

# 1 Introduction

IN 1857, ALLA LEE, a twenty-four-year-old native of Ningbo, China, seeking a better life, came to St. Louis, where he opened a small shop on North Tenth Street selling tea and coffee. As the first Chinese in St. Louis—and probably the only one for some time—he mingled mainly with immigrants from Northern Ireland; in fact, he eventually married an Irish woman.<sup>1</sup> Within a decade he had been joined by several hundred of his countrymen from San Francisco and New York, who came seeking work in the mines and factories in and around St. Louis. Most of them lived in boarding houses along or near a small street called Hop Alley. In time, Chinese hand laundries, dry goods stores, herb dispensaries, restaurants, and clan association headquarters sprang up in that neighborhood. In St. Louis, Hop Alley became synonymous with Chinatown.

Local records indicate that Chinese businesses—especially hand laundries—attracted a wide clientele. As a consequence the businesses run by Chinese immigrants contributed disproportionately to the city's economy. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Chinese provided 60 percent of the laundry services for the city, even though they comprised less than 0.1 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> St. Louisans willingly patronized these businesses but did not welcome the Chinese themselves, regarding them as “peculiar” creatures. Hop Alley was perceived as an exotic part of town and as a hotbed of criminal activities such as murder, tong wars, and the opium trade (manufacturing, smuggling, and smoking). Despite frequent police raids and the biases of many white St. Louisans, Hop Alley showed remarkable resilience and energy until 1966, when bulldozers of urban renewal leveled the area to make a parking lot for Busch Stadium.

The old Chinese settlement around Hop Alley disappeared. However, by then a new, suburban Chinese American community was quietly yet rapidly emerging. Over the next few decades

the city's ethnographic distribution changed considerably; more and more Chinese were residing in St. Louis County—specifically, in the suburban municipalities to the south and west of the city. The U.S. censuses indicate that in the St. Louis area, the number of suburban Chinese Americans increased from 106 (30 percent of the total Chinese in the St. Louis area) in 1960, to 461 (80 percent of the total) in 1970, to 1,894 (78 percent of the total) in 1980, to 3,873 (83 percent of the total) in 1990.<sup>3</sup> Since 1990 the Chinese population of Greater St. Louis has been increasing rapidly—to 9,120 according to the U.S. census of 2000.<sup>4</sup> Various unofficial estimates, however, give the figure as between 15,000 and 20,000, with the great majority scattered through suburban communities and constituting 1 percent of the total suburban population of Metropolitan St. Louis.<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese population of St. Louis has grown substantially. There is no easily discernable commercial or residential Chinese district; even so, evidence of a Chinese American presence is visible enough. A Chinese American engineering consulting firm, William Tao & Associates, has helped design more than half the city's buildings and structures. Two weekly Chinese-language newspapers serve the community. Three Chinese-language schools offer classes in Chinese language, arts, and culture. A dozen Chinese religious institutions are heavily attended. More than forty community organizations sponsor—independently or jointly—a wide variety of community activities ranging from cultural gatherings to the annual Chinese Culture Days. The latter are held in the Missouri Botanical Gardens and attract more than ten thousand visitors each year. More than three hundred Chinese restaurants cater to St. Louisans, who clearly enjoy the ethnic cuisine.

How are we to understand this phenomenon of a not quite visible yet highly active and productive Chinese American community? How did that community evolve, and how is it unique? After I settled in Kirksville, Missouri, in 1991 to teach at Truman State University, I found myself intrigued by these questions whenever I visited St. Louis for business or pleasure. Longing for answers, I conducted a series of oral history projects among Midwestern Chinese Americans, in both metropolitan areas and small towns. I spent my sabbatical year 1998–99 in St. Louis researching the city's Chinese American community. For more than a decade, I have had ample opportunity to observe and participate in this community, to interact with its members in many activities, and

to research its history. My work has taken me to libraries and archives, to public and private agencies, to Chinese burial grounds, to Chinese restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, and florists, and to Chinese law firms and acupuncture clinics, as well as into Chinese homes. I hope this book will show the process by which St. Louis's Chinatown gave way to a suburb-based Chinese American community. To explain this transformation, I propose a "cultural community" model that will define St. Louis's experience since the 1960s and place it in the context of other multiethnic and multicultural American communities.

### THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN ST. LOUIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION THEORIES

Among American academics, interest in migration and assimilation is nearly as old as the country itself. The literature on this topic is vast. Scholars have developed countless theories to explain how these processes have shaped the American character and how that character can account for the experience of various groups in their efforts to become part of American society.

As urbanization and immigration came to dominate American life, academics expanded their purview to include immigration and cultural assimilation. Robert E. Park, the University of Chicago sociologist, in his essay "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," argued that a migrant inevitably tried to live in two different cultural groups. This condition produced a "marginal man," and in the mind of the marginal man these conflicting cultures met and fused.<sup>6</sup> Park's writings strengthened the influence of the "melting-pot" theory. This theory—which was popularized by a play, *The Melting Pot*, written by Jewish writer Israel Zangwill and presented on Broadway in 1908—emphasizes the idea that as different ethnic groups interact, different groups of immigrants blend together, thereby creating "Americans" with American characteristics.<sup>7</sup> To test his hypothesis, Park launched a massive project, the Survey of Race Relations, on the West Coast. It ran from 1925 to 1927 and provided abundant data for later research on race relations and Asian American studies.

A postwar incarnation of the melting-pot theory is the "assimilation" theory developed by Milton Gordon in his classic work *Assimilation in American Life*. Gordon suggested that assimilation

in America has typically involved seven stages: cultural assimilation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavioral receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation.<sup>8</sup> However, there is no single model of the assimilation theory, as Jon Gjerde noted in his book-length study of important problems in American immigration and ethnic history.<sup>9</sup> Oscar Handlin portrayed immigration as an experience characterized by uprootedness—by sadness, death, and disaster.<sup>10</sup> Unlike Handlin, John Bodnar looked at transplantation as a dominant feature of immigration. When confronting capitalism, individual immigrants “had to sort out options, listened to all the prophets, and arrive at decisions of their own in the best manner they could.”<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1990s the “whiteness” of European Americans has been emerging as a controversial subfield of assimilation studies. David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* was one of the first historical works on whiteness. Roediger discussed how white workers in the antebellum United States came to identify themselves as white. He argued that in a racist republic in which slaveholding was legal, white workers identified themselves by what they were not: blacks and slaves. In another important study of whiteness, *Whiteness of a Difference Color*, Matthew Frye Jacobson declared that race ought to be recognized “as an ideological, political deployment rather than as a neutral, biologically determined element of nature.”<sup>12</sup>

Scholarship on Chinese immigration has focused largely on the causes and effects of the Chinese exclusion laws during the exclusion era. Most European immigrants assimilated into the “white” American culture after generations of hard work and sacrifice; in contrast, the Chinese—along with the Japanese and Koreans—were perceived by the public as members of a peculiar and debased race and therefore as “unassimilable.” For this reason the study of the peculiarity of the East Asians was long categorized as the “oriental problem.”<sup>13</sup> Perceptions that the Chinese were “nonassimilable” contributed to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred Chinese laborers from the United States. This law was not repealed until 1943.<sup>14</sup> Mary Coolidge’s *Chinese Immigration*, the first important study of this subject, attributed the enactment of the Chinese exclusion laws to antiforeign sentiment in California<sup>15</sup>—an explanation later supported by Stuart Creighton Miller.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Lucy E. Salyer has written about how, as soon as it was passed, the Chinese fought doggedly

to overturn the Chinese Exclusion Act.<sup>17</sup> Andrew Gyory regards the Chinese Exclusion Act as the precursor of the more far-reaching exclusion laws against Japanese, Koreans, and other Asians in the early 1900s, and against Europeans in the 1920s.<sup>18</sup>

Paul C. P. Siu was perhaps the first Chinese American scholar to propose the controversial “sojourner” hypothesis.<sup>19</sup> Gunther Barth similarly claims that the Chinese immigrated only to accumulate wealth and return home; thus they lacked the motivation to involve themselves in the mainstream culture.<sup>20</sup> In the 1960s the sojourner theory became the basis for most American scholarship on Chinese exclusion.<sup>21</sup>

Two decades later, scholars challenged the sojourner theory with evidence that the Chinese had been settlers from the very beginning—that in both Hawaii<sup>22</sup> and the continental United States they established permanent settlements and integrated into host societies. Scholars have documented that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chinese settled around Monterey Bay, in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta, in the Rocky Mountains, and in Midwestern cities.<sup>23</sup>

In the postwar era, Chinese settlements have been overwhelmingly family-oriented. In the 1970s, after a century of imbalance, the male/female ratio of the Chinese American community finally achieved balance.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, inspired by the civil rights movement, millions of ethnic Americans began reassessing their cultural heritage and demanding that their cultures be represented more fairly in mainstream America. Academics have reflected on the demographic and social changes and have begun incorporating family and community issues into their scholarship. Rose Hum Lee studied Chinese family organization and social institutions in Chinese communities of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>25</sup> Stanford M. Lyman has examined family, marriage, and the community organizations among Chinese Americans.<sup>26</sup> One of my own studies has examined the changing roles of Chinese immigrant women in the context of marriage.<sup>27</sup>

Recent studies of Chinese immigrant communities have renewed interest in nationalism and ethnic identity, focusing on the impact of political, cultural, social, and economic conditions in the sending countries and on immigration and settlement patterns. Some anthropologists note that immigrants have lived their lives across geographical borders and maintained close ties to home; the term “transnationalism” has been used to describe such cross-national,

cross-cultural phenomena.<sup>28</sup> A number of historians have endorsed this idea in their monographs;<sup>29</sup> among these, Adam McKeown's recent work is exemplary.<sup>30</sup> Ling-chi Wang's study classifies five types of Chinese identity in the United States, all epitomized in the following Chinese phrases: (1) *luoye guigen* (the sojourner mentality), (2) *zhancao-chugen* (total assimilation), (3) *luodi shenggen* (accommodation), (4) *xungen wenzu* (ethnic pride and consciousness), and (5) *shigen qunzu* (the uprooted).<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, Asian scholars and American sinologists have associated the identity of Chinese overseas with their host countries. Wang Gungwu notes that the postwar Chinese overseas preferred to see themselves as "descendants of Chinese (*huayi* or *huaren*)" rather than as "sojourners" (*huaqiao*), and their communities as "new kinds of local-born communities."<sup>32</sup> Harvard scholar Tu Wei-ming proposes a broad and tripartite division of China as "cultural China," including not only "societies populated predominantly by ethnic and cultural Chinese"—Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—but also the 36 million Chinese in diaspora as well as "individual Chinese men and women . . . who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conception of China to their own linguistic community."<sup>33</sup>

How does the Chinese community in St. Louis fit the above models? Transnationalism emphasizes two-way or multidirectional movements of migrants; in this context, the Chinese community in St. Louis seems to stay mainly within its own social boundaries. The diasporic paradigm and the idea of cultural China remain as workable methodologies, yet they lack specificity and precision in defining a Chinese community that has integrated economically into the larger society while clinging culturally to Chinese heritage. So it is clear that we must develop a new theoretical model to interpret the Chinese American community in St. Louis since the 1960s.

## THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN ST. LOUIS IN THE CONTEXTS OF CHINESE URBAN COMMUNITIES AND URBAN STUDIES

The preceding discussion of migration and assimilation theories points to the need for a new approach to examining the Chinese American community in St. Louis since the 1960s; a scrutiny of that community in the context of Chinese urban communities and urban studies underscores the need for a new theory.

Since the early twentieth century, Chinese immigration to the United States has been a mainly urban phenomenon. Table 1.1 shows that in 1930, 64 percent of the 74,954 Chinese in the United States resided in urban centers. A decade later the Chinese population was 77,504 and 71 percent lived in large American cities. By 1950 over 90 percent of the Chinese population resided in cities,<sup>34</sup> and the trend continues upward. Obviously, then, Chinese American studies must have a large urban-studies component, and scholars across all disciplines now realize it.

Like other immigrant groups, Chinese immigrants settled mainly in entry ports and major urban centers. In these urban settings they established their communities, known as Chinatowns. Chinatowns have evolved as integral components of the North American urban socioeconomic and cultural landscape, yet scholars have not been able to define “Chinatown” precisely. Historians and sociologists have studied Chinatowns in terms of their socioeconomic and cultural functions. When discussing the San Francisco Chinatown as it existed in 1909, historian Mary Coolidge described it as a “quarter” of the city established by the Chinese to “protect themselves and to make themselves at home.”<sup>35</sup> Sociologist Rose Hum Lee offered a similar description of Chinatown: an area organized by Chinese “sojourners for

TABLE 1.1 Percentage of Chinese population in the United States by urban and rural residence, 1930–2000

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Percentage of Urban</i>
1930	74,954	47,970	26,984	64
1940	77,504	55,028	22,476	71
1950	117,140	109,036	8,104	90.5
1960	236,048	225,527	10,557	95.5
1970	431,583	417,032	14,551	96.6
1980	812,178	787,548	24,630	97.0
1990	1,648,696	1,605,841	39,631	97.6
2000	2,432,585	2,375,871	56,714	97.7

Source: Figures of 1930 and 1940 are computed according to Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America*, 105. The rest of the table is tabulated according to the U.S. Census, 1940–2000.

mutual aid and protection as well as to retain their cultural heritage."<sup>36</sup> In another study she described them as "ghetto-like formations resulting from the migration and settlement of persons with culture, religion, language, ideology, or race different from those of members of the dominant groups."<sup>37</sup> Anthropologist Bernard P. Wong has examined Chinatown in terms of racial discourse and views it as a racially closed community. Geographer Kay Anderson interprets Chinatown as "a European creation."<sup>38</sup> By far the most comprehensive scholarly conceptualization of Chinatown was probably made by geographer David Lai: "Chinatown in North America is characterized by a concentration of Chinese people and economic activities in one or more city blocks which forms a unique component of the urban fabric. It is basically an idiosyncratic oriental community amidst an occidental urban environment."<sup>39</sup> Lai's definition of Chinatown holds for St. Louis before 1966 but cannot account for the dispersed Chinese American community since the 1960s.

To contextualize the model of "cultural community" that I develop in this book, I will turn to a historiographic examination of how Chinatowns throughout America have been mapped.

## TYPES OF CHINATOWNS

According to Rose Hum Lee, by 1940 Chinese Americans had established Chinatowns across the country in twenty-eight cities. San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles were the largest, in that order. Of the country's 77,504 Chinese, 69 percent or 53,497 were congregated in these three Chinatowns.<sup>40</sup> Although Lee omitted St. Louis from this list of Chinatowns, a separate study by her suggests that St. Louis, with a Chinese population of 236 in 1940, would have been ranked twenty-second at the time, between Newark (259) and New Orleans (230).<sup>41</sup> To situate the Chinese American community of St. Louis in the context of Chinese American urban history, and to help readers understand the broader phenomenon of the Chinese American urban development in North America, I have categorized the studies of Chinatowns by geographical division and characteristic divisions.

### *Geographical Division*

Chinatowns can be categorized by geographic location. Chinese American settlement has been an urban phenomenon across the country; that said, scholarly studies of Chinatowns in America



have long limited themselves to the three main Chinese urban communities: San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.

The following are exemplary studies of San Francisco Chinatown. Victor G. and Brett de Bery Nee interviewed residents and on the basis of that work compiled *Longtime Californ'*, which explores the forces that created San Francisco Chinatown and that continue to account for its resilience and cohesiveness as an ethnic community.<sup>42</sup> Thomas W. Chinn's *Bridging the Pacific* chronicles the history of San Francisco Chinatown through its social structure and the people who helped shape its history.<sup>43</sup> Chalsa M. Loo's *Chinatown: Most Time, Hard Time* is an empirical study that provides "an understanding of the life problems, concerns, perceptions, and needs" of the Chinatown residents.<sup>44</sup> Yong Chen's *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943*, depicts the cultural and social transformation of the Chinese in San Francisco over a century.<sup>45</sup> Nayan Shah's *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* offers fresh insights into complex issues of public health and race in the city.<sup>46</sup>

There is also a rich literature on New York Chinatown. Anthropologist Bernard P. Wong alone has written three books about it. In these he analyzes the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships of the Chinese and their contributions to the economic well-being and social life of the community,<sup>47</sup> investigates the adaptation of the Chinese in New York,<sup>48</sup> and examines how the patronage and brokerage systems developed and have been manipulated.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, two studies by Peter Kwong examine the social structure of New York Chinatown.<sup>50</sup> New York Chinatown may look cohesive; in fact, it is a polarized community: the "Uptown Chinese," professionals and business leaders, are engaged in property speculation, while the "Downtown Chinese," manual laborers and service workers, must work in Chinatown and rent tenement apartments there.<sup>51</sup> Sociologist Min Zhou studies and writes about social and economic life in New York Chinatown, challenges past notions that Chinatown is an urban ghetto plagued by urban problems, and describes Chinatown as an immigrant enclave with strong socioeconomic potential.<sup>52</sup>

Scholarship on New York makes note of alternative settlement models to Chinatown. Hsiang-shui Chen's work on the post-1965 Taiwanese immigrant neighborhoods of Flushing and Elmhurst in Queens asserts that these communities are no longer Chinatowns; their residents are beginning to scatter and to mix with other ethnic groups.<sup>53</sup> Jan Lin's study presents New York Chinatown as

a global town.<sup>54</sup> Scholarly literature has also looked into the workforce of New York Chinatown, with particular regard to unionization among hand laundrymen (such as Renqiu Yu's study) and Chinese women garment workers (such as Xiaolan Bao's study).<sup>55</sup> Some writers (such as Xinyang Wang) have begun utilizing a comparative approach.<sup>56</sup>

The Chinatowns of Los Angeles have also begun attracting the attention of scholars. Timothy P. Fong in *The First Suburban Chinatown* uses ethnographic observation, archival research, oral history interviews, and sociological imagination to present the experiences of the multiethnic residents of Monterey Park and their reactions to change in the community.<sup>57</sup> John Horton's work views the multiethnic diversity of Monterey Park as the key to understanding the middle-class city in an era of rapid economic globalization.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Yen-Fen Tseng asserts that the Chinese ethnic economy in Los Angeles has formed multinuclear concentrations in suburban communities in the San Gabriel Valley. The inflow of capital and entrepreneurs from the Chinese diaspora has strongly integrated the valley's economy with that of the Pacific Rim.<sup>59</sup> Leland T. Saito's study also examines Monterey Park, with special attention to Asian Americans' participation in local political campaigns.<sup>60</sup> Geographer Wei Li proposes a new model of ethnic settlement in Los Angeles: *ethnoburbs* (ethnic suburbs), that is, suburban ethnic clusters of residential areas and business districts in large metropolitan areas that are intertwined with the global, national, and place-specific conditions.<sup>61</sup>

### *Characterizational Divisions*

Chinatown studies have also looked at social structures, socioeconomic functions, and ethnic composition and physical space. In terms of the social structure of Chinatowns, scholars are debating whether Chinatowns are communities of ethnic cohesion or ethnic class cleavage. Earlier studies perceived Chinatowns as communities of order and harmony; more recent studies by Peter Kwong, Chalsa Loo, and Jan Lin have viewed Chinatowns as oppressive and polarized communities in which ethnic capitalists and a political elite have exploited those with less education, money, skills, and knowledge of English—albeit not without challenges from this group.

In terms of the socioeconomic functions of Chinatowns, researchers disagree as to whether Chinatowns have impeded

assimilation. Some scholars focus on the social and economic problems of ethnic communities; others see Chinatowns as dynamic and economically successful. The former view, represented by Rose Hum Lee, Peter Kwong, and Chalsa Loo, sees the residents of Chinatowns as caught in a world that works against social mobility and cultural assimilation. In contrast, Min Zhou's work emphasizes that Chinatown economies offer jobs to new immigrants and that as a consequence of these opportunities, the second and third generations find social and cultural integration an easier task.

In terms of the ethnic composition and physical space of Chinatowns, the differences relate to whether Chinatowns are isolated and homogenous urban ghettos or multiethnic suburban communities. The former position, found in most works dealing with Chinatowns, treats Chinatowns as urban ghettos or enclaves consisting of mainly Chinese immigrants. The latter argument, represented by Hsiang-shui Chen, Timothy P. Fong, Yen-Fen Tseng, Jan Lin, and Wei Li, asserts that with the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of new immigrants since the mid-1960s, Chinese communities are no longer homogenous and strongly urban; rather, the Chinese are mixing with other ethnic groups and are increasingly suburban.

It is generally understood that every settlement includes two basic elements: physical space and social space. The physical space establishes the geographical boundaries within which the settlement is defined and its members interact in a multitude of ways: economically, socially, culturally. The physical space is easy to recognize; however, the social space of a community is not necessarily confined by its physical space and can extend beyond the physical boundaries of the settlement.

Most of the above-noted studies focused on the physical space of a given Chinese community, be it urban or suburban; thus they overlooked its social space. Before the appearance of suburban Chinese communities, there was no problem to interpret Chinatowns with physical spatial boundaries. The traditional Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York City, Chicago, and many other urban centers—including the old Chinatown of St. Louis—were unquestionably urban ethnic ghettos or enclaves. Yet ever since the emergence of suburban Chinese communities, such as the ones in Oakland, New York (Flushing), and Los Angeles (Monterey Park), scholars have struggled to interpret them accurately. Timothy P. Fong sees a continuity between urban ethnic enclaves and the

suburban Chinese communities. However, Wei Li's "ethnoburb" model notes the contrast between traditional urban Chinese settlements and ethnoburbs.<sup>62</sup> Yen-Fen Tseng contends that in Los Angeles the strong expansion of upper-class professional jobs and service/petty-manufacturing jobs has created dual cities.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, Jan Lin argues that inner-city congestion has driven the development of "satellite Chinatowns" in the suburbs.<sup>64</sup> Yet all of these models focus on the geographical parameters of the new Chinese suburban settlements and thus fail to explain how there can be an ethnic community without a geographical concentration.

Clearly, unless we consider the social space of a Chinese settlement, we will find it difficult to explain why new suburban Chinese communities have emerged, have scattered, and have blended with other ethnic groups. The physical definition of a community is not adequate to explain these dispersed suburban settlements. This is why we must study the socioeconomic structures of the suburban Chinese communities not only in terms their physical parameters, but also in terms of their social dimensions.

## DEFINING CULTURAL COMMUNITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

### *Defining Cultural Community*

Resting on the framework of social space, this study proposes a new model of the Chinese American community in St. Louis as a "cultural community." A cultural community does not necessarily have particular physical boundaries; instead it is defined by the common cultural practices and beliefs of its members. A cultural community is constituted by its language schools, religious institutions, community organizations, cultural agencies, and political coalitions or ad hoc committees, and by the broad range of cultural celebrations and activities facilitated by the aforementioned agencies and groups. Since the 1960s the St. Louis Chinese community has been a typical cultural community. Its members live everywhere in the city and its suburbs; there are no substantial business and residential concentrations or clusters that would constitute a "Chinatown" or a "suburban Chinatown." Yet the Chinese St. Louisans have nurtured their community through various cultural activities organized by community groups and cultural institutions. They have preserved their cultural heritage and achieved ethnic solidarity without a recognizable physical community. Such a community is better understood as a cultural community.

A cultural community can also be identified by its economy, demography, and geography. In economic terms, the great majority of Chinese Americans in St. Louis have been professionally integrated into the larger society; as a consequence, the economy within their community does not significantly affect the well-being of its members and the community as a whole. In demographic terms, the Chinese American cultural community in St. Louis includes a large proportion of professionals and self-employed entrepreneurs; one consequence is that their economic well-being depends more heavily on the larger economy than on the Chinese American "ethnic" economy. The professionals are employed mainly by firms in the larger society; the entrepreneurs, although self-employed, also depend on the general population for their economic success. Only a small portion of Chinese Americans in St. Louis can be categorized as working-class. In geographic terms, a cultural community is more likely to be found in a hinterland or remote area, where the transnational economy has only limited penetration.

In the Chinese suburban communities in Flushing and Monterey Park—and in Vancouver and Toronto, in Canada—Chinese Americans/Canadians have invested heavily in the banking, manufacturing, real estate, and service sectors. In contrast, the Chinese Americans in St. Louis tend mainly to be professionals in the employ of mainstream companies and agencies.<sup>65</sup> It follows that economic self-interest is less likely to be the driving force behind the St. Louis Chinese community. In St. Louis the Chinese are more likely to congregate at cultural institutions such as language schools, churches, and temples, or at cultural activities organized by community groups. Moreover, the Chinese American community in St. Louis has no clearly defined physical boundaries, either in the inner city or in the suburbs.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CULTURAL COMMUNITY MODEL

The cultural community model can do more than simply help us interpret the St. Louis Chinese American community. First, the idea of cultural community can serve as a new model for understanding other Chinese American communities—that is, those in which Chinese professionals have assimilated into the broader society and their work is not tightly linked with the Chinese ethnic community. This model can be applied to places where there are not enough Chinese to constitute a large physical ethnic concentration, but there are enough that social communities can

form, with or without physical boundaries. In such circumstances, the cultural community model is yet another avenue for understanding the complexities of contemporary Chinese American communities.

Second, the cultural community model can help us better understand issues of cultural identity. A cultural community does not form to meet economic needs (i.e., for mutual aid); rather, it forms to meet people's psychological needs (i.e., for a cultural and ethnic identity). When the Chinese Americans are scattered throughout middle-class or upper-middle-class neighborhoods, it is difficult and less practical for them to establish a physical Chinese ethnic concentration. Their desire to share, maintain, and preserve their cultural heritage encourages them to develop cultural communities complete with language schools, churches, community organizations, cultural agencies, political long-term or ad hoc committees, and cultural celebrations and social gatherings. On these occasions the presence of other Chinese Americans makes it easy for them to recognize their cultural and ethnic identity. Cultural identity and ethnic solidarity thus provide comfort to those Chinese who do not have significant ethnic surroundings in daily life.

Third, the cultural community model reminds ethnic groups that they have reached a certain stage of assimilation and acculturation. History tells us that an immigrant or ethnic group's advancement in America generally follows three stages: physical concentration for economic survival; cultural congregation for ethnic identity; and political participation or coalition for a sense of democracy and justice.<sup>66</sup>

Most immigrant or ethnic groups, once they arrive in America, must before anything else find a way to survive. Inevitably, survival in an alien and often hostile environment relies heavily on strategies of mutual aid; this is why ethnic groups form physical communities. These ethnic communities have historically been identified as "ghettos" or "enclaves," as ethnic settlements such as "Germantown," "Jewishtown," or "Chinatown," or as replicas of an ethnic group's original culture, as in "Little Tokyo" or "Little Saigon." During this stage a physical ethnic settlement is essential to the group's survival.

Once an ethnic group has economically integrated itself into the larger society, mutual aid matters less; this explains why physical ethnic settlements are soon enough abandoned.<sup>67</sup>

The economically integrated and geographically dispersed ethnic group now focuses on maintaining and preserving its cultural heritage without a physical ethnic settlement to make this easier.

European immigrants up to the 1960s had mostly constituted the earlier and larger ethnic components of America. By that decade most of the European ethnic groups had moved out of their ethnic communities and merged with mainstream, "white" society. Yet even these economically assimilated European ethnic groups—especially the smaller ones such as the Jews—still felt a pressing need to preserve their ethnic and religious heritage and to identify themselves by where their ancestors came from. Jews have met this need by developing faith communities complete with synagogues, schools, theaters, and cultural and social organizations.<sup>68</sup> Asian immigrants have demonstrated similar patterns in preserving their ethnic identity. Stephen S. Fujita and David J. O'Brien's study explains how Japanese Americans have succeeded in staying heavily involved in their ethnic community even though the vast majority of them have been structurally assimilated into mainstream American life. They have done so through their ability to perceive all members of their ethnic group as "quasi kin."<sup>69</sup> Kyeyoung Park documents the importance of Christian churches, community organizations, and other cultural institutions in stabilizing the Korean American communities in New York.<sup>70</sup> Linda Trinh Võ and Rick Bonus extend the contemporary Asian American communities to include those of "less territory-centered" and more "fluid" spaces.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, since the 1960s Chinese Americans in St. Louis have been forming a cultural community. During this stage, cultural and social spaces rather than physical space constitute the ethnic community.

Once an ethnic group has achieved economic security, it begins to participate in mainstream politics and social activism. The best example at hand is the Organization of Chinese Americans, which was organized in 1973 and ever since has fought against discrimination and social injustice directed toward Chinese Americans. The "Committee of 100," formed after the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 and consisting of one hundred prominent Chinese Americans, has lobbied hard to promote positive relations between the United States and China.<sup>72</sup> Since the 1990s, Asian Americans have become more involved in local and national politics with the goal of protecting their freedoms and civil rights.



During this stage, political manifestations of an ethnic community are more visible.

In summary, during its survival stage an ethnic community has no choice but to concentrate in ghettos or enclaves. Later on, this physical concentration gives way to community structures such as cultural facilities, social organizations, political groups, and even cyber-communities, all of which are less bound by geography. These rather than the original enclave constitute the group's cultural community.

## SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The Chinese Americans in St. Louis have transformed themselves from a Chinatown into cultural community. In this process, significant questions have emerged. What forces—social, economic, cultural, geographic—attracted Chinese immigrants to the region? What have been the Chinese American experiences in the Midwest? What do those experiences tell us about Chinese American society as a whole, and in particular, what can they tell us about the Chinese on the East and West Coasts? Does the ethnic adaptation theory explain the settlement patterns of Chinese Americans in St. Louis?

The transformation of Chinese St. Louisans from Chinatown residents to a Chinese American cultural community coincided with the historical development of Chinese American society in the United States. The St. Louis Chinatown, "Hop Alley," which existed from 1869 to 1966, was a physical manifestation of ethnic solidarity and cultural gravitation; it was also the product of racial and cultural prejudice institutionalized by the Chinese exclusion laws. Hop Alley, like other Chinese communities, reminds us how adaptable and culturally resilient Chinese immigrants are. As more and more Chinese Americans entered the professions after World War II, and as a Chinese cultural community emerged in the 1960s, Chinese Americans showed how upwardly mobile they could be, both socially and economically. The 1965 immigration reforms, which brought more professionals to the United States, accelerated this upward mobility. The development of the cultural community since the 1990s is evidence of the potential socioeconomic and political influence of the new Chinese immigrants from Mainland China.



Chinese St. Louisans share a history with other Chinese Americans, but they also have their own unique history. Chinese settlement in St. Louis has been exceptional in a number of ways. Many Chinese came to St. Louis from already established Chinatowns on the East and West Coasts, but many others, from the very beginning, came to St. Louis directly from China. As happened in other American cities, the Chinese in St. Louis formed an ethnic enclave. Hop Alley was more than a place to eat Chinese food and see exotic sights—it was also a cultural institution that transplanted traditional elements from the homeland and absorbed new ideas from the adopted land.

As in other American cities, the first Chinese in St. Louis worked mainly in laundries, groceries, and restaurants. This occupational segregation was a product of racism and discrimination; however, it was also a reflection of the adaptability of the newcomers, who were seeking out niches that would enable them to survive in the New World. After World War II, and especially beginning in the 1960s, this pattern was broken when Chinese immigrants with better education and more fluency in English broke this occupational segregation and began entering the professions—medicine, engineering, computer science, and academia. The absence of a Chinatown after 1966 made it difficult for newcomers to St. Louis to survive without marketable skills and fluency in English. All of this explains why most Chinese St. Louisans today are professionals and entrepreneurs. By 1990, 80 percent of the Chinese in the St. Louis region who were working were either professionals or entrepreneurs; they were employed in the banking, insurance, real estate, business, and repair sectors. Also by that time, 83 percent of the Chinese in the region were living in the suburbs.<sup>73</sup> This high concentration of Chinese professionals and business owners is not something present in the major Chinese communities of San Francisco or New York. More importantly, Chinese St. Louisans today constitute a cultural more than an economic community. Chinese St. Louisans are more likely to gather at schools, churches, and cultural events than in Chinese business districts.

To highlight the transformation of the Chinese community in St. Louis from a Chinatown to a representative cultural community and to underscore the unique experiences of Chinese St. Louisans, this book includes nine chapters, which are divided into two parts—

"'Hop Alley,' A Community for Survival, 1860s–1966" and "Building a Cultural Community, 1960s to 2000s." This introductory chapter has defined the concept of cultural community and its significance in the broader contexts of the studies of immigration and ethnicity and urban history, by means of a historiographical discussion. It examines the influential theoretical approaches and methodologies, and compares and contrasts the significant literature in American immigration history and the Chinese urban studies.

Chapters 2 through 5 within Part I reconstruct the historical St. Louis Chinatown, "Hop Alley" that existed from the 1860s to 1966. Each of the four chapters investigates closely an aspect of the Chinese St. Louisans' experiences—the effort to build a self-defensive and self-reliant community, the attempts to assimilate into American culture, the self-governing mechanism of the community, and the dwindling and the final extinct of the Chinatown under the urban renewal campaign. Part I hails the triumph of ordinary Chinese men and women in the city despite hardship and adversity.

Chapter 2, "Building 'Hop Alley,'" portrays the effort of the early Chinese in St. Louis in building a community for their economic survival in an alienating environment. This chapter emphasizes the substantial contribution the Chinese made to the city in its overall industrial and urban development. Chapter 3, "Living in 'Hop Alley,'" examines the residential lives of the Chinese community from living quarters to final resting places in cemeteries, focusing on the fundamental issues of ethnic studies—class, gender, sexuality, interracial relations, assimilation, and ethnic identity.

Chapter 4, "Governing 'Hop Alley,'" chronicles the rise and the decline of the On Leong Chinese Merchants and Laborers Association, organized to cope with the discriminatory environment the Chinese merchants faced on the East Coast and in Midwest America. Although tainted with stereotypical imaging of criminal acts of tong-fighting and drug-smuggling, the St. Louis On Leong arduously worked to protect the commercial interests and legal rights of the Chinatown residents. Chapter 5, "Dwindling 'Hop Alley,'" examines the forces that limited the growth and contributed to the extinction of the St. Louis Chinatown.

Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 constitute Part II, which portrays a new type of Chinese American community—a cultural community—through its emergence and development. These four chapters

define the nature and scope of the model of cultural community through chronological and thematic treatment, and pinpoint the significance and applicability of the model to other Chinese American settlements in the country.

Chapter 6, "Emerging Suburban Chinese American Communities," analyzes the factors in the formation of a cultural community. Continued urban renewal efforts repeatedly halted the attempts of the Chinese to rebuild a Chinatown. The newly arrived Chinese professionals had limited incentive to recreate a Chinatown. Meanwhile, the dispersion of the Chinese restaurant businesses made it difficult and impractical to form a new Chinatown.

Chapter 7, "Building a Cultural Community," defines the model of cultural community in terms of its nature, scope, and characteristics. The perspective of a cultural community concentrates on the social-spatial parameter of a community. A wide array of community organizations, ethnic language schools, ethnic religious institutions, cultural agencies, and a variety of cultural celebrations and gatherings constitute a cultural community.

Chapter 8, "Development of the Cultural Community," depicts the more recent expansion and development of the cultural community in St. Louis since the 1990s. Students and professionals from Mainland China have joined Chinese American professionals in St. Louis. During this period, the Chinese ethnic economy has become more diversified. Meanwhile, the Chinese Americans in St. Louis have also displayed a higher level of political participation in electoral and coalition politics.

Chapter 9, "Cultural Community in Retrospect and Prospect," finds the local variants of a cultural community among other ethnic minority groups and Chinese Americans in other areas. It views cultural community as an alternative model for understanding the ever-changing multifaceted American society.

This work is a useful addition to studies of regional history, urban history, Asian American history, and urban policy, for at least three reasons. First, it is difficult to understand St. Louis without understanding its population's multiethnic character—many St. Louisans are foreign-born. More than two hundred works have been published already to depict the multicultural and multiethnic nature of St. Louisans; these works have greatly increased our understanding of the region as a multicultural metropolis from the moment it was founded. Yet only a few of

these works have dealt with the Chinese in the region, and most of these are merely compilations of data.<sup>74</sup> The underrepresentation of Chinese in scholarly works reflects the marginalized existence of Chinese in the past and the present lack of recognition of their significance to the region. Chinese Americans constitute only a little over 1 percent of St. Louisans today. Their social and economic contributions to the area have been far greater than that figure would indicate. For instance, the 1990 census found that 60 percent of the Chinese families in St. Louis had two or more workers, that 64 percent of Chinese St. Louisans older than sixteen were participating in the labor force, and that 78 percent of Chinese St. Louisans between eighteen and twenty-four were enrolled in college; in each of these categories the figures for the Chinese were higher than for the population of St. Louis as a whole.<sup>75</sup> Chinese St. Louisans are growing in number, and their visibility in the region is increasing, so it is important for scholars to study their history to get a better idea of the city's multi-ethnic and multicultural development.

Second, a study of the Chinese in the Midwest is needed for a more complete understanding of the Asian Americans. Most Asian Americans still live in the great coastal cities; however, the demographics have been changing in this regard since the 1950s. Asian American populations have been growing rapidly in the midwestern states. In Missouri, for instance, the Asian and Pacific Islander population has been doubling or tripling every decade since 1940. That year it was only 408 (0.01 percent of general population); by 2000 it was 60,000 (1.7 percent). These demographic changes have motivated scholars to expand the frontiers of Asian American studies. This study contributes directly to that expansion by focusing on a Chinese community in the Midwest, far from either coast.

Third, a thorough understanding of the circumstances of Chinese American communities will help governments at all levels formulate and implement urban policies as they relate to new immigrants and ethnic communities. The poignant history of Chinese St. Louisans undoubtedly has valuable lessons and insights to offer urban policymakers.

The sources employed in this study fall into two broad categories: American government records and public media, and evidence from the Chinese community. Chinese communities in America have long been perceived as byproducts of American public

policies—most obviously, the immigration legislation and other laws affecting Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. To gain a comprehensive understanding of American public policies and their practical effects, I gathered national, regional, and municipal records. Immigration files in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and Chinese Exclusion Act Cases in the Pacific Sierra Regional Archives at San Bruno provided copious information on the nationwide practice of the Chinese Exclusion Act. At the regional level, the Chinese Exclusion Cases Habeas Corpus Petitions (1857–1965), and the Records of U.S. District Court for the East District of Missouri from the National Archives–Central Plains Region, Kansas City, Missouri, offered valuable data on the early Chinese immigrants in Missouri.

At the local level, I searched manuscripts and data from St. Louis City Hall, the St. Louis Police Department, and various public and private libraries and archives, including the Mercantile Library, the Missouri Historical Society Library and Research Center, the Olin Library and West Campus Library at Washington University, the St. Louis City Public Library, and the St. Louis County Public Library. Regarding municipal records, the St. Louis Recorder of Deeds, the Annual Report of the Board of St. Louis Police Commissioner, and St. Louis Directories (to name only a few) told me a great deal about the lives of the Chinese in St. Louis at different points in history.

The U.S. Census and the annual reports of the Immigration and Naturalization Service provided a tremendous amount of data. In addition, American public media sources offered me a great deal of information about public perceptions of the Chinese and their communities. From these sources I collected many articles relating to the Chinese in St. Louis.

Chinese St. Louisans have not been merely passive victims of institutionalized exclusion and discrimination, of public prejudice and racial profiling. Rather, they have been active agents and both collectively and individually have shaped their communities and their history. For this study I developed a standardized oral history interview questionnaire that touched on the following: immigration background, education, employment, marriage, family, and sociopolitical activities. The interviews I conducted averaged two hours in length. By the end of this project I had interviewed

more than two hundred Chinese Americans in the Midwest, including more than sixty from the St. Louis area. I located the interviewees through business and commercial directories and through public and private agencies. I selected the subjects so as to ensure as much diversity of perspectives as possible. I place great value in oral histories but am also keenly aware of their limitations; for example, memories are often selective, and biases are often unconscious. This is why when using oral history records, I always incorporate census data and archival documents. Also, in this study I never use information from oral history interviews without corroboration.

From a broader, collective perspective, the two local Chinese-language newspapers—*St. Louis Chinese American News* and *St. Louis Chinese American Journal*, established in 1990 and 1996 respectively—constitute a strong voice for Chinese St. Louisans.

I have also kept in mind that the history of Chinese St. Louisans cannot be separated from the history of St. Louis, of Chinese Americans, of American ethnicity and immigration, and of American urban development. For this reason, I have placed this case study of Chinese St. Louisans within the broader framework of St. Louis history, Chinese American studies, American ethnicity and immigration studies, and American urban studies. In this, I have consulted with both primary and secondary sources, as indicated in the classified bibliography.