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**CIVIC AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT OF CHINESE AMERICANS
IN ETHNIC SUBURBS**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY
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Abstract

This project explores the motivations and expression of Chinese American civic and political engagement in ethnic suburbs. The suburb of Fremont is at the center of this investigation, but Chinese Americans from other suburbs are interviewed as well in order to provide a point of comparison. Contrary to popular belief that Chinese Americans under-participate in American civil society, this study finds that Chinese Americans are in fact very established in civil society and politically expressive, but their participation is unconventional. Even in locations with a high concentration of Chinese Americans, they lack a sense of group consciousness and communal motivations. Instead, these suburban Chinese Americans become politically mobilized or civically engaged for instrumental and individual reasons.

Purpose

This study seeks to understand Chinese American identity and civic assimilation in California by focusing on communal and political engagement in suburban neighborhoods. It explores, firstly, how Chinese Americans perceive themselves in their neighborhood community and, secondly, how and why they choose to participate within this context.

I furthermore aim to understand how forms of civic and political engagement relate to Chinese Americans' perceptions of their cross-cultural identity. The reasons and methods through which Chinese Americans interact with their community provide an intimate view of their core values and priorities. By exploring the meaning of civic and political participation, we can gain insight to how Chinese Americans adapt or have adapted to their American home and culture.

My research also addresses the stereotype of Chinese American under-participation in politics and community affairs. In addition to examining Chinese American involvement as a

whole, I intend to draw comparisons between ordinary suburbs and ethnic suburbs, suburban areas with high concentration of Chinese or Asian residents. I would like to find out to what extent the ethnic resources and support from ethnic suburbs will stimulate participation in their communities, and to what extent the ethnic communities provide enough familiarity and social comfort that it reduces the interest in political expression. Conversely, does living as a minority in a suburb create a greater interest in participation?

Studying the motives behind Chinese Americans' civic and political engagement is important because Chinese Americans are underrepresented in both academic research and political positions, despite having a long history and large presence in California. By understanding how Chinese-Americans view civic duty and why they choose to be involved, we can utilize their views and cultural frameworks to better understand and address issues within the Chinese American community. This information can additionally be used to mobilize the growing population of Chinese Americans towards greater political action and better representation of their interests.

Background & Literature Review

Population Change

The first wave of Asian immigrants migrated to the United States from the 1800s until 1924. Most of the Chinese arrived after the California Gold Rush, and over 300,000 Chinese immigrated to the West Coast in search of better life and livelihoods (Fong 2008). Many of these Chinese Americans worked on the Transcontinental Railroad or as merchants or laundry men, but they were not welcome visitors. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, 1913 Alien Land Laws, and

subsequent immigration quotas greatly limited the number of Chinese that could move and stay in America. These quotas were slightly loosened in the mid-1950s during China's Communist Revolution when around 18,000 Chinese refugees were granted asylum in the U.S (Fong 2008). It was only after the 1965 Immigration Reform Act that millions of more Chinese transplanted to the U.S.; this was the second wave of Asian immigration. In the past couple of decades, global economic restructuring has increased the demand for a more specialized and educated workforce, so hundreds of thousands of more Chinese students have been arriving in recent decades obtain American higher education and staying to find employment in mostly science and technology industries.

Chinese immigrants are an especially significant group in California. Chinese labor during the Gold Rush and on the Transcontinental Railroad contributed greatly to the development and growth of the state. These early Chinese immigrants established the first Chinatown in Northern American in San Francisco in 1848, and since then, Chinese Americans have maintained their significant presence in California. Of the 13 percent of Asians in California, over 25 percent identify as Chinese (US Census 2010).

Chinatowns, like the one in San Francisco, were the primary destination for the vast majority of Chinese immigrants. By 1940, 91 percent of the Chinese population was classified by the Census Bureau as "urban" (Takaki 1998). The Chinatown ghettos did not provide favorable living conditions, but they were the rare place where Chinese could find employment and beds. Residents of Chinatowns actively support the ethnic economy, enabling even unskilled, non-English speaking immigrants to make a living in the city. Starting in the late 20th century, however, more and more Chinese Americans began moving to the suburbs. Some immigrate directly to the suburbs, while others may have been raised in Chinatown but have decided to start

their own families away from the city. To most, though, the flight to the suburbs represents movement towards higher socioeconomic status (Lin 1998, Fong 1994, Fong 2008).

Suburbs are appealing to Chinese Americans, especially those looking to start families. Suburban communities are less densely populated, so they are considered to be quieter, safer, and middle to upper-middle class. All of the above qualities are highly prized by Chinese American parents and contributes to the attractiveness of suburbs. One respondent, a parent of two, explains:

I think it's good to raise your children [in a suburb]. I think most people move there because there is less crime and better education and better environment... because urban areas probably have more crowded schools. (Interview 4)

As a result of ethnic suburbanization, many suburban cities are becoming dominated by Chinese Americans. Using suburbs of Los Angeles as a model, Wei Li coined the term “ethnoburb”, a contemporary ethnic suburb with a concentration of immigrants and immigrant businesses (Zhou and Lin 2005, Li 1998, Li 2009). Li writes that ethnoburbs are “multi-ethnic communities, in which one ethnic minority group has a significant concentration, but does not necessarily comprise a majority (Li 2009). Through their research in San Gabriel Valley, CA and Flushing, NY, Zhou and Lin show how ethnoburbs differ from traditional models of ethnic enclaves in four distinct ways: diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, mixed model of economy development driven by the market and globalization, multi-ethnic and unlikely to be dominated by a single national-origins group, and the maintenance of transnational ties (Zhou and Lin 2005).

In this project, however, I would like to focus on ethnic suburbs in general, rather than ethnoburbs. Li's standards for the ethnoburb are based upon the ethnic economy model of ethnic enclaves. Research of ethnic enclaves has been dominated by theories of economics,

assimilation, and ethnic capital, yet there is no academic consensus on specific standards for defining ethnic enclaves. Literature thus far has focused primarily on economic processes in ethnic enclaves that are facilitated by high concentrations of ethnic populations, with only limited discussion on population boundaries for ethnic enclaves or the qualitative aspects of them (Zhou and Lin 2005, Li 1998, Portes and Zhou 1993). It is clear that many Chinese and minorities tend to live near others with similar ethnicities, but it is more difficult to distinguish an ethnic neighborhood from an ethnic enclave without additional dialogue on the significance of concentration versus size of ethnic populations. Given these setbacks, I intend to focus on ethnic suburbs without having the burden of proving it to be an ethnoburb. By studying suburban enclaves, I hope to gain a better understanding how residential factors can affect political engagement.

With a population of 214, 089 that is 50.6 percent Asian and 18 percent Chinese, Fremont is the ideal case study for an ethnic suburb (2010 US Census). Fremont is especially interesting because of its rapid growth of Asian residents. From 1980 to 2010, the Asian American population grew from 9,611 to 108,332. In addition, residents of Fremont are also highly educated with and tend to be financially secure. Around 49 percent of residents have their Bachelor's degree or higher, the average income is \$123,000, and around 46 percent of population has an income higher than \$100,000 (2010 US Census). Based on these demographics, Fremont has less class stratification and factionalism than other suburbs, yet as I will later show, it is still far from having a unified populace.

Participation

Chinese Americans and Asian Americans in general are infamous for having seemingly low rates of electoral participation despite high education and income levels (Diaz 2012; Fong

2008; Lien 2004; Lien 2009; Ong and Scott 2009; Wong 2006). This trend is known as the voting paradox, but the reasoning and explanations behind the paradox also applies to non-electoral civic engagement. It is a contentious argument; scholars have offered many hypotheses to prove, disprove, or explain this trend.

Janelle Wong's analysis suggests that there is truth to the paradox (Wong 2006). Not only may the procedure of American democracy confuse and intimidate immigrants, but Chinese Americans also share the feeling that their vote or contribution to the political system will not make a difference (Wong 2006). Furthermore, political parties rarely put in any effort into mobilizing potential or swing voters. By not valuing Asian voters, political parties alienate the Asian electorate, which consequently contributes to consistently low national voter turnout rates (Wong 2006).

Studies that make generalizations from voting behavior can be misleading, however. Voter registration and voter turn-out statistics usually neglect to situate their test population within the eligibility requirements for citizenship (Wong 2005, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). This is problematic because there is a constant influx of new immigrants who are ineligible for U.S. citizenship and are clearly unable to vote; it is more of a fact than paradox. After taking eligibility into consideration and not counting individuals ineligible to vote, voter turnout rates among Asian Americans who are naturalized are similar to the general US population. Lien's analysis finds that out of those Chinese Americans eligible to vote, over 75% of them do (Lien, et al 2004). The failure to take eligibility requirements into account creates misleading statistics and limits focus to an unrepresentative fraction of all Chinese Americans. With proper measurement, Lien shows that the paradox may not necessarily hold truth.

Conventionally, ethnic political participation in America has been shaped by machine politics or feelings of kinship. White urban minorities organized in this way in the late 1880s and were effective in mobilizing their constituencies in order to form electoral blocks and clientele. African Americans, on the other hand, mobilize around their common history of slavery and a shared sense of linked fate (Dawson 1994). In this post-civil rights era, however, neither ethnic identity nor party politics become as strong of a basis for political participation for Chinese Americans (Wang 1996).

Jan Lin, in Reconstructing Chinatown, shows how post-exclusion era collective action in New York's Chinatown has been shaped by organizational solidarity but hindered by class, personal, and organizational factionalism (Lin 1998). Ling-chi Wang also uncovers definite factionalism within urban Chinatowns as a consequence of the changing global forces that shape U.S. and China relations. (Wang 1996)

In his new book Asian American Political Action, James Lai studies political and civic engagement in ten small-to-medium sized suburbs with Asian American majorities or pluralities (Lai 2011). He argues that suburban contexts allow for greater Asian American political mobilization around Asian American candidates than in larger cities because these are places where group political mobilization and incorporation are taking place most rapidly. Furthermore, Lai contests that Asian American candidates are most successful when they focus on a two-tier campaign strategy that targets the mainstream (usually white) political base while also mobilizing a pan-ethnic coalition (Lai 2011).

Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) argue that high ethnic concentrations lower the per capita cost of participation, which should stimulate involvement (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade 2001). This position is supported by Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad (2008) who find a positive

correlation between city size and political presence in addition to between ethnic group size and political presence.

A closer examination of suburbanization and space and its effect on Chinese American engagement and social cohesion is warranted to shed more light on ethnic factionalism, group solidarity, political mobilization, and incorporation.

Methodology

My data comes from twenty in-depth interviews with Chinese Americans throughout Northern California. The interviews ranged from thirty to ninety minutes long. Every interview but two were conducted in person; the exceptions were completed through email. The majority of the interviews were in English, but two were in Mandarin and later translated into English. All interview excerpts in this paper have been edited for grammar and readability.

Respondents ranged from 40 to 81 years old, and they all reside in a Northern Californian suburb. The majority of the respondents live in Fremont, an ethnic suburb with a particularly large Chinese American population. Other respondents hail from Roseville, Almaden Valley in San Jose, and Pleasanton. Every respondent is also a parent and has completed at least some college education. They were also all middle to upper-middle class. The sample was relatively consistent in terms of socioeconomic status. The respondents, however, are diverse in many other ways that will soon be discussed.

I also interviewed four former or current Chinese American elected officials in Fremont in order to gain additional insight on the participation patterns of Chinese Americans in Fremont. Interviews with this group focused on their personal background, their motives for seeking public office, as well as their experiences mobilizing Chinese American constituents,

campaigning, and interacting with the public as a community leader. Their insight was paramount in allowing me to gain a closer and more in-depth understanding of ethnic politics in Fremont, a suburb with an extraordinary concentration of Chinese and Asian Americans.

The sample was obtained through snowball sampling and personal networking. I reached out to local organizations, elected officials, and informants who aided me in spreading the word about my interviews. Many respondents also referred to people within their own networks that would be interested in an interview.

The interviews all followed the same format. I asked respondents about their background, current location, geographic and cultural community, participation, voting motivations and habits, and lastly, their American and Chinese identity. Elected officials and community leaders were also asked about their experiences with the Chinese American community. The breadth of the interview topics was for an attempted to obtain a holistic picture of my respondents in order to best understand the circumstances and conditions that shape their civic and political behavior. The full list of interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

Debunking the Myth

Despite the pervasive and widely acknowledged stereotype that Chinese Americans do not have a predisposition to become politically active and community-minded individuals, I argue that Chinese Americans are in fact very involved and expressive. Contrary to conventional modes of ethnic political participation such as machine politics and group consciousness, suburban Chinese Americans demonstrate active forms of instrumental engagement.

Although Chinese Americans residents and political candidates are well-established in civil society and politically expressive, they lack group political consciousness. Suburban

Chinese Americans, even in large ethnic suburbs such as Fremont, are instead motivated by the potential for personal benefit or by their individual value standards. This kind of personal and instrumental engagement represents a political identity that is shaped by factionalism, diversity, suburbanization, and social status among Chinese Americans rather than a commitment to group solidarity or communal motivations.

Independent Political Identities

My research suggests that suburban Chinese Americans tend to have independent political identities that are shaped but not dominated by ethnic interests. Even those who live among a high concentration of Chinese Americans, such as Chinese Americans in Fremont, do not develop a sense of political solidarity with their other ethnic neighbors, and they maintain personally distinct political identities instead.

Respondents identify strongly with similar values and ethnic identities which shows a strong sense of ethnic consciousness and cultural identity. This ethnic identity, however, remains distinct from their civic and political identities and a sense of group solidarity premised on a communal Chinese American vision, agenda or goals. Suburban Chinese Americans lack a sense of linked fate, and I argue that this an outcome of suburbanization, high levels of social comfort, in addition to diversity and factionalism within Chinese Americans.

Suburbanization

A defining characteristic of suburban areas in comparison to urban geographies is an increased distance from house-to-house. Suburbs tend to be more spread out, and at the same time, each housing unit is more self-enclosed. Although white picket fences are no longer in

style, property boundaries are mutually understood if not physically acknowledged. The spatial distance and distinct property units make organic, social interaction among neighborhoods less likely. When interaction does occur, it is not often and more superficial. As one respondent describes,

“Sometimes when I see my neighbors we’ll chat but nothing too deep.” (Interview 7)

Because social camaraderie may not come naturally in suburban spaces, it takes a greater effort to build community and relationships within suburban neighborhoods. As a result, it is common for neighbors to only barely know each other. Time constraints for working parents in addition to language barriers among ethnically diverse residents can further heighten social distance between next-door neighbors. This respondent describes how she rarely has time to build a relationship with her neighbors:

We know our neighbors but it’s just like on the surface... Everybody’s so busy. They’re doing their own stuff... So when we go get out and go get mail or come back after work, we just chat for a bit like that. (Interview 4)

Another person elaborates,

We talk to each other but not deeply. I know them... but if there’s a community it’s a very loose community. (Interview 1)

Though they all felt like they belonged within the neighborhood, the environmental barriers caused many respondents to not feel like that they share a strong social bond with their neighbors.

Social Comfort

Experiences or perceptions of discrimination are known to be a predictor for ethnic solidarity as well as feelings of linked fate (Lin 1998; Junn and Masuoka 2008). Rim further emphasizes how social, political, and economic context, in addition to racial hierarchy, influence linked fate (Rim 2009).

Ninety percent of my respondents, however, did not experience any discrimination where they are living now, and all of them felt like they belong in their neighborhood. Despite not feeling close with their neighbors, everyone I interviewed said they felt comfortable where they lived.

Even if they are living in a predominately Caucasian community, many Chinese Americans do not feel like they are treated any differently than other Americans. A Roseville resident explains how race is not an issue in her white majority neighborhood:

Everyone minds their own business. You don't feel like someone wants to exclude you. I never heard about my kids being bullied because they're Chinese. Never heard of it... We never experience discrimination because usually you experience that through work, through schools, through neighbors, but we never experience that. At least I don't experience that. (Interview 4)

This feeling of belonging is often contextualized geographically. Respondents attribute their high levels of social comfort to being in a diverse state like California.

In California I never feel that way. In California, I definitely don't have that feeling [of a minority]... Because in California the population is very diversified. It's just you see every kind of different people everywhere. (Interview 2)

The growing diversity within ethnic suburbs contributes to an even greater sense of social comfort. This was especially true for residents of Fremont, who live in a particularly ethnic area. A resident of Fremont for almost 40 years, one respondent said that as demographics changed so did his social status.

When I moved to Fremont, [Chinese] were only 3 percent. And so the demographic has changed over the past few years where there is so much of a mix now so that being different is not different now... It's different than before when you're always going to be subservient. When Chinese were a numerical minority, it also felt like there was hierarchy. I feel like that's changed. Doesn't mean that it's always going to be changed... But at least in this area the field is more level. If you were to travel to throughout the country, you will not find it like this. (Interview 8)

A Pleasanton resident who has been in the United States for almost 30 years echoes this growing sense of belonging and of no longer feeling like a minority.

I feel like there aren't any issues and I don't feel anything different. No one bothers us, and I don't feel like we're not welcome.... Yeah I think now I don't really feel [like a minority]. Those feelings have gotten smaller and smaller. When I first came to America, when I did things I would be really careful, or when I did stuff I was scared and didn't want to do anything. But now, when I travel and go out and

eat out in the restaurant, I just feel like they treat me with courtesy and respect.... It's like I don't feel like an outsider. (Interview 7)

With the rising Chinese population has been a growth of Chinese businesses, services, and native-language speakers, all of which makes it easier and more comfortable to live in this area. A woman from San Jose describes how easy it is to be Chinese in her area.

There's a lot of Asians here, lots of your own kind, so you don't feel like you're an outsider..... Don't feel like a minority. There are so many Asians... There are so many Chinese things around here. Chinese food or Chinese doctors... You don't have to speak English here. You can find anything in Chinese to help you; you don't have to speak English in order to get around.... I just feel a little more comfortable in California. All these days in America, I like California the best. (Interview 5)

As members of these well-off suburban communities, Chinese Americans no longer feel like a minority or discriminated against in society, and it creates a favorable social context. These high levels of social integration overshadow any feeling of stigma attached to race or ethnicity. To many, race is no longer a distinguishing factor and no longer a reason to feel insecure or inferior. The lack of perceived racism is without a doubt a good thing, but as a side effect, without a common enemy there is less motivation for Chinese Americans to unite and fight for a common ethnic cause (Wang 1996; Lai and Arguelles 2003; Ong and Scott 2009). Without a sense of group threat or competition, there is less of a push to organize based on racial identity (Diaz 2012). This feeling of equality and lack of discrimination contributes greatly to the lack of political solidarity among Chinese Americans in the suburbs. As a result, political mobilization and civic involvement is dominated by individual-level motivations.

Diversity and Factionalism

We are probably one of the most diverse communities there are. I see this as a plus and a minus. Well, a plus because of the richness of the diversity, [and] a minus because there is not one political mass to keep up the rallying. It's not the same way everywhere. (Interview 8)

Contemporary immigrants are now more distinctly heterogeneous, but diversity among Chinese Americans is even more extraordinarily heterogeneous (Zhou 2001; Wang 1995; Wang 1996; Lin 1998). The diversity among suburban Chinese Americans creates additional factors

that contribute to disaggregate political identities. This complexity creates additional barriers that inhibit the formation of a unified Chinese American constituency.

Though the Chinese American population shares Chinese descent and represent the Chinese diaspora as a whole, the distinct histories and experiences from the specific generations and homelands of Chinese Americans create more well-defined and smaller Chinese American diasporas. The smaller diasporas share different spatial characteristics and have porous boundaries based on their context (Ma 2003). The different time, place, and experiences create distinctly different diasporas and add to the diversity of the Chinese Americans.

Place of origin. Chinese Americans come from many different places. Mainland China comprises of 22 provinces, 5 autonomous regions, and 4 municipalities, each which has a distinct cultural profile. In addition to people from mainland China, people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau also identify as Chinese and Chinese American when they come to the United States. These geographic differences contribute to the diversity of the Chinese American community.

Even in America, Chinese Americans still identify with their geographic origins and differentiate themselves from Chinese who have roots in places other than theirs (Zhao 2010). One Cantonese respondent describes how she feels different from Mandarin Chinese Americans:

As Cantonese, I feel like we are more lower class than Mandarin people. We are working class people.... And I feel that it is different. (Interview 12)

Another respondent describes how the different personal backgrounds of Chinese Americans affect her understanding of Chinese American history and identity:

Guangdong, Cantonese history [is] different than Chinese immigrants now from China and Taiwanese. Because my ancestors were from Southern China, the Guangdong province, and because I think that the majority of new Chinese immigrants are from either China or Taiwan, they don't share that history with me because they don't know about it of course, and I think the focus is very different, it's on like the education, the business." (Interview 9)

In addition, these different homelands can shape an individual's entire perception and adaptation to their new home. This immigrant from mainland China elaborates on how her experience in mainland China affected her experience adjusting to America. in contrast to other Chinese Americans:

Because mainland China at that time was Communist and isolated, our generation was isolated.... We were not familiar with this society, and our English was limited, and our knowledge and understanding about this society was naive. Compared with people from Hong Kong and Taiwan, their society is more open, more close to Western countries, and they have a greater understanding about society so their understanding of this country is more mature (Interview 19)

Generational differences. The Chinese have been immigrating to the United States for over almost two centuries, and Chinese Americans today share a wide range of immigration histories and experiences in America. American political and social order during each time period gives Chinese Americans unique experiences adapting and living in America based on their historical location.

Each generation and nationality is distinct because they are each defined by different experiences of dual domination (Wang 1995). They have been shaped by different degrees of exclusion, ranging from overt forms like the Chinese Exclusion Act or through subtle expressions such as the consistent lack of political representation of Chinese Americans. Extraterritorial domination varies as well, from pressures to reproduce Communist cultural values to the desire to capitalize on American business and technology. As one respondent bluntly said:

So many people who have grown up today have never experienced what it's like before. (Interview 8)
This is particularly relevant to the experiences of several of the American-born Chinese that I interviewed, whose parents grew up during the Exclusion Era, a time when America was much less diverse and much more race sensitive than today. Their upbringing was distinctly shaped by their family's experiences during this period. As a second-generation immigrant said:

My parents, having suffered through the Chinese Exclusion era, wanted me to be an American first. (Interview 18)

Another respondent shared similar sentiments of how her parents tried to repress their Chinese identity. Consequently, she never had the opportunity to know or embrace her cultural heritage until she was an adult.

There's a whole village of history here and a whole generation of my ancestors that I don't know anything about.... Because of the fire and because of probably the fears that people had those days, that next generation, my mother, then, didn't learn the stories, and because of that I didn't learn the stories. And because of the kind of treatment, I believe that was why my parents didn't teach us Chinese, to speak Chinese. We spoke English. Grandma only spoke Chinese. My parents spoke both, but they only spoke Chinese to grandparents and English to us. And sometimes when people say to me, do you speak Chinese and I say no, especially Chinese people will say, 'shame on you' and so then when I was interviewed once and I looked straight in the camera and said no, not shame on me, shame on the social climate that caused my parents not to teach us Chinese... Because at that time there were not a lot of Chinese left, and so that was the safest thing for my generation. We already look different, and they didn't want us to sound different like when they were growing up when the Chinese Exclusion was still in effect. (Interview 9)

This respondent is civically engaged is a response to her upbringing and is motivated by a desire to have a better representation and understand of Chinese Americans and their history. She also notes, though, that because of their generational differences, more recent Chinese immigrants have a harder time relating to and joining her cause.

Others respondents have also lived in less integrated neighborhoods and experience severe alienation and discrimination, and experience drastically different from the comfortable suburbs that are filled with Chinese Americans now. Their experiences are a product of a different time and place, one with more segregation than the suburbs recent immigrants reside in today. This American-born respondent reflects on her experience growing up post-Vietnam War:

When I was growing up I told you I was the only Chinese kid, but I haven't told you some other things. I have been stuffed in a locker, I have been stuffed in a closet, I had apples beamed at my head, I've had my mailbox blown up, my window shot out with eggs.... Unfortunately during the time period I grew up in (I'm 42) was post-Vietnam War and so people did not know if I was Chinese, Vietnamese or what, so I definitely had my fair share of racism.(Interview 10)

Among suburban Chinese Americans today, there is also a large group who came to the United States as visiting scholars in the 1980s. These are among the newest diasporic communities, and they, too, have their own unique American experience. One former visiting

scholar who decided to stay in the U.S. very specifically distinguishes himself from prior immigrants:

For us, it's like a special group of people because we were people that came to study. And back in China, that meant your grades and studies had to be really good. So in China your studies had to be strong, you had to go to a good school, etc., and not everyone had this opportunity. And for some reason or another, they decide to stay, so it means their studies are good or their abilities are strong and could work in America at U.S. companies. I know friends who get laid off in these times, and they're able to find new jobs really quickly. So this is really different from the immigrants before. Before the immigrants came because of family, or the people in Chinatowns they came from like Guangdong and mostly its family-based, but our people are like former students and then settle down here, and it's mostly in suburbs. So the education is typically very high. (Interview 7)

This respondent also feels like his immigration experience and transition to American life is distinct from current immigrants, who he feels adapt more easily:

I think there is this special/distinct experience of us who came to the U.S. and then decided to stay. Even though coming to America is simple, there are a lot of lifestyle changes. Coming to America was a big change in life. Like now, it's probably not. Now people come for a while, and then they'll go back, there's not a lot of change. (Interview 7)

The expansive Chinese Americans population is the result of multiple generations and decades. Each immigration story and experience reflects a different time and place in history. These distinctions create additional differences among Chinese Americans, and as time passes, these distinctions can only grow.

Factionalism

The diversity among such a high concentration of Chinese Americans seems to be clearly correlated with political factionalism. Despite having such a large population of Chinese, Fremont does not seem to have a politically cohesive group of Chinese Americans. Two elected officials in Fremont have noticed this and commented:

We have much more Chinese now and when you have more people you have more opinion... it's natural. We are not that cohesive as we were before. (Interview 16)

A more recent change: As you get more people involved, the pyramid closes up. And well because there's only so many avenues.... with a number of issues you don't have agreement. And you can expect that because decisions and things that come about, people take different views or sides of the issue. (Interview 8)

This shows that areas with higher-densities of Chinese Americans do not have necessarily have greater levels of ethnic solidarity and political unity. The factionalism observed in Fremont goes hand-in-hand with the independent political identities of Chinese American suburbanites.

Mobilization

Mobilization describes the types of external influences or pressures that may promote or prevent someone from taking political or civic action. Through interviewing with former and current elected officials, I hoped to gain insight into how Chinese Americans have been mobilized. My respondents described how attitudes and mobilization strategies towards Chinese Americans have changed within the past decade.

Elected Officials - Past

Two former elected officials in Fremont had said the support of the Chinese American community in Fremont was instrumental to their election. When asked if he had a lot of Chinese support during his campaign, one former elected official said:

It was almost I would say 100%. It was very high profile... So yes there was wholesale support from the Asian community. (Interview 8)
At that time, Fremont's Chinese population had not yet grown to current size. Nonetheless, these officials made a concerted effort to target, mobilize, and advocate on behalf of their fellow Chinese Americans. For them, the Chinese support was crucial to their election. They made significant campaign efforts that focused intentionally on Chinese Americans, and it paid off.

I was the highest vote getter. That really changed the whole That shows that we can work together as Chinese people if we put our efforts together we can make it happen....The whole Chinese community was involved and people poured in support and I didn't even know them. ... Just because I'm Chinese. We drew out lots of Chinese Americans to come out and vote. Usually the Chinese Americans have issues with politics, we didn't participate that much, so the Caucasians didn't look at us seriously.... well it's changed a lot. It's much better.

The whole Chinese community all came out. I was very touched but also felt like there's so much responsibility on my shoulder. So much weight. I felt like I had to answer to my Chinese American constituents. They had so much expectation because we never had any elected officials before. ...After you got elected you kind of are representing the entire Chinese American community" (Interview 16)

Because of the overwhelming Chinese support, this elected official felt like she was obligated to represent the Chinese American community and interests. Unlike many Chinese Americans in Fremont today, she carried a strong sense of group political consciousness. This consciousness and her motivation to represent the collective Chinese American interest was formed and motivated in response to institutional discrimination she experienced from the city, yet another thing that current residents cannot relate to. As she recalls:

Twenty years ago, we were a minority, so [the school district] didn't take us seriously and... well they did whatever they want. For example, they would increase rent at any time, they would charge us outrageous custodial fees, and eventually we were like that's enough. We have to stand up for ourselves.... There were a lot of instances... They were not friendly to the community... I felt like we were discriminated. (Interview 16)

Since this elected official was committed to improving treatment and conditions of her fellow Chinese Americans, there was a potential for the community to develop a strong Chinese American political group consciousness. But because of changes in leadership, commitments, and mobilization strategies, this inclination towards political solidarity was unable to be sustained.

Elected Officials - Present

Current elected officials are shying away from the ethnocentric efforts and successes of their predecessors. They adamantly claim to represent the entire Fremont community, and they make it clear that they are not serving the special interests of Chinese Americans.

The mentality is especially prominent during voter mobilization in election season as well. Often times the Chinese electorate is not strong enough for a candidacy to win an election, however, and candidates need to appeal to a broad selection of voters (Fong 1994; Fong 2008;

Lai 2011). Working with broad coalitions nonetheless does not preclude candidates from Chinese-specific advocacy.

This elected official describes the deracialization of her campaign, saying how she did not feel as if her race should be significant to the election.

During campaigning, I never felt more Chinese. People said, we don't need you we already have one yellow... It was worrisome for me that some people might associate me with thinking oh she is only for the mission district, only for the Chinese people, only for the Asian people.... I am really proud of my heritage, but I don't want someone to vote for me because I'm Chinese only, and I don't want someone to not vote for me because I'm Chinese. (Interview 10)

Another respondent, a former elected official shows a change in mentality that is similar to the above respondent, though he has successfully mobilized Chinese constituents in the past. He now emphasizes his commitment towards staying out of racial or geographic subjectivity.

My job is to take things and look at what is the best interest of Fremont, and that's all I do. I stay out of that. (Interview 8)

But considering the successful experiences of former candidates and the significantly larger population of Chinese Americans, this recent trend seems counterintuitive. James Lai points out, however, as ethnic minorities gain power and reach the tipping point, candidates often need to appeal more to mainstream base and pan-ethnic coalitions in order to reduce the appearance of threat (Fong 1994; Fong 2008; Lai 2011). This conscious and strategic effort of candidates to colorblind their campaigns and appeal to mainstream voters may benefit the Chinese American candidates' chances of election and increase the likelihood of Chinese political representation, but it could also have the consequence of reinforcing a lack of ethnic solidarity and political identity among Chinese Americans in Fremont. The lack of ethnic mobilization is moreover heightened by political parties, which also focus more on mobilizing reliable mainstream voters rather than Asians (Diaz 2012; Wong 2006).

Civic organizations

Civic organizations not only can promote community solidarity, but they can also be an important force in mobilizing community members to become politically engaged (Diaz 2012; Lin 1998; Lai 2011; Wong 2006). Though there are several civic organizations in Fremont dedicated to promoting Chinese American interests and involvement, respondents who are members in the organizations did not speak favorably about their efficacy.

One respondent, a former officer in the organization says,

“I like the people, I enjoy myself, but I don’t feel like we’re doing anything really major for the community” (Interview 13).

Another respondent who is heavily involved in these civic organizations also shared frustration over the lack of agenda of these groups. He says that they

“want to encourage people to come out, but without specific demands, it was difficult” (Interview 8). Despite having potential to create a more stimulating environment increase Chinese American involvement, these Chinese American civic organizations can only sustain a weak amount support for Chinese candidates and electorate. This, unfortunately, furthermore contributes to the lack of collective action and solidarity among Chinese Americans in Fremont.

All in all, factions and internal divisions within the Chinese American community are also related to decline in specialized Chinese American political mobilization. Perhaps the size of Fremont, with a population of over 200,000 residents, makes it a city more susceptible to factionalism that is found in large urban Chinatowns and less similar to the politically conscious Asian Americans in small-to-middle-sized suburbs that Lai studied (Wang 1996; Lin 1998; Lai 2011). Because the Chinese population is larger and more diverse, it becomes more worthwhile for candidates to spend their efforts outreaching to the general population instead of trying to unify Chinese Americans. It would not be surprising that the conscious effort of candidates to colorblind their campaigns reinforces the lack of ethnic solidarity and political identity among Chinese Americans in Fremont.

Cultural Inhibitions

Asian Americans are stereotypically perceived to be passive and uninvolved by political parties and scholars and mainstream institutions, which is used to explain low Asian American political participation (Hing 1993; Diaz 2012). Yet, in addition to this external perception, the vast majority of my respondents also understood, identified, and agreed with the stereotype that Chinese Americans are less likely to participate and be active in their communities. There was undeniably a general consensus among respondents from all nationalities and generations that there is a part of Chinese culture that discourages political participation and civic engagement.

A solid 80 percent of the respondents agreed that the voting paradox phenomenon exists and that Chinese Americans tend to under-participate in politics and civil society. In contrast to scholars' empirical analyses, the respondents viewed the under-participation as a cultural problem, as something that is inherent to Chinese heritage. Though some people did not personally identify with this issue, they were all still aware of this stereotype. Respondents offered slightly different variations of Chinese culture, but they all shared the same main idea. The sentiments brought up by the following four respondents were reiterated in almost all the other interviews.

As one respondent says, the root of the issue is with Chinese culture:

The culture of Chinese... is to take care of their own stuff, their things, their families, their kids. They don't want to touch other people's area. That's why they don't want to vote. (Interview 6)
This respondent describes how in Chinese culture, Chinese will only mind their own personal business so they won't care about public affairs or voting. A different respondent relates this to an old Chinese saying, a kind of Chinese cultural artifact.

It has certain truths to it.... The Chinese have this saying: you just clean up the snow in front of your house, you don't care about other people's ice on the roof. It's just like you take care of yourself, make

sure your family is self-sustaining, make sure your family is excelling, but you tend not to care about other people that much. That is Chinese always. (Interview 16)

Looking at it from a different perspective, the following respondent refers to a Chinese mentality of not getting to trouble and avoiding trouble. This person says:

People aren't involved in much. I think it's a cultural thing that people in China are accustomed to: don't get in trouble, take care of yourself, and their family values. All these reasons just caused them to be not involved too much. And if you like protesting and that kind of thing, that might get you in trouble, and we are group of people, we're more thinking that I have a family, I have a responsibility, I don't want to do that. (Interview 1)

This mentality of laying low, staying out of trouble, and prioritizing personal interests came up often in my interviews. While this respondent refers to it as a "cultural thing", there are also practical reasons why Chinese needed to keep a low profile. Another respondent mentioned that during volatile political times in China, there was a lot at risk for those who dared to express their individual political view or overstep their personal responsibilities. Other respondents, who were grew up as a token Asian, describe a fear of sticking out as another reason to stay out of trouble and lay low. Though culture is cited as the explanation, social and political contexts clearly play a less obvious role as well.

According to another respondent, it is complicity and lack of initiative that prevents Chinese from being active.

I think it's because there isn't a lot of initiative that they don't want to do anything for change. Things are the way they are, so it's like accepting it. Especially if things are okay, then there's not a lot of things to be dissatisfied with, so there's not really a purpose to it... Chinese people, I think, they think that living like this every day is pretty good, and there's not a need to change things. And things like voting it's like an active thing to change something or a belief that we should move in a certain direction. (Interview 7)

This respondent suggests that Chinese need to have a purpose or reason to create change in order to be motivated to take initiative and do something. This idea of needing to have something specific to change in the fact of dissatisfaction becomes much more apparent when respondents began discussing their political and community activities. In a later section, I will expand on this idea and propose that suburban Chinese Americans are motivated instrumentally to be involved and politically active.

The widespread perception of this cultural trait can demobilize the Chinese American community and adversely affect actual Chinese American involvement. By using culture to explain Chinese American behavior, my respondents make it seem as if low participation is inherent to all Chinese or unavoidable for those who still hold on to Chinese values. In this way, this explanation can act as a mental roadblock and prevent Chinese Americans from taking action and engaging within civil society. As a well-known concept, it can also be easily used by Chinese Americans as a convenient excuse to justify apathy or unwillingness to get involved. This stereotype thus has the potential to generate several negative effects, yet it does not seem to do as much damage as it could be. Many scholars have begun to comprehensively examine Chinese American political participation, and contrary to the voting paradox, they are documenting many different forms and types of Chinese American political and civic participation.

Chinese American Civic and Political Participation

Chinese Americans suburbanites are an active group of people, and it is important to acknowledge their non-electoral forms of involvement. Due to continuous Chinese immigration, there are significant parts of the population that may not be able to vote but are still politically active in their communities. Or, individuals who are able to vote may prefer to express themselves non-electorally, such as through volunteering, donating money, attending community meetings, or other forms of civic engagement. Although every single respondent who was eligible to vote claimed to vote, each respondent also showed at least one form of civic engagement, and many showed much more involvement beyond simply voting.

Church attendance is one of the leading indicators of voting participation across ethnic and racial groups, especially for churches with mostly homogenous memberships (Lien, et al 2004 and Liu 2011). Results from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Surveys (SCCBS) show that Catholic and Protestant Asian Americans volunteer more in their communities than those who are nonreligious (Ecklund and Park 2007). My results support these findings. Exactly half of my respondents regularly attend church, and they are all Protestant or Catholic. They all report a strong connection with their church and social community. Most go to church activities more than once a week, as well as dedicate additional time or resources to other community events and charities.

An overwhelming majority of respondents were active donors as well. Ninety-five percent of respondents used their financial liberties to support a wide range of recipients that include church missionaries, their children's schools, charities such as the American Heart Association, and organizations such as alumni associations and the Girl Scouts. Interestingly, only three respondents said they donated to Chinese or Asian organizations.

Many respondents, both church-goers and not, also volunteer in a wide range of functions, such as assisting senior citizens, helping out in the classroom, being an in-home assistant, serving on community Board of Directors, and much more. Volunteering seemed to be a popular form of engagement because respondents had the flexibility to choose to participate in only the opportunities that personally interested them.

Respondents all participated in a wide range of activities, but their involvement is highly instrumental and representative of individual, not collective, values. Results from the Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS) show that the most common form of participation beyond voting for Chinese Americans is working with a community to solve a

problem (Lien, et al. 2004). The responses from my respondents highly support this PNAAPS result; respondents only became engaged when they had a clear goal or interest in mind.

Instrumental Engagement

Instrumental engagement describes purpose-driven political or civic involvement that is motivated by personal interests or the potential for personal gain. This type of involvement is closely linked to individual's personal values and goals. These values are what are translated into actions.

My interviews found that suburban Chinese Americans tend to become involved for instrumental reasons. This is unsurprisingly considering that their individualized political identities are easily translated into individual motives and goals. Without ethnic solidarity and Chinese American political agenda, civic and political engagement is solely an avenue to advance personal interests. Suburban Chinese Americans are particularly motivated by these two priorities: education and property.

Education. Chinese American parents become extremely involved when their children's education is at stake. Education is extremely important value for Chinese Americans, and it was mentioned by 95 percent of my respondents as being an important issue in their community. One parent blatantly says:

The most important thing I think is education for our children. (Interview 4)
Higher education is especially valued, so parents want to make sure their children receive the best secondary education in order to prepare them for a top college education. Historically, education has been highly instrumental to Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. Both in China and in America, education was the most reliable way to break class barriers and achieve socioeconomic or geographic mobility (Kwong 1996, Fong 2008). Many immigrants were only

able to leave China because of their high academic abilities. Because of this, education is closely related to personal success and opportunity, and since so many generations of Chinese have gained from educational opportunities, it has become a core value that is passed down from generation to generation (Zhao 2010). As one parent summarizes:

We still believe we do the best for our children to give them the opportunity. We still believe in education. Our basic core values are still the same. (Interview 16)

In many cases, housing decisions are determined based on school districts and education quality. This is an experience that one respondent related with very well.

School is obviously the first. I mean, one of the reasons we moved here... We found out the school district is really good so we're happy. School is important. If you ask many Chinese families, school is one of the first criteria to pick where to live. (Interview 3)

The link between education and success drives Chinese Americans parents to volunteer and participate in extracurricular activities or community events that would enhance their children's academic experiences and opportunities. In this regard, involvement is instrumental for the sake of education. As a former elected official and community leader for over 15 years, this respondent shares his experience with instrumental educational engagement:

Trying to encourage people to get involved is easy to do at the school level because what a normal priority for Asians? Education. ...Parents and children are very often motivated to do things to increase their chances for a top college admission, and if this requires civil or political involvement, then Chinese Americans will gladly participate....Every time we go out to an event, do you know who always volunteers there? Not just high school students but Asians. Why? Well I would say that the interest of fulfilling the requirement, first of all, and then having participating in a club that they're involved with looks good on applications... Parents are always at recitals and functions that their kids are involved, but beyond that it's nothing... it's getting their kid into the position to get into the best. Well, sometimes, but the general rule is that the scope is very narrow. (Interview 8)

This respondent's experience shows that involvement motivated by education has clear goals, such as admittance into a top college. Without a goal or otherwise relevant benefit, it is unlikely that participation will be as high. Likewise, parents are unlikely to participate above and beyond what it necessary to reap the benefits. This type of proactive participation is highly instrumental.

A strong commitment to education can moreover cause intense reactive participation that is also motivated by instrumental reasons. This is best exemplified through Fremont Unified

School District's (FUSD) re-boundary debate in the late 2000s, when the district discussed redrawing school boundaries. This would have changed the school placements of hundreds of students, an extremely undesirable outcome for most parents who made the calculated choice of moving into and residing within this particular school boundary. Each school moreover has a distinct status and ranking, which parents cared very deeply about. Therefore, in order to maintain their children's quality of education, thousands of parents became extremely involved and invested in the redistricting process. The political activism and grassroots organization was nearly unprecedented. The former PTA President of a local elementary school and current school board member said that parents organized amongst themselves to form coalitions, online communities, and even hired lawyers to defend their interest. She reflects on that hectic time:

So when that happened by phone rang I kid you from 7am to midnight. i had people knocking on my doors, coming to my house....So we wake up at 4am ...then I get a home call saying some parents want to talk to you, can you come back from your [camping] trip, come to school. The parents had hired lawyers and I'm thinking like 15-20 parents, and I get to school and there's 500 parents waiting for me.Technology was booming so parents had Yahoo! groups and we had 5 different Yahoo! groups at that time. We combined it into one and it still exists, so we have parents submit questions. ... We decided to have a town hall meeting and invite the board, the sitting board at that time. And so we passed out fliers to parents, the community, like everything single house in the attendance area. And on the day of the meeting, I always joke with my fellow board members now, we had 1500 people come so the entire multipurpose room was packed.... My board members still joke with me about it now, the ones that came, you know I feel like if we didn't agree we weren't going to make it out of there alive. (Interview 10)

This example shows when there is a need or reason to become involved, suburban Chinese American parents will not hesitate to mobilize and act.

Property. Property is another sensitive issue for suburban Chinese Americans. Home ownership is a top priority for many Chinese American families because it represents economic stability and well-being, and it is an asset that can be passed down to future generations. Property is also a symbol of social status, which is especially important for immigrants trying to start a successful life in a new country. Many respondents affirm this notion:

People care about, especially homeowners, the value of the house. (Interview 3)

Issues? The housing market. The market is still bad and the listing prices are going down so that's a big concern, but we are staying here so we don't have plans to sell the house. (Interview 6)

I think housing market isn't that good so sometimes I worry. When buying the house you want the prices to be low, but now we don't want it to be low. (Interview 7)

Chinese American suburbanites therefore will also become heavily involved when their property or property value is threatened. Even during the school redistricting talks, many parents expressed concern over what would happen to their property values if the district changed. Part of the intense political activism in response to the boundary changes was motivated by concerns over property values.

There is an on-going controversy in Fremont right now over the fate of a community park. Residents, most of them Chinese, who lived in the area surrounding the park were strongly opposed to the proposed residential development, and were able to mobilize and stop the plan.

One respondent who remained neutral on the issue reflects on the controversy:

Honestly for the Chinese, money is a big issue, and Chinese will turn out to City Hall if it affects their pocket books or property.... I just recently remember that a developer wanted to build on Kimber Park. There was a huge uproar down that way, by the shopping center near the swim and tennis clubs. She wanted to develop, but the people in that area said no. (Interview 12)

Property and education are two extremely significant catalysts for political and civic engagement of suburban Chinese Americans. These examples show that Chinese Americans will become seriously involved if something they value is threatened or in jeopardy. It is the potential to gain or lose something that is the motivating factor, and this is what makes their participation instrumental.

Value-based Participation

Chinese American political participation is also motivated by personal values and perceptions of citizenship. This is especially true for electoral participation; a large majority of respondents cited reasons such as civic duty, being a good citizen, obligation to the community, privilege and responsibility as motivations for voting.

Respondents all echoed each other's sentiments:

I vote every year. I believe you have to. It's a responsibility. To be a good citizen; that's a part of the good citizen definition. You have to vote. (Interview 1)

I should do that because I'm part of the country, part of the community. First, it's my right. Second, it's my responsibility... You have to voice yourself... it makes a difference sometimes. (Interview 6)

It's more like obligation, so I pretty much vote every time.... I mean really it's a privilege to vote. As a citizen I think it's a privilege and a responsibility. (Interview 3)

These reasons were not attached to a particular goal or mission. This type of motivation is still premised upon individual belief systems and standards rather than collective goals. Ideas of what comprises good citizenship and feelings of personal responsibility are personally determined and do not form a collective agenda. These motivations are only meaningful in a collective setting, but because they rely on individually constructed value systems, this is another example of how Chinese Americans lack group political consciousness.

This rhetoric and value framework is also supported by elected officials and campaigners.

As one says,

It's getting the word out and doing your best to keep a constant message and conveying that your vote does count.... You need to exercise that privilege in order to make whatever it is you want to make.

You're in this country, and this is part of the responsibility to be here. (Interview 8)

By pushing this message, community leaders are reinforcing this type value-based participation.

Implications

While there is a general consensus among respondents that Chinese culture can inhibit civic and political participation in the United States, this collective perception has not prevented suburban Chinese Americans from voicing their opinions, voting in elections, donating time and money, and actively participating within their communities.

This study also shows that even in large ethnic suburbs like Fremont, Chinese Americans are unable to develop group consciousness and political solidarity. Rather, their civic and political engagement is based on individual values and instrumental reasons.

Based on these findings, I believe suburban Chinese Americans lack power and force to create political improvements for their ethnic group, such as increasing political representation in government or eliminating discriminatory practices. Due to their particular political and civic interests, suburban Chinese Americans are more likely to be able to mobilize and advocate for their socioeconomic interests, such as issues related to education, property, or taxes.

The experience of suburban Chinese Americans is clearly different from urban Chinese Americans, particularly those who reside in Chinatowns. Suburban political incorporation shows more individualistic form of civic engagement in contrast to the entrenched informal political structures found in Chinatowns. Political mobilization of Chinatown residents tends to focus around community-based organizations, and political organization is informally dominated by upper-class Chinatown elite. (Kwong 1996; Lin 1998). The political integration within urban Chinatowns appears to be more similar with historical forms of white ethnic incorporation than with that of their suburban Chinese American counterparts.

Suburban Chinese Americans also share similarities to present-day Latino political behavior. Latinos and suburban Chinese Americans both have high levels of involvement in civil life, and they engage in similar forms of civic engagement: organizational activity, charitable activities, and school-based activities (DeSipio 2006). Most Latinos also do not identify ethnic-specific issues as a top political issue (DeSipio 2006). Likewise, politics for many suburban Chinese Americans is not dominated by ethnicity or race-based issues because of their relatively high levels of social comfort and few experiences with racial discrimination.

Though the political incorporation of suburban Chinese Americans is distinct from that of historical white ethnics as well as African Americans, it is not too different from mainstream political participation today. Nineteenth century white ethnic immigrants, such as the Irish and

Italian, organized political machines in order to gain power and a voice in American politics. The spoils system has been long gone from American politics, but it paved the way for historical white ethnics to become fully incorporated into the American political system. African Americans, on the other hand, have been able to consistently mobilize around a shared linked fate mentality (Dawson 1994). The unified African American political coalition is driven by a recognition of a shared past experience, namely American slavery and centuries of institutionalized discrimination. Suburban Chinese Americans, in contrast, have very diverse homeland and generational backgrounds that has resulted in varying immigration and integration experiences for them in the United States. As a result, I did not find a strong sense of ethnic solidarity and group consciousness among suburban Chinese Americans.

The political expression of suburban Chinese Americans, however, fits well with mainstream American political participation trends. Dalton observes that the meaning of citizenship has shifted from duty-based norms to engaged citizenship norms (Dalton 2006; 2008). The transformation shows a decline in normative and obligation-based participation and a rise in engaged citizenship, which involves self-expressive values, stimulates activity in civil society, and allows participants to exercise more influence and say. Under this framework, citizens have more control in how they want to participate and define their own issue interests. These trends are exemplified by suburban Chinese Americans. As models of engaged citizens, suburban Chinese Americans tend to express themselves through informal political structures and civic organizations and autonomously decide what issues to become involved with. Their engagement is, in addition, highly instrumental and aimed at exercising political influence and utility. The only exception is electoral participation, which Dalton also finds to be the single activity that positively correlates with citizen duty for mainstream Americans as well. As a

contemporary American group, suburban Chinese Americans are also incorporating well into modern American political participation trends.

Conclusion

The civic and political engagement of Chinese Americans, whether it is be volunteering or voting, shows how Chinese Americans are progressively adapting and reconciling their perceived cultural roadblocks with American civil society. Culture will continue to affect how Chinese Americans navigate through the American way of life. Though they are all at different points in their lives and represent different generations of Chinese American heritage, each of my respondents is still struggling to find a place for their Chinese identity while living in an America. These respondents are trying to bridge their two cultures and preserve the best of both their worlds. Though often misperceived and overlooked by mainstream American society, suburban Chinese Americans are a significant and less foreign group within American politics.

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Respondent 1. 2012. Personal Interview, December 26.

Respondent 2. 2012. Personal Interview, December 26.

Respondent 3. 2012. Personal Interview, December 26.

Respondent 4. 2012. Personal Interview, December 26.

Respondent 5. 2012. Personal Interview, January 1.

Respondent 6. 2012. Personal Interview, January 2.

Respondent 7. 2012. Personal Interview, January 2.

Respondent 8. 2012. Personal Interview, January 4.

Respondent 9. 2012. Personal Interview, January 6.

Respondent 10. 2012. Personal Interview, January 10.

Respondent 12. 2012. Personal Interview, January 11.

Respondent 13. 2012. Personal Interview, January 11.

Respondent 16. 2012. Personal Interview, January 14.

Respondent 17. 2012. Personal Interview, February 15.

Respondent 18. 2012. Personal Interview, February 15.

Respondent 19. 2012. Personal Interview, March 25.

Respondent 20. 2012. Personal Interview, March 25.

Appendix A

Interview Questionnaire for Community Members

Warm-up Questions

Where were you born?

When did you come to the United States?

How were you able to enter the US?

-relative, applied/waited for immigrant visa, work-visa, student to work visa

When you came to the US, where did you move it?

How did you choose [that place]? How long did you live there?

Did you move anywhere after before you arrived to where you are now?

Where/How long/Why?

Are you a US citizen?

If yes, when? and why did you decide to?

If no, why not?

Who do you live with?

Neighborhood/Community Questions

How long have you been living in this neighborhood?

Why did you decide to move here?

How do you like your neighborhood?

Do you feel safe and comfortable living there?

Do you feel like you belong?

Do you know your neighbors?

Is there a sense of community?

Are there many Chinese people that live around here? Do you feel like you know them?

What are some important issues in your area?

[schools, housing, jobs, transportation, diversity, economy, safety]

What are issues others find important, but you don't really care or know about?

Do you often shopping, run errands, visit friends, or go to events outside of your city/vicinity?

If so, how often and for what?

What is your relationship or involvement like with the Chinese community?

Participation/Involvement

Where do you work?

Can you tell me about your job?

If no, what do you do in your free time?

Do you attend church?

Can you tell me more about your church and what it does?

How often do you go? Are you involved in [any non worship activities]?

When did you join? How did you hear about it?

Are you a member of other organizations? [ex, Rotary, professional orgs, etc.]

Can you tell me about what the organization does?

When did you join? How did you hear about it?

Do you volunteer for any organizations?

Could you tell me more about this org and how you are involved?

When did you get involved? (why?)

Do you donate to any charities or causes?

What was it for?

How do you hear about it?

How often do you donate?

Have you heard about the neighborhood association or community meetings?

Have you attended any of them?

[if no] Have you thought about attending?

[if children still in school] Have you been to any school meetings?

What were they like? Do you attend regularly?

[if citizen] A lot of people don't have time to go to the voting booth or keep up with elections, so they choose not to vote. Do you vote in elections? Which elections? Why or why not?

Any other forms of political participation?

What do you do to stay informed?

[for any of the above] What motivates you to do this?

Do you feel like you need to be involved for greater society/greater good or is it just personal?

Many studies find Chinese voters to be a paradox, since they tend to have higher incomes and education than other immigrants, but with significantly lower voting rates.

Do you think this is true?

Why do you think Chinese people do not vote?

Identity

Do you feel American? Why or why not?

What are some things you do that make you feel American?

What are some things you do that make you feel Chinese?

Do you feel like a minority in your neighborhood? Why or why not?

Are there any specific experiences that make you feel that way?

Do you feel like a minority in the United States?

Are there any specific experiences that make you feel that way?

What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

(Chinese American, Chinese, Asian American, Cantonese, Taiwanese, etc)

Demographic

How old are you? (What is your age range?)

What is the highest level of education you've attained?

Was it in the US or abroad?

Do you own or rent your home?

Would you consider yourself in the low, working, middle, upper-middle, or upper class?

Closing Questions

Is there anything you would like to add or emphasize that you haven't mentioned yet?

Do you have any questions about this interview or my research?

What is the most important thing you want me to take away?

Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire for Elected Officials

Warm-up Questions

Where were you born and raised?

How did you end up in Fremont? Do you still live here now?

Neighborhood/Community Questions

How do you like your neighborhood?

How long have you been living in this neighborhood?

Do you feel safe and comfortable living there?

Do you feel like you belong?

Do you know your neighbors?

Is there a sense of community?

Which part of Fremont/Bay Area do you live in now?

Are there many Chinese people that live there? Do you feel like you know them?

Do you feel like there is a sense of community among the Chinese here?

What about in the greater Fremont area?

What are some important issues in your area?

[schools, housing, jobs, transportation, diversity, economy, safety]

Are there issues others find important, but you don't really care or know about?

Participation/Involvement

When did you start becoming involved in your community?

What was the first organization that you joined? How did you hear about it?

Was it before moving to Fremont (young age?)? What was the first thing in Fremont?

What motivated you to take that first step and become active in your community?

Do you feel like you need to be involved for greater society/greater good or is it just personal?

Has your motivations changed at all?

When did you notice that you were becoming a community leader?

When did that translate to running for office?

How has being Chinese influence the organization you join and the leaderships you pursue?

How has being a Fremont resident influence the type of organizations/activities you're involved in?

What has been your experience to mobilize Chinese to volunteer time or donate money?

Any memorable victories or challenges?

Many studies find Chinese voters to be a paradox, since they tend to have higher incomes and education than other immigrants, but with significantly lower voting rates.

Is the paradox true?

Do you have any specific examples?

What has been your experience with mobilizing the Chinese electorate to vote?

Any memorable victories or challenges?

What do you think mobilizes Chinese to be active in their community?

What is your relationship/involvement like with the Chinese community? How does it compare to other communities?

Do you attend church?

Can you tell me more about your church and what it does?

How often do you go? Are you involved in [any non worship activities]?

When did you join? How did you hear about it?

Can you tell me about your job?'

Identity (ID)

Do you feel American? Why or why not?

What are some things you do that make you feel American?

What are some things you do that make you feel Chinese?

Do you feel like a minority in your neighborhood? Why or why not?

Are there any specific experiences that make you feel that way?

Do you feel like a minority in the United States?

Are there any specific experiences that make you feel that way?

What race/ethnicity do you identify yourself as?

(Chinese American, Chinese, Asian American, Cantonese, Taiwanese, etc)

Demographic (DEM)

How old are you? (What is your age range?)

What generation Chinese are you?

Do you own or rent your home?

Would you consider yourself in the low, working, middle, upper-middle, or upper class?

Closing Questions (CLOS)

Is there anything you would like to add or emphasize that you haven't mentioned yet?

Do you have any questions about this interview or my research?

What is the most important thing you want me to take away?