



Understanding ‘segmented assimilation’ in Australian cities: Modelling the residential choices of mainland China-, Hong Kong- and Taiwan-born migrants

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the dynamics of settlement by migrant group is complex, with a number of processes affecting outcomes ranging from assimilation to segregation. While both the assimilation and segregation are idealised models, the ‘segmented assimilation’ model provides a middle-ground explanation which fits more with actual outcomes whereby socio-economic position is affected by the class status of the host society sub-population with which migrants co-locate and interact. This paper applies the segmented assimilation model to the Australian urban context by examining the residential segregation of three interrelated migrant groups. Recognising the diversity in terms of birthplace, ancestry and language spoken at home, this study examines migrants from Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan to estimate variations of residential segregation using 2006 and 2011 Census data for the five largest Australian capital cities. It uses quantile regression models to capture the role of group-specific and metropolitan-specific characteristics on the degree of segregation. The results reveal that metropolitan-specific characteristics exert a stronger impact on higher degrees of segregation than socioeconomic characteristics regardless of group-distinctiveness. The segmented assimilation theory is shown to have utility in explaining group segregation patterns, as there is ample evidence of assimilation over time across each of the capital city regions, though this varies substantially by geography, group characteristics, and reference group.

1. Introduction

Ethnic residential settlement and its various outcomes have attracted much attention from geographers and sociologists (Johnston, Poulsen, & Forrest, 2007). In spatial terms, the assimilation (or the melting pot) and multiculturalism (or social pluralism) models are prevalent in the public imagination vis-à-vis recent migrant groups' relationship with the dominant host society (Boal, 1999). On one hand, the spatial assimilation model assumes that group members will, over the course of time or by generation, assimilate with the host society through the convergence of social, economic and cultural patterns among distinct groups (Massey, 1985). On the other hand, multiculturalism is associated with residential segregation - a mosaic of plural cultures - as group members retain their cultural identity and social distinctions (Iceland & Scopilliti, 2008), though some researchers argue that multiculturalism is merely ‘assimilation in slow motion’

(Jamrozik, Boland, & Urquhart, 1995, p. 110).

Whereas Peach (2005) views assimilation and multiculturalism as polar opposites, segmented assimilation presents a more nuanced model of ethnic residential location in which assimilation and segregation both occur, but at different rates for different groups (Zhou, 1997). The levels of segmented assimilation in different countries are subject primarily to national differences such as the characteristics of their migrants, urban features (ecological context), and/or policy settings. Much of the discussion on residential segregation is based on the United States' experience with its melting pot metaphor and the ‘Americanization’ of migrant groups (Forrest, Poulsen, & Johnston, 2006, p. 441). However, different countries and metropolitan areas within the country may conform to different ethno-spatial models (Johnston, Forrest, & Poulsen, 2001).

As a country with high net immigration, Australia presents an opportunity to evaluate the spatial outcomes of recent waves of migrant

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settlement. The country's nominally multicultural orientation (Jakubowicz, 2011) derived from the freedom of expression, religion, and other cultural attributes has led to a range of outcomes by migrant groups over time. However, while the majority of Australian migration studies emphasise on how the migrant-specific characteristics affect their integration/segregation (Coughlan, 2008; Edgar, 2014; Forrest et al., 2006; Healy & Birrell, 2003; Ip, Wu, & Inglis, 1998; Johnston et al., 2001; Poulsen, Johnston, & Forrest, 2004; Rapson, Birrell, & O'Connor, 1999; Viviani, 1996), few studies have investigated the role of both group-specific and metropolitan-specific characteristics of the migrants. This paper aims to redress this gap through examining the role played by both through an investigation of the spatial dynamics of migrant groups originating from the Mainland China (MC), Hong Kong (HK), and Taiwan (TW) within and across major Australian cities. The cultural integration of migrants has played an important role in Australia's population formation and has reinforced Australia's links to the world, the importance of which will continue to grow given that 28.5% of today's 23.7 million population in Australia were born overseas (ABS, 2017).

2. Background

The question of ethnic segregation and assimilation in urban areas has long attracted the attention of social scientists and policy makers (Jupp, 2002). A frequently voiced concern regarding the increased volume and diversity of migration to Australia is the propensity for spatial segregation within major cities (Johnston et al., 2001; Musterd, Priemus, & Van Kempen, 1999). As Healy and Birrell argue, 'there are now two Sydneys – one that is increasingly dominated by low to moderate-income non-English-speaking background (NESB) migrant communities in the West and Southwest and the other comprised of established inner affluent areas and predominantly English-speaking aspirational areas on the metropolitan periphery' (2003:65). However, there is clearly more nuance to the pattern than this, something this paper intends to reveal.

Numerous theoretical models attempt to characterise the nature of the spatial patterns of ethnic groups. The pluralism model, often termed 'place stratification' (Iceland & Scopilliti, 2008) results in distinct ethnic enclaves that are maintained over time as a result of spatially divisive strategies, which often result in the retention of social and spatial distinctiveness (Peach, 1999). The place stratification model emphasises the negative effects of prejudice, discrimination and institutional barriers in constraining access by some groups to labour and housing markets (Iceland & Scopilliti, 2008). The implications of this are the generational effects of characteristics retained due to the socio-economic outcomes of spatial stratification.

Other germane concepts of ethnic incorporation are segregation and polarisation (Boal, 1999). Segregation produces a mosaic of ethnically variegated neighbourhoods in the city and involves much sharper spatial divides, with various ethnic groups occupying distinct areas and form obvious spatial isolation with the wider society (Edgar, 2014). Polarisation is an extreme case of segregation, where local divisions, perhaps reflecting wider conflict, result in a fractured social environment involving the virtual exclusion of a group's member from many areas and their almost exclusive occupancy of defined ghettos (Peach, 1999).

Assimilation is a process relating to ethnic settlement whereby individuals within the new group absorb the cultural, social, and economic attributes of the host group over time (Massey, 1985). This is often a multi-stage process involving conflict with the host society, earlier settlers providing cheaper housing possibilities for new immigrants, new immigrants overcoming disadvantages and gradually becoming influential in the local community, improving their economic well-being and socioeconomic status to become independent in the host society, and finally moving out into other areas and integrating with mainstream communities (Cressey, 1938). The degree to which this

occurs is strongly affected by human capital, language, higher education and work experience (Coughlan, 2008).

The segmented assimilation model emphasises diverse patterns of incorporation amongst contemporary immigrants (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Segmented assimilation theory posits that the class-based attributes of ethnic settlement affect the outcomes of latter generations, but that full assimilation itself may be entirely desirable (Portes & Zhou, 1993). In other words, there are divergent generational outcomes based on the socio-economic attributes of the host culture that are 'absorbed'. Some updated versions of segmented assimilation model include a multicultural model proposed by Forrest et al., 2006 to facilitate comparative assessment of the absolute spatial context of ethnic group concentrations in three Australia's immigrant-receiving cities. Edgar (2014) introduced an intergenerational model to examine recent arrivals, long-settled immigrant cohorts and successive generations within and across diverse ethnic groups in Sydney and Melbourne. However, beyond the impact of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of migrants on their assimilation/segregation, little existing research has considered the role that ecological context and/or regional environment may have played in the integration process. The ecological context could be reflected by the metropolitan factors of places where migrants reside. This study builds a quantile regression model that include these factors to improve the model's fitness and to enhance our understanding of the role they play on residential assimilation/segregation.

Much of the current literature on migrants' integration focuses on the use of descriptive investigations such as threshold analysis (Coughlan, 2008; Forrest et al., 2006; Poulsen et al., 2004), point pattern analysis (Peach, 1999), index measurement (Burnley, 2005; Johnston et al., 2001; Massey, 1985), or employ statistical approaches such as logistic regression (Bolt & Van Kempen, 2010; Sun & Fan, 2011) or multivariate regression (Edgar, 2014; Johnston et al., 2001; Myles & Hou, 2004; South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005) to the understanding of how migrant-specific features affect residential segregation. In this paper we introduce a new modelling approach to the ethnic segregation literature – the quantile regression model – in addition to extending the range of variables to include both group-specific and eco-contextual characteristics to unveil the key drivers of ethnic segregation. The advantage of quantile regression over previously employed modelling approaches is its capacity to examine the way in which independent variables predict variations in the dependent variable at different points across the dependent variable's distribution (Koenker & Bassett, 1978).

In order to test the extent to which spatial assimilation explains the residential behaviour of migrant groups in the Australian urban context, we examine the change over time in three main Chinese subgroups by birth place - Mainland China born (MC-born), Hong Kong born (HK-born) and Taiwan born (TW-born). Ethnic Chinese migration to Australia has a long history, dating to the Gold Rush in the middle of 19th century. From World War II to the late 1970s, ethnic Chinese migrants in Australia most commonly came directly from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and the Nanyang countries of Southeast Asia (Gao, 2006). The situation began to shift in the late 1980s when China began to strengthen its ties with other nations and send increasing number of emigrants, particularly in the post-2000 period. By 2011, China had become the largest non-Commonwealth source country with the total number of migrants in Australia at around 319,000 (ABS, 2014).

Despite common ethnic and/or geographical origins, there is significant within-group diversity by birthplace, ancestry and language spoken at home (Ip, Lui, & Chui, 2007). For example, Chinese subgroups from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Southeast Asia countries have similar cultural origins but often possess different socioeconomic characteristics such as English proficiency and economic status (Ip et al., 1998). Thus, understanding the characteristics of subgroups is also important in explaining outcomes tied to migration and settlement. Against this background, we are primarily interested in addressing the following three questions:

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