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Many Asian Americans are as segregated by neighborhood as Latinos

A Brown University study finds the pattern especially pronounced in L.A. and Orange counties. But in many U.S. cities, it's a matter of choice, not economic hurdles.

By Emily Alpert, Los Angeles Times

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People with Chinese or Vietnamese roots are as segregated as Latinos in neighborhoods nationwide, a study from Brown University has found. In Los Angeles and Orange counties, the pattern is even more extreme — and has grown more so over the last two decades.

But the same study suggests that that may not necessarily be a problem. In many cities, some Asian Americans live in neighborhoods that appear "separate but equal," with incomes and education levels as high or higher than largely white neighborhoods, researchers said.

That contrasts sharply with the dismal history of segregation for Latinos and blacks in the U.S., said John R. Logan, a Brown University professor of sociology. The flourishing of many Chinese, Indian and Korean neighborhoods may be what keeps people there from moving into more integrated areas.

If your neighborhood is doing well, "where would the motive be to change?" asked Logan, co-author of the study. "There may in fact be a strong element of separation in the future."

It's no surprise that immigrants gravitate toward "ethnoburbs," suburban areas such as Monterey Park that are filled with ethnic businesses. "You can read the newspaper, listen to the radio, buy a house from a real estate agent, go to a doctor and get your groceries from people who speak your language," said Linda Vo, a professor of Asian American studies at UC Irvine.

What's interesting is that at least some of their children have stayed, even as they integrate into American life, Vo said.

It's "part of the new way we should be thinking about integration," said Manuel Pastor, director of the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration at USC. For Chinese Americans in the San Gabriel Valley, for instance, "there's economic mobility. There's increased civic participation — and the society that they have moved into has been just as much changed by them as they have been changed by that society."

Researchers measured segregation using an "index of dissimilarity" based on Census Bureau data, gauging how whites and Asian Americans were spread across areas.

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The study, sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation and the American Communities Project of Brown University, found different degrees of separation among Asian American subgroups. Vietnamese, Indian and Chinese Americans are as separated from whites where they live as are Latinos. Japanese Americans are the least residentially segregated.

In Los Angeles and Orange counties, Asian Americans live in more separated areas than do Asian Americans nationwide, the study found.

Brown University researchers also discovered that Asian Americans in Los Angeles and Orange counties lived in neighborhoods with lower household incomes, on average, than those of whites. That makes the Los Angeles area different from the average metropolitan area in the U.S., where median household incomes for Asian American neighborhoods rival or exceed those of white areas, one reason researchers call the neighborhoods "separate but equal."

Daniel Kikuo Ichinose of Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles, a civil rights group, warned that the study did not examine some of the most disadvantaged communities, including Cambodian and Samoan Americans, which have lower incomes and might be even more segregated. Calling the patterns "separate but equal" paints Asian American communities too broadly, he said.

Neighborhood household incomes were especially low among Vietnamese Americans in Southern California, averaging about \$64,000 compared with \$82,000 for whites.

But Vietnamese community leaders said they don't see their Little Saigons as places they are stuck in.

"We don't need to stay in the same area," said Huu Vo, president of the Federation of Vietnamese American Communities of USA. Some leave, but some also move back, he said. "When people get older, they like to get together and have easy access to the Vietnamese community."

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