
Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Inca - 05-05-2008 15:29

There's an article in the LA Times today about the domination of nail salon businesses in California and other parts of the country by Vietnamese immigrants--80% of nail technicians in California are Vietnamese, 43% nationwide.

A trend like that has to start somewhere, and bizarrely, the actress Tippi Hedren plays a big part:

The story of how the Vietnamese fell into the nail industry is one of pure chance -- of how 20 women who fled their war-torn country happened to meet a Hollywood starlet with beautiful nails.

The women were former teachers, business owners and government officials who came to America in 1975 after the fall of Saigon and landed in a tent city for Vietnamese refugees near Sacramento called Hope Village.

Actress Tippi Hedren, drawn to the plight of Vietnamese refugees, visited every few days. The Vietnamese knew little of Hollywood, so Hedren showed them Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds" and pointed out her face on the screen.

Hedren was captivated by the refugees' stories of their homeland. They were, among other things, fascinated by her nails -- long, oval, the color of coral.

"I noticed that these women were very good with their hands," said Hedren, now 78. "I thought, why couldn't they learn how to do nails?"

So Hedren flew in her manicurist once a week to teach the women how to trim cuticles, remove calluses and perform nail wraps. She persuaded a nearby beauty school to teach the women and helped them find jobs.

Thuan Le, a high school teacher in Vietnam, passed her nail licensing exam four months after coming to Hope Village.

"Any profession that was taught to us, we would learn it," Le said. "We had no idea if it was going to be successful or not."

Hedren helped Le find a job at a salon in Santa Monica. It wasn't easy work. Le did not have clients, manicures were not yet in vogue, and the tools of the trade were hard to find. She scoured hardware stores for very fine sandpaper to use in place of a buffer.

Seeing Le's success, one of her high school friends from Vietnam decided to get into the business. Within a few years, Kien Nguyen and her husband, Diem, opened one of the first beauty salons run by Vietnamese Americans.

Diem Nguyen, a former South Vietnamese navy commander, enrolled in beauty school himself and encouraged friends to get into the nail business. By 1987, the Nguyens had opened Advance Beauty College in Little Saigon, translating classes into Vietnamese.

Such success stories spread to thousands of Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States, hoping to rebuild their lives. Today, Vietnamese entrepreneurs have found whopping success in the nail business, such as the Happy Nail chain that is a staple in malls across Southern California, with more than 40 stores.

The article mentions other particular businesses where immigrants from one nationality are predominant--most famously, Indians (in particular, Gujaratis named Patel) in motels, as well as Cambodians with donut shops (I think this is mainly a SoCal thing--reportedly, around 90% of the areas donut shops are owned by Cambodians). It seems that every modest Japanese restaurant I go to around here is not owned by Japanese, but Koreans.

Any other examples?

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Coffy - 05-05-2008 15:35

At least in this area, diners and pizzerias tend to be owned by Greeks, and the Dunkin Donuts and 7-Eleven franchises tend to be owned by Indians, as famously commented on by Joe Biden.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 05-05-2008 16:01

Koreans and dry cleaners. That's not just a stereotype, apparently. Especially in California. Come to think of it, every dry cleaner I've been to in the DC area was run by Koreans.

Around here, small independent grocery/delis, like the one in my apartment building and the one in my office building, tend to be run by Koreans (although the cook staff of the one in my office are all Central American).

Dunkin Donuts, 7-11s and other franchises tend to follow regional or local patterns. One guy will own one franchise and then expand and buy a bunch in the area, employing more and more of his extended family as he expands.

When I was doing the immigration law job, one our clients was Anne Arundel County's king of Popeye's fried chicken franchises. I'm sure that's what he dreamed of growing up on the mean streets of Bombay.

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 05-05-2008 16:06

Canada's biggest pizza chain is Pizza Pizza, and their outlets seem to be exclusively run by the Chinese (in the Toronto area, anyway). Corner shops are Koreans, restaurant kitchens are Jamaicans and Sri Lankans, and for some reason, window and door replacements are Poles and Russians.

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 05-05-2008 16:15

It's probably because, like Canada, Russia and Poland get a bit brisk in winter and therefore quality window and door repair was highly valued trade under communism. Also, the KGB and SB kept kicking people's doors down.

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Inca - 05-05-2008 16:27

I forgot one. Before my father-in-law retired, he was a banker and several of his clients were in the jewelry business. There are apparently a lot of Indians--mostly Jains, named Shah--in the diamond business (illustration: my best friend's father-in-law is named Shah and that's his business). He also had a lot of Israeli clients, and was able to converse in Hebrew with one of our movers when we moved to our new apartment. A Persian Jew speaking in Hebrew to a Japanese-American: I love LA.

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 05-05-2008 16:49

Why would a Japanese-American mover speak Hebrew?

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by dgllh - 05-05-2008 17:12

So he can communicate with the Persian Jew.

Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 05-05-2008 17:26

I've noticed that 100% of the freelance cannabis dealers in the Camden Town area are negroes. Isn't that funny?

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Coffy - 05-05-2008 17:27

Not a nationality, but it seems like 100% of white cops in Philadelphia are Catholic.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 05-05-2008 17:31

The Greek pizzeria/deli connection is common in a lot of places. I wonder if that means that most gyro places are run by Italians?

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 05-05-2008 17:36

My 'people' have had the North American National Leader industry (with the exception of Mexico) locked up for over 200 years.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by ursus arctos - 05-05-2008 17:42

Does Pierre not count?

In any event, with some luck "we" will elect an exception to that "rule" in November.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 05-05-2008 17:47

I was lazily going with 'white males' instead of drilling down to religion or first-language. And I'm not counting Kim Campbell, either.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by The Purple Cow - 05-05-2008 17:48

Not sure if this was a national or local truism, but growing up in Brum all Fish & Chip shop owners seemed to be Greek Cypriots.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 05-05-2008 18:00

The Purple Cow wrote:

Not sure if this was a national or local truism, but growing up in Brum all Fish & Chip shop owners seemed to be Greek Cypriots.

Hah, I know a guy, a music journalist and former colleague of mine, who is a Greek Cypriot from Brum. His parents do indeed run a fish & chip shop.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Spearmint Rhino - 05-05-2008 18:02

By the way, how fucking rich was Tippi Hedren that she could afford to go flying her personal manicurist here there and everywhere? I never had her down in that league of stardom.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Soccer Scrimmage - 05-05-2008 18:03

In Washington, DC every parking lot attendant seems to be Ethiopian/Eretrian.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Inca - 05-05-2008 18:17

WornOldMotorbike wrote:

Why would a Japanese-American mover speak Hebrew?

The Japanese-American in that story is my father-in-law.

The Greeks/diners thing doesn't really happen in Los Angeles. There aren't too many mom-and-pop diners to begin with, though.

Funny you should mention that, SocScrim, because the parking attendants at the business park near my place that my bank is all seem to be Ethiopian also. That's the only place here I've noticed that, though.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Reed of the Valley People - 05-05-2008 18:28

"In Washington, DC every parking lot attendant seems to be Ethiopian/Eretrian."

From my immigration law days, I can confirm that's absolutely true most of the time. I think Colonial Parking is the dominant company in DC so probably everyone who works at one of their lots knows everyone else or at least knows somebody who knows them and it's the sort of job that people get by knowing somebody because, I suppose, the only qualification for that job is that one be reliable and honest and the most cost-effective way to find people like that is to have one of your current employees refer and vouch for them.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by WornOldMotorbike - 05-05-2008 18:40

The Japanese-American in that story is my father-in-law.

So your Japanese-American father-in-law learned Hebrew to speak to his jewelery-trade clients? If so, that's good customer service for ya.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by Inca - 05-05-2008 18:43

WornOldMotorbike wrote:

The Japanese-American in that story is my father-in-law.

So your Japanese-American father-in-law learned Hebrew to speak to his jewelery-trade clients? If so, that's good customer service for ya.

Yep. I don't think he learned too much, but he can have a basic business-related conversation.

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Re:Businesses dominated by one nationality

Posted by JtS - 06-05-2008 08:31

In North London chippies seem to be dominated by Greek-Cypriots.

I was in a Subway in a town just north of Derby a few weekends back and was suprised that the two lads working their were White British. All subways in London appear to be staffed by asians/middle-easterns/africans with generally limited English.