

## A Political Paradox: Asian American Participations and Representations

Kazuhiro Maeshima

Asian Americans defy political science theory because their educational, financial, professional achievements don't get transferred to electoral politics ---UCLA political scientist Donald Nakanishi<sup>1</sup>.

### Introduction

The Asian American community constantly shows a great political paradox. Asian Americans are comparatively well-to-do, and their education level is fairly high. Many studies consistently reveal that high levels of political participation are correlated with educational attainment and high socioeconomic status (e.g., Conway 1991, 23-27). However, several studies found that Asian American political participation has been at unusually low levels. Asian American political participation, unlike that of whites, African Americans, and Latinos, is not predictably influenced by levels of employment, educational attainment, and home ownership (Hing 1993, Chap 5).

The main purpose of this study is to investigate this paradox. This research extensively examines Asian American participations and representations in Western States and Hawaii, where the Asian American population is highly condensed. The Asian American community is rarely examined by political scholars, and studies of Asian American influence in U.S. national politics are in the stage of inception and leave much to be explored.

Nonetheless, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minorities in the United States. In 1980, Asian Americans constituted only about 1.6% (3.5 million) of the nation's total population (Rothenberg and William 1996, 43). However, because of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, the number has increased rapidly. The number of Asian Americans in 1995 was 9,756,000, which amounts to 3.7% of the total US population (Barkan

1992, 55, Kitano and Daniels 1995, 19). During the 1980s, Asian Pacific immigration totaled about two million to help account for the 108 percent increase during the decade from approximately 3.8 million to 7.3 million. Compared with 1980, the population in 1995 increased 2.8 times (U.S. Census, Hing 1997, 315). According to the 2004 U.S. Census estimate, the population of Asian Americans is 11,870,000, which is of 4.11% of the entire U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2006).

The Asian American political environment has gradually been changing. Although it is still in an inceptive stage, Asian Americans have started to form a movement to support their preferred political candidates. As in the case of the grass roots support for the former Washington State governor Gary Locke's campaign in 1996, the first Asian American governor in the mainland U.S., Asian Americans are emerging as a potentially crucial electoral force in the Pacific Coast states.

Moreover, in recent elections, Asian American advocacy groups nationwide has cooperated to encourage their community to get out to the vote since the late 1990s. Although the overall influence of the movement is not clear, this produced some favorable results, such as the increase of first-time Asian American voters in major states. According to the exit poll of *The Los Angeles Times*, 33% of Asian Americans casting ballots in Southern California were first-time voters in the 1996 presidential election.

This research first examines Asian Americans current political environments in the Pacific Coast states and explores their political history since their arrival in the United States. Especially, sociological and cultural backgrounds are focused on in this section. Secondly, this paper reviews Asian American political participations and seeks for the explanations of putative Asian political apathy. The last part of this paper further explores Asian American representations.

## **II. The Historical Development of Asian American Community**

Asian Americans have played a fundamental part in making the Pacific states what they are today. They were at the forefront of the agricultural labor movement, especially in the sugarcane and grape fields and were instrumental in developing the fishing and salmon canning industries of the region (McClain and Stewart 2002, Chap 3).

Asian American immigration started in 1850s by the Chinese. Because of the discovery of gold in the 1840s, the American West actively recruited them to fill needs in railroad construction, laundries, and domestic services. China also had reasons to provide America with their people. Some regions of China, such as Guangdong and Fujian provinces experienced rapid population growth and serious rice shortage. In the United States, Chinese immigrants helped build the great transcontinental railroads of the 19th century. Because of their industry and willingness to accept lower wages, Chinese were considered almost indispensable until the depression of the 1880s threatened the livelihood of the American working class becoming a major problem for them (Sandmeyer 1973, Chap. 3).

Following the Chinese, Japanese immigration started at the end of the 19th century. In 1884, two years after the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese government, which strictly restricted its own people to go overseas in order to keep domestic stability, yielded to internal pressure to permit laborers to emigrate to work in America. The immigrants ranged up and down the social ladder, from ex-samurai, the highest class citizens, to poor outcasts, and across the occupations, from farmers to fishers to *sake* (rice wine) brewers to Buddhist priests.

The Japanese immigrants labored on the sugar plantations of Hawaii and on the vegetable and fruit farms of California (Fugita and O'Brien 1991, 7-9). Likewise, Koreans and Asian Indians started to immigrate to the United States to fill the demand of an agricultural workforce (Kim and Patterson 1974, 1-24, Hurh and Kim, 1984, Chap. 1). Philippines became an American colony after the Spanish-American War in 1898, and Filipinos automatically became noncitizen nationals of the United States. They could travel without regard to immigration laws and they started migration to Hawaii soon after the War (Hing 1997, 317).

Aside from the agricultural sector, these Asian were importers, merchants, grocers, clerks, tailors, and gardeners. They operated laundries, restaurants, and vegetable markets, and manned the assembly lines (Cordasco 1990, 437-445). Asian Americans also served the United States in war: the famed *all-nisei* (Japanese second generation) 100th/442nd combat team of World War II remains the most decorated unit in U.S. military history (Hosokawa 1969, Chap 23).

Despite their historical contributions, Asian immigrants and Asian Americans have suffered social prejudice and economic, political, and institutional discrimination. They were excluded from churches, barber shops, and restaurants and forced to sit in the balconies of movie theaters and the back seats of buses (O'Brien and Fugita 1991, 109-112). They were paid lower wages than their white counterparts, relegated to menial jobs, or forced to turn to businesses where they were not in competition with white workers (Hoyt 1974, Chap. 11).

For more than 160 years, Asians were also refused citizenship by a law that precluded their right to naturalize, a law that remained in effect until 1952. Without citizenship, Asians could not vote, and thus could not seek remedies through normal political channels as did other immigrant groups (Hing 1993, 162). Asians were also targeted by laws prohibiting them from owning property. The alien land laws passed by California and other Western and Southern states earlier this century, fostered by envious competitors, placed heavy obstacles in the path of struggling Asian immigrants and their children that were not faced by others (Kitano and Daniels 1995, 60).

Perhaps most egregiously, Asians were denied civil rights guaranteed under the Constitution. Among other things, the relocation of 120,000 Asian Americans from the West Coast and Hawaii and their detention in internment camps between 1941 and 1946 is one of the worst civil rights violations in U.S. history. German Americans or Italian Americans did not suffer a similar fate (Kitano 1969, Chap. 3).

Additionally, Asians were denied immigration rights. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908, and the National origins Act of 1924 prohibited Chinese and Japanese immigration --while permitting the annual entry of thousands of European, immigrants. It was not until 1965 that the vestiges of these legal restrictions were lifted by Congress (Hing 1993, Chap 1).

The reasons for historical prejudice and discrimination against Asians are complex, often involving economic or political motives. Labor groups, threatened by cheaper Asian workers, staged strikes and acts of violence. Employers cultivated such "ethnic antagonism" in order to depress wages for all workers. Politicians cynically exploited anti-Asian sentiment to maintain

power, and the press, such as the Hearst Newspaper Syndicates, extensively used of the "Yellow Peril" propaganda prior to World War II in order to sell papers (Tsuruoka, 1997, 8).

But, at heart, the reasons for anti-Asian practices remain far simpler: Asians looked different, they had "accents," they worshipped different gods. They came from cultures and spoke languages that were beyond the narrow experience of traditional, white America (Heizer and Almquist, 1971, Chap 8, Sarasohn 1983, 59-60)

When the anti-Japanese movement was rising in California in the early part of the 19th century, H. A. Mills (1915) explained the anti-Asian feeling in California was akin to the Southerners' sentiment on African Americans. The author asserts that California's "Japanese problems" was mainly the result of the color of skin:

Few men of the West accept the Japanese on the same terms as they do the representatives of the different branches of the white race because they are colored. Being a mixture of Malay, Mongolian, Tartar, Caucasian, and Negro or Negrito elements, they stand out in a population predominantly white. . . Color marks a difference in kind most people are more or less conscious of. This is a fundamental fact of no little importance and especially in California, where there is a Southern element in the population in whom the natural feeling of opposition to a colored race has been deepened by the presence and struggle over the Negro. (239)

Between the end of World War II and 1965, Asian American society was dormant because Asian immigration was severely controlled. Also, before 1965, Asian American society was largely perceived as members of the three most numerous Asian ethnic groups: Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos<sup>2</sup>.

Nonetheless, immigration that opened up after 1965 spurred a phenomenal growth in the nation of Asian Americans. The U.S. Asian population of 1.5 million in 1970 quadrupled by 1990. The Asian American population reached 10.2 million by 2000---a 48 percent increase over 1990, compared with an overall U.S. population increase of 13 percent (Schaefer 2004, 314). New immigrants ranged from educated and middle- and upper-class professionals and entrepreneurs from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the

Philippines and South Korea to impoverished rural people of Laos and Cambodia, and refugees from war-torn Vietnam. Many came from repressive political systems, where political involvement was shunned (Hing 1993, Chap 3).

Employment profiles have been impacted as well. Before 1960s, Chinese, Japanese, Asian Indians, and Filipinos were primarily employed in rural regions in Pacific states. Most of them were engaged in farming or service jobs. However, the 1965 amendments saw the infusion of more professionals from every group. Thus, a significant portion of Asian Americans is now considered white-color (ibid).

As the population grows in the late 1960s, the pan-Asian idea emerged and become strong both organizationally and psychologically. Unlike the first-generation of Asian Americans, most second and third generation see themselves as Asians at the same time they saw themselves as Japanese or Chinese. Since the 1960s, the term "Asian Americans" has been used extensively, especially by professional groups. Further, Asian American advocacy groups, such as the Japanese American Citizens League and the Organization of Chinese Americans fight together to improve the political and social situation for Asian American as a whole (Murakami 1997). Chinese American scholar Bill Ong Hing explains the panethnicity<sup>3</sup> inside him:

I generally think of myself as Asian American rather than Chinese American, but that may in part be because I was born in the United States, I have many Japanese, Korean, and Filipino friends who are also American-born or have lived her most of their lives. . . I also have been a member of many political and social groups that are labeled or regarded as Asian American and have members of varied Asian backgrounds. . . My racial features inevitably evoke certain reactions, looks body language, and treatment from the people whom I interact, so that I am constantly reminded that I am Asian American. (Hing 1993, 179)

At the same time, Asian American subgroups are culturally diverse. Extreme political and socio-economic polarities suggest that the conglomerate image of "Asian Americans" is an illusion (Daniels 1997, 86).

To sum up, Asian American's community must be understood in two ways by the communality of Asian Americans and their ethnic origin.

Lastly, Asian Americans have started to cooperate with other ethnic minority groups. For example, Asian Americans became full partners in the Bradley coalition along with African Americans, Latinos, and Jews, and consistently supported Tom Bradley's mayorship in Los Angeles during the 1980s and 1990s (McClain and Stewart 1990, 139-140). However, as economic and housing market competition was increasing, tensions were rising among lower-income African-American, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The relations between African Americans and Koreans were especially strained. This antipathy between them culminated in the targeting of Korean small businesses by African Americans during the 1992 Los Angeles riots. The riot showed how the cooperation among ethnic minorities is difficult (Hamamoto 1997, 232-237, Kitano and Daniels 1995, 121-122).

### **III. Political Environments of Asian Americans**

Although many of the social and institutional barriers discussed in the first section have been broken down, and in spite of the fact that Asian Americans have become part of the everyday fabric of American life, members of the Asian American community continue to suffer because of their minority status. For example, there is a significant income disparity between Asians and whites with equal education (Kitano and Daniels 1995, Chap 3). Asian Americans are likely to be in secondary labor markets, where wages are low and prospects minimal, and occupy lower or technical positions, where income potential is not as great as in the executive ranks. Proportionately Asian Americans constitute less than half of one percent of the officers and directors of the nation's thousand largest companies. In corporate America, Asian Americans have their own "glass ceiling" (ibid).

More seriously, Asians and Asian Americans are periodically targets of hate crimes. The 1982 baseball bat killing of Vincent Chin in Detroit, a scapegoat for the Detroit auto industry's inability to compete with Japan, illustrated America's ignorance about Asian Americans. Chin was Chinese American, and he did not have the Japanese heritage at all (Huard 1991,1). A report by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium found that hate crimes against Asian Pacific Americans grew from 335 incidents in

1993 to 458 incidents in 1995, a 37 percent increase in just two years (Wu 1997, 2).

Asian American communities have begun to gather in order to solve these political predicaments. There are, nonetheless, several unique political environments which may facilitate or delay the political participations of Asian Americans. These political environments of Asian Americans are mostly explained by demographic characteristics. First, as discussed earlier, Asian Americans are one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States, and the growing number may help Asian Americans to unite. In addition to the current population growth, the number of Asian American's population is projected to continuously gain in the near future. According to *The Los Angeles Times*, 12 million is predicted by the year of 2010 (October 31, 1996). Also, the demographic predictions for the year 2020 show that 54 percent of Asian Pacific Americans will be foreign born. This is consistent with census figures in 1995 which revealed that, except for Japanese Americans, every group was mostly comprised of those born abroad: Chinese, over 60 percent; Koreans, 80 percent; Asia Indians, 80 percent; Filipinos, over 70 percent; Vietnamese, 90 percent. These predictions also find support from current annual levels of immigration (e.g., Filipinos 60,000, Chinese 55,000, Koreans 30, 000, Thais 8,900) (US Census, Hing, 1993, 315). According to the estimate by the US Bureau of the Census, the US population by 2050 is expected to be 8% Asian American, 53% European American, 25% Hispanic or Latino American (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central, and South American), 14% African American, and 1% Native American. Recent values are 3, 74, 10, 12, and 1, respectively (US Bureau of the Census 1996).

Because of the large influx of Asian Americans, Monterey Park, a city border of Los Angeles has changed over the last forty years from a predominantly white to a predominantly Chinese suburb. In 1990, people of Asian descent made up 57 percent of Monterey Park's population, almost double their number in 1980. Monterey Park is now called "Chinese Beverly Hills." However, the sudden shift in Monterey Park's ethnic makeup was not without problems. Some longtime residents complained that the newcomers were driving up housing price. In the mid-1980s, some frustrated residents launched an English-only movement. The city council passed a resolution



making English Monterey Park's official language. There were attempts to ban any foreign language from public signs. One councilman even sought to have all foreign language books removed from the local library. By 2000, Asians began to acquire political power proportionate to their numbers. They were successful to fight against the movement. It is, however, certain that the English-only movement has polarized communities in Monterey Park (Wong 1989, 113-126, Saito 1993, 34-43, Frolik 1996, 1).

Second, most Asian American population is highly condensed in limited regions; thus, their potential political power is significant as long as their unity is possible. Asian Americans are concentrated in the West Coast States and Hawaii, as well as large cities such as New York, and Chicago (Barringer, Gardner, and Levin 1993, 110-111). In California, the Asian American population has been contributing the state's diversity. In 1970, 80 percent of the state's residents were non-Hispanic white. By 1990, only 57 percent of the state's residents were non-Hispanic white, Hispanics were 26 percent, Asians 9 percent, and African Americans 7 percent. The Asian population rose up to 11 percent of the state residents in 1995, and 40 percent of all Asian-Americans in the nation reside there.

Except in these regions, the Asian American population is still very small. Although Asian Americans' political influence is limited on the national level, they are emerging as a potentially crucial electoral force because of their growing political importance in California, which is the nation's most populous state with 55 Electoral College votes.

Third, taken as a group, the Asian American population is relatively prosperous and well-educated. As discussed above, this provides a good condition for political participations because good education and political participations are usually correlated in political literature. More than one-third of Asian Americans has four or more years of college, which is twice as much as the national average. Indeed, disproportionate numbers of Asians are admitted to elite colleges, such as Harvard (14 percent), MIT (20 percent), and the University of California, Berkeley (25 percent) (Hing 1993, 11).

Regarding the financial situation of Asian community, almost 30% of Asian Americans are in managerial and professional occupations, although they constitute less than half of one percent of the officers and directors of

the nation's thousand largest companies. The Asian American median family income of \$42,245 in 1990, which was almost \$10,000 higher more than that of non Latino White (McClain and Stewart 1995,30). Uhlaner claims that Asian Americans, as a single group, have the highest income and lowest poverty and unemployment rate among minority groups. She also emphasizes that unlike other minority groups, substantial proportions of Asian are immigrants (Uhlaner 55).

Fourth, however, their socioeconomic situations vary. Although the middle class strata of Asian Americans is increasing in size and a number of its members are political conservatives, some other Asian Americans remain at the bottom of the economic ladder and are in need of the type of assistance likely to be offered by a liberal government. The average unemployment rate of Asian Americans above age sixteen was 6.3% in 1994. However, there is a significant variation within the Asian American community: while the Japanese rate was 1.6% and Korean one was 3.3%, Cambodian rate was more than 20% (McClain and Stewart 1995,30-33, Costanble 1995, A 1).

Fifth, another complication of the Asian American political environment is their intraracial identity discrepancies. The term "Asian American" includes people of different ethnic origins: Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and East Indians. Each of these groups has a different history before entering into the United States. Some Chinese and Koreans have not completely overcome the dislike their families have held for Japanese Americans. In the Chinese community, people take sides in the political struggle between China and Taiwan, or have loyalties based on regional differences, such as Shanghainese versus Cantonese (McClain and Stewart 1995, 112). Although Native Hawaiians often contend that then US federal government should entitle Hawaiian Americans to the same restitution rights and benefits as Native American Indians as an aboriginal people, the reparation movement seems to have little support among other Asian Americans (Mackenzie 1982,15). Actually, many Asian American advocacy groups claim that the racial and ethnic identity term "Asians" is often used inappropriately. While black immigrants to the United States may have a racial identity as black, Asian Americans ethnic identity reflects their country of origin (Frable 1997).

In addition, Asian Americans appear to be the strong ethnic identity. Phinney conducted a study of multigroup ethnic identity via a questionnaire which attempted to assess three common components of ethnic identity: positive ethnic attitudes and a sense of belonging, ethnic identity achievement, and ethnic behaviors and practices. Phinney concluded that Asian Americans perceive ethnic identity as more important than whites do (Phinney 1992). Political interests of Asian Americans are varied and complex; therefore, they are sometimes difficult to describe as a group. Generally, Asian Americans are less likely than African Americans and Latinos to favor increased spending on welfare and more likely to favor the death penalty, just as the whites are. Like whites and African Americans and unlike Latinos, a majority of Asian Americans do not favor amnesty for undocumented aliens. Like Latinos and African Americans and unlike whites, most Asians favor bilingual education programs. And unlike whites, African Americans, and Latinos, most favor a ban on handguns but not prayer in public schools. However, among Asians, Koreans are more likely than Japanese to favor bilingual education, and amnesty for undocumented aliens. Filipinos are the strongest supporters of prayer in public schools than other Asian groups. Also, Japanese political attitudes closely resemble those of whites than of other Asian groups (Hing 1993, 160-161).

Sixth, the first-generation of Asian American immigrants did not or have not shared a common language. This language problem is a formidable barrier to "pan-Asian" identification (Feagin and Feagin 1996, 441, Min 1995, 278-279). Daphne Kwok, executive director of the Washington D.C.-based Organization of Chinese Americans, has published the "get-to-the-vote" brochure in English and eight Asian languages, including Cambodian and Hmong (Kang 1996, 3).

Seventh, the language barrier becomes much less problematic for the second-generation and after. Interestingly, the 1992 Binder Exit Poll Study by Tramatolla Association in Berkeley finds that the party identification of the second-generation is somehow different from that of their father / mother. Generally, Asian Americans' party identification is evenly split between Democrat and Republican; nonetheless, the second-generation (and beyond) Asian American voters tend to identify and affiliate more with the Democratic Party than first-generation Asian voters (Chan 1995,1).

#### **IV. The Paradox of Asian American Political Participation**

The sociological discrepancy among Asians results in weak partisan attachment. According to research by the UCLA Pacific American Voters Project, Asian Americans' party identification in California is not monolithic. Among registered voters, Democrats and Republicans evenly split in party affiliation. Both Democrat and Republican parties share respectively about one-third of the whole Asian American community. The other one-third are independent (Nakanishi 1991,30, VanHorne 1982,25). While these figures resemble American aggregate figures, they are quite different from Blacks and Latinos who are predominantly Democratic (Flannigan and Zingale 1994, 91-97)<sup>4</sup>. Among Asian Americans, there is some variation in their support of political parties. Vietnamese Americans are strong Republican supporters and Chinese Americans are slightly more Republican than Democratic; however, Japanese Americans are slightly more Democratic than Republican and Filipino Americans are predominantly Democratic (Nakanishi 1991,43, Do 1996, 3).

Asian Americans' voting patterns are more complex. 48% of Asians voted for Dole in the 1996 presidential election, while 43% voted for Clinton. The partisan gap was much bigger in the 1992 election: 55% of Asians voted for Bush in 1992 presidential election, while only 31% voted for Clinton (Asians were not included in national exit polls until 1992). However, Asians have turned slightly toward the Democrats. Gore won 54% of Asian votes (41% for G. W. Bush) in the 2000 election (McCain and Stewart, 2002, 87). In the 2004 election, Kerry received 53% of Asian votes (44% for G. W. Bush)<sup>5</sup>. It is also important to note that while diversity of party affiliation exists in the Asian American community, there is a virtual Democratic Party lock on Senate and House of representative seats. There are eight officeholders in the beginning of the 110th Congress, and seven of them are Democrats.

Wendy Tam (1995) claims that past studies of Asian voting behavior usually treat Asians as a single homogeneous group, but she emphasizes that this assumption is often incorrect. She conducted a research on the voting behaviors of three Asian ethnicities (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) in three counties in California, and concluded that the separate Asian ethnicities

often act as separate groups with their own unique political perspectives and identities. She cautions against drawing wide conclusions based on aggregated data and describes a foundation from which Asian American politics should be viewed (243).

Asian American advocacy groups are also diverse. Although the largest national Asian American organization, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is more likely to advocate liberal policy (Hosokawa 1982, 222), other groups, such as the National Association of Asian American Professionals (NAAAP), are more likely to support a conservative agenda (Espiritu 1992,65-69).

As argued in the introduction, Asian American political participation paradoxically defies theories of political participation. Asian Americans are comparatively well-to-do, and their education level is fairly high. However, several studies found that Asian American political participation has been at unusually low levels. Usually, educational, financial, professional achievements contribute to the high political participations, and Asian participation contradicts "common sense" in political science.

Indeed, Asian Americans' turnout is usually very low. Only 43 percent of California's Japanese Americans are registered to vote, despite the fact that most are second or third-generation residents of the state. The levels of registration for other Asian national groups are even lower. The number of registered voters was only 30% of the voting age population (male 32.0/ female 30.6) in 1992 (Nakanishi 1991,42). The findings of a study in San Francisco show a similar result. While the voter registration rate for the general population in California was about 73 percent, the rate for Japanese Americans was only 36.8 percent and for Chinese Americans it was 30.9 percent. Also, this study reveals that those areas commonly believed to have higher concentration of middle class residents (Richmond region 39.9 percent) have higher registration rates than those of lower income residents (Chinatown 23.1 percent) (Hing 1993, 156-158). It is true that Asian Americans have the highest proportion of foreign-born members, and those non-citizens are not allowed to register. Even so, the low rate of voter registrations seems to be startling.

There are some explanations why Asian Americans political participation is very limited. First, the language problem acts as a barrier. Some Asian

Americans, especially the first generations, do not speak English as their everyday language. They are less willing to go to a ballot mainly written in English. Although Chinese translations of ballots are available in limited areas, not all Asian Americans share a knowledge of Chinese (Kitano and Daniels 1995 Chap 1).

Second, Asian Americans' political culture and economic situation constitute a voting obstacle. Many Asian immigrants bring with them political cultures that are at odds with Western models of government. Asian Americans are seen as historically docile, acquiescent, and deferential toward authorities. Many of their homelands are not democratic enough, and the authoritarian traditions foster their political apathy and uninvolvement (Massey 1996, 23). The newly immigrated strata of Asian Americans claim that they are too busy with their businesses to devote time to politics. Survival in their new country, they feel, is time-consuming enough (Espiritu 1992,55-59). Asian Americans are well known for their hard-working tendencies; hence, they are much less likely to participate in an election at the cost of their business. In addition, many Asian Americans have an incomplete understanding of the American political system and relatively less political socialization in mass democracy. Grant Ujifusa, political scientist and Japanese American, notes in *The National Review* (September 15, 1989):

Some Asian ignore politics because it doesn't fit with the Confucian view of what is important. To others, it's simply a matter of someone's mother saying, 'Don't waste your time in politics. Go to dental school.' (32)

Some Asian Americans also feel that their political efficacy is low because their population is too small to form an influential voting slate. They believe themselves to be isolated from the established political system and believe that their participation won't change a thing (Ueda 1989,16). The low political efficacy may partly be attributed to the fact that most Asian immigrants are from countries with a single dominant party where elections produce little meaningful change (Uhlener et al. 2007). Also, the legacy of discriminatory laws, which barred most Asians from naturalizing until the 1950s has significantly resulted in Asians' low political efficacy (McCain

and Stewart 1996, 95).

The Asian's aspiration to participate in politics appears to be even smaller than that of other ethnic minorities. According to a survey conducted in 1989 by the National Alliance of Latino Elected Officials, the ability to vote was cited by 95% of Latino immigrants as their chief reason for wanting to become a citizen. However, in a UCLA study of Asian immigrants, voting was cited less frequently after other forms of participation such as access to business loans and certain jobs as a reason for becoming a citizen. Another leading reason cited in this study was the ability to bring relatives to the United States, a right enhanced with citizenship (Wilkinson 1992,1).

Next, as discussed above, Asian Americans' partisanship is weak. There is significant data to support the proposition that partisanship affects turnout. Those with more intense partisan feelings are more likely to have political interest and more likely to turn out on election days (Flanigan and Zingale 1994,72-74, Hughes and Conway 1991,204-205). Asian Americans' weak partisan attitudes discourage participation (Ueda 1989,18).

However, there is a possibility that voting registrations and party identifications do not fully explain Asian political participation. Bill Ong Hing finds that while Asians seem to be less inclined than whites to work on campaigns, attend political rallies, and exhibit political signs and bumper stickers, Asian Americans are more likely than other groups to contribute money to candidates. Also, he points out that Asian Americans are as likely as whites to work in groups and more likely than any ethnic groups to convey opinions to news media. Political participation may have different manifestations because of different ethnic origins within the Asian American community. Filipinos and Koreans are more likely to convey their opinions to the news media than Vietnamese, Japanese, and Chinese, but Japanese are more likely to work in groups than Filipinos, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Koreans (Hing 1993, 158-160).

## **V. Asian American Representations**

Historically, political underrepresentation is another problem of Asian American communities. The number of Asian elected officials, however, has slowly but gradually increased. Also, their activities have begun gain the attention of political scientists (e.g., Lai, Tam-Cho, Kim, and Takeda 2001)

The first Asian American congressman from California was Dalip S. Saund, an Indian mathematician and viticulturist from Riverside, who was elected in 1958. In 1962, Alfred H. Song, a Korean American attorney, became the first Asian American to be elected to the state Legislature. Four years later, March Fong Eu, an Oakland Democrat, followed. Eu later became the first Asian American elected to statewide office in 1974, as secretary of state. In 1976, former San Francisco State University President S.I. Hayakawa, a Japanese American semanticist and a Republican, was elected to the U.S. Senate (Eljera 1996,13). In 1978, when UCLA compiled the first Asian American political roster, there were few Asian American elected officials outside Hawaii. But, recently, there are more than 300 Asian American elected officials--including two U.S. Senators, 41 state representatives, 83 city council members, and 26 city mayors (ibid).

Unlike the rapid growth in population, Asian Americans are still underrepresented in national political office (Tong 2007). There are only eight Asian-Pacific Island members of the 110th Congress (both Senate and the House), and they are mostly Democrats: Daniel Inouye (Sen. D-Hawaii, Japanese), Daniel Akaka (Sen. D-Hawaii, Native Hawaiian), Robert Scott (Rep. D-Virginia, African-American with Fillipino heritage), David Wu (Rep. D-Oregon, Taiwanese), Michael Honda (Rep. D-California, Japanese), Piyush "Bobby" Jindal (Rep. R-Louisiana, Indian), Doris Matsui (Rep. D-California, Japanese), and Mazie Hirono (Rep. D-Hawaii, Japanese). Since Jindal was elected the governor of Louisiana (the first elected Indian American governor in U.S. history) on October 20, 2007 and leaves Congress at the end of 2007, the number was the same as ten years ago<sup>6</sup>. The Asian American representatives amount to only 1.5% of the all federal representatives.

Asian American Representatives have formed a coalition to heighten their political capital in Capitol Hill. In the 103rd Congress, seven Asian Pacific members founded the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) in May 1994 to combine forces and promote issues of special concern to Asian and Pacific Americans (*Washington Post*, May 22, 1994, A 10)<sup>7</sup>. The CAPAC in the 110th Congress includes representatives from Pacific Islanders as well as non-Asians: Madeleine Bordallo (non-voting delegates. D-Guam), Eni Faleomavaega (non-voting delegates. D-American



Samoa, Samoan), Al Green (Rep. D-Texas, African American), Neil Abercrombie (Rep. D-Hawaii, white). The size of the caucus, nonetheless, is relatively very small. Also, it is important to note that while diversity of party affiliation exists among the Asian American community, there is a virtual Democratic party lock on Senate and House of representative seats. The reason why Bobby Jindal is not the member of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus is that he has been significantly more conservative than other CAPAC members (Jindal is a member of the Republican Study Committee, a caucus of conservative members of the Republican Party).

Further, in the state and local level, Asian representation is also still limited. According to the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, in 1996, there were 26 city mayors, 83 council members, 210 judges, and scores of county supervisors and school board members nationwide. Also, there were 23 Asian and Pacific Islander state senators and 42 state representatives nationwide (Eljara 1996,12).

This paucity of Asian political participation is especially noticeable in state and local level. For example, Asian Americans occupies more than 10% of Los Angeles County's population in 1996--outnumbering blacks since the 1990 census--but no Asian American sat on the Board of Supervisors or the City Council then. In contrast, three blacks and three Latinos are on the 15-member City Council and one black and one Latino are on the five-member Board of Supervisors (Kang 1996, 1-2). In Southern California, political successes of Asian Americans have been limited mainly to school boards and city council seats in small suburban cities such as Alhambra, Monterey Park, Rosemead, Cerritos, Hacienda Heights, Torrance, South Pasadena, Redondo Beach, Walnut, Westminster, and Garden Grove (Debow and Syer 1997, 74-77).

In Northern California, Asian representation has slightly progressed more than those of Southern regions of the state. San Francisco's 30% of the population are Asians, and the city has three Asians on the 11-member Board of Supervisors and an Asian police chief, chief administrative officer and registrar of voters and a host of other top officials. However, these successes have only recently been achieved (Kang 1996 3).

Because of the scarcity of Asian American representation, Congressional scholar Linda Fowler (1993) suggests the number of Hispanic or Asian

legislators in Congress is presently too small to make generalizations about the relationship between their backgrounds and policy decision (125). Political scientist Nicholas Alozie (1992) conducted research on the recruitment process of Asian American city council members in 66 urban cities where Asian American population exceeded 5%. Alozie found that the percentage of Asian population plays a crucial role in Asian council members' recruitment, although the Asian American office holders are fairly underrepresented (97).

Alozie's theory was supported by several election results in 1996. For example, Steve Chen, a Queens's assistant district attorney, captured just 30 percent of the vote in District 45 of the New York State Assembly but he received 71 percent of the Asian vote. Also, Republican Sylvia Sun Minnick became the first Asian and the first woman to run for state office in San Joaquin County (CA), and lost by a mere 7 percent by incumbent Mike Machado. She received nearly 90 percent of the Asian American vote. In the district, Asian Americans make up about 5 percent of the population (Eljera 1996,13). Regardless of party affiliation, Asian American voters may be likely to vote for Asian American candidates.

The Asian American community is beginning to cooperate to influence national politics. Moreover, in the 1996 election, 20 Asian American advocacy groups nationwide cooperated to encourage their community to go out and vote for the first time. For example, advocacy groups targeted young Asian Americans and ran television public service announcements for them ("The National Asian Pacific American Voter Registration Campaign") The 30-second "Voice Your Vote" commercial featured 15 young Asian American celebrities, such as an Olympic skater Kristi Yamaguchi and a comedian Margaret Cho to mobilize "yuppies" (young Asian professionals) and Asian American college students (Kang 1996, 3).

Although the overall influence of the movement is not clear, this attempt produced some favorable results for Asian Americans, especially in the Pacific States. One indication is the grass roots support for Gary Locke in Washington State in the 1996 election. He was the first Asian American governor in the mainland of the United States (Japanese American George Ariyoshi was the governor of Hawaii from 1973 to 1986, and Piyush "Bobby" Jindal will be the second Asian American governor on the

mainland U.S.A.).

Moreover, Gary Locke's victory appears not to have relied on the Asian vote. Asian Americans represent just 4 percent of the electorate in Washington State; nonetheless, Locke won by 19 percentage points over his opponent, Craswell, a conservative identified with the right-wing Christian Coalition. During the campaign he stressed education issues and attempted to appeal broadly to the public, rather than targeting minorities. Locke has reached out more wider than the Asian community in Washington State and attempted to appeal politically liberal whites and blacks. In his victory speech Locke stated: "I was elected to serve all the people of the state" (*Northwest Nikkei*, November 15, 1996). Bert Eljera(1996), a writer of a magazine, *Asianweek*<sup>8</sup> describes the significance of Locke's victory:

Gary Locke's dramatic victory in the governor's race in Washington State has made the 1996 election a historic one for Asian Pacific Americans. His landslide win over a conservative Republican was a breakthrough for an Asian American candidate, and has provided a road map for other APA [Asian and Pacific Americans] aspirants for high public office to follow. (12).

The Locke's victory has become a model for Asian American political aspirants who want to run for an office (Eljera 1996,14).

Another result of the movement for supporting Locke's campaign is the increase of first-time voters in major states. According to the exit poll of *The Los Angeles Times*, 33% of Asian Americans casting ballots in Southern California were first-time voters. The California Asians voted overwhelmingly against an anti-affirmative action measure Proposition 209 (November 25, 1996.B4). Also in New York, the number of first-time Asian American voters in the 1996 election amounted to 18% of all Asian voters. Among them, 79% were naturalized within the past two years (Cheng 1996, A7). According to the organizer of the National Asian Pacific American Voter Registration Campaign, at least 75,000 new Asian American voters have registered as a result of the national drive (Kang 1996, 3)

The fact that the Asian's participation movement has improved was partly influenced by national and regional congressional agenda since the 1990s.

For example in the 104th Congress, which started immediately after the Gingrich Revolution, welfare reform (restricting legal immigrants from receiving welfare benefits) and immigration legislation (reducing the number of legal immigrants, English as the official language) that adversely affect many Asians. In California, the Proposition 209 attempted to end affirmative action.

According to the Los Angeles Times, Stewart Kwoh, president of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California pointed out that recent negative publicity about foreign Asian contributions to the Clinton campaign may strengthen the community. Kwoh states: "The flap over the few political donations, while important, masks the larger story, which is the upsurge in political activity in the Asian Pacific American communities" (Kang 1996 5).

Although the number of registered voters is limited, the high voting rate among registered voters would suggest that Asian American have potential political clout as a group. According to a UCLA study, Asians have the highest voting rate among registered voters. In the 1994 election, 76% of all Asian American registered voters went to the polls, compared to 73% of whites, 64% of Latinos and 63% of blacks (Garcia 1996, 2).

## **VI. Conclusion**

Collectively, Asian Americans have attained very high levels of education and economic affluence. Contrary to political behavior theories, Asian Americans have the lowest level of political participation of any ethnic community, making up only a few percentage points of the overall electorate. Asian Americans are the least politically represented among any major ethnic groups.

That paradox results from several interrelated factors. Part of the explanation may lie in the fact that the motives for economic well-being some immigrants have for coming to the United States, as well as their home-country experiences, actually work against getting involved politically.

Although the paradox still persists, Asian Americans' political participation has been gradually improving. As their population grows, Asian Americans' political power appears to be rapidly increasing in both

local and national levels. Unfavorable political agendas toward Asian Americans, such as anti-immigration and anti-affirmative actions, have urged them to become involved politically. Also, advocacy groups' the get-out-to-the-vote movement affects their turnout. These trends are an indication of the growing political influence of the Asian American community.

### Notes

- 1 Kang, 1996
- 2 The Philippine was a territory of the United States between 1899 and 1946.
- 3 Lopes and Espiritu define panethnicity is : "the development of bringing organizations and solidarities among subgroups of ethnic collectivities that are often seen as homogeneous by outsiders" (195).
- 4 The data by the UCLA Pacific American Voters Project are collected among registered voters and do not include the number those who unregistered (Nakanishi 1991, 45). Unregistered Asians are likely to those with lower education and income levels with the Asian community (Espiritu 1992, 57), and they appear to be more likely to support Democratic party because of the party's progressive agendas.
- 5 <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/stats/US/P/00/epolls.0.html>
- 6 Asian-Pacific Island members of the 105th Congress (both Senate and the House) were: Daniel Inouye (Sen. D-Hawaii, Japanese), Daniel Akaka (Sen.D-Hawaii, Native Hawaiian), Robert Matsui (Rep. D-California, Japanese), Jay Kim (Rep. R-California, Korean), Patsy Mink (Rep. D-Hawaii, Japanese). Robert Underwood (non-voting delegates. D-Guam, Chamorro), and Eni Faleomavaega (non-voting delegates. D-American Samoa, Samoan). If the two non-voting delegates are omitted, the Asian American representatives amount to only 0.9% of the all federal representatives.
- 7 Seven Asian American representatives, all were Democrats, formed the CAPAC in 1994. They were: Inouye, Akaka, Matsui, Mineta, Mink, Underwood, and Faleomavaega.
- 8 According to the *Asianweek*, Oct. 5, 1997, the magazine has several unique features to unite Asian American as a group. The magazine is "the only English-language, pan-ethnic national newsweekly"; 2) it "aggressively advocates a more active role in the political process" of Asian American; 3) it "helps to define the priorities of the national Asian American community and create a stronger political voice among all Asian Americans.

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## アジア系アメリカ人の政治参加と代議制の現状 ——「政治的逆接」を超えて

前 嶋 和 弘

アジア系アメリカ人の政治参加と代議制の現状を分析するのが本稿の目的である。1965年移民法改正をきっかけにして、アジア系アメリカ人の人口は急速に増加しつつある。アジア系アメリカ人は、他の人種マイノリティ集団と比べ、比較的裕福であり、教育レベルも高いため、「経済的状况、あるいは教育レベルと投票率との間には高い正の相関関係がある」とするこれまでの様々な研究に従うと、アジア系の投票率は他の人種マイノリティ集団に比べて、高いはずである。しかし、実際はアジア系の投票率は比較的低い状況にある。

これには様々な理由がある。例えば、アジア系には移民が多く含まれており、言葉の問題もあるほか、アメリカの政治制度に対する知識が十分とは言えず、投票についての政治的有効性を見出せない状況にある。アジア系の中のエスニシティ間の差も大きく、特に難民として入国したカンボジア系の場合などにこの傾向は強い。

また、一般的に権威に比較的従順であるというアジア系の性格も関係しているという見方もある。アジア系の場合、十分に民主的とはいえないような出身国からの移民も多く、政治参加そのものに対する知識が十分とはいえない。さらに、アジア系は勤勉であるといわれており、平日を投票日としているアメリカでは、仕事を休んでまで投票をしないケースも少なくない。

一方で、90年代後半からアジア系の投票促進 (get-to-the-vote) 運動も盛んになっている。これは連邦議会や一部の州レベルで主にアジア系を対象とする二カ国語教育政策への反発や、アフーマティブ・アクション (積極的差別是正措置) の制限などが目立ってきたため、これに危機感を感じてアジア系が団結し始めていることに関連している。

アジア系の団結はアジア系の代議制にも影響している。アジア系の議員については、アジア系の人口が集中しているカリフォルニアやハワイ両州などの地域にこれまで限られてきたが、アジア系アメリカ人が多いとはいえない州についても変化が生まれている。特筆できるのが1996年にワシントン州の知事に当選したゲーリー・ロックの選挙戦である。この選挙ではアジア系アメリカ人が団結して1人の候補を応援した。また、この選挙では、アジア系以外のリベラル層にも幅広い支援を取り付けて成功したこともあり、今後のアジア系のや他のマイノリティ集団の選挙活動のモデルになるとみられている。