

imagine all the people

Chinese

CITY OF BOSTON
Martin J. Walsh
Mayor

2016

Chinese in Boston

“*imagine all the people*” is a series of publications produced by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Advancement. The series provides a comprehensive profile of Boston’s diverse immigrant communities and their numerous contributions to the city’s social, cultural and economic landscape. It is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate immigrants and gain insight into how they shape our city.



Photos by Renato Castello & Jeremiah Robinson

Introduction

The migration of Chinese individuals to Boston goes back over 100 years to the late 1800s when the first Chinese residents settled in what is now known as Boston's Chinatown, centered on Beach Street and bordered by the Boston Common, Downtown Crossing, the South End and the Massachusetts Turnpike. Chinese immigrants who first settled in the area came from California, which had long been a popular destination for Chinese immigrants. Most came to Boston to flee anti-Chinese sentiment in California.

Around the same time the first Chinese residents began settling in what would become Chinatown, several of Boston's large garment manufacturing plants relocated to the neighborhood, creating the garment district, which was active into the 1990s. Construction of the Southeast Expressway (I-93) through Chinatown in the 1950s and expansion of the New England Medical Center in the 1960s and 70s constrained growth of the community. However, negotiations with community leaders led to the public financing of community housing in the neighborhood. Chinatown remains a hub of Asian-American life, with Cambodian, Vietnamese and Japanese restaurants and stores accompanying Chinese establishments. It is the only historic Chinese neighborhood in New England.

Today, Chinese migration is shaped by an influx of Chinese students who are living in Boston while they attend college or university. These students possess a temporary visa (F-1) that allows them to remain in the United States up to 60 days beyond the completion of their academic program. If they wish to remain longer they must obtain an H1B visa. A greater share of foreign-born Chinese have arrived in the United States after 2000 (49 percent) compared to all foreign born (43 percent.).



Chinese New Year's Celebration - Jeremiah Robinson

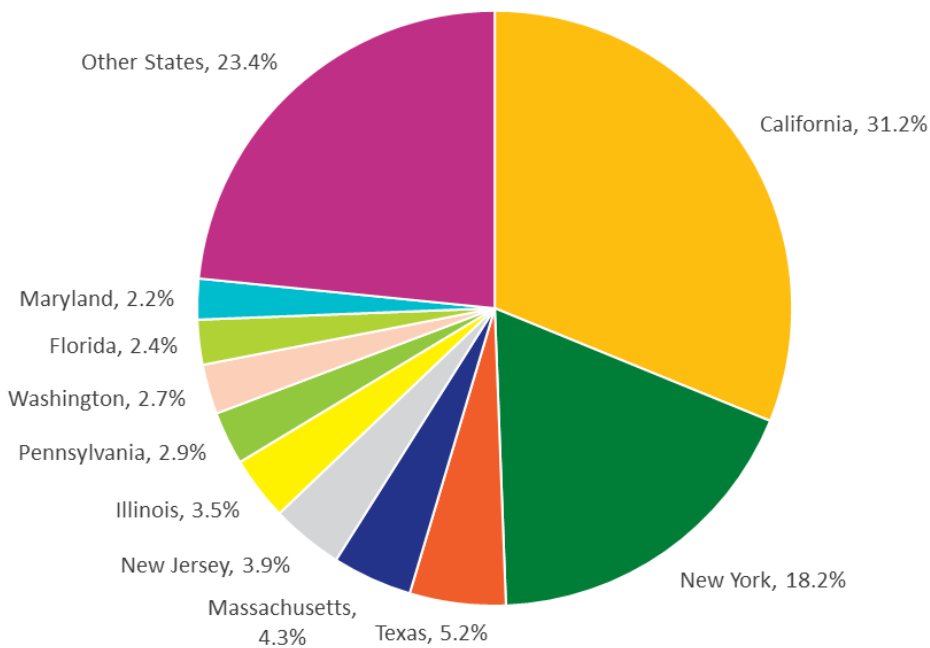
Chinese in the United States

The American Community Survey (ACS)¹ estimates that 2,519,964 foreign-born² individuals from China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) resided in the United States in 2014. Immigrants from China help make Chinese the largest Asian population in the United States followed by populations from India, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The United States is the largest destination for Chinese emigration, followed by Canada, South Korea, Japan, and Australia.³

With an estimated population of 107,627, Massachusetts ranks fourth among states with 4.3 percent of the Chinese foreign-born population in the United States.⁴ The other popular states for immigrants from China are California, which accounts for 31 percent of the country's Chinese population; New York (18 percent); and Texas (5 percent) and New Jersey (4 percent). Together with Massachusetts, these five states comprise nearly 63 percent of the Chinese foreign-born population living in the United States.⁵

About 2.5 million foreign-born Chinese live in the United States.

Share of Foreign-Born Chinese Population by State



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

Chinese in Boston

The 2014 ACS estimates that 22,356⁶ foreign-born Chinese live in Boston. Overall, Chinese comprise the second largest foreign-born population in Boston behind Dominicans, and they make up approximately 11 percent of the city's total foreign-born population.⁷ Haitians comprise the next largest share of the city's foreign-born population (8 percent); Salvadorans (6 percent) rank fourth and Vietnamese (6 percent) rank fifth.

The U.S. Census Bureau's ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) allows for the detailed socio-economic analysis of specific populations. For smaller populations like foreign-born Chinese in Boston, a 5-year sample is required to limit variation due to sampling error. The analysis that follows uses 2009-2013 ACS PUMS data.

According to the 2013 5-Year ACS, Boston's foreign-born Chinese, though found throughout the city, are mostly concentrated in the neighborhoods of Downtown (including Chinatown), Brighton, the South End, Fenway, Charlestown, Mission Hill, and Dorchester.⁸

Unlike other foreign-born populations who have greater female populations, 55 percent of Chinese in Boston are male. Over half of foreign-born Chinese are married (56 percent), 7 percent are widowed, and 7 percent are divorced or separated. Approximately 27 percent of all foreign-born Chinese are between the ages of 20-34, and the majority—65 percent—are over the age of 35. Approximately 45 percent of foreign-born Chinese residents are naturalized U.S. citizens.

Nearly 20% of foreign-born Chinese in Boston are enrolled in a college or university.



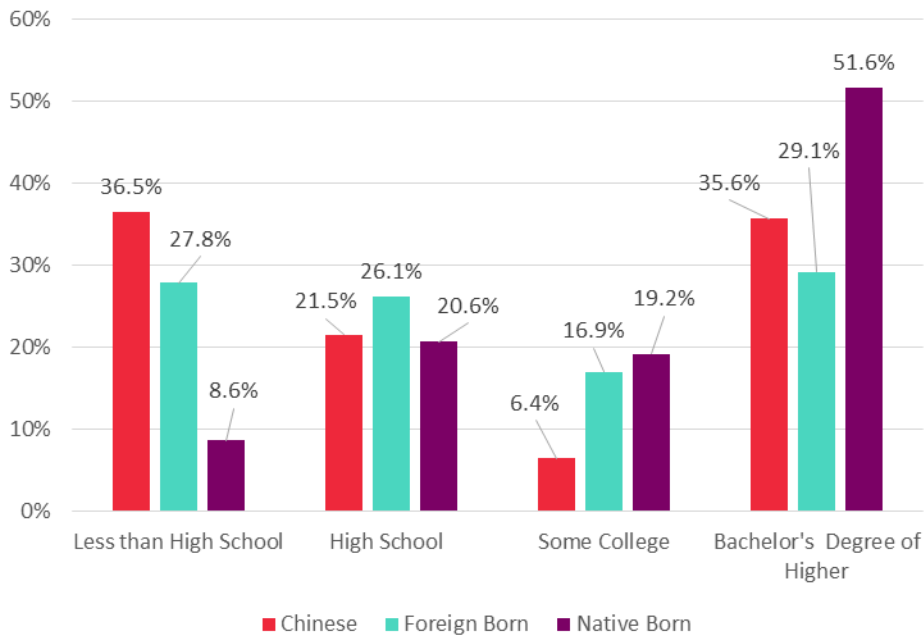
Chinese New Year's Parade in Chinatown—Don Harney

Educational Attainment

Foreign-born Chinese form two distinct groups based on educational attainment: those with at least a Bachelor's degree and those with less than a high school diploma. Many people come to Boston from China to get a higher education. Nearly 20 percent of all foreign-born Chinese are enrolled in a college or university, compared to 13 percent of all foreign born in Boston. Of the population 25 years or older, 36 percent of foreign-born Chinese have completed at least a Bachelor's degree, compared with 29 percent of the entire foreign-born population and 52 percent of the native-born population. With respect to advanced degrees, just over 21 percent of foreign-born Chinese living in Boston hold a graduate or professional degree, more than the 14 percent of all foreign-born but less than the 22 percent of all native-born residents.

However, many foreign-born Chinese do not have high levels of educational attainment. Of the Chinese foreign-born population 25 years or older, 36.5 percent have not completed high school. This figure is higher than for foreign-born residents (28 percent) and more than four times the share for the native-born population (9 percent).

Educational Attainment Boston Residents 25 Years and Older



U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

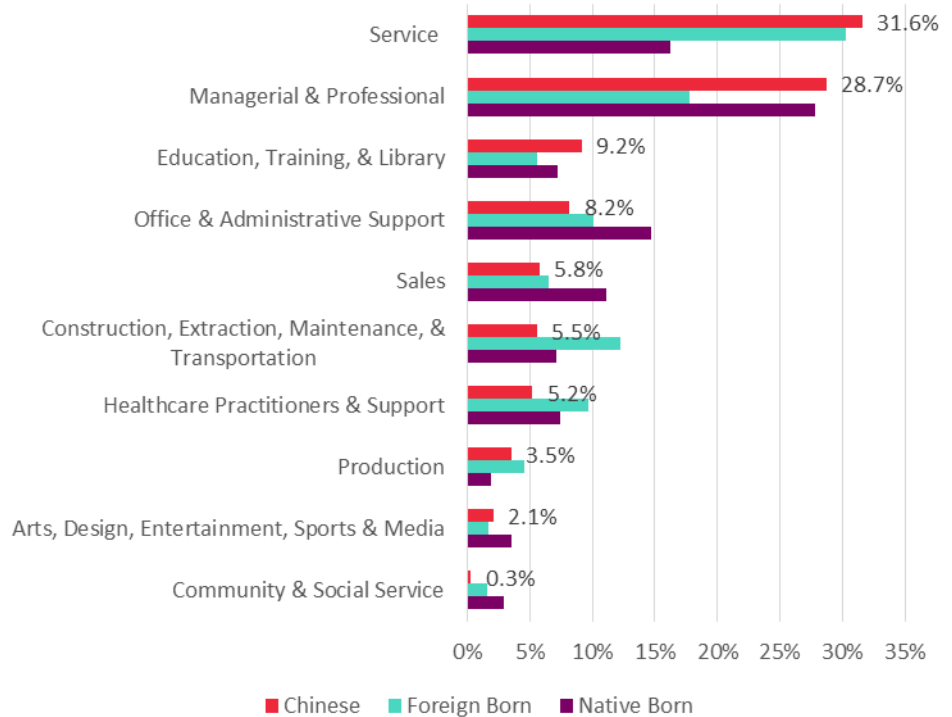
Foreign-born Chinese form two distinct groups based on education: of those over age 25, 36% have not completed high school and another 36% have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Occupations

In total, 55 percent of foreign-born Chinese participate in the labor force, compared to 68 percent for the total foreign-born and 69 percent for native-born populations of Boston.⁹ As their educational attainment suggests, foreign-born Chinese form two distinct occupational groupings: managerial/professional and service. Nearly one-third of foreign-born Chinese in the labor force work in service occupations.¹⁰ The next highest occupational category is managerial and professional (28 percent), followed by education, training and library occupations (9 percent).

Foreign-born Chinese are over-represented in the service sector compared to the native born but have similar shares compared to other foreign born. This higher level of participation in the service sector is likely driven by corresponding lower levels of educational attainment. However, unlike other foreign-born populations that are also over-represented in the service sector, they are not under-represented in managerial and professional occupations. The nearly 29 percent of foreign-born Chinese who work in managerial and professional positions is greater than the overall foreign-born average of 17 percent for this category and slightly higher than the native born.

Occupations by Nativity



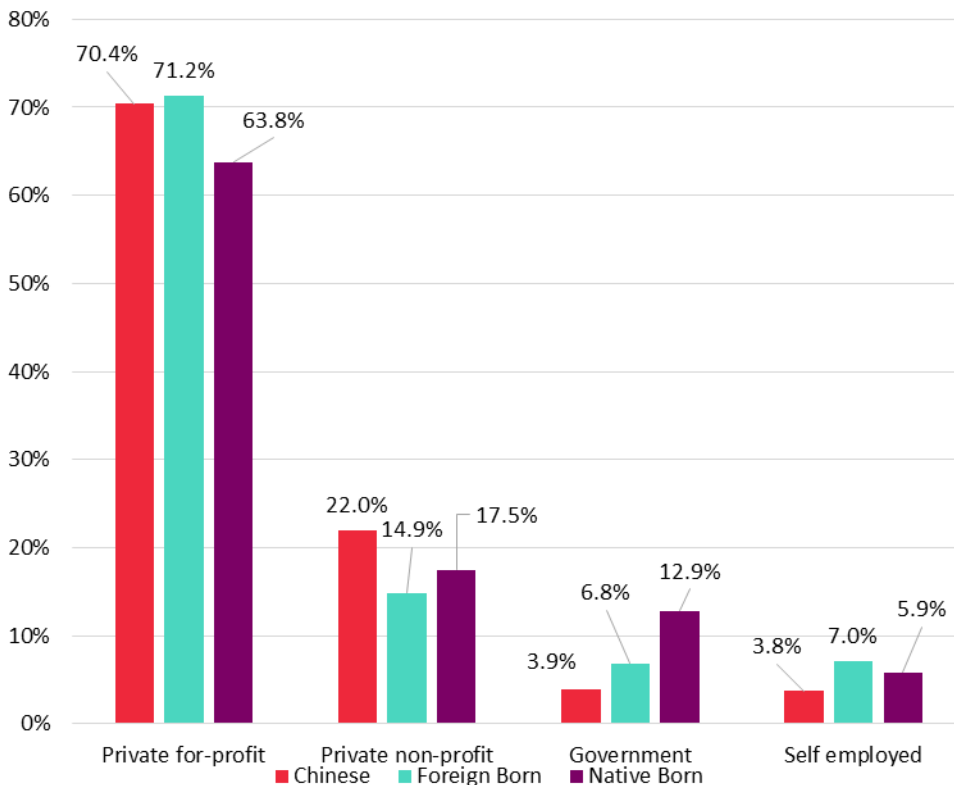
Type of Employment

An estimated 71 percent of foreign-born Chinese in Boston work for private, for-profit firms. This is similar to other foreign-born residents (excluding unpaid family members, but higher than for the native born who have greater shares working for the public sector (local, state and federal government). Approximately 22 percent of foreign-born Chinese are employed in private non-profit institutions—higher than for both the foreign-born and native-born populations.

Entrepreneurship among Boston's foreign-born Chinese population is lower than that of many foreign born groups, as an estimated 4 percent are self-employed. This is lower than the 7 percent of all foreign-born and the 6 percent of native-born residents who are self-employed.¹¹

Foreign-born Chinese are more likely to be employed in private non-profit firms than other populations.

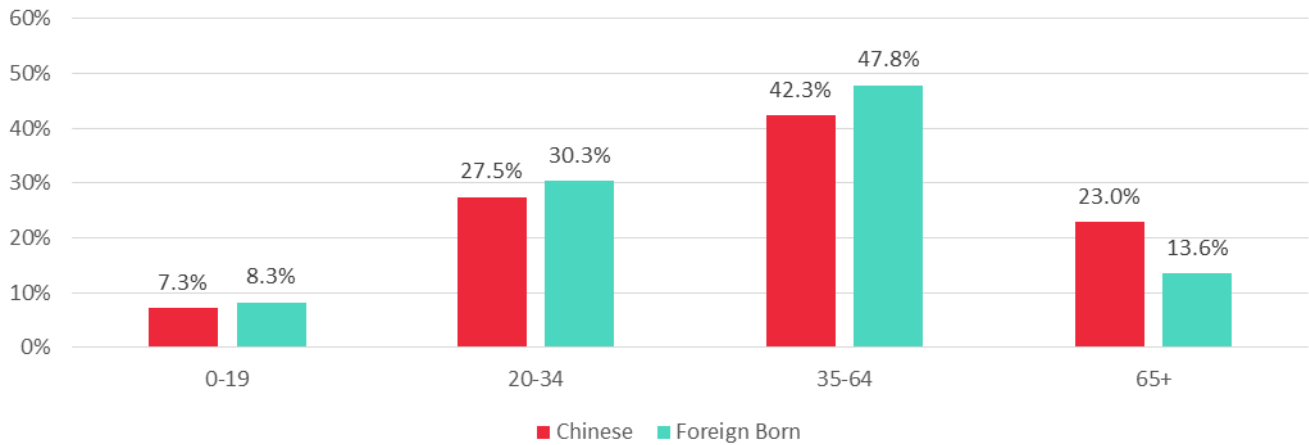
Employment by Type of Employer



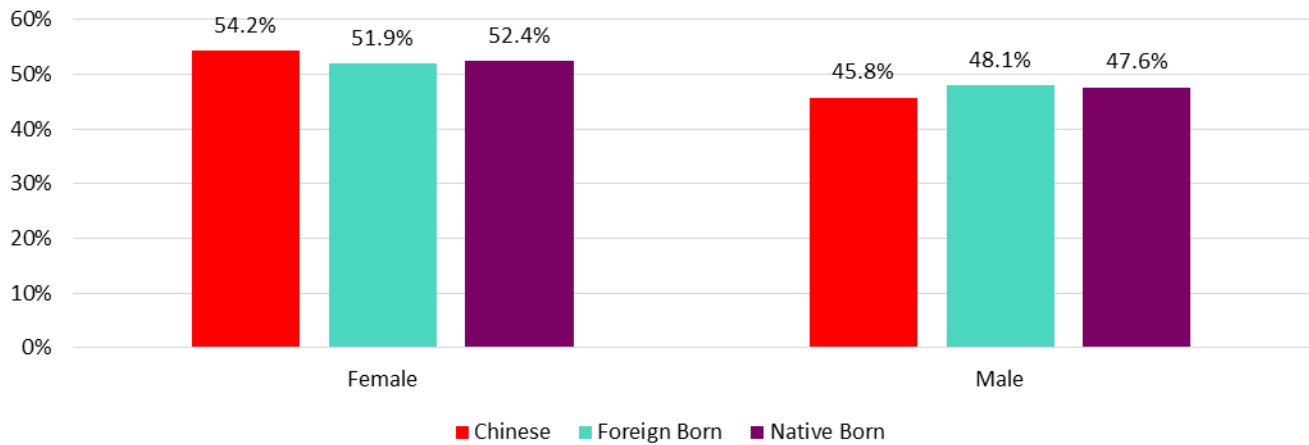
U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division

Imagine all the people: Chinese

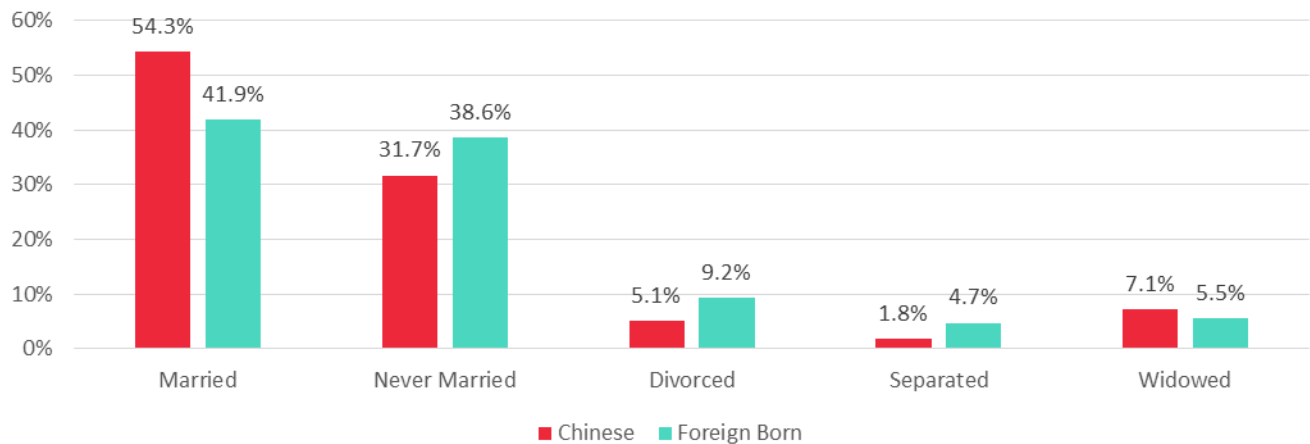
Age



Gender

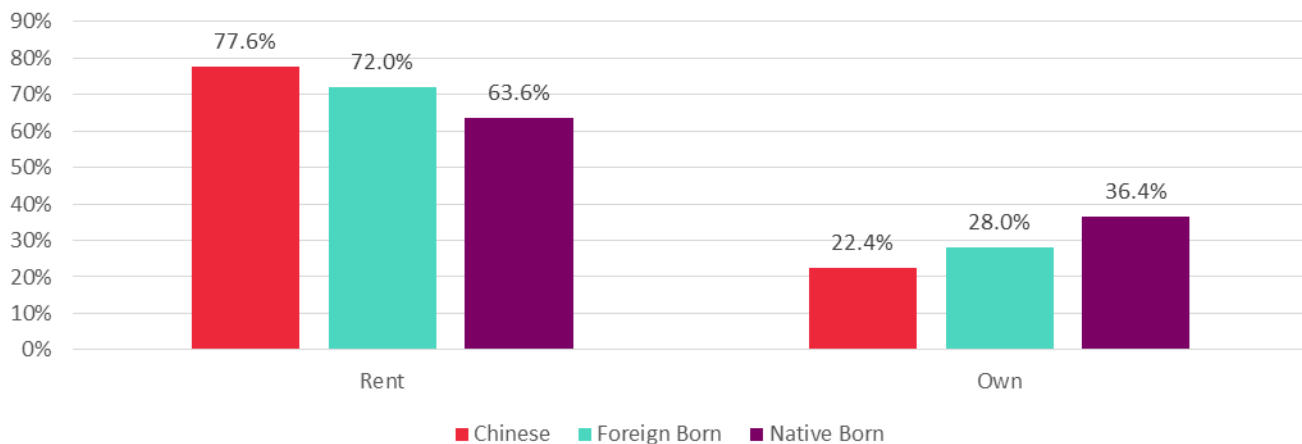


Marital Status

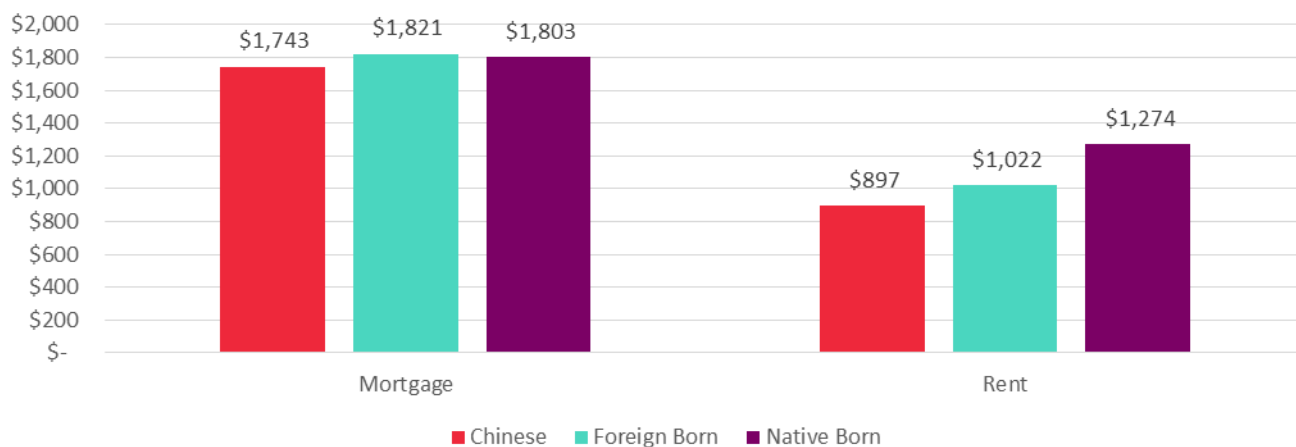


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

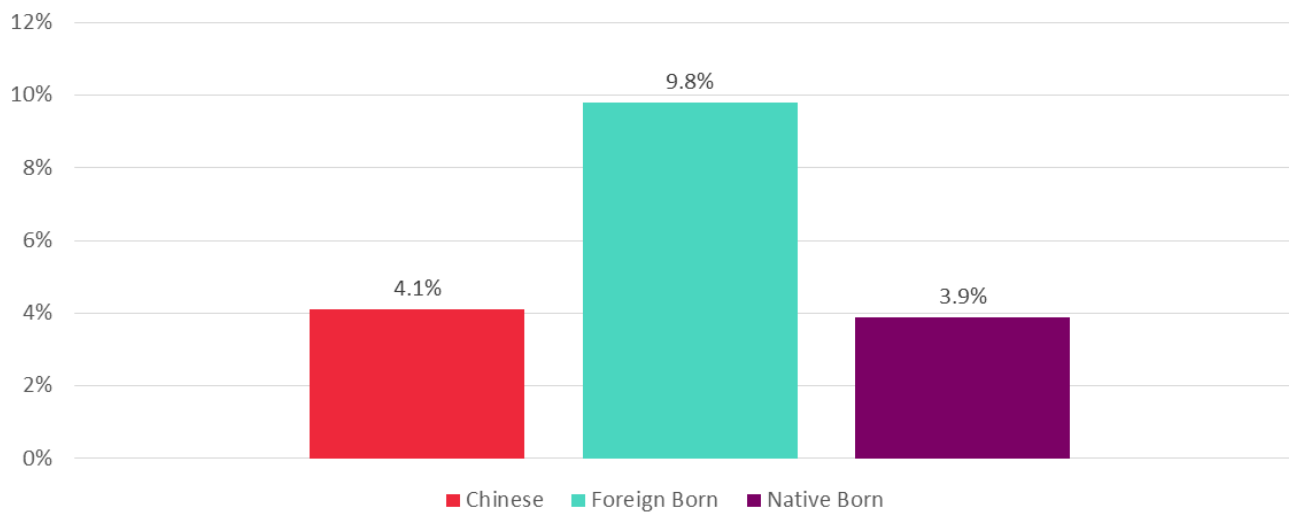
Housing Tenure*



Housing Costs*



Medical Uninsurance



*Housing data are based on the householder's country of origin.

Economic Impact

Foreign-born Chinese contribute to the local economy through their labor and consumer spending. The total value of their economic contributions were estimated using a Regional Economic Model (REMI) that calculated the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent. Foreign-born Chinese in Boston generated total expenditures of \$430 million in 2014.¹² These annual expenditures contributed over \$258 million to the regional product and generated \$14 million in state and local taxes.¹³ In total, these expenditures supported 1,800 jobs in the Massachusetts economy.¹⁴ The World Bank estimates that in 2014 Chinese remittances from the United States totaled \$16.3 billion.



Chinatown National Night Out — Don Harney



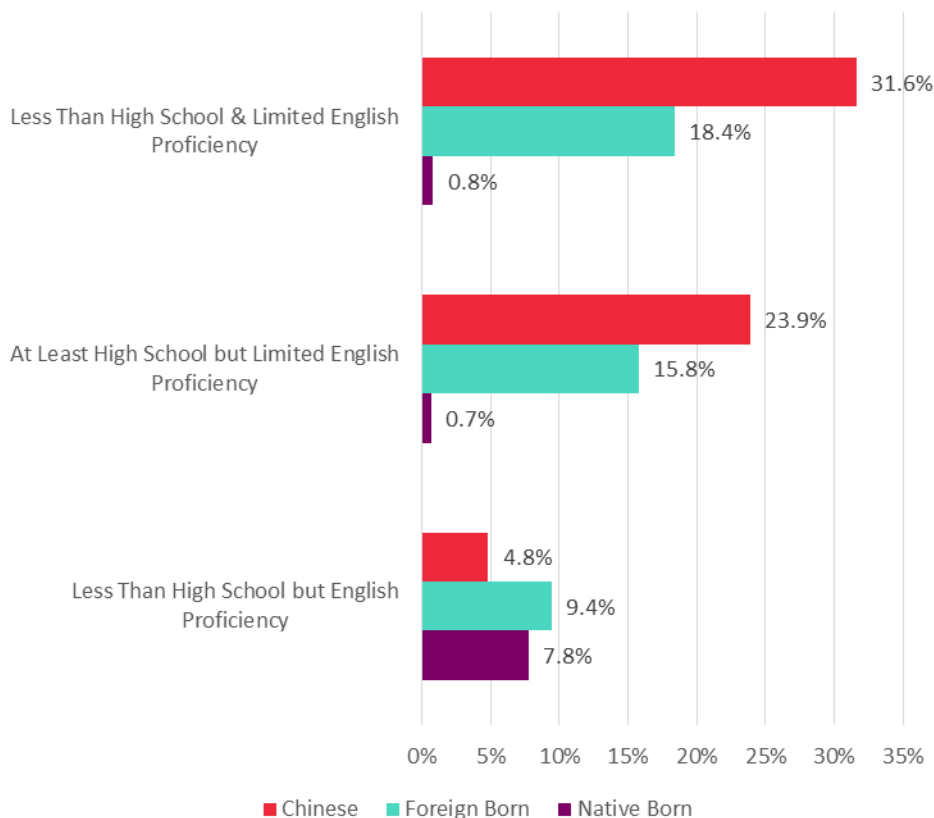
Standard of Living

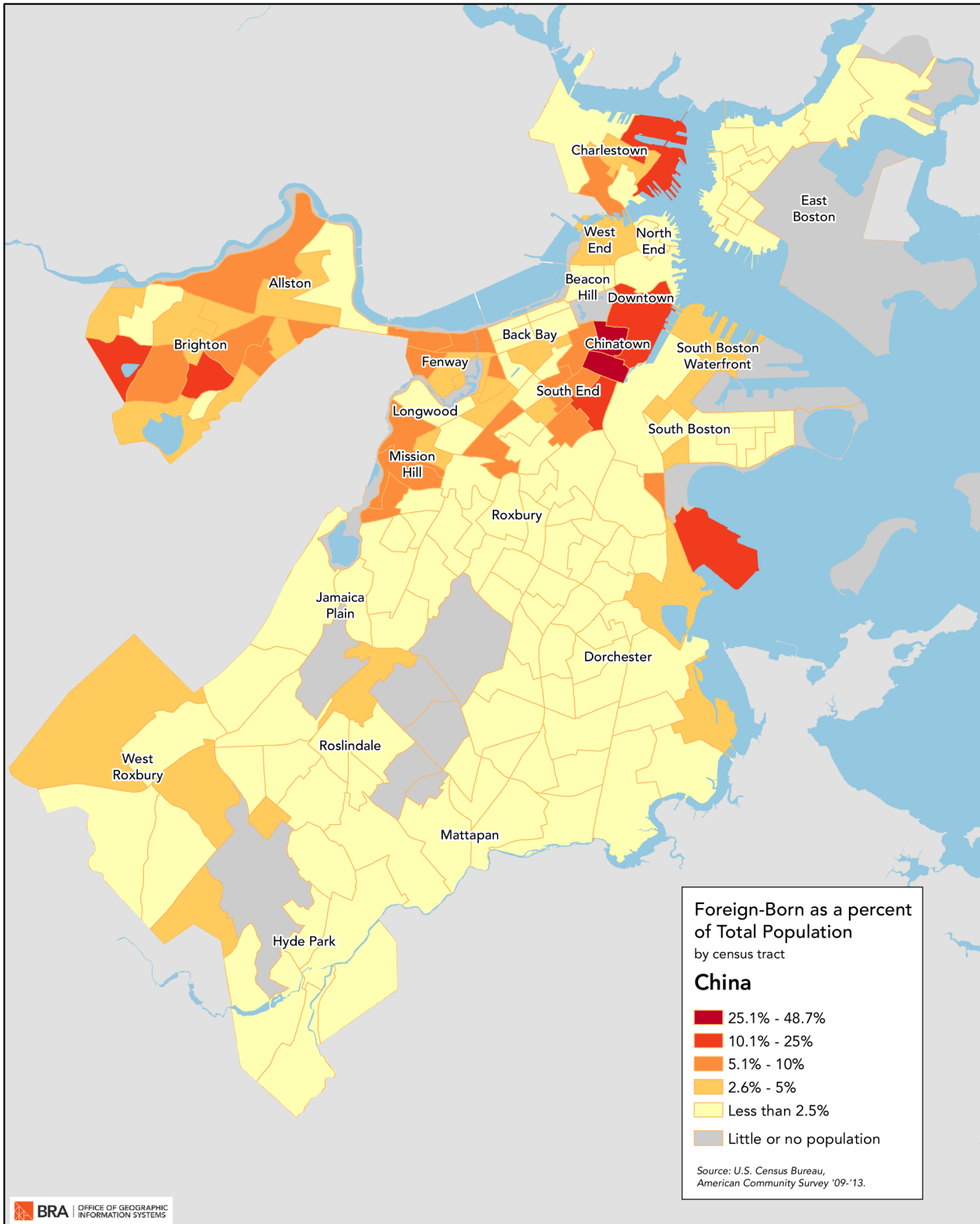
Approximately 28 percent of foreign-born Chinese have achieved a middle class standard of living, compared with 45 percent of Boston's native-born population, and 29 percent of all foreign-born residents. A family income four times the poverty level is a proxy for a middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the size and composition of the family. For a two-person family in 2014, a middle class income would be at least \$62,920.¹⁵ A greater share of foreign-born Chinese live in poverty (29 percent) than do all foreign born in Boston (22 percent).

Lower educational attainment and lack of English proficiency may contribute to this lower standard of living. While 18 percent of Boston's adult foreign-born population lack a high school diploma and have limited English proficiency, the share among foreign-born Chinese adults is 32 percent.¹⁶ Over half of foreign-born Chinese lack a high school diploma or English proficiency or both.

29% of foreign-born Chinese live in poverty.

Educational Attainment and English Proficiency Population 25 Years or Older





Children of Chinese Origin

The 2009-2013 American Community Survey estimates 3,170 children in Boston are of Chinese origin.¹⁷ Children of Chinese origin in Boston are predominately native born – 86 percent. However, 69 percent of Chinese children live with only foreign-born parent(s). In comparison, 40 percent of all Boston’s children live with only foreign-born parent(s).

Of Chinese children ages 5 to 17 with only foreign-born parent(s), about 9 percent speak only English at home, compared to 22 percent for all children with only foreign-born parent(s). These Chinese children appear to be learning English but at a lower rate than other children of foreign-born parent(s): 70 percent of Chinese children with foreign-born parent(s) speak English very well, but 76 percent of all children with only foreign-born parent(s) speak English very well.

Chinese children with foreign-born parent(s) are slightly less likely to live in poverty than other children in Boston. The federal poverty level in 2014 was \$23,850 for a 4-person household, and 25 percent of Chinese children with foreign-born parent(s) were living below the poverty level, compared to 28 percent of all children in Boston. Chinese children are also having fewer problems acquiring medical insurance. Less than 1 percent of Chinese children with foreign born parent(s) are uninsured, compared to 2 percent of all children in Boston.



Angel Performing Arts
School of Dance
2014 We are Boston Gala
Renato Castello

Conclusion

Massachusetts is a leading destination of Chinese who migrate to the United States. Foreign-born Chinese in Boston actively contribute to the economy, culture, and civic life of their new home. However, they have lower rates of labor force participation compared to other populations. Foreign-born Chinese are a diverse group. They are equally likely to have less than a high school education and to have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. Foreign-born Chinese are equally likely to work in lower wage service occupations as in higher wage managerial and professional occupations. As this dichotomy would suggest, foreign-born Chinese are equally likely to be middle class (28 percent) as they are to be living below the poverty level (29 percent).

¹The ACS is a yearly survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau intended to allow communities to see how they are changing in the years between decennial censuses. The ACS is based on a sample of the population. While the data in this document are reported as specific numbers and percentages, all results from the ACS are subject to sampling error. For more information on the ACS, please see: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>.

²The “foreign-born” population includes all people who are born outside the U.S., naturalized citizens, and non-U.S. citizens. The “native-born” population includes all people born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Island Areas and persons born abroad by American parents. Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) Research Division (2016).

³Hooper, Kate, and Batalova, Jeanne. “Chinese Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute (2015).

⁴American Community Survey, 2014, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis.

⁵American Community Survey, 2014, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis .

⁶The ACS’s American Fact Finder website reports that there are an estimated 22,236 foreign-born Chinese in Boston in 2014. However, the latest ACS, 2009-2013 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS,) data for Boston estimate the foreign-born Chinese population to be 17,388 during this period. Lower survey response rates due to language or documentation issues may result in an under count of the population.

⁷American Community Survey, 2014, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis.

⁸American Community Survey, 2009-2013, American Fact Finder, BRA Research Analysis (2016).

⁹Labor force participation is defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015.

¹⁰This analysis organizes occupations of workers into 12 categories. Managerial and Professional contains categories of Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations, Business Operations Specialists, Financial Specialists, Computer and Mathematical Occupations, Architecture and Engineering Occupations, Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations, and Legal Occupations. Healthcare Practitioners & Support contains the categories of Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations and Healthcare Support Occupations. Service Occupations contains the categories of Protective Service Occupations, Food Preparation and Serving Occupations, Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations, and Personal Care and Service Occupations. Construction, Extraction, Maintenance, and Transportation contains the categories of Construction and Extraction Occupations, Extraction Workers, Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers, and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations. Other categories consisting of Farming, Fishing, and Forestry, Military Specific, and long-term unemployed are excluded.

End Notes

¹¹There is no agreement among researchers regarding the reasons for variations in the self employment rates among different immigrant groups. Reasons cited include human and financial capital of individual immigrants, high rates of solidarity and social capital in some immigrant communities, as well as the opportunity structure encountered by immigrant entrepreneurs.

¹² 2014 Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations, BRA Research Division.

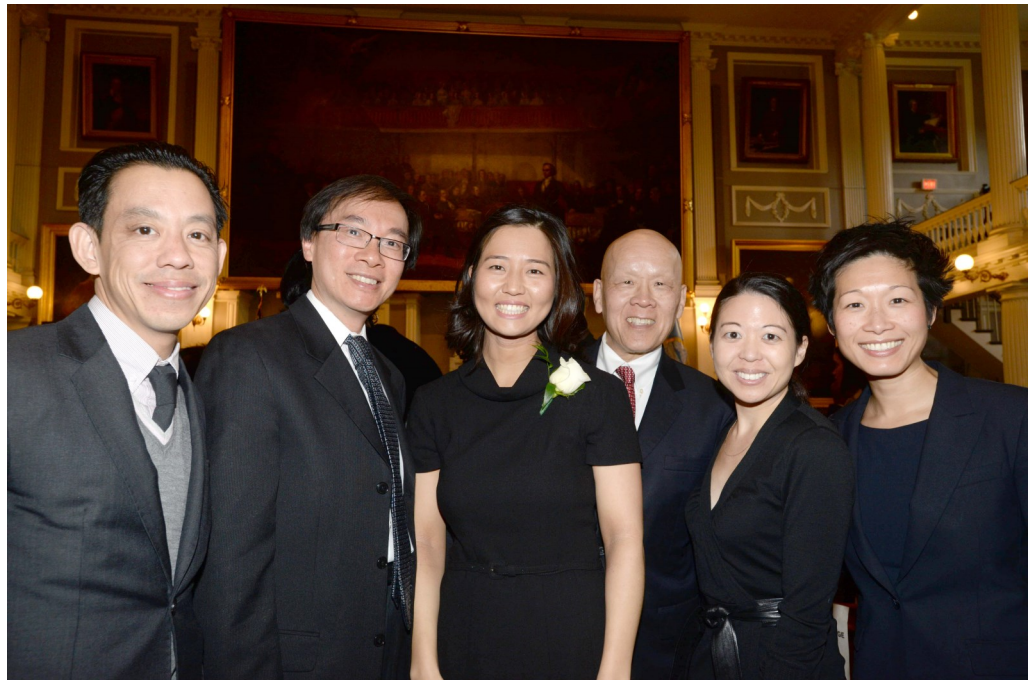
¹³ 2014 Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations, BRA Research Division.

¹⁴ 2014 Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI calculations, BRA Research Division.

¹⁵Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically. U.S. Census Bureau (2016).

¹⁶Limited English Proficiency includes foreign-born adults who do not speak English well or at all.

¹⁷Chinese origin is estimated from ancestry variables in the ACS. The ACS question on ancestry is "What is your ancestry or ethnic origin?" The response to the question allows the respondents to report one or two ancestries with which they identify. This analysis codes up to two ancestries to estimate Chinese origin. They can be Chinese, Cantonese, or Taiwanese.



Boston City Council President Michelle Wu at 2016 Inauguration ceremony at Faneuil Hall.
(Mayor's Office photo by Don Harney)



CITY OF BOSTON
Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



MAYOR'S OFFICE
FOR IMMIGRANT
ADVANCEMENT

Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston



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