendas while resisting efforts that may threaten the cultural heritage and the preservation of ethnic community landmarks or small immigrant businesses.

Another point we advocate is for a shift in our approach to community-academic partnerships from an “identity politics” focused on undifferentiated racial and ethnic unity to a “multiple identity politics” that identifies the intersections that bring together multiple interest groups around specific issues (Chung and Chang 1998). During our Ko-

reatown community plan project, we learned from the San Jose master plan about creating a priority list and “resource boxing” (or allocating resources for specific priorities) to make it easier to meet concrete community goals. This explains why, for KYCC’s Koreatown community plan, the focus on green space was a strategic decision. Recognizing the different generational, immigrant, business, and residential interests that divide, Song argues that everyone can agree that Koreatown is in dire need of green spaces—a need that has become even more critical in light of the rapid redevelopment of urban spaces. In Song’s view, tackling an issue like green space can be a necessary first step in building crucial relationships across the different groups while also delivering a much-needed resource across different communities of interest. From the San Jose master plan, we learned about the price paid in having to tackle too many issues with limited resources.

Art and music can be another creative forum for bringing together people across different identity groups, but also different institutions within the ethnic community around a creative, bonding experience. KIWA and KRC have historically utilized Korean traditional music such as “pungmeul” as a tool for raising political consciousness. Choi’s work with the Los Angeles Korean Traditional Cultural Music and Arts Competition has also helped to inspire collective action and solidarity, bringing together people from colleges, progressive nonprofits, religious groups, and the conservative Korean press to promote the Korean cultural arts in the diaspora.

While the process of coming together as a “community” might begin with, and even build on, only fleeting and flexible alliances around specific projects and actions, the actual benefits of said projects must be organized in a way that can benefit a larger community—whether it be through direct benefits stemming from the project or by community educators spreading that knowledge to others. For instance, despite opposition from Korean business owners, cultural brokers like Song pushed for the construction of the Robert F. Kennedy Community Schools, arguing that the recreational field could be utilized by the larger Koreatown community, which lacks green spaces. After the school’s completion, the recreational field has been increasingly closed off to the public due to maintenance costs, but Song continues to advocate for ways to broaden the general community impact of the school’s open fields.

The Future of Community-Academic Partnerships

Based on the combined scholarship and community-based expe-

riences of the authors, this article analyzes the changing context of today's larger ethnic enclave economies at the intersections of globalization, diversity, and urban redevelopment and how it has shaped the underlying political dynamics and potential for collective empowerment among large ethnic communities, such as Koreatown in Los Angeles. The influx of mainstream funds/relationships in the aftermath of the riots, homegrown immigrant investment, and Koreatown's economic and cultural positioning within Los Angeles's redevelopment plans and the global economy have recentered the game around issues of urban growth and redevelopment, involving new capitalist players among the 1.5 generation and a nascent but growing movement among progressive community activists from various backgrounds. The question is how students and scholars can situate themselves within these continuously evolving political spaces.

We argue that returning to the original political and community-based roots of Asian American studies requires a more nuanced approach that pays attention to the multiple racial, class, and gender hierarchies that shape contemporary ethnic politics in terms of the way we create community-academic partnerships, navigate the leadership and political terrains, and engage students in "building community." First, aligning with ethnographers, feminists and feminists of color, and community scholars, we advocate for approaching knowledge production as a "two-way process" in which the lines that divide the givers and receivers of knowledge (e.g., instructor/student and researcher/participant) are blurred and the knowledge claims of different groups are incorporated into the learning process. This means broadening our notion of "community," creating new educational forums beyond the classroom, and finding ways students can engage in the community-building process from start to finish.

Second, we advocate for approaching enclaves not as isolated islands from a voyeuristic lens but one that is embedded within multiple and interdependent levels of power from internal ethnic hierarchies to local race relations to regional city economies to national frameworks of race and economy and, finally, to global restructuring. Before students even enter the field, it is essential that they learn how ethnic communities are situated within these concentric circles of power, identify the many different stakeholders and interest groups that make up these communities, and discover how they play off of or relate to one another. We also have to recognize that the partnerships we develop with marginalized versus established organizations may vary because of their

different access to resources and time and then devise ways to adapt to these structures.

And lastly, we have to create a structure in which students do not simply extract from the communities they are studying in the interests of personal academic ambitions but also find ways that they can give back to the community based on what we learned. Such projects may be separated from the learning process (e.g., organizing a community fair based on individual research) or integrate both by centering on specific projects or issues that can benefit a larger community (e.g., assisting with activist training or nurturing green spaces).

While this article focuses on examining structures of inequality within the communities, we should note that the forging of effective partnerships also requires a deeper understanding of how the individualization, professionalization, and privatization of academic institutions have the potential to limit or expand the ability of these partnerships to engage fully with ethnic communities. For example, universities have diverted their resources away from the humanities and social sciences toward more lucrative natural sciences, which limits our ability to analyze and portray ethnic communities through creative, cultural, and humanistic expression. Coupled with the shifting priorities of universities, this disciplinary ranking privilege the natural sciences at the expense of social sciences, humanities, and interdisciplinary studies, including Asian American studies.

This restructuring has also had the effect of narrowing the field of Asian American studies by prioritizing individual over collective achievement; the maximization of profit through larger classes, increased student tuition, and external grants; and the hardening of borders between the hard/soft sciences and humanities, intellectual elitism and nonacademic learning, and professional education and political activism. The larger university structure can expand or curb our ability to forge new modes of learning by designating what missions and values are prioritized; what kind of projects or research/teaching/service are rewarded; how large classes are; what students they can attract and financial burdens they juggle; what resources are allocated to community engagement; and what type of relationship the university nurtures with the surrounding community, if any.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Glenn Omatsu, Edward J. W. Park, Russell Leong, Hyeyoung Kwon, May Lin, Jung Woo Kim, Jonathan Paik, Sophia Cheng, and Jack

Tchen. Special thanks to Sookhee Oh who created the demographic profile and maps for this article and provided invaluable feedback on earlier versions of the manuscript.

Notes

- ¹ Some of the material for this article is based upon a research study conducted by Angie Y. Chung (Principal Investigator), Jan Lin (co-PI), and Sookhee Oh (co-PI) and supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1457954. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.
- ² It is worth noting that some of these changes are an extension of East Asian investment patterns in downtown Los Angeles and Little Tokyo since the 1980s.
- ³ A community impact statement is essentially the official statement or position of the neighborhood council on issues that are being considered by the city council or commission.
- ⁴ Phone interview with Glenn Omatsu on March 6, 2018.

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