

## PROPOSAL: "REVISITING CHINATOWN."

José Antonio Espín Sánchez, Assistant Professor of Economics, Department of Economics  
([jose-antonio.espin-sanchez@yale.edu](mailto:jose-antonio.espin-sanchez@yale.edu))

In the 1974 motion picture *Chinatown* the private investigator J. J. "Jake" Gites (Jack Nicholson) is involved in a conspiracy that involved corruption, deceit and "family secrets." The goal of the conspirators consisted of buying the lands of unsuspected farmers in the Owens Valley (some 400 miles north of Los Angeles) and then building an aqueduct to bring the water to the city, where it would be worth a fortune. Although, this description is fictional, there is much controversy on the way the city of L.A. purchase the water and land rights in the Owens Valley.

The goal of the project is to gather individual unpublished detailed data of all the purchases of land and water rights (1905-1934). With the individual data we will be able to assess whether the prices paid were "fair." We will also assess why some farmers and not others were able to organize in sellers' pools. Finally we will test whether the city of L.A. established a purchasing pattern of "checkers," thereby isolating farmers' properties in order to buy them later at a lower price.

The goal for the RA will be to help processing the data from the farmer's plots. She will use GIS software to create maps of the plots and to transform that information into econometric analysis. Knowledge of GIS is, but is not a prerequisite.