

## CHAPTER THREE

### Inner-City Communities

*Everything is convenient. There is no need for transportation. You walk and you find stores you need. My parents like living here because they can't speak English. Here everyone speaks Chinese. Food is good. It is close to my company so I don't have to drive too far. I like it here.*

*Chinatown resident*

The quotation reveals some of the reasons why many Asians choose to live in ethnic enclaves. Whether for cultural and linguistic need, social networks, job opportunities, or lack of other options, many low-income Asians are geographically concentrated in growing Asian communities throughout Los Angeles County. But unlike the self-defined, enclosed ethnic ghettos typified by San Francisco's Chinatown, Asian enclaves in Los Angeles share space with other races, have no clear geographic boundaries, and are dispersed throughout the county. This intermingling of races and loosely-defined geographic community raise unique complexities that must be addressed in any Asian Community Economic Development strategy.

The first major wave of Asian immigrants to this region during the latter half of the nineteenth century to the early part of this century established many Asian communities in Los Angeles. They formed enclaves such as Chinatown and Little Tokyo and their more rural counterparts, such the Japanese community in Gardena, as survival mechanisms against racism. These neighborhoods served as economic and cultural bases for these populations. After World War II, Asians were able to move out of these enclaves, as racially-based legal and social restrictions on housing eased. This was particularly true for the better educated and higher skilled Asians who had the financial means to relocate to the predominantly white suburbs. The result was a separation of the rich and poor Asians, with low-income immigrants

and the elderly remaining as the primary residents of inner-city enclaves. Moreover, these communities were slowly dying, because there were too few new immigrants to replace those leaving.

The renewal of large-scale immigration after the 1965 Immigration Act and the influx of refugees from Southeast Asian have revitalized inner-city Asian neighborhoods and have created new concentrations in the suburbs. As Table 1 shows, the rapid growth of the Asian population in the last three decades corresponds with the increasing concentration of Asian Americans. While "Asian neighborhoods" are becoming more visible, Asians are still the least segregated race in Los Angeles. Only one percent of Asians live in census tracts where they comprise at least 80 percent of the residents (Ong and Azores, 1993, p. 27). In comparison, about one-third of Anglos, one-fourth of Latinos, and one-fifth of African Americans reside in areas where they comprise such a dominant concentration (Ong and Azores, 1993, p. 27). The lack of hyper-segregation for Asians is due to both the ethnic and class heterogeneity, which tends to produce many smaller population centers rather than one or two large communities.

**TABLE 1: Distribution of Asians by Neighborhood Type**

Percent Asian in Neighborhood	1970		1990		1970-90 % Incr.
	No.	%	No.	%	
0-9%	107,315	58.9	251,989	27.8	135
10-19%	39,189	21.0	243,296	26.8	521
20-29%	17,068	9.1	163,660	18.1	775
30-49%	18,702	10.0	196,327	21.7	950
over 50%	4,711	2.5	51,273	5.7	988

Source: Ong & Azores, 1993.

In addition to the more established communities, newer communities have developed within the last three decades throughout the metropolitan area. The sprawling communities of the West San Gabriel Valley (Rosemead, El Monte, Monterey Park, and Alhambra) are home to Chinese and Vietnamese. Carson is the home to one of the largest Filipino communities. Pomona has a large concentration of low-income Laotians and Cambodians. Near the Los Angeles Airport, in Lennox and Inglewood, is a thriving Tongan community. Lynwood

and South Gate contain pockets of Laotians. Compton is home to a large community of Samoans. The Hollywood area has a significant Thai community, as well as many Filipinos and Laotians. Sections of the San Fernando Valley are home to low-income Vietnamese and other Asians.

Not all Asian enclaves are residential neighborhoods. Little Tokyo, which is south of downtown, is primarily a commercial and cultural center. With relatively small numbers of new Japanese immigrants coming to Los Angeles, this neighborhood has few residents, most of whom are low-income Japanese American senior citizens. On the other hand, it has a large number of restaurants, retail stores, cultural facilities, and service organizations, which serve tourists and the larger Japanese American population in Los Angeles.

Although Asian enclaves are no longer just low-income communities, there is still a spatial segregation by class. While many of the newer suburban enclaves are middle-class, the inner-city neighborhoods continue to be primarily low-income, predominantly immigrant communities. Despite tremendous needs that overwhelm community-based agencies, and city and county departments, low-income Asians continue to be attracted by the basic support networks often available only in inner-city enclaves.

Despite the increasing concentration of Asians in the inner-city, today's enclaves have the added complexity of intermingling with non-Asian neighbors. Latinos constitute the largest racial group in both inner-city Los Angeles and Long Beach.

The concentration of low-income Asians often creates as well as exacerbates individual and social problems. Large numbers of low-income persons increase the competition for limited community resources such as jobs, affordable housing, and social services. The stress and struggle for survival may weaken family and social relationships, fostering mental and physical health problems, crime, gang activity, substance abuse, as well as domestic violence and other family problems.

Yet at the same time, geographic concentration represents potential strength through the sheer numbers of Asian residents with common problems and aspirations. Since Asians still constitute a small proportion of the population in most places, they are generally without a political voice. Numerical strength offers opportunities to organize a community and to develop a common agenda in seeking changes to improve the basic living conditions of low-income Asians and other community members.

Chapter Two summarized the general problems and issues facing low-income Asians. This chapter continues to examine these problems by taking a more indepth look at three specific geographic communities and the living conditions of their Asian residents. These communities are greater Chinatown, Koreatown/Westlake, and Long Beach. These enclaves contain concentrations of the largest Asian ethnic groups in the county, demonstrate different stages of community growth, and permit comparisons between immigrant and refugee populations. Thus, while these communities are representative of Asian enclaves, their unique characteristics remind us that understanding specific as well as general community needs is crucial to defining the role of Community Economic Development.

### **Characteristics of Three Asian Inner-City Communities**

Chinatown, Koreatown/Westlake, and south Long Beach are representative of the many low-income Asian communities in Los Angeles County. According to 1990 Census data, these three communities housed nearly one-quarter of all Asians living in poverty in the county. These enclaves are primarily immigrant communities, where over two-thirds of the Asians are foreign-born. The U.S.-born tend to be the children of immigrant parents. A large proportion of the adults are recent Asian immigrants and refugees with limited English-speaking abilities. Few have marketable job skills, especially the large numbers of Southeast Asian refugees with farming backgrounds and little formal education. Yet despite similarities, each community has its own characteristics and needs.

Chinatown is one of the more established Asian communities in Los Angeles, but it is no longer confined to its old boundaries north of downtown. Today, greater Chinatown, which is defined as the area served by its many social service agencies as well as by the ethnicity of the residents, includes parts of Echo Park to the west and Lincoln Heights to the east. The Asian population in this area is about 20,000. While Chinatown is still predominantly Chinese, the area has undergone major demographic changes with the influx of Vietnamese and Cambodian residents. Although the business core of Chinatown is well defined by Bernard, Alameda, Sunset, and Hill Streets, the residential area extends into parts of Lincoln Heights and Echo Park.

Koreatown/Westlake is the largest of the three inner-city communities both in geographic area and population. In addition to the more visible Koreans, significant numbers of Filipino residents and

businesses, as well as other Asians, call this area home. Although established after Chinatown, Asian communities in this area are expanding rapidly.

Although Koreans have been in Los Angeles since the early half of this century, Koreatown is a creation of the post-1965 immigration. Koreans represent one of the fastest growing populations in Los Angeles County. In the 1970s, the Olympic/Normandie area represented Koreatown. By 1980, Koreatown boundaries had expanded to Wilshire, Hoover, Pico, and Crenshaw. Today, Koreatown continues to grow, most notably to the north. This enclave in the mid-city area west of downtown is home to over 30,000 Asians. Although Korean immigrants comprise the dominant group in this enclave, there are also significant numbers of Filipinos, Thais, and other Asian ethnicities. Besides serving local residents, Koreatown's businesses, restaurants, churches, and social associations attract Koreans and other Asians from all over the area.

The Filipino community in the greater downtown area of Los Angeles originated in the 1920s. Although urban renewal displaced residents from their initial location, the community has survived. This "new" Filipino concentration was created in the 1950s when the Bunker Hill redevelopment plan forced residents and businesses to move from the small "Manilatown" near downtown, bordered by San Pedro Street, Figueroa, and Sunset Boulevard. Today, Filipinotown, located roughly between Chinatown and Koreatown, includes parts of Westlake, Echo Park, and Silverlake, and exists as a residential pocket for over 15,000 Filipinos. While we call this area "Filipinotown," the concentration of residents and businesses is less apparent than in enclaves like Chinatown or Koreatown, which have a strong ethnic identity because of the vast number of Asian-owned businesses and community institutions. Filipinotown has only a few visible landmarks located in its core area around Temple Street and Beverly Boulevard. Its commercial sector is largely absent, and its community institutions are not highly visible.

This may be partly due to Filipino adoption of American culture and the English language due to years of U.S. colonialism, resulting in relatively less need of an ethnic enclave. However, with new immigration, concentrations of Filipinos are increasing, indicating both a desire for a cultural community as well as economic problems. For despite a generally higher average education and skill level compared to other Asians, Filipinos live barely above the poverty line due to underemployment and relatively limited skills. The concentration of

Filipinos is still highest in Filipinotown, but smaller settlements have formed in Cerritos, West Covina, and Carson.

Unlike the older ethnic enclaves, Cambodians did not establish a community in Long Beach until about 1975. A small group of Cambodians, who arrived in Long Beach as exchange students in the 1960s, paved the way for the settlement of refugees after the Khmer Rouge seized control of Cambodia. After refugees were processed at nearby Camp Pendleton, Long Beach became a natural destination. Many refugees who had heard of the area through exchange students wanted to settle in California and found the supply of housing abundant after the navy moved to San Diego. Today, Long Beach has the highest residential concentration of Cambodians outside Cambodia. The heaviest concentration is within a section of South Long Beach bounded by Magnolia and Redondo, and 7th Street and Willow. This is home to nearly 15,000 Cambodians, making it the largest Cambodian community in the country. Along with its residential base, the community has a very visible commercial sector.

Significant numbers of Asians living in these inner-city communities are immigrants, often accounting for 80 to 90 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Although a slightly greater proportion of Asians in inner-city Los Angeles are immigrants compared with those in Long Beach, Southeast Asian communities are those most likely to consist of mainly foreign-born.

Of the immigrants, most are "recent" arrivals with ten or fewer years of residency in the U.S. Because of the political chaos that forced many to seek asylum in the U.S., Southeast Asians have the highest proportion of newcomers in Los Angeles and Long Beach, with 70 percent arriving between 1980 and 1990. However, in Long Beach, Southeast Asians have an even higher proportion of newcomers, approximately 85 percent, showing that distinctions exist even among Southeast Asian populations. The difference may be explained by the fact that most Southeast Asians in Long Beach are Cambodians who settled in the U.S. primarily after 1979, while most in inner-city Los Angeles are Vietnamese who came in two major waves in 1975 and 1979.

After Southeast Asians, Koreans and Filipinos have the next highest proportion of recent arrivals at about 65 and 55 percent respectively. Koreans and Filipinos have the highest proportion of very recent immigrants (those arriving between 1985 and 1990) since the unusually dramatic influx of Southeast Asians occurred only between the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

The proportion of very recent Asian immigrants range from 20-30 percent in Long Beach to 20-45 percent in inner-city Los Angeles. In Long Beach, the proportion is similar for both Filipinos and Southeast Asians immigrants: 30 percent. While the rate is lower for Southeast Asians in Los Angeles (20 percent), nearly 45 percent of Koreans are very recent immigrants, followed by Filipinos and Chinese at about 40 and 30 percent respectively.

While the proportion in each age group is similar among Asian ethnicities in the inner-cities, Southeast Asians in general and Asians in Long Beach tend to have a larger youth population and fewer older adults. Over 80 percent of Southeast Asians in both Los Angeles inner-city and Long Beach are under 45, compared to less than 70 percent for other Asian ethnicities. The proportion of youth among Southeast Asians is even more significant in Long Beach, where nearly 30 percent are under ten, and almost 50 percent are under 18 years old.

Even excluding Southeast Asians, more than 25 percent of Asians in Long Beach are under 18, compared with 20 percent in inner-city Los Angeles. By the same token, Southeast Asians and Asians in Long Beach, in general, have a smaller proportion of older adults.

### **Poverty Rates for Asians in the Inner-City**

Low-income Asians tend to concentrate in the inner-cities. The poverty rate in the inner-city is higher than that for Asians in the county overall. Over 20 percent of Asians in both the Los Angeles inner-city and the City of Long Beach live below the poverty level, compared to 13 percent for Asians in the county. In addition, another 10 percent live barely above poverty with incomes of 1.5 times the poverty line. Poverty heavily burdens the young in the inner-cities, with one in three Asian children under 18 living in poverty.

Southeast Asians have the highest poverty rate in both the City of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Over 40 percent of Southeast Asians live in poverty. Another one-fourth have barely enough income to stay above the poverty line (up to 1.5 times the poverty level). The pattern of immigration among Southeast Asians explains much of their current employment and adjustment problems. Only 22 percent came to the U.S. between 1975 and 1979. Most of this first wave were refugees with high educational and employment backgrounds. However, over one-half arrived between 1980 and 1984, representing a second wave of mostly low-skilled farmers with very little education.

Despite media images on the economic success of Korean and Chinese Americans, one out of four Koreans and Chinese in the inner-city lives in poverty. Only Filipinos have poverty rates equal to the 7 percent for Non-Hispanic whites. The low poverty rate is partly explained by the larger number of workers in Filipino households, compared to other Asians.

Although individuals and families can barely live on poverty level income, many Asians do not even earn half of that income. Fifteen percent of Southeast Asians struggle to survive on less than half of poverty level income. The concentration of low-income Asians in certain geographic locations severely strains community resources, and desperately underscores the need for an economic development strategy.

### **Lack of Job Skills**

The high incidence of poverty and low-income status among Asian immigrants, especially recent ones, is partly attributed to lack of English proficiency and low educational attainment. Recent arrivals have less earning potential than native-born Americans or immigrants who have settled in the U.S. for a long period of time. While almost one-third of Asians born in the U.S. earn less than \$15,000 annually, the rate is two-thirds for immigrants with less than five years of residency. The higher proportion of recent Asian immigrants (those with ten years or less in the U.S.) who are not in the labor force (NILF) is similar in the inner-city.

Responses from our survey (SALIC, 1993) for Chinatown demonstrate the relationship between English speaking ability and earning power. Respondents rating themselves as speaking no English have an annual median income of \$5,400. While those who speak "not well" do not fare any better, respondents who speak English "well" and "very well" have median incomes of \$12,000 and \$20,000 respectively. In a community where two out of three respondents believe they cannot speak English well, income is correspondingly low. Only 11 percent of SALIC respondents in Chinatown speak English very well.

Compared to Chinatown and Long Beach, fewer residents in Koreatown and Filipinotown have limited English speaking skills. The 40 percent with limited English capability is balanced somewhat by the 60 percent who speak well or very well. Since only 33 percent of Koreatown and Filipinotown respondents have taken ESL classes, the



lower incidence of English training may be due to less need or lack of classes.

With little communication skills, Southeast Asians believe themselves "less accepted," increasing their difficulty in adjusting to a multicultural society. More than 55 percent of SALIC respondents rate themselves as speaking English not well or worse, although a similar percentage to residents in Koreatown had taken ESL classes. Only 14 percent believe they speak English very well.

Like residents of Koreatown and Filipinotown, Long Beach Asian residents show a similar relationship between English speaking ability and earning power. SALIC (1993) results reveal little change in median income among Asian residents in Koreatown, Filipinotown, and south Long Beach with different levels of English speaking capability. Yet the range of incomes is broader for better English speaking residents. In these communities, Asian respondents who do not speak English well have annual incomes up to \$24,000. Those who speak English very well have incomes up to \$38,400.

Low educational attainment exacerbates the lack of English skills. Among the Asian ethnicities, Southeast Asians and Chinese have the lowest educational attainment in both inner-city Los Angeles and Long Beach. Almost half of Southeast Asians and Chinese have not graduated from high school, compared with the 22 percent of inner-city Asians in general. Southeast Asians in Long Beach have more education than their counterparts in inner-city Los Angeles. Filipinos generally have higher educational attainment. Educational attainment is lowest for recent and very recent immigrants.

Many inner-city Asians with little formal education are not in the labor market (NILF). About one-half of Asians with less than a high school education are not in the labor force. Due to their limited English speaking ability and low skills, there is a high proportion of jobless inner-city Asians. Cambodians in Long Beach have the lowest level of economic activity, with a majority not in the labor force. Koreans and Chinese in inner-city Los Angeles have similar NILF rates, about 30 percent, but the Filipino rate is noticeably lower, about 10 percent.

Labor force participation also differs by gender and age. The Asian female NILF rate is double that of men in Long Beach and triple that of men in inner-city Los Angeles. On the other hand, with so many women not even in the labor force, the female unemployment rate is generally lower than that of males in both areas. While the youth NILF rate is similar to other age groups, youth between 18 and 24 have a high unemployment rate, nearly double that of others. The

low labor force participation of Asian women and high unemployment of Asian youth demonstrate that programs to increase employability must specifically target these two groups.

Because of low skills, having a job for these immigrants does not guarantee a living wage. About half of Chinese and Koreans in the Los Angeles inner-city communities and Cambodians in Long Beach earn less than \$15,000 annually. About 25 percent of Chinese and Koreans in inner-city Los Angeles and over 35 percent of Cambodians in Long Beach earn between \$15,000 and \$30,000 annually.

Although Filipinos may not be the poorest Asians, a higher percentage have low earnings compared to other Asians. About one-third of Filipinos earn less than \$15,000, compared to the overall Asian rate of 44 percent. But over four-fifths of Filipinos in inner-city Los Angeles earn less than \$30,000. Thus, despite better English speaking ability, higher educational attainment, and better labor force participation, Filipinos earn a modest living, compared to other Asians. In fact, the proportion of Filipinos earning less than \$30,000 annually is larger than all other Asian ethnicities, except Southeast Asians.

About 20 percent of the Southeast Asian and Chinese populations work in the low-wage service sector. Southeast Asian in Los Angeles and Cambodians in Long Beach also display differences in occupational orientation. About 13 percent of Los Angeles' inner-city Southeast Asians are in managerial occupations and about 5 percent are in professional and technical fields. Yet, the inverse is true for Long Beach Cambodians.

Koreans have a different occupational orientation from other inner-city Asians. A higher proportion work in the managerial field than other Asians. However, while 16 percent have managerial careers, only 8 percent work in the professional or technical fields. Unlike other Asians, less than 9 percent are clerks, but 27 percent (more than double the Asian rate) work in sales-related jobs.

The entrepreneurship orientation of Koreans and generally better English speaking abilities of Koreans and Filipinos seem to reduce the correlation between English speaking ability and income in Koreatown and Filipinotown. Unlike Chinatown, where better English speaking abilities are correlated with higher incomes, no significant improvement exists in the incomes of Koreatown and Filipinotown Asians. However, income ranges vary greatly for those with better English skills. Asian residents who do not speak English had similar incomes, between \$15,600 and \$16,800. The potential to earn more seems higher for those who speak English well, with an income range from \$3,600 to \$30,000.

Those who speak very well had the greatest range, from \$7,200 to \$96,000.

Unlike other Asians in the inner-city or Long Beach, Filipinos in both areas suffer few of the more obvious economic survival problems. The poverty rate of Filipinos is similar to that of Non-Hispanic whites. Nearly 90 percent of Filipinos are in the labor force. Most Filipinos hold higher education degrees, and less than 10 percent do not have a high school diploma. Among the half who have at least a college degree, nearly 10 percent have master's or professional degrees.

Filipinos have an undistinguished occupational and earnings profile despite their English capabilities and educational attainment. The proportion of Filipinos in the managerial field is similar to other Asians. And while a good number have professional or technical jobs (over 15 percent), one out of three Filipinos holds clerical positions.

### **The Enclave Economy and Low-Wage Jobs**

One of the attractions of living in an ethnic enclave is the availability of jobs which match the limited skills and resources of Asian immigrants. But the status also has negative consequences when employers exploit menial labor through low compensation, poor working conditions, and little opportunity for upward mobility.

Each of our three communities has characteristics of both an ethnic and enclave economies. Ethnic economies thrive by exploiting low-skill immigrant labor for the production of goods and services for the general population. Asian-owned factories in garment, restaurant and other industries can easily fill their labor needs with the vast numbers of limited English speaking immigrants who have no other job choices. On the other hand, Asian enclave economies that target customers in ethnic communities, pay low wages because most are small businesses with narrow profit margins.

Because of the capital needed to start businesses, more Asian employers are found in inner-city Los Angeles than in the newer and poorer Cambodian community in south Long Beach. The 14 percent rate of self-employment or working in a family business for Asians in Los Angeles' inner-city is almost double that of Asians in Long Beach. Entrepreneurship is low among very recent Asian immigrants (those living in U.S. five years or less) and those with low educational attainment, regardless of their area or ethnicity. This may be due to lack of financial and other resources, limited language and business skills, as well as unfamiliarity with U.S. business practices.

All the Asian communities studied have businesses which cater to particular ethnic groups. Chinatown and Koreatown have the most visible number of businesses. Possibly due to their generally better English fluency, Filipinos in both Long Angeles and Long Beach lack an ethnic commercial center despite their long tenure in these areas. Less than 5 percent of Filipinos are self-employed or work in a family business. Although a much newer community, Cambodians in Long Beach have established a number of businesses whose market is the ethnic enclave.

Due to their more limited resources as poor refugees, Cambodians tend to operate small businesses with low overhead and skill requirements such as donut shops, restaurants, grocery stores, garages, and gift shops. Many of these small business owners function as they had in Cambodia with no credit, few loans, and no accounting system (Pok, 1992). As is true with other ethnic enclave businesses, Cambodian small businesses face high competition and concentration in a few food, retail and service businesses.

Koreans in Los Angeles' inner-city account for much of the high Asian rate of entrepreneurship, as over a quarter are either self-employed or in family businesses. But a majority of Korean businesses are small family-owned and operated firms. Thus, they too offer mostly low-wage jobs, if any jobs at all.

The large numbers of small businesses in ethnic enclave economies means that job opportunities are meager and wages are likely to be low. Small businesses generally have very small profit margins. And because of the lack of diversity among the types of businesses, competition further reduces profit resulting in jobs with very low wages and no job security.

### **Lack of Affordable Housing**

Asians, like other low-income populations throughout the county, face a massive affordable housing crisis. For thousands of low-income Asian families, high rents and mortgages are an additional burden in the quest for financial security.

The major reason for high rents and mortgages is the inadequate supply of affordable housing. For example, the City of Los Angeles grows an average of over 26,000 households every year, but developers generate only 15,000 housing units (Housing Preservation and Production Department (HPPD), 1991, pp. 11-13). After considering the average annual demolition of 3,000 units, we are left with a 14,000 unit

shortfall every year. And the shortfall is greatest for affordable housing units. As a result, HPPD data indicates that more than 150,000 families in the City of Los Angeles spend more than half their income on rent.

The current rent and mortgage levels severely strain family budgets of the unemployed, working poor, and in particular, welfare recipients. Federal guidelines from the Department of Housing and Urban Development identify 30 percent of household income as the ceiling for an "affordable" amount to pay for housing. Paying more than 30 percent reduces expenditure for food, clothing, and other necessities. Median rent in Los Angeles was \$626 in 1990 (Shiver, 1992). In order to afford this rent at 30 percent of their income, household members need to earn a total of \$2,087 per month. In Los Angeles County, 32 percent of Asian households earn less than that amount, according to the 1990 Census. The brunt of the affordable housing burden falls on low-income communities. Approximately two-thirds of renters surveyed in our three communities paid more than the "affordable" rent. Much of this high rate is attributable to the low incomes and high rents of Southeast Asians in south Long Beach and greater Chinatown.

The spiraling cost of homeownership puts this out of reach for most low-income families and even many middle-income families. Between 1980 and 1990, home prices in Los Angeles County shot up 157 percent, resulting in a median home price of \$226,400 (Shiver, 1992). Median mortgage payments increased correspondingly to \$1,137 per month, an amount greater than the total income of many low-income families. Because of the low income of most Southeast Asians, the relatively lower home prices of \$150,000 in south Long Beach do not help the refugee population attain homeownership.

Avoiding high housing costs often means living in overcrowded or substandard residences. An estimated 200,000 families double or triple up with other families in cramped apartments throughout the City of Los Angeles (HPPD, 1991, p. 13). The Los Angeles Housing Preservation and Production Department's overcrowded standard is more than two persons per room (excluding kitchen and bathroom). Almost one in five of the SALIC households lived in overcrowded units. Asians in south Long Beach have the severest problem with about 30 percent living in such units. Many Southeast Asian households in inner-city Los Angeles have six or more members. Hardly any Southeast Asians live alone, compared to about 20 percent for other Asian ethnicities. Unfortunately, the genocide in Cambodia reduces the chances that Cambodians can share housing with extended

families rather than non-family members. The greater Chinatown area and Koreatown have the next highest rates of overcrowding, about 50 percent and 20 percent respectively. Probably due to their slightly better income levels and higher labor force participation rates, few Asians in Koreatown and Filipinotown live in overcrowded conditions or pay a substantial amount of their incomes for rent.

In conducting our survey (SALIC, 1993), we found low-income Asian families living in horrid conditions: small, deteriorating backlot units, possibly illegally converted garages, and apartment buildings with trash lining dimly lit hallways. While residences in Koreatown tend to be newer, the attractive exterior facades often hide desolate courtyards and corridors. Koreatown and Filipinotown contain more large apartment complexes than greater Chinatown and south Long Beach, where housing consists primarily of detached houses and small apartment buildings. SALIC respondents in south Long Beach probably live in the worst conditions of those we studied. Although many live in apartment complexes with an almost communal environment, the buildings are run-down and flimsy. Children play in barren, dirt courtyards.

### **Conclusion: The Need to Improve the Quality of Life for Low-Income Asians**

Without Community Economic Development, the concentration of low-income Asians in ethnic enclaves simply means competition for low-wage jobs and a small number of affordable housing units. The struggle to survive is intense, as the immigrants, especially recent arrivals, increase the labor pool of workers with limited English capabilities and few marketable skills. Their only employment option is in ethnic enclave businesses that provide low-wage, dead-end jobs. With a large number of immigrants in low-wage jobs and a sizeable proportion without jobs, employers are under little pressure to offer better wages, benefits, or job security. Compounding the low wages and joblessness is the lack of quality affordable housing. After paying more than they can afford for housing, low-income Asians have little left for other necessities.

## NOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, these statistics and those in the rest of the chapter are taken from tabulations of the 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample. Because the data provide only limited sub-county geographic identification, we gathered information for Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Southeast Asians in the inner-city area of Los Angeles City, and for Cambodians for Long Beach. Although the data on Cambodians is for the entire City of Long Beach, they provide a picture of the Cambodians in the enclave, where a vast majority reside.