

The Transition of the Chinese Immigrant Communities in Great Washington Metropolitan Area

Chang, Chun-Chuan

Washington D.C., capital of the United States, is located between the two Mid-Atlantic States, Maryland and Virginia. As the political center of the country, Washington is home to many federal government agencies, diplomatic institutions and headquarters of international organizations. The large number of federal government employees in Washington area has contributed to the special local employment structure with stability and inclusiveness. This gave rise to a “small but resilient” Chinatown within the District in the nineteenth century without special niches. Since the twentieth century, hi-tech companies, including national defense, informational technology and biotechnology, have formed an industrial cluster surrounding the U.S. Department of Defense and National Institute of Health with numerous employment opportunities. In the context of post-Second World War international situation and adjustment of U.S. immigration policy, different classes of labors and ethnic groups largely migrated to the Washington metropolitan area, contributed to the growth of several satellite towns, and have formed one of the biggest and most famous immigrant gateways in the U.S.

From the perspectives of immigration history and urban history, this study discusses 1) how Chinese immigrants chose to settle in D.C. area; 2) how multi-ethnic immigrant communities were formed in Washington metropolitan area, and 3) the formation and development of the Chinese community over time. The three discussions are addressed as follows. First of all, this study examines the formation of Chinatown in the nineteenth century, how it survived and developed against the two forced evictions, and continued to receive Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indo-China and more. Second, this study synthesized the context of post-war immigration wave caused by the cold war structure, the reform of U.S. immigration law, and the suburbanization in the U.S. Third, this paper discusses how Washington developed to be a metropolitan area after the World War Two, received immigrants from Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and became an emerging immigrant gateway where Chinese is one of the most important ethnic groups. As an inclusively multi-culture society, D.C. provides Chinese immigrants with flexibility to use their

social and political capitals to protect their own interests and further contribute to their countries of origin. This practice is considered as part of the achievement of historical civil rights movements in the Washington area.

Keywords : Washington, Chinese immigrants, Cold war, immigration law, immigrant community, immigrant gateway