

Playing Checkers in Chinatown

Faculty Member: [Jose-Antonio Espin-Sanchez](#)

Proposal Description:

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 on 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 and far from reality, 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The goal of the project is to gather individual unpublished detailed data of all the purchases of land and water rights (1905-1934).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.

Requisite Skills and Qualifications:

The goal for the RA will be to use econometric techniques to test different hypotheses regarding the questions posed above. She will use the dataset that we have and use econometric software such as R or STATA. Knowledge of GIS is advisable, but it is not a prerequisite.

Award: Zach Auster

Houcine Jedli

Tobin Application Link: [Tobin Application](#)

Project Type: Tobin RA

Project Year: 2021

Term: Fall 2021

Source URL: <https://economics.yale.edu/undergraduate/tobin-ra/fall-2021/playing-checkers-chinatown>