

The Submissive, the Calculated, and the American Dream: Coverage of Asian American Political Candidates in the 1990s

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This study analyzes the news coverage of 3 election campaigns of the 1990s in which Asian American candidates were involved. The campaign stories from the LA Times, Seattle Times, and Oregonian were selected in the sample. Our investigation centered on fairness of the coverage and depiction of the candidates. Findings indicate that overall the coverage of the Asian American candidates, compared with their European American counterparts, is fair and balanced. However, the ethnic background of the Asian American candidates is more likely than their opponents to appear in the stories. Many stereotypical attributes about the Asian American candidates also exist in the stories examined.

KEYWORDS Asian American, campaign coverage, stereotype, fairness

To any avid observer of U.S. politics, the voice and participation of Asian Americans have been rather inconspicuous. Throughout American history, few public office holders or political leaders at the state or federal levels have been Asian descendants. If the elected politicians in Asian-dominant Hawaii were excluded, the picture of Asian Americans' political involvement in the nation would look even bleaker. The low visibility of the Asian Americans in the U.S. political arena is intriguing.

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According to Daniels (1988) and Wu and Song (2000), Asian Americans' political participation indeed lags far behind other racial minority groups. One possible explanation, according to Fong (1998) and Lien (1997), is that they are discouraged by past discriminations and other unsuccessful experiences in politics, which in turn intensifies Asian Americans' alienation from the democratic system. With a census figure less than 5% of the nation's population, no shared language or religious bond¹ among the widely diversified ethnicities, and vague geographic concentration of their residences, Asian Americans seemingly have had a bumpier road to reach the political arena than do other minorities. Lack of role models in politics may have also contributed to their disinterest and disengagement.

Psychologists would not hesitate to point out that mass media provide the most accessible and influential role models that audiences, especially children, can possibly imitate (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Wilson et al., 2002). It is, therefore, not surprising that media representations of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities as well as women have been popular topics among communication scholars (e.g., Creedon, 1993; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gross, 2001; Kilbourne, 1999). However, research on news coverage of Asian Americans, especially Asian American politicians, has been scanty in comparison to other minority groups. The present study attempts to bridge the gap by investigating newspaper coverage of three Asian-American candidates in high profile campaigns in the 1990s.

CAMPAIGN COVERAGE

The news media is arguably the most important source of information for citizens to keep up with politics and make voting decisions (Graber, 1994; Joslyn, 1984; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). The news media influence how people view political issues and candidates; therefore, directly or indirectly, they have powerful influence on public opinion and electoral results (Fallows, 1996; Glynn et al., 1999; Graber, 1994; Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998; Wanta, 1997). Media impact on elections was well illustrated by Patterson (1980, 1994), who contended that what people see during an election is not the actual campaign, but the media's version of it.

Given the known tendency of media coverage, one would naturally suspect that campaign coverage of minority candidates would differ from that of mainstream candidates. It is worth examining whether a given group of candidates are more likely to receive negative or stereotypical coverage and, therefore, suffer from the disadvantage in races. As the following section of literature review indicates, empirical investigation on this line of inquiry is not satisfactory or sufficient: Only a few studies done on the coverage of races in which African American candidates were involved. The examinations of campaign coverage about other ethnicities are almost non-existent.

Some scholars (e.g., Citrin, Green, & Sears, 1990), however, argued that gender and race of candidates do not necessarily have a significant impact on election outcomes. What really matter, they contended, are candidates' track records, campaign style, and whether they are perceived by the electorate as "solid." Female candidates, for example, are often seen as less competent than their male counterparts and thus need to work harder to establish their credibility (Bernstein, 2000).

FACTORS BEHIND NEWS COVERAGE

Journalists and the institutions they work for usually are part of the mainstream culture. Mainstream ideologies and traditional values are often reflected in news coverage to appeal to the mass audience. Protest groups that hold anti-mainstream, avant-garde views, for example, are likely to receive marginalized or slanted coverage (Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1986; Paletz & Entman, 1981). The daily decision of what news is and how to report it is, to a great extent, determined by the "enduring values" of society (Gans, 1979). Thus, to understand how Asian-American candidates are covered in the news, one may need to examine the society's common attitudes toward this particular group.

The traditional image of Asians Americans has been "inferior, threatening," but recently and occasionally has been described as "praiseworthy" (Kitano & Daniels, 2001). Once in while, the term *model minority* appears in the news to characterize the ethnic group's achievement and recognition (Fong, 1998; Wong, 1994), which, to many Asian Americans, serves as a double-edged sword. As Takagi (1992) pointed out, many Asian Americans do not feel comfortable with the praise—usually bestowed by the conservatives, Asian-Americans' unwanted ally—that can be used to strike and justify their ineligibility for affirmative action.

Interestingly, despite the history and contribution Asian Americans have made in U.S. society, they still are often seen by the majority of Americans as outsiders and certainly unlikely to be in power. As reported by Aoki and Nakanishi (2001), Congressman David Wu (D-Oregon) was denied entrance to the U.S. Energy Department where he was invited to deliver a speech. Wu's congressional identification did not convince security guards that he was a U.S. citizen. A recent national survey (see Aoki & Nakanishi, 2001) indicated that half of the interviewed respondents doubt the loyalty of the Chinese American, suspecting they may pass secret information on to China.

Journalists, like average Americans, may harbor such discriminatory attitudes toward Asian Americans but are not aware of them. Entman (1990) and Hemant and Thornton (1994) showed that careless and insensitive coverage of racial groups might actually promote racial stereotypes and resentments. The stereotype-saturated mindset about Asian Americans

may, one way or another, affect the way journalists report on Asian Americans and the issues in which they are involved. This is the very logic behind the efforts to diversify the news personnel (Brislin & Williams, 1996; Delaney, 1997; Zoch & Turk, 1998), which aims to elevating the capability of news media to cover the diversifying perspectives existing in our society.

The present study is strategically timely considering the sudden advance of several Asian American politicians on the national stage at the turn of the century. It is unprecedented that two cabinet members in the George W. Bush administration (Elaine Chao and Norman Mineta) are Asian American. Gary Locke became the first Asian American governor in the U.S. history. On the other hand, political accusations of racial discrimination against Asian Americans still exist, such as the controversial arrest of nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee and the illegal campaign contribution scandal. The fundamental research question of the exploratory inquiry is How have selected Asian American candidates been covered by newspapers? Have the political candidates of this minority group been treated fairly by the press in comparison to other mainstream politicians? What are the attributes of the coverage, positive or negative, bestowed on the candidates?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Coverage of Minorities

Fair presence for minorities in the media seems to be the first criterion researchers use to examine content. Chaudhary (1980) and Barber and Gandy (1990) investigated press coverage of African American public office holders and both found that African Americans actually received more stories than did their White counterparts. Based on the principle of proportional representation, Stevenson (1992) counted the number of ads with and without African American models and suggested unfair treatment. In addition to sheer quantity of representation, how a minority group is actually portrayed is important for sometimes it is where the difference resides (Barber & Gandy, 1990). Studies concerned with this aspect inspected whether a racial or sexual minority is represented in the media in a stereotypical or negative way. A typical example can be found in Lester's (1996) *Images That Injure*, in which contributing authors analyze stereotypical visual coverage of women, African and Latin Americans, as well as gays and lesbians. Even in sports programming, racial stereotypes are often invoked. Rada (1996) found that White players are often described as intellectual, whereas African American players were described as purely athletic.

There is relatively little empirical research on media coverage or representation of Asians or Asian Americans. Lester's (1996) book, like many other similar scholarly efforts, examined only African, Latino, and Native Americans as well as Pacific Islanders (e.g., Hawaiians), yet entirely

neglected Asian Americans. There are, however, studies that investigated the images of Asians or Asian Americans portrayed in television dramas, movies, or popular cultures. For example, Gardner (1961) examined the roots of the Chinese images in the U.S. history. Hamamoto (1994) traced the negative Asian images presented on American TV. Traditionally, according to Fong (1998), Asian roles in the Hollywood movies are rare, and, if present, tend to be stereotypical. For example, male characters tend to be asexual, cunning, but not very smart—Charlie Chen, Fu Manchu, and Jackie Chan may represent the category. Asian female characters, on the other hand, tend to be exotic sex objects who are submissive or helpless and await heroes to come to rescue. In a nutshell, these studies disclosed that Asians and/or Asian Americans trailed miserably in both volume and valence on mass media.

More recent anecdotal reports seem to confirm the aforementioned trends. Asian Americans are rarely seen on television either in entertainment programs (Elber, 2000) or in newscast (Matsumoto, 1998; Sengupta, 1997). In rare occasions when roles were assigned to this group on TV and in movies, they are still mostly negative (Chao, 1998). Chen (1996) and Ni (1995) both observed that Asian men are often portrayed either sexless or feminized. Asian women, on the other, are still confined in traditional and stereotypical roles (Braxton, 1999).

The studies reviewed above mainly focus on representation of the Asian American in entertainment media. One cannot help but wonder whether Asian American political aspirants have received similar treatment in the news. Specifically, did the three Asian American political candidates in the present study receive equal treatment in the news as their non-Asian counterparts? To approach this question better, two other areas of literature need to be reviewed.

Media Coverage of Minority Candidates

The majority of the studies that examined media coverage of minority candidates focused on African American candidates. Zilber and Niven (2000), for example, analyzed the news coverage of African American members of the Congress and found that the media devoted equally to covering all candidates and that they are more likely to mention the race of African American candidates while typically ignoring the race or ethnicity of White candidates. This observation is echoed by Terkildsen and Damore (1999), who also looked at the coverage of Congressional candidates. Additionally, Zilber and Niven indicated that the news discusses racial issues much more when African American candidates are involved. In line with this, when covering African American candidates, media emphasized the racial composition of the district and partisan orientation (Terkildsen & Damore, 1999).

Even though local elections are more possible to result in electing minority candidates because they are feasible to muster sufficient votes from the candidate's ethnic group, it is still important for minority candidates to reach out to other ethnic groups. Media's aforementioned tendency of covering statewide elections was also found in case studies that looked at local elections. Sylvie's (1995) examination of a mayoral race concluded that Black candidates received more stories on ethical qualities than on their issue stances. A survey of media coverage of political races involving gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender candidates shows that media appear to follow a similar mode of treating African American candidates by characterizing them as "gay candidates," leaving out the candidates' platforms and key issues (George, 2002). One slight difference between African American and gay candidates is that the latter group overall seems to receive a more positive tone in coverage. Looking at coverage across gender line, Kahn (1994) found that female candidates tend to be treated less favorably by the press. The media devote more time to covering the viability of female candidates rather than their stances on issues. In addition, reporters are "less responsive to the issue and trait agendas of women candidates when compared to their male colleagues" (Kahn & Gordon, 1997, p. 73). So far, literature has yet provided solid, comprehensive evidence as to what kind of news coverage Asian American candidates tend to receive during campaign periods.

Fairness, Balance and General Quality

Objectivity is a tenet that mainstream journalists embrace, and a key element in commonly held journalistic ethics. Essentially, it means being neutral, unbiased, detached and non-partisan, and can be translated to "accuracy, balance and fairness" in reporting (Achenbach, 1991; Merrill, 1997; Mindich, 1998; Reese, 1990; Streckfuss, 1990). Accuracy, although easy to understand, is more difficult to achieve and measure. It is also hard to be quantified. Balance and fairness, however, can be operationalized as equal amount of coverage given to all sides of an issue or all the candidates in a race.

To examine fairness of news stories, researchers take into account of the number of relevant news articles, length and location of each article, as well as the tone (favorability, neutrality, or negativity) in describing either side (Blumberg, 1954; Clarke & Evans, 1983; Fico, Ku, & Soffin, 1994; Kirman, 1992; Simon, Fico, & Lacy, 1989; Stempel & Windhauser, 1984). Quantity and placement of stories in relation to fairness are self-explanatory and can easily be operated in content coding. Regarding the qualitative aspects of campaign coverage, media have been found focusing on game plan, strategies and tactics, or the "horse race," rather than on the substance (Graber, 1994; Joslyn, 1984; Lichter, Amundson, & Noyes, 1988). Also, media seem to pay ample attention to candidates' images, and personal characters or private lives, rather than public office seekers' issue stances (Sabato, 1991,

1994; Stempel & Windhauser, 1991). The present study endeavors to incorporate all the above elements.

Research Questions

Given the finding of surveyed literature and the fact that mainstream journalists may not have much experience covering Asian American candidates in political races, it would be highly interesting to see whether the campaign coverage is steeped in stereotypes about Asian Americans and deviates from the traditional tenets of objective journalism. Accordingly, we developed the following explorative research questions:

- Q1. Did the news coverage of the election campaigns involving Asian American candidates demonstrate fairness and balance?
 - Q1a. Did the Asian American candidates receive the same amount of coverage as their opponents?
 - Q1b. Did the Asian American candidates receive the same level of valence in the news stories as their opponents?
- Q2. Were the Asian American candidates' racial or ethnic backgrounds mentioned more often or in more detail than their opponents?
- Q3. Were the Asian American candidates portrayed as "fringe" or mainstream candidates?
- Q4. Did the coverage of the Asian American candidates reveal any positive or negative racial stereotypes or images?

METHOD

Content analysis was used to record the elements of news stories that covered the three races that involved Asian American candidates. The fundamental attributes of news stories, such as datelines, bylines, and number of paragraphs, were included in the coding scheme. To successfully answer the research questions, coders evaluated each story's overall valence and recorded images and stereotypes associated with Asian American candidates. For example, the coding sheet asks the coder to check whether the "model minority" expression was invoked in the story; whether the candidate was described as good at math and science; and whether such adjectives as "submissive" or "indecisive" were used to describe the candidate. The coding sheet also includes 14 items that aim to record varied mentions of voter supports—White or minority—to unveil the portrayal of "fringe" or mainstream status of the Asian American candidates. For example, one of the items asks whether the story states that the candidate will receive support from White voters; another one asks whether the story depicts the candidate only representing the interest of minorities.

In addition, coders identified news topics and frames employed by reporters. The researchers adopted Hofstetter's (1978) operationalization of favorable and unfavorable coverage of political candidates. According to Hofstetter, favorable coverage would contain the following elements: winning, gaining, being successful, skilled, a hard worker, diligent, or responsible, and being greeted by a favorable crowd reaction or approval. Unfavorable attributes of a candidate would include losing, losing support, failing, being negligent, lazy, foolish, irresponsible, and being greeted by an unfavorable crowd reaction or disapproval. Coders were required to evaluate the overall tone for each candidate after reading a story. If the description cannot be classified as predominantly favorable or unfavorable for either candidate, then it was coded as mixed or neutral.

The campaigns analyzed in the present study include three high-profile races in the West Coast during the 1990s: the gubernatorial election in Washington in 1996 (Gary Locke vs. Ellen Craswell), the congressional race in the first district (Portland) of Oregon in 1998 (David Wu vs. Molly Bordinaro), and the mayoral election of Los Angeles in 1993 (Michael Woo vs. Richard Riordan). These races were selected because no incumbents were involved in them. Also, the electorates in the three races are diverse enough that the candidates needed votes outside their ethnic constituencies. Each of the races involved an Asian American candidate and a European American opponent. Coincidentally, all three Asian American candidates are Democrats and their opponents Republicans. The results of the three races, however, are slightly different—the former two races ended in electing the Asian American candidates, but the race of the Los Angeles mayor did not. The researchers hoped that by including both successful and unsuccessful cases, the investigation might result in a more comprehensive finding.

The newspaper articles were collected either from Lexis/Nexis or from the CD-ROM of a newspaper's archive using key words (candidates' names) to search every relevant story. As long as the names of either candidate in each race appear in the body of the news, the story was included in our sample. The *Seattle Times* was selected to represent the coverage of the Washington state gubernatorial race; the *Oregonian* was used for the coverage of the congressional race of the first district of Oregon; and the *LA Times* was examined for its coverage of the mayoral race in 1993. These three papers have the biggest circulation in the three regions, respectively. Therefore, we thought it is pertinent to include them as the study sample. The study period for each race is one year—an entire year's coverage about each race prior to the election day was included.

After excluding such non-news items as letters to the editors and one-line appearance announcements, a total of 454 news stories was selected for analysis. Specifically, 210 stories were from the *LA Times* in 1993 (46.3%), 138 stories from the *Seattle Times* in 1996 (30.4%), and 106 stories from the *Oregonian* in 1998 (23.3%). Two trained coders performed the

coding: one is an African American female in her early 20s, and the other is an Asian American male in his 30s. Both are familiar with U.S. politics and have a substantial knowledge of mass communication. Inter-coder reliability was calculated based on their coding of 20 news stories, and the average alpha for the coding items is 93% using Holsti's formula.²

FINDINGS

Of the three papers examined, the *LA Times* had far more stories (210) than the other two papers—the *Seattle Times* (138) and the *Oregonian* (106), despite the race covered by the *LA Times*, was more “local” than the other two. Most of the news stories were reported by the three papers' staff writers and most of the identifiable reporters are males (66%).

Regarding the primary focus of the news stories, as expected, most of them are about horse race (62.1%), only one in five stories is about issue and policy (21.1%; see Table 1). Of the stories that mention the Asian American candidates, 73.1% discuss horse race, followed by issue and policy (39.4%), image of the candidates (25.8%), and candidate's qualification (10.4%). The European American candidates seem to have attracted a similar pattern of new coverage. The only major difference resides in the horse-race topic—the European American candidates did not receive as much on the topic as did the Asian American counterparts. Perhaps, reporters were more interested in reporting the odds of the unusual candidates winning the offices.

Fairness and Balance

There are a total of 9,149 paragraphs in the 454 stories from the three papers. Therefore, on average a story has about 20 paragraphs. The three Asian American candidates were included in 3,182 paragraphs, whereas their opponents were included in 3,195 paragraphs—both the Asian Americans

TABLE 1 News Topics by Candidates.

News topic	Asian American		White		Overall story	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Issue and policy	39.4	179	40.1	182	21.1	96
Image	25.8	117	25.3	115	8.1	37
Qualification	10.4	47	9.9	45	3.1	14
Horse race	73.1	332	67.8	308	62.1	282

Note. Total of column percentage may exceed 100 due to multiple answers.

TABLE 2 Paragraphs by Candidates.

Paper	Asian American (<i>n</i>)	White (<i>n</i>)
<i>LA Times</i>	1,693	1,876
<i>Oregonian</i>	622	558
<i>Seattle Times</i>	867	761

Note. $\chi^2 = 19.73$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$.

and their opponents gained roughly 7 paragraphs in a given story, indicating the Asian American candidates and their opponents received approximately equal amount of coverage. Yet, when one compares the volumes across the three races (see Table 2), interestingly only the *LA Times* gave slightly less news coverage to the Asian American candidate, who coincidentally lost the race to his White opponent.

As for favorability, we evaluated each story that mentioned either candidate with a three-category scale: positive, neutral/mixed, and negative. The mean score of overall favorability for the Asian American candidates in the stories is 2.08 (based on 403 stories, $SD = .633$), and their counterparts have received an average of 2.02 (based on 369 stories, $SD = .599$). It appears that the Asian American candidates were covered slightly more positively (although statistically insignificant, $t = 1.298$, $df = 770$, $p = .195$) and their coverage's valence fluctuates more than that of the White counterparts. With the evidence about volume and valence of the news coverage between the three Asian American candidates and their opponents, we conclude that the coverage overall is fair and balanced.

Ethnic Backgrounds

A total of 99 paragraphs in the news stories identified Asian American candidates' ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, their opponents' racial or ethnic backgrounds were mentioned in only 19 paragraphs. A chi-square test was performed and the difference between ethnic mentions turned out statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 54.24$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$), indicating Asian American candidates' ethnic backgrounds appeared more often in the news stories than did the equivalent information of their European American counterparts. Although *White* or *Caucasian* were used to identify Bordinaro, Craswell, or Riordan, such terms as *Italian American* or *German American* were not invoked in the news stories. Nor did the stories introduce the ethnic background of any of the three European American candidates. The only exception was Richard Riordan, who was identified as Irish American twice by the *LA Times*. This striking difference can be interpreted that Asian American candidates are still a brand new breed to average American voters; therefore, their unusual background is newsworthy.

Fringe or Mainstream Candidates

Any Asian American public office seeker cannot be elected by Asian American voters alone; they need to appear mainstream and reach out to other ethnic groups. Sometimes, news coverage of ethnic-based voting for a given candidate can serve as a telling signal to the electorate and further demarcate the constituencies across the ethnic line, resulting in a fringe image of the candidate. A total of 127 paragraphs in the three papers stated that Asian American candidates are supported by racial minorities, while only 26 paragraphs indicated such a tendency for their white opponents. The difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 55.67$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$).

By comparison, 28 paragraphs indicated that the White candidates in the three races are likely to be supported by the racial majority, whereas only in 9 paragraphs did the stories report the Asian American candidates gain the supports from Whites. Again, the difference of White supports between the two groups of candidates is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.79$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). In addition, 13 paragraphs mentioned that the Asian American candidates are opposed by White voters, while nowhere in the stories could we find the same tendency toward the European American candidates.

Significant differences were also found between the two groups of candidates in terms of racially related descriptions used in the stories. First of all, the Asian American candidates were described to receive support from mostly racial minorities in the races in 43 stories, whereas in 23 stories the White candidates were said to receive support from mostly White constituents. In addition, 7 news stories predicted that if the Asian American candidate got elected, the candidate would only represent the interests of racial minorities but not the general constituency; in contrast, White candidates were described in 8 stories that, if elected, they would represent not only the interest of minorities. Despite the low frequency, the stories appeared to provide a divisive picture along the race line. On the other hand, the Asian American candidates—themselves or their ancestors—were more likely than their White opponents to be described to embody the American dream (28 mentions in total). This could be perceived as a positive descriptor, yet could imply the candidate's new immigrant background or even be interpreted as patronizing in tone.

Even though the frequency of describing Asian American candidates only supported by minorities is not high and the instances of mentioning opposition from White voters toward the Asian American candidates in the stories are not abundant, most differences between the news coverage about the Asian American candidates and about their counterparts are statistically significant. Therefore, we argue that despite the low frequency of fringe attributes associated with the Asian American candidates, the distinctive news treatments of the two groups of candidates are still worth stressing.

Stereotypes

The two attributes about the Asian American candidates that appeared most frequently in the news stories are “submissive, indecisive or shy” (62 times), and “cunning, calculated, and prone to corruption” (43 times)—both are utterly negative for politicians. The third on the list of most frequent stereotypes, however, could arguably be a positive one: “model minority” (over-achieving, aggressive, striving to succeed; 22 times). Another negative attribute for the Asian American candidates is stingy and/or greedy, which appeared a total of 16 times in the news stories examined.

Other adjectives that were used to depict the Asian American candidates are traditional (8 times), physically weak (4 times), and good at math and sciences (3 times). Another enduring perception (or misperception) about Asians in the nation is that they are likely to be foreigners. And this perspective is echoed in the occasional mentions of the Asian American candidates’ source of campaign funding that might be illegal and could come from foreign nationals or foreign agents. In three stories, the reporters, assuming the candidate’s connection with Asian countries, wrote that the candidate’s ethnic background might be beneficial to global business and foreign relations. It appears that the pictures of the Asian American candidates the reporters portrayed are in sync with the images that the entertainment media have been providing.

DISCUSSION

This study sets out to study the election coverage of three races in distinct West Coast states where Whites constitute the majority of the population and any office holder would have to collect the support of the racial majority. Based on the findings presented above, we conclude that the Asian American candidates seemingly have received a similar amount of news coverage as their European American opponents in the three elections of the 1990s. The findings also suggest that overall the news coverage is fair and balanced across the campaign camps. Regarding the topics of the coverage, we found that there exists only a minor discrepancy of coverage between the Asian American and the European American candidates—most of the stories focused on horse race and only about two-fifths of the news stories pertained to candidates’ issue stances and public policies.

The researchers, however, cannot draw the conclusion that the news coverage is completely free of flaws. It is found that some undertones and subjective, loaded adjectives might have distinguished the news coverage between the Asian American and European American candidates. Despite the low frequency of stereotypes embedded in the news stories, we believe their appearances may very well stick out from the ordinary text to attract readers’ attention, thus forming a remarkable framing effect. Some of the

clichéd descriptions about the Asian American candidates can invoke or strengthen the readers' existing bias. A substantial number of the stories described the Asian American candidates as submissive, indecisive, and shy; others attached such adjectives as cunning, calculated, and inscrutable with the Asian-American candidates, echoing those repugnant fictional characters such as Charlie Chen in some Hollywood-made films. Even though a couple of over-achieving, arguably positive, images were used sometimes in the stories—such as “model minority” and the American dream embodied in the candidate—the overall picture provided for Asian American candidates is not flattering.

Although two of the three examined races resulted in sending Asian American candidates to the offices, it does not necessarily mean that the slanted coverage did not damage the Asian American candidates. For one thing, their campaigns could have been more successful in capturing more White votes if the news stories delivered more positive tones. Gary Locke's campaign strategist, Blair Butterworth, and David Wu told us in interviews that their opponents' extremely conservative stances on various issues—vis à vis their middle-of-the-road approach, helped tremendously. Thus, election results simply cannot justify the way the race got covered.

Given the fact that roughly 10% of the West Coast population are Asian descendants and that Asian Americans have been living in this region for more than one and half centuries, one would expect that journalists of this region would know better about Asian Americans and readers would demand more sensitive coverage. The finding regarding the recurring usage of stereotypical adjectives in the news stories for the Asian American candidates is worth pondering. One may wonder what kind of coverage Gary Locke would have received had he run in another region of the nation that has a smaller Asian population, such as the deep South. Therefore, it is still too early for researchers to assert that the barrier for Asian American political candidates to receive completely fair, unbiased coverage is brushed away. Even though utterly prejudiced coverage seems to disappear in the news, subtly disapproving and disadvantageous coverage may still linger. Aspiring Asian American politicians need to cope with this challenge, while political journalists need to address this aspect of problem in covering campaigns.

This study certainly has limitations that should be addressed. For one thing, the sample of Asian American candidates under investigation would have been more representative if women and Republican candidates were included. Asian Americans are known to be vitally diversified in politics—it is even hard for political pundits to predict the relationship between an Asian ethnicity and its political party affiliation. Therefore, including more diversifying cases should be emphasized for future investigations. Secondly, all of the candidates included in this study are non-incumbents. It would be intriguing to see whether news coverage about Asian American incumbents are portrayed differently and whether the often-associated adjectives, such as

indecisive and submissive, still appear in the news. Lastly, this study only included newspapers as study samples. Given the known influence of television and the Internet, the audio and video parts of campaign coverage should not be neglected in future endeavors. This study is only a modest start and hopefully more of this kind of investigation will follow.

NOTES

1. For example, unlike African Americans or Hispanics, Asian Americans might believe in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam and speak more than 100 languages and dialects.

2. The two coders agreed on 1,269 out of 1,630 times, excluding "mechanical" items such as titles, dates and page numbers. The followings is the breakdowns of agreements among coding categories: (a) number of total paragraphs (100%); (b) number of paragraphs devoted to each candidate (85%); (c) identification of candidates and opponents in articles (85%); (d) favorability (63%); (e) number of paragraphs about candidates' racial/ethnic background (90%); (f) number of paragraphs about candidates' support or non-support from racial minorities and majorities (88.8%); (g) racial stereotypes about Asian-American candidates (98.6%); (h) description of Asian-American candidates (98.8%); (i) description of opponent candidates (99.4%); and (j) types of coverage (84.7%).

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