

Two out of three Chinatowns in New York are leaning Trump. Here's why

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Last Friday afternoon, I battled through throngs of local grocery shoppers and ambling culinary tourists on a crowded street in Queens to meet Mr Wu Yiping, a Republican-leaning voter who had arranged to see me in his office. He runs Asian American Cohesion (AAC), a community centre just a few minutes' walk from the heart of Flushing, New York City's most vibrant Chinatown.

Wu started AAC during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the safety and rights of Asian Americans, especially Chinese Americans, against Asia-hate, something that had emerged as one of the virus' most virulent side effects as it began its deadly march across the nation.

Educated with a BA in Chinese literature, Wu left China amid the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy protests. Today he proudly identifies as an American, having lived in the US for more than three decades. After forging a successful career in finance on Wall Street, and now living among the wealthy in Long Island, he divides his time between running his own finance business and running AAC, helping those less successful Chinese immigrants in Flushing.

Wu invited me to visit his centre again on the weekend. On Saturday afternoon, AAC offers English language lessons, and on Sunday afternoon, the centre runs an intergenerational forum where Chinese-American children can teach their community elders how to use digital technologies. 'We welcome everyone, and we don't ask questions about whether they're citizens, permanent residents or undocumented,' Wu says.

Lately, much of Mr Wu's energy is taken up with encouraging people in the community to vote: 'We are the Asian Americans (亚裔 yayi), not a muted ethnicity (哑裔 yayi)'.

Chinese Americans comprise 24 percent of the Asian-American population, numbering an estimated **5.8 million**. While Chinese Americans are small in comparison to Black and Hispanic communities in the US, the number of eligible voters in this community is growing fast, and they are becoming increasingly relevant to politicians on both sides.

An energetic and fast-talking man in his early 60s, Wu told me about his journey of political engagement.

He attributed his political awakening as a rights-bearing American citizen and his identification with the Republicans to an incident in 2014, when NYC police officer Peter Liang, the son of Chinese immigrants, was indicted and subsequently found guilty of manslaughter for accidentally shooting unarmed Black man Akai Gurley.

Wu and many people in the Chinese community saw Liang's conviction as unfair, and felt it represented a 'double standard'. For them, Liang had been made a scapegoat by supporters of leftist politics, which he saw as only concerned with the injustice suffered by African Americans. He became the most vocal [voice](#) defending Liang on behalf of the Chinese community in NYC.

Wu realised that to have a political voice, the Chinese community must become actively engaged in the voting process. He signed up for the Republican National Convention in Cleveland in 2016, and was actively involved in mobilising people in his community to vote for Donald Trump — a community that had been notorious for its low voter turnout.

Wu surprised me by saying he still hadn't decided who to vote for in the coming election, despite many of his WeChat posts clearly favouring Trump. He said he doesn't like either candidate, and that he is not a 'Trump fan' (chuan fen 川粉). Nevertheless, he said he may still end up voting for Trump, because he sees Chinese traditional values as more compatible with Republican values:

We Chinese people don't want to rely on welfare. We believe in making our own fortune with hard work. We have traditional family values like Trump. We liked the sound of Trump's position on law and order and his intention to be tough on crime and supportive of the police. We also agree with his views on other issues, such as gender transition and homosexuality. I believe these practices should be tolerated at an individual level but not promoted like the left are doing in our schools.

[Rong Xiaoqing](#) is a bilingual journalist in New York and another first-generation immigrant from China. She concurs that many first-generation arrivals from China, especially older immigrants, are now leaning towards Trump. But she believes that a bigger turning point for this is not the Liang incident, but various local governments, including in [NYC](#), removing race-based exams, aimed at reducing the number of Asian students and admitting more Black and Hispanic students in their place.

According to Rong, Chinese parents saw their children as being caught in a war on merit, since these affirmative action policies target schools that have a majority of Asian students. These parents realised they must act to defend their rights, she said. For the first time, they were getting organised and taking to the streets to protest against a decision.

'Growing up in China, meritocracy is in their DNA,' Rong explained to me over a lunch of crab-meat buns in a Shanghai dumpling restaurant in Flushing.

Rong sees Chinese-American parents' political actions as revolts against what they see as left-wing indoctrination in schools. 'Once a solidly Democratic group, Chinese Americans are increasingly forging their own path,' she [wrote](#) several years ago.

According to the latest [survey](#) commissioned by the Committee of 100, about three-quarters of Chinese-American citizens (76 percent) are certain they'll turn out to vote in November's presidential election. Historically, Chinese Americans have generally favoured the Democrats: around 46 percent of Chinese Americans identify as Democrats, while 31 percent identify as Republicans, according to the survey.

The 2020 presidential election saw a swing against Trump among Chinese Americans, following his anti-China rhetoric blaming China for the COVID-19 virus, which had led to an upsurge of Asia-hate. In that election, as many as 67 percent of Chinese American votes went to Biden, with Trump receiving only 28 percent.

But both Wu and Rong believe it will be different this time. Chinatown in Manhattan is populated mainly by earlier-generation Chinese Americans, many of whom are Cantonese speakers living on welfare. While they are typically loyal Democrat voters, the other two Chinatowns in New York — Sunset Park in South Brooklyn and Flushing in Queens — are already turning red. Since the last election, the pendulum has been swinging back to Trump's advantage, they told me.

The 2024 survey also indicates that age is a key factor. Some 92 percent of young Chinese American voters in the 18- to 29-year-old category voted for Biden, while only 7 percent voted for Trump. At the same time, the survey indicates that while Biden voters came from all age groups, Trump voters tended to be more than 45 years old.

This gives rise to tense family dynamics among many Chinese-American families. Other non-Chinese families may have this problem too, but Rong believes it's particularly pronounced in families where there are first-generation immigrant parents whose children were born and raised in America. 'Parents and children are either not talking to each other about politics at all, or they spend a lot of their time arguing,' Rong explained.

Chinese Americans don't currently form a potentially significant force in the nation's overall political fortunes, given that they comprise a relatively small percentage of the US population. By contrast, [Chinese-Australian](#) voters have already shown their capacity to shift the electoral dial in the most recent federal election. Nevertheless, the steady growth in importance of the Chinese-American vote in recent years will be an important force to monitor.

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