

# Chinese-Cambodian Donut Makers in Orange County: Case Studies of Family Labor and Socioeconomic Adaptations

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by Gen Leigh Lee\*

Tlog! Tlog! Tlog! — sounds of batter dropping into gallons of burning-hot oil to make old-fashion and devils' food donuts.<sup>1</sup> The time is 1:30 a.m., and the baker's daily routine has just started. A huge mixer whips the raised flour so that by the time the buttermilk and cake donuts are finished, the dough will be ready for kneading, twisting, turning, shaping, and cutting into glazed donuts, bars, twists, cinnamon rolls, butterflies, and apple-fritters. The different patterns go onto fryer screens which are positioned in a closed heater, so the dough can rise and be readied for frying.

The baker has not finished frying the first batch of raised donuts, but between 4:00 and 4:30 a.m., a regular early bird customer knocks on the door for coffee and a donut. The donut shop is open for the day. The baker calls his wife at home, and by 5:00 a.m., she begins her routine of baking muffins and croissants, stuffing fruit fillings into donuts, and handling the counter. This is the beginning of a typical morning in a Cambodian husband-wife-owned (or -managed) donut shop.

Since 1979, a large number of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam have resettled throughout the United States. They risked their lives and endured much hardship to escape their ancestral homelands and reach the United States. Many still struggle to adjust to a new culture, laws, and social and economic values.

The past 20 years have witnessed an increasing amount of research on immigrants' economic and social adaptation, particularly in ethnic-based or ethnic-dominated economies, and their impact on the local economic structures. Some research has included Asian Pacific Americans, but generally absent from increasing studies is consideration of contributions made by Asian refugees (Gold, 1994).

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Even less attention has been paid to Cambodian entrepreneurship. Most literature portrays Cambodians as socially and economically immobile, yet growing numbers of Cambodians have made remarkable progress socially, economically, and academically. Nearly all Cambodians who have arrived since 1979 are survivors of war and genocide. This survival has generated research about Cambodian refugees' post-traumatic stress syndrome, mental health, and poverty issues. This paper will begin to examine one of the effective economic strategies adopted by these survivors by focusing on donut shop owners and operators in California.

Since the 1980s, donut shop operation has been a growing business enterprise among these recent arrivals, particularly among Cambodians of Chinese ancestry. *The Wall Street Journal* counted about 2,450 Cambodian-owned or -operated donut shops in California in 1995; the *Los Angeles Times* placed the figure at approximately 2,000 in 1993 (Kaufman, 1995; Akst, 1993). Most are private, family-owned shops.

These donut shops are scattered throughout California and cater to a diverse group of customers, not just members of any one specific group. Some owners live close to the business (within two miles), while others might reside as far as 30 miles away. The desire to live close to the business means many do not live in a Cambodian enclave; instead, many own homes and live in white, middle-class neighborhoods.

That Cambodian refugees have come to dominate the donut shop industry in California is a remarkable phenomenon. As refugees from an agrarian, war-torn nation, they initially arrived penniless. The donut business has opened the door for some to become economically independent, creating a path for economic and social mobility. Their accomplishments in a span of ten years or less certainly deserves attention.

Linguistic and social barriers to finding good-paying jobs caused many Cambodians to seek self-employment. For them, small business ownership is a matter of economic survival as well as a path to socioeconomic status and acceptance. Operating donut shops may be labor intensive, but the skills required can be learned easily and English fluency is not necessary. Shops create employment for many family members who are unskilled or who have no transferable skills. The income also allows most of these shop owners to become homeowners and to pay the cost of higher education for their children.

Operating shops has essentially become an entrepreneurial niche that provides a base for a significant segment of the Cambodian American community. In many ways this is reminiscent of other entrepreneurial niches

established by earlier Asian Pacific immigrants. Like Chinese American laundries and Japanese American farms, Cambodian American donut businesses provide a source of support for relatives and friends.

The Cambodian community is of such recent vintage that the community itself has not been able to develop any formal social and economic organizations to assist its members. The main source of financial and social support for establishing any type of business is the strong kinship, ethnic, and regional ties shared by Cambodian refugees. Most depend on this informal, word-of-mouth network among families, relatives, and friends. Whether one wants to buy a shop, needs a baker or counter help, or requires technical or financial assistance, the informal network produces desired results. The predominantly ethnic Chinese Cambodian community in Orange County, the subject of this study, is a good example of a small, tight-knit, and supportive community. Its members value the same culture and speak the same language. They have relied on one another to develop a donut shop segment due to similar economic circumstances, educational backgrounds, and societal limitations.

## **Goals And Objectives**

This research uses case studies to explore the history of Cambodian American families' entry into the donut shop business, the relationship of the entry to their socioeconomic adaptations, and contributions to the local economy. In analyzing this work experience, the following are important considerations: (1) the institutional structure, opportunities, and resources in the local economy; (2) past experience and cultural values; and (3) the class and ethnicity of this population.

The most frequently asked questions about these Cambodian entrepreneurs are "Why the donut business?" and "How do they capitalize their business?" This research provides some initial answers to these and other questions. First, the effective economic and social strategies adopted by some families, and the division of family labor roles according to age and gender are examined. Specific questions include the following: (1) Why and how do Cambodians enter the donut business? (2) How do family members or kin and ethnic ties contribute to their entrepreneurship decisions and acquisitions, and to the maintenance of donut shops? Second, varying expectations of work and of each other among shop owners and their children in relation to acculturation and adaptation is explored. Questions include the following: (1) How does the business affect each family's

socioeconomic adaptation? (2) What is the level of acculturation, by age, into the mainstream society? (3) How do they perceive themselves in this society? (4) What kind of relationship do the parents have with their children? Third, how these experiences are impacted by their status as refugees and their contributions to the larger society is considered. Some questions include the following: (1) Do they encounter discrimination? (2) What are their contributions to the local economy and to government? (3) What are implications for policymakers?

## Theoretical Framework

An overview of the pertinent scholarship on immigrant and refugee small business ownership and family labor is helpful to an understanding of the Cambodian donut shop phenomenon. Immigrant and refugee groups often turn to small businesses or ethnic-based economies to find financial independence. Extremely “severe employment problems faced by refugees” contributes to the attraction of small business opportunities (Haines, 1987). The Cambodian entrepreneurs’ ability to finance, cope with, and adapt to economic needs and problems depends largely on utilization of kinship and friendship ties and networks, credit rotation, and ethnic solidarity. Much of this will be illustrated in the case studies below.

Steven Gold illustrates how ethnic Chinese Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the United States have been able to take advantage of their ethnic solidarity and connections with the Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. They use their ethnic linkages to secure capital from some cash-rich Chinese to establish businesses, which they themselves provide labor and which cater to other immigrants, predominantly Vietnamese, Chinese, and other Southeast Asians (Gold, 1994). In contrast, Cambodians tend to remain within their own small circle, utilizing their own savings or borrowing from friends, relatives, or credit-rotation associations. Ethnic Chinese Cambodians also take advantage of their connections with Chinese from other backgrounds.

Gold’s discussion of the strong family values of the ethnic Chinese Vietnamese and contributions of family members and relatives to the successful operations of their enterprises seem quite relevant to the Cambodian situation. How does a Chinese Cambodian family or household function to operate and maintain the business? What roles do cultural values, such as kin and ethnic ties, play in establishing and maintaining the business and family? What are the parents’ and children’s expectations and attitudes to-

ward their businesses? What are the social costs, sacrifices, or impact of Chinese Cambodian family, labor, employees, and employment?

Research by Usha Welaratna and Marie A. Martin includes discussion of the different work ethnics of Khmer and Chinese Cambodians. Their explanations of the cultural, religious, and socioeconomic stratification of Cambodian society provide some insights into the world-view of Cambodians (Welaratna, 1993; Martin, 1994). With regard to assimilation and the notion of “success,” Welaratna argues that most Western social scientists impose American values on Cambodians. Cambodian culture, values and society define success and failure differently from the United States mainstream: money is not an important measure of personal success (Welaratna, 1993). Chinese, Sino-Khmers, and Khmers all place great emphasis on the nuclear and extended family, “bound together by a variety of emotional, economic, and legal ties” (Welaratna, 1993) Khmers consider an individual’s “good conduct” and “emotional fulfillment” more important than wealth and commitment.

In pre-revolutionary Cambodia, people did not have to work hard to survive. The rice, fresh or dried fish, and vegetables that made up their simple diet were abundantly available. Homelessness was not an issue: people who did not have money to build a house or a villa could make a hut made of thatch or bamboo poles. In 1970 “everyone owned a building, a villa, an apartment, a beautiful wooden house, a straw hut, or a hovel” (Martin, 1994) This gave them plenty of leisure time.

In contrast, the majority of the Chinese in Cambodia, many of whom are entrepreneurs, strived for economic stability, social status, and prestige through wealth. Welaratna argues that the Cambodians’ social and cultural aspects should be analyzed from their perspectives. Both Welaratna and Martin distinguish some of the different values held by Khmer and Chinese, enabling an interpretation of differences in their socioeconomic adaptation and assimilation in the United States.

The vast majority of Cambodian refugees arriving after 1979 came from an agricultural background, a society where men and elders are believed to be supreme and right. Many who entered the U.S., however, were also of middle- and upper-class backgrounds. Further, since their arrival in this country, Cambodians have experienced changes in traditional gender roles due to harsh economic realities.

## Methodology

The methodology of this research is exploratory and descriptive, using multiple research methods: primary qualitative ethnography, archival research, and participant-observation. As a member of this community, the author's presence at many social gatherings in the last ten years was useful. A decade of experience and observation working in more than ten different donut shops during summers and weekends and as a temporary fill-in was an added advantage.

Interviews provided data on personal, economic, entrepreneurial, and social experiences. Secondary sources, including published materials on history, family, labor, ethnic/small business enterprise, and gender studies, provided historical and theoretical structures.<sup>2</sup>

## Sampling Design

Officials of B&H Distributors, a donut (and restaurant) supply and equipment warehouse, provided access to the company's 1,400 accounts, including shop names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Using the B&H account information, shops were plotted on maps of Los Angeles and Orange Counties to determine the number of shops within each zip code. More than 80 percent of B&H customers were Cambodian entrepreneurs. A brief survey was conducted at B&H's annual open-house on August 26, 1994. But most participants were unresponsive and ambivalent.

Potential interviewees, selected from diverse areas, based on zip code plotting, received letters informing them of the nature of this research and study. In follow up telephone calls, appointments were set up with those who agreed to participate.

Setting up interviews was quite difficult. Most customers contacted declined because of lack of time or scheduling conflicts. Consequently, the number of interviewees was greatly reduced and the focus became ethnic Chinese Cambodians in Orange County rather than Cambodians in both Los Angeles and Orange Counties. The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were specific but flexible enough to raise further questions or allow any necessary probing.

Seven individuals representing four families were interviewed for this study. Three interviews were conducted at the interviewees' shops, two took place both at home and at the shop, one interview was conducted at home, and another on the phone. Khmer and English were used inter-

changeably in four of the interviews; two interviews were in Cantonese, Khmer, and Mandarin, and one was almost entirely in English. Two families were randomly selected from the B&H accounts while two were chosen because of their personal acquaintance. Interviews were conducted between 8 December 1994 and 23 March 1995, and lasted 45 minutes to two hours, plus time for follow-up questions to clarify questions. Some interviewees were asked different questions. Three of the families are reported on in this paper.

## **The Families: Ly, Chau, And Vong**

Long Beach has the largest concentration of Cambodians outside of Cambodia, approximately 30,000.<sup>3</sup> The United States census does not distinguish Cambodians of Chinese ethnicity from the indigenous Khmer, but based on observations throughout the area, including social gatherings such as large wedding banquets, Orange County is home to several hundred Chinese Cambodians. The majority of these families own donut shops. In fact, at a typical wedding banquet, when donut shop owners from Orange, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Riverside Counties attend, a major topic of conversation is the donut business.<sup>4</sup>

In 1977, Ted Ngoy, who entered the United States in 1975, became the first Chinese Cambodian to buy a donut shop in La Habra, California, and eventually expanded his donut empire into a chain of 32 shops from San Diego to the San Francisco Bay Area. He trained many of his relatives and helped other Chinese Cambodians enter the trade, including Ning Yen, the owner of B&H Distributors. Ngoy is now bankrupt due to heavy debts, bad investments and other problems. Though he has returned to Cambodia, his legacy continues among those he helped, particularly those in Orange County.

### **The Ly Family**

After surviving the brutal Khmer Rouge era, the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, three trips walking through the land-mined, bandit-filled border jungles of Thailand and Cambodia, and more than seven months in a refugee camp, the Ly family (all names fictitious) was sponsored by a Catholic Church in Birmingham, Michigan. They arrived in 1980 penniless, ignorant of American culture, and except for the son, unable to speak a word of English.

In pre-revolutionary Cambodia, Bing Ly, 56, was a small merchant dealing in rice and fruit, while his wife Yin Ren Ly, 53, kept house, ran a smaller business on the side, and also cared for the family's vegetable garden.<sup>5</sup> Both

studied in private Chinese schools; she attended four years and he a total of fourteen years, including four years in Hong Kong. They did not study the Khmer language.

In Birmingham, she worked as a dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant, and he was a janitor for the primary school associated with the Catholic Church that sponsored his family. Many of their Chinese friends from Cambodia residing in Holland, Michigan, encouraged them to move there in the fall of 1981. Bing Ly was unable to find employment in Holland for more than a year, while Yin Ren Ly worked two full-time jobs, as a hotel maid and an assembler in a plastics factory. Finally her parents, brothers, sister, and friends—all in the Orange County donut business—urged them to move to Southern California in 1983. Within two years, they opened their own donut shop and bakery in Orange County.

Their son Wu Ly, 30, who graduated from California State University at Fullerton in finance and business administration, manages his parents' bakery in San Diego. Younger daughter Lynn Ly, 23, is a fourth-year student at San Diego State University, majoring in child development. She helps Wu at the bakery on weekends and whenever else she can. An older sister is a graduate student at the University of California at Los Angeles and helps the parents on weekends and at other times.

### **The Chau Family**

Sing Chau came from a family of eleven children. His parents were well-to-do Chinese in Cambodia before the Communists took over. After two attempts to escape the war-ravaged nation, he succeeded and then spent four years in a refugee camp, where he attended English classes and taught himself Mandarin. He and his older brother were sponsored in 1988 to the United States by their older sister, who now owns two donut shops with her husband.

After working for his sister, brother-in-law, and a younger brother (who owns a donut shop in northern California) for several years, Sing Chau purchased a small, busy donut-burger establishment in Mission Viejo, California, by the age of 30. Still single, he runs the business with the help of his older brother and sister-in-law.

### **The Vong Family**

Mao Vong's family was sponsored by a Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon. In Cambodia, Mao Vong, a Khmer, worked as the manager of a division of the government railroad system until 1975. During that time he learned French and some English. In 1984, after four years in Portland, he



left a well-paying job at a saw mill and moved to California. Vao is 49-years-old. His wife is ethnic Chinese.

The Vongs bought their first shop in 1984, in Anaheim, California, with a relative. They have since bought out their partner and have acquired two more shops in Westminster, just a few miles from their Anaheim shop. One is managed by the wife, and the other by a daughter. A son, who is a junior in a nearby college, helps out in the shops whenever possible.

## **Some Preliminary Findings**

### **Capital**

Of those donut shop owners who responded to a preliminary survey, a majority said that they utilized personal savings and loans from friends, relatives, and credit associations to start their business. Some began with at least one partner; others began as sole proprietors. The owners interviewed for this study followed these patterns.

The Lys purchased their first shop in 1985, with three partners—Yin's younger brother and his brother-in-law, and the brother-in-law's cousin. The Lys' savings were not enough for their share of the downpayment, so Mr. Ly borrowed from his friends and distant relatives in Michigan and other states.

The Vongs used their own savings and bought their first shop as partners with Ms. Vong's cousin and the cousin's husband.

Sing Chau first partnered with his brothers to buy a shop in Watsonville, California, with financial support from his older sister and brother-in-law. When he purchased the Mission Viejo donut and burger place for himself in 1994, again his sister and brother provided interest-free loans. He intends to repay them after the balance of his shop is paid up.

While the Lys, Vongs, and Chaus did not use credit-rotation associations for capital, many Cambodian entrepreneurs have used *huis*, as they are referred to, if personal savings and loans from friends do not provide sufficient startup capital.

### **Family Labor**

In many small businesses owned by first-generation immigrants, particularly "mom and pop" operations, family members and other relatives are important sources of cheap labor, as well as capital, for establishment and expansion of businesses. Most donut shops are family-centered: the husband bakes most of the night and sometimes helps in the morning; the

wife works all day; and any teenage children help out after school or whenever possible. The Ly children, for instance, return home from college to help on weekends, vacation breaks, or whenever needed. The Vongs' employees are also Cambodians, both ethnic Khmer and ethnic Chinese, but each one of their three shops is managed by at least one member of the family.

The reliance on family is not limited to the nuclear unit. For many, members of the extended family also play major roles in the establishment and maintenance of shops. For example, as a single man, Sing Chau depends on his older brother and sister-in-law to work equally hard running the donut and burger place. The first summer, he temporarily hired three of his cousins to help because his brother's family was behind schedule in moving from Salinas. In some families, grandparents typically care for the grandchildren while both parents are at the shop. Sing Chau's parents are taking care of his brothers' children. Since January 1995, his father has also been in charge of two grandsons in Mission Viejo, while his mother cares for his younger brother's three-year-old daughter and five-month-old son in northern California.

Because of the nature of the business, employees can easily steal from the cash register or supply room, so trust is vital. Members of the immediate extended family provide trustworthy employees. Plus, they are dependable childcare providers.

Family labor is not only cheap but also flexible. Teenage children can generally help after school and during weekends, school breaks, and summer vacations. In case of an emergency, college-age children are called upon to help out, even if they must skip classes. Education may be highly valued, but the well-being of their families and businesses are more important. For instance, when Ms. Ly was unable to work for four days in February 1995, due to a bad case of the flu, an older daughter came home to work. She missed no classes, but she had to take away time from her master's thesis work. Likewise, Zhi H. C., an ethnic Chinese Cambodian graduate student at the University of California in Los Angeles, missed the first several days of spring quarter 1995, because his father had to be out of town and his mother needed Zhi's assistance in running the family donut business.

### **Business Problems**

Despite their dominance in the industry, not all donut shops are doing well. Some are barely breaking even. Many remain small "mom and pop"

stores even after many years of operation. After its explosive expansion in the 1980s, the donut shop business is in decline today. The persistent economic depression, saturation of the market, and competition have hurt many shops. Owners feel pressured to protect any profits by maximizing family labor; some are forced to lay off a baker, a helper, or both in an effort to reduce costs.

The Ly family has been hit hard by all these forces. When they acquired one store in 1987, the surrounding area was nothing but empty fields waiting to be developed. The street in front of the shop had heavy traffic, and the closest donut shops were about five miles away. Today only two miles separate theirs from two other donut shops, a couple of coffee shops, several fast-food restaurants, and an Albertson's Supermarket that offers donuts. The development of another major street took away nearly half of their daily customers. Consequently, revenue is down, and their one employee helps only on weekends, instead of six days a week; she now works full time for another Chinese Cambodian donut shop owner in Fullerton.

Competition has prevented a price increase even though prices of most supplies and ingredients have gone up. Last year's coffee price, for example, went up at least \$2.00 a pound, but the Lys felt they should not raise the prices of their coffee because customers might switch to Carl's Jr. or MacDonald's or other nearby fast-food restaurants. The belief is that donut shops that do well with coffee will prosper.

These entrepreneurs face other business problems, including debt payments, limited capital, a lack of knowledge about American business practices, and customer service problems. Many businesses are running on very low profit margins. According to Bun Tao, a former co-owner of B&H Distributors, struggling owners owe their creditors (friends, relatives, association members) as much as \$700,000 (Akst, 1993). None of the interviewees in this study would reveal the exact amount of their debts; but based on certain revelations, each family likely has at least a \$200,000 debt. Limited capital and lack of knowledge have thus far prevented them from pursuing other enterprises.

### **Health Problems**

Debts, stress, anxiety, irregular eating habits, and the grueling nature of their daily routines have led to health problems. The first three months after purchasing his shop, Sing Chau slept only three to four hours a night and spent his waking hours at the shop. He worried so much that for several weeks he would wake up frequently during the night to check the

clock in the kitchen, worried that he was late for work.<sup>6</sup> His wife is constantly in a state of extreme stress and anxiety. She and their son Wu have developed stomach ulcers.

Many bakers and counter workers have complained of muscle aches and leg and back pain because of long hours of standing, walking, and lifting.

### **Resulting Attitudes**

The struggle of operating a donut shop has deeply affected the attitudes of the families. Most complain about the long hours. As interviewees observed, in Cambodia, “we do not have to work this hard;” “We work like crazy here.” In Cambodia, they did not have to pay mortgages and bills, but they also recognize that back then they had no luxuries, a lower living standard, and there was no peace.

Younger people lament that they have no time for social life, and that they are married to their shops. Wu Ly and Sing Chau are both unattached men, yet they cannot date or go out because they have to be at the shops 15 to 18 hours day, seven days a week. Their days start at 4:30 in the morning and end about 7:00 in the evening for Ly and 9:00 for Chau. Wu Ly at least has some time off when his sister Lynn helps out.

The interviews for this project as well as years of informal conversations and observations make clear that the prevalent view among donut shop families is that operating a donut business is a means to an end. The stores provide them a livelihood and socioeconomic mobility, but many do not regard their work as important.

### **Contributions to the Economy**

When the United States government opened its doors to starving and traumatized refugees from Cambodia nearly 15 years ago, the American public may have had little expectation of economic contributions from these newest arrivals. The government spent money for resettlement assistance and provided employment training and other social services. Private organizations and individuals played significant roles in helping with resettlement, placement, and assimilation. Since their initial arrival, many of these refugees — in this case donut shop owners — have made tremendous progress in contributing to the local and national economies, especially in the form of personal, property, business, local, state, and federal taxes.

Donut shops not only offer steady employment for owners, but also for their adolescent children, the bakers, and one or two counter helpers. This stable employment and income reduce unemployment concerns and de-

pendence on public assistance. In addition to their payment of personal taxes, their wages enable the workers to become consumers who support other sectors of the economy and pay sales taxes. Owners also pay monthly and quarterly sales and business taxes to both state and federal governments. The Lys, for instance, pay approximately \$1,300 in monthly sales and payroll taxes.

Contributions to local economies are also apparent. In 1994, B&H Distributors reported \$8 million in sales of donut and restaurant supplies (Kaufman, 1995). Its clientele is comprised mostly of Cambodian entrepreneurs in Southern California. Orange County not only has one of the largest economies in the nation but also one of the biggest concentrations of small businesses. Donut businesses significantly contribute to those statistics. Their presence has contributed to the vitality of some neighborhoods and increased property values. Certainly the county's bankruptcy in 1995 was felt throughout the area and hurt donut shop business, but the shops continue to create employment and generate incomes that result in more local consumption. Donut shops remain integral to the continued economic endurance of the area.

Cambodian donut shop families are consumers. After decades of war, communism, and poverty that deprived these refugees of the luxuries the United States has to offer, many Cambodians do not hesitate to purchase new clothing, eat well, and buy homes when they have the power to consume. The trend among Cambodian entrepreneurs during the late 1980s was to purchase new cars, houses, and jewelry. The median cost of a house in Orange County is at about \$200,000. New homes generally mean new furnishings, decorations, and amenities. Most families have at least two cars, more than one television set, video cassette recorders, and other entertainment products. Children are encouraged to seek higher education, and most are striving to become professionals in fields through which they contribute to society in other ways.

During periods of economic growth in the 1980s, the donut business was good to most owners. Many continue to save and invest in more than one shop, while others invest in other businesses and products. Entrepreneurial expansion and growth means more employees and tax contributions for the economy. Because of capital constraints and lack of resources, knowledge or guidance in other enterprises, most Chinese Cambodians tend to acquire more donut shops instead of diversifying their investments. Many have at least two shops. Yen Ren Ly's nephew and his wife have more than one; the Vongs have three. Mr. Vong feels that he is in a good financial

situation right now, and even if his son did not complete college, the father would purchase another shop for him to run.

The August 1994 preliminary survey revealed that a majority of respondents wish to leave the industry but lack the confidence to do so. Still, some donut shop operators have moved on to Chinese fast-food establishments, liquor stores, gas stations, frozen yogurt shops, burger places, and other small businesses. Because many feel the donut market is saturated — especially in Southern California — they are considering relocation opportunities. Some have already moved to Texas, the East, and the Midwest. The Lys are considering the Midwest, where one of Ms. Ly's sisters and brother-in-law have a thriving donut business.

## Implications

This research represents a preliminary look at the phenomenon of Cambodian-owned donut shops in California. Some insights into the economic activities of this group of refugees can be gleaned that are relevant to their values and goals, families, gender roles, small-business entrepreneurship, and the historical development of this particular group within the larger Asian Pacific American community.

Certainly there is a need for more exploration of different areas: a closer look at the impact on local economies, English literacy as a factor, cultural influences, social and economic cooperation within the community, sources of capital, and the relevance of government programs in this enterprise. This is, nevertheless, at least a beginning.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Practically every shop spells DONUT instead of doughnut. Some of the reasons for this include cost for each letter of the sign, space, and the short, familiar name would attract more costumers than the correct spelling. Therefore, in this study “donut” is used at the expense of spelling.
- <sup>2</sup> A more quantitative survey method was initially considered but eventually rejected in favor of case studies. Through informal conversations, entrepreneurs and other workers indicated that the vast majority of subjects probably would not respond to surveys because of a language barrier or lack of time. In one study of Southeast Asian businesses conducted by Orange County officials, only 2 of 100 mailed surveys were returned.
- <sup>3</sup> This is confirmed by Professor Shinagawa's demographic analysis provided in this volume.

- 4 If invitations announce the banquets at 12 noon, many of these “donut people” traditionally arrive one to two hours late because they cannot leave the morning rush and must clean up for the next day. Food will not be served until 2 pm to accommodate their schedule.
- 5 The author has worked summers, vacations and weekends for the Lys since 1987.
- 6 Mr. Chau and I lived in the same household for six months. Because I sometimes stayed up late watching television during the summer, I was able to witness his nightly anxiety ritual.

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