

East meets West

A short subway ride downtown is Manhattan's Chinatown, one of the largest and oldest Chinese communities not only in New York City but in the whole of the United States. Here, you can dine on authentic roast duck and wonton soup, see locals practicing t'ai chi and playing mah-jongg, and hear people on every corner speaking Cantonese, Mandarin, and the Fuzhou dialect. All across the US, there are other Asian community enclaves, too. San Francisco's Japantown, or *Nihonmachi*, is home to over 1,000 Japanese Americans. Further down the coast is the Koreatown of Los Angeles, one of the most densely populated areas of the city and one which forms an increasingly ethnically diverse community. Orange County's Little Saigon, meanwhile, comprises some 180,000 Vietnamese Americans – the largest population outside of Vietnam. Each of these districts is exciting and vibrant; a city within a city; a window onto a world half a world away.

But there is more to these enclaves than exotic dining and shopping. Many of them have been in existence since the mid-1800s, when a wave of immigrants from China came in search of work in the California Gold Rush and on the transcontinental railroads. They served as places for these people to share and enjoy their own language and culture. Far from coming into being as tourist attractions, they were in fact crucial refuges for those facing racial discrimination.

Hazel Lam, whose great-great-grandparents emigrated to America from Hong Kong in the 1860s, grew up hearing stories of their experiences as young immigrants. "My great-great-grandfather worked on the construction of the first transcontinental railroad. After it was completed, they moved to the East coast so that he could look for work in New York City, but there was very little available. They settled in Chinatown, where most of their friends worked in restaurants and laundry businesses, and so decided to set up their own dim sum restaurant. It was a great success and their son ran it after them, keeping it open until he retired in the 1930s. It only closed down because my grandfather wanted to go to university and become a dentist – which he did!"

For Hazel, who is now the fifth generation of her family to live in New York, Chinatown was an important step towards discovering her cultural heritage. "I think that each new generation has integrated more and more into American life, and so these communities are a way for us to stay in touch with our past." She is also positive about the future role that Asian community enclaves all over the Western world have to play. "Of course, racial stereotypes and negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities are still very much in existence. However, I believe that in many cases these communities are no longer seen as being completely separate to the rest of society, but rather as an integral part of it."

1 Read the text and check the sentences True (T), False (F), or the information is Not Given (NG).

- a** San Francisco has the largest Japantown in the whole of the US. T ☐ F ☐ NG ☐
- b** Many ethnic community enclaves started out as tourist attractions. T ☐ F ☐ NG ☐
- c** A lot of the immigrants who worked on the transcontinental railroads were from China. T ☐ F ☐ NG ☐
- d** Three different generations of Hazel's family ran their dim sum restaurant in Chinatown. T ☐ F ☐ NG ☐
- e** Hazel has never left New York. T ☐ F ☐ NG ☐

2 As well as their traditional language and culture, what else might the people living in ethnic community enclaves share? Talk to a partner.**3 Do you agree with Hazel that ethnic community enclaves have become an integral part of society? How might they help to break down racial stereotypes and negative attitudes? Talk to a partner.**