

# ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

Volume XIV • 2005

John F. Kennedy School of Government  
Harvard University



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*James Ku*

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*Reviewed by Yiaway Yeh*

## MEMORIAL TRIBUTE

**Tribute to U.S. Representative Robert T. Matsui**

*Cheryl Young*

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## FROM THE EDITORS

We are excited to present the fourteenth volume of the *Asian American Policy Review (AAPR)* of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. This year, the staff has critically examined a wide range of scholarly issues that directly and indirectly affect the Asian Pacific American communities in the United States.

This volume features interviews with two key staffers in the Republican and Democratic Parties who are responsible for Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) outreach. **Mina Nguyen**, the Director of Government Affairs at the Republican National Committee, was interviewed by *AAPR* staff member **James Ku**. **Victoria Lai**, the Director of the Office of APIA Outreach for the Democratic National Committee, was interviewed by **Hyun Kim**, co-editor-in-chief of the *AAPR*. These interviews provide a great insight into the parties' political strategies and the "in-the-trenches" campaign experience in the 2004 presidential election.

*AAPR* senior editor **PJ Kim** offers a captivating interview with the renowned filmmaker **Dai Sil Kim-Gibson**, director of the acclaimed documentary *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*. Kim-Gibson's *Wet Sand: Voices from L.A. Ten Years Later* was recently shown at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, and this interview presents a fresh insight into the filmmaker's approach to life.

This year, the editorial staff has chosen two analytical articles related to education and its relevance to the Asian American communities. **Richard R. Pearce** and **Zeng Lin** analyze the impact of race and culture on postsecondary education on generations of Chinese Americans. Furthermore, **Larry Hajime Shinagawa** offers his analysis on the relationship between educational institutions and Asian American communities.

Looking broadly, beyond the United States' borders, managing editor **Cecilia Hyun Jung Mo** provides a timely review of **Bruce Cumings's** *North Korea: Another Country*. This selection underscores the importance of the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula and its impact on not only Asian Pacific American communities but also on the United States as a whole. Co-editor-in-chief **Jane Yoo** has also conducted a book review of **Chang-rae Lee's** acclaimed work *Native Speaker*. This literary work by a Korean American author sheds light on important themes such as cultural alienation, identity, and loyalty. John F. Kennedy School of Government student **Yiaway Yeh** reviewed a recent film, *Nobody Knows*, an official selection of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival directed by the acclaimed filmmaker, Hirokazu Kore-eda. The film portrays the role that family plays in the lives of Asian Americans.

The *AAPR* staff would like to pay its tribute to a great American hero, **U.S. Rep. Robert T. Matsui** (D-Calif.), who passed away on 1 January 2005. He was not only respected by both the Democratic and Republican Members of Congress, but also widely embraced by many Americans. We are grateful for the many years that he served as a member of our honorary board. Senior editor **Cheryl Young** has written a tribute to our Congressman in remembrance of his major accomplishments.

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We extend our heartfelt thanks to **Christine Connare**, our journal publisher, for her counsel and support through the years. She helped at every stage of the editorial and publication processes, and we feel lucky that she will be able to assist **Cecilia Hyun Jung Mo** and **Liza Khan**, co-editors-in-chief of the 2006 *AAPR* staff. We extend special thanks to **Fred Wang** and the **Wang Foundation** for continuing in his strong support of the *AAPR*. Our publication is made possible by Mr. Wang's generous support.

As we close, we would like to take this opportunity to express our sorrow for the victims of the tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia. The disaster claimed thousands of lives and destroyed the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of people in Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Maldives, Malaysia, Burma, Bangladesh, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Seychelles. At current count, 111,171 people have died, more than 127,000 remain missing, and the number of homeless is estimated at 800,000 according to the BBC. The *AAPR* staff extends its heartfelt condolences to all the relatives, friends, and survivors of the tsunami disaster.

This volume is a culmination of hard work by every member of the *AAPR* staff. A great deal of the staff's time, enthusiasm, and energy went into producing another exciting journal. We hope that you continue to find the *AAPR* the premiere source for critical analysis of pressing policy issues that affect the Asian Pacific American community.

Hyun Kim  
Jane Yoo  
*Co-Editors-in-Chief*



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# FOURTEENTH ISSUE

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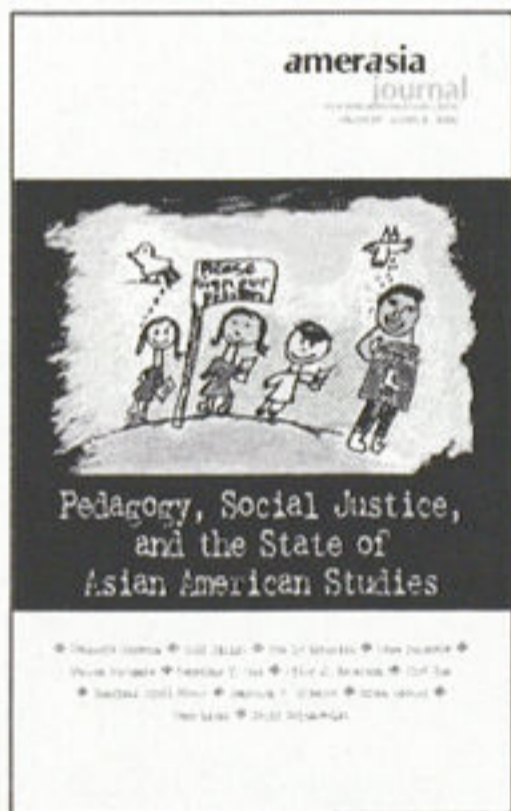
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# **On Message: The Republican National Committee's Vision for Expanding the Party and Reaching out to Asian Pacific Islander Americans: An Interview with Mina Nguyen, Director of Government Affairs at the Republican National Committee**

James Ku

## **Introduction**

The following interview took place in Cambridge, Mass., on 4 March 2005, on the eve of the annual Asian American Policy and Law Conference at Harvard University. Ms. Nguyen discussed her jump from management consulting to politics and her rapid rise within the Republican Party. She also shared her opinion of why the Republicans won in 2004 and why their message will continue to connect with the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community.

## **Interview with Mina Nguyen**

*AAPR*: Congratulations on your new position at the Republican National Committee (RNC). Can you share with us what your role will be?

**NGUYEN**: I am now the director of government affairs for the Republican National Committee. My responsibilities include ensuring that the RNC provides services and support to Senate and House members on the Hill and pushing for the right legislative issues.

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*James Ku is a master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He grew up in Winston-Salem, N.C., and received a bachelor of science in economics from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to attending the John F. Kennedy School of Government, James worked in real estate finance and spent some time as a journalist in China.*

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I'm also responsible for the business community, which includes working with trade associations and corporations to help them participate in civic participation programs.

*AAPR:* Can you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in politics and how you got to this point?

*NGUYEN:* My first exposure to D.C. was during high school through a student program, one of those high school presidential classroom-type programs. They had us meet members, visit memorials, and provided an introduction to the legislative branch of the government. I was really fascinated by the city and the complex processes in place. I got my official start by completing a UC Berkeley fellowship in D.C. I interned for my congressman and conducted research for a paper I was writing on the organizational structure of the juvenile justice system.

Then in 2001, I came out to work at the U.S. Department of Labor for Secretary Elaine L. Chao. My plan was to only stay for one year and then head off to get my MBA. Previously, I had worked at Accenture for close to three years, but I thought I'd come work for the secretary as she transitioned into her new post; however, I ended up staying for two years.

Shortly after I was accepted to business school, the Bush campaign offered me a position to serve as the National Business Coalition director, which I accepted. After the campaign ended, I thought I'd be done with politics for a while. But then the opportunity to work for Ken Mehlman, who is the current RNC chairman, presented itself, and I accepted because he is a great manager, strategic thinker, and visionary leader.

*AAPR:* On the subject of the campaign, tell us more about what you did for the campaign last year, and how your previous experiences prepared you. What were the biggest lessons you learned?

*NGUYEN:* As the National Business Coalition director, I made sure all small business, businesses, and everybody that was in the business realm were involved in some way or another. I also covered the northeast region, as well as Asian Americans, and "W Stands For Women." I had help in every area, so I was able to focus a lot of time on Asian outreach.

I think my business experience helped a lot because it made me think about, "How do I measure success? What's my plan? How will I execute?" and again, "How do I measure success?" You always ask that question. A lot of times in politics, you don't ask that question. We all had business plans with clear goals and execution strategies. Every two months, we would read our plans again and make sure we were going in the right direction.

Every week, we also had accountability meetings to go through how many volunteers we recruited, what we've done, etc. There was a great deal of accountability, which was very helpful and allowed us to monitor our progress.

*AAPR:* What role did the Asian American community play in the Bush campaign? What was their strategy with them? What mistakes were made? And generally, how did it work out?

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**NGUYEN:** I thought it worked out very well. The VNS data showed that we had received 41 percent of the community's vote in 2000, which increased to 44 percent in 2004. That is a huge margin. So I think we did very well. The community played an active role in all aspects.

We took a different approach to outreach and fundraising involving Asian Americans. We said, "Please get involved in the coalition you want. If you're Asian American and you want to be involved in the Asian American coalition, great. Join our coalition. But if you're a woman and you want to do women's coalition, you can do that as well. Be involved in whatever you identify most with."

What was amazing was people picked the Asian-American coalition, but they also picked small business, or doctors, or any one of our different coalitions. They didn't want just one issue area—and that's shifting a little bit towards where America is headed, where Asian Americans as a community are headed. Our cultural and ethnic heritage is so important to us. But we care about issues that all Americans care about—like the economy, terrorism, health care, and education. Those are the first things people identified with when I was out on the road. Before they said, "I'm Asian," they said, "You know, I care about these things first."

Therefore, people were involved in all of our coalition areas. Our Asian American effort was also successful in getting new people involved. From the community, we had about fifteen thousand Bush volunteers. We had a national steering committee of roughly one hundred Asian Americans made up of two to three per state that were mobilizing supporters. We had regional and county chairs as well.

**AAPR:** To what extent does identification as an Asian American factor into voting decisions then? Is it a monolithic group?

**NGUYEN:** I think it would be an oversimplification to say that Asian Americans or any ethnic group are a monolithic group. People care about a variety of issues that impact their lives, and they vote for leaders who share their values and can deliver on issues important to them. Let's just say the president of the United States is Asian American. You may think he or she is great. I really like her. She's Asian American. But she doesn't share my values on the economy, on healthcare, on education, on any of the issues I care about except she's Asian. Would you support her? Probably not.

It means you're supporting your values first and what you care about and what kind of country you want to live in and what kind of environment you want your family to live in before you say, "I'm going to support this person just because of his or her ethnicity."

**AAPR:** That said, could you give us a demographic breakdown of the APA voters? For example, how do age, income, country of origin, and other characteristics factor into the voting behavior?

**NGUYEN:** I don't have that information here, but I know that VNS data provides voting data based on age, ethnicity, and other characteristics. There are some exit

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polls and polls that show that Filipino Americans and Vietnamese Americans tend to be more Republican and Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans tend to be more Democratic. I don't know how reliable those numbers are and whether or not the sample sizes are large enough.

*AAPR:* Speaking of the geographic locations, there was a recent article about how Tom Delay's (R-Tex.) congressional seat might be in trouble largely because of the rise of the Chinese American population in his district. Is the rise of concentrations of Asian groups outside of California and New York hurting Republicans?

*NGUYEN:* I don't think it is though I don't know what the polling for Tom DeLay's race is showing. Like I said before, even though there are some numbers that show that these ethnic groups support Democrats over Republicans, I think people are going to vote on the values that matter to them.

Community members want schools to be held accountable, so their kids can have quality education. Education is so important in our community. The economy is a critical issue also. Health care is a big issue. And safety of the country—these are four key issues. I think Asian Americans will look at how their elected officials fare on these issues and make a decision to support him or her.

*AAPR:* So what other issues do you think are important for Asian Americans?

*NGUYEN:* I think immigration is an important issue that the president sees as important as well. We want to make sure that we handle the immigration process delicately without treating anybody unfairly, but at the same time protecting our borders, which is what the president firmly has always said. As governor of Texas he dealt with and understands the immigration issue.

But when I'm traveling across the country and talking to Asian Americans, I really think the top issues are the economy, jobs, security, and education for their kids.

*AAPR:* APIAs only made up 2 percent of the electorate in 2004. People don't really talk about it, though it's a rapidly growing segment of the electorate. Do you foresee a time when the group will be a bigger part of the electoral calculus?

*NGUYEN:* I think they are paying attention already. I think the campaign was an example of where we had focused efforts to reach out to Asian Americans. We had an Asian American national team who were making phone calls, going door to door, and hosting parties for the president.

Just because you're not hearing it in the media doesn't mean that the politicians aren't focused on it. I do think a time will have to come where, similar to the Latinos, the media will focus more on Asians. I can't speculate when though because the sample sizes for voting patterns have been too small for me to predict anything.

I think as the second and third generations get more comfortable with getting politically involved, we'll see rising numbers of voters.

*AAPR:* Could you give us any insight as to the APIA operation at the RNC compared to what the DNC is doing? Who has the edge in organizing and getting into the APA community?

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**NGUYEN:** I think we have the edge in getting into all communities because we're better organized, we have a unified message, a unified party, and we have values that are consistent with what most Americans believe in. And that's why we won the election.

If they won, I think they would be saying the same thing, but we won because we understand what it takes to go out there, organize, and share the president's positive message.

I'm not sure what the DNC message is, nor do I know what their plans are. During the campaign it was hard to understand what their message to the American people was. Their message was anti-Bush. That is not a message or a plan. And it's not optimistic. If you look at them today, they are the party of no. Too often on the Senate and House floors, the Democrats reject legislation before they even know what is being offered.

In terms of organizing, as you saw, there have been many business case studies and studies about the campaign and how well organized we were. We will still have the same strong effort to organize on the ground and will use all of the campaign assets. We'll do everything we can to reactivate all of our coalitions including the Asian American coalition. We'll continue to reach out to people and build the party.

One of the things that Ken Mehlman has started is going out and talking to ethnic communities. He did several African American events during Black History Month. In May, we'll have Asian American events during Asian Heritage Month.

Chairman Mehlman's message is "give us a chance and we'll give you a choice." I think we're going to take that message across the country, and we're going to get more Republicans registered.

**AAPR:** Is there a point person for Asian American outreach right now?

**NGUYEN:** Right now, I'm leading the effort because I have the knowledge from the campaign. And then as we grow and we get situated, we'll have people to work on it specifically.

**AAPR:** So bottom line, where do you think this trend is going? Republicans got 44 percent of the APIA vote last year. What direction is this going, and what is your objective?

**NGUYEN:** The chairman and others within the party understand that America is a diverse place that is changing rapidly. The only way we're going to win is if we include others and grow the party and get our message of inclusiveness and diversity out to all communities. We're a party of compassion. When people ask about where we stand on providing affordable and accessible health care, we have a plan and we have several programs including minority health care programs, community health centers, and many others that we have not talked about extensively enough. I think Republicans are action-oriented and focused on getting core issues done, that we don't do what the Democrats often do, which is focus on the peripheral and talk about these softer-side issues. I think we need to be better at that because we have a great record and a great message.

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So the strategy is to make sure we get out more to the community and talk about the president's positive record and the importance of political and civic participation, and we'll continue to do that. The chairman will continue to talk to the community to lay out what we've done, what we intend to do, and why we are a party of inclusiveness and a party of opportunity and ownership.

Once we get that out there, I think we'll grow the party and people will feel more comfortable. I think we have a challenge when it comes to younger voters that we need to work on. We're going to continue to reach out to students. I think we have a strong platform, and that's going to win a lot of people over. You can do all the outreach you want, but at the end of the day, once you reach out to someone, they're going to say to you, "What are you going to do for me?" And when they compare us to the alternative, they're going to see that we deliver on our promises. That's where they're going to change and start supporting Republicans.

*AAPR*: What you've done has been great, and others like Secretary Elaine Chao and Ed Moy are blazing trails in Republican politics. Are there a lot of other people coming through the pipeline? What can we do to encourage more people, more Asian Americans to go into public service?

*NGUYEN*: I think just this dialogue is really important. I think our Asian American leaders, like Secretary Chao, are leading the charge. She's really changed the way Asian Americans feel about politics. She understands the immigration process and issues as an immigrant herself. I love when she shares her story about when her family came to American. Her family did not have any money when they lived in New York, but because of the vast opportunities available in this country, her parents worked hard to provide for their family and sent her and her sisters to great schools. You can read her tremendous success story online. She's the kind of Republican that Asian Americans identify with. She does so much to get the community involved. I think that with people like her, Ed Moy, associate director of personnel, and others involved we're seeing more Asian Americans in high-level positions.

We need to reach out to college campuses and participate in programs that you have like the one at Harvard this weekend. This is why I took a day off to fly down here and spend my weekend. I think it is so important to cultivate a new level, new kind of generation of young leaders to get involved.

Last time I came out to visit, I met a woman named Candice Chiu who was an undergrad at Harvard, and she got involved. Now, she works in D.C. for Viet Dinh and she formerly worked at the Department of Justice.

So you can see coming out, going to these events and talking to people, and trying to create and provide opportunities is helpful. I hope the DNC is doing that. I hope everybody is doing that. It's important. I don't care which party people get involved with in the end. The important thing is to get involved.

*AAPR*: What a great place to end. Thanks.



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# How the Democratic National Committee Handles Asian Pacific Islander American Outreach: An Interview with Victoria Lai, Director of the Office of Asian Pacific Islander American Outreach at the Democratic National Committee

Hyun Kim

## Introduction

The following interview with Ms. Victoria Lai was conducted by e-mail on Thursday, 3 March 2005, two days prior to her debate with Ms. Mina Nguyen, who is in charge of similar efforts at the Republican National Committee. It was a great opportunity to speak to her about Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) outreach with memories of the recent presidential election fresh on her mind. Ms. Lai discussed at length her role at the Democratic National Committee (DNC), her strategy for APIA outreach, and her presidential campaign experience. The following is an edited transcript of the interview in its entirety.

## Interview with Ms. Victoria Lai

*AAPR*: Victoria, you are currently the director of the Office of APIA Outreach at the Democratic National Committee. Could you share with us what your role is at DNC and some broader background as to the nature of your work and how you ended up at DNC?

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*Hyun Kim, co-editor-in-chief of the AAPR, is a master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He is also the president of the Kennedy School Student Government. He is currently specializing in national security issues. Prior to his graduate studies, he worked on Capitol Hill as a legislative assistant to U.S. Rep. Michael Capuano (D-Mass.). He was born and raised in South Korea.*

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**LAI:** It is my role to promote the voice of APIAs in politics and government. At the Democratic National Committee, I work with leaders, activists, and organizations of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans to advocate for the issues important to these groups and their inclusion in the political discourse. Given the cultural, geographic, and sociological diversity of APIAs, this is a big job, but one that both I and the Democratic Party are committed to. Historically, much of the APIA population has consisted of foreign-born immigrants who settle in the urban centers of large cities. However, in the last few decades, the APIA population has skyrocketed, with the highest growth rate of any demographic group. Asian and Pacific Islander Americans are increasingly settling in suburban areas and in Midwestern states. South and Southeast Asians are also gaining a presence that was not seen a few decades ago.

My responsibilities include messaging and field organizing—I work with APIAs to make sure that they understand the principles of the Democratic Party and that they support Democratic candidates. I work with community leaders to raise awareness of injustices occurring to APIAs. When President Bush dismantled a White House commission that President Clinton authorized to monitor health, education, housing, and other issues that affect APIAs, the DNC worked with community leaders to make known our opposition to Bush's neglect. When Republican anti-terrorism laws resulted in discriminatory practices towards Asian Americans, we teamed up with numerous national organizations to advocate for better laws. When Asian Pacific Islander Americans could play a role in electing a Democratic president who was committed to civil rights, economic and educational opportunity for all, and a fair and consistent foreign policy, I was proud to facilitate their participation.

**AAPR:** Could you give us a detailed breakdown of the APIA voters that you target in terms of ethnicity, age, income, and other characteristics?

**LAI:** When advocating for the issues of concern to APIAs, I regard all ethnic groups of APIAs equally. When designing voter outreach strategies, however, I pay close attention to the size and vote share each of each group in the race at hand. For example, when working in Minnesota, we work especially with the Hmong in Minnesota. Beyond that, I work with the sophisticated targeting technology and voter file data used by the DNC to interact with all APIA voters in most effective method.

A 2004 U.S. Census report indicated that 14 million Americans identify themselves Asian, Pacific Islander, or one of these groups in combination with another race. This group includes people of many different ethnicities, including East Asians (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese), South Asians (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan), Southeast Asians (Hmong, Laotian, Indonesian, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese), and Pacific Islanders (Hawaiian, American Samoan, Guamanian/Chamorro) to name a few.

**AAPR:** What is your personal background? Has it shaped why you're a Democrat and working for the Democratic Party? Please explain.

**LAI:** My first exposure to public service was with my father. As a young girl, I

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would accompany him on his trips to the Houston Chinese Community Center where as a doctor, he taught elderly Chinese immigrants about Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. While he was not their personal physician, he shared his knowledge with these senior citizens and empowered them to make more informed choices about their health. By being sensitive to their concerns and language needs he was able to give them the access to the health care to which all Americans are entitled.

I am in politics because I hope to follow my father's example of helping people take an active and effective role in the world around them. My biggest success as an outreach director is providing others with information so that they become leaders in their communities. I believe that the Democratic Party is built on the strength of communities. Principles such as "love thy neighbor" and "honor thy mother and father" are apparent in Democrats' commitment to anti-discrimination, poverty prevention, and solid Social Security insurance.

I wasn't active in politics until my last semester of college. Until then I volunteered and interned for nonprofit organizations that focused on expanding opportunities to urban minorities in education and homeownership. The political bug bit me when I attended a conference in January 2001 where the former staff of senate, gubernatorial, and the presidential elections discussed the strategies used in political campaigns. Everything they talked about came down to connecting with people on a personal level. I've always enjoyed meeting and talking to new people and working in fast-paced environments. Politics seemed like a nice fit.

Before ending up at the DNC, I worked on a congressional campaign in Massachusetts and a mayoral election in Houston, my hometown. I moved to Washington, D.C., to work on the legislative staff of Congressman Nick Lampson from southeast Texas.

**AAPR:** I understand that you temporarily left your post as director of the Office of APIA to work on the Kerry campaign for APIA outreach in 2004. What was your role in that campaign? What was your campaign experience like? Did your DNC job prepare you for the presidential campaign? What was your campaign agenda, and why?

**LAI:** While at the Kerry-Edwards campaign I met with John Kerry several times and organized events where he met key community leaders. I actively worked with reporters and media organizations to share Senator Kerry's strong record in international issues and anti-discrimination legislation with the public. It was very exciting to work on the presidential campaign and build on the grassroots team I had developed while at the DNC in 2003. Because so many former elected officials, community leaders, and presidential appointees were eager to see a Democrat in the White House, I had the amazing opportunity to meet and work with many of APIA leaders I admire, such as Washington Governor Gary Locke, Bill Lann Lee, Congressman Mike Honda (D-Calif.), and the late Congressman Bob Matsui (D-Calif.).

The Kerry-Edwards campaign and the DNC together organized the largest get-out-the-vote [GOTV] program ever, which resulted in historic APIA political

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activism. Over four hundred APIA volunteers traveled to battleground states from other states to assist with outreach activities including phone banks, rallies, precinct walks, canvassing, and visibility. In addition, the campaign facilitated the placement of over twenty-seven hundred APIA volunteers who contacted over three hundred thousand APIA voters via multilingual phone banking. APIA voters were both identified and persuaded in languages including Hmong, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Hindi.

*AAPR:* How do you go about setting up an overall strategy to reach out to the APIA voters nationwide? In the aftermath of the presidential election in 2004, did you feel that your strategy was adequate? Why or why not?

*LAI:* Because of the DNC and Kerry campaign's commitment to including APIA in the national political dialogue, APIA support for Democratic candidates grew nearly 10 percent in the last four years, continuing a consistent Democratic trend that totals a 30 percent increase from the APIA support for Democrats in 1992. I designed the 2004 APIA political outreach strategy by evaluating the numbers and voting patterns of Asian Pacific Islander American voters and determining the impact they could have on the accumulation of electoral votes.

A national multilingual exit poll conducted by the nonpartisan Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund found that 74 percent of APIA voters favored Kerry-Edwards, with 38 percent of respondents being first-time voters. I believe our 2004 outreach strategy was effective because the APIA community voted overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates and Sen. John Kerry for president.

*AAPR:* Tell us the historical trends in APIA political behavior. What do you project from those trends?

*LAI:* The numbers speak for themselves: Asian Pacific Islander Americans are consistently growing as a Democratic base of support. APIA support for Democratic candidates has doubled in the last twelve years. In 1992, the majority of APIA voters supported the Republican presidential candidate, but that approval has dropped significantly. The U.S. Census projects that in forty-five years, the APIA population will have tripled. I project that Asian Pacific Islander Americans' influence in the Democratic Party and in society as a whole will grow exponentially. We'll also see many more APIA elected officials.

*AAPR:* What are some of the major issues that you think Asian Pacific Americans care about? How did you arrive at your conclusions?

*LAI:* Three nonpartisan organizations produced analyses of the issues that are on the minds of Asian Pacific Islander Americans in 2004. According to the presidential exit poll conducted by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, which reported a 74 percent turnout for John Kerry, APIAs voted based on concerns about the economy and jobs, terrorism, the war in Iraq, health care, civil rights, and education. APIAs voted for Democrats to achieve economic and educational opportunity, a fair and consistent foreign policy, and a steadfast commitment to civil rights.

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Analyses of issues important to APIA voters before the election resulted in similar results. In May 2004 a coalition of seventeen national, nonpartisan APIA organizations produced the Platform for Asian Pacific Americans: National Policy Priorities. This detailed assessment of equal rights, opportunity, security, and education issues is useful in understanding APIA concerns. Later that year, a multilingual poll conducted by a consortium of ethnic media organizations showed a majority of APIA voters, particularly Chinese, Indian, and Korean voters, thought it was “wrong” to go to war with Iraq. However, nearly 50 percent of the survey participants noted jobs and the economy as the most pressing issue for the next president to manage.

**AAPR:** The Democrats are now the minority party in both houses of Congress. Do you think that APIA will play a significant role in the midterm elections in 2006 and beyond? How are you going to prepare for 2006 and 2008?

**LAI:** Democrats are the minority party in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate, however, Asian Pacific Islander Americans have their eye on important legislation in both houses. Although 2005 began on a sad note with the unexpected passing of Congressman Bob Matsui, APIAs continued fighting for important legislation. NAKASEC, the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium, led the fight early in the 109th Congress against the Republican-led *REAL ID Act*, which manipulates existing homeland security concerns and imposes discriminatory restrictions on immigrant rights. APIAs are also speaking out about other issues, such as Social Security. One in every three Asian Pacific Islander American senior relies on Social Security as their sole source of income—that’s double the proportion of all seniors who rely on these monthly checks.

Asian Pacific Islander Americans are not waiting for the next presidential election to flex their political muscle. There are currently ten congressional districts where APIAs make up more than 20 percent of the population. These are all safe Democratic seats. But with rapid APIA population growth, many Republicans will need to fight to keep their positions. The Washington Post even noted in March 2005 that Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) will need to work hard to gain reelection, in part due to the growing Asian American community in Houston. Indeed in west Houston, Hubert Vo, a first-time candidate and Vietnamese Democrat, defeated a twenty-two-year Republican incumbent in the Texas Statehouse. The changing demographics are affecting politics at local and national level. APIAs will be critical in the 2005 governors’ races in Virginia and New Jersey. Then in 2006, APIAs are in the position to make sure the open U.S. Senate seat in Minnesota stays Democratic and Republican Senator Rick Santorum is defeated in Pennsylvania.

**AAPR:** Could you give us any insight as to your operation compared to that of RNC? Do you think DNC has a better edge in the APIA communities? Why or why not?

**LAI:** Working with millions of APIA voters across the nation during the presidential election kept me sufficiently busy. I did not spend much time investigating the RNC operation, however, activists in the states tell me that they did not uncover

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much in the way of Republican outreach to APIA communities, although Republican candidates made a point of fundraising from Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

*AAPR:* Given what you have learned on the job and in the Kerry campaign, do you think that DNC needs to adjust its approach toward the APIA communities or devote more resources into the political operations? Why or why not?

*LAI:* The DNC is wasting no time in preparing for future Democratic successes. We are implementing a nationwide political operation to make sure that every American in every state, county, and district knows what the Democratic Party stands for. Asian and Pacific Islander Americans will play a critical role in the growth of the Democratic Party. I am confident in the strength and determination of our grassroots activists and existing APIA legislators to continue work with their constituents and recruit new leaders.

I think the DNC needs to continue to grow its APIA outreach capacities to match the rapid growth of this population, but I think the method that is already in place has proved successful. After all, it was through this outreach that the Democratic Party once again earned an increase in the percentage and number of Democratic APIA voters. Pursuing the core Democratic values of opportunity, equality, and security are the key to Democrats' continuing to earn Asian Pacific Islanders votes.

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# Wet Sand to Douse the Fire Next Time: An Interview with Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, Documentary Filmmaker

PJ Kim

## Introduction

Dai Sil Kim-Gibson's groundbreaking 1993 documentary, *Sa-I-Gu* (Korean for 4-2-9, the date of the Los Angeles riots' beginning) presented Korean women shopkeepers in their struggle to understand the direct and indirect societal forces that led to the loss of their livelihoods and dreams. In her 2003 film *Wet Sand: Voices from L.A. 10 Years Later*, she returns to L.A. to explore the aftermath through the stories of the victims and witnesses from multi-ethnic communities. Her other acclaimed films, which have aired on PBS, include *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women* and *A Forgotten People: The Sakhalin Koreans*. These films have firmly established Kim-Gibson as one of the best known and most influential Asian American documentary filmmakers today. The *Asian American Policy Review* hosted Dai Sil Kim-Gibson in *Wet Sand's* debut in Boston on 27 April 2004, to commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the riots and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. The following interview was conducted by *AAPR* staff member PJ Kim in Boston on 27 April 2004, after the screening.

## Interview with documentary filmmaker Dai Sil Kim-Gibson

*AAPR*: Where did you get the inspiration to begin filmmaking? It is not a natural choice for a lot of Asian American women. And then, at that stage in your life, what compelled you to pursue this medium and this art form?

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*PJ Kim is a Soros Fellow concurrently pursuing a master in public administration at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and a master in business administration at Harvard Business School. He was born in South Korea, grew up in Louisiana and Tennessee, and became a U.S. citizen in 1999. He received an undergraduate degree from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs and seeks a career in public service that combines his interests in entrepreneurship, New York City redevelopment, and politics.*

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**KIM-GIBSON:** You know, filmmaking is my third career. And I thought that I'd changed my career too many times, and there was probably no continuity in my life. But when I really thought about that aspect, there was one continuity. And that is I was a teacher throughout my different careers. I mean, I started out my career as a college professor. And then I worked in cultural organizations of U.S. federal and state governments.

And when I worked with the scholars and artists, I was helping them get grants and [know] how to [get each] project going, and things of that sort. So it was always the sharing of ideas. Not so much in terms of a traditional teacher-and-student relationship but instead sharing ideas, talking together, serving as a mentor—a kind of teaching. I was always interested in this, and I've done it well.

When I was teaching at Mount Holyoke, I was the most popular in the department, for instance. And when I was teaching, it's not so much about giving good lectures, or anything, but I always knew how to ask good questions and how to listen to students. And how to make them think, you know? So that they can go and do things on their own.

So filmmaking is, in a way, teaching about those issues that are dear to me. Always on social issues—pressing issues, issues about the oppressed people, and oppression; issues like race and then poverty. And filmmaking allows me to teach on a larger scale—because our age is the age of technology. And instead of being confined to a single classroom, you make a film, you take it, broadcast it, and organize screenings everywhere. Then it becomes a larger classroom, in a way.

So I think filmmaking is a culmination of my career, in terms of my interest in social issues, in terms of my interest in art, in terms of my interest in studies, and in terms of critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis. And sharing something that I have: ideas and action. And I think it gives me a chance to do it in the most powerful, comprehensive way, across the country, and even around the world. So I think that's how filmmaking became my last career.

**AAPR:** Up to this point, what do you think has been the most difficult, unexpected roadblock or obstacle for you in your filmmaking? Something that you didn't know would happen, but you've had to struggle with.

**KIM-GIBSON:** In filmmaking, I think the most important thing, the way I make my films, especially, is your respect for the film's actors. I'm trying to work with people whose voices have to be heard, whose voices are often repressed and rejected. So working with such people, my passion and my emotion are always very high, very deep.

And sometimes, if the topic is a very difficult one, it pains me so much more than I had anticipated. Like when I was working with the comfort women issue. I mean, it really nearly killed me, every time I heard those harrowing, wrenching stories. So the emotional involvement is very difficult to manage—the pain and sorrow that is communicated through the films' subjects. The extent of it was deeper, and more, than I had ever expected. And so that was hard.

And then there is the practical stuff, like having no money. I find it very difficult to raise money as a filmmaker. But also, emotionally, as a Korean American, what was difficult was, many Koreans who are sort of materialistically oriented, they



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cannot imagine anybody doing any work that does not make money. And I did not make one cent through my filmmaking, you know?

So this lack of understanding, when I do this thing out of commitment and conviction, saddened me a lot. So there was a lot of emotional upset. In addition, finding broadcasting outlets and distribution partners is much more difficult. And for that, you have to really fight the mainstream. And every step of the way, there's struggle and difficulty. So that was very hard.

Yes, it's hard, from all aspects. But through this filmmaking, you learn so much more about other people. And you also learn about interesting issues—and how you really prioritize things and go after it—that you believe to be right. A lot of Koreans and a lot of people say that, you know, we're too busy making money. I mean, just putting out three meals a day and sending our children to school. Maybe the next generation—and I'm always saying that if you have enough money and enough time, and if you're waiting for that time to do something worthwhile, it will never come. So life is always a matter of prioritizing.

**AAPR:** How do you prioritize what subjects you decide to tackle?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I don't sit down and decide. But the subjects come to me when I see them. For instance, when I translated one of the former comfort women, giving a testimony, I felt her story in my heart—and I couldn't leave that subject, you know? The same things ring true for the L.A. riots. *Sa-I-Gu* was prompted from my heart when I saw all these Koreans who came to this country and worked so hard; everything they worked for just turned into ashes one morning.

When you saw that, and then when the mainstream just messed it up and misrepresented so much, making them mere numbers and statistics and issues. I mean, it came to me. You had to go do something about it. So these topics are not something that you write down and you prioritize. But something would come and really strike you, and you cannot say no, no matter how difficult the challenges seem to be.

**AAPR:** Can you tell us a little bit more about your current projects?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I went to Cuba to learn something about this island. And I discovered that there were Koreans living in Cuba, currently about seven hundred of them, whose ancestors came from Mexico in 1921 for a better life in Cuba. To me, it was an amazing discovery. And so once again, when I saw these Koreans on this island—on this small island that is constantly threatened by its superpower neighbor for its existence—and saw these Korean Cubans living there, many of them as full participants, I had to find out what's going on there.

So I just, almost impulsively, abandoned my group with whom I went. And I hired a Cuban crew, and I interviewed fifteen hours of footage. And I have to go back, and I have to do more research. Now I'm doing research on the basis of what I learned from these people. I have to raise money, and I have to go back to Cuba. And I'm going to go to Miami to interview some of the Koreans who left Cuba. As well as interviewing some Koreans who are still revolutionaries. And I want to tell the story about this country, Cuba, seen through the eyes of Korean immigrants on that island. So it's going to be an unusual story that you have not

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heard about Cuba; instead of the usual viewpoints that you are used to hearing about Castro in the mainstream media.

**AAPR:** You've often said that you are most proudest of your work for the film *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*. What do you think, in terms of tangible policy actions that the U.S. government, or any governments, can do, what do you think are the steps that need to happen for realistic justice to be delivered to these women?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I think the U.S. has a lot to do with it. The U.S. messed it up, to begin with. Because this is the issue that was brought up at the 1946 Tokyo Tribunal, and then it was dismissed. And then it was dismissed again in San Francisco Peace Treaty. And they let Japan go almost free, you know? So the U.S. has to be responsible for this. But still, the U.S. is on the side of Japan. They don't want to open up the Pandora's box. So they're not doing it; and it has to be done. And I'm afraid that these are not going to be resolved, if ever, during the lifetime of these comfort women who are fighting, every Wednesday, in front of the Japanese embassy. It is being done more at the U.N. level than in the U.S.

**AAPR:** So in both *Sa-I-Gu* and also *Wet Sand*, you shed light on a lot of issues and a lot of problems that most Americans don't want to talk about anymore. And especially in terms of dealing with the root causes of these situations. What would you do if you were able to attack one or two of these root causes? Although, in past years many people have been talking about improving education and awareness, what can we do to actually mobilize people and get them to do something tangible and concrete?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I don't know. I'm very pessimistic over these issues, as you can see in my film. But I'm trying to suggest, in my film, if there is a hope, it's with the younger generation, and it's with their education. So if there is something that we should be doing, in concrete terms, we should lobby; we should do everything we can to improve the educational system of the inner cities of America. But it's a really vicious circle because the structure and everything is such that funding and all those things are just dependent on those people who have money, who can go to Capitol Hill, and things like this.

So it's really that everything is so intricately related to the basic structure of the society. And at the moment, I am really also very pessimistic because the discrepancy between rich and poor, and the way the Bush administration is going after American identity, is really getting bad. As a nation of immigrants, America can not ignore such issues.

And so that's why people riot. Because you sit and sit, and hope and hope, and you talk and talk. They don't listen. So they riot. I just hope to God that it doesn't take another riot to get some attention. Because if another riot happens, attention will come, just like we saw in 1992. And then we didn't have enough help, and the attention will go away again. So we have to think strategically long-term, in terms of education, in terms of mobilizing young people with good thoughts and real determination. To do something worthwhile for the society, and go after, from the bottom up, and unite. I don't know how else we are going to do it.

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*AAPR:* What kind of different reactions have you gotten from audiences in different parts of the country, and different demographics? Did the reactions seem to vary pretty widely, depending on geography, class, race, gender? Or was it pretty similar?

**KIM-GIBSON:** You know, so far, clearly this film was shown in the places where people are already converted, you know? So their determination is renewed. They are moved. And so if they were letting their determination go a little bit, they are renewed; and they want to go out and do something more. The difficulty I have with a film like this is, for instance, I wanted so very badly to put this on national map, through PBS, which I was able to do with other films. This time though they were scared; they didn't want to deal with it, and they didn't see the urgency of these issues because of events in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So sometimes I feel really discouraged. That's why a screening like this, with these really bright young people like yourselves, coming together and talking about this, gives me hope. Because even if there are two people out of today's screening who go out and do something. Even if it's a small thing like going to South Central, or some inner city in north Philadelphia, becoming an intern and [getting] to know people, and [working] for free for something for a month, and [taking] a mentor. I think it's always the little things that will count.

*AAPR:* Before you became a filmmaker, your biography says you worked in state and federal government. What were you doing?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I was the director of media programs of the New York State Council of the Arts. So the salary was not all that good, but it was a prestigious job; everybody thought I had a lot of power. I didn't have a lot of power, but they thought that. Actually, I did have a lot of power, not so much in terms of the dollar worth of my program, but we did a lot of good things in terms of artistic format and invention. I used to quote a mystery writer whose books I used to read, but no longer, and that's Dick Francis. And Dick Francis had this wonderful, wonderful definition about experimental art. You know what experimental art is? He defined it as "more soul than success." So when I was the director of New York State Council of the Arts, I tried to look for more soul than success. And for three years, I did it. And I could have gotten way up in the mainstream, somewhere, if I was a submissive, good little girl. But I wanted to be on my own and do something that mattered to my conscience. So I quit.

*AAPR:* What do you think is the role of government in trying to promote art forms like that?

**KIM-GIBSON:** I want the government to intervene by giving us a lot of money because it's a problem and then stay out of it.

*AAPR:* How does the government judge whether or not an artist is worthy of funding?

**KIM-GIBSON:** Well, government should hire people like me to judge. That's what the New York State Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities

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do. So there are a lot of ways of judging it. I think government should be a little more systematic to create and to encourage that; not to intervene to direct us what to do, because then that will confine the movement. So just give us money, and let us do the work.

*AAPR:* You said filmmaking is your last career. Do you really believe that?

*KIM-GIBSON:* Oh, filmmaking and writing is my last career, yes. I mean, because I can always write, even if nobody gives me money, with the same food and same sleeping arrangements. So if nobody gives me money for film, I'm going to write.

*AAPR:* Do you have any other big projects coming?

*KIM-GIBSON:* I want to do a feature drama about Kim Ku, the Korean freedom fighter. But first I have to finish this project on Cuba. And then I want to write. My husband and I are writing a joint memoir. I'm married to this White man, who is the son of an Iowan tenant farmer. And we are worlds apart, but we are so close. As much as I believe in individual rights and ethnic rights, I am a big believer in universal values and universal merit and finding the common ground of human beings. And much of that belief comes from living with this wonderful White man, even though I bad-mouth White men all the time.

*AAPR:* Thank you very much.

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# Cultural Capital and Postsecondary Educational Attainment among White and Chinese Americans: An Analysis of NELS 1988–2000

Richard R. Pearce and Zeng Lin

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*Zeng Lin is an assistant professor with the Department of Educational Administration and Foundation at Illinois State University. After starting his career as a high school math teacher, he later became a school administrator. In the early 1980s, he had an opportunity to teach at Wuhan University in China, where he remained for roughly six years. In pursuit of excellence, he moved to Canada to obtain a second master's degree at McGill and then a Ph.D. at York. After three years of teaching at Lakehead University, he was promoted to associate professor with tenure. As risk taking has always been part of his life and with a confidence in calculated risk stemming from his expertise in educational statistics and methodologies, and with the help of his wife and daughter, he moved to his current post in 2001. Zeng Lin has extensive experience in large-scale data analysis. As the result of his broad research activities, he has published co-authored books, several book chapters, and numerous journal articles. Since moving to the United States, he has worked extensively with restricted national data from the National Center for Education Statistics. The initial outcome from exploring this data has resulted in two journal articles, several conference papers, and other publications.*

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## Abstract

In this article, the authors compare Chinese American postsecondary educational attainment with that of White Americans and, in identifying those factors that most strongly account for success, argue that commonalities exist among social structural factors while distinct differences are evident among cultural capital factors. The article rejects the notion of minority assimilation as the source of success and suggests that Chinese and White cultures, in promoting education, are harmonistic but different.

## Introduction

Racial minorities as a group have received a great deal of attention in the literature. One of the common disadvantages associated with minorities is their lower educational achievement, which is often explained by racial discrimination and other factors such as lower educational expectations (Barton 2003; Phillips 2003, 20). However, successful stories of Asian Americans in schooling have created an anomaly among minorities. When first Japanese Americans and later Chinese Americans were heralded as resounding success stories during 1960s, Asian Americans were labeled as a model minority (Peterson 1966; Kitano 1976). Their status as a model minority has been challenged on grounds of both racist intent and statistical evidence (Chun 1980; Nakanishi and Nishida 1995). Asian American's model minority status has conveyed two important messages: first, other minorities should learn from them, and second, Asian American academic achievement is largely a product of elements shared with White American culture (Braxton 1999; Chen 2001; Chun 1980; Kitano and Stanley 1973).

Asian Americans include comprehensive and diverse ethnic groups. This paper mainly focuses on Chinese Americans, insofar as Chinese have assumed a prominent place among the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States since China implemented its open door policy in the late 1970s. The 2000 Census report shows that Chinese Americans have become the largest group among Asian Americans, a trend also reflected in the 1988–2000 National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) data. Their status as a model minority and the increasingly large size of this minority group invite research attention.

Based on comparison between White Americans and Chinese Americans, this paper argues that, in addition to social structural factors, cultural capital plays an important role in academic achievement. Social structural factors can be defined as those elements that inhibit or enhance academic achievement and attainment but can be considered largely out of the individual control of the subject. A typical example would be socioeconomic status. Since higher education has a cost factor, fewer financial resources can be expected to lead to lower academic attainment. The individual student has little or no control over the actual cost of education (Clark 1983; Erikson 1996; Fuller, Manski, and Wise 1982; Hauser and Fetherman 1977). Cultural capital can be defined as those characteristics, either physical or behavioral, that allow individual status and positioning within a group. Cultural capital, like economic and social capital, is a form of leverage that can be utilized

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to affect individual status in a society through certain unique actions (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this paper, we operationally define cultural capital as four components: parental educational attainment, parental educational expectation, parental involvement, and parenting style. To identify the difference between Chinese American culture and White American culture in promoting academic excellence, we further argue that there is more than one path to academic excellence. The corollary of this argument challenges the model minority label because cultural capital has important and unique impact on student achievement. Therefore, any simplified model minority label may mislead the public.

Previous explorations of the “success” of Chinese Americans have approached the topic from one of two angles. Those investigations that do address cultural issues do so largely from a qualitative perspective. This is in part due to a dearth of data specifically related to Chinese Americans. Therefore, a glaring gap in the literature has formed since the topic was first broached in the 1960s. In addition, most of the work predates the period of increased immigration from mainland China in the era of reform and opening by the PRC government. Therefore, conclusions were reached about Chinese Americans based upon a subject group that differed dramatically in content from the subject group found today. These limitations make it necessary to revisit the reasons behind the success of Chinese Americans.

## **Research Questions**

The study first asks the question, is there evidence of academic success among Chinese Americans when compared with White Americans? Finding the answer to this question is yes, the study further explores the links between social structural positions and cultural components in explaining the apparent academic success of Chinese Americans when compared to White Americans. Conventional wisdom implies that similar levels of academic success among different groups would follow similar paths. However, this study hypothesizes that Chinese Americans, to a large extent, share social structural influences with White Americans in attaining postsecondary education but do not share the cultural components.

## **Theory and Relevant Literature Review**

Both media and academic attention has returned time and time again to report that Asian students outstrip their American counterparts on tests of mathematics and science (Keeves 1992; Stigler and Hiebert 1999), but no clear explanation for this disparity in terms of cultural differences has so far been provided. The gap has been attributed to differences in national educational systems, including the duration of the school day and the school year; to the level of inquiry-based teaching and learning; to textbooks and curricular materials; and to student and parent attitudes about learning (Hess, Chang, and McDevitt 1987; Chen 2001). These explanations suppose a demarcation along national lines. However, Asian American students have consistently outperformed other American students on

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tests of science and math achievement (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore 1992; Chen and Stevenson 1995; Huntsinger et al. 1997), regardless of whether the student was born in America. This suggests that the factors of success for Chinese Americans in educational attainment are deeper than the differences in educational systems and may instead reflect differences in culture.

Cultural capital can be defined as those characteristics, either physical or behavioral, that allow individual status and positioning within a group. Cultural capital can be further classified as being either dominant or nondominant (Bourdieu 1977a; 1977b; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Dominant cultural capital is linked to the dominant group. In American culture at large, dominant cultural capital would most often be identified as “White” cultural capital (Carter 2003). Nondominant cultural capital would in turn be identified as the cultural capital of the “other” group—in this case, Chinese Americans.

Among nondominant cultures, we can roughly identify two different broad, general types of cultures by their associations with the dominant culture(s). One is oppositional culture and the other is complementary culture. Oppositional cultural theory (Ogbu 1974, 1978, 1988) argues that racial discrimination and limited socioeconomic prospects compel some ethnic minority groups to maintain culturally different approaches to opportunity structures. For instance, Ogbu argues that a legacy of slavery and racism in the African American social experience predisposes many African American students to lower their aspirations for schooling because they believe that high academic achievement only benefits White, middle-class students. In the minds of these African American students, academic achievement comes to be perceived as “acting White.” On the other hand, complementary culture, Asian culture for example, is a culture that competes, but not in an oppositional manner in general, with the dominant culture in promoting such social factors as educational achievement. The nature of complementary culture may be most easily grasped if we look beyond cultures in contact. It is understandable that two distinct cultures may value, for instance, monogamy. This shared value, however, may have evolved within these two cultures spontaneously and without any mediation, one upon the other. When members of these two cultures come into contact, they will naturally sympathize with the shared value of the other group. In this case, and relative to this one value, these two cultures could be viewed as complementary.

Dominant culture and oppositional culture have been used extensively to examine the achievement gap between White and underachieving minority groups (DiMaggio 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr 1985; Dyson 1993; Erikson 1996; Hall 1992; Kelley 1994; Rose 1994; Swartz 1997). However, nondominant cultures that are complementary to the dominant culture have been largely neglected in examining educational attainment gaps, which results in an interpretation of educational attainment among minorities that centers on oppositional theory.



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Within the context of cultural theories, distinction must be drawn between immigrant and non-immigrant minorities (Ogbu 1974). Since America is a land of immigrants, perhaps a more accurate version of this dichotomy would be voluntary and involuntary immigrants. Due to successive waves of immigration and acculturation over generations (Portes and Zady 1996), such distinctions are often difficult to make. Ogbu draws the line, not with the current generation, but with the first generation. He points out that African Americans are, by and large, descendents of forced immigrants. Hispanic Americans are a combination of involuntary immigrants conquered by the westward expansion of the United States and waves of immigrants actively seeking to enter the United States. Asian Americans are, by and large, either voluntary immigrants or descendents of voluntary immigrants (Ogbu 1974). As voluntary immigrants, Asian Americans may aspire to the dominant culture. Asian Americans may choose to adopt the attitudes, preferences, tastes, and styles of the dominant White culture so as to be admitted into the dominant cultural group. Involuntary immigrant groups may oppose and reject elements of the dominant culture so as to form and maintain a group identity and to avoid association with the dominant (and dominating) culture. This may partly explain higher educational achievements among voluntary immigrants, but the authors do not find it likely that higher educational achievement among Asian minorities is due purely to their assimilation to the dominant culture.

If the dominant and nondominant cultures value different physical and behavioral characteristics, a trade-off must occur. While gaining cultural capital within one group, the subject would lose cultural capital within the other. The degree of difference between the cultures would define a trade-off ratio (Pearce and Lin 2004). Alternatively, if the dominant and nondominant cultures both place value upon a specific characteristic, the subject is able to gain cultural capital in both groups as a result of the same behavioral or physical characteristic. In this case, the presence of the characteristic in question among members of the nondominant group may not reflect assimilation. The subject may be responding to the demands of their own culture, while simultaneously exhibiting those behavioral or physical characteristics demanded by the dominant culture. Therefore, if Asian American and White American cultures share a sense of value in certain characteristics, Asian Americans may appear successful in adopting the dominant culture although they are in fact demonstrating elements of their nondominant culture that mesh well with the dominant culture.

One example would be the emphasis on education as a vehicle of upward mobility. Academic achievement is a key element of the dominant White culture. Asian cultures, particularly the cultures of China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam (the Confucian empires), have traditionally placed a heavy emphasis on educational achievement as the sole vehicle of social mobility.

Therefore, Asian Americans may be pursuing specific nondominant cultural capital with the result being the appearance of conscious assimilation. Within the limits of cultural divergence, Asian Americans may be able to simultaneously acquire cultural capital among both the dominant White and nondominant Asian American groups.

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In looking specifically at the largest Asian American group in the United States, Chinese Americans, this study first looks for evidence of academic success in terms of both attainment and achievement. Finding evidence of this, we look further to identify those factors that most strongly account for success. This study suggests that those factors may be identified as being either social structural or cultural in nature. Further, the study suggests that commonalities between White and Chinese Americans are evident among the social structural factors while distinct differences are evident among the cultural factors.

Figure 1 demonstrates the causal framework of data analysis. On the left side, we assume that social structure and cultural capital play a combined role in influencing individual educational attainment (Lin, Sweet, and Anisef 2003). Social structural factors are further collapsed as gender, family income, urbanicity, and family composition. Cultural capital is categorized as parental education, parents' highest educational expectation, parental involvement, and parenting style.

The literature suggests an attainment gender gap among Asian Americans that is inconsistent with the norm among all Americans. The literature further suggests gender has a substantial impact on how children gain status and position within the academic culture, as well as how students form and foster relationships between academic achievement and both home and school cultures. In the high school setting, female students are more likely to have positive relationships with their teachers and tend to perform better than males (Demie 2001; Perrault and Hill 2000). On the other hand, male high school students show greater cognitive dissonance (Chow and Wood 2001). Inconsistencies in the literature also can be found in terms of the social structural impact. Some researchers have argued that family culture, not the parents' profession, education, income, or social status, is the greater determinant of a student's academic achievement and attainment (Clark 1983; Chao 1996; Peng and Wright 1994).

Several studies suggest that the parental role in a child's education is perceived in a variety of ways, with distinctions often falling along ethnic or cultural lines. Lee and Manning (2001, 41) found that Asian parents, unlike those of the White majority, are often reluctant to become involved in school functions or to confer with teachers because they "defer to the authority of educators, often lack confidence in their ability to speak English, lack encouragement by other parents, and work long hours."

The role of parental expectations in academic success has been widely accepted, and Henderson (1988) found that this was true regardless of socioeconomic or ethnic background. The question that remains to be addressed is whether expectations are a function of culture. Since there are obvious differences between the dominant cultures of China<sup>1</sup> and the United States, the cultural differences may affect parental attitudes about education and parental expectations for academic attainment and achievement.

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## Methods

### Data Source

The data analysis was based on the National Educational Longitudinal Survey of 2000 (NELS-2000; see NCES 2003), which consisted of base year 1988, and four follow-ups in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. NELS provides trend data about critical transitions experienced by students as they leave elementary school and progress through high school and into college or their careers (NCES 2003, 5). The NELS-2000 sample included 2,203,472 White respondents and 22,195 Chinese American respondents (weighted).

### Data Analysis

Table 1 reveals the variables used in this study. It should be noted that some of the variables were recoded for the purposes of the data analyses (see Table 5a and Table 6a in appendix). All cases were selected based on White and Chinese; all other cases were excluded. Social structural variables include sex, family income, school district location, family composition, and immigration status. Cultural capital is defined as parents' educational attainment, parental educational expectation, parental school involvement, and parenting style.

The first part of the data analysis describes the cultural capital variables, which lays a foundation for a basic discussion of the issues in question. To systematically examine the model, logistic regressions were introduced. The dichotomous dependent variable is highest postsecondary degree attained, and the independent variables are social structure and cultural capital, respectively.

## Results

The NELS-2000 follow-up data were examined for evidence of Chinese American success in educational attainment and achievement in terms of parity with the dominant White American population. Figure 2 shows that educational attainment levels among White and Chinese are comparable. Overall, Chinese have slightly higher educational attainment than do Whites. About 65 percent of the Chinese have a bachelor degree or higher certificates, while only 42.7 percent of the White Americans attained the same qualifications. Some 10.9 percent of the White Americans have an associate degree, but only 1.5 percent of the Chinese show the same degree of attainment. This disparity may be explained through cultural differences. The Chinese concept *Zheng Ming* (è) demands that each individual strive higher because it is believed that the degree that you earn is the life that you lead. This may explain why so few Chinese Americans settle for an associate or two-year degree. For the purposes of this study, we assume that both White and Chinese cultures promote education but that the related cultural components are significantly different.

Over the past few decades, sociologists have associated several factors with educational attainment. Studies have claimed that attainment depends upon such family demographics as income, parents' education, and parental involvement (Rumberger 1995). Additional factors that have been associated with attending

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college include information about and access to schools (Fuller, Manski, and Wise 1982; Manski and Wise 1983). Yet such models based on social structural factors do not fully explain the variance in educational attainment between Chinese and White Americans.

If these social structural factors were to account for the variance between White and Chinese American educational attainment, then we should find differences in these factors between White and Chinese subjects, however, this is not the case. Although we see substantially higher attainment among Chinese Americans when compared with White Americans, we find almost counterintuitive figures when we examine such factors as family income (NCES 2000).<sup>2</sup>

It seems reasonable to explore cultural capital in the shaping of a child's educational attainment. Table 2 demonstrates how Chinese and White parents are involved in their child's school. When asked if parents attended school events, 67.9 percent of Whites answered yes, while only 34.5 percent of the Chinese did so. Some 54.1 percent of the White parents attended a school meeting, and 33.9 percent of the Chinese did the same. Almost six in ten White parents (58.8 percent) spoke to a teacher or a counselor, but less than four in ten Chinese (35.4 percent) did the same. Some 26.5 percent of the White parents had visited classes; only 19.7 percent of the Chinese had done so. In brief, Chinese parents are much less involved in their children's schools.

Table 3 discusses parental involvement with their child. Among White respondents, 91.8 percent had discussed school with their parents, compared to only 71.9 percent among Chinese American students. Contrary to several stereotypes, Chinese parents are not more involved in their children's educational work than are their White counterparts. Only 35.6 percent of Chinese respondents claimed their parents often check on their homework. This figure is well below the 44.2 percent claimed by White respondents. In fact, 44.9 percent of Chinese respondents stated that their parents offer no help at all with homework, compared to only 18.4 percent of White respondents. Most children do not count on parents to solve problems, but Chinese children show slightly more independence.

Table 4 refers to parenting style. In contrast to White parents, slightly more Chinese parents (81.4 percent Chinese vs. 79.5 percent White) trust their children to do what they expect. As the consequence of mutual trust, Chinese children are more likely to follow their parents' instructions (32.5 percent Chinese vs. 27.8 percent White) than are White children. It seems that Chinese parents are more restrictive than are White parents concerning TV viewing. Some 25.6 percent of the Chinese parents often limit TV viewing, while only 12.8 percent of White parents do the same. Chinese parents are less likely to require their children to do chores than are White parents. The data suggest that 65.9 percent of the White parents have often required chores, while only 46.1 percent of the Chinese parents can be classified in this category.

As descriptive analyses, Tables 2 to 4 have depicted some essential differences in terms of parental involvement in schools, parental involvement with their child, and parenting styles. These are the initial indicators of how cultural capital influences educational achievement. These descriptive analyses have laid the foundation for a more detailed exploration.

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### Social Structural Positions and Postsecondary Attainment

To systematically examine the reasons behind postsecondary educational achievement, several logistic regressions were conducted. The dichotomous variable, postsecondary educational attainment, serves as the dependent variable and social structural variables (e.g., gender, family income, urbanicity of the school, family composition, and immigrant status) serve as predictors in Table 5.

Females are more likely to have postsecondary educational attainment than males among both White and Chinese Americans, however, the gender influence is stronger among Chinese than among Whites. Specifically, a Chinese female is almost 1.84 times more likely than a Chinese male to attain a postsecondary education. In contrast, a White female is only 1.3 times more likely to attain the same level of education as a White male. Family income of both Whites and Chinese has a significant, positive influence on educational attainment. In contrast to families/households with two parents, children in single-parent families with guardians are negatively impacted in educational attainment in both races, and similar negative influences are observed in single-parent or relative households. Despite slight differences, overall the structural factors impact children's postsecondary educational attainment in the same direction for both White and Chinese Americans.

### Cultural Capital and Postsecondary Educational Attainment

Logistic regressions were conducted with the dichotomous variable postsecondary educational attainment serving as the dependent variable, and the cultural capital variables, categorized as relating to parent's education, educational expectations, parental involvement, and parenting style, serving as predictors in Table 6.

In general, the cultural capital variables show significant impact on both Chinese and White Americans, but the magnitude and direction often vary, which may be explained by cultural differences between White and Chinese Americans.

Among both Whites and Chinese, parents' educational attainment has a positive influence on the child's educational attainment. The strongest influence is evident in the Chinese mother's educational level. The child is nearly three times more likely to gain a secondary education if the mother has a secondary education.

Parental expectations generally have a positive influence, however, again the degree is substantially higher among Chinese Americans.

The parental involvement data presents a mixed picture that requires a degree of anthropological analysis. Both White and Chinese American students are positively influenced by discussing school activities with their parents. The degree of influence, again, is nearly double for the Chinese Americans. Similar results are seen for parental visits to the classroom, with both groups seeing a positive influence, but with the degree being more than double among Chinese Americans.

The remaining predictor variables shared significant influence. However, in each case the direction of influence was inconsistent between White and Chinese Americans. Parents attending a school meeting had a positive influence on White children but a negative influence on Chinese American children.

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The opposite influences found between White and Chinese Americans among several predictor variables represent clear distinctions in the cultures of these two groups. The clear distinctions most strongly demonstrate different attitudes and approaches to parental involvement.

Only approximately 34 percent of Chinese parents attended a school meeting, compared to more than half of the White parents. The direction of influence was positive for White students but negative for Chinese. This difference appears to represent a cultural distinction. One explanation is that White American parents believe parental involvement is important to scholastic success; therefore, educated and affluent parents, whose children are more likely to have a higher level of educational attainment, seek opportunities to be involved in the academic life of their child. On the other hand, Chinese American parents appear to more closely adhere to the adage, *If it ain't broke . . . don't fix it*. Therefore, when we see 33.9 percent of Chinese American parents attending a school meeting, a substantial proportion of these may be responding to difficulties in their child's education—the direction of influence is negative. If those students whose parents have visited the school are those having difficulties, it would follow that they will be those less likely to realize higher educational attainment. At this point, this is only speculation. Further study should examine parental perceptions and attitudes among Chinese Americans concerning involvement in the formal education process.

Similarly, the direction of influence for the predictor variable parents attended a school event differed. The direction was positive for White American children and negative for Chinese American children. Again, this is not to suggest that the attendance by Chinese American parents at a school function has a negative impact on their children's future educational achievement. Instead, it demonstrates the divergent definitions of educational value held by White American parents and Chinese American parents.

Chinese American parents view the educational experience from a predominantly scholastic perspective. Any extracurricular activities are expected to be directly related to academic performance. Therefore, it seems reasonable that such school events as PTA/PTO meetings, family fun night, and pancake and sausage breakfasts would not be heavily attended by Chinese American parents. Among the NELS-2000 respondents, less than one-third of Chinese American parents claimed to have ever attended a school event.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The data analyses, through comparing White and Chinese Americans, suggest that social structure has significant impact on student achievement. Furthermore, the impact is in the same direction across both groups. When the data analysis moves to cultural capital, the significant impact on student achievement still exists, but in opposite directions. The empirical evidence supports the initial argument that cultural capital factors have a strong impact on student achievement. In addition, the cultural differences that define the cultural capital value assigned by individuals to various elements related to the educational experience, particularly

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in terms of parental involvement, indicate the educational attainment realized by Chinese Americans is rooted in their culture rather than achieved through assimilation to the dominant, White culture. Since a model minority assumes assimilation to the dominant culture, the inference of this finding challenges the model minority status of Chinese Americans because cultural capital has an important and unique impact on student achievement. A simple model minority label may not provide a true model for minority academic success.

In order to serve as a model for other minorities, the model minority must demonstrate behaviors or traits that can be copied. This assumes either a pattern for successful assimilation into the dominant culture or a pattern for success as a nondominant culture. Criticism of the model minority premise has come from both of these quarters. Critics of the latter point to the hypocrisy of labeling as success behavior often characterized as docile, subordinate, or nonconfrontational. In the 1960s, when proponents of the model minority premise first touted Asian Americans as figures to emulate, they did so as a reaction to the growing Hispanic and African American empowerment struggles. Characterizations, often misperceived, of Asian Americans were flouted as lending themselves to a path of least resistance leading to the ultimate measure of success—parity with Whites. Critics point out, by definition, such behaviors can never result in equality (Chun 1980). The notion of success through assimilation has met with mounting resistance. Oppositional cultural theory suggests that many minority groups have developed through historical experience a definition of themselves as defined by their differences when compared with the dominant White culture. Therefore, success through assimilation requires for these groups an abandonment of their own cultures.

Too often, we assume conflict between different cultures. But the comparisons between White and Chinese Americans reveal that compatibility exists between the dominant White culture and the nondominant Chinese culture in terms of promoting educational success. We further see that the definition of educational success and the path leading to educational attainment and achievement can be differently defined by the two cultures. In either case, the usefulness of Asian Americans, and in this study Chinese Americans in particular, as a model minority becomes questionable since educational success, as measured by attainment in higher education, appears to be more closely related to shared cultural values placed on education than to attempts by Chinese Americans to assimilate to the dominant White culture. In other words, the two cultures in promoting education are harmonistic but different.

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## Endnotes

1 Due to the limitations placed upon this study by the classifications used in the NELS-88 study, no distinction is drawn among the various Chinese groups (i.e., mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or elsewhere) or waves of immigrations (i.e., pre-*Oriental Exclusion Act*, pre-1949, post-1978).

2 See Table 5, Logistic Regression for Educational Attainment with Social Structural Positions.

Figure 1

Cultural Capital and Postsecondary Educational Attainment  
White vs. Chinese

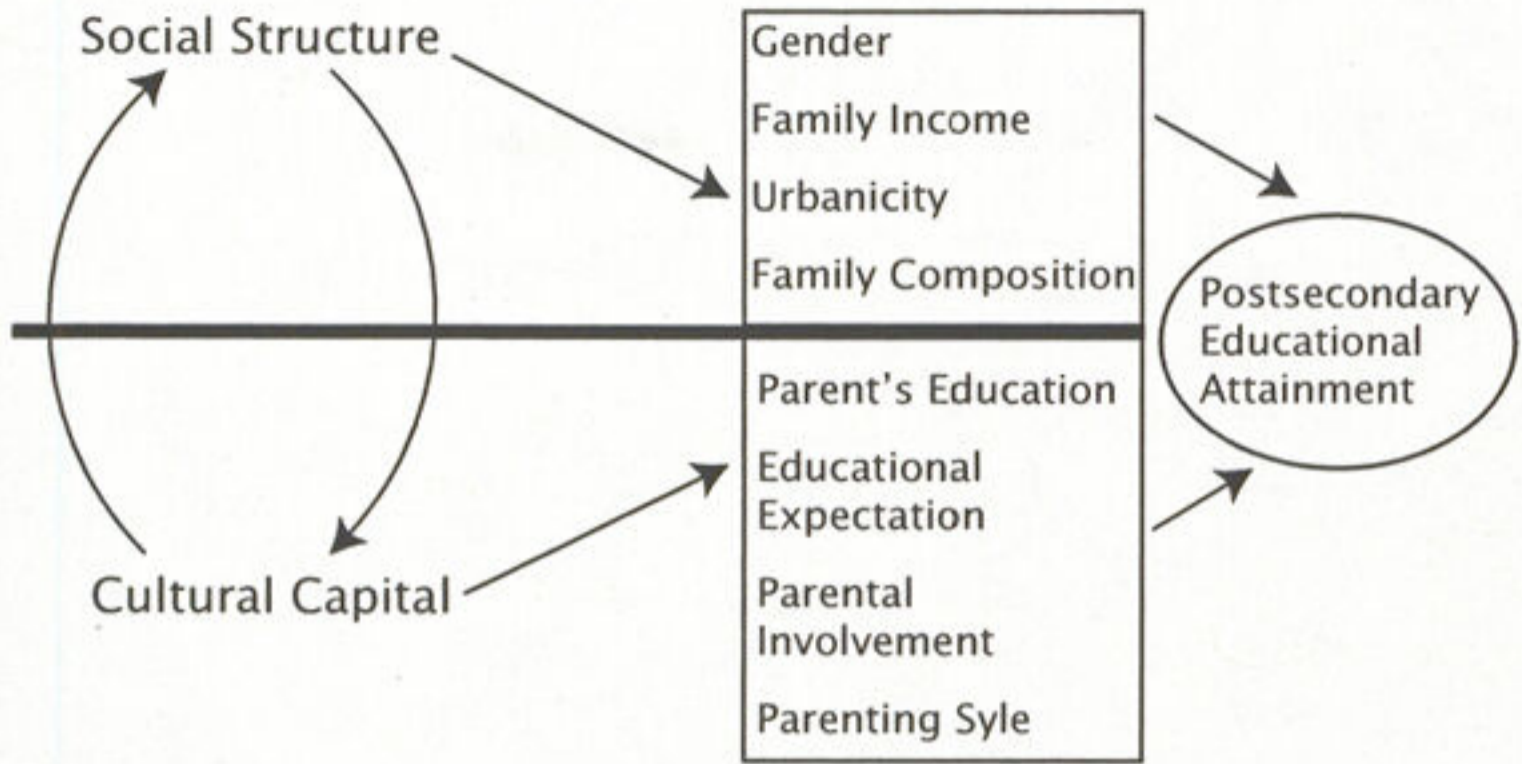


Figure 2

Educational Attainment:  
White vs. Chinese Americans, NELS: 88-2000

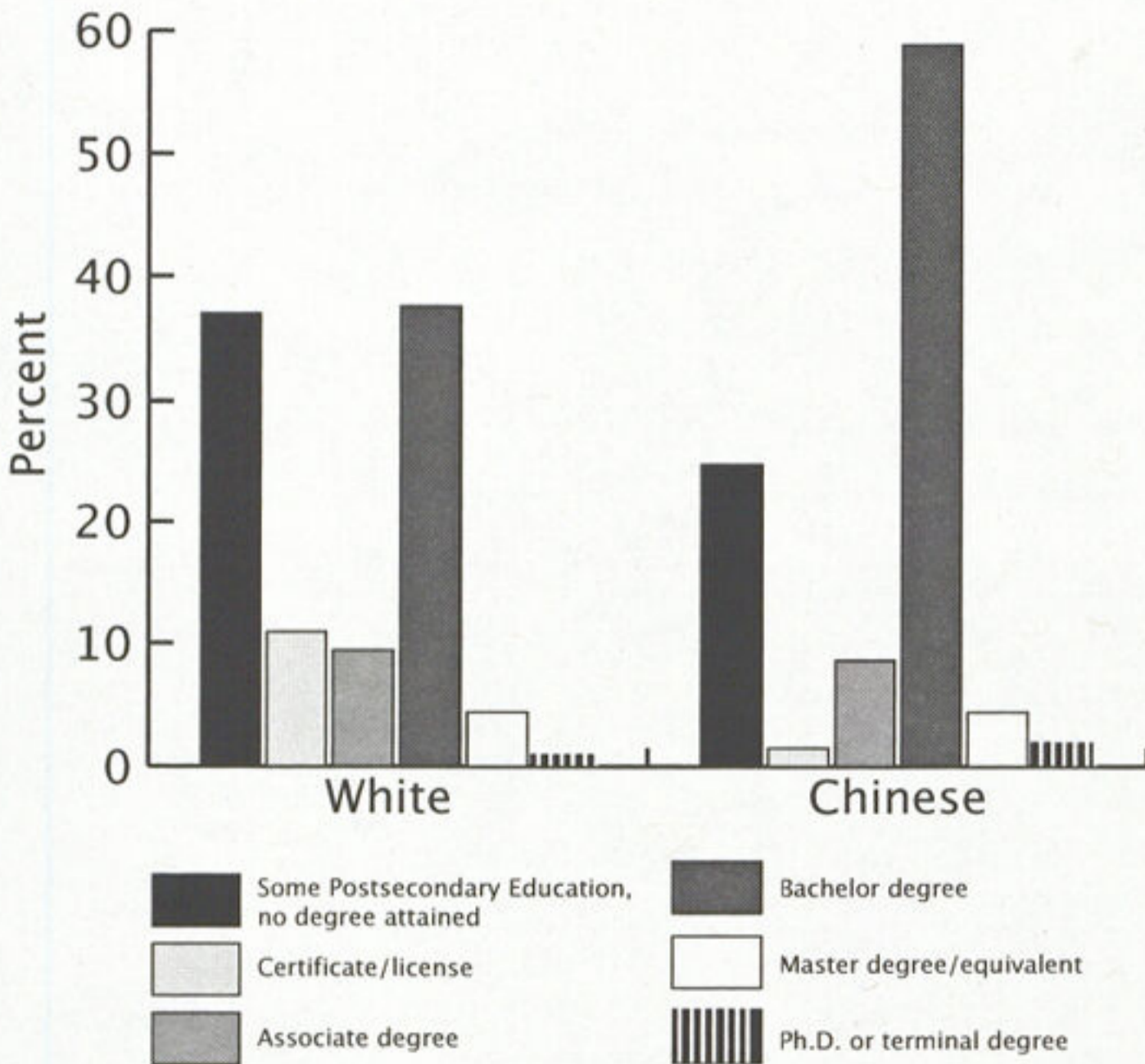


Table 1

## Selected Variables

Variable		Variable Label
Social Structural Position	F4SEX	Sex
	BYFAMINC	Family Income
	G8URBAN	School District Urbanicity in Grade 8
	BYFCOMP	Family Composition
	IMMIGRNT	Immigrant Status
<b>Cultural Capital</b>		
Parents' Education	BYS34A	Father's Highest Education
	BYS34B	Mother's Highest Education
Expectation	EDEXPECT	Highest Educational Expectation
Parental Involvement	BYS36B	Discuss School Activities with Parents
	BYS37A	Parents Attended a School Meeting
	BYS37B	Parents Spoke to Teacher/Counselor
	BYS37C	Parents Visited Child's Classes
	BYS37D	Parents Attended a School Event
	BYS38A	How Often Parents Check on Child's Homework
	BYS39C	Often Count on Parents to Solve Problems
Parenting Style	BYS38B	How Often Parents Require Chores Done
	BYS38C	How Often Parents Limit Time Watching TV
	BYS39A	Parents Trust Child to Do What They Expect
	BYS39B	Often Don't Know Why I Am to Do What Parents Say
	F1S84	Ever Been Employed?

Dependent Variable F4HHDG, Highest Postsecondary Degree Attained As of 2000

Table 2

## Parental Involvement in Schools

Activity		Frequency		Percent	
		White	Chinese	White	Chinese
Parents Attended a School Event	Yes	1,314,913	5,611	67.9	34.5
	No	573,531	9,470	29.6	58.3
	Don't know	48,342	1,177	2.5	7.2
	Total	1,936,786	16,258	100.0	100.0
Parents Attended a School Meeting	Yes	994,312	5,429	51.4	33.9
	No	711,047	10,030	36.8	62.6
	Don't know	227,963	573	11.8	3.6
	Total	1,933,322	16,032	100.0	100.0
Parents Spoke to Teacher/Counselor	Yes	1,141,001	5,781	58.9	35.4
	No	573,708	9,146	29.6	56.0
	Don't know	222,325	1,391	11.5	8.5
	Total	1,937,034	16,318	100.0	100.0
Parents Visited Classes	Yes	508,697	3,218	26.5	19.7
	No	1,315,392	12,845	68.6	78.5
	Don't know	92,879	297	4.8	1.8
	Total	1,916,967	16,360	100.0	100.0

Table 3

## Parental Involvement with the Child

Activity		Frequency		Percent	
		White	Chinese	White	Chinese
Discuss School Activities with Parents	Not at all	160,190	4,231	8.2	28.1
	Once or twice	610,355	5,587	31.4	37.1
	More than twice	1,172,905	5,251	60.4	34.8
	Total	1,943,450	15,069	100.0	100.0
How Often Parents Checked on Child's Homework	Often	861,951	5,803	44.2	35.6
	Sometimes	574,479	5,244	29.5	32.1
	Rarely	335,750	3,461	17.2	21.2
	Never	178,008	1,806	9.1	11.1
	Total	1,950,187	16,314	100.0	100.0
How Often Parents Helped with Child's Homework	Often	157,683	733	8.5	4.1
	Sometimes	746,332	5,102	40.3	28.6
	Rarely	609,416	3,990	32.9	22.4
	Never	340,254	8,020	18.4	44.9
	Total	1,853,686	17,845	100.0	100.0
Often Count on Parents to Solve Problems	True	371,487	2,806	19.2	17.5
	False	1,568,190	13,210	80.8	82.5
	Total	1,939,677	16,016	100.0	100.0

Table 4

## Parenting Style

Activity		Frequency		Percent	
		White	Chinese	White	Chinese
Parents Trust Child to Do What They Expect	True	1,546,484	13,042	79.5	81.4
	False	398,321	2,974	20.5	18.6
	Total	1,944,806	16,015	100.0	100.0
Often Don't Know Why I Am to Do What Parents Say	True	539,311	5,217	27.8	32.5
	False	1,402,424	10,821	72.2	67.5
	Total	1,941,735	16,038	100.0	100.0
How Often Parents Limit Time Watching TV	Often	249,034	4,169	12.8	25.6
	Sometimes	449,489	4,758	23.1	29.2
	Rarely	537,079	3,292	27.6	20.2
	Never	710,401	4,094	36.5	25.1
	Total	1,946,003	16,314	100.0	100.0
How Often Parents Required Chores Done	Often	1,284,124	7,524	65.9	46.1
	Sometimes	474,449	5,834	24.3	35.8
	Rarely	151,738	2,727	7.8	16.7
	Never	39,600	230	2.0	1.4
	Total	1,949,910	16,314	100.0	100.0

Table 5

## Logistic Regression for Educational Attainment with Social Structural Positions

Ethnicity		White			Chinese		
Variable	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	
	Female	0.267**	0.004	1.305	0.505**	0.039	1.657
	Family income	0.321**	0.001	1.379	0.236**	0.008	1.266
Urbanicity	Urban	-0.076**	0.005	0.927	-0.226**	0.041	0.798
Family Composition	Single parent w/ guardian	-1.099**	0.006	0.333	-0.386**	0.076	0.680
	Single parent/relatives	-0.350**	0.006	0.705	-1.454**	0.061	0.234
	Constant	-3.608**	0.012	0.027	-1.633**	0.084	0.195

Notes:

1. Logistic regression model for Whites, -2 log likelihood=1,780,303,  $X^2=172,771$ , d.f.=5,  $p<.00$
2. Logistic regression model for Chinese, -2 log likelihood=17,580  $X^2=2,386$ , d.f.=5,  $p<.00$
3. \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*  $p<.05$
4. B = unstandardized beta; S.E. = standard error; Exp(B) = beta weight.

Table 6

## Logistic Regression for Educational Attainment with Cultural Capitals

Ethnicity		White			Chinese		
Variable	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	
1	Father's Education	0.701**	0.005	2.016	0.428**	0.108	1.533
	Mother's Education	0.391**	0.005	1.478	1.804**	0.105	6.074
2	Expectation	0.875**	0.003	2.398	1.770**	0.058	5.871
	Discuss School Activities with Parents	0.302**	0.004	1.353	1.563**	0.066	4.772
	Parents Attended a School Meeting	0.363**	0.005	1.437	-3.087**	0.121	0.046
	Parents Spoke to Teacher/Counselor	-0.261**	0.005	0.770	0.811**	0.110	2.251
3	Parents Visited Child's Classes	0.020**	0.005	1.020	0.692**	0.111	1.999
	Parents Attended a School Event	0.268**	0.006	1.307	0.201	0.099	1.223
	How Often Parents Check on Child's Homework	-0.127**	0.002	0.881	-0.244**	0.049	0.783
	Often Count on Parents to Solve Problems	0.110**	0.006	1.116	0.061	0.095	1.062
	How Often Parents Require Chores Done	-0.187**	0.003	0.830	0.151**	0.054	1.163
	How Often Parents Limit Time Watching TV	0.075**	0.002	1.078	0.267**	0.042	1.306
4	Parents Trust Child to Do What They Expect	-0.342**	0.006	0.710	-0.846**	0.112	0.429
	Often DK Why I Am to Do What Parents Say	0.259**	0.005	1.295	-0.068	0.082	0.934
	Ever Been Employed?	0.261**	0.005	1.299	1.686**	0.079	5.399
	Constant	-7.499**	0.027	0.001	-16.891**	0.607	0.000

Notes:

1. Logistic regression model for Whites, -2 log likelihood=1,187,806,  $X^2=373,968$ , d.f.=15,  $p<.00$
2. Logistic regression model for Chinese, -2 log likelihood=6,269,  $X^2=7,531$ , d.f.=15,  $p<.00$
3. The four aspects of cultural capitals are labeled as 1=Parents' Education; 2=Educational Expectation; 3=Parental Involvement; 4=Parenting Style.
4. B = unstandardized beta; S.E. = standard error; Exp(B) = beta weight.
5. \*\*  $p<.01$ , \*  $p<.05$

Appendix: Definition of Variables for Logistic Regressions

**Table 5a**  
**Definition of Variables for the Logistic Regression of Social Structural Factors**

		Frequency		Parameter Coding	
		White	Chinese	(1)	(2)
Family Composition	Both parents	4344	134	.000	.000
	Single parent with guardian	638	5	1.000	.000
	Single parent/relatives	847	20	.000	1.000
Urbanicity	Urban	1201	59	1.000	
	Suburban/rural	4628	100	.000	
Gender	Male	2710	78	.000	
	Female	3119	81	1.000	

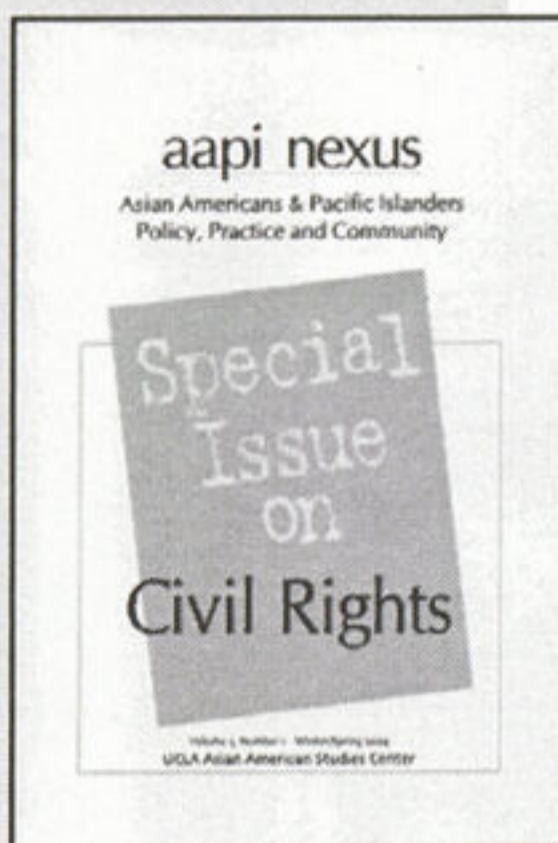
**Table 6a**  
**Definition of Variables for the Logistic Regression of Educational Attainment**

		Frequency		Parameter Coding
		White	Chinese	(1)
Employed before Grade 10	Never employed	1933	63	1.000
	Employed	2879	50	.000
Mother's Education	High school or less	2768	51	.000
	College and more	2044	62	1.000
Parents Attended a School Meeting	Yes	2776	48	1.000
	No	2036	65	.000
Parents Spoke to Teacher/Counselor	Yes	2766	48	1.000
	No	2046	65	.000
Parents Visited Child's Classes	Yes	1369	22	1.000
	No	3443	91	.000
Often Count on Parents to Solve Problems	True	851	26	1.000
	False	3961	87	.000
Parents Attended a School Event	Yes	3660	56	1.000
	No	1152	57	.000
Father's Education	High school or less	2475	47	.000
	College and more	2337	66	1.000

# aapi nexus

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# Creating Educational Institutions as Centers of Academic Excellence, Community, Identity, and Empowerment: The Case for Asian Americans

Larry Hajime Shinagawa

## Abstract

As we enter into the twenty-first century, Asian Americans are increasingly diversified. Asian Americans are being progressively more affected by overlapping identities and allegiances, and they are also affected by the perceptions of themselves by others and by each other. Yet despite this diversity, there are many commonalities of experience that they share with each other because of our nation's perceptions of (or, might we say, obsession with) their "race"—which coalesce interpersonally and intrapersonally toward a pan-ethnic self-awareness of their Asian Americanness. In the past, Asian Americans have been heavily discriminated against in education. Yet since the 1960s, Asian Americans have been depicted by the media and by American society as epitomes of model minority success—especially in the arena of education. This essay examines some of the features of the so-called educational success of Asian Americans and calls into

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question whether this reflects accurately the experiences and conditions of contemporary Asian Americans. It also notes indications of generational declines in Asian American educational attainment and differential rate of returns on educational investment that suggest the continuing presence of discrimination and the effects of the glass ceiling. In order for Asian Americans to prepare for a brighter future that can offset some of the negative trends and conditions, we must acknowledge that overlapping identities and allegiances are important aspects of contemporary Asian America. Rather than to see these to be shortcomings, problems, or fracture points, the commentary will suggest that these are the very seeds for a future vibrant, dynamic, multipositional Asian American culture and community. In order for that future to be realized, however, we must acknowledge that education has been and continues to play a central role in Asian American culture and community. For Asian Americans to be successful in the future, we must also acknowledge that educational institutions must increasingly serve as centers of academic excellence, community, identity, and empowerment. This essay argues for the creation of educational institutions at the high school and collegiate level that highlight academic excellence, preservation of heritage, and service to the world—but in this case, with a dual mission to empower Asian Americans and to advance communication and education between the East and West. We also note several examples of African American and Latino educational institutions and discuss some of their successes and issues. The essay concludes by arguing that Asian Americans (under a broad definition of themselves) have the economic, political, social, and cultural power within themselves to create such institutions and that these institutions will serve the needs of the Asian American communities, the United States, and the world.

### **The Twenty-first Century Setting—Overlapping Identities and Allegiances**

As we enter into the twenty-first century, Asian Americans are increasingly diverse. Foreign born and U.S. born, immigrant and refugee, multi-ethnic and multiracial, transnational and pan-ethnic, and increasingly multigenerational, no easy characterizations of Asian Americans are possible. Asian Americans are becoming more affected by overlapping identities and allegiances, and they are also affected by the perceptions of themselves by others and by each other. Yet despite this diversity, there are many commonalities of experience that they share with each other because of the mainstream perceptions of their “race,” which coalesce interpersonally and intrapersonally toward a pan-ethnic self-awareness of their Asian Americanness.

One example of this growing trend toward overlapping identities is transnationalism. Transnationals who significantly stake their fortunes in more than one nation are increasingly common. What might have once been described as the international jet set has morphed into a global transnational elite whose children may have such histories as being born in Hong Kong, being educated at a boarding school in Switzerland, attending Cornell University as an undergraduate,

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graduating from Kings College in the United Kingdom for his or her doctorate, speaking four languages, marrying a 1.5-generation Korean American, and now working in corporate finance at a multinational corporation whose holding company is headquartered in Japan and where the apparently "American" workplace is at a South Carolina-based company. To characterize this person as Hong Kong-raised, Cantonese, Chinese, Asian, Chinese American, Asian American, British, or American would be difficult to do. He or she partakes in all of these identities and yet none of them completely. This individual is a global transnational who has multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances. Yet in some sense, there is an Asian Americanness to this set of circumstances in that much of what shapes his or her identity is still affected by race. Regardless of what he or she may identify with, the typical American would still view him or her as Asian, would have numerous presuppositions about who she is and what she does, and would wonder, in times of crisis, where her loyalties lie.

What these diverse identity formations have in common is the simple observation that identities are also shared communities, with their own codes of behavior and mores and their own set of social boundaries, however tightly or loosely made, about in-group and out-group. A person is a member and participant, and each person will have varying degrees of attachment in their participation in an identity. Strong attachments will elicit feelings of allegiance and belonging while loose attachments may bring about conversion or straying away and feelings of alienation and disaffection.

When individuals experience multiple and overlapping identities, it is natural to hold multiple allegiances that would ebb and flow with various stages of their lives, their immediate situations and environments, and the political and social discourse prevalent in the ethos. As Asian Americans progress into the twenty-first century, they must not shy away from a discussion of the social dynamics of identity and allegiance, even if there is a danger that it might play into the hands of some conservative interests who would question the loyalties of some individuals and groups, as had happened in World War II against Japanese Americans. Yet times are different: in the previous era, the national narrative was strongly assimilationist and didn't allow for ambiguity regarding identity and allegiances. Times and circumstances have changed with the globalization of our economy and our participation in world events as the single remaining global superpower. These have brought about, for many persons who are considered racial minorities, a range of identities that for some would be choices and for others largely pre-chosen by the ascriptive nature of our society. Such identities carry with them coetaneous allegiances. Perhaps to their peril, multiple identities and allegiances are no longer completely banned to the degree as in the past, but neither are they completely voluntary or without disapproval. Without recognizing the complexity of current constructions of identities and allegiances, race and ethnic relations in the United States are overly simplified.

An example of this is the case of Richard Perle, currently a highly influential Pentagon policy advisor and leading neoconservative who holds dual citizenship in both the United States and in Israel. Although born in New York City, he has served for the Israeli government as a Likud policy advisor; been on the boards of

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numerous American corporations, government agencies, and think tanks; and continues to participate in the civic and nonprofit activities of major Jewish American and Israeli organizations. During the 1970s and the 1980s, indisputable evidence was indeed garnered that he had passed American governmental secrets to the Israeli government; however, because of his strong connections with the American government and corporate interests, and although he was indicted, he evaded sentencing and continues to serve both the United States and Israel at top echelons of their governments (IRC 2003).

Another contrasting example is the sad case of Dr. Tsien Hsue-shen, who was born in China in 1911, came to the United States during the 1930s, and later earned a doctorate at Caltech. He later achieved major scientific breakthroughs in aeronautics, rocketry, nuclear technology, and other fields at American government-sponsored research laboratories. After applying for U.S. citizenship in the 1950s, he became an innocent victim of the Red Scare, was subjected to grueling interrogations regarding his loyalty, and was put under house arrest. He was ultimately deported to Communist China. Instead of assuming the leadership role in America's missile and space programs that he was eminently qualified to hold, he became a victim of racist paranoia, red-baiting, the effects of the glass ceiling, and the Cold War. Out of this set of tragic experiences, he was quickly recruited into the scientific efforts of Communist China to modernize its military capabilities. He became one of the fathers of the Chinese missile and space program that would develop the Silkworm missile and subsequently other more deadly nuclear missiles (Chang 1996).

Forty years later, almost the same set of patterns occurred for Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a U.S. citizen and a former researcher who had worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. While employed, he was alleged by the FBI to be a spy passing on national defense secrets to the Communist Chinese. He was fired from his job. Eventually, after a thorough and contentious review, he was released from his forced incarceration, absolved of the charges of espionage, and cleared of all wrong-doing; however, his fate contrasted sharply with that of Richard Perle. Today, he is no longer allowed to work in national security agencies and was subsequently forced to retire. A shy and quiet elderly man, he currently remains at his home almost as if in house arrest (Lee and Zia 2002).

Such examples as those above suggest that among those who have multiple and overlapping identities, there still remains different degrees of choice and different degrees of punishment resulting from the perceived choices made regarding their allegiance that continue to be shaped by domestic and international politics, race relations, and access to power. Unfortunately, Asian Americans have been and continue to be caught by the perceptions of race, perceived threat to majority or national interests, and questioned allegiance that have historically caused great discrimination against them.<sup>1</sup>

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## Education

Historically, Asian Americans have reacted to this outward racism and discrimination by investing heavily in education. Over fifty court cases contesting racial discrimination testify to the strong efforts by Asian Americans to ensure equal access to education (McClain 2002, 1-13). The San Francisco School Board conflicts (1906), *Gong Lum v. Rice* (1927), *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), and the efforts to develop Asian American studies and ethnic studies across the United States to the present day all attest to the position that Asian Americans have taken regarding the importance of quality and relevant education in providing opportunities for Asian Americans.

Even when Asian Americans were not so directly proactive, they supported the call for further education. One Japanese American nisei described himself as being “200 percent American.”<sup>2</sup> An internment camp survivor and a decorated career military serviceman of the Marines and the U.S. Air Force, he impressed upon his children the importance of education. Because of the discrimination and the harsh conditions after World War II for Japanese Americans, he did not go to college. Instead, he entered into military service to prove his citizenship and his Americanness. In an interview, he said, stoically, that “it’s not realistic to change the racism, but you can change yourself. Invest in yourself—most of all, invest in your education.” Like many Asian American parents, he admonished young people to work twice as hard, get better and more education, and “take it on the chin and persevere if you and your family are to survive and prosper.”

Scholars such as Susan Chow, C. N. Le, and Vivian Shuh Ming Louie have all pointed out this strong emphasis on education among Asian American immigrants. Louie (2004) goes on to argue that there is an “immigrant optimism” that translates in a complex way toward the possibilities of educational success and achievement. But she also argues that there is also a dark cloud of an “immigrant pessimism,” which is across class and is enmeshed in the belief of immigrant parents that the United States is a racially and ethnically stratified country and that being Asian would hurt them as they sought opportunities. Louie argues that Asian Americans have embraced higher education as the balancing act solution to facing racial discrimination and opening the doors to the possibilities of American opportunity. In a 9 December 2004 interview with the Harvard Gazette, Louie states, “Higher education becomes especially important as a way to mitigate the potential effects of discrimination.” Asian Americans are “compelled to excel” in this complex interplay of culture, racial discrimination, class conditions, optimism, and pessimism.

## Myth of the Model Minority

The American public has been spoon-fed an endless series of media stories, articles, and books about the supposed success of Asian Americans. Asian Americans garner a good education, work well and quietly with others, and earn a decent income. Their hard work, diligence, and uncomplaining patience provide examples for other minority groups to emulate.

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The litany of indicators rattle off smoothly from the tongue—Asian Americans have the highest educational attainment of all racial groups, the highest median family income, highest labor force participation rates, the highest occupational scores, low crime rates, some of the lowest divorce rates, and among the lowest rates of out-of-wedlock births.

Yet as many Asian American scholars have noted, a deeper investigation shows wide discrepancies. Educational attainment is indeed high for many groups, but study after study shows that the economic returns on education remain consistently lower than that of Whites. Cabezas, Fong, Jiobu, Le, Ong, Sakamoto, and Shinagawa<sup>3</sup> have conducted numerous studies that show that controlling for cost of living, occupation, and disaggregating the population consistently belies the model minority imagery of economic success and fair treatment. Instead, as C. N. Le (2005) argues, “The typical Asian American has to get more years of education *just to make the same amount of money* that a typical White makes with less education.”

Moreover, large swaths of the Asian American children do not achieve educational or economic success. According to the 2000 Census, college attainment among Vietnamese Americans and other Southeast Asian Americans remains below 20 percent. Cambodian Americans, Hmong Americans, and Laotian Americans have the highest school dropout rates in the United States (Le 2005).

Locally, in the city of Ithaca in Tompkins County, New York, there are two main institutions of higher learning—Ithaca College and Cornell University. In Ithaca, 17.7 percent of the population is Asian American; for Tompkins County, one in ten is Asian American. Over 70 percent of the Asian American population above the age of twenty-five holds a college degree or higher.

Yet despite their high educational achievements, Asian Americans in Tompkins County are a microcosm of trends happening throughout the nation. In the local high schools, the drop-out rates of Southeast Asian Americans are above 60 percent (ICSD 2005). Even with the extension of time for high school completion to six years, less than 26 graduated with a GED. Among our college-educated population, they exhibit significantly higher levels of educational achievement than the local majority population, yet Asian American males above the age of twenty-five who are working full time/full year make only 70 cents to every dollar of a White male, and Asian American females make 63 cents to every dollar of a White female (age differences in structure account for some of the difference, but the median age among workers are only different by three years).<sup>4</sup> The returns gap continues to be a vexing problem for Asian Americans, and the local statistics might be due to what Deborah Woo (2000) has described as the effects of the glass ceiling on Asian Americans.

### **The “Failure” of the Third and Subsequent Generations**

The higher one goes up the educational hierarchy, there are proportionately fewer racial minority individuals of third and subsequent generations who enroll in education. This tendency has been observed by many social scientists and

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social commentators, notably such public intellectuals as Susan Chow<sup>5</sup>, Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2003), and Alexandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut (2001). Unlike Whites, racial minorities do not exhibit maintained class or educational status or sustained class or educational upward mobility. While racial minority immigrants exhibit remarkable initial gains in education and occupation in the first and 1.5 generations, and many times in the second generation, this is not necessarily true for many of the U.S. born, especially among third generation and subsequent generations.

So where are they? Many drop out; some join the military, some are in prison, and many, especially among Asian Americans, complete degrees at lower-status institutions or at lower levels of education.

Contrary to the myth of the model minority, Asian Americans are finding this set of general trends among racial minorities to be true for them as well. In different studies, Susan Chow and Larry Shinagawa have observed that in family gatherings of Chinese Americans and Japanese Americans who have been in the United States for three generations or more, the educational and subsequent occupational achievements of the 1.5 generation and second generation are greater than among the third and fourth generation when they were of the same age.<sup>6</sup> Among the later generations, they not only had less education than the former, but when they did attend colleges, they attended schools of significantly lower stature than their parents and grandparents.

As Helen Zia (2004) has noted, the Asian American population is about to undergo another sea change. In another eight to ten years, for the first time in forty years, the Asian American population will be majority U.S.-born. The significance of this fact is profound—increasingly, Asian Americans will be further removed from ethnic-specific experiences and increasingly acculturated. They will be less likely to speak a non-English language, more affected directly by their shared perceptions of race, and much more likely to identify with some form of Asian American set of identities or to believe that they are acculturated and assimilated.

The implications of this sea change are substantive. What Louie characterized as immigrant pessimism will be less likely to be balanced by immigrant optimism. Less informed by their immigrant forebears about the direct consequences of racism, some of the more affluent Asian Americans may believe that they are truly equal and would act in such a way that their educational achievements will reflect their belief that they do not need to “stand out” in order to compensate for racism. But the simple irony would be that their immigrant forebears will continue to be right—that the United States is still racially and ethnically stratified and treats unequally people of color in education, work, and in general, social opportunities.

Frank Wu (2002, 325) observed that racial minority immigrants do not tend to see themselves as racial minorities, yet they and their children are treated by American society and institutions as such. In a complex relationship of perception, treatment, and self-awareness, racial minority immigrants eventually become “racialized,” both by themselves and by others.

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## Coming Full Circle—Acknowledging Overlapping Identities and Allegiances and Recognizing the Continuing Importance of Education for Asian American Empowerment

In order for Asian Americans to prepare for a brighter future that can offset some of these negative trends and conditions, they must acknowledge that overlapping identities and allegiances are important aspects of contemporary Asian America. Rather than to see these as shortcomings, problems, or fracture points, these may be the very seeds for a future vibrant, dynamic, multi-positional Asian American culture and community. However, in order for that future to be realized, Asian Americans must also acknowledge that education has been and continues to play a central role in Asian American culture and community.

For Asian Americans to be successful in the future, they must also acknowledge that educational institutions must increasingly serve as centers of academic excellence, community, identity, and empowerment. The creation of such educational institutions at the high school and collegiate levels can highlight academic excellence, preservation of heritage, and service to the world—but in this case, with a dual mission to empower Asian Americans and to advance communication and education between East and West. Rather than to neglect globalization, heterogeneity, acculturation, panethnicization, and racialization, these educational institutions must explore, delve, and swim in this sea of difference and perception. The creativity of these explorations will lead toward empowerment and self-discovery among Asian and Asian American students, as well as for other students enrolled in the school, and will prepare them to live in a diverse and ever-changing world.

Several organizations of the Asian American educational community more recently have been calling for is the creation of a set of secondary schools and a future college (Asian American university or East-West college) that will be international, intercultural (multicultural), and interdisciplinary.<sup>7</sup> Some might be multicultural, and others will consist largely of Asian and Asian American students. Combining arts, social science, culture, identity, heritage, and the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, the twenty-first century institution will provide the vehicle for the development of some of the future leadership for the Asian American population (similar to the notions of leadership development advanced by W. E. B. Du Bois almost a century ago for African Americans). Asian students from around the world, Asian children of transracial adoptions, multiracial Asian Americans, third- and fourth-generation Asian Americans, students interested in a multicultural and international education, as well as recent immigrants and refugees could benefit from schools that are inclusive yet engendered with identity and culture. Unlike Asian American studies, which is a curricular appendage to mainstream Eurocentric institutions, the multicultural and international curriculum of these secondary schools would truly foster an integrative vision for our students that would engage them to become global citizens and stewards of the world.

Developing Asian American-related educational institutions would not occur in a social vacuum. Precedents have been set many times before in other communities,



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including those of Native Americans, Jewish Americans, Latinos, and African Americans. Notably, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have been studied extensively, and a literature of educational findings supports a clear need for such institutions serving the African American communities.

There are many features of HBCUs that can be included in future educational institutions related to Asians and Asian Americans—a strong maintenance of the ethnic historical and cultural tradition, strong support network, relevant and practical education, more focused leadership opportunities, strong parental-familial linkages for student success, and providing culturally relevant role models. Such features provide students with a unique competence to address the issues between the minority and majority, and produce future scholars that would be sensitive and aware of the role of Asians and Asian Americans in the American and global stage.

The success of HBCUs warrants further observation. HBCUs, despite severe cutbacks and budgetary restrictions, have shown that they have positively affected the educational experiences of African Americans.

During the 1980s, President Reagan (1984) indicated that half of all the Black business executives, 80 percent of all Black federal judges, and 85 percent of all Black doctors graduated from HBCUs. These statistics, although somewhat diminished today, continue to be largely true (Wright 2004). Moreover, U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige, in a speech celebrating the role of HBCUs in 2004, indicated that HBCUs continued to be the primary source for African American teachers (eight out of ten) (DOE 2004).

Moreover, in 2004, HBCUs were among many of the top institutions for African American graduates. HBCUs were listed as seven of the top eleven universities that produce African American engineers; all top ten colleges that graduate African American scientists; eight of the top eleven schools that confer African American baccalaureates in agriculture, agricultural operations, and related sciences; and sixteen of the top twenty-one institutions that graduate African American baccalaureates in biological and biomedical sciences. HBCUs also were among the top twelve producers of African American baccalaureates in physical sciences. Additionally, African American students at HBCUs were much more likely to enter a STEM discipline as an academic major and a future career (Barton 2004).

Regarding social integration, retention, and graduation, HBCUs had African American students who rated HBCUs significantly higher in the total range of academic and social areas than their counterparts in traditionally White institutions (TWIs). Detailed and repeated studies show that African American students attending HBCUs are more likely than African American students attending TWIs to complete their degrees. In fact, when prior student achievement, institutional size, and institutional selectivity were taken into account, Black students attending HBCUs were found 17 percent more likely than their TWI counterparts to complete their degrees (Barton 2004, 13–15).<sup>8</sup>

The long-term economic benefits of attending HBCUs have been borne out by research. HBCUs had African American women and men who were shown to experience a boost in wages in comparison to students graduating from TWIs

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(Constantine 1998). HBCUs also prepared African American students for careers in the sciences and engineering, professions in which they are most underrepresented and that are conducive to positive labor market outcomes (Wright 2004, 10–11).

## Education and Empowerment—A Conclusion

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1973) argued that social capital, like economic capital, can be accumulated and would have the capacity to reproduce itself over time. Such capital is socially reproduced and is shown in the possession of knowledge, accomplishments, and the creation of formal and informal networks and relations that are connected to opportunity. Through education, the individual can gain entry and social rewards, such as privilege, status, and position. Social capital creates, maintains, and reinforces relative disadvantages and advantages in a society. If people are denied the means to develop *social capital*, it is unlikely that they will accumulate or maintain economic capital. Communities without economic and social capital or the capacity to accumulate such capital are at a disadvantage relative to those with capital.

One concrete example of a form of social capital accumulation within the minority experience has been the formation of HBCUs. With their wealth of knowledge, networking, mentorship, leadership, and fiscal resources (even though limited), these institutions have played a key and central role in the well-being of African Americans.

Asian Americans can learn much from the experiences of African American educational institutions and similar endeavors of Latino-themed education led by National Hispanic University and the NHU Preparatory School.<sup>9</sup> Although Asian Americans do not have the same set of historic and social circumstances as these communities, there is a shared commonality between our communities—and that is that race, in subtle and direct ways, has shaped and continues to shape our experiences, regardless of our diversity. The themed educational endeavors of African Americans and Latinos have always recognized that reality and have focused consistently in seeing that the social meaning constructed around race, shared in common with one another, was used to further inform, educate, and empower their communities as well as improve the general social good.

The problems facing Asian Americans in the twenty-first century are complex and multidimensional. Given the diversity of multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances (both perceived and real), no easy characterizations and answers fit all circumstances, but continual confrontation and interaction with race—and the concomitant interpersonal and intrapersonal interpretation of it as panethnicity—continues to be a unifying theme among Asian Americans. They are affected by it, stereotyped by it, characterized by it, and build upon it. Despite substantial gains, Asian Americans continue to be discriminated against, and their economic returns for their education show consistently that they face many ongoing social obstacles.

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The old rule of thumb of the immigrant generation remains true: Asian Americans must invest in themselves, develop character, and take care of their families. The older generation emphasized that investment in education was a primary compensatory method for overcoming many of the effects of discrimination. With the shift of the Asian American population away from a direct immigrant experience as the population becomes increasingly U.S.-born, this dual wisdom of self-improvement *and* awareness of the impact of race may not be imparted easily. Unless steps are taken to culturally and communally impart this wisdom, the long-term prospects for Asian Americans may not improve—they may become a set of communities with nothing that completely ties them together because they don't recognize their commonalities with each other and with other racial minorities (shaped, in part, by race and culture) and might not be able to weather future storms of allegations of improper allegiance or the effects of anti-Asian violence.

Asian Americans must not shirk from their diversity but should consider embracing it. They can acknowledge that they have multiple points of interaction and commonality with many communities—the majority, the minority communities, Asian nations, members of the same ethnicity, and each other in their respective Asian American ethnic communities. These interconnections can translate into goodwill and greater communication. They can also help create a panethnic identity that envelops and overlaps with all of these other identities, and thus assist in the building and empowerment of a truly wondrous Asian American set of communities.

To do this, Asian Americans must take concrete steps, and while they have individually garnered economic capital, they must invest in themselves as a set of related communities and develop *social capital*. One set of positive steps is to develop educational institutions that highlight academic excellence, preservation of heritage, and identity and that reach out to the world through service learning programs that train students to become responsible stewards and global citizens. Developing such themed primary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions will build a network of social relationships and contexts that can further develop the cultural, economic, social, and political aspirations of Asian Americans.

The creation of this set of educational institutions will bring about many benefits.

An international, intercultural, and interdisciplinary curriculum could be established that can highlight twenty-first-century, globally-informed academic excellence. The institutions can be depositories and transmitters of Asian and Asian American traditions and history. Given what we know about HBCUs and NHU, these institutions can lead toward increased rates of academic retention and graduation for disadvantaged populations. The potential for developing the future generation of Asian American leadership is promising in these institutions and can lead to the development of a nexus of contacts and contexts among youth that will be lifelong, sustaining, and affirming.

Economic boons will likely be associated with the development of such institutions. Similar to the enormous impact of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford

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University in fostering the Asian American community growth and well-being, the development of these institutions will likely lead toward the well-being and growth of Asian American communities.

Moreover, the development of scientific and cultural skills necessary for a global multicultural future can be established there. Language skills, cross-cultural communication skills, and the incorporation of scientific, technology, art, and culture can lead toward a sharing of knowledge and awareness with Asian Americans and with others. Its focused Asian-themed education can engender an educational context for the promotion of goodwill between East and West.

Lastly, the twenty-first-century curriculum of these institutions will lead toward a holistic consciousness among youth regarding social responsibility and social entrepreneurship and may lead them to pursue initiating future endeavors that will better global awareness, peace and sustainability, and global citizenship.

All of these points above relate how future Asian American institutions of education might someday provide the seeds for the accumulation of social capital for Asian Americans. Their provision of a nexus of relationships, contacts, and resources can translate to individual and collective Asian American empowerment. These educational institutions can serve as powerful institutional agents and agencies for social change and play a significant role in identifying, negotiating, and transmitting knowledge and resources, all of which would be important for the cultural, social, economic, and political empowerment for Asian Americans.

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## Endnotes

1 Asian Americans are not alone in this dilemma. National distrust of a race happens many times when some communities are more likely to have multiple and overlapping identities and allegiances while other communities largely continue to perceive themselves as monocultural and homogenous. The anti-Semitic Palmer Raids of the 1920s, the detainment and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, and the more recent roundup, detainment, and incarceration of Muslim Americans in post-September 11 America stand as testimony to the tragic consequences of ill-treatment of groups who through no fault of their own held or were perceived to have held multiple identities and allegiances. In each of these historic incidences, a large set of the American population, namely large segments of the White population, were the primary doubters of the subset's loyalty and allegiances and were able to impose racially and ethnically consequential policies that seriously hurt these particular communities as well as led to the erosion of the civil rights of all Americans. What may perhaps be unique is the historical consistency and continuity in the perceptions of American society regarding the ambiguous positioning of Asian Americans and their perceived allegiances.

2 Roy Yonori Shinagawa (father of author), personal interview with the author, Fremont, Calif., 5 May 2002.

3 For some detailed information about Asian American education and the summary analysis of the works of these authors, see Min 2004, 332-348.

4 Analysis conducted by the author using the on-line demographic analysis features located at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) for the 2000 census.

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5 Susan Chow is completing a soon to be released book on assimilation and acculturation of Asian Americans. In conversations on 12 February 2005, we discussed our shared research findings.

6 Susan Chow, personal interview with the author, 27 February 2005, on her forthcoming book on Asian American intermarriage and acculturation. Dr. Chow is a former faculty member of Stanford University in Asian American studies and the Department of Sociology. She is now a diversity consultant in Silicon Valley, Calif.

Author's research on Asian Americans in subsequent generations is based on ethnographic interviews and data analysis from the 2000 census. These will be published in a forthcoming book on Asian American demographics.

7 One group central to the organization of these efforts is the National Association of Asian Americans for Education and Empowerment (NAAAFEE). For further information about their efforts in establishing secondary schools and a future East-West-themed college related to Asians and Asian Americans, access their Web site at [www.naaafee.org](http://www.naaafee.org). Another organization exploring these issues is the National Association of Asian Pacific American Education (NAAPAE). The author presented the keynote speech focusing on the themes of this paper at NAAPAE's national conference, held in Philadelphia, Penn., on 20 May 2004.

8 For detailed information on HBCU indicators of African American student achievement, see Borden et al. 2004.

9 National Hispanic University is the first Hispanic/Latino college in the United States. It has also started the first Latino-themed preparatory school in San Jose, Calif. For further information, view the Web site [www.nhu.edu](http://www.nhu.edu).

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## **Book Review: Resolving the Prisoner's Dilemma Game between North Korea and the United States** **Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New Press 2004)**

Reviewed by Cecilia Hyun Jung Mo

North Korea distrusts the United States. The United States distrusts North Korea. A helpful model for understanding the interaction between the two nations is the classic two-agent prisoner's dilemma game. As a simple game that replicates the mixed interests of an individual, the prisoner's dilemma parsimoniously presents possibilities for both conflict and cooperation. The game's potential to model dynamic human interaction is one that originates from an anecdote regarding two suspects of a crime used by A. W. Tucker. The two suspects are separated, so there is no discussion regarding their course of action. If they both do not confess, then the district attorney states he will book them on some very minor punishment; if they both confess they will be prosecuted, but he will recommend less than the most severe sentence; but if one confesses and the other does not, then the confessor will receive lenient treatment for turning state's evidence whereas the latter will get "the book" thrown at him (Alker and Hurwitz 1980). The dilemma in the prisoner's dilemma game arises from the fact that individual interest dictates the non-cooperative choice (to confess) to both players because of the following two reasons: (1) the temptation for the best possible sentence for the lone defector, and (2) the fear of getting the worst sentence as the lone cooperator. North Korea and the United States are currently in a prisoner's dilemma-type game. The mistrust

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that exists between the two nations and mutual fear of getting the worst "sentence" makes mutual cooperation difficult, even though that would lead to the best end.

To Bruce Cumings, greater understanding on the part of the United States of why North Korea is what it is may allow the two nations to achieve the best end, that of mutual cooperation. The desire to impart an improved understanding of North Korea is indeed the motivation behind the writing of his book, *North Korea: Another Country*. Bruce Cumings is the author of the primary Korean history texts read around the world, including South Korea; it is worth emphasizing that there are few individuals that understand Korea better than Cumings. As such, the information he imparts and his conclusions are worth serious consideration.

To this reader, Bruce Cumings composes a compelling piece overflowing with enlightening insights, commentary, and analyses that urge his readers to reconsider their comprehension and interpretation of the sounds and images that have and are being presented by popular media. Pres. George W. Bush recently denounced North Korea by making it a charter member of his "Axis of Evil." He then publicly described North Korea's leader Kim Jong Il as a "pygmy" and is quoted as saying "I loathe Kim Jong Il." A growing periodical literature on the north followed suit, which resoundingly substantiated Bush's viewpoint assuming that Washington is innocent and North Korea is treacherous and profoundly depraved. Cumings convincingly argues that, for the most part, the stories are both unreliable and sensationalized, and a serious study of Korean history would inevitably lead one to conclude that fact and fiction are tragically blurred in even the most mainstream publications, thereby misleading the public.

In his new book, Cumings provides an alternative viewpoint to that of mainstream media and the Bush administration, and argues through the lens of a historian and a humanist that the United States has significant responsibility in the emergence of the garrison north. Indeed, a just and evenhanded treatment of any subject requires a consideration of arguments and counterarguments and more counterarguments. In a time of few counterarguments to a mainstream belief that has grave and extensive ramifications, the words of Cumings are indeed refreshing and poignant, and must be considered before concluding that North Korea is "evil" and led by an even more "evil" dictator.

The main argument of the book is summarized in his preface: "North Korea does not exist alone, in a vacuum, even if the regime's inveterate solipsism would make you think otherwise. It cannot be understood apart from a terrible fratricidal war that has never ended, the guerrilla struggle against Japanese imperialism in the 1930s, its initial emergence as a state in 1945, its fraught relationship with the South, its brittle and defensive reaction to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, and its interminable daily struggle with the United States of America" (ix). North Korea's behavior must be understood in the context of its history and those involved in its history. Indeed a society cannot truly be understood without understanding where it came from. Otherwise, the reality that 23 million human beings live inside the borders of the Hermit Kingdom eludes us, the rationality of seemingly irrational and crazy people confuses us, and the responsibility that the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Japan, among



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others, have in the creation of, by Harold Lasswell's definition, "the most astounding garrison state in the world" will escape us (2).

So why is North Korea a garrison state? Perhaps it is because the United States is technically still at war with North Korea. On 27 July 1953 an armistice that stilled the blasts of gunfire and bombs was signed; however, no formal peace was agreed upon. As such, the Korean War is one of the longest-running conflicts remaining in the world. Most Americans neither know nor care that the Korean War is not over and simply wonder why North Korea is so bothersome. The North Korean people, prizing national sovereignty like life itself, are constantly drilled to prepare for war. The centerpiece of North Korea's regime is "the Juche idea" (158). Juche (*chuch'e*) means self-reliance and independence in politics, economics, defense, and ideology and infused in the word is the "notion that individuals are not worthy of living if they are deprived of their nation . . . complete loyalty to the nation is considered natural" (159). This almost obsessive need for sovereignty can be understood in light of a brutal Japanese colonialism, which was followed by a "liberation" that involved dividing the nation at the thirty-eighth parallel (arbitrarily drawn by Washington, with the consent of the Kremlin) with the Soviet Union occupying the north and the United States occupying the south. After the Soviets left the north, a civil war fought by Koreans for Korean goals followed suit. This civil war, however, became known as the Korean War as the United States and the United Nations became involved. In the process, approximately four million Koreans (three-quarters of which were in the north) and fifty-four thousand American soldiers died. North Korea was founded in the aftermath of decades of colonialism and warfare, and meanwhile the Korean War is not over, and it is apparent that the Bush administration and most Americans do not care for North Korea. The activities of the past century seem to shed some light on why North Korea is what it is.

To Cumings, what North Korea is in the eyes of the public today is not entirely accurate. In 1994, President Carter negotiated the October Framework Agreement with North Korea. The framework called for full normalization of relations, an American pledge not to threaten or target North Korea with nuclear weapons, and financial assistance to replace its graphite reactors with light-water reactors. The United States never provided the pledged amount that would make the construction of the new reactors possible. As such, North Korea did not dismantle its graphite reactors. In 1998, South Korea's president, Kim Dae Jung, unveiled his Sunshine Policy, pledging to "actively pursue reconciliation and cooperation" with North Korea and "declaring his support for Pyongyang's [the North Korean capital] attempt at better relations with Washington and Tokyo" (77). He ordered large shipments of food aid to be sent to the north, allowed business deals between the north and south to occur, and asked the United States to end economic embargoes against the north. In the June 2000 summit, Kim Jong Il welcomed Kim Dae Jung to Pyongyang. Both governments committed themselves to a staged slow process of reaching a confederated reunification. The Clinton administration created a policy of "engagement," which would lead to a progressive lifting of the American embargo, establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and North Korea, and a substantial aid package for the north. Clinton was unable to

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finalize this policy with the north due to domestic concerns (in particular the problems with the 2000 presidential election), and when George W. Bush became president, the work of Clinton and Kim Dae Jung was undone. Kim Dae Jung met with President Bush expecting the continuation of Clinton's policy and returned home calling the meeting embarrassing and privately cursing President Bush. Cumings attempts to show that North Korea is not as evil as Bush says it is; Pyongyang is attempting to achieve peace and normalized relations with the world in return for its sovereignty.

Bruce Cumings is indeed offering a different understanding of the north. As a Korea expert, a historian, and a researcher with access to the United States, South Korea, and North Korea, he provides a compelling alternative analysis of North Korea to that which is provided in mainstream media. While his politics are infused throughout the book, it is almost impossible to write this kind of book without some sort of opinion. And to his credit, he is able to provide levelheaded evidence that is difficult to contest.

In his work, Cumings allows the voices of those who object to the politics of the Bush administration to be expressed. To the many Asian Americans who see that Asian countries like North Korea are often misunderstood by the United States and desire alternative views from those presented in mainstream media, this book is refreshing. In a debate of great importance, which is especially engaging the attention of Korean Americans today, a sound instructive text offering an opposing viewpoint is necessary. It is uncontested that once upon a time "Oriental despotism" was the leading framework for understanding and interpreting the Asian world. And we know today that the framework is ridiculous and utterly false and has since been replaced by alternative frameworks. Perhaps we should not be so sure about the existing interpretation and view of North Korea's behaviors and make a more informed decision regarding how best to treat North Korea by considering alternative viewpoints, including that offered by Cumings. Only then can we end the Korean War and achieve the more ideal payoff that is achieved via mutual cooperation. Let us once and for all end this prisoner's dilemma game, which is already over half a century old.

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## **Book Review: Cultural Alienation and the Asian American** **Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*** **(Riverhead Books 1995)**

Reviewed by Jane Yoo

“I turn but do not extricate myself, Confused, a past-reading, another,  
but with darkness yet.”

—Walt Whitman

Chang-rae Lee’s epigraph from Whitman serves as a fitting introduction to his work, a story that centers around a second-generation Korean American searching to define himself and elucidate the relationships in his professional and private life. As the novel begins, Chang-rae Lee introduces us to Henry Park, the son of Korean immigrants and husband of Lelia, a fiery New England Caucasian woman. In the opening scene, Henry’s wife hands him a list just as she is about to board a plane to take a trip to the Mediterranean. Although Henry is aware that his marriage is encountering difficulties, he is surprised to see the list containing phrases such as “You are surreptitious/B+ student of life/emotional alien/Yellow peril: neo-America/stranger/traitor.” Henry, who cannot resist the idea of considering the list as a cheap parting shot, is left to ponder the implications of Lelia’s stinging words and thus brings the reader closer into his peculiar and rather unconventional life.

We quickly learn that Henry does not hold the typical 9-to-5 job bagging groceries or working in the corner office. He is a spy for Glimmer and Associates, a private intelligence agency specializing in gathering information on non-white subjects for its clients. As Henry’s adroit ability to remain tight-lipped and expressionless has engendered him much success in his career, it has created many problems for him at home. His past includes the recent loss of seven-year-old son

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Mitt, who died while being suffocated under a pile of neighborhood White children. Henry's detachment from his son's death has made Lelia retreat from her husband and struggle to understand his cold-hearted demeanor.

As Henry begins to contemplate his own reaction and reconsider who he is, his work brings him to shadow New York City councilman, John Kwang, a Korean American contender for New York's mayoral seat and the favorite son of thousands of immigrant voters in his home district of Queens. Henry's professional demeanor soon fades as he views Kwang as a father figure and becomes personally involved in the case.

In moving between the past and the present through flashbacks, Chang-rae Lee brings to bear the troubling relationships that Henry exhibits with his traditional Korean father and his American wife, however, there are some striking similarities in Park's interactions with his father and wife: the inability to express love and incomplete understanding of both cultures.

As a speech therapist, Lelia acts as a window for Henry to reflect on the lives of struggling immigrant laborers and their children. When two Laotian boys visit the apartment for speech therapy, Henry learns that the boys are first cousins and have fathers who run a business selling merchandise from the back of a Ford van. As Henry listens to father and son communicating with customers in broken English, he knows all too well that the boys will soon break their association with their native language in hopes of adopting and assimilating the new language.

As a result, Lee weaves a poignant story of how assimilation occurs between generations of immigrants. While second-generation children are quick to embrace the new language and culture, parents are more reluctant to fully immerse themselves—instead choosing to hold fast to their native roots. Although Henry's father holds a college degree in engineering, his father is forced to earn a living as a grocery store owner because his difficulty with English is too great an obstacle to finding employment in a technical field. His father's hard work and success as a grocer has resulted in a nice suburban home for Henry. Although never wanting to sell fruits and vegetables for a living, his father desires a better life for his son; we feel empathy for Henry's father for making sacrifices for his only child, only to find his son all too eager to reject his Korean heritage.

Yet, ironically enough, we realize that Henry will never be a "native speaker," either from the viewpoint of his Korean roots or American upbringing. He will serve as a bridge between both worlds and continue to examine his life through the eyes of Lelia, his father, and a spy. His latter role highlights the fact that he will always be considered an outsider, despite his valiant efforts to mask reality.

In this rich tapestry, Chang-rae Lee confronts not only issues of identity but also the various aspects of the immigrant and minority experience, including the complexity of racial tensions that exist among Blacks and Koreans. The aspirations of a minority politician struggling for higher office dwindle when it is learned that Kwang has engaged in behavior that is largely unethical by American standards.

Nevertheless, the theme of espionage is difficult to apply to second-generation Korean Americans. The realities of Korean American life do not conform to that of spy Henry Park. Lee neglects to reflect on important features of Korean American culture that include socioeconomic status and hierarchy. Sprinkled with

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Korean phrases that appear awkwardly placed, the novel depicts an incomplete and distorted portrayal of Korean American lives. For the Korean American reader, it leaves one with the sense that we can all be characterized as traitors to our roots and that our inner tensions cannot easily be resolved. Wherein there are varying degrees and circumstances that comprise of the pressures felt by Korean Americans, this work only highlights certain facets. Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, while providing insight and reflection about broad themes engaging culture, still leaves much to be desired.

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## **A Family's Story: A Movie Review of *Nobody Knows* (2005) Directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda**

Reviewed by Yiaway Yeh

Based on true events in 1988 that became known as the "Affair of the Four Abandoned Children of Nishi-Sugamo," *Nobody Knows* arrives in American theaters having been an official selection of the 2004 Cannes Film Festival. Hirokazu Kore-eda's latest film tracks the lives of four children abandoned by their mother in a small apartment in Tokyo. Presented from the children's perspective, the film achieves moments of true humor and others of immense sadness. From the children's first carefree days on their own in the apartment, to their uncertain ventures outside, and up to the film's devastating end, *Nobody Knows* avoids a melodramatic portrayal of the situation, instead, slowly unfolding according to the children's own reaction to their new isolation. While a quietly engaging film set in Japan, it provides American viewers with a reconsideration of the role and structure that the family unit plays in the lives of Asian Americans.

Kore-eda first achieved acclaim with his 1995 film *Maborosi* and followed it up with the well-received *After-Life* in 1998. Both films grappled with issues of human vulnerability, also a central theme of *Nobody Knows* that is established at the outset with the departure of Keiko, mother of four children: Kyoko, Yuki, Shigeru, and Akira, the eldest at 12 years old. Left only with some money and clear instructions to take care of his siblings, Akira (Yuya Yagira, winner of the 2004 Cannes Best Actor Award) is pushed onto the fast track to adulthood. With the winter holidays approaching but being unable to write without any schooling, Akira finds a store vendor to scrawl everyone's names on envelopes to fold lucky money in to keep alive the idyllic dreams that every child has: buying candy, a

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piano, and rollerblades. Yet, with a voice still in pubescence, Akira struggles with providing for the needs of his family and playing video games with a couple buddies from the nearby school.

Together, the children engage the world outside the apartment, with frolicking in public parks, crossing streets, and discovering urban life in the sights and sounds of their Tokyo. Soon though, the dark reality of isolation descends upon the apartment and the children. Squalor results from an unkempt living space, emptiness fills their young hearts, and as money runs out, hunger even leads younger brother Shigeru to chew paper for a meal. Particularly horrifying is the impact of solitude that plays out with the children lying down in the stifling heat, without laughter or dialogue. In these moments, the viewer is able to see and feel the depths of abandonment.

As a film-going experience, *Nobody Knows* is a deliberate and painful look at what can happen to children faced with no support system, literally unknown to others. In taking on this problem, director Kore-eda succeeds in presenting a story that touches upon issues not commonly associated with the Asian experience. Indeed, although the movie does not take place in the United States, *Nobody Knows* offers an opportunity to reconsider the role of the family in Asian American lives. Subjected to the model minority stereotype, Asian Americans are not immune to life pressures faced by other households regardless of background. The thought of a parentless Asian American household strikes a dissonant chord—it undermines the stereotype of Asian families as a guaranteed support system for their children.

As an Asian American, I recognize the irreplaceable guidance my family conferred on me during my formative years. The ability to set goals, to work hard, to stay positive was extrinsic to me, developed primarily through the lessons from those around me. I appreciate that *Nobody Knows* vividly portrays the lives of four enterprising children. I would like to think that I, like Akira, would have found the shopkeeper that gave the children sashimi out of compassion. I would like to believe that I would have kept up the spirits of my younger sisters and brother like Akira did. The difference is I had my parents and grandparents to feed me, to care for me as a child, and did not face the reality of the film's four protagonists.

It is after internalizing Kore-eda's film that I appreciate his balanced documentation of the moments when the children's ability to cope falters. Through these scenes I find a powerful acknowledgment of human vulnerability resulting from a missing parent. Asian American children face manifold challenges today, and Kore-eda skillfully reveals how much more difficult growing up could be without the watchful eye of a parent or guardian. *Nobody Knows* is not a film with spectacular special effects or breathtaking cinematography. Instead it finds force in making the viewer contemplative of children's ingenuity and frailty through a family's story.



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## Tribute to U.S. Representative Robert T. Matsui

Cheryl Young

U.S. Representative Robert T. Matsui (D-Calif.) passed away 1 January 2005, and with him Americans lost a dedicated public servant and the Asian American community lost an irreplaceable leader.

Born on 17 September 1941 in Sacramento, Calif., Matsui was only six months old when he and his family were interned in Tule Lake Internment Camp in northern California. His first years of life were spent as an interned Japanese American, the memory of which compelled many of his efforts in politics.

After graduating with a degree in political science from the University of California, Berkeley in 1963, Matsui went on to earn a J.D. from Hastings College of Law in San Francisco. A fourteen-term Democratic congressman, Matsui was first roused to public service after hearing Pres. John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in which he challenged Americans to do something for their country.

Matsui began his political career in his hometown of Sacramento, gaining a seat in the City Council in 1971. Following two terms as City Council member, he served as vice mayor of Sacramento in 1977. In 1978, Matsui announced his candidacy for Sacramento's congressional seat, which had recently been vacated by Democratic representative John Moss. Since Matsui's victory in this race, he remained in Congress until his death, which amounted to over twenty-six years representing his district.

Known for garnering support on issues from both sides of the aisle, Matsui was an advocate of issues of great importance on the federal level while never forgetting his roots. At the time of his death, Matsui was the third-ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, championing central issues such as tax policy, health care, Social Security, welfare reform, and international trade. Matsui was the ranking Democrat on the Social Security Subcommittee and was most recently involved in efforts to save Social Security and promote social insurance.

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*Cheryl Young is a master in public policy candidate at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. After graduating from Columbia University with a B.A. in urban studies, she spent two years working in affordable housing finance for the city of New York's Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Ms. Young's current interests relate to slum redevelopment and scaling up microfinance in developing countries.*

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Held in high esteem by his fellow Democratic congressmen, Matsui was elected as chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in 2003, where he endeavored to win back control of the House for Democrats.

Matsui is perhaps best remembered for fighting for an issue closest to his heart: Japanese American reparations for internment during World War II. In 1998, Matsui led the charge to ensure passage of the congressional *Japanese-American Redress Act*, which provided formal apologies and partial economic compensation to internment survivors. In addition, Matsui worked to designate Manzanar, a wartime relocation camp located in southern California, as a national historic site, and obtain land on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to memorialize the courage and patriotism of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Matsui also worked tirelessly for his constituents in his hometown. In particular, Matsui worked to ensure public safety and expand services to Sacramento. Ravaged by floods from 1985 to 1997, the Sacramento area needed expanded flood control as the region lay prone to overflows from the nearby Folsom Dam. In 2003, Matsui obtained federal authorization to raise the dam seven feet, greatly extending flood control measures. California's capital expanded considerably during Matsui's tenure, straining public services and demanding economic revitalization. Matsui's accomplishments in growing Sacramento include securing \$142 million for a new federal courthouse, encouraging waterfront revitalization, expanding the city's light rail system, expanding pedestrian walkways around the waterfront and downtown, and replacement of diesel public buses to those that used compressed natural gas. As a result of his efforts, the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trail awarded Matsui with the 2003 Clean Air Award for reducing air pollution in the area, and the American Public Transit Association recognized his efforts in providing sustainable mass transit. These are only a few of the many awards Matsui received as a congressman.

Last year, Matsui was diagnosed with myelodysplastic disorder, a rare blood condition that inhibits the immune system. Matsui was admitted into Bethesda Naval Hospital with pneumonia, a complication of his illness, on 24 December 2004. He died a week later, surrounded by family. Matsui is survived by his wife, Doris, former deputy assistant to President Clinton, and his son Brian.

The staff of the *AAPR* would like to express a heartfelt thank you to Representative Matsui for his guiding presence on our honorary board and his indefatigable pursuit of equity and civil rights.

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