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## **Liu Courts the Press in Many Languages**

By [EWA KERN-JEDRYCHOWSKA](#)

Aleksandra Slabisz John C. Liu addressed New York's ethnic and community media at a news conference organized by New York Community Media Alliance. Jehangir Khattak, the group's communications manager, sat next to Mr. Liu.

When [John C. Liu](#), the city's comptroller-elect, dropped in earlier this month at the [Ippies Awards](#), which honor the work of the city's ethnic journalists, he may as well have been at his own party. There was no end to all the hand shaking with the 100 or so immigrant reporters, the posing for photos, the countless interviews.

"He has already won, but he still comes to see us," said Ari Kagan, a reporter with [Vecherniy New York](#), a Russian-language weekly, who met Mr. Liu about five years ago during an event in the Russian community.

A politician shaking hands at a gathering of reporters? That is hardly news. But these are ethnic journalists, who find they get far less attention than their mainstream media competitors, often feeling like second-class citizens — except when Mr. Liu is involved. He has aggressively courted immigrant journalists ever since he was elected to the City Council in 2001.

These days, dozens of reporters have his private cellphone number. Plenty of them were at his victory party in November, when he became the first Asian-American to be elected comptroller. And he knows their names, even though some of them may be difficult to pronounce because they come from all over the world.

"He always returns our e-mails and phone calls," Mr. Kagan added.

Immigrants constitute more than 36 percent of the city's population, and Mr. Liu said he saw a clear opportunity here. "Growing up in New York City and watching the communities that I represent in the City Council, I realized most people are not reading 'the non-ethnic newspapers,'" he said.

"If you look around Flushing, if you look on the subway, if you look at local coffee shops, or even at the litter on the street, there is all different kinds of newspapers that you see," Mr. Liu added.

Interestingly, and perhaps a bit counterintuitively, Mr. Liu said he did not actually like the term ethnic, calling it “marginalizing.”

“News organizations are news organizations,” he said, “whether they publish and broadcast in English or not.”

According to the latest census data, about 3.7 million New Yorkers 5 years old and older — 47.8 percent — speak a language other than English at home. Though it is hard to pin down exact numbers, roughly 300 foreign-language newspapers and magazines in more than 50 languages cater to their needs.

Mr. Liu received no endorsements from the mainstream media. Reaching out to often-overlooked newsrooms turned out to be a good strategy. “The ethnic press gives local candidates a great opportunity to get exposure, to get known and to get attention,” said Mitchell L. Moss, a professor of urban policy and planning at New York University’s Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. “Another benefit is that often ethnic papers are weekly, so you get the whole seven days to absorb everything in that paper. They just don’t get tossed out.”

“Mayor Bloomberg also put a lot of attention to that,” Professor Moss said.

While campaigning, Mr. Liu visited about 50 ethnic and community newspapers to present his policies. One issue he raised again and again was expanding economic opportunity to immigrants. “We should make sure that the smaller and the new upcoming businesses, often run by immigrants, have a chance at the economic pie,” he said during a visit to [Nowy Dziennik, a Polish-language daily](#). He also cited his record as a city councilman when he fought for better access to translation services and against bias crimes. He talked about his immigrant roots and how his father, Chang F. Liu, admired the Kennedys so much that he changed his own name to Joseph and his sons’ to John, Robert and Edward. John C. Liu’s original name was Chun.

His parents still read *The World Journal*, one of four Chinese-language dailies published in New York. His mother-in-law reads another, [Sing Tao Daily](#).

Mr. Liu, 42, who came to the United States from Taiwan when he was 5, says he is not able to read Chinese-language papers. He likes, however, to browse through [El Diario La Prensa](#), the largest Spanish-language newspaper in New York. “In New York City public schools, I had several years of Spanish and no instructions in Chinese.”

But it was Chinese-language newspapers that provided nearly daily coverage of his campaign and were instrumental in explaining the election process to their readers.

“For example, a lot of people didn’t know what runoff was; we spent a lot of time writing about it,” said Lotus Chau, the chief reporter at [Sing Tao Daily](#). “The community was very excited about his candidacy. And they went to vote.”

For many ethnic papers, Mr. Liu's attention brought another benefit. "For the first time somebody running for the comptroller's office advertised in our newspaper," said Mohsin Zaheer of [Sada-E-Pakistan](#), published in Brooklyn. "But it was his outreach to the Pakistani community that really amazed us. He came twice to our office and then whenever someone from the community called him and invited him for an event, he was there."

*Ewa Kern-Jedrychowska is a reporter for Nowy Dziennik, The Polish Daily News.*