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# The Backdoor and the Backlash: Campaign Finance and the Politicization of Chinese Americans

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*This paper examines the controversy about the allegedly improper and illegal campaign finance activities of Asians and Asian Americans during the 1996 election year. Using data from a 1997 Los Angeles Times poll, the paper considers how one prominently implicated ethnic group, Chinese Americans, assesses the Republican-led congressional investigations and the media coverage on this issue. Assessments about whether congressional investigations on this matter are offensive and discriminatory and whether media coverage on this matter is unfair are shaped by the political and institutional attachments Chinese Americans hold and by their immigrant/racial experiences. In particular, how Chinese Americans view opportunities in the U.S., how they view their decision to immigrate, and whether or not they experience discrimination are critical factors. The paper closes with some general points about future theory and research on Asian Pacific American mass opinion.*

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Since the fall of 1996 the political activities of Asian Pacific Americans have been pulled unexpectedly and unceremoniously into the swirl of controversy encircling the Clinton Presidency.<sup>1</sup> In the brief history of this issue, a cast of obscure characters notable hitherto only as behind-the-scenes fund-raisers — John Huang, Charlie Yah-lin Trie, Johnny Chung, Maria Hsia, Yogesh Gandhi, Eugene and Nora Lum, among others — have been thrown onto the center stage of contemporary Asian American politics. In some respects, such limelight is relatively uncharted territory for Asian Americans, who have more often been distinguished for their relative political invisibility and their inclination for political influence through backchannels like campaign contributions. In other respects, such limelight is more

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familiar terrain for Asian Americans — yet another strain of the racial resentment and nativism that has marked the history of Asians in America and, more generally, the politics and policies affecting predominantly immigrant ethnic communities at the end of the twentieth century.

As Don Nakanishi (1998) points out, the spin on the political status of Asian Americans has been almost wholly beyond the control of Asian Americans themselves as a result of the campaign finance controversy. The issue of allegedly illegal fundraising and improper influence-peddling by select Asian and Asian American donors quickly overshadowed the significant inroads that Asian American elected and appointed officials forged in the 1996 elections. The critical response from leaders within the Asian Pacific American community has been swift, but often neither unequivocal nor univocal. While some decry the anti-Asian rhetoric and practices, others decry the moral bankruptcy of our nation's electoral system, and still others decry the personal avarice of individuals like Charlie Yah Lin Trie and Johnny Chung.<sup>2</sup>

In each case, however, the Asian American leadership have noted the searing political backlash that has resulted from the campaign finance controversy. Prominently, a coalition of Asian American leaders and organizations filed a formal complaint with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in September 1997 in response to the media's coverage on this issue, the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) in-house investigations, and the Republican-led congressional investigations. Among other things, this formal complaint condemns the dubious manner of the DNC's in-house investigation and the revivification of some of the worst stereotypes about Asian Americans by the mass media and members of the House of Representatives on this issue. Importantly, while the Asian American leadership has spoken, the voices of ordinary Asian Americans are largely unheard and unknown.

The impetus behind this paper in the first instance is to “move beyond a cataloging of the slights and insults” (Watanabe 1998, 2) and to discipline the welter of public speculation and media coverage on this issue with some hard-nosed analysis. The paper is comprised of two parts. First, I review existing studies of media coverage on this issue and consider the extent to which the media is implicated in perpetuating negative representations of Asians in America. I then focus on the ethnic group that has been most visibly implicated in this controversy — U.S. residents of Chinese descent — and examine what data from a 1997 *Los Angeles Times* poll tells us about the perspectives of rank-and-file Chinese Americans on this matter. Specifically, I examine the conditions under which Chinese Americans: (1) make an explicitly negative, racialized assessment of ongoing congressional investigations; and (2) view the media's coverage on this issue to be unfair.<sup>3</sup>

## **MEDIA COVERAGE ON THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE ISSUE**

The first observation about media coverage on the allegedly illegal Asian campaign finance activities is its sheer volume and questionable content. As Ling-

chi Wang, one of the most outspoken critics of John Huang and other APAs implicated in the controversy writes, “[n]ot since the protracted national debate over whether the Chinese should be excluded from the U.S. in the 1870s and early 1880s have we seen more sustained media coverage and acrimonious debate on the so-called ‘Asian connection’” (1998b, 1). At least for the moment, stories about the heroic struggles of hard-working, “model minority” immigrants have receded in media representations of APAs, only to be replaced by unsubtle allusions to a “Yellow Peril” and “Red Peril” who are “perpetual foreigners” within U.S. borders. In an especially malignant instance of this, the *National Review* in March 1997 published a cover depicting President and Mrs. Clinton as “the Manchurian Candidates,” garbed in Chinese silk, coolie hat, and Mao cap and grinning ear-to-ear with buck teeth, slanted eyes, and other “Orientalized” characterizations.

As Helen Zia put it in *The Nation*, “[t]he images of yellow spooks at the White House, with ties to Indonesia and the post-*glasnost* Evil Empire, China, was too tempting for pundits and politicians not to exploit” (1997, 10). In a petition submitted to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, a coalition of Asian American leaders and organizations pointed an inculpatory finger at the mass media for their negative coverage on this issue. For those who have closely followed the history of Asian immigrants in the United States, media coverage on the campaign finance issue is a stark reminder of “the peculiarly American way in which the media portray [Asian Americans] as eternal foreigners, regardless of our pedigrees” (Zia 1997, 10).<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most systematic critique of media coverage on this matter to date has been Frank Wu and May Nicholson’s “Racial Aspects of Media Coverage on the John Huang Matter” (1997). Wu and Nicholson look at media coverage surrounding John Huang’s fund-raising activities between October 7th, 1996 (the date the story broke) and January 20th, 1997 (President Clinton’s inauguration) in six media outlets: the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Newsweek*. Wu and Nicholson note the following themes in the newspapers they examine:

- (1) The media assumes that John Huang represents all APAs. Huang, Riady, Trie, and others never acquired an identity in news reports as *individuals*, but rather as the Chinese, the Indonesian, or the Asian American.<sup>5</sup>
- (2) The media consistently regards race as relevant to the issue. Where sources are identified by race, it is almost always APAs, and the interests and motives of APAs are always presumed to be as *Asian Pacific Americans*.<sup>6</sup>
- (3) The media applies double (and changing) standards to APAs because APAs are scrutinized for activities that other special interests have long been complicit to.
- (4) The media pursues this issue with an ease and swiftness that reflects overreaction and evokes a long history of marking APAs as perpetual foreigners and a “Yellow Peril.”<sup>7</sup>
- (5) The media fails to distinguish between Asians and Asian Pacific Americans.

- (6) The media assumes guilt by association. Notably, by linking John Huang to Jay Kim and Charlie Trie and Michael Kojima, they assume a linkage between each of these individual cases, given by their race.
- (7) The media uses racial/cultural explanations to interpret wrongful and illegal actions. John Huang's identity is not only racialized and presumed to be Chinese rather than Chinese-American, but his actions are culturally essentialized to Chinese practices and a pan-Asian predisposition to use special favors, bribery, and political corruption as a means to political power.
- (8) The media links the issue of campaign finance to Asian immigration. The insinuation here is that the allegedly illegal fund-raising activities were pre-conditioned on expectations of extra-legal influence on immigration policies.<sup>8</sup>
- (9) The media, despite placing APAs as the ostensible subject of the congressional hearings, confers little voice or agency to APAs on the issue.
- (10) The media's editorials suggest that any critical mention of race was a misappropriation of "the race card."<sup>9</sup>

Following the observations of Wu and Nicholson and others, Lee and Hahn (1998) conducted content analysis of print media coverage to systematically assess how prevalent negative representations of Asian Americans have been. Specifically, Lee and Hahn examine the content of print media coverage from seven newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, and the *Sacramento Bee*. The content analysis codes for six dimensions of media coverage on Asians/Asian Americans concerning the campaign finance issue: (1) "invisibility" (whether or not Asian Americans are given "voice" in articles); (2) "homogeneity" (whether or not articles distinguish between constituent Asian American ethnic groups); (3) "perpetual foreigner" (whether or not articles distinguish between Asians and Asian Americans); (4) "Yellow Peril" (whether or not articles treat the allegedly illegal activities of Asians/Asian Americans as an invasive threat to U.S. democracy and the U.S. political system); (5) "cultural essentialism" (whether or not articles attribute the campaign finance activities in question to Asian "culture"); and (6) "issue synecdoche" (whether or not media coverage fails to distinguish an isolated dimension of the issue of campaign finance reform — i.e., alleged Asian/Asian American improprieties — from the more systemic issue at hand).

The results from Lee and Hahn's analysis clearly show that critics of media coverage like Wu and Nicholson are close to the mark. In more than 60 percent of the articles, no Asian Americans are quoted; in more than three-quarters of the articles, no distinctions between Asian American sub-groups are visible; in almost 60 percent of the articles, there is some insinuation of an Asian American "Yellow Peril"; and in more than two-thirds of the items, APA campaign contribution activities are equated with the issue of campaign finance reform *in toto*. Lee and Hahn also find that the tenor of media coverage becomes more heated and more editorialized as the Senate begins their hearings on campaign finance reform, that negative stereotyping is evident in both news articles and op-eds, and that media coverage

differs (usually less negative) when newspapers that have a sizeable Asian American readership (i.e., the California papers in their dataset) and when news items are written by Asian Americans.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, media coverage is not uniformly and unambiguously consistent with critics' assessments. For one thing, some negative representations are significantly less prevalent than others: references to APAs as "perpetual foreigners" is found in less than 40 percent of the news items, and the use of totalizing cultural explanations is evident in only about 10 percent of the news items. For another, although there is much historical and contemporaneous evidence that the media representations that Lee and Hahn examine *are* negative, such valenced readings of media coverage are difficult and contentious. This is especially so when imputing motive, either to individual journalists and commentators or to a singular, monolithic, hegemonic "mass media."<sup>11</sup> What's more, the consequences of such coverage depend crucially on the author and the audience.<sup>12</sup>

Even taking these necessary caveats about the reliability of content analysis into account, the account of how Asian Americans have been depicted in the mass media on the campaign finance issue is sobering indeed. This is especially so because such media coverage often presents a misleading (if not outright wrong) view of Asian Americans. For example, Lee (2000c) shows that it is Chinese American *Republicans* who are much more likely to engage in campaign contributions and that these contributors fundamentally view themselves as political and economic stakeholders within the United States (and not their countries of origin). Importantly, Lee (2000a) also shows that exposure to mass media, beliefs about the fairness of media coverage, and factual knowledge about Asian Americans play a critical role in the anti-Asian American sentiments and stereotypes that blacks, whites, and Latinos in the U.S. hold. Worse yet, these anti-Asian American sentiments and stereotypes are decisive influences on the preferences that blacks, whites, and Latinos express on policy matters that impact the Asian Pacific American community.

## ASSESSING THE CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATIONS

In what remains, our analytic gaze is inverted from media representations of APAs to the actual experiences and beliefs of Asian Americans themselves. That is, we examine how Chinese Americans assess the nation's primary social and political institutions vis-à-vis the campaign finance controversy. If media coverage on this issue is inaccurate and evokes historically negative stereotypes about Asian Americans, do Chinese Americans take umbrage? Do they view the ongoing as discriminatory and offensive? Do they assess the nation's principal social (i.e., mass media) and political (i.e., Congress) institutions through a racialized lens?

The data come from a 1997 *Los Angeles Times* (LAT) poll of Chinese Americans in Southern California.<sup>13</sup> Table 1 presents the frequency distributions for survey questions used in this paper. There are nuances to polling predominantly immigrant ethnic communities that limit what we can infer from these data. To mention just

two, the sampling of Chinese Americans in the 1997 *LAT* may not be fully representative and survey data on Asian Americans are susceptible to subtleties in the text and language of the interviews.

Such caveats warn us against accepting the results of poll data on Asian Americans too enthusiastically or uncritically (see Lee 1998 and Lee 2000a).

**TABLE 1. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF VARIABLES**

Variable	Percent
<i>Demographics</i>	
Age: 18–29	25
Age: 30–44	36
Age: 45–64	21
Age: 65 or older	18
Female	52
Education: high school or less	37
Education: some college	15
Education: college graduate or higher	48
Income: < \$20,000/year	21
Income: \$20,000 to \$40,000/year	31
Income: \$40,000 to \$60,000/year	21
Income: more than \$60,000/year	28
<i>Generation</i>	
Immigrant	87
Second generation	10
Third generation	2
Fourth generation	1
<i>Political status<sup>f</sup></i>	
Citizen	72
Registered Democrat	21
Registered Republican	22
Registered Independent, other party	20
Not registered	31
<i>Political Contributions</i>	
Does contribute	15
Does not contribute	85
<i>Sincerity of congressional hearings on campaign finance</i>	
Sincere	13
Partisan politics	75
Both	13
<i>Congressional hearings offensive</i>	
Offensive	47
Neutral	18
Not offensive	35
<i>Congressional hearings discriminatory</i>	
Discriminatory	52
Not discriminatory	48
<i>Attentiveness to issue in media</i>	
Closely following	46
Not closely following	54
<i>Fairness of media coverage</i>	
Very unfair	7

Somewhat unfair	46
Somewhat fair	34
Very fair	13
<i>Ethnic community center</i>	
Importance of Chinatown	41
Importance of San Gabriel Valley	58
<i>Opportunity structure facing Chinese Americans in Southern California</i>	
Very good	13
Good	71
Bad	14
Very bad	1
<i>Personal experience with discrimination</i>	
Great deal	1
Fair amount	9
Not much	48
Not at all	42
<i>Experienced discrimination in institutional settings</i> (38)	
In jobs or promotion	33
In education	10
In housing	4
In dealing with government agencies	13
In dealing with a business or retail agency	30
<i>Experienced discrimination in informal settings</i> (28)	
From neighbors	8
From strangers	30
During language or cultural misunderstandings	24
<i>Language preference for interview</i>	
Cantonese or Mandarin	55
English	45

*Data: 1997 LAT Survey #396.* Cell entries are weighted frequencies. Percentages for questions with mutually exclusive categories may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding error. The margin of sampling error is  $\pm 4$  percentage points. Percentages in parentheses for experiences with discrimination in institutional/informal setting reflects the percentage of all respondents who report such an experience.

† Voter registration and party identification asked only of citizen respondents.

‡ Asked only of respondents who were not born in the United States.

These caveats notwithstanding, survey data on Asian Americans remain singularly rare and the *LAT* survey is the *only* poll in the two year history of the campaign finance issue in which Asian Americans themselves have been interviewed.<sup>14</sup> As Asian Americans rapidly emerge into the political limelight and as that limelight suspectingly glares back at Asian Americans, a clearer understanding of how the Asian American mass public negotiates such precarious racial currents is increasingly urgent. What's more, the *LAT* has a proven commitment to understanding Asian American mass opinion, having conducted surveys of other Asian American ethnic groups — Filipino Americans, Korean Americans, and Vietnamese Americans — as well as a multi-racial survey of attitudes about Asian Americans in Southern California.<sup>15</sup>

Turning to the data itself, Table 1 shows that Chinese Americans take a somewhat negative, but divided, view of the congressional proceedings. About 57 percent of respondents who are not undecided find the investigations offensive and

52 percent of respondents find the hearings discriminatory. This skepticism extends in respondents' evaluations of the institutions involved in this affair as well. Fully 75 percent of respondents view the investigations as insincere and purely partisan, while 52 percent of respondents decry the unfairness of media coverage on this issue.

Taken at face value, these marginal frequencies suggest a discernibly racialized response. Sociologists like Portes and Bach (1985) and Portes and Rumbaut (1996) have carefully detailed the multiple pathways toward the "reactive formation" of ethnic identity and solidarity. Such studies, notably suggest that a politicized ethnic identity often follows generational changes as predominantly immigrant ethnic groups face everyday insults and more coordinated nativist campaigns in a society that remains deeply divided by social markers like race, gender, class, and citizenship status. Portes and Rumbaut thus argue that such "ethnic resilience is a uniquely American product because it has seldom reflected linear continuity with the immigrants' culture, but rather has emerged in reaction to the situation, views, and discrimination they faced on arrival" (1996, 95). A focal public event like the campaign finance controversy that places a predominantly immigrant ethnic group under attack, then, might plausibly evoke a racialized response among in-group members.<sup>16</sup>

What we make of the campaign finance controversy and its long-term impact on racial politics in the United States, however, depends vitally on what form this racialized response takes. On this point, more recent works by Lopez and Espiritu (1992) and Kibria (1997) suggest that ethnic resilience and assimilationism present a false choice, and that "panethnic" racial formations, like the category of "Asian American," are increasingly a third option. That is, even if Asians in America do pull together in response to events like the campaign finance controversy, it matters whether they do so as Asian Americans or as members of particularistic ethnic sub-groups. Generally, evidence for an overarching Asian American "panethnicity" is modest and isolated. But as Espiritu (1992) shows, where pan-Asian formations do occur, they often do so as a manifestation of "reactive solidarity" in response to anti-Asian incidents.<sup>17</sup>

In contemporary politics, evidence that link such a panethnic formulation to political opinions and policy preferences is unremarkable (Conway and Lien 1997; Lien 1997a). In addition, unlike African Americans (or, to a lesser extent, Latinos), Asian Americans split their loyalties fairly evenly between the Democratic and Republican parties and between political liberalism and conservatism (Cain, Kiewiet, and Uhlaner 1991; Ong and Nakanishi 1996). And on issues directly affecting the Asian Americans as a group, such as affirmative action, welfare reform, immigration policy, and California's referendum initiatives, there is often no distinguishable bloc voting among Asian Americans (Lee 2000a). Thus Asian Americans appear to many to be better situated to play a strategic role as a "swing vote" rather than an active role in a progressive, multiracial Democratic coalition (Nakanishi 1991).

A key insight to note in considering this welter of evidence is that most Asian ethnic sub-groups in the U.S. are predominantly immigrant. Fully 85 percent of

respondents to the 1997 *LAT* poll are foreign-born. The strength of Asian ethnic or pan-Asian ties, the degree of Asian American political mobilization, and the contours of Asian American political preferences are thus transient and rapidly evolving matters. As Lin and Jamal (1997) note, predominantly immigrant groups present an almost ideal “natural experiment” for the study of political socialization. We should not, then, either wishfully accept the idea of a fixed, unitary, homogeneous “Asian American” political identity or presume that the absence of such an identity at present implies the impossibility of such a conception in the future.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, research on Asian American mass opinion would do well to examine the conditions under which Asian Americans do view an issue or event through a racial/immigrant lens.

In this section, then, I examine whether or not the campaign finance controversy is just such an instance for Chinese Americans in Southern California.<sup>19</sup> The 1997 *LAT* allows us to test the impact of factors such as one’s immigrant status, one’s evaluations of political institutions, the mass media, and indigenous community institutions, one’s level of political awareness, one’s personal experience with racism, and one’s personal views about immigrating to the U.S. on assessments of the congressional investigations. The dependent variable is whether or not respondents, as Chinese Americans, view the congressional investigations as discriminatory. This measure simultaneously captures respondents’ views on campaign finance, the nation’s political institutions, and anti-Asian discrimination.

The explanatory variables begin with age, educational level, family income, and gender. Again these measures examine if sociodemographic and economic cleavages shape assessments of the congressional hearings. With a predominantly immigrant population such as Chinese Americans, however, there are more explicit generational and time-dependent sociodemographic differences to consider. As with the model of political contributions, second and third generation respondents are distinguished from immigrant Chinese, and I include a measure of the number of years lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident. As noted earlier, a plausible expectation from sociological accounts is that second and third generation Chinese Americans will exhibit a stronger sense of “ethnic resilience” and thus voice opposition to the congressional hearings (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

The expectation that generation *per se* predicts one’s attitudes leaves open the question of *how* it does so. As Wong (1999) compellingly demonstrates, properly understanding the effect of generational change on the political attitudes of Asian Americans is crucial. In this paper, I compare the effect of generation *per se* against several measures that might describe what happens over the course of generations. Specifically, I consider the immigrant experiences, racial predispositions, and institutional attachments that might capture the political socialization that Chinese Americans undergo across generations in the United States.

I first consider the respondents’ political status and institutional ties. Citizenship and partisanship, again, measure one’s chosen political identity. How citizenship is likely to affect one’s view of congressional investigations is uncertain, but if that citizenship has an ethnic component (i.e., as a Chinese American, or Asian

American), then it may predict a negative view. Given the ostensibly partisan nature of this issue (i.e., the Republican leadership has largely initiated aggressive investigations and pushed for the appointment of an independent counsel), Chinese Americans' views on the discriminatory nature of the investigations may split down party lines as well. Additionally, partisanship also gauges the extent to which attachments to mainstream political institutions in themselves yield distinct viewpoints on this issue (i.e., by comparing respondents who register with either party against respondents who do not register with a political party).<sup>20</sup>

Along these lines, I also consider the impact of another mainstream institution, the mass media. Respondents are asked whether or not they follow the allegations of illegal Asian American fundraising in the media closely or not. At first blush, media attention ought to indicate the influence of the media's information or interpretations on respondents' opinions. Close attention to media coverage on this issue might simply reflect differences in respondent political awareness, however. Such respondents may be more generally knowledgeable about politics or be more invested in the outcome of political matters. Thus media attention may not reflect anything about media exposure *per se*, but rather, it may reflect respondent characteristics.<sup>21</sup> A second media variable is the respondent's assessments of the media as an institution itself. Specifically, respondents are asked whether or not they consider the mass media's coverage of the Asian American campaign contributions issue as fair or unfair.<sup>22</sup> The expectations here are fairly clear: if respondents view media coverage as unfair, they are more likely to take a dim view of ongoing investigations; if they view the coverage as essentially fair, then they might be more tolerant of ongoing investigations.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to these measures of mainstream institutions, I consider the influence of indigenous institutions and social ties.<sup>24</sup> The particular measure here is whether or not respondents value ethnic centers like Chinatown or San Gabriel Valley (home to Monterey Park).<sup>25</sup> The importance of an ethnic center not only captures the influence of institutional and social ties to a physical Chinese American community, but also indirectly estimates the impact of ethnic group consciousness.<sup>26</sup>

Thus far, our explanatory variables assess respondents' immigrant and racialized experiences only obliquely. The last set of variables take a more direct look at the immigrant-based and racialized worldviews of respondents. First, I consider whether personal experience with discrimination makes one more likely to view the congressional investigations as discriminatory. Here two distinct contexts of experience with discrimination are examined: discrimination in institutional settings and discrimination in informal, social interactions. Discrimination in institutional settings pools together respondents who report discriminatory experiences in employment decisions (getting a job or being promoted in existing jobs), in education, in housing, in interactions with government agencies, and in business or retail transactions. Discrimination in informal settings is comprised of respondents who report discrimination in their interactions with neighbors, strangers, or as a result of linguistic and cultural misunderstandings. Because these measures are self-reported,

the actual circumstances of a given incident might be reported by one individual as institutional racism and another as informal discrimination. This aside, what clearly differs across these individuals is the *ex post* interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

Keeping this in mind, I expect respondents who report racism in institutional settings to perceive the ongoing investigations as discriminatory. There ought to be a connection between having personally experienced discrimination in events where civil rights protections are expected and one's interpretation of the congressional hearings. What about discrimination in informal settings? One possibility is that, even in these settings, there will be a positive relationship. Another is that there might be no relationship at all, since it is a much more situational, individualized, *apolitical* view about the context of ethnic discrimination. Perhaps the most intriguing possibility, however, is that there will be a negative, *opposite* relationship. If respondents willfully (perhaps even ideologically) choose to interpret discriminatory incidents as situational, individual, and *apolitical*, then they might *more* willingly view the congressional investigations as non-discriminatory and inoffensive.

In addition to experience with anti-Asian discrimination, I also test the effects of whether or not respondents view racism as a barrier to the well-being of Chinese Americans. In this question, racism is compared to language, culture, integration into mainstream society, and adequate job training as possible impediments to the success of Chinese Americans. Regardless of one's personal experience with discrimination, I expect that respondents who view discrimination as a general problem for Chinese Americans will be more likely to view the congressional hearings as discriminatory.

More generally, I include an attitudinal measure of one's immigrant experience. How a respondent evaluates her personal decision to immigrate may shape how she evaluates political events like the campaign finance controversy. The key hypothesis here is that respondents who report that "life here in the United States [has] turned out better than you expected" might interpret even contradictory events in the best possible light, and therefore take a more conciliatory, positive view of the ongoing investigations.

Lastly, two language-related measures are included to assess the role that language plays in shaping one's immigrant experience and political socialization. As I intimated earlier, the language in which interviews are conducted may significantly and systematically influence the answers that respondents give to questions. Here, we directly test whether a non-English interview makes a difference in one's assessments of the congressional hearings. To the extent that comfort with a Chinese dialect may imply a greater sense of ethnic resilience, we may expect respondents interviewed in Mandarin or Cantonese to be more likely to see the investigations as discriminatory. To rule out the possibility that respondents may choose to be interviewed in a Chinese dialect simply because of greater proficiency in a non-English language or greater everyday use of Chinese dialects, I control for respondents' degree of "language segregation" — an additive index of respon-

dents' use of a Chinese dialect in everyday encounters (at home, at work, and in commercial transactions).<sup>28</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are shown in Table 2. For the most part, sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors appear not to influence whether Chinese Americans view the congressional hearings as discriminatory. The two salient exceptions are respondent age and length of permanent residence in the United States (among immigrant respondents). The fact that older Chinese Americans are less likely to see discrimination is generally consistent with Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan's

**TABLE 2. ARE CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATIONS DISCRIMINATORY?**

*Dependent variable:* "As you may know, Congress is investigating alleged illegal campaign contributions by Asian nationals to President Clinton's reelection campaign in 1996, as well as some congressional election campaigns. The congressional committees are looking primarily at contributions made by donors who have Asian sounding names for any illegal donations ... Do you think this is a form of discrimination against Asians in this country?"

Variable	Coefficients	(std. errors)	Mean of X <sub>i</sub>
Age	-.017	(.005)**	40.34
Educational Level	0.092	(.064)	3.47
Family Income	-.016	(.042)	5.02
Female	0.119	(.143)	0.34
U.S. Citizen	0.111	(.201)	0.77
Democrat	0.063	(.195)	0.19
Republican	-.112	(.188)	0.22
Ideology	0.065	(.067)	2.99
Second Generation	-.379	(.258)	0.24
Years in U.S. as Permanent Resident	0.022	(.009)*	10.32
Issue-specific Media Attention	0.075	(.073)	2.49
Fairness of Media Coverage	0.268	(.065)**	3.07
Importance of Ethnic Center	0.083	(.048)^	3.96
Exp. Institutional Discrimination	0.325	(.098)**	0.56
Exp. Situational Discrimination	-.130	(.131)	0.36
Racism as Barrier to Chinese Americans	0.550	(.222)**	0.12
Satisfied with life in U.S.   Immigrant	-.264	(.092)**	1.61
Language of Interviewer Effect	0.425	(.189)*	0.38
Language Segregation	0.051	(.103)	1.16
Constant	-1.24	(.523)	
Number of Observations	417		
Restricted log-likelihood	-289.01		
Goodness of fit ( $\chi^2$ )	87.05		
McFadden's pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.151		
Percent correctly predicted	68.1	(H <sub>0</sub> =49.4)	

*Data:* 1997 LAT Survey #396. Cell entries are maximum likelihood probit parameter estimates and their corresponding standard errors in parentheses. \*\* = p<.01; \* = p<.05; ^ =p<.10.

**TABLE 3. PREDICTED PROBABILITIES: CONGRESS DISCRIMINATORY**

Variables of interest	Probability Estimate	Probability Ratio	Probability Difference
<i>Years in U.S. as permanent resident</i> †			
μ - σ (=0 years)	.422		
μ (≈10 years)	.512	1.21	.090
μ + σ (≈24 years)	.637	1.51	.215
<i>Fairness of Media Coverage</i>			
Very fair	.299		
Somewhat fair	.398	1.33	.099
Not sure	.504	1.69	.205
Somewhat unfair	.610	2.04	.311
Very unfair	.708	2.37	.409
<i>Experiences w/Institutional Discrimination</i>			
None	.439		
One context	.568	1.29	.129
Two contexts	.690	1.57	.251
Three or more contexts	.794	1.81	.355
<i>Racism as Barrier to Chinese Americans</i>			
Disagree	.485		
Agree	.696	1.44	.211
<i>Satisfied with Life in U.S. as Immigrant</i>			
Better than Expected	.368		
As Expected	.471	1.28	.103
Worse than Expected	.576	1.57	.208
Not immigrant	.676	1.84	.308
<i>Language of Interview</i>			
English	.447		
Cantonese or Mandarin	.618	1.38	.171

*Data:* 1997 LAT Survey #396. Predicted probabilities are calculated for each measure of interest by holding all other explanatory variables at their mean values. See Greene (1997).

† Partial effects of number of years in the U.S. as a permanent resident are calculated as standard deviations from the mean number of years (approximately 14 years in the U.S.). Since the distribution is skewed to the right, the lower bound is taken at zero.

(1998) findings on age and racial attitudes. Among Chinese immigrants to the U.S., however, this effect is offset by the number of years of permanent residence.

To infer magnitude of the statistically significant relationships in Table 2, Table 3 shows predicted probabilities calculated relative to a hypothetical “mean” respondent. By this calculus, Table 3 shows that immigrant Chinese who have lived in the U.S. for 24 years are about 22 percent more likely to view the congressional investigations as discriminatory than newly arrived Chinese immigrants to the U.S.

Importantly, generation *per se* appears to bear no effect on whether Chinese Americans view the congressional hearings as discriminatory. If anything, the effect is likely to be opposite, where second and third generation Chinese Americans are actually more likely to view the issue as not discriminatory. As the results in the model suggest, it is immigrant-specific, racialized experiences and beliefs that occur

across generations and over one's tenure in the United States that most forcefully condition how Chinese Americans assess this issue.

While attachments to dominant political institutions in itself may not predict assessments on the campaign finance controversy, this by no means implies that institutions play no role in shaping respondents' opinions. Respondents' who judge the media coverage on the campaign contributions issue as unfair are much more likely to view the congressional hearings as discriminatory. Table 3 shows this as the strongest effect on respondents' assessments. Chinese Americans who perceive the media coverage to be fundamentally unfair are fully 40 percent more likely to view the congressional hearings as discriminatory than their counterparts who see the media's coverage as very fair.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, respondents who value ethnic centers like Chinatown and San Gabriel Valley are somewhat more likely to see the investigations as offensive and discriminatory. As suggested earlier, this result tips off the impact of indigenous institutions and social ties on the assessments of Chinese Americans. It also weakly and indirectly supports the general link between ethnic group consciousness and one's views on the campaign contributions issue.

The remaining measures of Chinese Americans' immigrant-based, racialized opinions all show striking results. To begin, experience with discrimination plays a significant role in shaping assessments of the congressional hearings, but not uniformly so. Rather, the context and personal interpretation of that experience may actually lead to opposite effects. Respondents who report personal experiences with discrimination in at least one institutional context are 13 percent more likely than those who report no such experiences to view the congressional investigations as discriminatory. Respondents who report such experiences in three or more institutional contexts are more than 35 percent more likely to view the congressional investigations as discriminatory. By contrast, reporting personal experiences with discrimination in informal settings may have no effect on their views about the campaign contributions issue. If anything, such experiences in informal settings appear to make respondents *less* likely to see any discrimination in the issue.<sup>30</sup>

Moving from personal experience to attitudes, respondents' views about barriers facing Chinese Americans and their narratives about immigrating to the U.S. significantly shape their views on the congressional hearings. Respondents who view structural racism against Chinese Americans are about 21 percent more likely to find the hearings discriminatory than those who see no such structural barriers. Respondents who find life as an immigrant in the United States worse than expected are also about 21 percent more likely to see discrimination than those who find life in the U.S. better than expected.

Lastly, the results in Tables 2 and 3 bolster the potential import of the language in which surveys of predominantly immigrant ethnic communities are conducted. Respondents who are interviewed in Mandarin or Cantonese are fully 17 percent more likely to find the congressional hearing discriminatory than respondents interviewed in English. This finding intimates that language-of-interview is not simply a question of measurement error or a matter of language proficiency (note that

everyday language use is controlled for). Rather, language-of-interview may alter responses significantly and in a politically meaningful way.<sup>31</sup> That is, interviews conducted in a Chinese dialect appear to result in different conversations than interviews conducted in English. Thus prior studies based on data from surveys that interview exclusively in English may miss important dimensions of Asian American opinion.<sup>32</sup>

**TABLE 4. ARE THE CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATIONS OFFENSIVE?**

*Dependent Variable:* "As you may know, Congress is investigating alleged illegal campaign contributions by Asian nationals to President Clinton's reelection campaign in 1996, as well as some congressional election campaigns. The congressional committees are looking primarily at contributions made by donors who have Asian sounding names for any illegal donations ... Are you offended or not offended by these congressional committees investigating campaign contributions primarily from donors with Asian sounding names, even if that investigation might get at contributions made illegally?"

Variable	Coefficients	(std. errors)	Mean of $X_i$
Age	-.005	(.004)	41.52
Educational Level	0.046	(.048)	3.42
Family Income	-.006	(.032)	4.87
Female	0.201	(.106) <sup>^</sup>	0.36
U.S. Citizen	0.189	(.140)	0.76
Democrat	0.022	(.139)	0.19
Republican	-.184	(.139)	0.22
Ideology	0.051	(.052)	3.01
Second Generation	-.366	(.199) <sup>^</sup>	0.21
Years in U.S. as Permanent Resident	0.001	(.004)	10.97
Issue-specific Media Attention	0.245	(.057)**	2.42
Fairness of Media Coverage	0.189	(.049)**	3.07
Importance of Ethnic Center	0.90	(.037)*	3.98
Exp. Institutional Discrimination	0.253	(.075)**	0.57
Exp. Situational Discrimination	-.140	(.098)	0.34
Racism as Barrier to Chinese-Ams	-.117	(.171)	0.12
Satisfied with life in U.S.   Immigrant	-.110	(.070)	1.67
Language of Interviewer Effect	0.179	(.143)	0.42
Language Segregation	-.099	(.078)	1.20
$\mu(0)$	-.544	(.384)	
$\mu(1)$	0.596	(.061)	
$\mu(2)$	1.263	(.078)	
$\mu(3)$	2.383	(.109)	
Number of Observations	476		
Restricted log-likelihood	-742.32		
McFadden's pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.058		
Goodness of fit ( $\chi^2$ )	85.95		

*Data:* 1997 LAT Survey #396. Cell entries are maximum likelihood ordered probit parameter estimates with corresponding standard errors in parentheses. \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ ; <sup>^</sup> =  $p < .10$ .

Taken together, the above results make a powerful case that one's particular immigrant experience — specifically, the racial/ethnic content of that experience — plays a vital role in how Chinese Americans evaluate Congress on the issue of Asian American campaign finance improprieties. The racial, immigrant cast on this issue is evident even when respondents are asked whether the congressional investigations are offensive (that is, absent the explicit mention of racial discrimination). Table 4 shows this question modeled with the same set of explanatory measures as in Table 2. Respondents' views on racism as a barrier to opportunity loses its statistical significance, and the effects of respondents' satisfaction with life in the U.S. and the language-of-interview fades to a faint suggestion. That said, personal experience with discrimination and the perceived importance of ethnic centers retain a significant, strong sway.

**TABLE 5. IS MEDIA COVERAGE ON THIS ISSUE UNFAIR?**

*Dependent variable:* "Do you think television and the press and magazine and radio are covering the news of alleged illegal contributions made by Asian nationals to the president's reelection campaign fairly or unfairly? (IF FAIRLY OR UNFAIRLY) Do you think it is very (fairly/unfairly) or only somewhat (fairly/unfairly)?"

Variable	Coefficients	(std. errors)	Mean of X <sub>i</sub>
Age	0.008	(.003)*	42.13
Educational Level	0.007	(.047)	3.42
Family Income	0.018	(.031)	4.83
Female	-.559	(.107)	0.38
Democrat	0.064	(.145)	0.18
Republican	-.527	(.133)	0.21
U.S. Citizen	0.130	(.145)	0.76
Issue-specific Media Attention	0.126	(.056)*	2.43
Cynicism re Sincerity of Congress	0.237	(.069)**	1.48
Second Generation	0.127	(.148)	0.20
Years in U.S. as Permanent Resident	0.004	(.004)	11.16
Racism as Barrier to Chinese Ams	-.113	(.142)	0.12
Exp. Institutional Discrimination	0.158	(.067)**	0.53
Exp. Situational Discrimination	0.102	(.093)	0.32
Oppt'y Structure Facing Chinese Ams	-.167	(.101)^	3.01
Language of Interviewer Effect	0.393	(.122)**	0.45
μ(0)	0.749	(.434)	
μ(1)	1.347	(.101)	
μ(2)	2.112	(.109)	
μ(3)	3.220	(.124)	
Number of Observations	508		
Restricted log-likelihood	-730.07		
Goodness of fit (χ <sup>2</sup> )	66.77		
McFadden's pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.046		

*Data:* 1997 LAT Survey #396. Cell entries are maximum likelihood ordered probit parameter estimates with corresponding standard errors in parentheses. \*\* = p<.01; \* = p<.05; ^ = p<.10.

This net can be cast even wider to consider whether a racial, immigrant account holds with assessments of a non-governmental institution on this issue. Specifically, I examine whether or not respondents view the media coverage (defined as “television and the press and magazine and radio”) on the campaign finance issue as fair or unfair. Table 5 specifies a model that basically replicates the explanatory variables in Tables 2 and 4, but differs in two important respects.

First, I examine whether respondents who take a cynical view toward the nation’s political institutions — measured by whether or not Congress on this issue has been insincere and purely partisan — also view the mass media as unfair. Second, I look at whether respondents who affirm the basic fairness of the opportunity structure in the U.S. towards Chinese Americans also affirm the basic fairness of the mass media on the campaign contributions issue. The rationale in the first instance is that respondents’ views about one kind of institution may extend to the mass media. The rationale in the second instance is that respondents’ views about fairness in one context may extend to their views about the fairness of the mass media.

The results, shown in Table 5, are mostly consistent with the story on respondent assessments of Congress. Respondents who follow the story more closely are also more likely to view the media coverage as unfair. Respondents who view the opportunity structure in the U.S. as unfair towards Chinese Americans are more likely to view the media coverage as unfair. Respondents who experience racism in institutional settings are more likely to view the media coverage as unfair. Finally, respondents interviewed in a non-English language are more likely to view the media coverage as unfair.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This paper has discussed the campaign finance controversy involving Asian/Asian American donors and the response of Chinese Americans to this issue. The findings support the critical denouncements of Asian American commentators against the media and Congress for racializing the issue of campaign contributions and diverting the public’s attention from more systemic problems with how elections are financed in the U.S. Among other things, media coverage on this issue appears to routinely represent Asian Americans as homogeneous, voiceless, perpetual foreigners, and as a “Yellow Peril.” Such media coverage surely feeds into the widespread myth and misconception about the political legitimacy and activism of Asian Americans. It is no surprise, then, that the swirl of suspicion surrounding the campaign finance issue is reflected in the expressly racialized assessments of Congress and the mass media by ordinary Chinese Americans.

For understandable reasons many leaders within the Asian American community have attempted to recast this issue in a more positive, empowering light. To wit, it would indeed be just irony if the campaign finance imbroglio served as a clarion call for Asian Americans mobilize *en masse*, rather than as a dirge for what little political influence Asian Americans have wielded to date. The anticipation that this

might be so is especially keen given the persistence of negative representations of Asian Americans by political elites and the mass media in more recent spectacles like the alleged espionage of nuclear physicist Wen Ho Lee.

The results of this paper offer some mixed insights on this matter. The fact that the mass media and Congress have implicitly and explicitly evoked a racialized response among the Chinese Americans in the 1997 *LAT* lends enticing support for the prospects of an activated Asian American political voice. Clearly, perceiving the political world from a discernibly racialized standpoint is a precondition to finding and expressing an empowered collective voice. Vitality, the findings in this paper describe the keys to developing such a voice: the opinions of Chinese Americans on the campaign finance issue stem from their immigrant experiences, their institutional ties, and their views about discrimination, immigration, and the opportunity structure in the United States. That said, expressing a shared political perspective on a survey is several steps removed from expectations of developing into a mature, organized, and panethnic political voice. Bridging these steps, as with any other social change movement, will require creative leadership, material and organizational resources, and enduring alliances.

As a parting comment, using data from Chinese Americans in Southern California on a single issue to make broadly generalizable claims about the politics of Asian Americans or predominantly immigrant ethnic communities writ large is admittedly perilous. Yet even from so narrow a thread, we have seen a richly textured account. In fact, the beliefs and sentiments of Chinese Americans in this paper vividly makes the case for specificity and detail in examining Asian American politics. Put succinctly but broadly, researchers must take the heterogeneity, contingency, and fluidity of Asian American politics as a starting point. Each ethnic subgroup falling within the panethnic penumbra of "Asian American" is characterized by a distinct and evolving history of immigration, a distinct and evolving economic and political resource base, and a distinct and evolving set of ideological beliefs, cultural practices, social ties, and community institutions.

## APPENDIX A: EVENT HISTORY OF THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE ISSUE

July 1994	John Huang enters Clinton administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce Department.
Dec. 1995	Huang leaves the Commerce Department to become a fund-raiser for Democratic National Committee (DNC).
June 1996	FBI agents warn 6 members of Congress that they may be targeted for illegal contributions from China.
Oct. 1996	Final month of 1996 Presidential campaign. Bob Dole alleges campaign improprieties, esp. with regard to foreign money infiltration into Democratic coffers, a central theme in his campaign.
Oct. 3, 1996	John Huang is “suspended” by DNC.
Oct. 15, 1996	Newt Gingrich makes statement about John Huang and the Lippo Group suggesting campaign improprieties.
Oct. 19, 1996	Huang fired by DNC.
Nov. 1996	Commerce Department’s inspector general opens investigation into Huang.
Dec. 5, 1996	Commerce officials discover John Huang had top-secret security clearance even after he left Commerce Dept. post.
Jan. 1997	FBI director Louis Freeh assigns 25 agents to investigate Huang and the Lippo Group after a request by Congressman Gerald Solomon (R-NY).
Jan. 27, 1997	Yah Lin “Charlie” Trie indicted as a result of Justice Department investigation on illegal foreign contributions.
Feb. 1997	Washington Post reports that special Justice Department task force is investigating possible Chinese influence in U.S. elections.
Feb. 1997	Senate committee votes to issue subpoenas for Lippo Group records.
Mar. 11, 1997	Senate votes to expand investigation probe on improper/illegal activities in campaign fund-raising.
Apr. 1997	Documents relating to Huang’s tenure at the DNC released to public.
July 8 1997	Public hearings on campaign finance improprieties of 1996 open in the Senate, led by Chair Sen. Fred D. Thompson (R-Tenn.)
Feb. 1998	Maria Hsia, DNC fundraiser, indicted on charges of using false cover to funnel illegal funds into election campaigns.
Feb. 1998	Democrats and Republicans from the Senate committee investigating allegations against Chinese government present drafts. Drafts are contradictory – Republicans are more accusatory.
July 13, 1998	Thai businesswoman, Pauline Kanchanalak, charged with conspiring to funnel illegal foreign money into President Clinton’s 1996 reelection campaign.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I use “Asian Pacific American” interchangeably with “Asian American,” making no privileged claims for these designations over alternatives like “Asian Pacific Islanders” or “Asian Pacific American Islanders.”

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., within the same volume of the *National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac*, commentaries by Akaka (1998), Nakanishi (1998), and Wang (1998a).

<sup>3</sup> For expository ease, I use the term “Chinese American” to refer to U.S. residents of Chinese descent — citizen and non-citizen immigrants alike — holding in abeyance the necessary precau

tions about the social/political construction of ethnic/racial/national identity markers and the legal construction of citizenship and immigrant status.

<sup>4</sup> This is a history that dates, in legal/political terms, at least as far back as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentleman's Agreement of 1908, and the National Origins Act of 1924. Journalists like William Randolph Hearst and V.S. McClatchy in the 1920s took an active part in this history by stirring social hysteria around a "Yellow Peril" of Asian immigrants that threatened the integrity of the "American way of life." For general histories of Asian immigrants to the United States, see Chan (1991) and Takaki (1989).

<sup>5</sup> Stewart Kwoh and Frank Wu write that "The Huang matter, however, has become much more than an issue of partisan politics. It has turned from a question of one person's dealings into scapegoating of a racial minority group" (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Senator Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) writes that "hints of the kinds of anti-Asian treatment that have been practiced in the past" are found in "the inappropriate and misguided attention paid by the media, commentators, and public figures to the ethnic heritage of those involved in the fundraising controversy ... Clearly, in some quarters, 'Asian' and 'Asian Americans' are synonymous, unlike the case with Europeans and European Americans. In fact the term, 'European Americans' is rarely heard in public discourse, because the ethnic origin of European Americans is not presumed to have a bearing on their patriotism (1998, 25)."

<sup>7</sup> The most notorious example of both the dimension of homogeneity and perpetual foreigner status is Ross Perot, who, while visiting the University of Pennsylvania not only mistakenly referred to John Huang as an "Indonesian businessman," but also asked his audience "Wouldn't you like to have someone out there named O'Reilly? Out there hard at work. You know, so far we haven't found an American name."

<sup>8</sup> Specifically, John Huang organized a \$25,000 per couple fundraising Lunar New Year's event February 19, 1996. The alleged link here is that APAs at the time were concerned with the slashing of benefits to legal and illegal immigrants and tighter restrictions around immigration, and that Huang happened to have written President Clinton a memo urging the maintenance of "fourth preference" or family preference immigration.

<sup>9</sup> Along these lines Zia (1997) also suggests that certain media outlets considered the protests of leaders within the Asian American community to be illegitimate, and points to the *Boston Globe's* editorial that such complaints of stereotyping was "a shabby maneuver to avoid scrutiny."

<sup>10</sup> On regional effects, Lee and Hahn find that California papers are less likely to negatively stereotype APAs along every one of the six potentially negative dimensions examined. Moreover, Asian Americans are represented as agents of their own destiny on the campaign finance issue in 78 percent of news items in California papers, but only 28 percent of news items in national papers. This finding is consistent with Wu and Nicholson's observation that the *Los Angeles Times* is generally an exception to their findings.

<sup>11</sup> Certainly, there is no such monolithic mass media that can be shown using content analysis. In fact an author would have to exercise verbal contortionism to simultaneously represent all six dimensions Lee and Hahn examine, or worse yet, all ten themes that Wu and Nicholson discuss. That said, there is a now robust social scientific literature on the subtle and not-too-subtle ways in which race is represented in the media. For example, see Entman (1992), Gilens (1999), Gilliam et al. (1996), and Iyengar (1991).

<sup>12</sup> Resort to "cultural" explanations of Asian Americans' campaign finance activities, for example, might read differently if inked by William Safire in the *New York Times* than if inked by Connie Kang in the *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>13</sup> Between May 9th and May 27th, 1997, the *Los Angeles Times* conducted a poll of 773 telephone interviews of adult Chinese residents of six counties in Southern California—Ventura, Los Angeles, San Bernadino, Orange, Riverside, and San Diego counties. Surveys were conducted by Interviewing Services of America, Inc. in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. The sampling frame for this survey was individuals with Chinese surnames in telephone directories in the six counties examined.

<sup>14</sup> Most of what we know in published academic research on Asian American mass opinion come from four surveys, the 1984 Institute of Governmental Studies poll, the 1992 Los Angeles County Social Survey, the 1993–94 Los Angeles Study of Urban Inequality, and the 1993 *Los Angeles Times* survey used in this paper.

<sup>15</sup> And with each of these polls, the *LAT* takes pains to consult with several key leaders and academics within the Chinese American community in Southern California. The roster here includes Stewart Kwoh (of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California), Peter Woo (of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce), and Michael Woo (former LA City Council member). These ethnic-specific *Los Angeles Times* polls also avoid an important potential pitfall that mars most existing survey data on Asian Americans: allowing respondents the option to be interviewed in a non-English language. Given Census Bureau data that 73 percent of Asian Americans speak a language other than English at home, the language-of-interview when polling predominantly immigrant ethnic groups is potentially crucial. As Lee (2000b) shows, the language in which respondents are interviewed can significantly and systematically influence data on their political opinions.

<sup>16</sup> Among other things, national origin thus presents itself as the primary basis for group identification, to the exclusion of alternative bases such as class.

<sup>17</sup> The two other kinds of conditions in which Espiritu finds pan-Asian formations are in top-down political constructions of government agencies and in pragmatic, situational, and ultimately transitory electoral and campaign coalitions.

<sup>18</sup> Rather, we recognize and take advantage of the fluid and shifting nature of Asian American political identity. An especially illuminating discussion of the ways in which Asian American identity is characterized by “heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity” and crosses legal, political, economic, social, and cultural boundaries can be found in Lowe (1996).

<sup>19</sup> One important caveat is that the survey does not permit a test of a perhaps more interesting question, namely, whether or not this political spectacle will leave a lasting racial imprint on the minds of the *LA Times* respondents. That is, the details of how our elected officials, political institutions, and media actors respond to the campaign finance issue may serve as a focal, mobilizing events that contributes to the formation of a politicized ethnic identity. As Omi and Winant suggest along these lines, “far from *intervening* in racial conflicts, the state is itself increasingly the pre-eminent site of racial conflict” (1994, 82). Testing for the campaign finance controversy as an instance of racial *formation* requires longitudinal data, and the only available data are cross-sectional.

<sup>20</sup> There are, unfortunately, no measures of intensity of partisanship in this survey.

<sup>21</sup> The expectations that ensue from these two possibilities diverge somewhat. As Zaller (1992) shows, receptivity to novel political messages is non-linear with respect to political awareness. Respondents who are most aware are not the most likely to absorb a stream of political information as new (because, put simply, they already know better); rather, respondents who are moderately aware are the most likely to take in new information.

<sup>22</sup> Because we are controlling for the perceived fairness of the media coverage, I would argue that media exposure is a more direct measure of political awareness, rather than the substantive content transmitted through the media.

<sup>23</sup> Lee (2000a) shows that perceived bias in media coverage plays a significant part in shaping anti-Asian stereotypes, sentiments, and policy preferences.

<sup>24</sup> See Cohen (1999), Dawson (2000) and Lee (forthcoming) on the influence of indigenous institutions and social ties on the political attitudes of racial minorities.

<sup>25</sup> For research on the political significance of San Gabriel Valley, see Saito and Horton (1994) and Horton (1995).

<sup>26</sup> Given, that is, the relatively innocuous assumption that respondents with a stronger sense of Chinese American identity are more likely to value centers like Chinatown and San Gabriel Valley. It is, obviously, not a measure that can distinguish between an ethnic conception (i.e., as Chinese American) from a panethnic conception (as Asian Americans).

<sup>27</sup> This also begs the question of why identical incidents are not perceived by respondents as discrimination of any form.

<sup>28</sup> This language segregation index also allows us to test, albeit obliquely, Cho's (1999) contention that respondents' English proficiency tells us something important about their political socialization and, by implication, their political attitudes as well.

<sup>29</sup> The question wording does not specify or imply the object of the unfairness—i.e., unfair towards Asian Americans or President Clinton.

<sup>30</sup> In a modified specification, discrimination in informal settings achieves weakly significant effects ( $p < .10$ ).

<sup>31</sup> The allusion here is to the well-studied phenomenon of "race-of-interviewer effects" (see Schuman and Converse 1971; Sanders 1995; Hurtado 1994).

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet (1989), Bobo and Suh (1995), Bobo and Hutchings (1996), Conway and Lien (1997).

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