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Transnational Homeland Concerns and Participation in US Politics: A Comparison among Immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong¹

PEI-TE LIEN

This study addresses the scholarly debate between assimilation and transnationalism through analyses of public opinion data collected mainly in California and from residents of Chinese descent whose families originated from the Chinese mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere in Asia. It explores the empirical relationship between Chinese Americans' concern about the political condition of the ethnic homelands in Asia and their patterns of political participation in the United States. Not all transnational concerns are equal. This study distinguishes between the democratic-oriented and nationalist-oriented transnational political behavior. It also separates voting registration from other types of political participation. A main argument of this study is that the relationship between political assimilation and transnational linkages depends both on the nature of the transnational political concern and on the type of political participation. Transnational political concerns are found to influence the degree of participation in regime-influence (e.g. making campaign contributions) but not system-support (e.g. voting registration) acts. Also, only those homeland concerns that are consistent with US foreign policy interests such as regarding the democratic future of Hong Kong after the 1997 transition are found to have a positive impact on participation.

ALMOST EVERY RECENT MAJOR STUDY ON THE ADAPTATION experiences of contemporary US immigrant groups makes an attempt to address the influence of globalization by invoking some notion of transnationalism. Whereas an appeal to study the non-domestic/international dimension of Asian American politics has been in place for two decades (Nakanishi 1986), it may not be an exaggeration to suggest that

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we still know very little about the transnational political, as compared to the economic and socio-cultural, dimension of the Asian American experience. In particular, political scientists lag behind many of their peers in other social science and humanities disciplines in advancing understanding of this very vibrant research field. Moreover, when transnational political practices are the focus of research, much more scholarly attention has been paid to the trans-Atlantic and inter-American than the trans-Pacific border-crossing activities. This study is part of an effort, however preliminary, to address the extant deficiency in research. It explores the political dimension of transnationalism and its relationship to participation in US electoral politics. Specifically, it assesses the scope and significance of the empirical relationship between Chinese Americans' concern about the political condition of the ethnic homelands in Asia and their patterns of political participation in the United States. The US Chinese population is ideal for this study not only because the majority members of the present-day community are foreign-born and of recent immigration background, but because they come from a politically-divided homeland whose political and economic development has been closely linked to US foreign, trade, defense policies and international security concerns. Data from the *Los Angeles Times Poll* (LATP) Survey of Chinese in Southern California on the eve of the British handover of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1997 are uniquely suitable for the study's purpose. They form the basis of this study's empirical observations and analyses. A main argument of this study is that the relationship between political assimilation and transnational linkages may not be a unified one. Although the Chinese American experiences provide ample evidence to support the model of "dual domination" — which posits that involvement in homeland politics may suppress participation in host society politics, globalization and social change on both sides of the Pacific in contemporary times may also support the model of "dual mobilization" — which posits that interest and involvement in homeland politics may stimulate interest and participation in host society politics as well.

Political Transnationalism and Participation

Although transnationalism is often seen to be in opposition to assimilation, until very recently the exact meanings and dimensions of transnational practices as well as the relationship between assimilation and transnationalism have not been subject to rigorous social science examination. To help remove the theoretical ambiguity and analytical confusion in the use of the theory, Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) advocate setting apart the political from the economic and socio-cultural spheres of cross-border activities. They also propose distinguishing the transnational, civil society or "bottom-up" level of activities that do not involve

governments or corporations from the international and multinational or “top-down” levels of activities that do engage the two institutions. Most of the immigrant transnational activities, they argue, fall under the nongovernmental, noncorporate civil society category. Focusing on migrants’ political transnationalism, Ostergaard-Nielsen (2003) notes that distinctions have been made between the “broad” and the “narrow” forms of transnational practices. Direct participation in the political institutions of the home country including political parties, elections, and hometown associations is an example of the “narrow” form; participation in meetings, discussions, or events related to home country politics without actual travel is a “broad” form. Similarly, “core” practices refer to activities happening on a regular basis and are an integral part of an individual’s life, while “expanded” practices refer to activities that occur more occasionally and are usually triggered by political events in the country of origin. Generally, those migrants who are engaged in “narrow” or “core” political transnationalism are few in number, their participation far between. These authors concur that the more common form of transnational political practices occurs on an occasional basis and involves activities that are broadly defined.

In their seminal survey on the transnational political activities of Colombians, Dominicans, and Salvadorans, Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003) find that regular cross-border political activists are a small minority, not exceeding 10 percent in the full weighted sample and 15 percent among the most active group. The transnational political activities surveyed include membership in home country political parties, donating money to home country political parties, and participation in home country political campaigns and rallies. From these findings, participation seems to be more common among those who are occasionally involved, but not by much. They also find that greater participation in these activities may be associated with the expectation to return home, more education, male, married, more years of US stay, and (to a certain degree) older in age, while it is not significantly reduced by the acquisition of US citizenship or downward mobility in occupation. Their research helps settle the dispute between assimilation and transnationalism by concluding that both are not at odds with each other, for it is the better established and more secure immigrants who engage in transnational activities. It confirms Kivisto’s (2001) suspicion that transnationalism may be considered a variant rather than an opponent of assimilation.

The observation that most individuals are not regular participants in core transnational activities appears to ring true among Chinese and other Asian Americans. In a large-scale pilot survey of the political attitudes and opinions of 1,200 Asian Americans residing in five metropolitan areas (Pilot National Asian American political Survey, PNAAPS), only four percent of Chinese (and six percent of all Asian) respondents reported having ever participated in home country politics after arriving in the United States (Lien, Conway, and Wong

2004). Their social contact either by phone or by mail or in person with people in their respective Asian homelands was much more frequent. Twenty-two percent of Chinese (and 25 percent of all Asian) immigrants maintained contact at least once a week and 20 percent of them reported contact at a frequency of two to three times a month. Their attention to news stories and other information about what happened in Asia was even higher — 68 percent of the Chinese (and 56 percent of all Asian) respondents reported paying very close (20 percent) or fairly close (48 percent) attention to news about Asia. Likewise, on the eve of the March 2004 presidential election and referendum in Taiwan, a lofty 79 percent of respondents in the survey of 603 Chinese and Taiwanese Americans residing in 36 states indicated awareness of the events, even if only 11 percent of the respondents were born in Taiwan.

Analyzing the immigrant portion of the PNAAPS, Lien, Conway, and Wong (2004) find that, other conditions being equal, activism in homeland politics is associated with a higher level of participation beyond voting and has no significant relationship to voting or registration. Studying the Vietnamese American protest behavior in Orange County, CA, Collet and Furuya (2005) observe a positive relationship between participation in a protest over the Communist homeland and the likelihood of voting. These empirical results not only echo the findings by Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller (2003), but they support the “dual mobilization” model that has been observed by scholars of other immigrant groups (Chang 1988; Foner 1997; Jones-Correa 1998; Karpathakis 1999; Graham 2001). All appear to support Shain’s (1999) once controversial assertion that immigrant communities’ involvement in homeland-related affairs may facilitate, rather than deter, their social integration and political incorporation by disseminating the American democratic values both within and outside of the United States. None of the above studies empirically assesses the situation when immigrants are involved in promoting a political cause for the homeland that may be at odds with the US national interest. In this latter situation, an adverse rather than a complementary relationship may be observed.

The current study focuses on the broad concept of political transnationalism that is practiced by the mass, without their actually crossing the national borders, and without governmental or organized group intervention. The transnational political practices investigated involve the awareness, interest, and concern over ethnic homeland development that may occur among both immigrant and non-immigrant sectors of the ethnic population and over a sustained period of time. Two distinct homeland political issues regarding Chinese Americans are investigated: the transition from British to Chinese rule of Hong Kong and the pursuit of Taiwanese independence. We hypothesize that, depending on the homeland issues involved and whether the cause is consistent with US values and interests, the relationship may either be complementary or adverse. Specifically, Chinese

Americans' concern over the democratic future of Hong Kong after the 1997 handover to China may be positively associated with their participation in US mainstream politics; but their supportive attitude of an independent state of Taiwan may be negatively associated with their participation in US mainstream politics. In addition, we also hypothesize that their experiences of racial oppression in the host society may mobilize participation in a certain but not other types of host society politics. Furthermore, although respondents' homeland origin or place of socialization may affect the nature and level of their transnational contacts, its effect on political participation may be mostly explained away by controlling for sociodemographic differences related to each country or place of socialization.

Chinese Americans Past and Present: An Evolving Transnational Population

The Chinese had a prolonged presence on the American continent, but their first significant migration to the United States did not begin until shortly after the discovery of gold in California in 1850 (e.g. Chinn et al. 1969; Chan 1986; Tsai 1986; Chen 2000; Lai 2004). In this first major wave of Chinese migration that ended abruptly in 1882 when Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, an estimated 220,000 young male peasants — almost all coming from the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province — arrived to seek opportunities as miners, railroad workers, and migrant farmers or to work in low-paying, labor-intensive manufacturing jobs. The combination of their manner of entry, terms of employment as semi-contracted workers, hostility from the white union and politicians, and Sinophobia rooted in the racial attitudes and practices of the larger society precluded most from becoming permanent settlers (Saxton 1971; Sandmeyer 1973; Gyory 1998; Aarim-Heriot 2003). In fact, between 1882 and 1920, the Chinese population in the United States was in a steady decline because of immigration exclusion and the voluntary or forced departure of the Chinese. For those who stayed, the combination of daily encounters with American racism and a growing concern over China's backwardness and vulnerability in the face of Western and Japanese imperialism contributed to the rise of Chinese nationalism during the period of exclusion (Ma 1990; Yu 1992; Wang 1994; Chen 2002). Focusing on elite mobilization from the homeland, Duara (1997) explains that their rising nationalism can also be attributed to the direct contacts with and appeals made by three nationalist groups to the overseas Chinese.

The declining population began to replenish itself in the 1920s as those who entered as exempt classes (i.e. merchants, students, diplomats, tourists, and their spouses and children) gave birth to children in the United States. In addition, between 1920 and 1940, an estimated 71,000 Chinese or half of the total Chinese

admission entered as “paper sons”² after surviving ruthless interrogations at the immigration station or successfully challenging the negative decisions made against their right to immigration (Lai 1978, 2004; Lee 2003). Prior to the repeal of the Exclusion Act during World War II, Chinese Americans growing up in a racially segregated society looked to China as their surrogate homeland and contemplated returning to China to seek better opportunities and treatment (Chun 2000).

The Chinese American population gradually expanded and restructured itself in the postwar era with the entry of wives and children of Chinese American G.I.s as well as intellectuals and elite students sent by governments in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Immigrants’ ability to petition for naturalization after 1943 and the abrupt termination of all ties and communications between Chinese Americans and their families and friends in mainland China after 1949 helped forge and facilitate the identity transformation from ethnics to (ethnic) Americans among the foreign-born. Nevertheless, the assimilation of Chinese Americans was hindered by the controversies over the falsification of immigration papers during the era of exclusion, and interfered with by the “confession program” run by the US State Department and the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) in the late 1950s to stop immigration fraud. The politics of anticommunism affected the identity of US-born Chinese as well. US government agents, in the name of investigating document fraud, and with support from the operatives in Chinatown of the Taiwan-based anti-communist GMD government, increased their surveillance and harassment of the US-born Chinese who were perceived as natural allies of the Chinese Communists (Lai 1999, 2004; Chun 2000; Zhao 2002). The “dual domination” of the two governments resulted in the strangling of the voices of the political left and delayed the development of an indigenous ethnic identity among the US-born Chinese (Wang 1995). Until the lifting of the martial law in Taiwan in 1987, Taiwanese American political dissenters also experienced a similar kind of dual oppression (Cohen 1988; Wang 1999).

The size and composition of the Chinese American population underwent a dramatic expansion and transformation in the third major wave of Chinese migration occurring after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. Between 1971 and 1980, close to 238,000 immigrants arrived from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong; another 445,000 and 529,000 arrived in the 1980s and 1990s respectively (US Immigration and Naturalization Service 2002). According to the 2000 US Census, there were close to 2.9 million Chinese in the United States. Individuals of full Chinese descent accounted for 23.7 percent of the Asian population nationwide. Including the 447,000 Chinese of mixed-race descent, about one in four Asians in the United States could claim to be Chinese. A full seven in ten Chinese were foreign-born in 2000. Among them, only 24 percent arrived before 1980; about a third arrived between 1980 and 1990; and 43 percent arrived after

1990. Among other things, the recentness of their immigration has affected their language use and citizenship acquisition. In 2000, about 85 percent of all US Chinese reported speaking at least some Chinese at home and exactly a third of the US Chinese did not possess US citizenship.

The normalization of US-China relations in 1979 permitted the re-building of cultural and political ties with the Chinese mainland. Meanwhile, the repressive GMD rule and deteriorating international stance of Taiwan expedited the exodus of talents and labor from the island to the United States (Ng 1998; Williams 2003). Living under the shadow of the ticking clock for the 1997 return of Hong Kong to China created a similar effect on the well-off and better-connected among the Hong Kong Chinese (Tucker 1994). Contrasted with the pre-1965 immigrants, who were mostly from Guangdong, these new immigrants have brought with them not only their skills and capital but political tensions over their divided homeland in Asia. Almost inevitably, ethnic homeland issues have affected the ethnic identity and behavior of the more established immigrants as well as the US-born generations (Wang 1994; Zia 2000; Kibria 2002; Louie 2002; Yao 2002; Chang 2003). Regardless of their place of origin, time of entry, and social status, both the old and the new Chinese immigrants contributed significantly to the US economic development. But even the most socio-economically successful among them could not escape racial prejudice and discrimination against the ethnic group, the most prominent recent example being the persecution of Chinese American political campaign donors in the 1996 presidential election cycle (Chang 2004).

Because of the divided homeland in Asia, three sets of immigration statistics are reported by the US Citizenship and Immigration Service. In fiscal years 1989–2003, immigrants born in China represented 70 percent of the nearly one million legally admitted Chinese immigrants to the United States; those born in Taiwan represented 18 percent and those born in Hong Kong represented 12 percent. Among persons who became legal permanent residents during fiscal year 2003, California was the top state of permanent residence for 28 percent of the China-born, 43 percent of the Hong Kong-born, and 51 percent of the Taiwan-born. New York was the second most popular state of residence for 21 percent of the China-born, 18 percent of the Hong Kong-born, but only seven percent of the Taiwan-born. Among the China-born, 54 percent were admitted as immediate relatives of US citizens, 25 percent were admitted under family-sponsored preferences, and 18 percent were admitted under employment-based preferences. In contrast, only 15 percent among the Hong Kong-born and 29 percent among the Taiwan-born were admitted as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. Moreover, about seven in ten of the Hong Kong-born and just over one in three of the Taiwan-born were admitted under family-sponsored preferences. Another indicator of differences among immigrants from the “three Chinas” is their occupation.

Whereas about one in four among the Taiwan-born and one in five among the Hong Kong-born held managerial or professional jobs, only one in eight among the China-born were in a similar occupation.

The sharp differences in population share, place of settlement, admission classification, and occupation status among the three groups of Chinese immigrants who became permanent residents in 2003 give a snapshot of the current socio-demographic divide among Chinese Americans. The contemporary formation of the ethnic community reflects the outcome of a convergence of influences that include not only US immigration and naturalization policies, receptivity in the host society, homeland conditions and its extraterritorial politics, but also changing US-China, US-Taiwan relations and the restructuring of the Pacific Rim economies after World War II. The long and convoluted group history and uneasy encounters with politics on both sides of the Pacific suggest that the adaptation experiences of Chinese immigrants cannot be conveniently explained by the straight-line assimilation theory based on the European-American patterns. Rather, transnationalism may be better able to describe the situation of the contemporary Chinese American population, which is predominantly foreign-born and has close ties with its ethnic homeland in Asia.

Data and Methods

A review of Chinese American history demonstrates that, to study the political concerns and adaptation experiences of the contemporary population, there is a need to disaggregate the term Chinese American into categories of homeland origin. This need is met by a first-ever large-scale public opinion survey on Chinese Americans collected by the *Los Angeles Times* just weeks before the Senate hearings on illegal Chinese campaign contributions and on the eve of the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule. In addition to having a sufficiently large number of respondents for advanced analysis, the survey's unique focus on these two concurrent events involving Chinese on both sides of the Pacific and on issues of major US domestic and foreign policy concerns provides a prime opportunity for researchers to empirically assess the scope and impact of transnational political ties on domestic political participation.

Chinese of voting age residing in six Southern California counties were interviewed by telephone between 9 and 27 May 1997. A list of Chinese surnames was used to draw the sample from phone directories in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, San Diego, San Bernadino, Riverside, and Ventura. Of the 773 interviews completed, 45 percent were conducted in English, 29 percent in Mandarin, and 26 percent in Cantonese. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus four percentage points. Only weighted results adjusted to conform to census figures on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and region are reported.

About half of the respondents were female (52 percent) and had college or advanced degrees (46 percent). The average age was 45 and about four in ten were 45 years of age or older. Two-thirds were married. Sixty percent were employed full-time or part-time or self-employed. Citizenship rate was 72 percent; naturalization rate among the foreign-born was 68 percent. Eighty-six percent were immigrants. The average length of permanent US stay for immigrants was 14 years.

Among the foreign-born, 204 or 26 percent of the respondents were born in China, 187 or 24 percent were born in Taiwan, 174 or 23 percent were born in Hong Kong, and 106 or 14 percent were born elsewhere (mainly Vietnam). Among the 100 respondents who were US-born, 80 percent belong to the second generation. Because about 14 percent of those born in any of the “three Chinas” did not grow up in their place of birth, an indicator of socialization context is created where respondents born in China and raised in Taiwan had their place of socialization coded as Taiwan. Likewise, those born in China and raised in Hong Kong have their place of socialization coded as Hong Kong; those born in China or Hong Kong or Taiwan but raised in the United States have their place of socialization coded as the United States. This practice finds 25 percent of the respondents socialized in China, 23 percent in Taiwan, 21 percent in Hong Kong, 20 percent in the United States, and 12 percent in other Asian places. By using place of socialization rather than place of birth as the social marker, this study is able to compare the attitudes and opinion of the US-born or US-raised Chinese with those of their foreign-born and -raised counterparts.

To address the research question on the relationship between transnational political concern and participation in US politics among Chinese Americans, we first report the summary frequency distribution and cross-tabulation results by place of socialization for the key independent and dependent variables in Tables 1a to 1c. Then, we report multivariate results assessing the independent impact

Table 1a. Percentage Distribution of Homeland Political Ties

Political Concern over the Hong Kong Transition:

Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of the Chinese government in ruling China?

	China	Taiwan	Hong Kong	US
Very Satisfied	8	1	2	1
Satisfied	51	24	38	23
Unsure	19	18	14	22
SW/Dissatisfied	18	28	28	30
Very Dissatisfied	4	29	18	24

Table 1a. (continued)

Are you currently satisfied or dissatisfied with the performance of the Chinese government in dealing with Hong Kong affairs?

Very Satisfied	13	5	8	3
Satisfied	41	24	28	34
Unsure	33	27	28	30
SW/Dissatisfied	11	33	25	25
Very Dissatisfied	2	12	11	8

Having thought about the issues relating to the July 1, 1997 handover, how optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of Hong Kong's political performance under the control of China? Are you—

Very Optimistic	7	3	6	3
Optimistic	26	15	22	27
Neutral	49	31	31	20
Pessimistic	16	41	29	41
Very Pessimistic	2	10	11	10

Having thought about the issues relating to the July 1, 1997 handover, how optimistic or pessimistic do you feel about the future of Hong Kong's economic performance under the control of China? Are you—

Very Optimistic	11	4	11	7
Optimistic	42	34	40	42
Neutral	34	30	29	14
Pessimistic	9	28	14	32
Very Pessimistic	4	4	5	5

How worried are you that China will restrict freedom of the press in the reporting of news in Hong Kong?

Not Worried	29	16	13	12
Slightly Worried	13	14	11	19
Unsure	18	11	13	6
SW/Worried	26	28	36	35
Very Worried	14	31	26	29

Political Concern over the Status of Taiwan:

Do you think Taiwan is part of China today, or not?

Is part of China today	79	37	62	27
Should become part of China	2	2	6	3
Should become independent	1	22	10	32
Should remain as it is	4	26	16	24
Not Sure	14	13	6	15

Source: *Los Angeles Times* and Hong Kong Transition Project Survey, *Los Angeles Times* Poll Study #396, May/June 1997.

Table 1b. Percentage Distribution of Homeland Ties: Social and Cultural Contacts

	China	Taiwan	Hong Kong	US
Social Contact:				
<i>Do you have relatives or friends living in Hong Kong, or not?</i>				
Yes	69	42	94	61
Cultural Contact:				
<i>Generally speaking, what language do you primarily speak when you are at home talking with your family?</i>				
Chinese	94	89	91	33
<i>Generally speaking, what language do you primarily speak when you are conducting personal business and financial transactions?</i>				
Chinese	48	19	39	3
<i>Where do you do most of your shopping? Do you shop mostly in stores operated by Chinese owners or primarily serviced by Chinese speaking salespeople, or do you shop in stores owned mostly by owners that are not Chinese and primarily serviced by English speaking salespeople?</i>				
Chinese	50	27	32	13

of socialization context and homeland political concerns vis-a-vis other homeland ties by controlling for possible confounding factors related to a respondent's assessment of the minority experiences and levels of integration into the US political and economic systems, and his or her personal socio-demographic background. Ordinary least-squares regression results predicting the level of Chinese American activism in US politics are reported in Table 2. Because of the binary nature of the dependent variable, logistic regression results predicting the likelihood of becoming registered to vote among citizens are reported in Table 3. In each table, nested models testing the unique contribution of each set of factors are reported: Model I tests the effects of socialization context, Model II tests the effects of ethnic homeland ties, Model III tests the effects of US experiences, and Model IV tests the effects of socio-demographic background.

Assessing the Scope of Chinese American Political Transnationalism and Participation in US Politics by Place of Socialization

In the survey of Chinese in Southern California, the level of political concern over the Hong Kong transition is measured by the respondents' assessments of the performance of the Chinese government and the perceived effects of the transition.

Table 1c. Percentage Distribution of Participation in US Politics

	China	Taiwan	Hong Kong	US
<i>How active are you in American politics?</i>				
Not Active at all	69	64	62	22
Not Too Active	23	18	14	27
SW/Active	7	17	24	45
Very Active	<1	2	<1	6
<i>Have you ever given money to a political candidate's campaign, or not?</i>				
Yes	13	19	16	23
<i>Given the climate in Washington these days about funding political candidates' campaigns, how likely is it that you will contribute to a candidate running for office in the future?</i>				
Not Likely	79	76	75	70
SW/Likely	19	20	22	21
Very Likely	2	4	3	9
<i>How closely have you been following the allegations by members of Congress that Asian nationals gave money illegally President Clinton's reelection campaign indirectly through the Democratic National Committee?</i>				
Not Closely	26	18	19	25
Not Too Closely	28	27	36	28
SW/Closely	37	41	40	36
Very Closely	9	14	5	11
<i>Voter registration (among citizens)</i>				
Yes	58	74	60	81

Those born and raised in China were significantly less likely to express dissatisfaction with the Chinese government in terms of its ruling over China and its dealing with Hong Kong affairs than those socialized elsewhere. They were also much less pessimistic about the impact of the political change on Hong Kong local politics, economy, and press freedom. Interestingly, those who were socialized in the US context showed a higher or as high a concern over the negative impact of the transition over the politics, economy, and press freedom of Hong Kong than those socialized in Taiwan or Hong Kong. However, those socialized in Taiwan showed the highest level of dissatisfaction with the Chinese government. For the multivariate analysis, a five-item summed index of homeland political concern over the Hong Kong transition based on a respondent's level of dissatisfaction with the Chinese government and its handling of Hong Kong as well as the degree of

pessimism about Hong Kong's politics, economy, and press freedom under China is created (standardized Cronbach's $\alpha=.76$).

Another indicator of respondents' transnational political concern is with the ambiguous political status of Taiwan and its subtle but often contentious relationship with China (Bush 2005). When asked whether Taiwan is part of China, a much larger portion of respondents socialized in China (79 percent) or Hong Kong (62 percent) than those socialized in Taiwan (37 percent) or the United States (27 percent) responded affirmatively. Only 22 percent of those raised in Taiwan would support the push toward the creation of an independent Taiwan state, and it is 10 percentage points lower than the opinion of those Chinese raised in the United States. About one in four of those socialized either in Taiwan or the United States believed that the future of Taiwan should remain as it is — neither part of nor separate from China. No more than one in seven persons in each of the socialization places was uncertain of how the relationship should be. To measure the degree of support for Taiwan independence, we assigned a score of one to those who believed that Taiwan is part of China today, two to those who believed that Taiwan should become part of China, three to those who were uncertain, four to those who preferred the status quo of *de facto* independence, and a score of five to those who supported the push for political independence.

To gauge the respondents' level of transnational social and cultural contacts, Table 1b shows that the majority (61 percent) of Chinese growing up in the United States reported having relatives or friends living in Hong Kong. Although their level of transnational social contact is considerably lower than that of those raised in Hong Kong, it is considerably higher than that of those born or raised in Taiwan. In terms of cultural contact, there is a huge gap between those socialized in the United States and those socialized elsewhere, with those socialized in the US context reporting much lower levels of usage of the Chinese language at home or in business settings and of visiting stores owned or primarily serviced by Chinese-speaking persons. Among persons from the "three Chinas," there is not much difference in terms of speaking Chinese at home, but those raised in Taiwan were much less likely to use Chinese to conduct personal business, and those raised in China were much more likely than others to do business with Chinese-speaking shops. For the multivariate analysis, a three-item summed index of ethnic cultural ties is created (standardized Cronbach's $\alpha=.59$) by taking stock of each respondent's level of contact with the Chinese language when at home, in making personal business transactions, and in shopping.

The dependent variable, participation in US politics, is measured by the level of an individual's general activism in American politics and his or her specific participation related to campaign finance. In addition to regime-influence politics, we also measure participation in system-support politics by one's act of becoming a registered voter. As reported in Table 1c, those socialized in the United States

had a substantially higher level of general activism, followed by those socialized in Hong Kong, and by those socialized in Taiwan, in that order. They also reported the highest levels of both past and prospective campaign donations and rate of voter registration. By contrast, those born and raised in China ranked the lowest in terms of participation levels across all of these participation items. Those born or raised in Taiwan reported the second highest level of making campaign donations and voter registration, but paid the closest attention to campaign finance news — probably due in part to the widely reported fact that the figures at the center of the controversy were either born or raised in Taiwan. For multivariate analysis, a four-item summed index of participation in US politics is created for each respondent by taking stock of his/her levels of activism in American politics, participation as campaign donors, intention to make future campaign contributions despite the reported controversy, and attentiveness to news coverage of the campaign finance controversy (standardized Cronbach's $\alpha=.57$).

Predicting Chinese American Participation in US Politics

To empirically assess whether transnational political concern is a deterrent of or a catalyst for Chinese American participation in US politics, we hypothesize that this relationship may be interfered by four sets of factors that deal with an individual's place of socialization, homeland ties, US experiences, and socio-demographic background. For measuring the significance of one's place of socialization, we test the effect of being socialized in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or other places in Asia, as compared to that in the United States. For measuring the significance of homeland ties, we compare the effect of transnational social and cultural ties as compared to that of homeland political concern, using indices discussed in the previous section.³ For measuring the significance of US experiences, we test the effect of four indicators: the perceived bias against Asians in US Congress' investigations of the campaign finance controversy,⁴ the perceived importance of Chinese participation in American politics, the level of political integration as indicated by one's citizenship status, and the level of economic integration as indicated by one's investments in the United States. For measuring the significance of one's socioeconomic background in predicting participation, we examine the role of six items: educational achievement, marital status, age (in raw years), employment status, gender, and the percentage of US political life (calculated as one if US-born, but a fraction of one's length of US stay over age if foreign-born).⁵

Table 2 reports the multiple regression results based on ordinary least-squares analysis. Model I shows that, compared to those socialized in the US context, those socialized outside of the United States are significantly less likely to

Table 2. Predicting Chinese American Participation in US Politics

	Model I b./s.e.	Model II b./s.e.	Model III b./s.e.	Model IV b./s.e.
<i>Place of Socialization</i>				
(ref. = USA)				
China	-.308**/.051	-.228**/.059	-.154*/.056	-.096/.081
Taiwan	-.180**/.052	-.105*/.054	-.114*/.051	-.106/.082
Hong Kong	-.237**/.053	-.219**/.057	-.180**/.054	-.123/.078
Other	-.425**/.063	-.365**/.065	-.274**/.062	-.187*/.081
<i>Transnational Homeland Ties</i>				
Concern over Hong Kong Transition			.063**/.022	.056**/.020
.054*/.020				
Support for Taiwan Independence		-.032*/.012	-.031**/.011	-.028*/.011
Social Contact		.124**/.038	.082*/.035	.078*/.034
Cultural Contact		-.262**/.061	-.152*/.058	-.039/.061
<i>US Minority/Incorp. Experiences</i>				
Anti-Asian Bias in US Institution			.211**/.039	.159**/.039
Importance of Ethnic Participation			.119**/.021	.112**/.020
US Citizenship			.110**/.037	.094*/.043
US Investment			.132**/.033	.071*/.035
<i>Socio-demographic Background</i>				
Education				.045**/.008
Married				.066/.037
Age				.000/.001
Employed				-.031/.034
Female				-.120**/.031
% US Political Life				.104/.109
(Constant)	1.331**/.037	1.173**/.082	.368**/.131	.256/.160
N=656				
Adj. R-Square	.078	.125	.249	.299

Note: The dependent variable is a 4-item summed index of participation in American politics. b = unstandardized regression coefficient, s.e. = standard error *p < .05 **p < .005
Source: Los Angeles Times and Hong Kong Transition Project Survey, Los Angeles Times Poll Study #396, May/June 1997.

participate in US politics. Considering the effect of place of socialization alone, those born and raised elsewhere in Asia are particularly disadvantaged. Model II shows that, after considering the effect of homeland ties, the degree of participation deficit for those socialized outside of the United States is reduced, especially for

those born or raised in Taiwan. After differences in US experiences are taken into account, Model III shows that the participation deficit for those socialized outside of the United States is further reduced — except for those socialized in Taiwan. Model IV shows that, when individual differences in basic socio-demographic background are controlled, place of socialization is no longer a factor in predicting participation except for those Chinese socialized neither in the “three Chinas” nor in the United States. This result refutes the general idea of the essential disadvantage of being foreign-born and foreign-raised as compared to the US-born or -raised in participation in mainstream politics among Chinese Americans.

Model II provides a clear answer to whether transnational political concern regarding one’s ethnic homeland deters or boosts Chinese American participation in US politics. As hypothesized, homeland political concern over the transition in Hong Kong is shown to have a positive and significant effect on mainstream participation and the effect remains robust despite the consideration of additional factors in Models III and IV. The reverse is true regarding concern over the status of Taiwan. Those holding a supportive attitude toward Taiwanese independence are less likely to participate in US politics. Having stronger transnational social ties may also increase the level of participation. Having stronger cultural ties to the ethnic homeland may be associated with a lower level of participation in US politics. However, this effect is reduced and its significance eventually disappears after taking into consideration additional factors contained in Models III and IV. In the end, Model IV shows that, other conditions being equal, possessing homeland political ties may either increase or decrease the level of participation in US politics depending on the nature of the political concern; having social ties may positively influence and having cultural ties may not negatively influence the level of participation in US politics.

Among indicators of US experiences, perceiving anti-Asian bias in US congressional investigations of campaign finance violations, as hypothesized, is positively related to greater participation. The perception that it is very or somewhat important for Chinese Americans to participate in US politics is also positively and significantly related to greater participation. The same is true with the possession of US citizenship and having US investments. These effects are reduced but remain significant in predicting greater participation after socio-demographic differences are controlled.

Among the socio-demographic variables, having greater education is associated with more participation and being female is associated with less participation for Chinese in Southern California. Other conventional correlates of political participation such as marital status, age, employment status, and the degree of exposure to US political life are not significant when controlling for differences in socialization context, homeland ties, and US experiences among the respondents.

Table 3. Predicting Chinese American Voter Registration in Southern California

	Model I b./s.e.	Model II b./s.e.	Model III b./s.e.	Model IV b./s.e.
<i>Place of Socialization</i> (ref. = USA)				
China	-1.253**/.305	-1.002*/.365	-.846*/.382	-1.074/.586
Taiwan	-.409/.325	-.082/.351	-.245/.366	-.567/.594
Hong Kong	-1.180**/.301	-.911*/.349	-.866*/.345	-1.016/.556
Other	-.230/.411	.157/.441	.402/.456	.405/.608
<i>Transnational Homeland Ties</i>				
Concern over Hong Kong Transition		.010/.140	-.015/.149	-.083/.155
Support for Taiwan Independence		-.172*/.081	-.184*/.084	-.136/.089
Social Contact		.259/.246	.158/.261	.298/.273
Cultural Contact		-1.514**/.384	-1.14**/.407	-.751/.453
<i>US Minority/Incorp. Experiences</i>				
Anti-Asian Bias in U.S. Institution			.350/.288	.302/.308
Importance of Ethnic Participation			.516**/.140	.499**/.141
US Investment			.964**/.226	.613*/.246
<i>Socio-demographic Background</i>				
Education				.188**/.063
Married				.450/.282
Age				.018*/.007
Employed				.389/.253
Female				.111/.231
% US Political Life				.418/.788
(Constant)	1.521**/.229	2.016**/.526	-.427/.728	-2.93*/1.208
N=509 citizens				
Model Chi-square	25.5	45.5	86.9	109.9
-2 Log Likelihood	570.4	552.5	511.1	488.3
% predicted correct	69.9	71.8	74.4	77.0

Note and Source: Same as Table 2; b = unstandardized logit coefficient, s.e. = standard error.

Table 3 reports the result of logistic regression analysis predicting one’s likelihood of becoming registered to vote among citizens. Model I shows that, compared to those born or raised in the United States, those citizens socialized in Taiwan or other places do not register at a significantly lower level, but those citizens who were socialized in China and Hong Kong do. With the additional consideration of differences in homeland ties (Model II), US experiences (Model III), and socio-demographic background (Model IV), place of socialization

becomes insignificant as a factor in predicting voter registration for those citizens socialized in China or Hong Kong as well.

Contrasted with the result in Table 2, both types of homeland political concerns may be negatively associated with voter registration but the effects are not significant in any of the models. Nor does having relatives or friends in Hong Kong have a significant impact. Having stronger cultural ties as indicated in the usage of the Chinese language may have a negative and significant relationship to becoming registered to vote, but its significance is reduced and disappears after controlling for additional factors dealing with US experiences and socio-demographic background. In the end, none of the indicators of transnational homeland ties may be associated with the likelihood of voter registration among Chinese American citizens.

Among the indicators of US experiences, having perceived bias in US Congress' conduct of campaign finance investigations against Asian Americans does not have a significant impact on the likelihood of voter registration among citizens. In contrast, the perception of importance for Chinese Americans to participate in US politics and having invested in the US economy are both significantly associated with a higher likelihood to become registered among citizens.

Among the indicators of socio-demographic background, both education and age are strongly and positively related to one's registration likelihood. All other socio-demographic factors do not exert significant impact when differences in socialization context, homeland ties, and US experiences among the Chinese are controlled.

Conclusion

This research empirically evaluates the scope of political transnationalism among Chinese Americans and tests if transnational political concern is a deterrent of or a catalyst for Chinese American participation in US Politics. Although both historical and contemporary experiences show that being associated with a Chinese homeland, however defined, can be a reason for exclusion, suspicion, or deprivation of US citizenship by the powers that be, our survey analysis finds some evidence of cautious optimism for present-day Chinese Americans to express an interest in and concern over homeland political development. The study shows not only that a broad form of transnational political practices exists among the Chinese American community in Southern California in the intense interest in and concern over the issue of the Hong Kong transition, but that there is little evidence that a respondent's concern over this particular type of homeland political change may deter his or her level of political participation in US mainstream politics. In fact, consistent with recent survey findings on immigrants from Latin America and Asia, homeland political concern among Chinese Americans may be associated

with a higher level of general activism in US politics while not significantly deterring one's likelihood of becoming a registered voter.

Nonetheless, when examining the influence of another type of homeland politics — support for Taiwan independence — which may not be in sync with the current US China policy and regime interest, we observe an opposite effect of transnational political ties. Those respondents showing greater support for Taiwan independence are found to be less likely to participate actively in US politics, even if they may not be significantly less likely to become registered voters, either. The disparate result of the two types of homeland concerns shows that there is not a unified relationship between political transnationalism and participation in US politics. Rather, the relationship may be a bifurcated one, shaped not only by the nature of the transnational political concern but also by the mode of political participation. Transnational ties may have little impact on participation in system-support acts such as becoming registered to vote. Transnational political concerns may influence the degree of participation in regime-influence acts such as making campaign donations or particularized contacts. However, only those homeland concerns that are consistent with the democratic values and US national interests may have a positive impact. Involvement in a homeland political cause that is not consistent with the US foreign policy interest may hinder participation in US mainstream politics.

Confirming a likely relationship between racial oppression and political mobilization, our results show that the perception of anti-Asian bias in US institutions is positively associated with the level of general political activism and likelihood of participation in US politics. Moreover, although Chinese Americans socialized outside of the United States are generally found to have lower participation levels than those socialized in the United States, this research shows that the negative effect of socialization context mostly disappears once differences in transnational ties, US domestic experiences, and basic socio-demographic background are controlled.

By examining the attitudes and opinions of Chinese Americans, this research provides a more varied and nuanced account of the relationship between transnationalism and assimilation in the political dimension than past research. These results do not, however, lend us enough information to conclude that a causal relationship exists between transnational political concern and participation in mainstream politics because of the cross-sectional nature of the one-shot survey. To address the issue of causality, we need to clarify the temporal relationship and rule out spurious factors through longitudinal data or experimental designs. More research is also needed to see if a similar pattern of relationship exists across an array of transnational issues and among Chinese Americans residing outside of Southern California. Nevertheless, it seems safe to conclude that, in this day and age of globalization, non-domestic and domestic oriented politics are not mutually

exclusive terms, and that interest and participation in the politics of both the country of origin and that of settlement may co-exist and may not necessarily negate the effects of each other. However, this research also shows that not all homeland concerns are equal and there is the need for future researchers to distinguish the ones that are for and against regime stance and interest.

Appendix. Perceived Bias in US Congress over Campaign Finance Investigations

	China	Taiwan	Hong Kong	US
<i>Are you offended or not offended by these congressional committees investigating campaign contributions primarily from donors with Asian sounding names, even if that investigation might get at contributions made illegally?</i>				
SW/Offended	4	10	7	13
Greatly Offended	29	36	31	29
<i>Do you think members of the Republican-led congressional committees investigating these allegations are sincere in wanting to get at the truth, or are they playing partisan politics as usual?</i>				
Partisan	41	55	48	63
<i>Do you think this is a form of discrimination against Asians in this country, or not?</i>				
Discrimination	39	45	35	40

Notes

- ¹ This is a significantly revised version of a paper presented at the 2005 Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies, Los Angeles, 20–23 April. The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments and support provided by the panel participants, the anonymous reviewers, and editors of *Journal of Chinese Overseas*.
- ² Because of the destruction of birth papers in the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, many Chinese immigrants claimed to be US-born so as to circumvent immigration exclusion and bring in their China-born children related to them either by blood or by fraudulent documents.
- ³ We are also interested in measuring the extent of economic ties. One question in the survey asks if the respondent had investments in the country of socialization. However, this is asked only of the foreign-born. About one in ten immigrant respondents indicated having invested in homeland economy. It was positively and significantly related to one's investment in the US economy and one's income level.
- ⁴ This is assessed by the responses to three questions related to congressional investigations of the campaign finance controversy shown in the Appendix. A 3-item summed index of perceived bias in US institution was created based on the scores of those who felt greatly

or somewhat offended by the congressional committee investigations, who felt the investigations were motivated by partisan politics, and those who believed that the investigations was a form of discrimination against Asian Americans (standardized Cronbach's $\alpha=.62$).

- ⁵ An additional indicator of socioeconomic status, family income, was dropped from the analysis because of the large number of non-responses. The US investment variable can be treated not only as an indicator of one's economic stake but as a surrogate measure of one's income status ($r=.55$).

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