

2

Uncovering Asian Americas

Examining Korean Americans and Indian Americans in Texas

RESEARCH ON ASIAN AMERICA typically concentrates on one group. I analyze second-generation Indian Americans and Korean American adults because they share important similarities and differences. Both are recent populations who have built up their communities predominantly since the 1965 Immigration Act. The first generation of each group arrived with different occupational patterns, but the second generation has succeeded in the education system and labor market to similar degrees, with a high level of educational attainment and gradual residential integration (Cheng and Yang 1996). As a result, both communities break down the margins-versus-mainstream dichotomy central to this study's focus. They also have noticeable differences, such as religion, appearances, pan-ethnic solidarities, heterogeneity of home country, and others (Min and Kim 1999). Although the differences between Korean and Indian Americans receive ample attention in this book, I concentrate on the overlaps. "Asian America" is a social construction and is often depicted as extremely heterogeneous.¹ A look at commonalities speaks to shared themes within their adaptation and race relations that give meaning to a single population. Research on each group rarely addresses the other. This chapter first explains Indian Americans' and Korean Americans' histories of immigration and racialization in the United States. It then describes their current demographics nationally, the setting of Dallas, the social demographics of the area, and the participants in this study.

HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY RACIALIZATION

Asian Americans have been described as wanted more for their labor than for their lives (Espiritu 2003; Prashad 2000). Historically, they have entered

the United States mostly for work, but they faced systemic hostilities as they pushed for real acceptance in terms of both employment and their social-cultural lives. Although today's conditions differ politically, culturally, and economically from those at the end of the nineteenth century, similar patterns arguably remain in terms of the role of Asian Americans in the U.S. economy and their treatment from other Americans. Many immigrants generally appreciate the opportunities available in the United States relative to those in their homeland. And when they arrive and work in the United States, they often receive greater returns on their capital. Yet, they remain constructed by the state as both racial minorities and foreigners, apart from other races and immigrants (Ancheta 1998; Omi and Winant 1994). Asian immigration has been and continues to be a product of U.S. needs in global capitalism. It has been designed to fill gaps in occupational sectors ranging from white-collar positions to sweatshops (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994). By bringing in Asians, the government has also limited its social service spending on the education and training of local minorities and has helped businesses alleviate the costs associated with labor and training.

As Asian Americans become successful, suspicions turn on them, especially during times of economic insecurity and political tensions with Asia, which affirms the image of the United States as a White country, despite changes in the economy (Lowe 1996). They become racialized as the "yellow peril" bent on overtaking American industries and national defense. They are no longer the "model minority" who kept to their place and worked hard to sustain national and local economies (Okimoto 1994). This notion of Asian Americans as the "enemy within" was displayed most vividly with the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the Japan-bashing of the 1970s and 1980s (Chan 1991). Another literal example was the mistaken identity of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American killed in Detroit partly because he was assumed to be a Japanese American during a time of strong economic competition by Japan in the auto industry. Violence, distorted media images, and nativist laws reinforce the symbolic and practical boundaries between White Americans and immigrants, whether they live in separate countries or as neighbors (Chang 2000).² Gendered and sexual images of Asian American women and men also serve to uphold White male heterosexual dominance by positioning Asian Americans as either the deviant characters that Whites should define themselves in opposition to or as the desired objects that serve as a warning to other Whites of how they should behave (Espiritu 1997; Lee 1999). This structural racism becomes difficult to address through individual, as

opposed to collective, efforts alone, even though people in daily life have little other option. Indian and Korean immigrants, while uniquely different from one another, have histories that fit these general experiences. This chapter does not offer an exhaustive history of each group but instead provides a backdrop to the experiences and attitudes of the current first-generation interviewees, discussed in the following chapter. The history of the two groups fits the trend of Asian Americans wanted more for their labor than for their lives.

Indian Americans

The greatest numbers of Indian immigrants to the United States have arrived since 1965. But Indians have been in North America since as early as 1750. Our best records start with those on the West Coast at the turn of the twentieth century. They arrived in western Canada and the northwestern United States at that time to work in lumberyards, farms, and railroads (Sheth 1995). Violent incidents and even anti-Indian riots ensued due to racial prejudice and economic competition. Many Indians moved to California to avoid racial violence, welcomed at first by farmers needing to replace Chinese and Japanese labor. There were about 7,000 Indian immigrants in California by 1914. Along with Japanese and Chinese Americans, these Indian immigrants substantially changed the agricultural landscape of the state, in particular the Imperial Valley area (Leonard 1997). Still, the usefulness of their labor did not translate into an acceptance of their lives. The immigrants, predominantly Sikhs and Muslims from Punjab, were misnamed “Hindoos” and stereotyped as slaves (Takaki 1989). In the rural areas in which they worked, they often were denied entry into White restaurants and hotels and instead found acceptance in segregated parts of the town, along with Chinese and Mexican immigrants (Leonard 1992). Indian immigrants also were targeted by the Asiatic Exclusion League in California, which previously had sought the removal of Japanese and Korean immigrants. As a result of their economic threat, dark skin that resembled that of “niggers,” and Asian origin, the league sought restrictions on them as well. The notion of yellow-peril Asians overtaking U.S. culture, politics, and economy became that of the brown peril.

Citizenship and land ownership laws limited the impact of this brown peril. Following the Ozawa case of 1922, in which Asian Americans were denied citizenship because they were not “Caucasian,” Bhagat Singh Thind argued to the Supreme Court in 1923, that he deserved citizenship because he was Caucasian. The courts rebuked the argument and concluded that though

Thind was Caucasian, he was not “White” as defined by “common sense” (Lopez 1996). At that moment the United States outwardly defined itself as a racial and racist state, with Asian Americans denied full acceptance, no longer defended by “science” but attacked on the basis of ideology. This ruling, along with the Alien Land Law of 1920, which denied noncitizens the right to own land, meant that Asian Americans lacked economic security and control and were forced to accept a subservient position relative to Whites and to go outside the legal framework to attain land (Leonard 1992). In other words, Asian Americans could work in needed occupations but were not accepted as real Americans.

Not only Asian Americans but also those wishing to migrate into the United States faced discriminatory treatment. As the labor market grew tighter in Asian-concentrated occupations at the turn of the century, many Americans lobbied to have all Asian immigration stopped (Chan 1991). In 1882, Chinese laborers were excluded from immigrating. Other Asians were denied entry into the United States in 1917, when Congress created the “barred zone.” Still more were prevented with the Immigration Act of 1924. Almost no women entered at this time, leaving a predominantly male immigrant population. Without co-ethnic women, families were more difficult to start, and immigrants would presumably either return to their homeland or slowly die away. They could not form legal unions with White women owing to antimiscegenation laws aimed at protecting the sexual “decency” of White women and the durability of the “White family” (Lee 1999). Some Punjabi men in California married Mexican women, often sisters of laborers on their farms (Leonard 1992). The family was a metaphor for the nation, and the laws helped define the nation along racial lines. This limited Asian immigrants’ status to a minor presence of likely sojourners.

Practically all migration from Asia ceased from 1924 until 1946. In 1946, the Luce/Celler Act, widened in 1952 with the McCarran and Walter Act, allowed a small quota of Asians to immigrate and obtain citizenship (Sheth 1995).³ The majority of Indian Americans arrived after 1965, following the Immigration Act of 1965, which eradicated the limited quotas against Asians.⁴ Although the act was not intended to result in a sizable increase in Asian Americans, many fell into the preference category for highly skilled professionals and relatives of citizens. Indian Americans arrived as doctors, engineers, professors, students, or managers, women and men in equal numbers. Given their proficiency in English and their human capital, they rarely formed segregated residential

and commercial districts comparable to those found in Chinatowns or Koreatowns (Helweg and Helweg 1990). In contrast to many other Asian Americans, a sizable minority of Indian Americans have settled outside of urban centers, taking those professional or small business openings least preferred by natives. Still, enclaves of Indian American-owned shops and residences, known as “Little Indias,” can be found in or near major cities, including Queens (in New York City), Edison (New Jersey), Chicago, and Los Angeles. Many—not all—of the men and women working in these areas lack the professional degrees and/or English abilities of their sponsoring relatives and represent the chain migration of the professionals who arrived in the 1970s and early 1980s (Khandelwal 2002). One of the more graphic forms of anti-Indian violence were the “dotbusters” in Jersey City, New Jersey, in 1987 (Lessinger 1995). (The “dot” referred to the bindis on Hindu women’s foreheads.) A group of mostly White teenagers threatened Indian Americans. Among their other attacks, they beat to death a bank manager named Navroze Mody while chanting “Hindu! Hindu!” and beat a doctor so severely that he was in a coma.

The stratification within the Indian American community is stark. In addition to the “brain drain” during the 1960s and 1970s, a large number of computer programmers and businesspeople more recently have established a reputation in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, including Dallas. At the same time, South Asian Americans increasingly own and/or work in gas stations, convenience stores, and motels. Patels alone, a subset of the population from the state of Gujarat, India, own more than 50 percent of motels in the country (Bhakta 2002). Other South Asian Americans drive taxicabs or work as seasonal farm laborers. The image of Indian Americans as economically affluent hides this diversity as well as community problems such as domestic violence, glass ceilings, anti-immigrant violence and rhetoric, and cultural intolerance. Some of these issues facing the first generation receive attention in the following chapter. The occupational diversity is matched by the religious, regional, and linguistic diversity of the diaspora. Most individuals are Hindu, with a significant number of Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, and Hare Krishnas. These religious groups have built temples or churches that serve as community spaces as well (Kurien 2002). The largest segment of Indian Americans originates from Gujarat, although areas of the entire country have come to be represented. After 9/11, Indian Americans, in particular Muslims and Sikhs, have encountered increased attacks and general suspicions. I discuss this further, and its impact on the local community, in later chapters.

Korean Americans

Korean Americans share a history with other Asian Americans as immigrating primarily for economic incentives and encountering opportunities as well as resentment and hostility as “foreigners.” As with Indian Americans, the largest influx of Korean Americans in the United States has occurred since 1965, with limited numbers relative to other Asian American groups before then. Few Korean Americans immigrated at the beginning of the twentieth century owing to restrictions by the Japanese government, of which Korea became a protectorate in 1905 (Henthorn 1971). This first wave of Korean Americans was made up of male laborers who arrived as contract workers to Hawaii to toil on sugar plantations, displaying Asian Americans’ historic role in global capitalism. Their labor was needed because Chinese had been excluded from immigrating, Japanese American laborers had gone on strike protesting their conditions, and European Americans proved too expensive (Hurh 1998). Koreans looked to escape harsh economic conditions in their country, including a famine in 1901 that loosened emigration restrictions (Min 2006b). Although the labor of Korean Americans on the sugar plantations was valuable, they too had great difficulties establishing lives for themselves. The work proved dangerous and lacked adequate compensation, and an extremely imbalanced sex ratio ensured that many would stay bachelors. Some moved to California. Barred by Whites from owning land and restaurants, they formed Koreatowns with their own residential and commercial buildings (Takaki 1989). When they could no longer even own farmland—a result of the Alien Land Law Act of 1913—some Koreans left California entirely.

As Korean immigrants tried to build a community in the United States, they also organized around Korea’s attempt to attain national independence from Japan (Lyu 1977). Korean intellectuals gave money to newspapers and patriotic funds, and parents emphasized the need to maintain Korean culture, which was being threatened by Japan. Such transnational organizing is similar to the international Gadar movement by Indian immigrants in the 1920s to overthrow British colonial rule. Gadar members, including those in the United States, tried to bring arms to India, wrote newspaper articles on the need to overthrow the British, and even tried to start a revolt in Singapore (Singh 2002). Korean Americans pushed for independence but, at the same time, also strove to accommodate to U.S. society by stressing their Christian background. They believed that Chinese and Japanese Americans inflamed

tensions with Whites by not trying to assimilate sufficiently (Hurh and Kim 1984). (The strategy of advancing national interests while trying to integrate into U.S. society is adopted by current immigrants as well, as discussed in chapter 3.) A small number of men sent for “picture brides” (women in Korea who wed Korean immigrant men based on mailed photos and who subsequently immigrated to the United States) between 1910 and 1924, which resulted in a mixture of some positive and some very negative unions. By 1908 Japan had political control over Korea, and the Gentleman’s Agreement between the United States and Japan put a stop to all further Korean migration. With a lack of continued migration, the community did not grow, and in 1924 almost all Asian immigration ended.

The next major wave of Korean Americans occurred in the 1950s, resulting not from economic needs of the United States and the immigrants, but from the war between the countries, in which Asian Americans often find themselves caught in the middle. War brides, war orphans, and students arrived as a result of the Korean War (Hurh and Kim 1984). As the Soviets and the United States fought the cold war on Korean land, they facilitated the split of the country into two. This furthered the exodus and the number of war brides. Upon arrival in the United States, however, many of these women experienced culture shock and depression as they tried to adjust to their new country, often in marriages that proved extremely difficult.

The third wave of Korean immigration has taken place since 1965, and mostly since 1970. The current second generation sampled here for both ethnic groups consists of the children of this wave of immigrants. In fact, the Korean American population increased by almost tenfold after 1970. Many Korean immigrants arrived, as did other Asian Americans during this time, as students or professionals in highly specialized fields. Once they received admission, they could sponsor their families under the preference system of the 1965 act rather than being constrained to living alone.

Korean Americans are predominantly Christian, even though Koreans are not. The Korean American church, probably more than any other ethnic religious institution, serves as a central site for local communities. Such churches proliferate as new ones break off from existing ones. Members not only attend religious services regularly but exchange information of both internal dynamics and external opportunities. People often learn of employment possibilities or access to financial opportunities within the church setting. With educational degrees that were not transferable to the United States and with poor

English skills, many Korean Americans experienced downward mobility after migrating (Hurh 1998). Many in cities entered low-paying service occupations, such as janitors. About a third have started family-run small businesses, often stores that cater to co-ethnics or to native minorities. Koreatowns, where some Korean Americans but also other minorities may live, comprise major business districts in Los Angeles, Oakland, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City, not to mention Vancouver and other North American cities. Other business owners serve racially diverse clientele, such as greengrocers in New York City, who work long hours and stock a large selection of merchandise to accommodate customer preferences. Although few of these businessmen had experience running stores in Korea, the businesses helped many realize, albeit slowly, their motivations for migrating to the United States: economic attainment, educational opportunities for their children, and reunification with family members. At the same time, intense competition among co-ethnics often limits profitability, even though many Korean Americans accrue the necessary money for their businesses from co-ethnics (Abelmann and Lie 1995). In addition, they can encounter dangerous work environments within some inner-city neighborhoods. For instance, 20 Korean Americans were murdered by African Americans in Los Angeles County between 1987 and 1991 (Min 1996).

As “middleman minorities” Korean Americans have filled a service gap left by grocery and retail corporations in poor, urban neighborhoods. Like other Asian American immigrants, Korean Americans serve capitalist needs caused by fluctuations in industries within U.S. capitalism. Capitalism rewards companies not for serving the public but for limiting costs and increasing profit, and many corporations have exploited this fact by abandoning poor communities (Abelmann and Lie 1995). Because Korean Americans are caught between White (as well as Korean) suppliers and native minority clientele, they often find themselves the brunt of hostilities by both groups. The 1992 Los Angeles riots and numerous boycotts in New York City, at times violent, have brought to the forefront the tensions between communities and the challenges facing Korean Americans’ acceptance as equal members of U.S. society (C. Kim 2001; Min 1996). They are targeted as culturally insensitive and as patronizing toward their inner-city, African American customers while at the same time relying on their business. At other times the business owners are lauded for their entrepreneurship despite their foreign status. Korean Ameri-

cans illustrate the complicated racial and class dynamics within urban areas today, as well as the continued role of Asian Americans as buffers between White and Black America.

CURRENT POPULATIONS

A major similarity for both groups is the model-minority stereotype, that is, as hardworking immigrants who stay in their place. This image is assigned to our current populations of Indian Americans and Korean Americans. Versions of the stereotype date back even earlier, to the fictional character Charlie Chan, which originated in 1925 (Okimoto 1994). Chan was an overweight, subservient detective in Hawaii who used his mind instead of his weak body to solve problems. He could not threaten local or national security, given his almost effeminate style. He spoke broken English and hoped to please Whites through his obeisance. He fit the desired image of how a minority should behave by staying in his place and earning praise through serving Whites. This model-minority caricature gained more popularity as it became attached to real Asian Americans in the 1960s. The stereotype grew at the time of the civil rights movement as a means of countering the claims by Blacks that discrimination impedes the socioeconomic equality of its minority population (Chan 1991). The supposed success of native- and foreign-born Asian Americans enables the United States to appear as an open, modern society benevolent toward its minorities. The model minority also serves as a warning to Whites that they should not complain about their working conditions, for if they do, a more acquiescent labor force is available.

The model-minority myth is currently being challenged by an influx of working-class Asian Americans. They face heightened danger in their occupations and are more likely to be victims of hate crimes. Discrimination in wages, promotions, and interpersonal relations against Asian American immigrant professionals also continues as they struggle to be rewarded for their labor and gain acceptance for their lives, as discussed in chapter 5 (Fong 1998). The experiences of first- and second-generation Indian and Korean Americans in Dallas support this historical perspective and the current racialized stereotypes, seen in the ensuing chapters.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Asian Americans make up more than 4 percent of the U.S. population. Indian Americans and Korean Americans comprise 0.66 percent and 0.44 percent of the country's population, respectively, which makes the former group the third largest Asian American con-

Table 2.1 Family income, U.S.

	<i>Median family income, 1999</i>	<i>Mean family income, 2000</i>
Whites	\$50,046	\$70,000
Indian Americans	\$70,708	\$94,000
Korean Americans	\$47,624	\$71,000

SOURCES: Census 2000 Summary File 4 (SF 4)—Sample Data, U.S.; Sakamoto and Xie 2006, 71.

tingent and the latter group the fifth largest.⁵ Foreign-born Asian Americans outnumber native born as of 2000, 69 percent to 31 percent. Korean and Indian Americans had comparable percentages of native born, 22 percent and 25 percent, respectively (Min 2006a). There are still heavy geographic concentrations of both groups, in particular Korean Americans in California, but migration has spread throughout the country, even into rural areas of the South and Midwest, especially for Indian Americans (Bhakta 2002). In fact, 19 percent of Asian Americans lived in the South in 2000, up from 7 percent in 1970 (Min 2006a).

The median family income in 1999 was \$70,708 for Indian Americans, \$47,624 for Korean Americans, and \$50,046 nationally for Whites (see Table 2.1).⁶ The mean family income offers a slightly different picture, with both Korean Americans (at \$71,000) and Indian Americans (at \$94,000) above the average of Whites (of \$70,000) (Sakamoto and Xie 2006). In terms of employment, more than half of employed Indian immigrants worked as managers, professionals, or executives in 2000. Korean Americans have the highest percentage of business owners among Asian Americans. Twenty-three percent of Korean Americans owned a business in 2000, down from 25 percent in 1990 but up from 17 percent in 1980 (Min 2006b). Regarding educational attainment, Asian Americans also rank more highly than other racial groups. In 2000, 63 percent of native-born adult Indian Americans and 61 percent of native-born adult Korean Americans had finished college, well above the average of 29 percent for Whites and even the 45 percent for native-born Asian Americans (Sakamoto and Xie 2006) (see Table 2.2). So, although Korean and Indian immigrants have different occupational trajectories, those of each group who were born in the United States have comparably high average education levels. In addition, despite differences among the first generation, the native born of both groups are well represented in professional occupa-