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**Authors**

Chu, Clara M.

Honma, Todd

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Research Article

# Libraries as Contested Community and Cultural Space: The Bruggemeyer Memorial Library of Monterey Park, California

Clara M. Chu and Todd Honma

## Abstract

In the City of Monterey Park, a sleepy city east of downtown Los Angeles, the late 1970s and the 1980s marked a dramatic demographic shift from predominantly White to Asian American. Who had economic and political power was publicly played out through struggles between the City Council and the business sectors. An unlikely locus for political struggle was the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library. In the late 1980s, what many might consider to be a neutral agency that collects, organizes, and disseminates information, the public library became the battleground to (re)claim community, access, and representation of Asian Americans in Monterey Park. By contextualizing the library as civic space, this paper explores dominant U.S. hegemonic ideologies and political agendas reproduced in cultural institutions, such as libraries.

## Introduction

Monterey Park, a city situated about seven miles from downtown Los Angeles, has been referred to as “Little Taipei,” “Chinese Beverly Hills,” or contemptuously, as “Mandarin Park” as a result of the sudden demographic shift in the late 1970s that created a city with a sizable Chinese American population. As longtime citizens coped and responded to this shift, the change that took place was not limited to a visible difference in the racial make-up of its new residents. Other transformations were observed, including the physical landscape of its business sector, the sharp rise of the cost of housing and commercial space, and the political machinations to contain these changes. The extreme political measures taken by local nativist leaders to stop the social and economic transforma-

tion catapulted Monterey Park into the national spotlight, making it the focus of research by political and social scientists interested in studying rapid social and political changes. The social, economic, and political forces experienced during the 1980s are described in three books and one dissertation, which provide compelling accounts of the dynamics faced by the residents of Monterey Park: *The First Suburban Chinatown: The Remaking of Monterey Park, California* (Fong, 1995); *The Politics of Diversity: Immigration, Resistance, and Change in Monterey Park, California* (Horton, 1995); *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Saito, 1998); and *Politics in a New Demographic Era: Asian Americans in Monterey Park, California* (Saito, 1992). Yet in examining the development of the “Chinese ethnoburb” (Li, 1999), previous scholarship on Monterey Park has focused predominantly on spaces such as residential districts and the business sector instead of investigating the role that cultural institutions such as libraries play in the (re)development of the community. In an unlikely contest for power, the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library became embroiled in the fight to retain a predominantly English language institution that reflected the culture of the longtime White residents. This article examines how the public library, what many consider to be a neutral civic institution that collects, organizes, and disseminates information, became the battleground to (re)claim community and a pivotal source of information access and representation for Asian Americans in Monterey Park. By contextualizing the library as civic space, this paper explores dominant U.S. hegemonic ideologies and political agendas reproduced in cultural institutions, such as libraries.

### City in Transition—From Bedroom Community to Prosperous and Chaotic Municipality

Monterey Park, a city of approximately seven square miles, is bordered by Los Angeles to the west, Alhambra to the north, Rosemead to the northeast, Montebello and unincorporated East Los Angeles to the south, and unincorporated South San Gabriel to the southeast. The land on which Monterey Park sits was once inhabited by Shoshone Indians, who were later renamed Gabrielino Indians by Spanish missionaries. This area was gradually populated by Whites until the late 1970s, which then saw a rapid influx of Taiwanese immigrants and conversely, the swift flight of

Whites in the 1980s (see Table 1). In 1960, this city, located in the hills of the San Gabriel Valley, was a bedroom community with a predominantly White population (85 percent) and a small Asian American community (2.9 percent), consisting mostly of Japanese Americans. The sharp decline of Whites was observed starting in 1970 when the White community dropped to 50.5 percent and in 1980, only constituted 25 percent of the total community. Meanwhile, the Asian American community grew about fifteen times in number during the 1970s and 1980s. Japanese Americans (56.9 percent) were the largest Asian American ethnic group in 1970 (see Table 2) while the Chinese made up 27.1 percent of the Asian American population. However, this was no longer the case in 1980 when Japanese Americans only made up 39.6 percent (Chinese made up 42.4 percent) of the Asian American population, and in 1990 dropped to 17.4 percent (Chinese made up 63 percent). The first wave of Chinese immigrants in the 1970s originated from Taiwan and Hong Kong while the wave in the 1980s was marked by immigration from Mainland China and Vietnam. The established, wealthy Taiwanese immigrants have since relocated out of Monterey Park and northward to the wealthier suburbs of San Marino, Arcadia, Temple City, South Pasadena and eastward to Rowland Heights (dubbed the “new Little Taipei” by the local edition of the Chinese language paper *World Journal* [Li, 1999]), Diamond Bar, Hacienda Heights, and Walnut. The 1990 demographic data affirmed Monterey Park as the first U.S. city with a predominant Asian descent population (see Table 1). The Hispanic population jumped from 11.6 percent in 1960 to 34 percent in 1970 and has remained at approximately one-third of the Monterey Park population during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1</sup>

Local realtor Frederick Hsieh is credited as the “engineer” of the sociodemographic and economic transformation of Monterey Park. An immigrant born in China, Hsieh grew up in Hong Kong and came to the United States after high school to obtain a university education. After graduating from Oregon University with bachelor’s and master’s degrees, he pursued his calling as an engineer in Los Angeles, but by the early 1970s he had obtained his real estate license and moved to Monterey Park, where he began buying properties around the thoroughfares of Atlantic Boulevard and Garvey Avenue. In 1977, he declared at a Chamber of Commerce meeting that Monterey Park would become the “mecca” (or

desired migration destination) for Chinese immigrants. No one could have anticipated Hsieh would aggressively promote Monterey Park as the “Chinese Beverly Hills” in the Taiwanese and Hong Kong media, converting a bedroom community southeast of downtown Los Angeles into a magnet of Chinese prosperity and a favored migratory point (Eljera, 1996). Hsieh attracted investors and real estate developers, which resulted in increased property values. Housing prices increased three- to four-fold, and the value of commercial space increased fifteen-fold, making Monterey Park commercially competitive with downtown Los Angeles. At this rate, locals could not afford to engage in business ventures. The distinct feature of these Chinese immigrants was that they were well-off—they had a mean income of \$30,119 while Whites had an average income of \$24,765, and many were well-educated—22 percent had a college degree (Nosset, 1991). Many Chinese investors started businesses aimed at the growing local Chinese community, and used Chinese language signs to attract this target market. The sight of non-English language characters alienated the non-Chinese-speaking community.

Monterey Park was a city liberal in its outlook with a tolerant community in the 1960s and early 1970s, but the sudden arrival of Chinese immigrants created a backlash. The following decade was thus riddled with racial tension and political turmoil propagated, in part, by the efforts of local leaders with nativist leanings to declare English as the official language and require English-only business signs.<sup>2</sup> While the landscape became dotted with Asian language business signs reflecting the economic prominence of the new immigrants, the state was amid a slow growth and anti-tax movement. Monterey Park became caught in a political whirlwind, as longtime residents fought what they perceived as a growing threat to their purchasing power and the alteration of familiar surroundings. Paradoxically around this time, in 1985, Monterey Park was hailed nationally as a model of racial harmony and named an “All-American City” by the National Municipal League and the newspaper *USA Today*.

One way to “take back” their city was for residents to become politically active. In 1985 two such individuals, Barry L. Hatch and Frank J. Arcuri, joined forces to promote a ballot measure making English the official language of Monterey Park, a move in response to the prominence of Chinese business signs (unreadable by long-

time residents), traffic congestion, and excessive building. Hatch, a junior high school social studies teacher and former California Patrol Officer, was not new to Chinese culture as he had done his compulsory Mormon missionary service in Hong Kong (Hudson, 1988b). Arcuri, the author of the measure, originated from New York and was a self-employed photographer. He claimed that the measure was symbolic and would not require residents to speak English. Some perceived the move as an attempt to garner votes in the forthcoming City Council election, which saw Hatch elected. The City Attorney Richard Morillo argued the validity of the measure as a safety issue, where businesses in an emergency situation would need to be quickly identified by police and fire personnel. After much debate, the petition, which carried 3,452 signatures (only 2,000 or 10 percent of the city's registered voters were needed), was not placed on the ballot, as the proposal provided rationale but lacked the proper wording for an ordinance. It read:

English is the official language that we use in Monterey Park when we want everyone to understand our ideas. This is what unites us as Americans, even though some of our citizens speak other languages. Let us make English our official language as a symbol of this unity (Nossett, 1991, 5).

Following the City Attorney's decision, Arcuri sued in Superior Court and in late December 1985, Judge Jack T. Ryburn ruled against him. Although the judge gave him until January 10, 1986 to place another initiative on the ballot, Arcuri decided not to pursue it. Nevertheless, in February 1986, City Council passed by a 4–1 vote a measure requiring businesses to have one sign in English stating the nature of the business readable from 100 feet. Evidence exposing the alarmist character of this move was substantiated in a survey by a local Chinese language newspaper which found that only thirteen businesses at the time had no English identification on their signs (Nossett, 1991). The interests of longtime residents did not only rest on the shoulders of flagbearer Hatch, but they were also taken up by RAMP, the Residents' Association of Monterey Park. RAMP not only supported Hatch, who was elected to City Council in April 1986, but also had its own members, Christopher Houseman and Patricia Reichenberger, elected onto the City Council.

## The Bruggemeyer Memorial Library Case— Caught in Political Crosshairs

In 1915, the County of Los Angeles established a branch library in Monterey Park, named the Monterey Park Library. On February 21, 1929, the City of Monterey Park established its own public library, which was enacted by ordinance under the provisions of the 1901 Municipal Libraries Act (Education Code §18900 et seq.), with a board of trustees with decision-making powers. Approximately sixty years later, on October 12, 1987, by Ordinance 1726, passed by a 3–2 vote, the Monterey Park City Council disbanded the incumbent board of library trustees and transferred control of the library to the City Council as the City of Monterey Park held that the library was operated according to Government Code §34102 (see Appendix for a timeline of related events). A public hearing held during the City Council meeting was part of the deliberations. Three proponents of the ordinance espoused that elected officials could serve residents better and should have control of the library budget rather than an appointed administrative board, while four opponents affirmed that the board assisted the library to run economically and effectively and that the Council already had control of the budget with a line item veto and the approval of board members (Monterey Park City Council, 1987). Hatch introduced this ordinance to allow the City Council to gain control over the million-dollar library budget (Ward, 1988). Although most saw this action headed by Hatch to be part of his English-only fight, he stated that he was not interested in changing library policies on the provision of foreign language<sup>3</sup> books (Ward, 1988). However, in summer of 1988, approximately six months later, he had urged the city librarian not to “cater too much to foreign languages” (Hudson, 1988d). Not surprisingly, after his election, Hatch forced through the Council a measure making English the official language of Monterey Park. However, the measure was eliminated as a result of community protest and a petition with 4,000 signatures to rescind the ordinance.

Other matters exacerbating Hatch’s and the City Council’s antagonistic posture toward the library included Hatch’s hostility toward ousted library board member Mike Eng and a donation of 10,000 Chinese books by the Little Taipei Lions Club made in August 1988 and due to arrive in December (Bruggemeyer Memorial Library of Monterey Park, 1988 and Siao, 1989). Actions taken

by the City Council did little to ameliorate matters with the old Library Board and showed disregard for the library needs for heritage language materials by the Asian American community (Stockton, 2001). These actions included the hiring of Elizabeth Minter as the new City Librarian in January 1988, who answered to the City Council, and the slashing of the library budget in July 1988 by \$150,000, which reduced the foreign language book budget by 50 percent, to about \$6,000. Hatch, a vocal proponent of halting U.S. immigration, was obsessed with the encroachment of Asians in all areas of the city, including the library. Despite his concern that the library may be “catering too much to foreign languages” (Hudson, 1988a), in reality, only 4 percent of the library holdings (6,000 of the 145,000 books) were in non-English languages, and in essence, the library had a collection that was not meeting the needs of a literate and growing Chinese community (Nossett, 1991). Although at the time the Chinese book donation along with the Chinese language business signs were unsolicited and unwelcome, the books were eventually incorporated into the library’s collection with funding from a federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant to catalog them and make them accessible online.

The disbanding of the Library Board of Trustees, making it an advisory commission and transferring power to City Council were no small matters as boards are decision-making bodies (e.g., budget, hiring) and have a fiduciary relationship with their libraries. Thus, the 1901 Municipal Libraries Act (Education Code §18900 et seq.), which had authorized the Library to run for close to sixty years, also empowered its board of trustees to be an independent, autonomous entity. The five trustees serve staggered three-year terms. This practice reduces the possibility of any particular City Council from radically altering the board’s make-up (Hudson, 1988a).

The difference between the two library governing bodies was the amount of power the council granted them. The advisory commission could only make recommendations to the council, while the previous board had the authority to hire the librarian and oversee management of the library. In both cases, the council controlled the overall amount of city funds allocated to the library (Hudson, 1988a).

The Friends of the Library of Monterey Park and three of the ousted board members (with the exception of ousted Board President Mike Eng) filed a lawsuit to reinstate the Board of Trustees



because the change made the library susceptible to political interference, threatened its administration and manipulated library policies, unduly controlling materials selection, programming, and other services (Hudson, 1988a).

At the trial (No. B034948. *Friends of the Library Of Monterey Park et al., Plaintiffs and Respondents v. City of Monterey Park et al., Defendants and Appellants*), held on May 2, 1988, the legality of the City's action was challenged. The superior court "granted the petition and ordered the City of Monterey Park to rescind the challenged ordinance and resume operation of the library in compliance with the Municipal Libraries Act. The superior court further ordered reinstatement of the incumbent members of the board of library trustees" (*California Reporter*, 1989, 362). The basic argument made by the legal team representing the Friends of the Library of Monterey Park was that the Library had been established by the provisions of the 1901 Municipal Libraries Act (Education Code §18900 et seq.), which governs the establishment and management of public libraries in California general law cities. Thus, the city's ordinance abolishing the board of trustees did not comply with the library disestablishment process stipulated under the Act. The City of Monterey Park argued that Monterey Park was a municipal corporation (i.e., not a California general law city), organized under the laws of Government Code §34102, giving it authority to establish and manage the public library. Presided by Judge Ricardo A. Torres, the Superior Court findings, which in large part agreed with the Friends of the Monterey Park, included:

(1) that the Municipal Libraries Act (Ed. Code §18900 et seq.) governs the establishment and management of public libraries in California general law cities; (2) that Education Code section 18910 requires that the Bruggemeyer Library be managed by a board of library trustees; (3) that Monterey Park Ordinance No. 1726 is in conflict with the Municipal Libraries Act; and (4) that Government Code section 39732 does not provide general law cities with separate, independent authority to establish and manage public libraries outside the rubric of the Municipal Libraries Act (*California Reporter*, 1989, 363).

The City decided to appeal the ruling and Hatch, who was taking his turn serving as Mayor, decided to hold a press conference where he revealed his fears by red-baiting: "When communists want to take over then they take over the library" (Fong, 2002). To

an extent, Hatch was correct by alluding that what goes in the library dictates who will be served, but in this case, the public was being short-changed. In November 1988, the People for the American Way, a constitutional rights organization that viewed the conflict as a “test case for racial intolerance,” joined the legal battle over control of the library (Hudson, 1988c). Mary D. Nichols, Executive Director of its Los Angeles office, regarded the case as representing “a rising trend of intolerance and racism involving citizens and immigrants to our country who do not speak English” (Hudson, 1988c).

The city in fact had no case and on June 7, 1989 the Court of Appeal also “held that the trial court’s order reinstating the incumbent trustees and extending their terms was a reasonable remedial measure, and that the incumbent trustees were entitled to further extensions of their terms for the time they were deprived of office during the pendency of appeal” (*California Reporter*, 1989, 358). A consequence of this decision was the firing of City Librarian Elizabeth Minter as she had been hired by the City Council, at the time when it had taken over the role of the Board of Trustees.

Now, more than fifteen years later, the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library is thriving and few recall the Monterey Park library incident. The energies of the library staff are channeled towards the running of:

a full service, public library providing thousands of books, newspapers, magazines, documents, CDs, videos, DVDs, and other materials to meet the cultural, educational and information needs of the residents of Monterey Park. In addition, the library provides storytimes, craft programs, family programs, one-on-one English language tutoring, literacy classes, citizenship classes and tutoring, Internet access, homework assistance, summer and fall reading programs for children, a teen summer reading program, and other services. Besides English, staff members also speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, and Vietnamese (*The Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library Website*).

The library is receiving heavy use and has become a community space.

Compared to 1995, attendance is up 47 percent, children’s circulation is up over 50 percent and in-library material use is 108 percent over the national average. There are some 50,000 library card holders and 1,000 people who attend the library regularly. Library board of trustees member Michael Eng

adds: "The library is really an extension of the family and cannot be replaced. Our library is very safe. It's across the street from the police department, next to a church, adjacent to a senior citizen housing project. The bookstores are artificial environments. Ours is a natural family environment."

With its significant Asian collection, the library has been a draw for many APA (Asian Pacific American) library users who frequent the establishment. In fact, the collection is systematized by a computerized card catalog system in Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and English characters that accommodates the 62 percent APA population in San Gabriel Valley (Lim, 2002).

As the community's information and cultural needs have continued to grow, the library no longer had the physical capacity to address their needs. As a response, the library mobilized the community and obtained multi-source funding to expand its facilities. The \$18.1 million project to construct and remodel the library to double the existing 26,500 square foot property to 52,000 square feet was completed in Fall 2006. To mark the transformation of the library, in 2005 the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library was renamed the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library, and it reopened on September 9, 2006.

### Locating the Library in the Social Imagination

Why was the library a site of a political tug-of-war in Monterey Park? What was it about the library that occupied the imagination of both the older White residents and the newer Chinese immigrants alike? Libraries are often conceptualized as idealized non-partisan civic institutions, all-welcoming third spaces of public contact and comfortability, or race-neutral counterspaces for the benefit of all people regardless of color (Whitmire, 2004, 12-14). Yet, as critical library scholars have begun to illustrate, libraries are seldom, if ever, free of the sociopolitical ideologies within which they function. Rather, as Molz and Dain (1999) point out:

public libraries have always mirrored trends in society at large. They can be viewed as microcosms of the macrocosm of American civilization, its social and governmental structures, economic conditions, political currents, and intellectual and cultural life. Not only are libraries best understood in relation to the larger society, but they can serve as lenses through which to see the effects of societal trends on community services, both historically and contemporaneously (3).

In the case of Monterey Park, the library became an unexpected site of contestation, where issues surrounding race, class, transnationalism, and global capital converged and conflicted within a highly charged atmosphere of social and political debate. By probing deeper into the sociocultural meanings of the library as a cultural institution, our critique challenges dominant (mis)conceptions regarding the presumed neutrality of the public library, and instead reconstitutes the library within more complex understandings of its role in historical legacies of racial exclusion and the reproduction of dominant Euro-American social and cultural normativities.

The battle over the library can be interpreted as a battle of cultural dominance. As the previous section of this paper elucidated, the influx of new Asian immigrants triggered an aggressive nativist response from the White population, not simply because of the large numbers of distinct ethnoracial populations moving into the city. Rather, the conflict took shape around the differences in language and the encroaching financial and political power of the immigrant population, a challenge to the prevailing ethnoracial hierarchies of the city and a threat to the predominantly White demographics that had hitherto securely populated the region. Indeed, the liberal inclusiveness of the so-called "All-American City" had reached its limits, as attempts to enact anti-Chinese English-only legislation divided the city while the Monterey Park City Council alarmingly proclaimed that the library (like the city itself) was becoming "too Asian." The library, then, transformed from a "neutral" third party to a highly-coveted representation of community power, "an embattled epistemological terrain on which different social groups struggle over how reality is to be signified, reproduced, and resisted" (Giroux, 2003, 207).

Thomas Augst (2001), who argues for a critical investigation of libraries as agencies of culture, writes:

the Western ideal of the library has represented not merely a collection of books gathered for some purpose but also arguments about the location, form, and power of knowledge in particular social and historical contexts. As a symbolic space, a type of collection, a kind of building, the library gives institutional form to our collective memory" (16).

This quote touches upon many of the aspects of the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library case, particularly on how the politicians

and the community came to view both the material and symbolic representations of the library and its location within the sociocultural imagination. For example, Hatch's designation of the library as "too Asian" implies that the normative value of the library lies in its predominance in Anglo-American whiteness. The threatening increase of the library's non-English language collection and public services to its non-White constituents disrupted the unacknowledged racial normativity of the library, one that naturalized whiteness as the *de rigueur* category of "neutrality." While the library had successfully implemented literacy and citizenship programs targeted to the growing Chinese community—user-driven services, which are at the core of the U.S. public library system since its inception in the late nineteenth century—the outrage that these programs elicited from certain influential and vociferous politicians and reactionary community groups in Monterey Park, indicated the xenophobic attitudes of the Whites in the community and their depictions of Asians as the perpetually foreign "Other," unable and unworthy to partake in such a homegrown institution as the U.S. public library.<sup>4</sup>

As with any cultural institution, the type of collection that is (re)presented to the public is inherently linked to particular political and ideological locations. In the case of the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library, controversies surrounding these representational politics arose when the proposed donation of 10,000 Chinese language materials from the Little Taipei Lions Club threatened to drastically alter the collection from dominant English language to one of multilingual resources, particularly toward the needs of the increasing Chinese community. In fact, this donation would almost double the 6,000-item foreign language collection that consisted of both European and Asian language materials. At the time, the library had difficulty finding adequate storage to house the Chinese language items, indicating the material limitations of the physical space. Under such circumstances, collection development policies that determine what is kept and what is discarded play an important role in what types of information and knowledge are circulated and preserved as part of the community's collective memory. Through such selection policies, libraries, as gatekeepers to a community's history and knowledge about itself, hold the power to enact their own brand of social formation, not just responding to a particular user community's perceived informational needs,

but constructing a collection that in practice reflects the entrenched ideologies regarding the “proper” uses of the library system. Additionally, there already existed a backlog in the cataloging of several hundred Asian (mainly Chinese) language books. The lack of priority given to the processing of Asian language materials not only blocked public access to these items but is also indicative of who the library considered to be its primary clientele. The subordinate status of the Asian user community was further evidenced in the 50 percent cut to the foreign book budget. Thus, while the aforementioned literacy and citizenship programs offered by the library fall conveniently in line with liberal orthodox formulations regarding “citizenship” and “assimilation,” the acceptance of the Chinese language book donation points to the recognition that the retention of cultural and linguistic diversity can and does exist simultaneously with incorporation into the larger U.S. civil society. However, the public’s (in)ability to access certain types of materials (such as the Chinese language collection), whether intentional or not, illustrates the limits of freedom of thought and information found in such government-sanctioned institutions operating under the restrictive normativities of whiteness. As Donald Davis (1998) has pointed out, collection development policies and the selection of library materials are often engaged in ideological battles forged around a library’s sociopolitical context.

Not just the library services, but the building itself became a site of struggle in this case. The library building was a gift from Judge Mancha Bruggemeyer in memory of his first wife Roberta Pauline Bruggemeyer. The name is also associated with the first City Librarian Helen (Nell) Thomas, who became the second Mrs. Bruggemeyer. Nell Bruggemeyer was a widely read columnist for the *Monterey Park Progress* for over thirty years, whose writings promulgated small town idealisms and local community formations characteristic of Monterey Park prior to the demographic shifts of the 1970s (Stockton, 2001). As Chinese financial capital continued to flow into the Monterey Park community, a donation of \$100,000 was proposed to build a second floor above the atrium of the library as well as to rename the library to the Molly Tang Library after the donor’s wife (Eng, 2005). In considering this donation after the struggles of the 1980s, the proposed renaming had the potential to continue to fuel the community’s hostility toward the new immigrants, for not only disrupting the “small town”

feel experienced by the White residents of the city, but creating a historical discontinuity in their attempt to buy sociocultural influence or cover over the name of one of the more popular figures in their local history. While the monetary gift was declined and hence the renaming of the library never materialized, the “threat” of such an action illustrates the significance of the building itself as an historical marker of a particular ethnoracial community. Contextualized within the shifting socioeconomic dominance of various populations in the city, it raises the question of whether demographic realignments and the increasing financial capital of the newly emergent ethnic majority should be enough to warrant the erasure of a name of historical importance to some of the members of the community. As Leland Saito (1998) writes, for both the Whites and Asians in Monterey Park, “[r]acial and ethnic identities can flow from an attachment to a geographic place, and cultural elements such as history and memories create a sense of rootedness as expressed by those who wanted a place where ‘they could feel at home’ once again” (50). Hence, the “institutional form of our collective memory” (Augst, 2001) can be found in the politics of representation and the resistance to a history of forgetting that continues to shape the urban landscape.

More recently, the debate over naming resurfaced again in 2005. The expansion project over the latest incarnation of the library brought about a new proposal to restore the library’s title by dropping “Bruggemeyer Memorial” to become the Monterey Park Library, its former name for forty-six years from the time the city had a library to 1961 (Bruggemeyer Memorial Library of Monterey Park, 2005 and Shu, 2005). The Bruggemeyer family, for whom the library was named for the last forty-four years, would still be honored through the naming of an entire wing of the library and memorialized through the prominent display of a portrait of Mrs. Pauline Bruggemeyer and a commemorative plaque. This proposal was seen fit for a number of reasons: the funds to expand and renovate the library came from a citywide effort, it responded to the needs of the current user community, some of whom had difficulties spelling and pronouncing the Bruggemeyer name, and it would help unify a diverse community (Bruggemeyer Memorial Library of Monterey Park, 2005). Opposition within the community stifled such efforts, and a compromise was made to name it the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library.



Much like other institutions of art and culture, the library occupies an important location in the U.S. imaginary; as spaces of democracy and knowledge as well as sites that promote local, regional, and national values of U.S. society. As Augst (2001) insightfully points out, “such institutions intervene in our collective memory less through the functional preservation of documents and archival material, than through the production of national history as a locus of symbolic imagination” (10).

### Conclusion—Lessons in Community Building and Research Implications

The Bruggemeyer Memorial Library case illustrates the difficulties in negotiating changing community demographics and the tensions that arise when competing interests struggle over the redistribution of limited community resources and community identity. By contextualizing the struggle of one particular cultural institution within its sociopolitical milieu, we have attempted to analyze how ethnic communities effectively wield political power to claim a rightful civic space. Navigating the complex webs of competing political and ideological interests is certainly one of the tantamount difficulties in any process of collaboration. These are the disabling and enabling characteristics of what Anna Tsing (2005) terms *friction*, “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (4). She states that “friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (5). Indeed, the friction involved in the MPL case has resulted in the reconfiguration of not just the library but the community itself, a sign of the importance affixed to cultural institutions operating in the public sphere.

The examination of this library case provides us lessons in what to do and what not to do during a time of fast-paced community change. J. Craig Fong (2002), one of the lawyers representing the Friends of the Library, points out that both sides contributed to the problem. Whereas the old residents remained hostile to change instead of making an effort to welcome the new immigrants, the new Chinese immigrants did not try to understand the history and culture associated with their new home community. According to Fong, both sides were shortsighted and better mediation between the two groups could have prevented the situation from escalating to such a dramatic degree.



The intervention of lawyers and politicians, representing clients and community, respectively, further polarized the community. Their objective to achieve a win did not take into account how their actions would impact the community which they were trying to protect and support. Instead, the intervention of these key groups shut down negotiations between the two sides.

Although the public library as a public institution fell prey to the xenophobic attitudes of Monterey Park's longtime residents, it escaped the attention of political and social scientists who have researched and published the major accounts on the social, economic and political upheaval experienced during the late 1970s and the 1980s in Monterey Park. This oversight is significant as community struggles do not stop at any door, and institutions, such as libraries, should be held accountable in fulfilling its role as information providers, community centers, cultural agencies, and keepers of collective memory, including ethnic history.

Curiously absent from the public discourse has been the positioning of the librarians themselves and what role they should play in helping to mediate the conflict. Part of their noteworthy absence lies in the philosophical tradition of library service that takes an active stance on maintaining the "neutrality" of the profession. As Trosow (2001) has indicated in his critique of disciplinary formulations and regulations within the field of Library and Information Studies, the discourse of neutrality must be dismantled and replaced with new theoretical models, such as standpoint epistemology, that are attuned to the multiple positionalities and distinct power relations between and among library professionals and their patrons. Indeed, this is very much a political project, one which should foster increasing dialogue among the library, the academy, and the community.

While the case can be interpreted as a substantial victory for ethnic community-based organizing, pro-bono legal work, the library and the city, in general, the victory of the Asian American community also highlights the importance of collaboration and change working across different sectors of society—the cultural, political, institutional, and legal—that allowed the negotiations to take place. Asian Americans occupied positions of power, allowing them to vocalize their protests against the discriminatory changes in the local legislation. Unlike other immigrant groups, the Asian Americans in Monterey Park had both economic capital

and sociopolitical resources, the former posing a threat and the latter abating a threat. In the various attempts to maintain the spread of their influence and limit the perceived encroachment into the cultural/community space of the library institution, Asian American residents came forward to stand up for immigrants' rights. Eng and others involved with the library case had experience with community organizing and building as community activists and/or with UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, enabling them to speak up and tap legal resources to protect the interests of the new immigrants. Such networks and resources not only stopped the nativist attacks, but enabled second generation Asian Americans to speak up for the interests of new immigrants.

In 2005, Mike Eng, then Mayor of Monterey Park and repeat library board member, recalls the differences between then-and-now, the progression of Monterey Park as it moves from ethnic antagonism to acceptance and cooperation:

When I moved to Monterey Park, 1 of every 10 phone calls someone complained about race relations, now six months will pass before one might get a call of racial reference. Programs are working and we are learning from the past. I put in place first language access<sup>5</sup> to the city. Previously, English was the only language on the website, telephone and newspaper. Extra money (\$100/month) is provided to bilingual personnel who use their language skills, and there has been no backlash (Eng, 2005).

Eng can now assert better racial relations but they came about from interventions by the City Council, such as Harmony Week, first celebrated on October 20 to 28, 1990, which subsequently has become Harmony Month and is celebrated annually in October. Harmony Week/Month celebrates the city's cultural diversity, provides opportunities for residents to become better acquainted and celebrate each other's culture through activities offered in diverse public locations, and includes an essay-writing contest exploring the benefits of living in a multicultural community. Although the community has moved on and is thriving, the recent library renaming debate reveals unresolved issues regarding community identity. The struggle over the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library serves as a reminder of the constant process of collaboration and (re)negotiation required to create harmony and build community among and between diverse groups and group interests.

We have seen how dominant racial/cultural thinking had been “signified, reproduced, and resisted” within the contested community space of the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library. But what is also important to address here is a critical intervention of another sort, that is, an opening up of a different space, a space of scholarly inquiry that has very seldomly been investigated—namely the intersections between Library and Information Studies (LIS) and Asian American Studies (AAS). Within the LIS field, there are not enough critical writings addressing race, and more specifically, Asian Americanist critiques of libraries and other information institutions and practices. On the other hand, in AAS, the library is one cultural agency that has not been thoroughly investigated, particularly given its historic mission in “educating and assimilating” immigrants into the rubric of U.S. society. Indeed, as Wayne Wiegand (1999) has pointed out, the library remains one of the most underresearched and undertheorized institutions in the United States. Some topics that could be explored at the intersection of libraries, information technologies, and Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities are: memory keeping in API communities, information seeking practices of API communities, information needs of API communities, information and the Internet in API community building, social networking in API communities, API identity and representation in publications and the media, information gatekeepers in API communities, racism in library practices, reading and literacy in API communities, and library and media use in API communities, to name a few. Sub-API communities can be studied to determine if there are any differences amongst API group, comparative ethnic and transnational studies can be conducted, and critical theory applied. The multidisciplinary terrain upon which LIS/AAS research is situated presents exciting analytical and epistemological trajectories that will undoubtedly increase our level of understanding regarding culture, information, community, and sociopolitical involvement and exchange.

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Tables

Table I. Population by Race/Ethnicity in Monterey Park: 1960–2000

Ethnicity	1960		1970		1980		1990		2000 <sup>d</sup>	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Anglo	32,306	85.4	24,476	50.5	13,552	25.0	7,129	11.7	4,362	7.3
Hispanic	4,391	11.6	16,477	34.0	21,079	38.8	19,031	31.4	17,359	28.9
Asian <sup>a</sup>	1,113	2.9	7,441	15.3	19,046	35.0	34,022	56.0	37,125	61.8
Black	11	<0.1	111	0.2	661	1.2	330	0.5	226	0.4
NHPI <sup>b</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	37	<.01
Other <sup>c</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	-	226	0.4	1,053	1.8
Total	37,821	100.0	48,505	100.0	54,338	100.0	60,738	100.0	60,051	100.2

Source: Monterey Park Community Development Department (as cited in Fong, 1995, p. 22); 2000 U.S. Census

Note: Percentages are rounded.

<sup>a</sup>Includes "Other" in 1960, 1970, and 1980.

<sup>b</sup>Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations included in "Other" from 1960-1990

<sup>c</sup>Includes Native American in 1990

<sup>d</sup>Single race counts for Asians, Blacks, NHPI; Sum may be greater than the total because Hispanics include all races of Hispanic origin

Table 2. Asian Ethnicity in Monterey Park: 1970–1990

Ethnicity	1970		1980		1990		2000 <sup>c</sup>	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Japanese	4,627	56.9	7,533	39.6	6,081	17.4	4,433	11.9
Chinese	2,202	27.1	8,082	42.4	21,971	63.0	24,758	66.7
Filipino	481	5.9	735	3.9	1,067	3.1	871	2.3
Korean	118	1.5	1,011	5.3	1,220	3.5	862	2.3
	-	-	731	3.8	2,736	7.8	3,101	8.4
Other/ <sup>d</sup>	700	8.6	954	5.0	1,823	5.2	3,100	8.4
Total	8,128	100.0	19,046	100.0	34,898	100.0	37,125	100.0

Source: Monterey Park Community Development Department; 1990 U.S. Census (as cited in Fong, 1995; p. 26); 2000 U.S. Census

<sup>a</sup>Included under Other/Unidentified in 1970.

<sup>b</sup>Includes Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Cambodian, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Thai for 2000; Asian Indian, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Tongan for 1980 and 1990; Asian Indian, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Hawaiian, Samoan,

Guamanian, Tongan, Native American, and Vietnamese for 1970

<sup>c</sup>Single race counts

APPENDIX

Timeline of Events Related to the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library Case

Date	Event
1915 February 21, 1929	The County of Los Angeles establishes a library in Monterey Park and named it the Monterey Park Library. The Monterey Park Library is enacted by ordinance under the provisions of the 1901 Municipal Libraries Act (Education Code §18900 et seq.).
1961 April 1986 1986 Post-election	The Library Board of Trustees and City Council rename the library the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library of Monterey Park. Barry L. Hatch is elected to City Council. Hatch forces through City Council a measure making English the official language of Monterey Park, which is later rescinded.
October 12, 1987	The Monterey Park City Council adopts Ordinance 1726, disbanding the incumbent board of library trustees, and transfers control of the library to the City Council as the City of Monterey Park holds that the Library is operated according to Government Code §34102. A public hearing during the City Council meeting is part of the deliberations. By a 3-2 vote, the City Council replaces the library board with an advisory commission.
January 1988	Elizabeth Minter is hired as the new City Librarian to start on February 22nd.
March 1988	Friends of the Library files a lawsuit to reinstate the Board of Trustees. Judy Chu, wife of ousted Library Board President Mike Eng, is elected to City Council, receiving 35 percent of the Latino vote, 30 percent of the White vote, and 90 percent of the Chinese vote (Waldman, 1989).
May 2, 1988	Trial (No. B034948) of the Friends of the Library of Monterey Park et al., Plaintiffs and Respondents v. city of Monterey Park et al., Defendants and Appellants, the Superior Court finds in favor of the plaintiffs.
July 1988	Library budget reduction by \$150,000 which results in a 50 percent cut to the foreign book budget reducing it to about \$6,000.
September 6, 1988	The Library Board at its meeting is informed of a donation of 10,000 Chinese books by the Little Taipei Lions Club. A memo from Asian Language Librarian Christina Yueh to City Librarian Elizabeth Minter, dated August 31, 1988 is presented.
November 1988	People for the American Way, a constitutional rights organization, joins the legal battle over control of the Library.
June 7, 1989	Court of Appeals hears the City's appeal but rules in favor of the Friends of Monterey Park Library et al.
Spring 2005	The library during its expansion project is renamed the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library.
September 9, 2006	Doubled in size, the 52,000 square-foot Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library reopens.



## Notes

1. While any consideration of ethnic antagonisms and collaborations in the City of Monterey Park demands a contextual analysis of the complexity of its multiracial inhabitants, this paper focuses specifically on the Bruggemeyer Memorial Library and the discourse surrounding the Board of Trustees controversy, which frames the issue within a White/Asian binary. Moreover, the roles that Latinos, as well as other non-Chinese Asian groups played in this conflict have not been documented in local or national mainstream or ethnic presses, nor have they been addressed by key players involved in the case, and thus, are considered beyond the scope of this paper. For an analysis of how race and politics is played out among Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in San Gabriel Valley, more generally, see Saito (1998).
2. For more details about the turbulent political and community struggles taking place during this time and into the 1990s, see Li (1999), Fong (1995), Horton (1988 and 1995), and Saito (1998).
3. "Foreign" is used here to reflect the usage made at the time in library and general discourse as well as in newspaper accounts when referring to "international" issues, such as foreign language books rather than international language books.
4. For a detailed history of U.S. public libraries and their implementation of Americanization programs to aid in immigrant citizenship projects, see Plummer Alston Jones (1999) *Libraries, Immigrants, and the American Experience*. Such services have been historically aimed at the assimilation of White ethnics into the U.S. White racial citizenry rather than directed at non-White ethnic immigrants. For a critique of the racialized discourses of U.S. librarianship and immigrant services, see Honma (2005). For rationale on offering multicultural library services, see Chu (2004).
5. "First language access" refers to the accessibility of city services in the first/heritage language of the city's residents. In the case of Monterey Park, communication with and by city agencies is made available in English, Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese, the four most-spoken languages by the community.

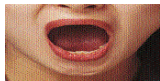
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CLARA M. CHU is Associate Professor, UCLA Department of Information Studies. Chu specializes in the social construction of information systems, institutions, and access in order to understand the usage of and barriers to information in multicultural communities. Her transnational ethnic minority experiences provide her a distinctive and critical lens to examine information issues and to inform professional practice.

TODD HONMA received his master's degrees in Asian American Studies and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is currently a doctoral student in the Program in American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California.

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