

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Localizing the Global: Exploring the Transnational Ties That Bind in New Immigrant CommunitiesWan-Ying Lin¹, Hayeon Song², & Sandra Ball-Rokeach³

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This study seeks to examine the ways in which transnational life is lived at different “local” levels. In particular, we ask: What are some of the important aspects of immigrants’ life that are enacted across borders? To what extent are ethnic media that serve the immigrant population connected to home countries in content and operation? To what extent does transnational news have local and global implications? Multiple methods are employed in this study, including a telephone survey of immigrant communities, interviews with media producers and senior editors, and a content analysis of ethnic newspapers. This study shows that transnational activities go beyond economics to include more social aspects and communication practices in immigrants’ everyday lives.

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The contested notion of “transnationalism” has generated new insights into international migrants’ ongoing ties with their communities of origin as well as their diasporic communities. Because of improved transportation and communication technologies, immigrants’ experiential horizons have been drastically altered and expanded in the past few decades. As the migrants’ communication activities are now extended to a global scale, what we have increasingly observed in new immigrant groups are transnational practices for “keeping feet in both worlds” (Levitt, 2003). New immigrants have come to “imagine” and belong to a community that is no longer “either-or” but “in between” the homeland and the host land (Ang, 2001; Fournon, 2003; Kraidy, 2002; Ma, 2003; A. Ong, 1999; Sinclair, Yue, Hawkins, Pookong, & Fox, 2001; Sreberny, 2003; Yokochi & Hall, 2001).

Scholars, however, have not adequately addressed the roles that communication plays in immigrants’ transnational activities. Many social scientists who attend to

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the impact of labor and capital movements on political regimes and economic infrastructures in both sending and receiving countries ignore communication processes. This gap in the past literature thus leaves many questions unanswered. For example, *who* participates in transnational activities and *how*? Are transnational practices primarily economic? What other aspects of immigrants' life are enacted across borders? In particular, how strong are immigrants' transnational communication networks, and how closely are ethnic media that serve the immigrant population connected to home countries? To what extent do immigrants engage in transnational communication behavior? To what extent does transnational news have local and global implications? In this work, we seek to address these questions from a comparative perspective. We discuss in the following sections various aspects of transnational practices, identify different "local" dimensions of these activities, and explore how transnational communication networks are constructed in the diasporic community. We then empirically assess the strength and prevalence of these transnational ties in several new immigrant communities in Los Angeles, California, USA, home to a large share of new arrivals and a traditional site for the study of transnational connections (Basch, Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 1999; Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995; Vertovec, 2004).

Transnational ties: Immigrants and their "homes"

Transnationalism is a term that has been in vogue in recent years. Yet the condition to which it refers to—"multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec, 1999)—has a much longer history. Undoubtedly, earlier immigrants engaged in behavior that scholars today would describe as "transnational." However, they were rarely analyzed as behaviors that produced new and interesting outcomes at both sending and receiving sites. Hence, transnationalism is not a novel phenomenon, but it represents a novel perspective for the study of recent migration trends. Among new immigrants to the United States,¹ the growth of Asian and Latino immigrant populations has been among the fastest—this growth coming after the relaxed immigration law in the United States after 1965 (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001; Fong, 2001; Hum, 2002; Ngim & Torres, 2001; P. Ong & Azores, 1994; Sanchez, 2000).

Portes (1999) distinguishes transnational forms from other cross-border activities. "International" pertains to activities and agendas of nation-states, "multinational" to large-scale institutions such as corporations whose activities take place in multiple countries, and "transnational" to activities initiated and sustained by noninstitutional actors, which frequently refer to immigrants and their lived experiences. In other words, transnationalism is not a phenomenon that is "out there." Rather, it involves transformations in the very texture of everyday life "in here" (Charney, Kiong, & Yeoh, 2003). It is experienced and realized by the "growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders" (Portes, 1999, p. 217).

The nature of transnational practices is generally categorized into three domains. The first, and probably the most extensively studied, is primarily economic, with a focus on the increasing transnational mobility of capital. These activities include immigrants sending money home or having property ownership in both sending and receiving countries. Global remittances (i.e., money sent back “home”) had exceeded US\$70 billion by the mid-1990s, compared to less than \$2 billion in the 1970s (ESRC, 2001). In the second domain, that is political, transnational activities also take place, where immigrants continue to be part of political parties, contribute to political campaigns, or even vote in the election in home countries (e.g., Vertovec, 2004; Waters, 2003). Third, in the less frequently studied sociocultural domain, scholars such as Levitt include the flows of ideas, identities, and social capital, or what she calls “social remittances,” as part of transnational practices (Levitt, 1998, 2001).

Transnational life at the “local” level

As evidenced in many studies (Sassen, 2001), immigrant life is always lived and experienced locally. Even the most “global” forces are subject to “local” inflection in specific sites of consumption. According to Appadurai (1996), locality is “primarily relational and contextual” (p. 179). It is a social achievement through collective imagination and discursive construction at a particular historical moment. Locality is also a dimension of social value that is realized in material facts and has potential for social reproduction.

The “local” is thus seen as a fluid and relational space. Often times, it is referred to as a community, a village, a town, or even a city. At other times, however, the local is defined as all subglobal forms of social organization (Anderson, 1991; Cheng, 2004; Ferguson, 1995; Wiley, 2004). For those scholars, the local is constituted in and through its relation to the global. For instance, the “local” represents the nation–state in Ferguson’s (1995) examination of national economic interests as drivers of local and global audiovisual trade policies. According to Ferguson, nation–states still constitute the nexus of the global–local exchange despite that the conventional nation–state model has been challenged in the wake of advanced transport technologies and the blurring of national territoriality (Basch et al., 1994; Sassen, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). In this light, the power of the nation–state is not rendered obsolete. Rather, transnational activities are still largely contained within national boundaries and policies (Ferguson, 1995; Jackson, Crang, & Dwyer, 2004; Levitt, 2001; Naficy, 1999; Sassen, 2001).

Along the same line, Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2003) argue that immigrants’ attachments to home and their host societies do not transcend state authority, but operate within its limits. In their view, immigrants do not become more “globalized” by moving to another country, but they open a path of exchange between two “local” communities that are divided by political boundaries. They thus propose the concept of “bilocalism,” an emphasis on the local in both sending and receiving communities, to describe the highly localistic connections that immigration patterns produce.

Hence, unlike straight-line assimilation scholars and the public at large who believe that immigrants must choose one place (i.e., the adopted country) to belong, transnationalism scholars view the migration process as neither a one-time nor a unidirectional experience. Rather, it is an interactive, bumpy, and nonlinear journey (Foner, Rumbaut, & Gold, 2000; Gans, 2000; Levitt, 2003; Morawska, 2003), and transnational migrants appear to have a dual sense of belonging or attachments to their “homelands” (Naficy, 1993; Pries, 2001). This new sense of locality transcends earlier notions of a polarity between the place of origin and the place of residence.

Transnational communication networks

In the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information, or what Rouse (1991) calls a “transnational migrant circuit” (p. 14), the information exchange and communication networks embedded in immigrants’ everyday life have not received due attention. Many scholars have argued that globalization essentially follows the line of ethnicity insofar as communication contact is concerned (Appadurai, 1991; Gibbs, Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Jung, 2000; Waters, 2003). Through phone calls, letters, or e-mail, new immigrant groups frequently engage in transnational communication practices with family and friends in the homeland. In addition, immigrants also connect to ethnic media for homeland news. Once marginalized, ethnic media nowadays have become sophisticated in content and operation, and a few have even turned into multinational enterprises (Cheng, 2004; Karim, 1998; Lin, 2004; Lin & Song, 2006). These transnational networks that connect home and the host society have not only adapted to globalization trends, but also have helped to fashion the new global order with their diasporic audiences and international production operations (Chalaby, 2003; Charney *et al.*, 2003; Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000).

For instance, in Kolar-Panov’s (1994) study of Croatian immigrants in Australia, immigrants were found to rely heavily on homemade videotapes to stay on top of what was really going on in their home country during the war between Serbia and Croatia. The violence involved in the war and inhumanly killed and treated dead bodies were brutally revealed in those amateur videotapes, which were largely missing in mainstream media and documentaries (Kolar-Panov, 1994). Similarly, in his examination of Iranian exile cultures in Los Angeles during the 1980s, Naficy (1993) points to the critical role of various forms of popular culture, including television, periodicals, music, movies, the telephone, and the like, in the process of “becoming” (p. 8). In particular, the mediating role of ethnic television has helped transform the exile group into an ethnic community by offering a “double text” that includes programs infused with homeland culture and language, and materials driven by the mainstream ideology and values of the host society. To Naficy and many scholars on transnationals, diasporic experiences are located, and lived, in the intersection of other cultures. This hybrid status transcends their original or current social and cultural locations through popular media, whether it is a news or entertainment program, or a mix of genres.

In this light, communication through media becomes essential in immigrants' transnational practice. In particular, studies of the relationship between media and everyday life point to the central role of *news* in ordering the lived experience of time. In their interviews, Sinclair et al. (2001) showed how Chinese ethnic television viewers in Australia delayed going to work in the morning in order to find out what happened at "home" the day before. They needed this information, this sense of ritualized summation of the day over "there," even if it was experienced in another place and time. This habitual consumption of home country news provided a strong sense of "dual dailiness," a doubling of time that allowed people to remain connected to "experiences of everydayness," both here and there (p. 53).

As Appadurai (1991) points out, the power of news media in the global arena has greatly enhanced the imagination capacities of ordinary people in their everyday lives. Through sharing the same media rituals and messages, immigrants can symbolically participate in, and imagine (Anderson, 1991), the community that the media have defined for them, be it their neighborhood, the host country, or their homeland. Ethnic media, striving to bridge between the sending and receiving countries, have contributed to the formation of transnational networks of media production and consumption between "home" and "host" sites, creating what Vertovec (2004) has described as "bifocality" of daily rhythms and routines that join localities here and there. Hence, one of the important functions of the news media is to construct and narrate locality in the news, more than just provide information. In this light, ethnic media designed to target specific immigrant groups play an important role in narrating and constituting such a transnational, plural locality.

Research questions

In accordance with the above discussion, we intend to explore new immigrants' transnational practices in Los Angeles' new immigrant communities, where predominantly first-generation and second-generation immigrants reside. The communities under study include Asian and Latino immigrant groups, two ethnic groups whose growth has been the fastest among other groups in Southern California as well as in the United States since the 1970s. Despite some common characteristics shared among immigrants, Asian and Latino immigrants differ in cultural orientation, identity formation, and socioeconomic background (Allen & Turner, 2002; Ball-Rokeach, Kim, et al., 2001; Fong, 2001; Hum, 2002; Lin & Song, 2006; Ngim & Torres, 2001). The task is taken on in a multiethnic setting that enables us to make comparisons of transnational activities among different immigrant groups, not only from an economic standpoint, but also from a social and communication perspective that takes into account everyday behavior.

Specifically, we seek to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do new immigrants engage in transnational practices?

RQ1-1: Are those activities primarily economic, or are other aspects of life also enacted across borders?

RQ1-2: Are there differences in these transnational practices among different immigrant groups?

We are particularly interested in examining the often overlooked transnational flows of information as they occur in immigrants' everyday connections to ethnic media for news about the home country. As Robert Park (1922) suggested in his classic work, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, newspapers that target immigrants serve as a powerful institution to keep the mother language from disintegrating as well as to help immigrants integrate into the host society. The dual role of the immigrant press, as Park argued, enabled newcomers to acquire the information needed about American government, values, and attitudes, as well as provided a psychologically satisfying experience for immigrants to be able to read their native language. Although electronic media and new media such as the Internet have increasingly taken up the role bridging between the homeland and the host land, newspapers remain a powerful medium that reflects immigrants' views and represents their community (Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2003). Hence, drawing upon a larger study that addresses different media, we intended to place our focus on the print media in this study.

RQ2: How are transnational communication networks exhibited in the consumption and production processes of ethnic newspapers?

RQ2-1: To what extent are immigrants connected to home country news via ethnic newspapers?

RQ2-2: To what extent are immigrants connected to local news via ethnic newspapers?

RQ2-3: To what extent do ethnic newspapers have home country connections in their ownership and operation?

RQ2-4: To what extent do ethnic newspapers report home country news?

RQ2-5: To what extent do ethnic newspapers report local news?

RQ2-6: Are there differences in transnational communication practices among different immigrant groups?

We argue, in line with other scholars, that the transnational flow of information is not a mere "local reception of global media text" (Kraidy, 2002). Rather it is a communication practice that involves simultaneously the sending and receiving countries, akin to Vertovec's (2004) "bifocality" of daily rhythms and routines that join localities here and there. We thus propose to examine the following questions with regard to transnational news, defined here as news that has implications for both home and the host countries:

RQ3: How do ethnic newspapers report transnational news?

RQ3-1: What is the nature of the transnational news covered in ethnic newspapers?

RQ3-2: How is transnational news different from home country news and domestic U.S. news in terms of its content and source?

RQ3-3: Are there differences in transnational news in ethnic newspapers serving different immigrant communities?

Method

This study investigates transnational activities in multiethnic communities in Los Angeles, California, the second largest city in the United States. Los Angeles, being one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, challenges the traditional urban experience and notions of association and identity. The study areas include Latino and Asian neighborhoods, within 10 miles of the Civic Center of Los Angeles.² The data utilized in this study are part of the efforts of the Metamorphosis Project. The Metamorphosis Project at the University of Southern California investigates the transformations of urban communities under the forces of globalization, new communication technologies, and population diversity.

Data collection

To answer our research questions, multiple methods are used, including a telephone survey of the residents, interviews with media publishers and senior editors, and a content analysis of ethnic newspapers. The random-digit-dialing survey, which was conducted between June 1998 and December 1999, collected samples between 250 and 321 households in each of the four study areas (East LA = 250, Pico Union = 250, Koreatown = 238, and Greater Monterey Park = 321) for participation in the language of respondents' choice (Cantonese, English, Korean, Mandarin, or Spanish). The overall response rate was 31%, calculated by dividing the number of completed interviews by the number of theoretically eligible phone numbers. In all, the basic characteristics of our sample show good conformity to the population characteristics in the same area, compared with 1990 estimates of all Asian and Latino groups (Ball-Rokeach, Gibbs, Jung, Kim, & Qiu, 2001; Matei, Ball-Rokeach, Wilson, Gibbs, & Hoyt, 2001). In addition to the survey, a media census³ of all newspapers available in each study area was conducted. In accordance with the media census, follow-up interviews with media publishers and senior editors were carried out between 1999 and 2000.⁴ Interview questions include a basic media profile (type, history, circulation, frequency of publication, readership, staff size, reach, foreign presence, sources of revenue, distribution, and subscription base), production and editorial goals, commitment to coverage of local or neighborhood news, and perceived roles in the community.

For the content analysis, we randomly selected two issues of each available newspaper in each study area based on our media census.⁵ As a result, 20 newspapers in the Latino neighborhoods (a total of 40 issues), 14 newspapers in Koreatown (a total of 28 issues), and 17 Chinese newspapers in Greater Monterey Park (a total of 34 issues) were included in our analysis. These included dailies, weeklies,

and biweeklies which were published between August 2003 and March 2004. All news articles, including hard news, features, editorials, and letters to the editors, were included in the analysis. In total, 8,255 news articles ($N_1 = 1,518$ from Latino papers, $N_2 = 2,635$ from Korean papers, and $N_3 = 4,102$ from Chinese papers) were content-analyzed. For each of the ethnic groups, two coders were hired and trained. Coders were graduate students at the University of Southern California, with their mother tongues being Spanish, Korean, and Chinese, respectively. They were also fluent in English. The *kappa* measure of agreement was used to assess the intercoder reliability. The kappa values were satisfactory,⁶ with .819 for the Chinese, .817 for the Korean, and .620 for the Latino newspaper articles.⁷

Measures

To measure immigrants' transnational practices, we examined three variables: financial remittance to home, work connections with home countries, and location of friends and family. Specifically, we asked, "Do you ever have occasion to send money to relatives in (home country)?" The response categories were "yes, frequently," "yes, occasionally," and "no." We also asked, "Does your work put you in touch with any people or companies in (home country)?" Respondents answered "yes" or "no." In addition, we asked them, "Where do most of your close friends and family live? Do most of them live in your neighborhood, in the Los Angeles area, in California, in the United States but not in California, or in your home country?"

With regard to the consumption side of the transnational communication networks, we calculated time spent on both mainstream and ethnic media in a typical week. In our study, mainstream media refer to English-speaking media accessible to the immigrants, whereas ethnic media were those that speak their languages. For each of the media types (newspaper, television, and radio), respondents were given categories from "none," "a few minutes to 1 hour," "1 hour to less than 2 hours," "2 to less than 3 hours," "3 to less than 4 hours," "4 to less than 5 hours," and "5 or more hours." To assess respondents' attachment to home country news, we asked them to rank the importance of home country news relative to other geographical locations, specifically the neighborhood, Los Angeles, California, and the United States.

On the production side, we asked media publishers and editors about their ownership location, history, circulation, and the number of employees in the organization. In the content analysis, we classified news stories by their geographical location: A *neighborhood-level* story concerns the happenings in the neighborhood or the community. A *county-level* story refers to issues and events that concern the residents in Greater Los Angeles. A *regional-level* story refers to issues and events that take place in Southern California. Outside the local area, a *state-level* story concerns statewide events, agencies, and policies in California. A *national-level* story refers to domestic issues and events in the 50 states of the United States. Finally, an *international-level* story refers to issues and events that concern two or more countries, including home countries. Categories are mutually exclusive. A story that

referenced more than one level was always coded at the lower-distance level. For instance, a news story about the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) outbreak in Asia and its implications for the local Chinese community of Los Angeles should be coded at the county level (Greater Los Angeles) and should not be double coded at the international level.

Finally, to examine the coverage of transnational news, we identified whether a story concerns “both home and host country issues regardless of where it takes place.” Transnational news may also take place at any level. For instance, the SARS breakout in Asia having a negative impact on local businesses in the Chinese immigrant community belongs to this category. At the national level, a story about the increasing number of Korean pregnant women coming to the United States to give birth belongs to this category. At the state level, an example of transnational news in this category would be politicians in Mexico calling for Latino immigrants in Los Angeles to return home to vote in the Presidential Campaign.

Results

Table 1 shows the sample characteristics of the new immigrants in our study area. Mexican-origin residents constitute more than 80% of East Los Angeles’s population. Their income and educational levels are lower than that of their Asian counterparts. Central American-origin residents living in Pico Union, another Latino neighborhood under study, have the lowest level of income and education among the four communities. They are also the least likely to own a home, despite the fact

Table 1 The Profile of our Latino, Korean, and Chinese Samples in Los Angeles

	East LA	Pico Union	Koreatown	Greater Monterey Park
	Mexican <i>N</i> = 250	Central American <i>N</i> = 250	Korean <i>N</i> = 238	Chinese <i>N</i> = 321
Age	34	33	35	41
Household income (median)	\$26,709	\$21,734	\$32,688	\$44,833
Highest level of education				
≤ High school	85%	82%	55%	20%
≥ College graduate	5%	7%	22%	39%
% of first generations	42%	61%	77%	72%
Second generations	38%	36%	21%	23%
Third or fourth generations	20%	3%	2%	5%
% Unemployed	11%	13%	8%	5%
% of Home ownership	31%	6%	10%	46%

Source: The Metamorphosis Project (Ball-Rokeach, Gibbs, et al., 2001; Gibbs et al., 2000) and 1990, 2000 U.S. Census reports.

that they have lived in their neighborhood longer than the other groups. On the contrary, Korean residents in Koreatown and Chinese residents in Greater Monterey Park, coming primarily from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, are relatively rich and well educated. In particular, Greater Monterey Park residents have the highest levels of income and education, and the highest rate of homeownership, relative to the other three groups. However, they are mostly first-generation immigrants and are not long-time dwellers. In comparison, residents in East Los Angeles have a higher percentage of longer term residents as well as second- and third-generation immigrants than the other three groups.

Transnational ties: Financial and social remittances

To examine transnational activities, we looked into financial remittances, work connections, and location of friends and family. In terms of financial remittances, the Latinos in Pico Union, on the one hand, were found to have sent money home the most often, with a total of 77% having ever done so, of which 37% reported sending money home frequently and 40% occasionally. In addition, more than half (12% frequently; 43% occasionally) of the Latinos in East LA and 45% (6% frequently; 39% occasionally) of the Koreans in Koreatown reported ever sending remittances. The Chinese in Greater Monterey Park, on the other hand, sent money home the least frequently (see Figure 1). Only 5% reported having done so frequently and 31% occasionally. In other words, almost 70% of them never engaged in this activity.

Besides, more than half (55%) of the Chinese residents in Greater Monterey Park were involved in work that put them in touch with people or companies in their home countries, a sharp contrast with Korean immigrants (20%) and Latino immigrants in East LA and Pico Union (9% and 7%, respectively). We also assessed the social ties

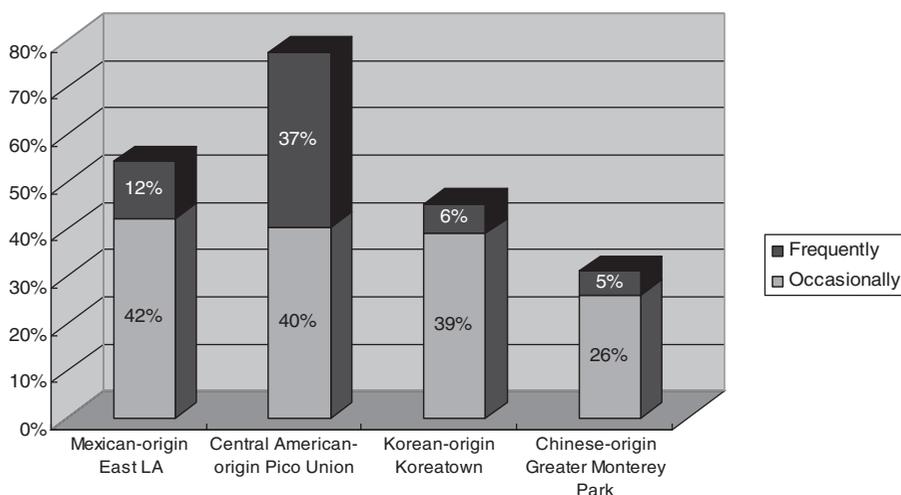


Figure 1 Percentage of new immigrants making financial remittances.

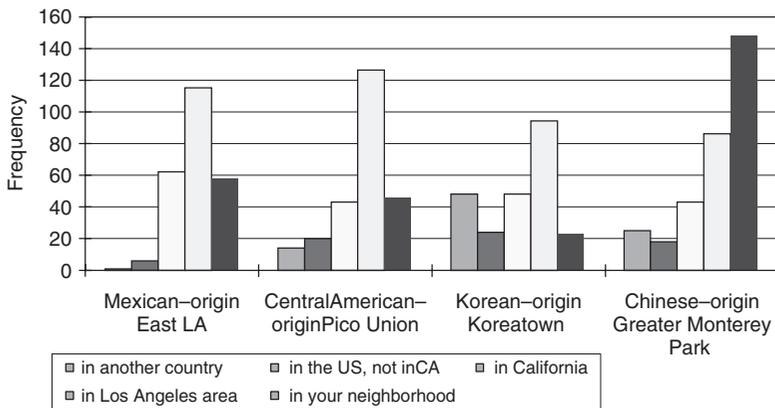


Figure 2 New immigrants' social networks: location of friends and family.

that immigrants have between their host and home countries by looking at where most of their friends and family are located. Across the study areas, approximately 90% of the respondents said that most of their friends and family lived in the United States (Figure 2). Almost all of the Latinos living in East LA reported that most of their friends and family were located in the United States, followed by the Latinos in Pico Union (94%) and the Chinese in Greater Monterey Park (92%). While the majority of the Latino and Chinese immigrants had most of their friends and family residing in their neighborhoods or Greater Los Angeles, the Korean immigrants had most of their social ties spread out in Los Angeles (40%), California (20%), and other parts of the United States (10%). Moreover, 20% of the Korean immigrants in our sample had close friends and family back in South Korea, compared to 8% of Chinese, 6% of Latinos in Pico Union, and less than 1% of Latinos in East LA.

Transnational communication networks

Our second research question explores transnational communication networks as exhibited in the consumption and production of news in the ethnic press. On the production side, our findings show that ethnic media are in many ways similar to local media. Most of them are small, community-based mom-and-pop businesses. The print media in the immigrant communities under study were primarily weekly newspapers, printed in their mother tongue, and most of them were free of charge. More than 80% of them were established after 1975, and, on average, had been in existence for 21 years (Figure 3). These organizations varied in size. More than 60% had 10 employees or less; however, 10% of them were staffed by more than 100 people. Their circulations also varied widely, ranging from a few hundred to half a million copies (Figure 4).

From the content analysis, we found that more than half of the stories were home country news, whereas local news (including the neighborhood, Los Angeles, and

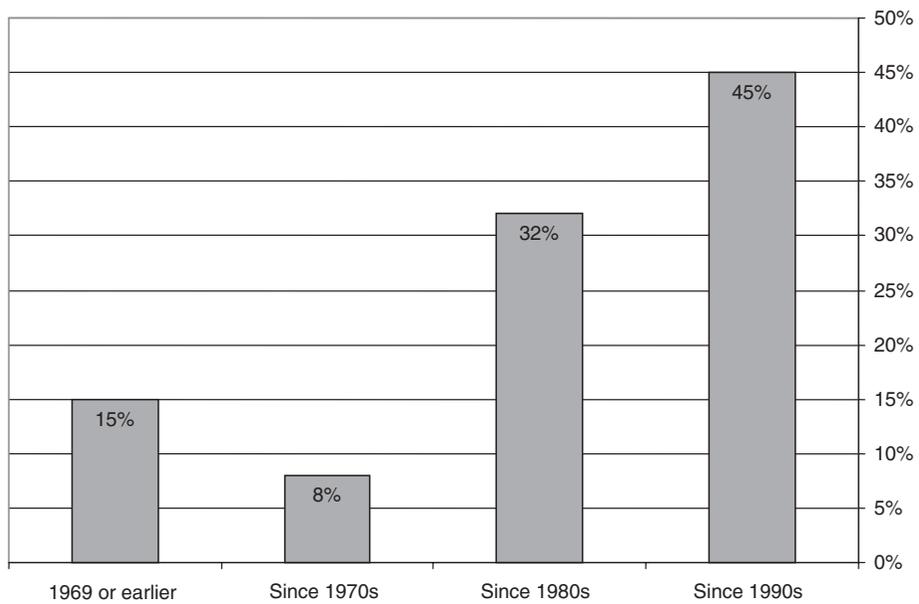


Figure 3 Operating history of ethnic newspapers in Los Angeles's new immigrant communities.

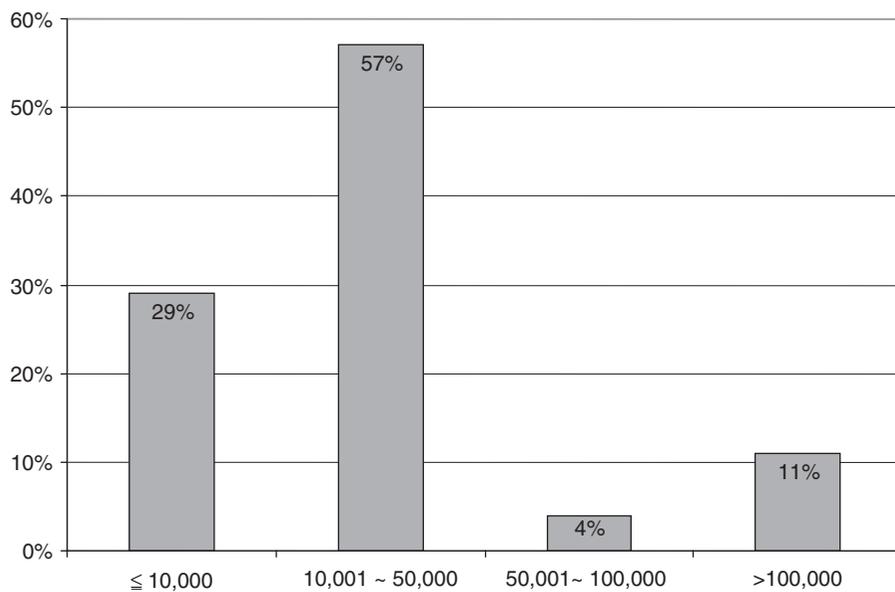


Figure 4 Circulation of ethnic newspapers in Los Angeles's new immigrant communities.

Southern California) constituted only 15%. Among three ethnic groups, the Latino papers reported the fewest stories taking place in home countries (27%), whereas more than half of the Chinese stories (51%) and 43% of the Korean stories were primarily homebound. In contrast, Latino newspapers provided more neighborhood stories (12%) than Korean papers (4%) and Chinese papers (3%). The interviews with ethnic media publishers revealed that ethnic newspapers with a circulation of 5,000 or more were mostly subsidiaries of multinational corporations in their home countries. A total of 11% of these newspapers were also circulated in other parts of the world. As a result, news stories that appear in these global media are often times syndicated from a home country version with modifications to meet local needs.

On the consumption side, all new immigrants were highly connected to ethnic media as opposed to mainstream English-language media (Figure 5). The average time spent on ethnic media was 8 hours in a week, compared to 3 hours on mainstream media. With regard to specific media type, ethnic television was the most popular (3.7 hours per week), followed by ethnic radio (2.7 hours per week) and newspapers (1.9 hours per week). Latinos watched more ethnic television than did Asians, while Asian immigrants spent more than twice the time on ethnic newspapers than did Latinos (Table 2). More importantly, we looked at how many new immigrants placed the highest importance on home country news as opposed to national news, California news, Los Angeles news, and neighborhood news (Figure 6). The rank of home country news is, at least in part, a reflection of immigrants' emotional ties to their homeland. The results showed that approximately one in five immigrants in our samples ranked home country news as the most important in their lives. Korean immigrants again exhibited a stronger tie to the mother country, with 35% ranking home country news the most important, compared to 21% for Chinese in Greater Monterey Park, 17% of the Latinos in Pico Union, and 4% of the East LA Latinos. In contrast, 27% of the East LA Latinos considered neighborhood news the most important, whereas only 15% of the Latinos in Pico Union, 12% of the Chinese in

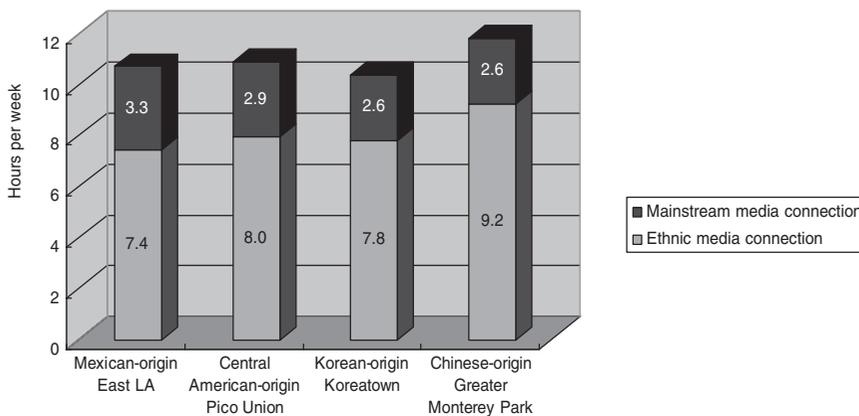


Figure 5 New immigrants' connections to ethnic media and mainstream media.

Table 2 Immigrants' Connections to Ethnic Media and Mainstream Media Across Study Areas (hours per week)

Study Area	Main-stream TV	Main-stream Newspaper	Main-stream Radio	Main-stream Media (Total)	Ethnic TV	Ethnic Newspaper	Ethnic Radio	Ethnic Media (Total)
East LA	1.8	0.3	1.1	3.2	3.6	1.0	2.9	7.5
Pico Union	1.5	0.2	1.2	2.9	4.0	1.0	2.9	8.0
Koreatown	1.6	0.2	0.8	2.6	3.1	2.4	2.3	7.8
Greater Monterey Park	1.3	0.3	1.0	2.6	3.8	2.9	2.6	9.2
Average	1.5	0.3	1.0	2.8	3.7	1.9	2.7	8.2

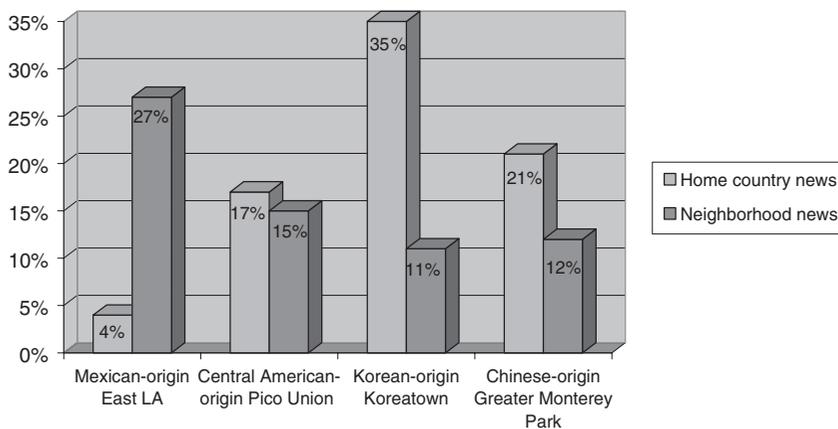


Figure 6 Most important news ranked by new immigrants.

Greater Monterey Park, and 11% of the Korean placed the highest importance on neighborhood news.

Our third research question concerns the extent to which ethnic print media include transnational stories that connect home and the host country. Among all ethnic groups, Latino newspapers had the most transnational news. Specifically, 15% of the stories in Latino papers, 6% of the Chinese stories, and 4% of the stories in Korean papers concerned transnational news. To further unfold the “bilocalness” dimension, we looked into three levels of location of these stories. First, almost one-third of transnational news stories (30%) were concerned about home and host country (United States) issues and events at the national level. For instance, a story about an increasingly popular phenomenon of Korean pregnant women coming to the United States to give birth belongs to this category. Second, news that involves home and host country local-level events and happenings, including the neighborhood, LA County, and Southern California, comprised 20% of the transnational news stories. An example of news in this category would be politicians

in Mexico calling for Latino immigrants in Los Angeles to return home to vote in the Presidential Campaign. Third, news that addressed home and a community issue or event in the host country accounted for only 7% (Latino 10%, Korean 8%, and Chinese 3%). For instance, the SARS breakout in Asia having a negative impact on local businesses in the Chinese immigrant community belongs to this category. Table 3 summarizes the locality of transnational news in different ethnic newspapers.

Transnational news differed in some respects from home country news and host country news (see Tables 4–6). With regard to story source, about 60% of the transnational stories were written by the staff, which is higher than that of home country news (40%) and of all U.S. news (44%). Among different ethnic groups, more than 70% of the transnational stories that appeared in the Chinese press were contributed by the staff, compared to 48% in Latino papers and 41% in Korean papers. Meanwhile, transnational news had fewer stories without a byline than did home country and all domestic news. Only 23% of transnational news did not specify a byline, whereas 36% of both home country news and domestic U.S. news did not have attribution to sources. The use of bylines varies widely among different ethnic newspapers. More than half (51%) of the Korean transnational news stories lacked a byline, as opposed to only 25% in Latino papers and 10% in the Chinese press.

In terms of story topic, transnational news was concentrated on political issues. In other words, political news tends to flow across borders more so than other types of news stories. For instance, every one in four Korean transnational news stories was about politics. In Chinese newspapers, almost 40% of all transnational news dealt with political issues, compared to 20% of home country news and 15% of domestic U.S. news.

Economic issues were also prominent in transnational news. Twenty-one percent of transnational news was about economics compared to 17 and 14% of home country news and domestic U.S. news, respectively. Asian, and especially Chinese, newspapers tended to put more emphasis on economic issues in their transnational news than did Latino newspapers. Specifically, 35% of Chinese transnational news

Table 3 The Level of Locality of Transnational News in Ethnic Newspapers

	Latino	Korean	Chinese
International level (Including home countries)	34%	39%	56%
National level	27%	31%	31%
State level	6%	2%	1%
Regional level	2%	1%	0%
County level	13%	18%	6%
Neighborhood level	10%	8%	3%
Not location specific	8%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table 4 Profile of Transnational News in Ethnic Newspapers

	Total	Latino	Korean	Chinese
		(% within each ethnic group)		
Byline				
Staff writers	58%	48%	41%	72%
Wire services	11%	15%	1%	12%
Other media	2%	3%	0%	2%
Other sources	6%	9%	6%	3%
Not available	23%	25%	51%	10%
Topic				
Politics	33%	29%	26%	39%
Religion	1%	0.4%	7%	0.4%
Economics	21%	9%	14%	35%
Entertainment	5%	9%	3%	2%
Education	3%	2%	1%	4%
Arts/Culture	9%	16%	1%	5%
Crime	3%	4%	7%	1%
Health	3%	2%	0%	4%
Immigration	10%	14%	16%	3%
Everyday life	5%	4%	15%	2%
Sports	4%	6%	5%	2%
Consumer info	1%	1%	0%	0.4%

and 14% of Korean transnational news dealt with economic issues, while only 9% of Latino transnational stories were economic news. Issues of immigration (10%) and arts/culture (9%) were also reported in transnational news. Notably transnational arts/culture news was much more common in Latino papers (16%) than in Chinese (5%) or Korean (1%) papers.

Discussion

As one of the earliest attempts to quantify immigrants' transnational activities in multiple dimensions, this study demonstrates that these activities go beyond the economic domain to include communicative practices in the everyday lives of immigrants. In line with earlier statistics (ESRC, 2001) and recent surveys (IDB, 2005), we found that the majority of new immigrants in our study samples have ever sent money to people in their home countries. However, engagement in this practice varied by ethnicity. Pico Union residents with Central American origin lead all other groups in sending remittances. In comparison, less than one-third of Chinese immigrants in Greater Monterey Park ever sent money home. Research comparing old and new Chinese migration patterns suggest that recent Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan (approximately 38% of our ethnic Chinese sample) are generally well educated with relatively high levels of income (Chen, 1992; Horton,

Table 5 Profile of Home Country News in Ethnic Newspapers

	Total	Latino	Korean	Chinese
		(% within each ethnic group)		
Byline				
Staff writers	40%	32%	50%	67%
Wire services	15%	30%	1%	11%
Other media	2%	4%	0.2%	2%
Other sources	7%	12%	3%	6%
Not available	36%	23%	46%	14%
Topic				
Politics	19%	24%	15%	20%
Religion	3%	0%	5%	2%
Economics	17%	10%	9%	23%
Entertainment	18%	9%	30%	14%
Education	2%	1%	3%	2%
Arts/Culture	7%	10%	4%	9%
Crime	6%	6%	6%	5%
Health	5%	3%	5%	5%
Immigration	1%	5%	1%	0%
Everyday life	10%	7%	10%	11%
Sports	6%	18%	5%	4%
Consumer info	2%	1%	3%	1%

1995; Lin, 2004; P. Ong & Azores, 1994; Saito, 1992). Unlike most Latinos who come to the United States to gain a better standard of living, these well-to-do Chinese are pushed primarily by political factors (Horton, 1995; Lin, 2004; Saito, 1992). It seems reasonable to assume that the families of Chinese immigrants still living in the home country are less in financial need.

On the contrary, a much higher percentage of Chinese immigrants have work relations with home countries, compared to Korean and Latino immigrants. This may be understood, at least in part, by the typology of diasporas proposed by Cohen (1997).⁸ According to Cohen, merchants who move and settle in one place as well as those who continue to move back and forth between home and host countries have resulted in an interrelated net of commercial communities that form a trade network, or a trade diaspora (Cohen, 1997). Chinese population movements were classified as mainly *trading* based, and as a result showed a greater connection of transnational businesses. This transnational work relationship appears to relate to immigrants' socioeconomic status as well. When comparing relatively affluent with relatively poor Latino immigrants, we found that affluent Latino residents had more work connections with home. These findings support the claim that those who are doing better in the United States are more likely to participate in transnational life (Portes, 1999; Smith, 2001).

Table 6 Profile of the U.S. News in the Ethnic Press in Comparison with Home Country News and U.S. National News

	Total	Latino	Korean	Chinese
		(% within each ethnic group)		
Byline				
Staff writers	44%	39%	29%	59%
Wire services	14%	15%	5%	20%
Other media	1%	3%	1%	1%
Other sources	6%	9%	6%	3%
Not available	36%	34%	59%	16%
Topic				
Politics	5%	26%	5%	15%
Religion	8%	1%	20%	1%
Economics	14%	8%	8%	23%
Entertainment	6%	10%	3%	8%
Education	5%	7%	4%	4%
Arts/Culture	6%	7%	4%	6%
Crime	4%	4%	3%	4%
Health	5%	8%	4%	5%
Immigration	5%	6%	4%	5%
Everyday life	14%	13%	18%	10%
Sports	8%	6%	11%	8%
Consumer info	7%	2%	11%	6%

Our study demonstrated that ethnic group differences exist in the little understood domain of transnational social networks. Although the majority of Latino and Chinese immigrants have most of their friends and family residing in the local area, Korean immigrants have their social networks more spread out over the homeland and the host country. When taking the immigration generation into account, we find that very few of East LA Latinos—less than half of the first-generation (42%) immigrants—have close friends and family in their home countries. However, immigration history alone does not predict those social ties. Although both Chinese and Korean communities are composed of more than 70% first-generation immigrants, only 8% of Chinese immigrants and 20% of Korean residents have their primary social networks in their home countries.

Localizing the global: Communication networks across borders

Our examination of communication networks clearly points to the daily ritual and desire of immigrants to connect to “local” news here and there. Immigrants stayed on top of what is happening in their communities “here” and “there” through heavy reliance on ethnic media, the media that speak their languages. In addition, new immigrants’ ranking of local news and country of origin news importance reflects

their emotional attachment to their original and adopted “homes.” A few of them even ranked homeland news as more important than news in the host country.

Nonetheless, “local” news was not produced and received in a balanced way. As discovered by this study, much of the transnational news we analyzed was addressed at the national (the United States) level and only a small portion of it was reported at the neighborhood and community level. According to the Metamorphosis Project at the University of Southern California, new immigrants in Los Angeles’ multiethnic communities showed different levels of neighborhood belonging. In particular, Asians and Latinos generally had lower levels of belonging than did older, more established immigrants such as Anglos (Ball-Rokeach, Gibbs, et al., 2001). Our finding confirms that the way news is presented has an impact on the audiences and their sense of community and belonging.

Moreover, the small portion of local community news in ethnic newspapers can be largely attributed to the ownership structure and the financial hardship for most of the ethnic media organizations. Larger media that have “bilocal” production and distribution networks report more news that has joined transnational localities. For most of the other smaller ethnic media, however, the lack of staff and economic resources has made local news reporting a luxury (Adams & Baldasty, 2001; Lin & Song, 2006).

New immigrants in Los Angeles: Diversity and divisions

Significant variations were found among different new immigrant groups in their transnational practices. Latinos tend to keep their feet in both home and host countries, financially and politically speaking, more so than do Asians. As discussed earlier, many Latinos move to the United States in hopes to strive for better economic conditions, as opposed to the already well-to-do Asian immigrants. In addition, the public promotion of transnational connections by politicians in a number of Latin American countries contributes to the phenomenon. For example, the three principal political parties in the Dominican Republic changed the way they raised funds, recruited supporters, and their expectations of their members when they realized how much money migrants contributed to their campaigns and how strongly they influenced nonmigrant family members’ political preferences. They implemented strategies in support of a dual agenda, encouraging migrants to integrate politically into the United States and to continue to be active on the island (Levitt, 2001).

On the contrary, quite a number of Chinese and Koreans migrate to the United States and other parts of the world because of political instabilities in their homeland (Lin, 2004), and hence their transnational practices remain mostly on the economic and social levels, such as work connections and networking with their family and friends in home countries. For instance, scholars have pointed to the rather peaceful relations in Greater Monterey Park since the 1970s (Horton, 1995; Saito & Horton, 1994). Political activism through mass media remains anecdotal.

However, although all new immigrants in our study areas depend much more on ethnic media than on mainstream media, Asian immigrants show an even stronger preference for these media than do Latinos. With regard to emotional ties, more Asian immigrants rank home country news the most valued than do Latinos. For news coverage, Chinese and Korean newspapers report a greater number of stories about their home countries than do the Latino papers, whereas Latino papers contain a greater percentage of transnational news than Asian papers. Geographic proximity of the United States and Latin American countries may explain the higher level of transnational news production in Latino newspapers.

Conclusion

Our investigation attests to the prevalence and the diversity of transnational activities among different immigrant groups. This work complements existing research by providing comparative and quantitative evidence to the study of transnational activities. Policy makers in both sending and receiving countries need to understand that these cross-border initiatives, even when enacted occasionally, are of great importance to both sites.

This study has limitations that warrant future research. First, although newspapers are particularly salient in creating an imagined community, electronic media such as television and the Internet are equally, if not more, important channels that provide news flow across borders nowadays. At the time of data collection, however, Internet penetration rates in the immigrant communities under study were still low (Ball-Rokeach, Gibbs, et al., 2001), and few ethnic newspapers had Web presence for us to make insightful comparison between old and newer media in connection with transnational practices. By the mid-2000s, most ethnic newspapers, large or small, had established their online news sites, and the Internet has presumably become a major player today. Recent research has started to look into this area and suggested that new information and communication technologies, particularly the Internet, may offer new immigrants novel ways to negotiate their identity (Kim & Ball-Rokeach, 2009). Future research should thus consider the Internet and other electronic media such as television or satellite broadcasting for a comprehensive reading of transnational communication networks.

Second, given the data used in this work were a small part of a larger study that addresses many different issues, the measures for transnational activities may not be in-depth and sophisticated enough to provide a full picture. For instance, only three items were used to measure immigrants' global remittances. Future studies should apply a scale to better capture the frequency of such an activity. Thirdly, our findings suggest that subsequent generations of immigrants seem to engage in transnational practices less frequently and more selectively in scope; nonetheless, the ways in which children of immigrants engage in transnational activities may be equally interesting and deserve more thorough investigation. Finally, longitudinal data are needed to examine the crucial issue of generational transmissibility.

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Notes

- 1 The history of U.S. immigration is generally divided into three phases: (a) mass European immigration between 1901 and 1930; (b) limited movement between 1931 and 1970; and (c) new immigration wave of large-scale, non-European immigration since 1970 (see Masey, 1995). The shifts largely correspond to major shifts in the U.S. immigration policy. The first wave of immigration ended around 1930 with the National Orientation Act which imposed strict country quotas; and the second wave of immigration started around 1970 with amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act which relaxed those quotas (Jasso & Rosenzweig, 1990; Masey, 1995). New immigrants, in our definition, are those who immigrated after 1970, after the amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act took effect.
- 2 To reach respective target ethnic groups, the research team mapped the 1990 Census ethnic data at census tract levels, using the Geographic Information System (GIS) software, and then selected those census tracts with the highest concentrations of our target populations (Mexican, Central American, Korean, and Chinese immigrants).
- 3 The research team consulted major media directories in each study area. Given that many of these ethnic publications are not listed in official directories (e.g., freebies and tabloids), members of the research team went into each study area to pick up copies of print media targeted to the ethnic group we were studying in the area.
- 4 To identify the best person in the ethnic newspaper for our interview, our English, Spanish, Korean, and Chinese bilingual staff members made phone calls to each ethnic newspaper and introduced the project. Those who were knowledgeable about the operation of the news organization were invited to our interview. Interviewees filled out the questions that were mailed to them earlier and returned the answers by mail. A total of 51 media professionals in our study area completed the interview.
- 5 The data from East LA and Pico Union were combined as the majority of the papers in these areas targets both Latino communities and do not confine their circulation to a single neighborhood.
- 6 Researchers have pointed out that relatively liberal criteria are often used for “conservative indices” such as kappa (e.g., Lombard et al., 2002). According to the SPSS Base 10.0 Application Guide (1999, p. 82), values of kappa greater than .75 indicate *excellent* agreement beyond chance, values between .40 and .75 indicate *fair to good*, and values below .40 indicate *poor* agreement.
- 7 The reason for the lower kappa value in the Latino case may be attributed to the complicated nature of the Latino community. The term “Latino” suggests the aggregation of several distinct national origins of subgroups including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Central Americans, South Americans, and others. Hence, unlike

Chinese or Korean newspapers, the Latino press presents a much more heterogeneous picture of the populations it serves, posing challenges to the coders.

- 8 Cohen constructed five different forms of diasporic communities: Africans and Armenians as *victim*, Indians as *labor*, British as *imperial*, Chinese and Lebanese as *trading*, and Caribbean as *cultural*.

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