

## Chapter 8

# Portland's East Asian Connection

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Within the past century most Americans have come to dwell in cities. This concentration of people in particular places is a significant feature of contemporary society, creating an unprecedented opportunity to analyze the characteristics of urban populations and their ethnic make up. Such study is not new; Shakespeare himself immortalized it in the famous observation, "What is the city, but the people?" (Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, Act. III, Sc. 1, line 198). The geographer, however, is less a student of people than of place, and this distinction suggests the perspective developed in this chapter, the identification of residential settlement patterns of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans which together comprise the Portland East Asian ethnic community.<sup>1</sup> By focusing on the East Asian case, utilizing primarily 1980 population census materials and computer assisted techniques for mapping of the data, the distribution patterns for these ethnic groups can be determined and evaluated.

The west coast of the United States has been an historically important zone for East Asian settlement. Portland has

absorbed waves of immigration from Asia and the Pacific, and each has left a distinctive mark on the landscape, including local architecture, well-delimited Japanese and Chinese neighborhoods, and commercial centers of ethnic activity. Portland features a rejuvenated commercial Chinatown, one recently graced with an impressive traditional gate and complemented by streets named in Chinese and English, (Figure 8.1). The City supports several dozen East and Southeast Asian restaurants, providing an Oriental flavor and commercial landscape. Portland also has a beautiful Japanese garden generally acknowledged to be one of the finest of its kind in the United States (Figure 8.2). These urban landmarks suggest the importance of East Asian influences on the character and function of the city.

### RESEARCH PROBLEM

A relatively large amount of information is now available regarding the North American experience of East Asian minority groups (Endo, 1980; Hundley, 1976, Perrin, 1981). Much of this literature deals with the process by which Asian sojourners become Americans (Knoll, 1982). In the case of Oregon, an inventory of library holdings at the Oregon Historical Society and Portland State University indicates that there is a small but valuable set of resources available for the student of Chinese American (Chen, 1973; Ho, 1978; Manchester, 1978) and Japanese American

<sup>1</sup> *The definition of East Asia, limited to consideration of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ethnic groups, is an orthodox one. Questions can be raised about the Census' definition of these three groups, particularly since some Southeast Asian nationals will identify themselves as Chinese. Further research on the accuracy of Census totals and definitions is needed.*

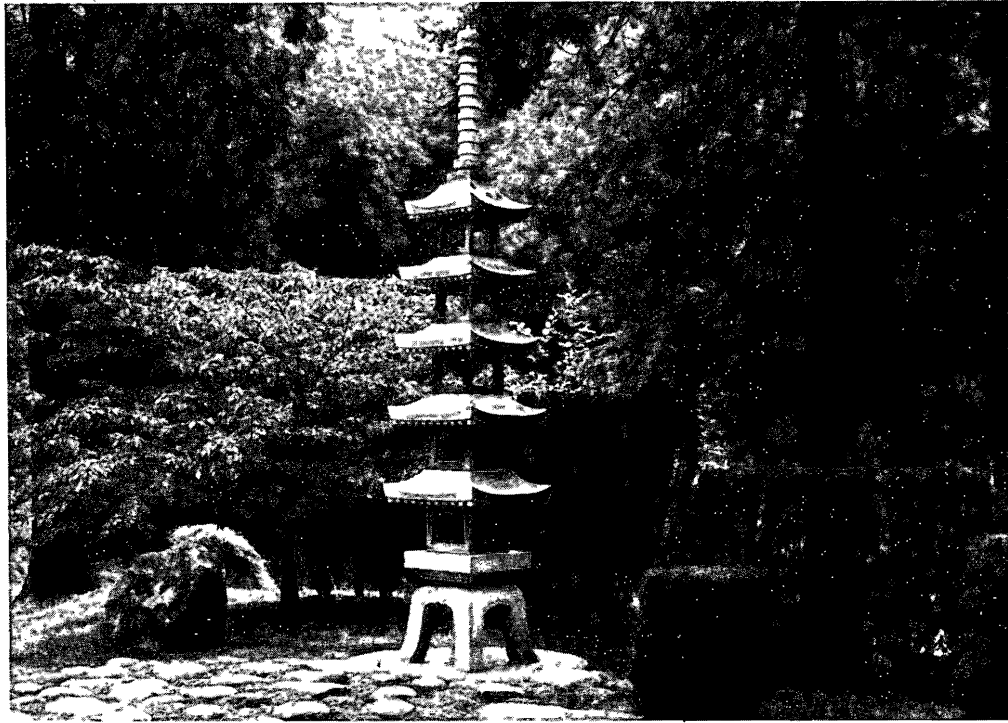


**Figure 8.1:** Entry gate to Portland's Chinatown District erected in 1986 at the corner of Burnside and Fourth Street (Photo: The Oregonian, Marv Benderowicz).

history (Ito, 1973; Kohl, 1982; Yasui, 1973 and 1975), but a relative dearth of information on Korean Americans. With regard to the Chinese and Japanese, the bibliographies by Chen

(1973) and Yasui (1973) are recommended as departure points; the single best source for the Northwestern United States is the annotated bibliography project completed at the University of Washington (Yoshitomi, 1978) which includes a small number of references to Korean experiences in the region, including Oregon.

A characteristic of this East Asian literature is its emphasis on the process of acculturation over time, particularly in terms of those who attempted to



**Figure 8.2:** Spring view of Portland's Japanese Garden showing hand sculptured pagoda donated by Mayor Yosaku Harada, Sapporo, Japan (Photo: Greater Portland Visitors and Convention Association, Inc.).

exclude East Asian minority groups (Hundley, 1976). The experience of those who were excluded, and locational factors, are given short shrift (Daniels, 1976; Iriye, 1976; Jolly, 1974). This observation is somewhat paradoxical since research on problems related to assimilation of an ethnic group may be limited to a particular part of the United States, such as the West Coast (Knoll, 1982; Mears, 1928), a particular state (Yasui, 1975), or urban or rural areas (Ho, 1978; Lyman, 1970). With

few exceptions (Jolly, 1974; Kobayashi, 1984; Lyman, 1968), however, analysis of place of residence, or community, is overshadowed by preoccupation with ethnic identity in a pluralistic society (Fujii, 1980).

The distinction between ethnic identity and an ethnic group's experience of place is the focus here. This investigation concentrates on the contemporary distribution of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean minorities in the Portland-Vancouver Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). Distinctive population distribution patterns are identified through analysis of selected spatial and socio-economic characteristics of the 1980 census data, including delimitation of the Portland and Vancouver East Asian ethnic enclaves. The discussion concludes with a set of tentative observations which might guide future

research on the relationship between location and ethnic experience in the Portland case.

### THE STATE

Oregon is said to be composed of two economies with distinct functional and locational characteristics, Portland and the rest of the state. Portland accounts for more than one-half of all manufactured goods and includes a growing high technology sector (see Chapter 10). The rest of the state is composed largely of primary industries, e.g., forestry, agriculture, and fisheries. Oregon's population geography follows closely on this division. Of 2,639,915 people in the state, Portland (366,520) accounted for 13.8 percent; this figure jumps to 39.9 percent or 1,053,100 people when calculated in terms of the tri-county area of Clackamas, Washington,

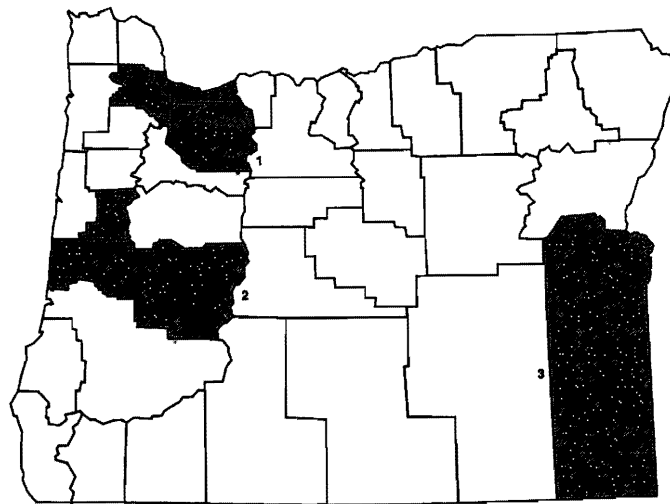
and Multnomah counties. The balance of the state's population is found outside this core area, with smaller nodes of concentration in the central and southern Willamette Valley in Salem (90,195), Corvallis (41,300), and Eugene (105,750), as well as to the far south and east (Table 8.1).

The East Asian ethnic population distribution parallels the partitioning of the state into two regions with distinct settlement patterns. In total, there were 21,496 East Asians in Oregon in 1980; Japanese were the largest group with 8,580, followed by Chinese, 7,918, and Koreans, 4,998. Those counties with 400 or more people of East Asian ethnic descent included Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Benton, Lane, and Malheur (Figure 8.3; Table 8.1). Two observations regarding these six counties are that: Koreans were concentrated only in

**Table 8.1:** 1980 Population of selected counties and cities in Oregon and Washington (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980, PC80-1-B39, pp. 139-141).

State	
Oregon	2,639,915 (total)
Tri-County	1,053,100 (total)
Clackamas	243,000
Multnomah	562,300
Washington	247,800
Metropolitan	
Portland	366,520
Willamette Valley	237,245
Salem	90,195
Corvallis	41,300
Eugene	105,750
Clark County, Washington	192,227
1980 East Asian Population in Oregon	
Total East Asians	21,496
East Asians in Tri-County Metropolitan Area	12,901 (60%)
East Asians in Remainder of Oregon	8,595 (40%)

### Counties with 400 or More Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans



**Figure 8.3:** Distribution of East Asians in Oregon. Numbers indicate location of (1) Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans; (2) Chinese and Japanese; and (3) Japanese (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980).

Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington, based on the 400-level numerical designation; and Japanese outnumber Chinese at the state level, but Chinese (5,320), outnumber Japanese (4,755) in the tri-county Portland area.

The fact that the Portland's East Asian population can be distinguished in terms of the absolute number of Chinese relative to Japanese, as well as being the only place in the state with a relatively large number of Korean people, is significant. It suggests, first, that the vast majority of East Asian ethnic groups are associated with the state's urban areas. Secondly, although the historical experience of the Chinese and Japanese ethnic groups may be

similar, including employment as laborers during early construction of the rail network in Oregon and employment as tenant farmers, it is the Japanese who continue to be involved in the state's primary sector (Knoll, 1982, pp. 47-85; Yasui, 1975, pp. 225- 57). Sample data in the 1980 census indicates that only .07 percent of the Chinese population were engaged in agriculture; the Japanese total was 9 percent (Table 8.2). A third point of interest, which pertains to all three ethnic groups, is the distribution of their respective populations in the tri-county area (Figure 8.3; Table 8.3). The highest concentration of each ethnic group is in Multnomah county, which includes Portland, but relative distribution of each differs for Washington and Clackamas counties.

#### **THE PORTLAND-VANCOUVER SMSA**

Discussion of the Portland-Vancouver SMSA requires a change of focus in terms of the numbers of people under

**Table 8.2:** *Selected social and economic characteristics of East Asian population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980, PC80-1-C39, p. 83).*

Occupation	Japanese	Chinese	Korean
(total)	4,381	3,942	2,082
Professional	1,237 (28%)	1,223 (31%)	319 (15%)
Manufacturing	802 (18%)	487 (12%)	780 (38%)
Agriculture	396 (9 %)	30 (.7%)	66 (3 %)

**Table 8.3:** *1980 East Asian population, Portland-Vancouver SMSA, by county. (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1983, pp. 71-94).*

County	Chinese	Japanese	Korean	Total East Asians
Clackamas	380 ( 6.8%)	740 (14.7%)	411 (12.5%)	1,531 (10.9%)
Clark	323 ( 5.8%)	301 ( 5.9%)	462 (14.1%)	1,087 ( 7.8%)
Multnomah	4,012 (71.7%)	2,921 (57.8%)	1,252 (38.1%)	8,185 (58.7%)
Washington	877 (15.7%)	1,094 (21.6%)	1,165 (35.3%)	2,136 (22.6%)
Total	5,592 (100%)	5,065 (100%)	3,291 (100%)	13,939 (100%)

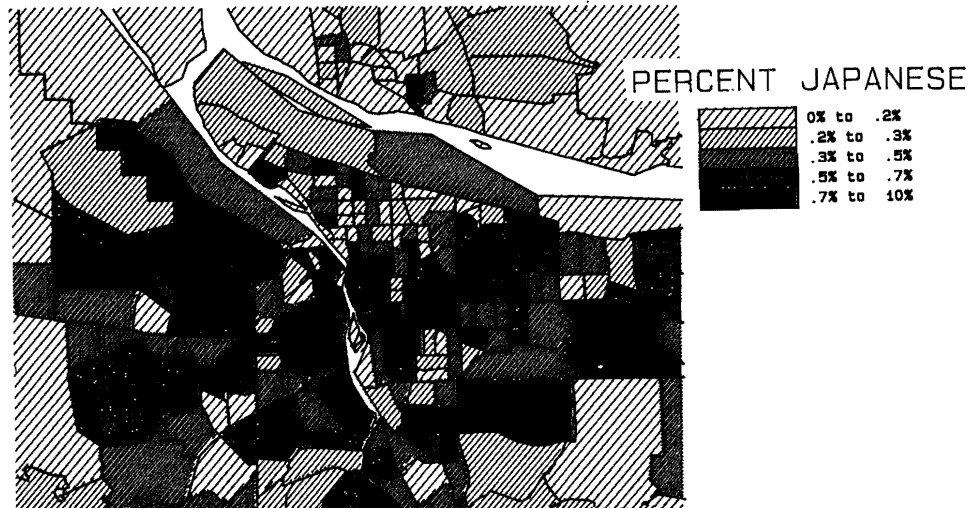
consideration, as defined by census boundaries. Such a shift is appropriate since analysis must narrow in on questions about ethnic distribution within a bounded area smaller than Oregon, yet extending beyond state boundaries. The Portland-Vancouver SMSA is composed of four counties, three in Oregon -- Clackamas, Washington, and Multnomah -- and one in Washington State -- Clark -- (see Chapter 7, and frontis map). Total area is 3,698 sq. mi.; the 1980 population equaled 1,261,030 people residing in 295 census tracts. The majority of the population of the Portland-Vancouver SMSA can be found in the incorporated areas of Portland, Vancouver, Beaverton, and Oregon City.

A distinctive feature of the Portland-Vancouver SMSA is its Asian population. Investigation of this point indicates that

the total population of Asian and Pacific Islanders, 23,971, is third only to that calculated for people of Spanish descent and the Black American population (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1983). Further examination of the census reveals that the three ethnic groups comprising the East Asian population, Chinese (5,592 people), Japanese (5,056 people), and Korean (3,291 people), represent more than half (58.1 percent) of the Asian and Pacific Islanders total.

Two types of maps can be generated

**Figure 8.4:** *Distribution of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in Portland-Vancouver SMSA as a percent of total population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980).*



which help to pinpoint the distribution of the East Asian population. The first type plots a particular ethnic group as a percentage of the population found in each census tract (Figure 8.4). The second type plots the absolute population of a particular ethnic group as found in each census tract (Figures 8.5). In the latter case a composite map can also be designed which plots each tract in the Portland-Vancouver SMSA with 40 or more people of East Asian descent; based on this information it is possible to identify East Asian ethnic enclaves (Figure 8.6), an analysis of which is deferred until the conclusion of this section.

As a percentage of the total population in each census tract, the Chinese display the most concentrated settlement pattern of the ethnic groups under consideration (Figure 8.4). A large proportion of Chinese live in northeast and southeast Portland directly east of the Willamette River, between Holgate Boulevard and the Banfield Freeway. Northwest and southwest Portland also have a moderately large convergence, although the number of tracts is smaller and less markedly contiguous. Vancouver and outlying areas of the SMSA have low concentrations of people of Chinese descent.

The Japanese distribution pattern is the most dispersed of the three ethnic groups (Figure 8.4). In contrast to the Chinese, the Japanese are concentrated less conspicuously in a core area of northeast or southeast Portland and, at the same time, they are distributed more prominently in outlying areas, probably a reflection of their agricultural heritage. The exclusive and more affluent neighborhoods of southwest Portland, e.g., the Inner West Hills, contain a greater proportion of Japanese in comparison to other East Asians.

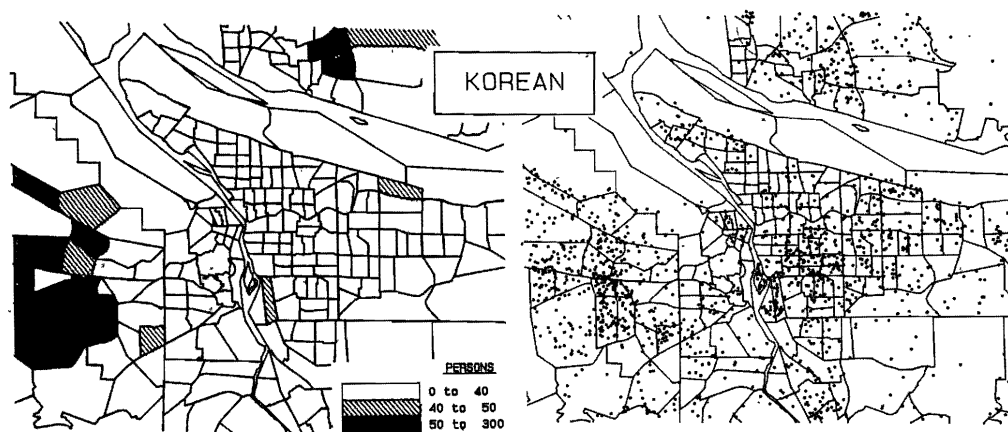
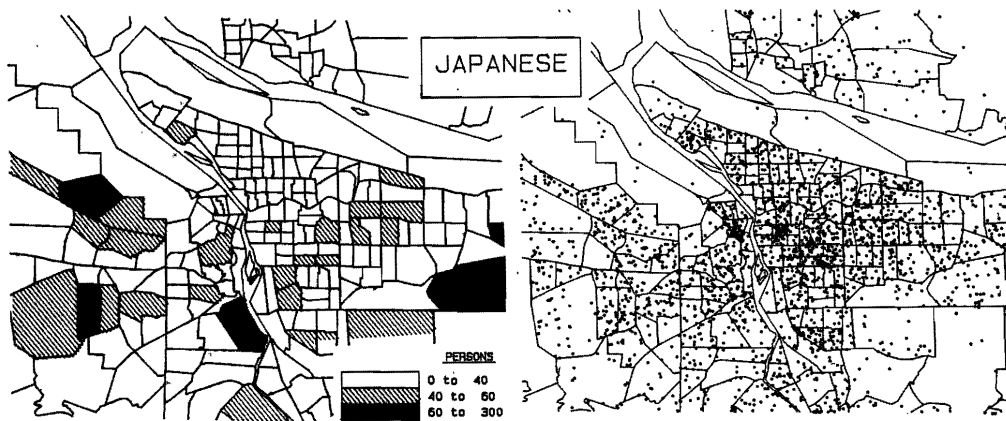
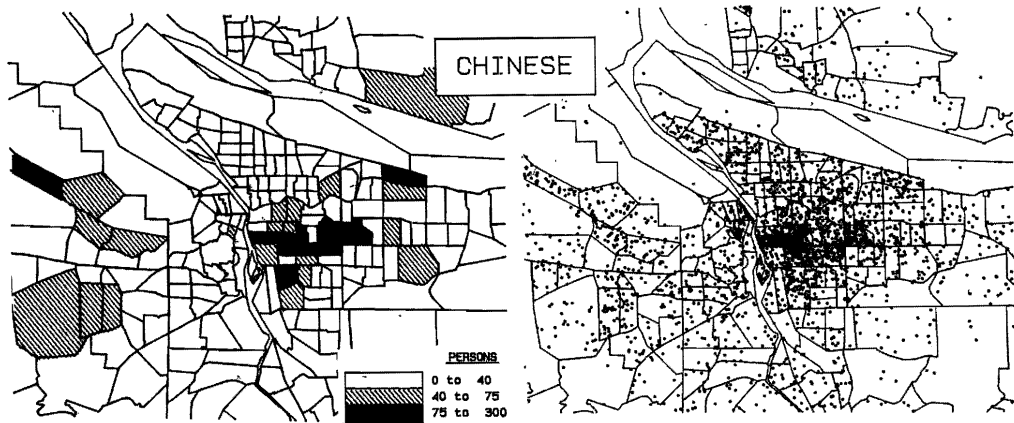
Vancouver does not have a concentration of people of Japanese descent.

The most distinctive distribution pattern is provided by the Korean population (Figure 8.4). Only two tracts in southeast Portland reflect a convergence of this ethnic group; the tract nearest the east bank of the Willamette River appears to be related to commercial (restaurant) activity along U.S. Highway 99E. The highest concentration of Koreans, as a proportion of the total population, is located in Washington County in association with suburban agricultural areas. A second area of denser settlement, but representing a relatively small number of people, is to the north in Vancouver. The outlying areas support larger numbers of Koreans than Chinese, although the proportion is less than for people of Japanese descent.

The distribution patterns found in Figure 8.4 are generally reinforced by Figure 8.5, which displays the absolute number of East Asians found in the Portland-Vancouver SMSA. Differences can be observed, however, including the fact that the total number of people of Korean descent are almost evenly distributed between Washington and Multnomah Counties, and Clackamas and Clark Counties; this point can be contrasted to the aforementioned observation that the concentration of Koreans, as a percentage of total population, is higher to the west and to the north (Figures 8.4, 8.5, and Table 8.3). More importantly, mapping of the absolute population permits more accurate measurement of the degree of ethnic concentration and the extent to which

**Figure 8.5:** Distribution of absolute number of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in Portland-Vancouver SMSA (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980).





it differs by ethnic group.

Fifty-nine census tracts in the Portland-Vancouver SMSA have 40 or more people who are ethnically East Asian (Figure 8.5; Table 8.4). This tract total represents 5,297 persons, slightly more than one-third or 38 percent, of the total East Asian population. The distribution pattern of those tracts with a relatively high number of each ethnic group is strikingly different. In the case of the Chinese, for example, 2,659 people (47.5 percent) of the total population are concentrated in 33 tracts (Figure 8.5). An additional indication of relative concentration is that nearly one-half of these tracts have 75 or more persons of Chinese descent; it is remarkable to note that 274 people, nearly five percent of the total population of this ethnic group, are found in a single tract in Multnomah county, 12.02, bounded by southeast Division, Hawthorne, 16th, and 30th Avenues.

The Japanese have a similar number of tracts with 40 or more people, 32 in total (Figure 8.5). In contrast to the Chinese, however, the tracts where Japanese live do not display such a high degree of concentration, representing just 1,718 persons (34 percent) of the total population for this ethnic group. Only six tracts display convergence of 60 or more people, all of which are located more than 10 miles from downtown Portland. Four tracts have 75 or more people but none has more than 100 persons of Japanese descent.<sup>2</sup> The highest tract, 315.03, with

94 people, is located in a rapidly suburbanizing part of northeastern Washington County.

In the case of the Korean population there are 15 tracts with 40 or more people, representing only 954 persons (28.9 percent) of the total population for this ethnic group (Figure 8.5). Nine of these tracts reflect conditions where there are 50 or more people of Korean descent; all are located in either Washington or Clark Counties. Four tracts have 75 or more Koreans and two have concentrations of 103 and 106 people, tracts 310.01 and 318, located contiguous to each other in Washington County, southwest of Beaverton.

A composite description of the Portland-Vancouver SMSA 1980 East Asian population geography, one that identifies ethnic enclaves, now becomes possible (Table 8.4; Figure 8.6). Based on the absolute population for each group, the pattern of settlement indicates that there are more census tracts with a relatively high concentration of all three minorities located in the western sections of the SMSA. Tracts with a convergence of Chinese and Japanese ethnic groups, on the other hand, are found primarily in northeast and southeast Portland. If the characteristics of relatively high density tracts are investigated in terms of socio-economic characteristics, slightly more than one-half of the East Asians live in areas where some 15 percent of the population are college graduates, and where the median housing value is between \$40,000 to \$60,000. Housing values and number of years of education differ by ethnic group; more than twice as many Chinese (52.4 percent) are living in more modest neighborhoods than is true of the Japanese (23.1 percent) (Table 8.5). These preliminary observations set the stage for additional research on East Asian patterns of settlement in the Portland-

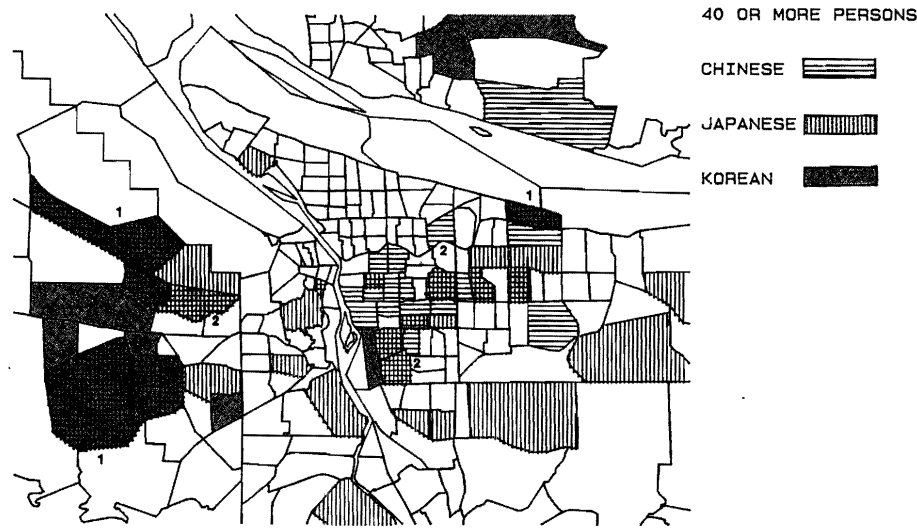
<sup>2</sup> One of the census tracts with more than 40 people of Japanese descent, tract 332 (76 people), is not shown in Figures 8.4, 8.5, and 8.6 because of its location in the far western section of the Portland-Vancouver SMSA, between Cornelius and Forest Grove, Oregon.

**Table 8.4:**

*A Comparison of census tracts with 40 or more East Asians, median housing values, and percentage of college educated population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1983, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, pp. 119-66).*

Tract	Japanese	Chinese	Korean	Median Housing Value	College Education Percentage
2	18	19	50	50,300	12.52
3.01	57	81	17	63,000	16.08
3.02	40	68	6	74,000	23.35
4.01	26	41	19	74,300	13.94
7.01	37	155	19	52,200	7.65
7.02	40	25	23	44,500	5.85
8.01	38	99	30	51,300	9.70
8.02	40	67	13	47,700	8.37
9.01	36	127	22	50,700	13.80
10	29	58	12	44,600	9.73
11.02	16	124	1	51,900	16.38
12.01	53	54	5	46,000	16.73
12.02	28	274	7	61,700	15.07
13.01	10	59	6	43,700	18.23
13.02	7	130	10	47,400	14.55
14	30	104	11	46,300	10.28
16.01	46	94	14	59,000	15.82
16.02	25	116	7	47,100	6.82
19	16	41	2	69,300	22.94
20	31	68	7	48,200	12.80
29.02	23	53	1	52,900	10.13
40.02	54	39	4	49,800	7.56
41.02	12	1	11	39,600	3.18
56	49	57	7	62,500	21.73
58	90	44	29	120,800	43.15
63	63	32	12	96,700	26.66
64.01	35	18	22	73,400	24.08
66.02	41	19	9	61,700	23.60
81	42	30	25	57,800	9.88
82.01	44	97	14	66,300	11.32
83.02	26	37	17	53,700	9.44
91	34	46	17	59,400	6.03
92.01	46	40	20	56,900	7.47
93	45	26	16	61,500	8.32
95	58	83	42	87,700	15.77
99	80	32	27	72,200	12.82
104.03	70	31	36	67,400	8.29
205.02	40	15	7	93,100	26.53
211	58	8	9	60,400	8.23
216.02	41	18	6	63,200	6.54
222.02	41	37	20	93,900	15.52
301	44	29	23	88,100	23.01
302	45	54	16	105,600	28.67
305	58	15	24	71,900	20.50
306	2	8	50	64,400	12.80
310.01	61	61	108	85,800	21.52
310.02	47	44	59	77,000	15.93
312	20	17	92	59,400	13.71
314.01	54	75	66	63,100	14.62
314.02	50	76	51	87,500	21.94
315.02	50	76	51	87,500	21.94
315.03	94	71	40	94,800	23.71
316.02	34	35	69	67,000	11.24
317.01	33	31	64	67,700	12.50
318	51	55	103	80,600	18.24
332	76	20	9	51,900	8.13
412.02	28	10	76	58,000	8.13
413.01	11	43	25	73,300	13.88
413.03	18	6	40	54,900	5.60
Total	2,343	3,220	1,591	avg. 64,800	avg. 14.65

## EAST ASIAN ETHNIC ENCLAVES



**Figure 8.6:** Distribution of census tracts with 40 or more Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in Portland-Vancouver SMSA. Numbers indicate overlap: (1) all three ethnic groups; (2) Japanese and Chinese (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980).

Vancouver SMSA, not only in terms of location and socio-economic characteristics, but from the perspective of history, degree of change over time, and the individual and collective urban experience of these minority households.<sup>3</sup>

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Delimitation of Oregon's, and Portland's East Asian population geography is instructive in several respects. Association with urban and suburban areas is a dominant characteristic. In the Portland-Vancouver SMSA, distinct settlement patterns can be identified for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean ethnic groups;

the Lorenz Curve in each case shows that Chinese and Koreans have higher concentrations of population than is true of Japanese (Figure 8.7). These distribution patterns overlap in specific census tracts and the existence of East Asian enclaves raises intriguing questions about the relationship between location and ethnic experience. The 1980 Census is a rich resource for study

- 3 *Potentially intriguing questions include: how long has the ethnic group under study resided in a particular census tract; are the cultural landscapes of these neighborhoods distinctive; how has settlement pattern and ethnic composition changed over time; have centrifugal and centripetal forces, socio-economic or otherwise, contributed to the changing pattern of ethnic settlement; do minority groups perceive differently the neighborhoods they occupy; in what ways do neighborhood experiences of these groups shape collective and individual ethnic character; and is there, to reverse a commonly asked question, a distinctive East Asian perception of Portland-Vancouver?*

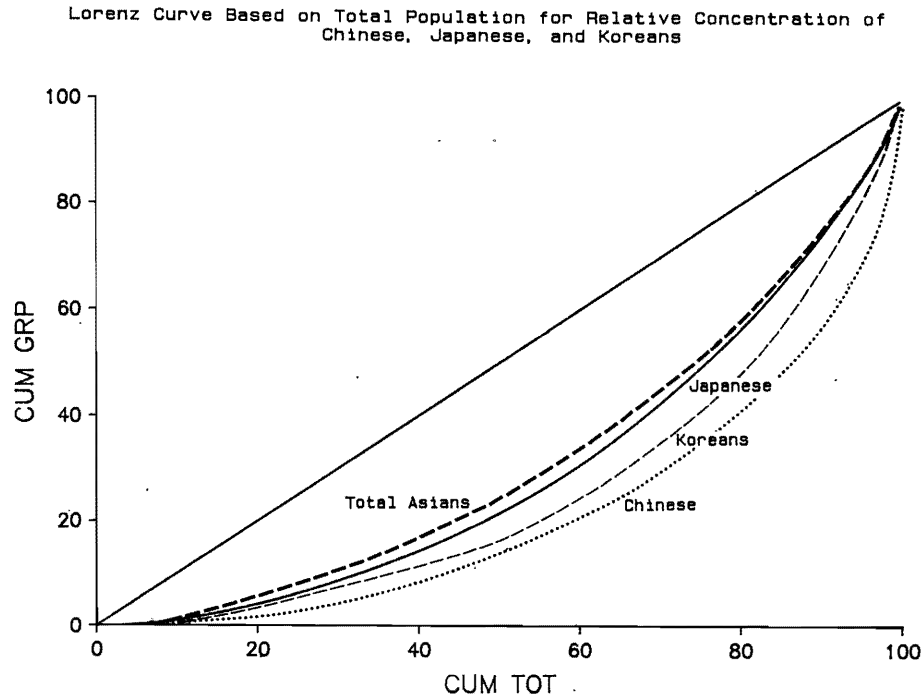
**Table 8.5:** 1980 Composite summary of selected population and socio-economic data for Portland-Vancouver SMSA: East Asians (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1983, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, pp. 119-66).

Housing Value \$	No. of Tracts	Japanese	%32 Tracts	No. of Tracts	Chinese	%33 Tracts	No. of Tracts	Korean	%15 Tracts
40-60,000	8	397	23.1	16	1,394	52.4	5	304	31.9
60-80,000	13	684	39.8	10	821	30.9	5	308	32.3
80-100,000	9	502	29.2	5	346	13.0	5	342	35.8
100-120,000	2	135	7.9	2	98	3.7	0	0	0
Total	32	1,718	100%	33	2,659	100%	15	954	100%
<u>% College Education</u>									
3-15	13	690	40.3	16	1,374	51.7	9	533	58
15-25	15	790	45.9	15	1,187	44.6	67	401	42
25-35	3	148	8.6	1	54	2.0	0	0	0
35-45	1	90	5.2	1	44	1.7	0	0	0
Totals	32	1,718	100%	33	2,659	100%	15	954	100%

of ethnic distribution and future analysis of these data, in conjunction with interviews and specific neighborhood studies, can be expected to define more precisely the character of the East Asian community.

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**Figure 8.7:** Relative density of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans in Portland-Vancouver SMSA; the Chinese are most heavily concentrated (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1980).

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