

The Contours and Sources of Ethnic Identity Choices Among Asian Americans

Pei-te Lien*

Political Science and Ethnic Studies

University of Utah

260 S. Central Campus Dr., #252

Salt Lake City, UT 84112-9152

801-585-7984

plien@poli-sci.utah.edu

M. Margaret Conway

Political Science

University of Florida

P.O. Box 117325

234 Anderson Hall

Gainesville, FL 32611-7325

mconway@polisci.ufl.edu

Janelle Wong

Political Science and Program in American Studies and Ethnicity

University of Southern California

Von KleinSmid Center 327

Los Angeles, CA 90089-0044

janellew@usc.edu

*Please direct all correspondence to the first author.

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Abstract: How do individuals of Asian descent in the United States identify themselves in ethnic terms and why? In this study, we map the contours of ethnic self identities among adults in this immigrant community of color and explain their identity preferences with a new and large-scale survey that collects public opinion from randomly selected individuals of the six largest Asian American descents who reside in five major metropolitan areas at the dawn of the 21st century. Although only one in six respondents prefer to identify themselves as “Asian American”, close to six in ten respondents indicate acceptance to this panethnic term as part of their identification. Our results confirm ethnic identity as a fluid, malleable, and layered phenomenon that depends on context. Using multinomial regression analysis, we show that indicators of primordial ties and prior socialization, in addition to cultural, social, and political integration, are instrumental in structuring ethnic identity preferences among Asian Americans.

The Contours and Sources of Ethnic Identity Choices Among Asian Americans

Do individuals of Asian descent residing in the United States tend to think of themselves as “Asian American”? How do Asian Americans identify themselves in ethnic¹ terms? Because of the pronounced internal diversity and continuous growth of the population, whether or not Asians in America are able to coalesce into a meaningful social and political bloc based on a common identity is a question of interest to not only students of the Asian American community but followers of the U.S. racial and ethnic minority politics. Although a number of researchers have investigated the issue, most focus on the experiences of the U.S.-born—a minority population in this immigrant community of color. Only one major survey prior to the current study produces some direct empirical evidence of the scope of panethnic self identification among Asian Americans, but it is targeted towards the children of immigrants. In this study, we attempt to map the contours of ethnic self identities among Asian American adults and explain their identity preferences with a new and large-scale survey that collects public opinion from randomly selected individuals of the six largest Asian American national origin groups who reside in five major metropolitan areas.

Research on Asian American Ethnic Self Identities

Most of the past research on ethnic self identification among Asian Americans focuses on the experiences of the U.S.-born and their identification with the panethnic concept (e.g., Gibson, 1988; Lee, 1996; Kibria, 1997, 2000; Rumbaut, 1997; Tuan, 1998; Zhou and Bankston, 1998; Hong and Min, 1999). With few exceptions, these studies usually adopt qualitative interview or

¹We treat “ethnic” as a generic term that covers ethnic-specific, panethnic, and racial dimensions of self identification based on shared cultural practices, languages, behaviors, national or ancestral origins, physical attributes, and experiences. It is part of the study’s purpose to unpack the meanings of this umbrella term along various dimensions. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to address the complex identity formation process of mixed ancestry individuals (but see Root, 1992, 1996 for a discussion).

ethnographic data to describe the process of ethnic identification among high school or college students of various Asian ethnic origins. In the first wave of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), second generation Asian American middle and high school students in San Diego, mostly of Filipino or Southeast Asian origin, were found to split between national-origin (ethnic) and nation-specific hyphenated-American (ethnic American) labels in 1992 (Rumbaut, 1997). National-origin identifiers outweighed hyphenated American identifiers in the second wave survey conducted in 1995-96. However, the percentage of panethnic “Asian” identifiers also increased from the .3% in 1992 to 4.5% in 1995-96 (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The authors surmise that this trend toward ethnicization and panethnicization in identification among the U.S.- born may be explained by the anti-immigrant/minority events in the mid-1990s. In a survey of Korean junior and senior high school students in the New York area, the authors report a similarly low level of panethnic Asian American identity (3%) and a very high level of Korean American identity (72%) among the second generation respondents (Hong and Min, 1999). The percentage of un-hyphenated “American” identifiers was 3.5% in both surveys.

The relative popularity of the national-origin or ethnic-specific identities and the near obscurity of the panethnic identities is also reported by studies of the Latino population (de la Garza et al., 1992; Jones-Correa and Leal, 1996). For Asian Americans, this phenomenon may be attributable to a combination of factors unique to the Asian American experience (e.g., Takaki, 1989; Chan, 1991; Espiritu, 1992; Okihiro, 1994; Kitano and Daniels, 1995; Min, 1995; Fong, 1998; Lien, 2001). They include the lack of historical precedents of interethnic cooperation because of the practice of “divide and conquer” rule by white labor management, the practice of “ethnic disidentification” by some Asian Americans to avoid being misidentified as belonging to other politically or socially ostracized Asian American groups, the political and

military conflicts among and within the homelands in Asia, and the belated emergence in the late 1960s of a pan Asian American racial identity. They also include the simultaneous strengthening of homeland ethnic ties and further diversification of the polyethnic population along class, ethnic origin, race, ideology, religion, and other lines of cleavage occurring after the 1965 immigration reform, U.S. military involvement in East and Southeast Asia, and global economic restructuring in the past four decades. Thus, despite racial lumping by the U.S. government and the media as well as recent efforts by panethnic oriented community organizations to foster pan Asian American solidarity (Espiritu, 1992; Omi and Winant, 1994; Espiritu and Omi, 2000; Lien 2001), ethnic boundaries created by shared history, cultural ties, and political events may be difficult to tear down, especially in communities that continue to receive a large influx of new immigrants.

The Mode and Extent of Ethnic Self Identification among MAAPS Respondents

To empirically assess the contours of ethnic self identification among Asian Americans, we turn to the Multi-Site Asian American Political Survey (MAAPS). This is the nation's first multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-city study on the political opinion of adults of the six largest Asian American ethnic descents who resided in five major population hubs of the Asian American population. A total of 1,218 adults of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese descents residing in the metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, and Chicago were interviewed by phone in English as well as in four ethnic languages of preference between November 16, 2001 and January 28, 2002. (See Appendix A for a detailed description of the sampling and survey methodology).

Table 1 reports the distribution of ethnic self identity modes. While Asian Americans may be viewed as homogenous by outsiders, there is a tremendous level of heterogeneity within the

Asian American community writ large as well as within each constituent ethnic Asian group. As shown in responses for Q1, a question asking respondents about how they identify *in general*, given a choice between identifying oneself as American, Asian American, Asian, ethnic American (e.g., as Chinese American), or simply in terms of one's ethnic origin (e.g., as Chinese), respondents were most apt to indicate an ethnic-specific identity as their preferred identity. Among all respondents, 34 percent chose to identify as ethnic American and 30 percent by ethnic origin alone. The prevalence of ethnic American identification is fairly consistent across all groups, with Filipino American (40%) the most common and Japanese American (26%) the least common. Ethnic Asian identification varies considerably more, with Chinese (42%), Vietnamese (42%), Korean (41%) respondents much more likely to identify by ethnic origin alone than Filipino (21%), Indian (21%), and Japanese (12%) respondents. There is a fairly consistent minority of respondents in all groups, ranging from 12 percent of Chinese respondents to 23 percent of South Asians, who self-identified as "Asian American". The degree of identification simply as "American" is astonishingly varied across groups. On the high end, more than 40 percent of Japanese respondents identify themselves as "American", with roughly one in seven Filipinos and Indians in the middle, and almost no Korean, Chinese, or Vietnamese identifying with the nonethnic label. Only three percent of all the respondents were not sure of how to answer Q1.

Among other factors, the distribution of ethnic identity modes may be a function of the survey's question wording, which includes specific mention of possible ethnic choices. When respondents who did not choose "Asian American" are asked to indicate in a follow-up question, Q2, if they *ever* think of themselves as Asian American, about half of respondents report such a panethnic consciousness. As high as six out of ten Filipino (59%) and Vietnamese (56%)

respondents, compared to four out of ten Koren (41%) and Chinese (43%) respondents, who previously did not identify themselves as panethnic American do so after the follow-up question. Among those who did not self-identify as “Asian American” in the first question, those who first identified themselves by an ethnic American label are most likely to adopt the panethnic American label (65%). Just over half of those who first identified as “American” or “Asian” alone adopted the panethnic American label when probed; about 1/3 of those who either identified as ethnic Asian or were previously uncertain about which label to choose (29%) would do the same. Those who previously refused to identify with an ethnic label are most reluctant to adopt the panethnic label when asked the follow-up question (14%).

Table 2 shows that, as a whole, close to six out of ten respondents (57%) would consider themselves panethnic American (“Asian American”) at some point in time. This is a significant jump from the 15% who answered “Asian American” in response to the first question about ethnic identity asked in Q1. About one out of five respondents (20%) would still self-identify as ethnic Asian following the panethnic probe (Q2) (compared to 30% in response to Q1). Only 12% of respondents would self-identity as ethnic American (compared to 34% in Q1) after the panethnic probe. And the percentage points for both American alone and Asian alone identifiers were cut in half in response to Q2.

Table 2 also shows that, when segmented by nativity, a much higher percentage of the U.S.-born would identify themselves as “American” and a much higher percentage of the Asia-born would identify themselves as “ethnic Asian.” There’s not much of a difference between the U.S.-born and the Asia-born among the percent of respondents reporting “Asian American”, “ethnic American”, or “Asian” identity. The distribution pattern by nativity under each identity mode remains much the same after the panethnic probe.

Within each of the six Asian origin groups, although South Asians originally had the highest percentage of panethnic American identifiers (23%), Filipinos registered the highest percentage of that identity mode (66%) after being asked of Q2. Most of this identity shift among Filipinos came from a 30 percentage-point drop of “Filipino American” identifiers after the panethnic probe and not from a change among “Filipino” identifiers. The Chinese respondents registered a similar percentage-point decrease for “Chinese American” identifiers, but there’s also a 15 percentage point drop among “Chinese” identifiers after Q2. Among the Japanese, after being asked the panethnic probe, the increase in the percentage share of panethnic American identifiers came mostly from a 20 percentage-point drop among “American” identifiers and a 16 percentage-point drop among “Japanese American” identifiers.

These results suggest that ethnic identity is a fluid, malleable, and layered phenomenon that depends on context. Even though only one out of six respondents would choose “Asian American” as their first and foremost ethnic identity, based on responses to Q2, we find that more than half of U.S. adult Asians in our survey reported that they had thought of themselves in panethnic American terms at some point in their lives. Confirming the conditional nature of responses to survey items, our survey shows that ethnic self-identity is highly susceptible to the context structured by the survey content. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that the contours of ethnic identity may vary greatly from one ethnic group to another and, for certain identity modes, from one immigration generation to another. To understand why some individuals would prefer one ethnic identity mode to the others or how everyday Asian Americans make their ethnic self identity choices, we next turn to literature that discusses the formation of ethnic identity.

Theorizing the Formation of Ethnic Identity Among Asian Americans

One of the basic challenges to understanding the sources of ethnic group-based identities is that there is little agreement about the basic concept of ethnic identity. In fact, a major review of ethnic identity literature reports a great deal of confusion over conceptual and operational definitions and inconsistency in findings across studies (Phinney, 1990). In addition, theoretical refinement appears to far outweigh empirical research on ethnic identity, with much of the empirical work concentrated on U.S.-born children rather than immigrant adults. This research fills a void in the extant literature by analyzing the ethnic self-identification patterns of Asian American adults, the majority of them are foreign-born immigrants.

We consider ethnic identity formation for individuals in an immigrant majority community of color as part of the multi-faceted process of developing new attachments and affiliations in the host society. How individuals identify themselves in ethnic terms is a product not only of primordial ties or individual characteristics and preferences but also of social and political construction of the concepts of race and ethnicity. In addition to distinct ethnic group culture and human capital factors, this process can be influenced by domestic racial and social conditions, transnational events, community organizing efforts, and U.S. immigration, citizenship, and racial categorization policies, among other factors. As shown in the preceding section, this is a process that can have multiple and variable outcomes. The ethnic self-identity labels preferred by individual Asian Americans are likely to be the negotiated outcome of several competing forces, such as between assimilation and ethnic retention, and between identification with a specific ethnic or a panethnic, racialized entity. To understand how at the nexus of these forces Asian Americans make their ethnic identity choices, we hypothesize that this process is likely to be influenced by the following set of factors derived from a cross-disciplinary survey of major conceptual frameworks developed to explain the formation of ethnic identity.

Primordial Ties. To scholars of primordialism, ethnicity is considered first and foremost an extension of a pre-modern social bond or a common sense of belonging to a particular ancestry or origin and the sharing of common cultural characteristics and historical experiences (Min, 1999). For an immigrant majority community, a central element in this perspective is the strong and lingering effect of emotional ties to the country of origin or ancestral homeland. The affective bond is often sustained by adopting ethnic language, religion, food, dress, holidays, customs, values, and beliefs; even though recent research suggests that maintaining ethnic traditions is not a necessary component for strong ethnic identification among U.S.-born Asian Americans (Tuan, 1998). Nevertheless, the intensive transpacific flow of capitals, skills, and goods in recent decades may help sustain cultural distinctiveness of many contemporary Asian American groups and imply the continuing significance of primordial ties in drawing ethnic boundaries. Differences in ethnic culture and history among Asian American communities, however, may predict different roles of primordial ties in shaping ethnic identification among individuals of various Asian descents.

Socio-psychological Engagement. Most studies in (social) psychology treat ethnic identity as part of a social identity or a self-concept derived from an individual's knowledge of his or her "membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981:255). According to social identity theory, having developed cognitive, evaluative, or emotional attachment to an ethnic group may increase the sense of belonging to that group. The role of socio-psychological engagement in structuring ethnic identification is attested in a recent study by Jackson and Smith (1999) where they find that "attraction to the in-group" or emotional attachment to one's own ethnic culture and people and "interdependency of beliefs" or belief in common or linked fate among group members are

among the dimensions that are conducive to the formation of identification with one's own group. This theory, however, does not pay enough attention to possible differences in ethnic boundaries and modes of identification found among our respondents.

Acculturation and Social Integration. Ethnic identity can also be conceptualized as consisting of two aspects: internal and external identity (Isajiw 1990). The former refers to the dimensions of self-perception mentioned by Tajfel. The latter refers to observable social and cultural behaviors such as language usage, media preference, friendship pattern, spousal choice, and so on. The external indicators of ethnicity overlap with the cultural and social assimilation stages of immigrant adaptation to America proposed by Gordon (1964). The formation of an assimilated nonethnic American identity ("American") may be associated with the level of using English language at home, in business transactions, or in consuming mass media products. It may also correlate with the level of supportive attitude toward intermarriage. Residing in a mostly white neighborhood or having close friends who are white may also facilitate the formation of an American-only identity. It is not clear, from theories of assimilation and social identity, whether and how these external indicators impact the formation of U.S.-based ethnic and panethnic identities. However, because nonwhites are found to be less likely to self-identify with their ethnic group when they perceive it to be of lower social status (Tajfel 1978), having experienced discrimination by race or ethnicity in the U.S. may hinder the formation of U.S.-based identification (either nonethnic, ethnic, or panethnic) among members of immigrant-majority communities.

Political Integration and Civic Participation. One of the final stages in immigrant adaptation to the U.S. mainstream society and polity is to become politically integrated into the system (Gordon, 1964; Alba and Nee, 1997). By developing affiliation with major U.S. political parties,

adopting U.S. mainstream political ideological jargons to express one's political views, and by acquiring or seeking to acquire U.S. citizenship, one is expected to possess a stronger sense of attachment to U.S.-based identities. Nevertheless, participation in American politics to advance ethnic community interests may facilitate the development of identification with both the American mainstream and the politicized panethnic community in the U.S. Being more active in social organizations, such as those related to religion and ethnic communities, may influence ethnic identity choice because these organizations often function as important conduits of political information and social networking (Wald, Owen, and Hill, 1988; Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Jones-Correa and Leal, 2001). Specifically, being more active in ethnic churches and community organizations may reinforce ethnic or panethnic identity rather than a mainstream "American" identity.

Socialization and Social Ties. Last but not least, recent literature on transnationalism (Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Blanc, 1995; Vertovec, 1999; Faist, 2000) and segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou, 1994; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996, 2001) emphasizes the importance of prior socialization and social networks in shaping immigrant adaptation. Having received education mostly outside of the U.S. context or spending a smaller share of lifetime in the U.S. may impede the formation of U.S.-based identities. On the other hand, having more extensive exposure or ties to the U.S. society because of gains in age, spending a large proportion of one's life in the United States, or networking opportunities created by the workplace environment may have the opposite effect. Because of the lack of opportunities for networking and developing social ties to the U.S. mainstream as compared to their male counterparts, being female and Asian may suggest a lower likelihood to adopt U.S.-based identities among members of this immigrant-majority community.

Understanding Ethnic Identity Choices: Multinomial Regression Results

In order to understand if and how the possible correlates discussed in the previous section can influence a respondent's decision in selecting his/her preferred ethnic identity mode (Q1 in Table 1) while considering simultaneously the effects of all other variables on a range of alternative identity choices, we report results of multinomial logistic regression analysis. This procedure is a variant of the maximum likelihood-based estimations (MLE) where the dependent variable is categorical and has more than two values. It requires that one of the dependent variable categories be selected as a referent point. Effects are then computed and assessed in comparison to that category. To make the results more interpretable, the dependent variable is restricted to four categories² and "Asian ethnic" is assigned as the category of reference. This coding decision seemed to make the most sense for the immigrant majority population we are interested in and it does not assume the process of assimilation or panethnicization. Cell values in Tables 3 are logistic coefficients (b) or log odds; standard errors (s.e.) are in the columns to the right of the columns containing the coefficients. Because the impact of any given factor in a MLE model is not constant across values and cannot be interpreted independently of other factor scores, discussion of results and comparison of effect size is facilitated by estimating the parameters with rescaled independent variables with scores varying between 0 and 1.

To test the hypotheses discussed in the previous section empirically, the following sets of explanatory variables are used in the analyses (see Appendix B for question wording and coding scheme): respondent's ethnic or country of origin; three measures of the affective, cognitive, and evaluative bases of ethnic identity (belief in shared culture, sense of common or linked fate, and

² The excluded categories are "Asian", "Other", "Don't know", and "Refused". They represent less than 9% of the survey respondents.

interest in ethnic news³); respondent's level of acculturation as indicated by his/her reliance on English to communicate at home, in business settings, and to receive information and entertainment from the mass media;⁴ four measures of everyday interracial interactions (experience with ethnic discrimination,⁵ attitude toward intermarriage, residence in a mostly white neighborhood, and intimate friendships with whites); respondent's political profile as indicated by his/her identification with a mainstream political party and ideology, acquisition of U.S. citizenship or expectation of citizen status, level of activism in Asian American organizations or political campaigns involving Asian American candidates or issues, and level of participation in faith-based activities; and respondent's socialization in the United States (whether their primary education was outside the United States and the proportion of respondent's life in the United States). In addition, controls for socio-demographic background characteristics such as education, family income, gender, age, length of residence in a community, employment status, and marital status are included in the analyses.

In Table 3, the "American" columns report respondents' likelihood to prefer the "American" identity to an "ethnic Asian" identity. We find that national origin is a predictor of "American" identity for three of the five national origin groups, lending some credence to theories of identity that focus on primordial ties. Other conditions being equal, respondents of South Asian, Japanese, and Filipino origins are significantly more likely than those of Chinese origin to self-identify as being "American". Those who are more acculturated in terms of their English

³ We create a two-item summed index of ethnic news interest by adding up the responses to questions on following Asian American news and news from Asia (alpha=.73). Similarly, we create a summed index of linked fate by adding up the responses to questions on one's concern about the fate of co-ethnics and of other Asians (alpha=.75).

⁴ We create a three-item summed index of English language use weighted by the number of response categories in each of the three measures (alpha=.68).

⁵ A summed index of racial discrimination is created by adding up the positive responses of being a hate crime victim and of being discriminated based on ethnic background (alpha=.56).

language use and support for intermarriage, more politically integrated into the U.S. mainstream structure in terms of citizenship status or involvement in Asian American political causes, older in age, or have spent a higher proportion of life in the U.S., are also more likely to self-identify as “American” than those who do not share these attributes. Conversely, those who are more involved in ethnic organizations, have experienced racial discrimination, are female, or have received most of their education outside of the United States are less likely to self-identify as “American”. Based on the sizes of the rescaled coefficients, participation in Asian American events, followed in descending order by the respondents’ age, South Asian ancestry, citizenship status, Japanese ancestry, and language acculturation have some of the largest impacts on the preference for an “American” identity over a non-American ethnic-specific identity.

The middle column in Table 3 contains the log odds for choosing the “Asian American” identity relative to choosing an “ethnic Asian” identity. Here, of all national or ethnic origin groups, only respondents with South Asian ancestry are more likely than those of Chinese descent to prefer a panethnic American identity. Those who perceive a shared culture among Asians in America, are more politically integrated in terms of identification with mainstream political parties, citizenship status, and involvement in Asian American political causes, are older in age, or are employed are more likely than those who do not have these characteristics to self-identify as “Asian American”. Conversely, those who have experienced racial discrimination, are female, or received most of their education outside of the United States are less likely to self-identify with the “Asian American” label. In particular, those who received most of the education outside of the U.S. are only one-third as likely as their U.S.-educated counterparts to prefer the panethnic identification. In terms of their relative impact, participation in Asian American political causes and age, once again, have the largest effect sizes, followed in

descending order by citizenship status, South Asian ancestry, and perceived shared culture for predicting one's preference for a panethnic American identity over an ethnic-specific non-American identity.

The columns under "Ethnic American" in Table 3 report multinomial regression results for respondents' chance of choosing the "ethnic American" identity over an "ethnic Asian" identity. Here again, South Asians are more likely than Chinese, the comparison category, to identify as ethnic American ("South Asian American") than ethnic Asian ("South Asian"). Although the odds of this identification increase with greater political integration in terms of citizenship status, greater social integration in terms of having close friends who are white, and being older in age, they are negatively impacted by being liberal in political ideology, experiencing racial discrimination, being female, or having received most of the education outside of the United States. In terms of their relative effects, citizenship status and age have the largest effects, while having white friendship and gender have the smallest effects, on favoring an ethnic American identity over a non-American identity.

Other conditions being equal, we note that a respondent of South Asian descent is more likely to identify oneself either as "American", "Asian American", or "South Asian American" than as "South Asian". This is not the case with other Asian ethnic groups, even though a person of Japanese or Filipino descent is more likely to identify as "American" than someone of Chinese descent, all other things being equal. Among the socio-psychological indicators of ethnicity, only the perception of a common culture is statistically significant enough to predict identity choices among Asians and associated with greater self-identification as "Asian American".

Turning to the indicators of social and cultural adaptation, having experienced discrimination because of ethnic background decreases the probability of forming identities as an “American,” “Asian American,” “Ethnic American,” compared to “ethnic Asian”. Possessing supportive attitude toward interracial marriage as well as a preference for using English to communicate at home and in business and for using English media may increase the likelihood of self-identification as “American” over “ethnic Asian”. Although the racial makeup of neighborhood does not seem to affect ethnic identity choices, having close friends who are whites can increase the odds of selecting being “ethnic American” over “ethnic Asian”.

Although the frequency of attending religious services have no independently discriminatory power in shaping ethnic identity choices, being or expecting to become a citizen can increase the likelihood of self-identification with each of the U.S.-based identities. Greater participation in Asian American political activities can also boost identification as being “American” or “Asian American”. Greater involvement in ethnic organizations can decrease the odds of identification as “American” but not in two other identity modes. Stronger identification with either the Democratic or the Republican Party may be associated with greater likelihood to choose the panethnic American identity. Having a more liberal political ideology may decrease the odds of identification as “ethnic American” over being “ethnic Asian”.

In terms of socialization experiences, as predicted, being female or having received education mostly outside of the United States may lower an Asian American’s likelihood to adopt each of the three U.S.-based identity modes. Being older in age has exactly the opposite effect. Having spent a higher percentage of lifetime in the U.S. may increase the likelihood of adopting the “American” identity mode, but not the ethnic or panethnic American modes, over the ethnic

Asian mode. Likewise, being employed may create opportunities for identifying oneself as “Asian American” but not other U.S.-based identities.

Overall, these multinomial results suggest that the preferences Asian Americans expressed for each of the three American-based identities over an “ethnic Asian” label can generally be predicted by the set of factors suggested in our literature review. Nevertheless, indicators of socio-psychological factors appear to be the least useful, while indicators of civic participation and political integration as well as of socialization and social ties appear to be the most useful, in predicting ethnic identity choices among Asian Americans. Importantly, differences in socio-demographic background among our Asian American respondents, as indicated by their educational achievement, family income, length of residence in a community, and marital status, do not have sufficient discriminatory effects on making their ethnic identity choices.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored the contours and sources of ethnic self identification among Asian Americans by reporting results from a new and unique survey that was designed to better reflect adult opinion from an ethnically, linguistically, and geographically diverse and rare U.S. population the majority of whose members are nonwhite and non-native English speaking immigrants. We find that two-thirds of the respondents prefer to identify themselves in ethnic-specific modes, with the percentage of ethnic American identifiers (e. g., “Chinese American”) slightly higher than that for Asian ethnic identifiers (e.g., “Chinese”). Although only one-sixth of respondents would identify themselves first and foremost as “Asian American”, close to six out of ten respondents were able to identify with this panethnic term after probing. These results demonstrate that ethnic identity is socially constructed and defined by context. Most importantly, our findings suggest that identity is “layered.” That is, although the majority of respondents do

not claim “Asian American” as their primary identity, when probed, we find that a significant proportion of each group has thought of themselves as “Asian American” at some point in their lives. In terms of specific determinants of identity, we find that indicators of primordial ties and prior socialization, in addition to indicators of cultural, social, and political integration, may play an important part in structuring ethnicity identity preferences among contemporary Asian Americans. Indicators of socio-psychological attachment, on the other hand, are only marginally useful in understanding the ethnic identity choices of this immigrant population. One reason for the relative lack of utility of social identity indicators may be that they are of equal value in shaping the formation of various identity modes discussed in this study. One direction of our future research is to apply the conceptual model proposed here to understand the sources and consequences of identification with the panethnic Asian American mode. The other direction is to explore the underpinnings of the findings on the roles of gender and racial discrimination in shaping identification and other attitudes and behavior.

Appendix A: Survey Methodology

This multi-city, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual survey is a preliminary but unprecedented attempt to measure the political behavior and attitudes of Asian Americans. A total of 1,218 adults of Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino, and Asian Indian or Pakistani descent who resided in Los Angeles, New York, Honolulu, San Francisco, and Chicago metropolitan areas were randomly selected to be interviewed by phone between November 16, 2000 and January 28, 2001. Telephone households in these five metropolitan areas--chosen for their Asian population size, geographic location, and Asian ethnic group makeup--were sampled using a dual-frame approach consisting of random-digit dialing at targeted Asian zipcode densities and listed-surname frames. Only telephone households with surnames associated with the top six Asian ethnic groups in population size were included in this study. The listed-surname approach was the only method used to generate samples in New York and Chicago. Within each sampling area, the probability of selection for each ethnic sample was to approximate the size of the ethnic population among Asians according to the 1990 Census. However, the Vietnamese and Asian Indians were oversampled to generate a sufficiently large number of respondents for analysis. Within each contacted household, the interviewer would ask to speak with an adult 18 years of age or older who most recently had a birthday. To increase the response rate, multiple call attempts made at staggered time and day of week and to re-contact breakoffs and refusals were used.

The resulting sample contains 308 Chinese, 168 Korean, 137 Vietnamese, 198 Japanese, 266 Filipino, and 141 Asian Indian or Pakistani Americans or an average of 200 completed interviews from each MSA and an additional 217 interviews from the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area. Based on the English proficiency rate of each Asian subgroup and practical cost concerns,

English was used to interview respondents of Japanese, Filipino, and Asian Indian descent; respondents of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese descent were interviewed in their language of preference. Among the Chinese, 78% chose to be interviewed in Mandarin Chinese, 19% in Cantonese, and 3% in English. Close to 9 out of 10 Koreans (87%) chose to be interviewed in Korean. Nearly all Vietnamese respondents (98.5%) chose to be interviewed in Vietnamese.

The average interview length is 27 minutes for interviews conducted in the respondent's non-English language and 20 minutes for interviews conducted in English. The average incidence rate for interviews drawn from the listed surname sample is 41%, with a range from 14.5% for the Filipino sample to 81% for the Chinese sample. The incidence rate for RDD interviews is 15%, which ranges from 4.6% for Korean to 24% for Japanese sample. The average refusal rate is 25%, with 34% in the listed sample and 3.5% in the RDD sample. The margin of sampling error for the entire sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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Appendix B: Question Wording and Coding Scheme

Primordial Ties

Ethnic Origin. *“What country in Asia are you or your mother’s side of the family from?” “What country in Asia are you or your father’s side of the family from?”*

Common Culture/Linked Fate

Common Culture. *“Some say that people of Asian descent in the U.S. have a great deal in common culturally, others disagree. Do you think groups of Asians in America are culturally very similar, somewhat similar, somewhat different, or very different?”* 1=very different, 2=somewhat different, 3=somewhat similar, 4= very similar

Panethnic Linked Fate. *“Do you think what happens generally to other groups of Asians in this country will affect what happens in your life?”* [IF YES] *Will it affect it a lot, some, or not very much?* 0 = No, 1 = Yes, will affect but not very much, 2= Yes, will affect some or not sure how, 3= Yes, will affect a lot

Ethnic Linked Fate. *What about the [R’S ETHNIC GROUP] people in America, do you think what happens generally to[R’S ETHNIC GROUP] Americans will affect what happens in your life?@*[IF YES] *Will it affect it a lot, some or not very much?@*0 = No, 1 = Yes, will affect but not very much, 2= Yes, will affect some or not sure how, 3= Yes, will affect a lot

News Interest in Ethnic Affairs

Follow Asian American News. *“How closely have you followed news stories and other information of Asians in the United States--very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?”* 1= Not at all, 2= Not too closely, 3= Fairly closely, 4= Very closely

Follow News from Asia. *“How closely have you followed news stories and other information about what happened in Asia such as a story from Japan, Korea, China, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines--very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all?”* 1= Not at all, 2= Not too closely, 3= Fairly closely, 4= Very closely

Acculturation

Language use (business/home). *“What language do you usually speak, when at home with family?” “What language do you usually use to conduct personal business and financial transactions?”* 1= Something else (language other than English), 2= Mix of English and other language, 3= English

Media Use. *“Compared to your usage of the English media, how often do you use [R’S ETHNIC GROUP’S] language media as a source of entertainment, news, and information? Would you say, all of the time, most of the time, about the same time, not very often, or not at all?”* 5=not at all, 4=not very often, 3=about the same time, 2=most of the time, 1=all of the time

Racial Integration

Attitude toward Intermarriage. *“How would you feel if someone in your family married a person of a different ethnic background than yours? Would you strongly approve, approve, neither*

approve nor disapprove, disapprove, or strongly disapprove?” 1=strongly disapprove, 2=disapprove, 3= neither approve nor disapprove, 4=approve, 5= strongly approve

Neighborhood Racial Makeup. *“How would you describe the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood where you live? Would you say it is mostly white, mostly black, mostly Latino, mostly Asian, or would you say the ethnic makeup is pretty evenly mixed?”*

1=mostly white, 0=otherwise

Cross-racial Friendship. *“Thinking for a moment of blacks, whites, Latinos and other Asians, do you yourself know any person who belongs to these groups whom you consider a close personal friend or not? [IF YES] What ethnic groups do they belong to? Any others? Any other group?*

1=having white close friends, 0=otherwise

Experience with Personal Discrimination *“Have you ever personally experienced discrimination in the United States?” 2=yes, 1=not sure, 0=no*

Ethnic Discrimination. [IF EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATION] *“In your opinion, was it because of your ethnic background?” 1=yes, 0=otherwise*

Victim of Hate Crime. *“Have you ever been the victim of a 'hate crime,' that is, have you had someone verbally or physically abuse you, or damage your property, specifically because you belong to a certain race or ethnic group?” 1=yes, 0=otherwise*

Political Integration

Strength of Party Identification. *“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or of another political affiliation?” [IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT] “Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat)?” [IF INDEPENDENT] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party? 0=no party identification, 1=Independent, closer to Democrat or Republican, 2= Democrat or Republican, but not a strong Democrat or Republican, 3= Strong Democrat or Republican*

Political Ideology (Liberal). *“How would you describe your views on most matters having to do with politics? Do you generally think of yourself as very liberal, or somewhat liberal, or middle-of-the-road, or somewhat conservative, or very conservative?” 3=very liberal, 2=somewhat liberal, 1=middle of the road, 0=otherwise*

Citizenship status. [IF NOT A CITIZEN] *“Are you planning to apply for U.S. citizenship or to become a U.S. citizen?” 0=no, 1=not a citizen, but expect to be one, 2=citizen*

Civic Participation

Religious Activism. *“How often do you attend religious services? Would you say Every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?” 1=never, 2= a few times a year, 3= once or twice a month, 4= almost every week, 5= every week*

Membership and Involvement in Ethnic Organizations. *“Do you belong to any organization or take part in any activities that represent the interests and viewpoints of [R'S ETHNIC GROUP]*

or other Asians in America?" [IF YES] "How active are you as a member? Are you very active, somewhat active, not too active, or not active at all?" 0=no, 1=not active at all, 2= not too active, 3=somewhat active, 4=very active

Participation in Activities involving Asian American. "Which of the following activities, that you participated in, involve/d an Asian American candidate or issue affecting Asian Americans?" [read all responses from a previous question on participation beyond voting] 0=no participation in any Asian American activity, 1= participation in one Asian American activity,...8=participation in eight Asian American activities

Immigrant Socialization and Sociodemography

Years of Stay. [If Born in Asia] "How many years have you lived in the United States on a permanent basis?" Raw score in year

Place of education. "Were you educated mainly in the United States?" 1=No

Education. "What is the highest level of education or schooling you have completed?" 1=less than high school, 2= high school graduate, 3= vocational/technical training beyond HS or some college, 4= bachelor's degree, 5= some graduate school, 6= post-graduate degree (beyond college degree)

Length of community residence. "How long have you lived in you present city or town?" Raw score in year

Income. "If you added together the yearly incomes of all the members of your family living at home last year, would the total of all their incomes be less than \$20,000 ... or more than \$40,000 ... or somewhere in between? [IF LESS THAN \$20,000] Would the total of all their incomes be less than \$10,000? [IF IN-BETWEEN] Would the total of all their incomes be less than \$30,000 or more than \$30,000? [IF MORE THAN \$40,000] Would the total of all their incomes be between \$40,000 and \$60,000 ... or between \$60,000 and \$80,000 ... or more than that?" 1=less than \$10,000, 2=\$10,000 to \$19,999, 3=\$20,000 to \$29,999, 4=\$30,000 to \$39,999, 5=\$40,000 to \$59,999, 6=\$60,000 to \$79,999, 7=\$80,000 or over.

Table 1 Percentage Distribution of Ethnic Self Identities Among Asian Americans

Q1. *People think of themselves in different ways. In general, do you think of yourself as an American, an Asian American, an Asian, a [R= ETHNIC GROUP] American, or a [R= ETHNIC GROUP]?*

	Chinese	Korean	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	S. Asian	All
American	1	3	1	41	14	14	12
Asian American	12	15	13	15	16	23	15
Asian	4	5	7	2	4	3	4
Ethnic American	34	33	34	26	40	33	34
Ethnic Asian	42	41	42	12	21	18	30
Not Sure	4	1	3	2	2	7	3
Refused	1	2	1	2	3	2	2
N	308	168	137	198	266	141	1218

Q2. (Asked of those who did not self-identify as an Asian American in Q1) *Have you ever thought of yourself as an Asian American?*

	Chinese	Korean	Vietnamese	Japanese	Filipino	S. Asian	All
Yes	43	41	56	50	59	48	49
No	41	56	34	46	32	43	41
Not Sure	9	2	8	1	4	5	5
Refused	7	1	2	3	4	3	4
N	270	143	119	168	221	106	1027

Source: The Multi-Site Asian American Political Survey (MAAPS), 2000-2001.

Note: Cell entries are percentages. Cell values within each column may sum up to over 100 percentage points because of rounding errors. The categories of Ethnic American and Ethnic labels refer to the respondent's respective national or ethnic origin.

Table 2 Percentage Distribution of Ethnic Identity Choices by Nativity and Ethnic Origin

	American	Asian Am.	Ethnic Am.	Asian	Ethnic Asian	Row N
All	12(6)	15(57)	34(12)	4(2)	30(20)	1218
U.S. born	33(16)	17(63)	33(12)	3(1)	7(3)	305
Asia born	5(2)	15(55)	34(12)	5(2)	37(25)	913
Chinese	1(-)	12(50)	34(15)	4(2)	42(27)	308
Filipino	14(6)	16(66)	40(10)	4(2)	21(22)	266
Japanese	41(21)	15(57)	26(10)	2(1)	12(9)	198
Korean	3(1)	15(50)	33(12)	5(4)	41(31)	168
South Asian	14(8)	23(60)	33(14)	7(1)	42(27)	137

Source: see Table 1. *Note:* Entries in parentheses are re-constructed percentages of ethnic self-identification after respondents were asked the panethnic probe question (Q2 of Table 1). Cell values across each row may not sum up to 100 percentage points because of the omission of not sure and refused categories.

Table 3 Predicting Ethnic Identity Choices Among Asian Americans

	American		Asian American		Ethnic American	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
<i>Primordial Ties</i>						
Filipino	2.278*	.953	.215	.522	.646	.422
Japanese	2.990**	1.025	.619	.647	.473	.557
Korean	-.414	1.315	-.035	.455	.215	.348
Indian	3.512**	.969	1.559**	.539	1.080*	.467
Vietnam	-.574	1.318	-.814	.528	-.361	.409
<i>Socio-psychological Engagement</i>						
Perceive Shared Culture	.216	.550	.890*	.438	.140	.358
Sense of Linked Fate	-.076	.500	.226	.394	.377	.325
Interest in Ethnic News	.603	.729	.570	.588	.649	.495
<i>Acculturation/Racial Integration</i>						
English Language Use	2.365*	1.139	1.063	.733	.483	.590
Support Inter-marriage	1.758**	.621	.651	.477	.644	.392
White Neighborhood	-.002	.391	.242	.303	-.013	.239
White Close Friends	.086	.354	.105	.286	.469*	.236
Experienced Discrimination	-1.308*	.504	-.857*	.389	-.654*	.318
<i>Political Integration/Civic Participation</i>						
Strength of Partisanship	.227	.440	.715*	.344	.051	.282
Liberal Ideology	-.944	.524	-.347	.411	-.729*	.344
Citizenship Status	2.633**	.889	1.650**	.489	2.235**	.385
Religious Activism	-.374	.477	.139	.379	-.179	.310
Ethnic Organ. Activism	-1.837**	.644	-.813	.493	-.201	.400
Particip. for Ethnic Causes	3.887*	1.550	2.865*	1.238	1.298	1.105
<i>Immigrant Socialization and Social Ties</i>						
Proportion of Life in U.S.	1.680*	.817	.905	.639	.305	.557
Non-U.S. Education	-1.709**	.478	-1.033**	.348	-.959**	.298
Age	3.685**	1.066	2.125*	.822	1.799*	.691
Female	-.794*	.329	-.774**	.263	-.514*	.215
Employed	.699	.394	.783*	.310	.389	.244
Intercept	-8.000	1.446	-3.299	.816	-2.537	.666
N=767						
-2 Log Likelihood (Intercept only) =2000.78						
Model Chi-Sq = 475.81						
Nagelkerke R-sq=.499; McFadden=.238						

Source: see Table 1. *Note:* The dependent is a categorical variable with 4 possible responses. The reference category is R's self-identity as "ethnic Asian". R's education, family income, length of community residence, and marital status are controlled for but not reported in the table. The parameters are estimated using multinomial regression procedures with re-scaled independent variables where scores are to vary only between 0 and 1. b=unstandardized logistic coefficient, s.e.=standard error, **p<.005 *p<.05

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