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Sewing Women

Immigrants and the New York City Garment Industry

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Doing Ethnic Business

In 1950 New York City was a major center of U.S. manufacturing. Apparel manufacturing was its anchor, accounting for 32.8 percent of manufacturing employment. However, by 1996 apparel had slipped to only 7.9 percent of manufacturing employment, and apparel accounted for only 2.2 percent of employment citywide (Levitan 1998). Even with this drastic decline, women's outerwear production became a larger proportion of all clothing produced. In fact, women's outerwear grew from 46.5 percent of garment industry employment in 1974 to 69.9 percent in 1996 (Levitan 1998). Most of my fieldwork involved workers who make women's apparel.

The ability of the garment industry to hang on by a thread in New York City is part of a much broader phenomenon of global restructuring that is characterized by flexibility. Specialty designers and retailers no longer needed to send their sewing overseas. This is especially true for those who want a small order to test the market or a quick run of a particular piece that is selling far above expectations. Such jobs are not worth the planning that overseas production requires. Moreover, the cost of the small run in New York City is usually not much greater than overseas production would be. New York City-based designers or retailers can send their runner the few blocks to a small Korean-operated shop to request that the work be done. Or they can take their product to a contractor in Chinatown. Whichever contractor in New York City who can produce the items for the least cost will get the production job. The garment industry in New York City is uniquely structured with a clear division of labor. At the top of the business hierarchy are the retailers and designers who sell and design clothing for the public. The next step below are the jobbers, who coordinate the actual production of the garment—including acquir-

ing the materials such as cut cloth, buttons and zippers, thread and tags. And on the bottom are the contractors, who actually produce the garment for the jobbers.¹

This hierarchy is also stratified by profits and racial differences. For each dress that the retailer sells for \$100, \$50 is profit. The other \$50 is split between the jobber and the contractor. Ultimately, on average the jobber will spend 22.5 percent, or \$22.50, on fabric and notions and keep \$12.50 as profit. The remaining 15 percent, or \$15, goes to the contractor to pay for labor and other expenses. In the end the worker who actually sews the dress will probably get only \$6 (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000).

In New York City, Asians and Hispanics share the bottom in the contractor sector, as both workers and employers. They are in the lowest tier and earn the least. Data from a 1998 report on the New York City garment industry show that 83.5 percent of operators, fabricators, and laborers (who make the garments) were of either Hispanic or Asian descent. On the other hand, at the very top, with the best-paying positions are whites, who hold 54 percent of the executive, administrative, and managerial positions, 67.2 percent of the professional specialty jobs, and 68.8 percent of marketing and sales positions (see table 2.1).

In New York City the ethnic division of labor is very specific, although the data in table 2.1 do not capture it. Asians in particular are employers in many contractor shops. Typically, they are educated, English-speaking Koreans and Chinese who hire either Hispanic or Chinese immigrants. Many Koreans, and some Chinese, had professional jobs in their home country but are not able to obtain the same kind of employment in the United States because of their inability to meet licensing requirements and their lack of contacts in the mainstream economy. Korean and Chinese employers receive just a small portion of the profits earned from the sale of garments. Both the Chinese and Korean employers serve as contractors, and their work is full of risk because they have no guarantee of long-term contracts; they hire Chinese and Latino workers who do the lowest-paid work of all.

The modern garment industry is a very different industry from that of the midtwentieth century. No longer is large-scale, overseas mass production appropriate for assembling all garments. The smaller, more flexible local contractor is in high demand. However, if demand falls short for particular garments, the small contractor is also expendable. Asians and Hispanics feel the brunt of the economic fluctuations in the industry. If Chinese and Korean contractors cannot get job orders, they cannot provide work for their Chinese and Hispanic employees.

In 1996 nearly 70 percent of all manufactured clothing in New York City was produced in these Chinese- and Korean-owned garment factories, accord-

TABLE 2.1 *Racial/Ethnic Group Share by Percentage of Occupations in New York City Garment Industry*

<i>Occupation/Group</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>Hispanic</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Percentage of total</i>
<i>Executive, administrative, managerial</i>	54.0	5.5	25.4	15.0	9.1
<i>Professional specialists</i>	67.2	7.9	16.6	8.3	4.3
<i>Technicians</i>	18.8	0.0	51.9	29.3	0.2
<i>Marketing and sales</i>	68.8	10.8	13.4	7.0	5.2
<i>Administrative support, clerical</i>	36.3	20.7	32.3	10.7	9.6
<i>Service</i>	18.1	2.6	66.3	13.0	0.9
<i>Precision production</i>	30.9	15.0	37.9	16.3	10.2
<i>Operators, fabricators, and laborers</i>	12.1	5.4	43.5	40.0	55.1
<i>Race/Ethnic Group Share of Total</i>	25.3	9.3	38.1	26.8	100.0

Source: Mark Levitan, *Opportunity at Work: The New York City Garment Industry* (New York: Community Service Society, 1998), table 4, p. 31.

ing to garment union officials and other people I interviewed. Most residents of New York City did not even realize that Manhattan is home to hundreds of small garment factories. The Chinese garment shops employed twenty thousand workers and the Korean shops, twelve thousand, making this industry one of the largest employers of Asian and Hispanic immigrants (see tables 2.2 and 2.3 for summaries of their similarities and differences).

The Chinese and Korean factories have a very different look and feel about them. The Chinese contractors hire only other Chinese to work in their shops. The Manhattan shops are situated in Chinatown and are a part of the ethnic community and economy.² The Chinese workers and their employers share a native language. In fact, some contractors were former employees. Chinese workers develop relationships with the owner-employers that offer mutual benefits—often their children attend public schools on similar schedules, which means that both employer and employee bring their children to work on weekends and holidays, and class divisions are muted because of their common eth-

TABLE 2.2 *The Chinese- and Korean-owned Shops in the New York Garment Industry: Similarities*

Both

1. produce moderately priced women's clothing
 2. attract producers who want a "made in USA" label
 3. are flexible, able to produce short runs of fashionable items
 4. are competitive
 5. have been in business for less than ten years
-

TABLE 2.3 *The Chinese- and Korean-owned Shops in the New York Garment Industry: Differences*

	<i>Chinese</i>	<i>Korean</i>
Unionized	Yes	No
Coethnic workers/employer	Yes	No
Documented workers	Yes	Few
Training	Yes	No
Work organization/pay	Piecework	Section work at hourly rate
Wages	Lower/changes with work	Higher/hourly wage
Location	Chinatown	Midtown
Gender of workers	95 percent female	65 percent female

nic/racial background. Moreover, Chinese women workers develop close relationships with each other; their shared culture and language attract a steady stream of new Chinese women workers and underpin an informal training system for newcomers.

Shared ethnicity, however, does not eliminate worker grievances. Chinese workers often feel exploited by their Chinese employers because they are paid by piece rates, which often mean wages even lower than those paid to undocumented Hispanics.³ Chinese employees believe that working for white-owned garment shops would be an improvement because they would be paid hourly wages instead of piecework rates.

The Koreans hire mostly undocumented Hispanics who work on small assembly lines. Few Korean coethnics want these jobs; most are interested in going into business for themselves. Korean employers have little trouble communicating in Spanish. While they are not of the same ethnicity, Korean employers and their Hispanic workers have shared similar experiences as recent immigrants. Both Koreans and Hispanics consider themselves hard-working immigrant Americans, whether they have proper documentation or not. The Hispanics feel that Koreans understand their economic situation better than whites would. Koreans, they feel, at least give Hispanics an opportunity to work for minimum wage. The best workers are highly sought after by Korean employers and can shop around for the best pay. The newest immigrants, however, are often taken advantage of and offered rates for their work way below the minimum wage.

The workers are not completely exploited. Some are at the bottom of the pay scale and receive health benefits, whereas others receive a higher wage but no benefits.

CHINESE IN CHINATOWN, HISPANICS AND KOREANS IN MIDTOWN

9 A.M. CANAL STREET #6 AND N SUBWAY STATION

At the subway stop I watch the throng of Chinese women heading for work at the garment shops. They fan out north, south, east, and west toward the garment shops in and around the Chinatown area. Many go to the large shops just north of Chinatown—toward SOHO and little Italy. Others head toward shops on the west side of Broadway off Canal Street, and some even go farther, to the tiny shops in the tenement buildings on East Broadway. On their way they pass the still-closed Chinese gift stores and specialty shops. Some bakeries and grocery stores are open.

Women shop as they go to work—sometimes buying vegetables and fruits and sometimes breakfast or lunch. Street vendors and stores are just preparing the cooked foods and fresh fruits that they will sell during the lunch hour. It looks as though all these women were just shopping and not actually on their way to work. On the street level I see no indications that factories are nearby. However, when I look up through the large windows of the century-old loft buildings, I can see the tubes of fluorescent lights, the steam billowing from windows, and the piles of cloth. Occasionally, I can also see clothing hanging on racks just inside the windows and even garment workers sitting at their machines.

Uptown, about two miles away, a similar scene takes place. But the ethnicity of the workers and the feel of the neighborhood are different.

8 A.M., 42ND STREET AND 8TH AVENUE SUBWAY STATION

Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and Dominicans come pouring out onto the streets to go to work in the shops in the Garment District. They walk south along Eighth Avenue and fan out into the numbered side streets. The majority of these shops are located between 35th and 41st streets between Seventh and Ninth Avenues. This neighborhood has an industrial feel as trucks are double parked to load and unload clothing and other materials. I can tell right away that clothing is being produced in these buildings. Within thirty minutes men are pulling dollies with cloth or racks of just-made clothing. The buildings are large industrial buildings. The stores cater to all the needs of garment manufacturing: sewing machine stores, sewing machine repair shops, button stores, fabric stores, zipper stores, and stores that carry other sewing notions. This is not an ethnic neighborhood. But by 10 A.M. women with little carts that sell hot tamales and other ethnic foods are at their stations. By the end of the day these ethnic food carts have disappeared.

These two examples from my fieldnotes give a sense of how garment workers are differentiated by location and ethnicity. Most Chinese coethnic shops are located in Chinatown—in an area with only about fifty thousand Chinese residents⁴—so the presence of about twenty thousand Chinese garment workers at four hundred garment shops has a huge economic and social impact on the Chinatown community. Garment workers make up nearly a third of the ethnic Chinese consumers who purchase goods in Chinatown. Many services in Chinatown, such as banks, hair salons, and travel agencies, depend on these garment worker-consumers. Many, perhaps most, of the Chinese garment workers do not live in Chinatown—they come to Chinatown from Brooklyn and Queens because the jobs in Manhattan are unionized and provide much-needed health insurance benefits. These are extremely important to Chinese women because their husbands often do not have coverage in the Chinese restaurants where they work. Moreover, factories in Manhattan often pay wages by check. This is especially important for workers who want to establish their yearly income and credit records so that they can buy homes and arrange for relatives to emigrate.

The garment shops are concentrated in an area just north of Canal Street, which is also known as Little Italy. The large buildings in this area have big lofts that suit garment production well. At one time the lofts might have held other

kinds of manufacturing; however, the majority house garment shops now. Most are walk-ups with a freight elevator. On the street level most stores or storefronts are Chinese ethnic stores. Occasionally, one will find an Italian storefront. Trucks of all kinds—food delivery trucks, garment delivery trucks, and pickup trucks—are parked in the narrow streets. Although the area is in Little Italy, its character is distinctly Chinese and houses a “garment production sector” (see figure 2.1).

The twelve thousand Mexicans, Ecuadorians, and Dominicans who work for Koreans do so in about three hundred garment shops in midtown Manhattan in the West 30s—where they are just one part of the large garment district. Just about all the jobs that support garment manufacturing—including designing, pattern making, sample making, pleating, marketing, and sales—can be found in midtown Manhattan. However, the garment industry is just a small part of a midtown area that is bustling with many different kinds of businesses. Many diverse groups hold jobs in this area, and the effect of the Hispanics’ presence in midtown is not as great as that of the Chinese in Chinatown.

THE SITES

CHINATOWN SHOP FLOOR

When I climb up the dark and dusty stairways to the garment shops, I cannot help noticing that these buildings have been around for at least one hundred years. The ornamental molding and the ironwork on the railings are clues to the former grandeur of the building. The windows are huge, allowing for plenty of natural light. On all the landings, doors are thrown open.

When I peek in, I see rows and rows of sewing machines, set three or four feet apart. On one side of the shop by the windows are two pressing machines used for ironing. In another little area is a family altar with offerings. And in yet another area are about a half-dozen large rice cookers, which are steaming rice for lunch. I also spot jugs of boiled water.

Each little area is personalized. Each woman has placed a back cushion on her chair. Each woman has brought snacks, ranging from crackers to candy to dried plums arranged in a tin on her sewing table. They are listening to Hong Kong pop music that the owner has piped through the shop floor. Some women are discussing their children. Some have already started working. Some are getting ready to work—gathering threads and opening up their bundles. The forewoman has already distributed the bundles to each spot. Other women are filling their jars with drinking



FIGURE 2.1 Map by Merih Anil, Center for Urban Research CUNY Graduate Center.

water and settling their lunch by the heater. Some are still coming in, ignoring the punch clock on the wall. No one uses the punch clock. It is 9:15 A.M.

Over by the pressers is a finishing area where the garments are hung, bagged, and tagged. An African American man is collecting garments for pickup.

Bundles of cloth are all over. The space seems tight for forty workers and materials.

The owner's office is close to the entranceway—no one is there yet—but I notice that the office is small and cramped, dominated by a huge calendar that lists orders and due dates. On the office door are Chinese posters depicting “fortunate sayings,” such as “Prosperity.”

KOREAN SHOP FLOOR

Many workers wait to ride up in the freight elevators. Workers seem to get off at almost every floor. As in the buildings downtown, there are large open loft spaces, but these buildings are not as old. The elevators are more modern, and the spaces appear to have been renovated. There are tiles on the floor and on the ceiling.

The workers file in, line up to punch their time clock, and sit down at their machine. Each worker's space is larger than the space given to the Chinese workers but less personalized. The work has already been distributed. A bell rings at 8:30 and all the machines begin. At the sound of the bell all chit-chat suddenly ends, and all one can hear is the loud whir of the machines. Like the Chinese shops, this shop has a finishing area and an area with pressers.

The Korean owner's office is near the entrance. He and his wife are there—walking the floor and monitoring the work. The office is large with a big desk and a rack with samples of the clothes that the factory is producing.

As these two descriptions from my fieldnotes suggest, garment production is very different in the Korean and Chinese sectors. The differences stem not only from the way the garment shops' owners see their work and role but also from the way the garment workers do their work.

The Chinese owners see themselves as a capable group that has good communications with Chinese workers. The workers and owners share many values. Workers can come and go to run errands during their workday so long as they complete the work that is expected of them. Garment production in the

Chinese factories can be quite relaxed and informal. At the extremes, one person might make three bundles of clothing, while another makes only three pieces in the same amount of time. Often one sees a woman informally training another. These women will be paid piecework rates for each whole garment they complete.⁵ Each woman can sew as slowly or as fast as she needs to, giving the workplace a casual atmosphere. Every now and then children of the garment workers or the owner can be found at the shop, usually doing homework in the evenings. If school is closed, they may spend all day in the shop.

The Korean owners, in contrast, see themselves as professional business owners who need to take their work seriously. Thus they have large offices that announce their importance to the designers and the inspectors from the New York State Department of Labor. Rarely are children on the shop floor. Video cameras survey areas of the shop. The owners know Spanish, and those who have lived or worked in Central or South America know it well. Thus they can communicate with the workers on the shop floor. The Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Dominican workers value their boss's ability to communicate with them. At the same time the work is highly regimented. Each group of workers sews a certain number of seams on pieces of cut cloth (a section of the garment), and those partially sewn pieces are passed to another group of sewers to sew another group of seams. Together, after all the seams are sewn, the assembled cloth resembles a garment. Thus in the Korean shops work is passed from person to person. They cannot delay, and workers have to keep up their production, because garment assembly in these factories depends on a closely controlled order for sewing seams and sections of the garment. These workers are paid hourly wages in cash.

The Union

The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), which later became the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), was represented only in the Chinatown garment shops. Put another way, the Chinese workers were the only ones in my study population who were unionized. As I mentioned earlier, Chinese workers were attracted to this industry because it was unionized and offered health insurance (Bao 2001).

The union was trying to address the problem of its lack of representation in other shops around the city; during the periods when I conducted interviews (1994–96 and 1999–2000), the ILGWU had a community-organizing component that brought the union, English classes, and workers' rights education into the workers' communities. In Chinatown, midtown Manhattan, and Sunset Park in Brooklyn, workers' centers welcomed both unionized and

nonunionized workers. More Chinese workers began to avail themselves of the training, citizenship, and English classes that the union offered. The union card, for some, became more than just a health insurance card.

The workers' centers helped build the loyalty of union members by offering them valuable and convenient services near their homes. Furthermore, these centers encouraged the participation of workers who were nonunion members or undocumented. The information provided helped to mitigate the exploitation of workers, which benefits union members because it blunts the power of owners to undercut them. While union officials could only hope that these centers would eventually increase union membership, in the short run they at least educated workers about their rights in the garment shops.⁶

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AND THE LITERATURE

The Chinese coethnic and Korean-Hispanic garment-contracting sectors produce similar items under similar market conditions. But underlying these similarities are a multitude of differences. The two sectors manufacture similar women's outerwear (dresses, blouses, pants, skirts) that sell for similar prices, even though the workers' characteristics, work organization, and pay are different (see tables 2.2 and 2.3).

Of the workers I studied, the Chinese were approximately 95 percent unionized and the Mexican, Ecuadorian, and Dominican workers were not unionized at all. The majority of all Hispanic workers were newcomers who arrived in the United States within the previous five years. Nearly a third (38 percent) of the Chinese had arrived within the previous five years. The Hispanics were mostly undocumented, whereas the Chinese were almost all permanent residents or citizens. The Chinese received lower wages than the Hispanics. However, the two sets of owners were similar in that the majority had opened their shops within the previous ten years, and close to half (43 percent) had some previous experience in the garment industry. Although the Chinese-owned garment shops were supposed to only sew union work, they also competed for work from the nonunion manufacturers that also supplied the Korean-owned shops. Thus the two sectors encountered similar conditions in the economy and had a similar relationship with many manufacturers in the industry. These two sectors competed with each other and existed side by side. How was this possible?

Guided by the larger literature and my own research, I emphasize two sets of relationships in answering these questions: the relationships between immi-

gration, family circumstances, and gender, and the relationships on the job floor between owners and workers, and among the workers themselves.

Immigration and Family Circumstances

This study extends previous work on immigration by emphasizing the importance of such factors as the social organization of emigration, for both documented and undocumented workers, and the family relationships and obligations that immigrants have to others here and in their homeland. By comparing the Korean and Chinese sectors and examining the social relationships among the workers and owners, I can see the influence of gender, immigration status, and family circumstances, and the relationship of these factors to ethnic job-finding networks.

Studies of immigrants have long shown that the emigration process itself organizes networks of individuals entering particular industries (I. Kim 1981; Portes and Bach 1985; Gold 1992; Smith 1994). Many earlier studies have also addressed the power that women gain after they emigrate and find a job (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). What is often missing, however, is attention to changing gender status and roles among both documented and undocumented immigrants as they organize their lives in New York City. Immigrants' lives are arranged according to particular circumstances surrounding their migration status and the extent of family support required or acquired in New York City. In particular, many immigrants have had to make a choice about their children, whether to bring them or to leave them in their home country. These factors affect men and women differently and shape their work lives accordingly. Researchers rarely discuss the balance of work and family among immigrants.

Hispanic women and men in the garment industry often enter the United States without their children. Couples that come together also leave their children in their home country with relatives. Thus they have relatively few family responsibilities in New York City. Both men and women assume the role of breadwinner when they arrive. Circumstances of illegal immigration often complicate the ability to bring children to the United States and thus place Hispanic men and women in roles that are less gendered than in the traditional family.

Simultaneously, the immigration process has made garment industry jobs more gender neutral. Hispanic men from poor farming communities see any job in a "factoria," including work in a garment factory, as a move upward. The Korean-owned sector of the garment industry, which hires Hispanics, reflects these dynamics. In my sample, 35 percent of workers in this sector were male. Both male and female undocumented workers did not have children living

with them in the United States. Some of the women, especially the Dominican women (a minority in this sector), were citizens or permanent residents. For them, the family balancing act was extremely difficult because of the need for child care during work hours and the pull that they felt when their children needed them. Although the sector was gender neutral in hiring, the women who had to care for children had more traditional gender roles.

Immigration plays a different role for the Chinese workers. Most Chinese emigrate legally and bring children and other family members with them to New York City. The ethnic Chinese sector of the Manhattan garment industry changed over time throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as did women workers and their roles in the Chinese community. The garment sector provided an economic and social role for women that allowed Chinese working-class families to survive and even thrive in New York City. The women in the industry have much more independence and influence than any study has recognized so far. The Chinese women have used their ethnic embeddedness in the community to strengthen their ability to perform their work for pay and for their family—in other words, because employers share their workers' ethnicity, workers take advantage of the owners' sympathy and of their proximity to the services available in the ethnic community.

The Chinese sector of the industry has both the formal union benefits that provide health insurance and many informal benefits as well. These informal provisions give women the flexibility that allows them to cope with their long working hours—often from 9:30 A.M. to 7:30 P.M. They often come to work after dropping their children off at school, do their grocery shopping during their lunch hour, frequently take their children and groceries home after school ends, and return to work in the early evening. This flexibility, rarely seen in other manufacturing or professional industries, allows the women to balance their work-family load. While the Chinese women work very long hours for low wages, they are able to take care of their household needs by shopping and shuttling children during their breaks. Although the women are extremely tired and strained, they can maintain their role as the primary caretaker of their children and of the house.

Their husbands, who have little access to jobs with health benefits, also seek jobs that pay good wages—usually in cash. For the most part, men have been able to remain in those industries like food service—which are run informally, without benefits—so long as the men are paid well and in cash. The Chinatown community businesses benefit, but there is a down side for the men. Because women in these families have health insurance, the men have been reluctant to organize for benefits and to demand much more of their employers. At the same time the women feel pressured to stay in their garment jobs longer than

they may wish. However, the work of these women has helped sustain at least one generation, perhaps two generations, of Chinese immigrant families in the United States.

Ethnic Business

Most of the many studies of ethnic businesses (Light 1972; Bonacich and Modell 1980, Portes and Bach 1985; Waldinger 1986; Light and Bonacich 1988; Waldinger et al. 1990) focus on the association between immigrants and business, and business and the ethnic community, and less on the coethnic relationships themselves and how factors such as gender and immigration status might affect these relationships.

Most of the literature has stressed the positive uses of ethnic bonds, that is, the use of networks, and the obligations or responsibility of entrepreneurs to help other coethnics in the community (Portes and Bach 1985; Bailey and Waldinger 1991; Zhou 1992). Waldinger (1986, 1996), for example, emphasizes that ethnic networks are conduits for information, allowing immigrant employers to learn about the salient characteristics of their workers, thereby reducing uncertainty when hiring and training. Ethnic networks also provide a basis for the construction of a set of shared understandings about the obligations and responsibilities that bind employers and workers. These relationships are maintained to advance the goals of the firm.

At the same time a number of authors acknowledge that ethnic bonds can hide exploitation, especially when entrepreneurs capitalize on coethnic relationships (Portes and Bach 1985; Sanders and Nee 1987, 1992; Light Bonacich 1988; Zhou 1992). Exploitation of coethnics generally does occur in immigrant businesses, even in immigrant businesses that are located outside the immigrant enclave (Light and Bonacich 1988; Yoon 1997). The exploitation is most likely to involve cash labor, unlimited work hours, and undocumented status. Kwong (1997) specifically refers to working for coethnics in the enclave as a trap. Once immigrants take such a job, they have little opportunity to move up and out of the enclave.

Entrepreneurship is an option for many Korean immigrants because they have access to a high level of ethnic and economic resources, such as money, education, and connections (Light 1972; Bonacich and Modell 1980). The ethnic business literature also discusses the role of ethnic businesses in the larger society, with much written about Koreans, who tend to open shops in neighborhoods populated by other ethnic groups (Light and Bonacich 1988; Yoon 1997; Min 1996). As such they interact with both their customers and their employees, both of whom often mistakenly identify the entrepreneur as someone who is oppressing them by extracting large profits and wielding power over the em-

ployees and the neighborhood. The customers and employees seldom speak the same language as the entrepreneur (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000). Thus when a crisis occurs, the community blames the entrepreneur. Koreans' solidarity can be galvanized when they are criticized (Min 1996). Other scholars, like Abelman and Lie (1995) and Yoon (1997), emphasize that not all Korean entrepreneurs find themselves in this predicament. In my study Hispanic workers would not consider Korean garment shop owners to be a middleman minority. The relationship between these two groups is based on both class antagonism and the conditions in the New York City garment industry. Hispanics search for Korean employers because they can get jobs with them. Hispanics know that Koreans in New York City pay much better than Koreans in Los Angeles. Hispanics and the Korean shop owners share a common emigration experience and a common language (Spanish). While New York has no shortage of undocumented workers, it does have a shortage of experienced and skilled garment workers. Thus some undocumented workers make more than minimum wage, and on average they make more than the Chinese workers who have documents. By the same token, Koreans have their shop floor under strict control. And Korean owners can prevent workers from helping their friends to get jobs because the Koreans prefer to hire outside the worker networks.

The enclave itself is a concentration of ethnic firms that hire a significant proportion of workers from the same minority group, and the term *enclave* aptly describes Chinatown as a whole (K. Wilson and Portes 1980; Portes and Bach 1985; Zhou 1992). Some researchers have argued that the existence of the enclave allows immigrants to find jobs that pay more than the low-wage they could find outside the enclave. Enclaves act as havens for immigrants, shielding many who do not speak English and lack other skills from dead-end jobs in the wider labor market while channeling them into jobs (both good and not so good) in the enclave. Employment in the enclave, the argument goes, is better than outside the enclave, for both the employers and the workers. Implicit in this argument is that immigrants who stay at jobs within the enclave do better than those who leave it. Proponents of the enclave economy would argue that ethnic solidarity involves reciprocal favors, which explain why enclave workers experience returns from their investment in education and work experience similar to those gained by workers in better, nonenclave jobs. The Chinese garment workers are embedded in their communities and as a whole have benefits that are not included in their wages. They also have more liabilities than the various enclave studies (Zhou 1992) have mentioned. This is especially true in regard to gender and family roles. Women tend to have lower wages than men. The women take on the training of new workers

whom they bring in. In the end, the women become embedded in a web of obligations from which they often cannot disentangle themselves. As workers and women, they become indebted to their male employers, who hire these women's relatives, although the senior women benefit by getting easier work from their employer.