Immigrant Networks in New Urban Spaces: Gender and Social Integration

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how dispersed settlement in areas of urban sprawl affects the structure of personal networks that in turn influences the likelihood of social integration among male and female immigrants from Taiwan. Settlement in the deconcentrated spaces that currently constitute the new urban spaces of U.S. metropolitan areas potentially offers more opportunities to interact with ethnically diverse people than the traditional ethnic enclaves of inner cities. However, these spatial structures also increase dependency on cars and road systems. Findings from ethnographic fieldwork in Orange County, California, show that the social networks of affluent first generation immigrants from Taiwan are not comparable to the densely knit broadly based ties linking neighbors and kin group members traditionally attributed to immigrants. Instead, the social networks of immigrants with high levels of human and economic capital are based on loosely bounded, sparsely knit, and dynamic specialized ties. At the local level networks involve few ties to extended relatives, but a substantial amount of relationships with former classmates and members of recreational associations. However, despite good English skills and employment in diverse workplaces the number of interactions with nonimmigrants outside of work and school environments is rather small.

These circumstances are experienced differently by men and women. Female immigrants consider living in the deconcentrated spaces of master-plan communities beneficial for achieving personal contentment. They welcome the changed conditions for social interaction and enjoy the decrease in network size and frequency of contacts that result in less obligations and responsibilities compared to life back in their country of origin. Male immigrants, however, mourn the loss of opportunities to gain reputation and social recognition. They would prefer to live in areas with close spatial proximity of immigrant residences. These gendered evaluations further affect the likelihood of social integration for first generation immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

Since moving into a newly built subdivision in southern Orange County in the early 1980s first generation immigrants Mr. and Mrs. Lai continue to be amazed by the rate of urban sprawl in the region. Although the population in the surrounding master plan communities...
is growing, they don’t find the size of their personal networks increasing. However, Mrs. Lai is adamantly against moving to an area with a higher concentration of immigrants from Taiwan, such as the cities along the San Gabriel Valley in Los Angeles County. She considers the number of ethnic Taiwanese community associations scattered throughout Orange County sufficient and is glad that the level of her social responsibilities does not resemble life in Taiwan; “I like to get involved with activities that catch my interest instead of being obligated to attend certain prescribed events. Sure, it’s lonely sometimes. But at least I don’t have to fulfill other people’s wishes.” Mrs. Lai would like to interact with more nonimmigrants but her recreational activities and existing circle of friends keep her too busy to actively pursue new and diverse relationships. Her husband sees it rather differently. Since the children have entered college he finds social life in Orange County too quiet and uneventful and certainly very boring. His job with a leading structural engineering firm in the area brings him in contact with a culturally diverse group of co-workers. Yet in the evenings and on weekends he finds himself unfulfilled. Mr. Lai frequently complains that although there are opportunities for community involvement, few have binding expectations or offer community-wide recognition.

The Lai’s are part of a large group of immigrants entering the United States after the implementation of the Hart Celler Act of 1965, who either arrived with high levels of human and financial capital or were able to acquire these by obtaining graduate degrees at American institutions of higher learning (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Waldinger, 1996). They challenge the classic straight-line assimilation model that assumed only second or third generations of immigrant families are able to achieve fluent English skills, higher levels of education and income, and settlement in ethnically diverse neighborhoods (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Nee, 1997; Guarnizo et al., 2003). Instead, these high human capital immigrants attain markers of cultural assimilation such as residence outside ethnic enclaves, good English language skills, and socio-economic achievements already upon arrival (White et al., 1993; Fong and Wilkes, 1999; Chiswick and Miller, 1999; Hiebert, 2000). Another interesting characteristic of this recent wave of legal immigrants is that more women than men between the ages of 20 to 60 years old arrive in the United States (US Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2002; Zhou, 2003: 26–27). Furthermore, many new immigrants use communication and transportation technologies to keep in frequent contact with family members, friends, and business partners back home (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; Portes et al., 1999).

These changed conditions for incorporation of affluent first generation immigrants with high levels of human capital who settle dispersed in areas of urban sprawl raise questions about the likelihood of integration (Berry, 1997). While research has demonstrated that economic and spatial integration into the larger society is attainable, social integration seems to be more elusive (Reitz and Sklar, 1997). This article uses a social network perspective to assess the likelihood of social integration of immigrants who arrive with high levels of human and economic capital. It’s specific focus are affluent, first generation immigrants from Taiwan who chose to settle throughout Orange County, California. The basic premise of this analysis is that individuals are integrated into society through their social relationships. The article identifies structural constraints that shape the formation of personal social networks, such as the characteristics of new urban spaces and the opportunities for interaction these spaces afford. The network properties of men and women are expected to differ and in turn influence the sense of well-being among male and female immigrants. Special attention is given to gendered choices in forming ties and building bridges to people within and outside their ethnic group.
The research focus of this article concerning gendered experiences of immigrants in new urban spaces and the likelihood of their social integration finds itself at the intersection of immigration studies and urban studies. Both areas of study have generally neglected gendered perspectives in their research efforts. This is changing as evident in reviews of more recent work (Brettell and de Bejois, 199; Pessar, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Pessar and Mahler, 2003; Donato et al., 2006; Curran et al., 2006; Garber and Turner, 1995; Miranne and Young, 2000; Darke et al., 2000). Scholars generally concur that the experiences of men and women differ with respect to both immigration and urban settlement. However, there is no general agreement in evaluations of benefits by gender either as a result of immigration or settlement in urban spaces. Given the diversity of circumstances in a multitude of cases this is not surprising and can hardly be expected. Nevertheless, in the following section I present a brief overview of the discussion of advantages and disadvantages of both emigration and urban settlement for either gender as conceptualized in each field because these insights can assist the evaluation of structural constraints to integration.

In terms of evaluating the immigration experience by gender, Jones-Correa, for example, ponders whether life in the new cultural environment is a series of raptures or rather a form of continuity for men or women (1998), and Patricia Pessar wonders if immigration has led to emancipation or just stagnation of the status and well-being of women (1999). The majority of studies show that female immigrants become well adjusted to life in America while male immigrants have difficulties with the challenges to traditional male authority as a result of women’s participation in the work place and their subsequently changed attitudes towards family, marriage, and gender roles (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Foner, 1998; Menjivar, 1999; Salaff, 2002; Chee, 2005). In addition, immigrant women are often able to overcome social isolation and become more influential than men in the formation of ties between their ethnic communities and the larger society (Kibria, 1993; Jones-Correa, 1998; Park, 1997; Hune, 2000).

Even in cases in which women are unable to establish cross-ethnic ties outside of their ethnic communities, the vast spaces and large number of unrelated people in their host community provides them with more opportunities to engage in “unwatched and unregulated activities” compared to their home culture (Zentgraf, 2002: 637). Women also benefit from the fact that they have less pressure to succeed than men (Beiser and Hou, 2000; Tran and Nguyen, 1994). In fact, many female immigrants claim that residence in America has enabled them to fulfill personal dreams and pursue personal goals (Hune, 2000; Chen, 2005). At the very least, most women in these studies are more likely to establish a sense of well-being in their host country than men (Tran and Nguyen, 1994; Menjivar, 2000; Zentgraf, 2002; Remennick, 2005).

However, not all studies show a rosier picture for women than for men. Many immigrants experience economic downgrading after immigration. Women’s work in public spaces is not always a sign of liberation but often a result of economic necessity (Esperitu, 1999; Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Zentgraf, 2002). Women with low human capital only find employment in the ethnic economy within work places that are characterized by networks that lack diversity in terms of gender or ethnic composition (Menjivar, 2000; Hagan, 1998; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). In fact, migrant social networks are not always reliable sources of social support. Cecilia Menjivar demonstrates quite remarkably that migrants with limited resources often cannot rely on kinship ties after arrival in the host society because they lack the necessary resources for reciprocity, such as access to goods and services, which they could offer in return for assistance (2000). While immigrant men find ways to socialize with each other in public
through joint recreational activities, women have few opportunities to gain access to goods and services beyond their immediate households (Menjivar, 2000: 182). In addition, social isolation from members of their ethnic group can result in the negative consequence of women becoming subject to undetected violence inflicted by husbands (Mahler and Pessar, 2006; Kurien, 1999).

While the final evaluation of benefits and burdens of immigration for either gender depends on the specifics of each case, it is important to reflect on the fact that most studies focus on the immigration experience of low human capital immigrants. Only a few studies discuss the implications of immigration for professionals, especially female professionals (Kurien, 1999; Bagchi, 2001; Salaff and Greve, 2004; Purkayastha, 2005; Shih, 2006). The main conclusion of these studies is that female immigrants with high human capital experience difficulties to find employment suitable to their expertise due to both their gender and their ethnicity (Purkayastha, 2005). However, in geographic areas with large proportions of high human capital immigrants, relationships to others with similar backgrounds can assist them to overcome these challenges to equal access by learning best practice strategies from each other and by becoming more visible and less marginalized members of the larger society (Shih, 2006).

Before looking at the gendered experience of immigrants in urban space, it is important to comment on gender differences in network compositions in general. In the context of American society the social networks of men and women are generally not significantly different in terms of size, density or level of heterogeneity (Marsden, 1987: 129). However, life-course variables including age, number of children, and marital status influence the changing composition of networks through time. Fischer and Oliker found that women in later stages in life continue to make new friends whereas men often have a diminishing store of earlier-met friends and tend to not replenish the friends they loose (1983). In addition, all early network studies of gendered network structures found that when controlling for stages in the life cycle, women have larger proportions of kin in their networks, engage in more frequent interactions with kin, and keep in contact with more diverse types of kin than do men (Moore, 1990: 731). The general tendency towards continued responsibility for maintenance of family relationships among women has also been confirmed by Wellman and Wortleyes' study on social ties within North American communities with the often cited expression “men fix things, women fix relationships” (1990: 582).

However, this pattern of involvement with kin weakens somewhat when women enter full-time employment as professionals (Moore, 1990). Although studies on ties that provide social capital conclude that women have fewer chances to acquire social capital compared to men, there is evidence that network compositions that overcome the exclusive focus on strong ties to kin and neighbours facilitate change in the lives of women (Lin, 2000; Bagchi, 2001). Stoloff, Granville and Bienenstock show that women who have diverse and extensive networks are more likely to achieve access to paid employment (1999). Similar findings by Dominguez and Watkins on the impediments of strong ties to kin have on low income African- and Latin American women’s search for jobs, confirm the potential negative aspects of strong kinship ties (2003).

In terms of the gendered experience in urban spaces there are currently two differing interpretations of the role of urban areas play in the lives of men and women (Wilson, 2001). One view is that women hold inferior positions in urban environments, which still predominately benefit men. Women have major disadvantages compared to men in using urban space, especially when it comes to issues of safety. The opposing viewpoint is that settlement in urban areas is rather beneficial to women and allows them to practice behaviors and experience freedoms they would otherwise not be able to enjoy in non-urban spaces. Similar to the gendered experience of immigration, moving into urban spaces seems to allow men and
women to be less watched and less regulated, but also exposes them to the threat of social isolation and a reduction in the number of strong supportive ties to others.

The ongoing discussion about benefits and pitfalls of the gendered experience is further complicated by the changing shapes of actual urban settlement forms and the shifting notions of what kinds of spaces can be labeled urban (Bondi and Rose, 2003: 239). Suburbs, for example, were long considered to be non-urban spaces that perpetuate the divide between public and private spaces of women (i.e., their role as homemakers). Ray and Rose, however, show that the notion of suburbia as a guardian of nuclear family values and domesticity is exaggerated (2000). Many so-called suburbs have become self-sufficient areas of urban sprawl and the women living in these spaces are as likely to be working in public spaces as in private spaces within the household. The research that informed my article was conducted in a metropolitan area in which traditional hierarchies between the suburbs and the city-center no longer apply (Gottdiener, 1985; Kling et al., 1991; Sorkin, 1992; Scott and Soja, 1996). The main characteristics of these new urban settlement structures are their high degree of deconcentration both in terms of population and land use patterns. As a result, administrative boundaries between suburbs of a larger city and new municipalities or unincorporated residential areas are no longer visible. This accounts for a high degree of urbanization in so-called urbanized counties (Gottdiener and Kephart, 1991: 33).

To gain a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of life in these sprawling urban spaces, I turn now to urban studies that investigate opportunities for interaction and well-being. The beginning of a combined sociological and psychological approach to the study of interaction patterns in urban communities was made by Durkheim, Simmel, Park, Wirth, and others (Milgram, 1970; Fischer, 1981). This research started when cities were still understood in their traditional form, consisting of center and periphery. The assumption at the time was that the effects of “urbanism as a way of life” are social disorganization and individual alienation (Wirth, 1938). Later research revealed that settlement in cities does not inevitably lead to alienation, despite the difference in social interaction patterns in local urban communities from rural communities (Young and Willmott, 1957; Gans, 1962; Fischer, 1995). Studying the social networks of urban residents is a crucial element in understanding the social interaction patterns facilitated by specific settlement structures. The early developments of the network analysis paradigm in British social anthropology were related to urban community studies (Bott, 1957; Mitchell, 1969; Anderson, 1974; Brettell, 1981). Initially, the traditional image of urban community was that “neighborhood equals community” (Wellman, 1999: 23). According to this understanding of community, most ties stay within the local neighbourhood and most neighbourhood residents presumably interact with each other, forming densely knit clusters of support relationships and companionship.

However, over time additional network studies of neighborhoods found that urbanites’ motivation to engage in local networks varies in response to their alternative sources for social relations and network involvement (Fischer, 1982). Within the structure created by relationships and the resulting opportunities to meet other people, involvement with potential new network members is both selective and quantitatively limited (Schieflo, 1990: 99). The increased geographic reach of ties among urban residents and the absence of simple hierarchical group structures create spatially and socially ramified networks (Wellman, 1999). The personal networks of urbanites often overlap only to a small extent at the local level and then branch out in varied shapes of relationship trees with few interconnections. These observations led Wellman to conclude that the current reality of communities in North America is far from the traditional model of tightly bounded, densely knit, and broadly based ties (1999). Instead, communities today consist of loosely bounded, sparsely knit and specialized ties (Wellman, 1999: 24).
What do these findings on the interaction patterns facilitated by urban spaces suggest for the case of first generation immigrants and the likelihood of their integration? Along with the straight-line assimilation model crafted by Park and further developed by Gordon among others (Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964), the common assumption in immigration studies used to be that immigrants first settle in urban ethnic enclaves upon arrival to the United States (Gans, 1962; Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Nee and de Bary, 1972; Lyman, 1986). They were expected to need the close proximity of ethnic group members to adapt to a new environment. Therefore, dispersed settlement of immigrants in urban and suburban neighbourhoods outside of ethnic enclave communities was considered an important indicator of successful immigrant incorporation and economic mobility (Massey and Denton, 1985; Alba and Nee, 1997). In fact, spatial assimilation was considered a proxy for social assimilation since few studies had access to data on its most salient condition, primary ties to members of the larger society (Brown, 2006).

Yet, recent studies on the residential choices of first generation immigrants questioned these assumptions and inspired a reassessment of the importance of spatial proximity in finding social interaction partners. Cases of ethnic groups whose immigrant members do not cluster residentially but disperse due to either the absence or distance of an already existent ethnic enclave include the Iranians in the greater Los Angeles area (Bozorgmehr, 1997), Indian immigrants in metropolitan regions in the states of California, Arizona, New Jersey, New York and Connecticut (Smith, 1995; Kurien, 1999; Purkayastha, 2005; Skop and Li, 2005), and Salvadorians in the greater Phoenix area (Menjivar, 2003). The design of these spatial structures calls for the use of a car to navigate even spatially close neighbourhoods due to the absence of pedestrian friendly street connections (Grannis, 1998). However, dispersed settlement of immigrants is not evolving without any geographic references. Metropolitan areas often have a few clusters of ethnic institutional and commercial services such as strip malls occupied by several store owners who share a common ethnic background (Olds, 1996; Hiebert, 1998; Preston and Lo, 2000). In addition, cultural or religious organizations often link immigrants who reside in different parts of a larger metropolitan area by joint membership in one of several ethnic churches or other meeting places in the region (Menjivar, 2003; Avenarius, 2004a).

Overall, the level of ethnic concentration in new urban spaces is only low to moderate, especially for affluent, high human capital immigrants (Allen and Turner, 2005). However, structural assimilation seems elusive (Skop and Li, 2005; Zhou, 2006). Instead, immigrants engage in what Zelinsky and Lee call heterolocalism: they maintain ethnic cohesion and solidarity with members of their ethnic group across spatial distances (1998). Fong and Ooka’s discussion of contemporary integration also comes to the conclusion that residential location, English skills, and participation in informal groups have ceased to constitute reliable predictors of the incorporation process (2002, 2006). Instead, individual immigrants engage in selective behavior. Just as they refrain from displaying particular loyalties to obtain goods and services from either ethnic or mainstream economies they also seem to be selective in their choices regarding where and how to participate in the larger society (Lo and Wang, 2004, 2007).

What does this mean for the likelihood of social integration? Are men and women able to make different choices regarding their social involvement? How to evaluate the current incorporation process of men and women under these changed conditions? In this article, I argue that social network analysis can provide evidence of potential integration by looking at opportunities for interaction and levels of civic participation based on the frequency and reach of co-ethnic and cross-ethnic ties in immigrant networks (Blau, 1977; Han, 2004). In the immigration literature the social network perspective has mainly been used to study decisions to migrate (Curran and Saguy, 2001; Palloni et al., 2001; Wilson, 1998; Jasso and
Rosenzweig, 1995). Comparatively few studies have employed this perspective to understand immigrant incorporation. Hagan and Kibria make important contributions by describing the interaction patterns of immigrants with employers and community organizations in the larger society (Hagan, 1998; Kibria, 1993). However, these studies focus on immigrants with low human capital. On the other hand, Portes and Sensenbrenner influenced many scholars of immigrant incorporation with observations about the continued embeddedness of immigrants in their ethnic social networks (1993). This implies that immigrants will utilize co-ethnic rather than cross-ethnic ties as long as they obtain benefits from these interactions (Sanders, 2002).

To understand what kind of quality of life and opportunities sprawling urban spaces offer male and female immigrants, a closer investigation is needed of the actual social relationships that tie affluent immigrants from Taiwan to each other and to nonimmigrants.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Conceptualizing personal networks**

The exploration of personal network structures is the main analytic tool for assessing the likelihood of social integration of immigrants from Taiwan in the sprawling metropolitan areas of Southern California. Given that social actors are embedded in social structures that determine their opportunities and limitations to action (Schweizer, 1997), the structure of immigrant networks can provide insights on the presence or absence of constraints to interaction with both co-ethnics and nonimmigrants (i.e., members of other ethnic groups). Due to immigrants’ high levels of human and financial capital and dispersed settlement structure, this research expected the networks of immigrants from Taiwan to have low degrees of constraint. In other words, life in areas of urban sprawl was assumed to afford them a multitude of opportunities to find interaction partners. Low degrees of constraint in a personal network structure are defined by the presence or absence of constraints to interaction partners. Low degrees of constraint in a personal network structure are defined by the presence of individuals with extensive, heterogeneous, and diverse relationships.

The extensiveness of a personal network is indicated by its size, measured as the number of people a person interacts with on a regular basis (Wasserman and Faust, 1994). This includes both strong and weak ties. A strong tie is a social relation that connects two people who interact frequently with each other, share similar identities, and have several activities in common, that is they are multiplex. Weak ties are social relations that loosely connect people who share only a singular interest or have only one activity context in common, that is they are usually uniplex. Interaction is infrequent and often instrumental in nature (Granovetter, 1973; Wellman and Wortley, 1990: 564). However the definition of extensiveness it is not a representation of all people a person knows. It only includes regular and consistent interaction partners. Heterogeneity in personal networks is measured by looking at the proportion of members with different characteristics other than ego. In contrast, homophily among network members is expressed as shared ethnicity, sex, age, family status, occupation, income levels, etc. (McAllister and Fischer, 1983; Marsden, 1988). Finally, network diversity is defined as the proportion of network members from other ethnic groups in relation to one’s own ethnic group.

Constraints in a personal network are often caused by the degree of multiplexity of ties, because the higher the number of strong ties and the overlap of social roles among network members, the more confining a personal network becomes, leaving fewer opportunities to meet new people or acquire information through different social channels (Burt, 1992). Network density can also limit opportunities for interaction with a diverse group of people.
Density is defined as the number of ties actually existent within a network divided by the number of ties that would be present if every member in a network would be connected to all other members. A network is most dense if every member is connected to every other member in the network (Borgatti and Everett, 1997). In summary, identification of constraints in the personal network structure of male and female immigrants and their influence on both intraethnic and interethnic interaction needs to be based on information regarding the roles of relationships (i.e., friends, family, etc.), the characteristics of network members (i.e., gender, age, occupation, education, etc.), the presence of strong or weak ties and the local, regional or global reach of relationships.

However, the emphasis of relational properties does not dismiss information on characteristics of individual actors. Attributional information is used for illustration and in-depth interpretation after the structure of networked activities is produced. Certainly, attributes also play a role in the design stage of a network study when determining which social roles or type and location of groups to include in the inquiry. In addition, the attributes of network members are of interest in the analysis stage, for example, the gender of interaction partners and other similarities (i.e., homophilies) between two people linked by a tie. This type of data is important because it informs about opportunities for networking among people and the preferences and obligations of a person. In general, any attributional data on network members and the nature of their ties puts the structure of a network into a larger context of behavior patterns among human beings. It helps to specify when, how and why interaction takes place and how it differs by gender.

**Data collection**

The southern part of Orange County constitutes a suitable research site for understanding the impact that sprawling settlement structures of metropolitan regions have on the development and maintenance of social relationships among immigrant residents. This geographic area with its extensive urban sprawl and low population density was expected to be home to a large proportion of immigrants that are affluent enough to settle in newly built subdivisions devoid of large scale clustering of co-ethnics. Immigrants from Taiwan were chosen as informants because of the researcher’s Chinese language skills. At the time of fieldwork in 1998 hardly any immigrants living in southern Orange County had arrived directly from mainland China. Instead, affluent Chinese speaking immigrants originated predominately from Taiwan.

To collect the network data needed for the evaluation of incorporation processes as specified above, I engaged in participant observation and conducted informal, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2006). The initial stage of data collection involved participant observation in the public spaces where immigrants from Taiwan meet, and was exploratory and lead to the composition of questions for unstructured interviews with community leaders and real estate agents. The goal was to compile a list of ethnic Chinese and Taiwanese organizations in southern Orange County that would allow a more systematic sampling approach for data collection on personal network structures as specified below. At the time of fieldwork a total of 62 different social organizations founded by immigrants from Taiwan were identified. Subsequently participant observation continued by working part-time in a local Taiwanese owned business serving customers and by becoming a temporary member in a range of recreational groups (e.g., ballroom dancing, choir meetings, etc.) and Christian churches and Buddhist and Daoist prayer groups (Johnson et al., 2006). The insights gained from engaging in these social roles facilitated the construction of semi-structured interview guidelines in line with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
Table 1 provides an overview of the different types of interviews conducted during twelve months of fieldwork. Informal, unstructured and semi-structured interviews differ in respect to the level of comparability of both elicitation devices and informants’ answers (Johnson and Weller, 2002; Bernard, 2006). Informal interviews with key informants resembled frequent chats about ongoing processes in the community. Each conversation differed in content. Unstructured interviews were conducted with community leaders such as pastors, association presidents, teachers, and Chinese speaking real estate agents. Interviews focused on the similar topic of ethnic community activities and opportunities for interaction but questions varied in reference to the material presented by the interview partners. Data provided by these interviews was not as systematically comparable as the data produced by semi-structured interviews that are based on a carefully prepared set of interview questions that allow a variety of open-ended answers but are presented in similar fashion to each informant. This research includes two sets of data generated by semi-structured interviews. The first data set was conducted to elicit information about personal network structures from 60 purposely selected informants who were members in a variety of community organizations. The second data set aimed to verify these findings with 30 informants that at the time were not involved in a particular community organization. These interviews were based on a convenience sample (Bernard, 2006). Network structures of these informants resembled those involved in community organizations in size and proportion of cross-ethnic ties.

While all data informed the analysis for this article, the majority of findings on network structures are based on data from the 60 semi-structured interviews on personal networks. These interviews with 40 women and 20 men between 40 and 60 years of age elicited information about the social roles of interaction partners (i.e., co-worker, neighbor), the types of relationships they provide for each other, such as emotional support, the context or meeting places in which interactions took place, and the frequency of interaction. Informants could mention as many names of people as they wanted and there was no restriction to overlapping of relationships by functions or roles. They were also requested to specify the residential location of their interaction partners. Furthermore, they were encouraged to evaluate and comment on their lives and experiences.

The urban context, the dispersed settlement patterns of immigrants, and the unavailability of reliable statistics on immigrants from Taiwan, made the development of a sampling frame rather difficult. It was not feasible to draw a random sample among all residents in southern Orange County who had arrived from Taiwan, because at the time of fieldwork no statistics could be found for these municipalities that list populations by ethnic group. The available statistics used only the category Asian and Pacific Islander, which include a number of different countries of origin, most predominately from Taiwan, Korea, and Iran. They also failed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interview</th>
<th>Male Informants</th>
<th>Female Informants</th>
<th>Sum Per Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal interviews with key informants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstructured interviews on range of community organisations</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews on personal network structures</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semi-structured interviews to verify patterns of behavior</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>Total number of informants</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>112</td>
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TABLE 1
NUMBER OF INFORMANTS IN EACH INTERVIEW CATEGORY BY GENDER
to provide information on socio-economic background, household size, or their physical addresses. Instead, this study used a two-step approach for informant selection in order to increase the level of representativeness of informants within the limits of a non-probability sample. The first step of the selection process for the semi-structured interviews on personal network structures was to make theoretically driven choices that would determine a pool of informants from a universe of possible characteristics (Johnson, 1990: 23). These criteria included place of origin, generation of immigration, socio-economic status, location of residence, and location of social involvement in ethnic community organizations. Based on rosters obtained from all ethnic Chinese or Taiwanese social groups in the geographic area that fit these requirements, the second step of the selection process sampled from within this collection of potential informants, randomly selecting one person from each organization. Since more social groups had predominately female than male members, the sample has an uneven proportion of male and female informants. It reflects the fact that on average women are more likely to join a community organization than men. The profile of individual informants then varies by length of time spent in the United States, location of spouse, age of children, occupation, educational credentials, including proficiency in English, and membership in social groups.

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND: LOCATION AND PEOPLE

In recent years California has become the state with the highest number of non-white residents, exceeding the proportion of this traditional majority in the United States (US Bureau of the Census, 1998). While Los Angeles County consistently attracts the highest number of immigrants, Orange County is a preferred by a large number of immigrants as their first place of settlement, specifically affluent immigrants from countries in Asia. Among immigrants from Taiwan, Orange County constitutes the third highest preference after Los Angeles and Santa Clara County (State of California, Department of Finance, 1999).

The extraordinary influx of people from Asia to Orange County warrants a closer look at the processes which created these ethnically mixed residential areas. During the last 30 years, Southern California has been transformed into a focal point for both high-skilled and low-skilled newcomers alike. Employment opportunities are plentiful in the cities of Orange County and residents travel all over the county on a daily basis for their jobs, recreational activities, shopping opportunities and socializing. This has changed the role of Orange County from a suburban area adjacent to Los Angeles into a complex metropolitan region with its own economy and cultural life (Kling et al., 1991: 2). Today Orange County is considered an urbanized county, which functions as an independent entity and ranks alongside traditional urban centers in terms of consumption and buying power per household per city compared across the entire United States (Gottdiener and Kephart, 1991: 51).

City boundaries in this type of metropolitan region serve merely administrative purposes but do not operate as community boundaries, let alone visible boundaries. As a result, these spaces provide little in the way of a reference points for community activities and public gatherings. Any effort in community building has to make do without a sense of history or previously established traditional customs (Soja, 1996: 259). Individuals and small groups have to create and reinvent their own practices of attachment and identification independent of central and historically grown locations. The relatively young age of Orange County is also indirectly responsible for the absence of extensive ethnic residential clustering, or in other words, adjacent housing tracts with more than 25 per cent of the population from the same ethnic group. Indeed, the southern part of Orange County does not qualify as an eth-
noburb, defined as scattered ethnic clusters connected to a historic place of ethnic settlement as, for example, the City of Monterey Park in Los Angeles County that developed in reference to the Los Angeles Chinatown (Tseng, 1994; Fong, 1994; Li, 1999).

Although the informants of this study all list Taiwan as their country of origin, they are not ethnically homogenous. Immigrants who arrived from this island use three different terms of self-identification in reference to the rather tumultuous history of settlement of Taiwan (Copper, 2003). In their daily interactions informants usually distinguish themselves and others belonging either to the group of ethnic Han Chinese who arrived on Taiwan from Mainland China after 1945, or to the group of ethnic Taiwanese, including both Hoklo and Hakka Chinese, whose ancestors had settled Taiwan between the early 1600s and late 1800s. While these differences have some effects on the preference of leisure time activities, in respect to social network structures members of both subethnic groups respond similarly to their urban environment (Avenarius, 2007). In this study each group is represented in roughly equal proportions.

The socio-economic background of immigrant families from Taiwan, which enables them to purchase houses in the new subdivisions of Orange County with housing price that at the time of fieldwork started at US$250,000, is predominately based on the employment of at least one adult family member as a professional in the fields of either medicine, engineering, or information technology (Zhou, 2006). In addition, a smaller group of informants generates income as business owners or as employees in the service sector. More than half of all female informants of this study are homemakers. Women who hold occupations in the public sphere, especially female immigrants who were educated in the United States, usually work in professional occupations comparable in pay and status to men. Similar to male immigrants, they work as doctors, dentists, engineers, computer analysts, and economic advisors. In addition, many initial homemakers, especially the few women whose husbands have returned to work in East Asia, work part-time jobs in the service sector of the ethnic economy, such as real estate agents or insurance brokers.

Immigrants from Taiwan to Orange County can also be profiled by the number of years spent in the United States and reasons for emigration. The first immigrants from Taiwan arrived between the early 1950s and the late 1960s as students in pursuit of higher education. Given the economic conditions at home at the time, most students decided to stay in the United States (Copper, 2003; Roy, 2003). In fact, these former students sponsored immigrants of the second wave lasting from the late 1960s until the late 1980s. The threat of a takeover of Taiwan by the Communist Party of China following the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between the United States and mainland China, which began with President Nixon’s visit to Beijing in 1972, prompted many residents of Taiwan to emigrate, especially those who had left mainland China for Taiwan less than three decades earlier.

In my time Taiwan was a war zone, people were always afraid, and therefore sent their kids to a place with safety, a place which was rich. That was the hope at that time, so people sent their kids to America. (male informant #6).

Additional reasons for immigration in addition to education were economic opportunities for entrepreneurs and skilled workers in the United States.

Motivations for emigration and the composition of immigrant families from Taiwan have changed since the late 1980s. Newcomers not only face a very different economic situation upon arrival compared to previous groups, they also leave for slightly different reasons. No longer are business and job opportunities more plentiful and promising in the United States than in Taiwan. In particular immigrants with high levels of human capital realize that work places in East Asia were more suitable for their skills and income expectations. However, compared to life in Taiwan immigration to the United States continues to offer a higher quality of life in terms of affordability of spacious housing, better air quality, lower popula-
tion density, and less grueling school curricula for their children combined with a higher like-
lihood of access to a university education.

Taiwan is special as it does have a lot of very rich people, but the environment is tough. People in Taiwan want to send their kids to the United States to study– because then it is not so hard for them - life is more fun and more rewarding if you go to school in the United States– not as hard as in Taiwan. (female informant #58).

In response, some immigrant families decide to split geographically (Salaff, 2002; Chee, 2005). The main breadwinner returns to job opportunities in East Asia and the other parent, usually the mother, and the children establish a household in the United States. In fact, some already established immigrants from Taiwan pursue similar transnational strategies after a job loss or early retirement in North America (Ong and Nonini, 1997; Wong, 1998; Waters, 2002).

BASIC NETWORK COMPOSITION OF MALE AND FEMALE IMMIGRANTS

Network extensiveness

The average social network of immigrants from Taiwan includes 13 (sd = 3.9) regular and consistent interaction partners. Although this seems to represent a rather substantial size in the North American context as evident in research using the General Social Survey (GSS), informants considered their social worlds rather small compared to the networks of their sib-
lings, friends and parents back in Taiwan (Marsden, 1987; Moore, 1990; Bearman and Parigi, 2004). This mean number of network members is similar for both male and female immi-
gants (t (58) = .266, p = .793). Length of years spent in the United States and age of infor-
mants have no significant effects on the size of networks. This is explained by the fact that at the time of fieldwork all immigrants from Taiwan who participated in this study had resided at least five years in Orange County with children either in high school or college, putting them in roughly comparable lifecycle positions. However, a closer look at the distribution of network characteristics reveals important differences between men and women.

In general the personal networks of female immigrants consist of a mixture of equal pro-
portions of strong, moderately strong, and weak ties. Yet women’s networks have a higher degree of multiplexity compared to their husbands or male kin who settled in similar areas of urban sprawl (t (58) = −2.141, p < .05). This means that a number of members in the net-
works of female immigrants fulfill several social roles at once, such as friend, fellow parent, and choir member. In combination with network size, this information reflects the rather socially engaged nature of women’s networks. Women meet a certain proportion of their net-
work members in more than one context rather than encounter an acquaintance in just one particular social environment.

There are no significant differences between the network structures of women whose hus-
bands live with them in Southern California and women whose husbands spend the majority of their time overseas. While the absence of husbands makes certain social activities that cater to couples unavailable to women, it creates no social stigma that restrains women from community involvement in general. In fact, the daily presence of a husband actually con-
strains a woman’s time budget and therefore her ability to participate in many different recre-
ational activities. However, women who have to care for their own or their spouse’s elderly parent report reduced involvement in community organizations in Orange County compared to women whose parents are deceased or reside in Taiwan (t (58) = −2.969, p < .01).

A closer look at the network structures of male immigrants provides evidence that the average values for network size, which measures extensiveness, are in fact the result of a bimodal distribution. Less than half of the men have very large networks with up to 20
frequently activated ties that connect them to various others in a number of different contexts. Larger networks are usually a reflection of connections to former classmates established prior to emigration. These preexisting relationships encourage these men to get involved in several community associations and recreational activities throughout California. Their multitude of interests results in extensive personal networks of weak ties with very little overlap among members. In contrast, the majority of male immigrants have very small networks with an average of eight members who all know each other. These networks are multiplex and consist mainly of strong ties. Male informants explained that job related time constraints and a shortage of people who share similar backgrounds and experiences are responsible for the small size of their networks.

**Network heterogeneity**

In addition to size, social networks are characterized by the social roles that network members fulfill for an informant and the types of support they provide, including social, instrumental and emotional support (McAllister and Fischer, 1983). In terms of social roles, the largest proportion of all relationships, or more than one fifth of all links mentioned by informants, are between people who enjoy recreational activities together such as dancing, golfing, playing tennis, singing in a choir, or playing an instrument. Immigrants also reported ties to co-workers or business partners, to former classmates or fellow alumni, and to acquaintances they meet in a faith related context (e.g., at a Buddhist temple or Christian church). These three types of social roles each constitute roughly 15 per cent of all ties. The number of relationships to extended family members and kin is less than ten per cent of all ties. Relationships with other parents of school age children and with fellow members of cultural, professional or political organizations, account for even smaller proportions. The role of neighbour was the least frequently mentioned among all ties.

The majority of these social roles are activated to obtain social support for conversations and leisure time activities after work. Immigrants have few needs for instrumental support in the sense of information about services in the area (Avenarius, 2008). However, it is important to note that only former classmates and family members or kin provide emotional support. Many informants specified that people with whom they went to school are their most important network members. The structurally equivalent position of these former classmates with kin group members has also been identified for the case of Hong Kong émigrés to Canada (Wong and Salaff, 1998).

My best friends I don’t meet in the (... community organization). They are from school and college. Same high school, and college, (name), and then they came here to the United States as well. We are still together. High school and college friends are my best friends here. And even one friend – he moved here from the East Coast – he is my elementary school friend. We haven’t seen each other for 20 years before we met up here again. He moved from the East Coast to (...) neighborhood here. So we kind of see each other every weekend. (female informant #52).

When looking at network composition by gender, the main differences are between the proportions of recreational contacts and co-workers. Women mentioned more ties to people they meet while doing leisure time activities and men mentioned a higher number of co-workers as members of their personal networks. All other social roles were listed in almost equal quantities by gender. The degree of homophily or sociodemographic similarities among members of a personal network confirms and expands on these observations. Women are more likely to interact with other women than with men. For the subgroup of female informants roughly 70 per cent of their network members are female and 30 per cent are male. Men
have a different distribution in their personal networks. While they have slightly more contact with other men, 45.5 per cent of their social interaction partners are women.

The average age of network contacts is 48.23 years (sd = 7.98) compared to an average age of 48.33 (sd = 7.57) for informants. However, the age ranges of members in the networks of male informants are narrower than in the networks of female informants. The tendency for interaction with others of similar age is to some extent also evident in the pairing of occupations among informants and their friends and acquaintances. There are strong tendencies of preferences for interaction with others who share the same social standing and have similar time budgets due to their responsibilities in the workplace, in a business, or in the household as evident in table 2.

Informants are more likely to have more ties with people who share the same socio-economic background. Homemakers seek other homemakers more often and professionals interact more frequently with other professionals (both relations are significant at the p < .0001 level). All other interactions between members of different occupational groups are lower than would be expected by chance. The only exception is the exchange taking place between business owners and people who work in service related occupations. The two groups are often linked by an overlap of related tasks at the workplace. In sum, the personal networks of immigrants have a rather high degree of homophily. Findings from a review of ethnic diversity are consistent with these observations.

**Network diversity**

Imminent ethnic diversity in immigrant networks has the potential to inform about the likelihood for social integration (Brown, 2006). While immigrants are not expected to interact exclusively with members of ethnic groups other than their own, opportunities for interaction and attitudes towards the establishment of cross-ethnic ties present important clues. Immigrants from Taiwan encounter people with different ethnic backgrounds at the workplace, in the neighborhood, at school related events, and in public places such as shopping malls, doctor’s offices, banks, etc. Yet, often interethnic contacts amount to nothing more than greeting relationships or occur only at the weak tie level (Deng and Bonacich, 1991; Schweizer et al., 1998). Despite the expressed desire to interact with members of the larger society, especially among female immigrants, few become regular and consistent interaction partners that provide social, emotional or instrumental support. Though the proportions of cross-ethnic ties in the personal networks of male immigrants is higher than in the networks of female immigrants (t (58) = 2.715, p < .01), only 13 per cent of their ties represent socializing activities with nonimmigrant network members. That means that informants have zero to three outside contacts, while the majority of informants interact at most with only one person from

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**TABLE 2**

HOMOPHILY OF INTERACTION PARTNERS BY OCCUPATION (N = 722)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Homemaker</th>
<th>Service Provider</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Business Owner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>45 (29)</td>
<td>29 (25)</td>
<td>37 (53)</td>
<td>10 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service provider</td>
<td>15 (16)</td>
<td>14 (14)</td>
<td>21 (28)</td>
<td>15 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>26 (36)</td>
<td>26 (32)</td>
<td>84 (66)</td>
<td>15 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business owner</td>
<td>2 (7)</td>
<td>8 (7)</td>
<td>18 (31)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers reflect the raw counts of ties. The expected number of ties, listed in brackets, is rounded.
another culture on a regular basis. The gender difference in respect to the degree of ethnic diversity in networks is a result of the lower rates of full-time employment among women. They have fewer occupationally generated opportunities to meet people of various ethnic backgrounds that introduce them to interethnic social activities.

Since the neighbourhoods and subdivisions in southern Orange County are ethnically heterogeneous but socio-economically homogenous they were expected to facilitate interethnic interaction. However, many informants confess that they have little contact with neighbours of any ethnicity, not even fellow immigrants from Taiwan, due to a lack of common interests. As Greenbaum and Greenbaum have shown, significant relationships between neighbours develop only in the presence of additional shared experiences (1985).

Previously there used to be two white families in our neighborhood who always seemed to be very close to all the other neighbors, yet they are gone now. We others, we don’t interact much, we are all very busy. I am actually not really busy – I don’t go out often. One of the ladies here (in the subdivision) she works and the other one has two kids, so she doesn’t go out but is busy. If you don’t go out, you don’t meet anyone. And I never used to be close to them, so I can’t go all of a sudden and request contact. (female informant #65).

There is a need for shared experiences that serve as a basis for feelings of comfort and belonging in relationships. This is evident from the answers that informants provided when asked why their social networks include very few cross-ethnic ties. Despite the fact that only homemakers have to struggle with language barriers, all informants explained that opportunities to regular interactions with nonimmigrants are constrained by the limited range of commonalities.

Well, we – em, well, it’s something we don’t really do, we Chinese. Chinese people only get together with their own people, which is not healthy. Well, you don’t know the white people, so you don’t associate with them, get together. (male informant #36).

I don’t know – I have just that feeling – they don’t really want to be close friends – we are different. They are Americans; they have so many people they can make friends with. They don’t need to make friends with us. They can make friends with their likes, with people who are like them, are the same. (male informant #67).

**Geographic Reach of Ties**

Given the moderate to low levels of extensiveness, heterogeneity and diversity in immigrant networks, it is important to review the spatial distribution of ties. The goal is to understand to what extent spatial distances constrain opportunities for interaction. Immigrants from Taiwan engage in social relationships that link them with people in the same local subdivision and throughout Orange County. They also connect them across the globe to people in Taiwan. In general, the spatial structure of the sprawling metropolitan region of southern Orange County with its lack of central places and scattered office and shopping areas is not very conducive to finding interaction partners in close proximity to one’s residence, as suggested by the limited number of relationships to neighbors. Rather than looking simply at spatial proximity, in this study neighbours are defined in the strictest sense of the term as having potential for interaction due to mutual accessibility resulting from the connectivity of streets (Grannis, 1998: 1534).

The notion of accessibility through residential streets is important in the American metropolitan context, especially in the master-plan communities of southern California. The design of recently built subdivisions significantly reduces the opportunities for interaction among neighbours who live on separate cul-de-sac streets that can only be reached by leaving one residential area and entering another by way of a major feeder street. Grannis demonstrated
that in areas of vast urban sprawl it takes almost the same amount of time to reach a home in a different subdivision across a major artery street as getting to a home which is spatially adjacent and in the same subdivision but not connected through a residential street (1998: 1533). Therefore, it is important to understand what distances immigrants were willing to travel to maintain relationships. The distribution of personal network ties in space was measured by comparing the approximate distances between the residential area of an informant and the residential area of each person he or she listed as providers of emotional, social and instrumental support. The unit of analysis here was not the individual neighbourhood or subdivision within a municipality, but a larger area defined as the space between two or more highways or major artery streets.

Immigrants often talked about the fact that they had to travel at least five minutes by car and pass several major intersections when they wanted to visit others or run errands even within the same section of their city. Similar sentiments have been reported by other immigrant groups (Mesch, 2002; Zentgraf, 2002). Comparing their present social life with their former social activities in Taiwan, they explained their reduced levels of involvement with other people with references to the impediments caused by vast distances and extensive infrastructure in Orange County. Analysis of the spatial correspondence between the residential locations of network members revealed that only 17 per cent of all social relationships connect two people who live in the same residential area between two major thoroughfares. While the driving distance by itself did not pose a major constraint to interaction for informants, the inconvenience of having to switch highways and/or driving an extended period of time on a potentially congested highway was considered a major hindrance in the maintenance of relationships with the parents of other school-age children, co-workers, training buddies, joint recreational group members, or joint association members.

Ok, why does everybody say they are “busy”? Being busy means usually ‘cleaning up the house’—here, whatever you do takes time. You have to drive your car very far. So they are always running out of time. If the time seems to be not enough, that’s when people say “they are busy.” For example if you need to buy a certain item or get a repair for something, you never know how long it’s gonna take you - everything needs driving. Time is very hard to manage. Few chances to get a lot done, there is not much you can do on a single day. (male informant #66).

As much as informants love their spacious homes and the modern layout of the region’s municipalities, they are disappointed about the lack of opportunities to meet others in this environment. When comparing their current life with their former social circles in Taiwan they often attribute the smaller network sizes and the less intense levels of involvement with others to the impediments caused by vast distances and extensive infrastructure in Orange County. From the immigrants’ point of view the huge amount of space between individual places seems to be an essential ingredient of American culture, but is not a desirable component for the establishment and maintenance of relationships.

There is nothing we can do without a car. In Taiwan it’s not like that. A lot of neighbors, they all hang out together. So it’s never far to the next person. There is always someone. You come out of your building, there you meet your neighbor and they ask you what you like to eat, and so forth. Everything is at you footsteps, shops, food. Life is easy. But in America, even for food you have to drive somewhere. So, it takes a while to get used to this place. (female informant #22).

The spatial analysis of local and regional ties shows that geographic proximity plays a role in the search for contact and activities, yet is not the only or the most decisive factor. Most family members and former classmates, for example, are usually do not live in close vicinity to informants. The fact that immigrants from Taiwan forgo settling geographically close to extended family members indicates their financial independence. In contrast, network studies
of financially less well-to-do residents of urban areas revealed that poor people are more likely to live in close proximity to relatives who provide them with emotional, social and financial support in very close-knit networks of strong ties (Espinoza, 1999). As a result, the high level of density in the networks of the poor inhibits them from branching out to the larger society and taking advantage of better economic opportunities. The affluent immigrants of this study, on the other hand, need their social relationships mainly for socializing and emotional support.

The social ties that link immigrants to interaction partners in Taiwan or elsewhere on the globe are mainly connecting close friends and family members. Detailed analysis revealed that transnational activities such as phone calls, email exchange and travel are not as common among informants of this study as often assumed (Miron et al., 1998; Ong, 1999; Faist, 2000). Given that the sample did not include husbands who work abroad, the comparison of statistical regression models discovered that only the presence of parents in Taiwan and the ownership of a business with global reach, for example an importer of computer chips made in Taiwan, explain the likelihood of frequent transnational activities (Avenarius, 2004a: 357). Surprisingly, the presence of a spouse in Taiwan has little influence. The low significance of spousal relations is often the result of estrangement between marriage partners over time.

For women whose husbands spent the majority of their time overseas there is no correlation between transnational activities and reduced involvement in community organizations across southern California. Even women who travel frequently to Taiwan, staying there for months at a time, resume their social activities in the Orange County region upon return. Overall, statistical analysis confirmed that the actual scope of transnational activities is rather limited among both male and female informants of this study despite their easy access to space- and time-compressing technology. As the time of settlement increases and immigrants grow older, they have less and less contact with other people in Taiwan such as former classmates, neighbors, co-workers and even members of their larger kin group. Once parents are gone, visits to Taiwan can become downright awkward or nothing more than a holiday to a formerly familiar place.

It doesn’t really make sense to go back to Taiwan, because we don’t have a house there and nobody to offer us a job. Most of my daily friends are here. In Taiwan I only have siblings – no friends, no activities. If I go back to Taiwan, I live at my husband’s relative’s homes. But it’s not very convenient. I can’t just pick up and go and hang out in Taiwan. Those people who are in business they have a lot of money – yet those who are office workers – they kind of don’t want you around for too long. It’s not that easy. Going back and forth is not that easy. (female informant #34).

Those who maintain close ties to family members and friends in Taiwan by way of frequent visits and phone calls can be considered ‘flexible citizens’ as described by Ong (1999). However, these transnational activities have no influence on the likelihood of integration since they are neither impeding nor promoting the establishment of cross-ethnic ties. This corresponds to observations by Itzigsohn and Saucedo who find that while modern technology allows almost all immigrants to engage in transnational activities, the practice rarely obstructs the process of incorporation (2002).

GENDERED SOCIALIZING IN NEW URBAN SPACES

While the spatial distribution of ties within and beyond the urban sprawl of Orange County is responsible for the comparatively low degree of extensiveness of personal networks (i.e., size of networks) due to time spent traveling on the highways of southern California, the dis-
stances fail to inspire immigrants to look for interaction partners of any ethnic background in their immediate neighborhood. Instead, they would rather navigate the urban spaces and engage in homophilous relations with other immigrants from Taiwan who share similar interests. Informants often expressed their widespread belief that it is necessary to work on relations constantly and continuously. As discussed above they look for shared experiences that assist the formation of social bonds with others. In addition to their ties to extended family members and their circle of former classmates they find most of their interaction partners in the Orange County region as a result of their participation in various types of social groups and community organizations.

Not surprisingly most of these social arenas are ethnic organizations that include primarily immigrants from Taiwan. These ethnic groups founded by immigrants from Taiwan cooperate with general community organizations in the region at charity events and local festivals but hardly any informant participates in a sports club or church community organized by non-immigrants. Although ethnic community organizations are found dispersed across the entire Orange County region, the activities organized by co-ethnics prove to be comprehensive enough to serve most interests of immigrants from Taiwan. Breton’s term “institutional completeness” applies to the ethnic community in this area despite the decentralized settlement of its constituency (1964).

Types of ethnic community organizations include cultural, political, and professional associations, alumni associations, religious organizations, child-related organizations (e.g., Chinese Schools, Chinese Parent Teacher Association), recreational organizations and groups that serve educational purposes (e.g., adult school, toastmaster, etc.) (Avenarius, 2007). The number of membership affiliations individual immigrants hold ranges from zero to six organizations and the average rate of participation is 2.9 (sd = 1.37) groups per informant. However, composition of membership rosters is not stable. Immigrants pick and choose their involvement according to their changing interests and positions in the lifecycle. In particular, recreational groups experience major shifts in membership constitution. Even religious communities witness frequent comings and goings of participants due to recruiting efforts of existing members and internal divisions. The fluctuation of group memberships has an effect on the strength of ties between individual. Unless people keep in contact after they end participation in a particular group, their relationships are generally weakened.

McPherson and Smith-Lovin posit that women practice selective joining and are predisposed to attend smaller, community-oriented associations and recreational groups which are generally more time-consuming than organizations in which men are involved (1982, 1986). Men are more likely to join political, professional, and alumni associations that meet on a monthly or quarterly basis than on a weekly basis (t(58) = 2.645, p < 0.01). Exceptions are women who participate equally in the workforce at equal pay based on equal levels of education. However, women dominate child related associations. In contrast, most religious organizations are frequented in equal proportions by both men and women. While the overall membership in Christian churches and Buddhist prayer groups is not female dominated, certain activities, such as fundraising efforts and charity events, are gender oriented. Furthermore there are more women’s bible study groups than men’s bible study groups (Avenarius, 2004b: 864; Chen, 2005).

Immigrant women are involved in more leisure time activities than men, which results in a voluntary gender segregation of recreational organizations (Popielarz, 1999). There are a few sports and music oriented groups that have both male and female members. However, there are only two groups that are predominately frequented by men compared to eight groups that have only female members. Women especially treasure the opportunity to take self-improvement classes, such as singing lessons and dance instructions.
I like doing water color, go to the choir, bible study, dancing classes (...). It’s nice to be able to follow my interests. (female informant #49).

The higher participation rates of women in these types of groups are not the result of differences between homemakers and professionals. In fact, many homemakers forgo signing up for recreational activities until their children enter high school and women who are employed as professionals have higher rates of participation in leisure time activities than their male counterparts. Finally, but not unexpectedly, education-oriented groups in adult school that are hobby oriented or provide instructions of English as a second language, are mostly women dominated. In this distribution the participation of women in the workforce does play a role. Women who are in the workforce participate in professional associations in addition to their recreational interests and therefore have less time or need for educational groups.

With the exception of extremely inconvenient driving distances between homes and meeting places, the spatial location of a group is not a criterion for choosing involvement. Only senior citizen clubs and adult schools have a local focus by serving members who live in their immediate vicinity. All other ethnic organizations, including religious and recreational organizations, have members that come from all municipalities throughout southern Orange County.

It follows that the structure of socializing opportunities immigrants have created for themselves is not only based on existing homophilous relationships but also further promotes the development of homophilous relationships (Marsden, 1988; McPherson et al., 1992). Similar to the characteristics of personal networks, the limited heterogeneity at the social group level is also an indicator for a low level of integration into the larger society (Popielarz and McPherson, 1995). Since relationships are rarely reaching out to create ethnically mixed social groups, they are unlikely to link individual immigrants to the larger society, which in the case of Orange County is made up of a diverse body of people.

Well being or isolation? Benefits and detriments of new urban spaces

Most female immigrants do not consider life in the urban sprawl of southern Orange County to limit their opportunities to meet other people. On the contrary, many women keep their networks deliberately small. They insist that they would be able to invest in a much larger number of relationships if they weren’t so keen on keeping the range of their social obligations manageable. By no means do they wish to recreate the tightly bounded networks they experienced in their homeland.

If I would participate in everything I could affiliate myself with in relation to my (former) school, work, and interests, I might as well have stayed in Taiwan. (female informant #54).

Well, I don’t want to go to so many parties. I am not a kind of a social butterfly. I need my time. And, I mean, you need to sit down and think “do I want to – kind of – have all these parties?” You just see that all these social things mean nothing. You see what I mean? And if we are close friends we can just go to lunch, just a quiet lunch. You don’t have to go to all those 400 people meetings – and it’s so noisy – and sometimes it’s meaningless. I mean, I don’t want to spend that kind of money. And with some friends you don’t even know! So, I don’t want to go beyond these three major activities I have. (female informant #69).

Compared to the life women left behind in Taiwan, their social environment in the United States and the resulting structure of their personal networks creates fewer social obligations.

In America life is simple and everyone just cares about themselves. Yet, in Taiwan life is more complex and often too much trouble with relatives and relations. But it has one advantage, so to speak, to live here. You have fewer relatives here, and fewer friends. Therefore
you don’t have to attend many social events. In Taiwan on the other hand, it is most likely you have a lot of relatives, a lot of friends. Then there is that person marrying, and that one is having a birthday. Every day you are busy to the nines. [Life in] Taiwan can be very exhausting. (female informant #34).

Beyond measurable network structures, explanations and comments like these provide further insights about gender differences regarding immigrant incorporation in areas of urban sprawl. Almost all female informants reported that due to the convenience of the American lifestyle with its 24 hour stores and availability of information in regular and ethnic yellow pages there is less need to weave and maintain social connections for instrumental purposes (Avenarius, 2008). In turn they have gained additional leisure time to pursue recreational interests. Many also mention that they appreciate the respite from kinship and neighborhood obligations that they experienced in urban Taiwan. Not surprisingly, many female immigrants consider the lifestyle, customs, and attitudes of nonimmigrant American women desirable. They often express an interest to get better acquainted with others outside their ethnic group. Yet women in the workforce claim time constraints – and homemakers – their lack of fluency in English as reasons that keep them from establishing more ethnically diverse relationships.

The description of leisure and ease is not meant to give the impression that life in America is without any hardships for female immigrants from Taiwan. Many informants recall that it took them a few years to develop self-directed interests and to get used to the feeling of loneliness in subdivisions without any visible neighbours. Women with husbands who engage in frequent travel had to learn to negotiate the accommodation of both their husband’s schedule and their own activities (Wong, 1998; Waters, 2002).

I used to be upset about life here. But now I have my singing (...) and over the years it got better. (female informant #37).

Since I am going out more often to exercise and meet my friends, my husband is actually jealous that I have such a good social life. (female informant # 25).

While women declare they consciously keep their networks small, men are not pleased with the characteristics of their social life in metropolitan Orange County, in particular in light of their cultural expectations and in comparison with the lives of former classmates and colleagues who returned to Taiwan. Even men with comparatively large social networks consider the type and number of opportunities to engage in leisure time activities in the United States lacking in comparison with those available in Taiwan. Although some join golf and tennis clubs in southern Orange County, they would like to be exposed to more numerous occasions for interaction with other men in bars and restaurants. Many voice doubts about their decision to remain in California.

Do I regret not going back? Nah. . . maybe. . . but sometimes the situation forces you, the job, the family. But I found a job and I raised a family and then your center already evolves in a certain direction. My kids were born here and it is good for them. And so I continued to stay here. It depends on the moment when you have to make the decision, where you are at. Some of my classmates went back in the beginning of the 90s when the economy was in recession. Yet I didn’t go. (male informant #39).

I don’t have a social life, a social life like the white people have. That is only possible in Taiwan. Social relations in America are like this: people know each other for a short time and then split again. Everyone has their own thing to keep them busy. America is pretty amazing that way. You lose touch, just once in a while a phone call, that’s the most. Close friendships are very rare. (male informant #19).

A comparison of the social spaces created by sprawling metropolitan areas with traditional urban enclaves such as Chinatowns shows that the density and multiplexity of social relations in ethnic enclaves are more likely to fulfill male immigrant’s expectations of a desirable social
environment. Many men appreciate opportunities to become well known by a large number of compatriots. They enjoy the visibility of social positions in the rather bounded social worlds of ethnic enclaves. However, settlement in ethnic enclaves carries a social stigma. Most affluent immigrants associate settlement in ethnic enclaves with the presence of lower class immigrants. Therefore they do not consider residence in these types of urban spaces a viable option.

In contrast, female informants dread the social conditions associated with ethnic enclaves. They consider them to be a repetition of the lives they left behind in Taiwan because they make it harder for women to elect with whom they want to interact and how to satisfy their individual interests in leisure time activities. Chen came to similar conclusions in her research on the role of Christianity and Buddhism in the life of female immigrants from Taiwan (2005). Life in metropolitan areas of the United States with fewer traditional obligations has afforded women more time and occasions to find a distinct sense of self, as for example through conversion to a particular religious teaching. It follows that these types of urban structures present more advantages for immigrant women than for men.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand the likelihood of social integration for affluent first generation immigrants from Taiwan. The assumption was that men and women who live in the newly built subdivisions of Orange County have very little constraints to social interaction with nonimmigrants due to their high levels of human and economic capital in combination with dispersed settlement patterns. As a result the personal networks of immigrants were expected to consist of diverse, extensive, and heterogeneous ties. However, the analysis of personal network structures revealed that immigrants from Taiwan experience more constraints to social integration than expected, a situation that male and female immigrants negotiate differently.

While transnational activities proved to have little effect on the incorporation process, spatial structures influence opportunities for interaction. In line with the assumptions of the spatial assimilation hypothesis, the decentralized urban design of metropolitan areas such as Orange County with its dispersed settlement of ethnic group members, its low population density, and its culturally diverse residents seems to provide opportunities to meet others due to the absence of visible ethnic clusters and hierarchies between urban structures. However, the dependency on cars for regional travel of almost any kind causes immigrants and citizens alike to be less attached to any particular geographic or physical location. Dispersed settlement patterns fail to automatically induce contacts between diverse neighbors. The structural arrangement of residences and streets is not conducive to overcoming social or cultural distances between members of different ethnic groups. This is not a new phenomenon. The results of studies on ethnic stratification conducted by Shibutani and Kwan in the 1960s attributed the perpetuation of perceptions of differences to a lack of opportunities to gain knowledge about others (1965). As a result, people of similar cultural and socio-economic backgrounds spent more time with each other than with people who have different profiles. In addition, existing network contacts between people who are alike further limit opportunities to interaction, which demonstrates that network homophily is rather a product of social structure than human agency (McPherson et al., 1992: 168).

At the same time, the spatial characteristics of new urban spaces prevent co-ethnics from establishing tightly knit, densely connected personal networks, despite the fact that a sufficiently large number of ethnic social organizations is available in southern Orange County to
facilitate social interaction between co-ethnics. Immigrants do not see each other on a daily basis, which reduces some aspects of social control. A visible result is fluctuating membership rates and group compositions in many ethnic organizations. The main purpose of participating in community groups is to socialize with others. A few people initially struggle with finding such contacts. However, over time many new residents to the area, especially women, appreciate the benefits brought by highly dispersed settlement of co-ethnics.

Indeed, the physical absence of their husband’s kin groups and status generating social organizations has allowed women to find new opportunities for socializing with others outside of neighborhoods and kinship groups. This confirms the function of both immigration experience and urban space as facilitator of unregulated and watched behavior for women, including affluent immigrants. As studies of gendered network structures have demonstrated, relationships to kin represent the biggest differences between men and women and are responsible for constraints to diversity and extensiveness in women’s networks (Moore, 1990). Although other structural constraints to social integration exist, female immigrants are more likely than male immigrants to make use of the remaining room for human agency to configure their social worlds. Unlike men who express preferences for imposed or obligatory ties resulting from tightly knit community structures, women opt to engage in elected ties. They would rather choose with whom they want to interact and accrue mutual obligations than abide by the security of large social networks.

The conditions for incorporation of first generation immigrants have certainly changed for immigrants with high levels of human and economic capital. Interestingly, women show more potential to become socially integrated than men. Despite structural constraints and small numbers of cross-ethnic ties female immigrants express more interest in establishing contacts and exercise more flexibility and agency in their choice of interaction partners. Similar observations of women’s more active and practical approach and men’s protracted reluctance to develop cross-ethnic ties outside the workplace have been made among immigrants to Israel and Germany (Remennick, 2005; Zimmermann et al., 2007). Although women are often called the gatekeepers of culture they are just as likely to be more predisposed to initiate intercultural contacts than men. Further research is needed on the choices of interaction partners that affluent female immigrants make despite structural constraints to provide insights on how to improve the conditions for social integration of first generation immigrants.

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NOTES

1. While the pseudonym “Mr. and Mrs. Lai” is used to introduce the story of this couple, most immigrants from Taiwan follow the traditional Chinese naming rules. Women keep their maiden name after marriage and abstain from taking the last name of their husbands. However, upon arrival in the United States non-Chinese neighbors, co-workers, teachers, etc. often address women by their husband’s last name.

2. Orange County in California, the site of this research, is such an urbanized county. Gotttdiener and Kephart (1991) identified 20 other counties that fulfill three criteria: they are multinucleated, highly urbanised and prosper adjacent to a traditional urban center. The list includes counties surround-
ing the urban centers of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and also Norfolk, Mass; Fair- field, Conn.; Suffolk, New York; Middlesex, New Jersey; Monmouth, New Jersey; Montgomery, Pa; Du Page, Ill.; Macomb, Mich.; Fairfax, Va.; and Gwinnett/De Kalb, Georgia to name a few. They differ somewhat in size, growth rate of population and economy, and proportion of employ- ment sectors such as high-tech industries, defense industries, transportation and communication, retail/wholesale, finance, service and real estate development (Gottdiener and Kephart 1991: 37).

3. Although the majority of immigrants arriving in the United States settles in urban areas, immi- grants are also known to move directly to rural areas. For example Chinese vegetable farmers settled in clusters near San Francisco (Chan 1986; Minnick 1988) and in the Central Valley (Weiss 1974). Japanese immigrants pursued similar occupations and settlement locations in rural areas (Fugita and O’Brien 1991). The Central Valley has also become home to Punjabi Sikhs (Gibson 1988). In addition, Chinese Owners of Groceries set up business in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta to cater to poor Blacks in the area (Loewen 1988).

4. All municipalities in the southern part of Orange County combined had a total population of 782,736 people according to the 1990 U.S. census (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998). The 1990 cen- sus served as the basis for this research conducted from 1997 to 1998. The cities that were included in this study are: Fountain Valley, Costa Mesa, Newport Beach/Newport Coast, Irvine, Tustin/Tustin Foothills, Laguna Beach, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Hills, Aliso Viejo, Mission Viejo, Lake Forest (formerly El Toro), Dana Point, San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, Rancho San Margarita/Coto de Caza.

5. There is no single factor that can explain the growth of these urbanised counties. It is not only a matter of high technology, military related production and spending, postindustrial service or the power of manufacturing which could singularly describe the evolving patterns of multicaen- tered urbanisation from a once rural space. Rather an additional combination of social forces such as a robust real estate market, racism, the flight of the white industrial working class from urban cen- ters, the expansion of service-related industries (which do not need a central location for operating their business) and new arrangements in corporate business structures have all contributed to this new form of spatial settlement (Gottdiener and Kephart 1991: 52).

6. Orange County as one of the largest and fastest growing county-based metropolitan regions in the United States has provoked the use of flowery adjectives to describe and capture the departure from traditional forms of human settlements. With it’s endless stretches of new houses, interrupted only by occasional clusters of commercial areas, it has been likened to “tomorrowland”, “exopol- lis”, “thirddspace”, “frontierland”, “giant theme park” and “the most California-looking of all Cali- fornias” (Davis 1990, Soja 1992, Sorkin 1992, Soja 1996, Scott and Soja 1996).

7. The more frequent involvement of men in alumni association is due to the fact that more men than women in this group of immigrants had attended a college or university in Taiwan prior to emigration. However, the alumni association of Taiwan’s most prestigious high school for women, Taipei First Girl’s High School, is well-known among Taiwanese Americans in the United States and its members are influential in both business and community activities.

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