

POLITICAL BEHAVIOR/PARTICIPATION

Demythicalizing the Asian-American Campaign Contributor

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However one would like to portray or interpret the 1996 campaign finance scandals, there is no dispute that Asian Americans were clearly central figures. And although the public is rarely interested in the role of Asian Americans in American politics, in this instance, this group of contributors attracted considerable attention from the media. This attention, albeit negative, cast the connection between Asian Americans and campaign finance into the limelight, highlighting for average Americans what political activists have been claiming for some years, that Asian Americans have become major-league contributors. Indeed, because of the voluminous media attention, we believe that we know something about the behavior of this group despite the lack of scholarly research. There is now a fairly large received wisdom about Asian Americans and campaign finance. For instance, it is now widely believed that Asian Americans are unique political animals because they combine general political apathy with generous campaign giving. Moreover, their contributions are believed to be significant and disproportionately large in relation to the size of their population. Indeed, while Asian Americans have been arriving in droves only since 1965, some now claim that Asian Americans have, in this short time span, become disproportion-

ately influential with respect to financial campaign contributions.¹ The broad understanding is that Asian Americans favor activism not on the front lines, but from the sidelines. As Conservative Ron Unz pithily puts it, Asians are on the verge of becoming “Republican Jews” since Americans of Asian descent have deep pockets, “without the liberal guilt.”²

Moreover, this insider’s conventional wisdom, that Asian Americans cannot be expected to turn out to vote in large numbers, but that they can be induced to make large campaign contributions, is certainly not lost on politicians and fundraisers.³ The late Robert Matsui (D–CA), former Democratic National Committee (DNC) treasurer, said that “[i]n 1976 there was one Asian at the Democratic National Committee who worked the [Asian-American] community. In a few weeks, he had a million dollars.”⁴ The clout and dollar amounts have only risen since the 1970s. In 1996, the DNC collected a record-breaking \$5 million from John Huang’s efforts. Though over \$1 million was eventually returned to donors in an attempt to correct ethical lapses,⁵ the dollar amounts are noteworthy, nonetheless. The Republicans, as well, have recognized the large potential source of funds. After Matt Fong introduced Bob Dole at a rally of ethnic supporters in California, Roy Wong, the Asian-American get-out-the-vote director concluded “this is the first time the Asian community has been reached out to so aggressively.”⁶ Clearly, both parties have come to view Asian ethnic communities as a rich source of financial support, still largely untapped. Despite the recent immigrant status of Asian Americans, party leaders believe that “the economic success of many Asian immigrants should soon make them a major source of politi-

¹ See, e.g., William Wong, “Asian Americans Shake Off Stereotypes, Increase Clout as Political Activism Grows,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1988; Carole J. Uhlner, Bruce E. Cain, and D. Roderick Kiewiet, “Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s,” *Political Behavior* 11 (1989): 195–221; Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Alethea Yip, “A Taste of Political Power: APAs Enjoy Increasing Political Clout,” *AsianWeek*, August 9–15, 1996; Pei-te Lien, *The Political Participation of Asian Americans* (New York: Garland; Nakanishi, 1997), Don Nakanishi, “When Numbers Do Not Add Up: Asian Pacific Americans and California Politics,” in *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California, Volume 2*, ed. Michael B. Preston, Bruce E. Cain, and Sandra Bass (Berkeley: IGS Press, 1997).

² Ron Unz, “Why National Review is wrong: Value added” *National Review* 46, 21 (November 7, 1994): 56–58.

³ Peter Kwong and JoAnn Lum, “A Silent Minority Tests Its Clout,” *The Nation*, (January 16, 1988): 50–52; Judy Tachibana, “California’s Asians: Power from a Growing Population,” *California Journal* (November 1986): 535–43.

⁴ Thomas Massey, “The Wrong Way to Court Ethnic.” *The Washington Monthly*, May 1986, 21–26.

⁵ Alan C. Miller, “Democrats give back more disputed money,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 23, 1996.

⁶ Sam Chu Lin, “Optimism on Both Sides: Campaigns Look to APAs as Swing Votes in 10 States,” *AsianWeek*, October 11, 1996.

cal funding.”⁷ Candidates are starting to work San Francisco’s Chinatown the way they have long worked Miami’s Jewish donor circuit. Fred Fujiota, president of the Japanese-American Democratic Club of San Francisco told the *San Francisco Chronicle* that he gets “approached by everybody from all over the country. They want an introduction to the club. They send appeals for money.” In 1990, a columnist for *AsianWeek* wryly observed, “members of the Chinatown and greater Asian-American communities don’t need a calendar to see that there are some elections coming. They can just tell by the huge volume of mail inviting them to candidates’ fundraisers.”⁸

Despite the emerging folklore and obvious potential impact on American politics, there has not yet been a systematic study of financial contributions to political campaigns by Asian Americans.⁹ What is the exact pattern of Asian-American campaign contributions? To whose campaigns are they contributing money? Why do they contribute? Do they contribute money in order to influence politicians? Are they successful in pushing their favorite policy issues? Or, are they merely symbolic contributors—that is, do they contribute only to other Asian candidates as a gesture of ethnic pride or solidarity? Instead of basing our knowledge in scholarly work, our impressions of Asian-American contributions are shaped largely by fast and loose commentary glibly put forth and then recirculated amongst politicians, activists, pundits, and journalists. Beyond the many casual statements lacking hard evidence, we know little about the patterns of Asian-American campaign contributions. Perhaps part of the problem is that there is a mistaken notion that the data are not available. Espiritu states that “Although comprehensive data are not available, Asian Americans are believed to be the second most generous political donors after Jewish Americans.”¹⁰ However, the claim that comprehensive data are not available is plainly mistaken. Much of the relevant data exist in public archives. It is simply the sheer volume and structure of the data that make it difficult, but not impossible, to parse manageably. Though it is cumbersome to rake through years of campaign contribution records documenting millions of contributors and contributions, this task is essential to establishing an understanding of Asian-American political participation in this realm.¹¹ Our un-

⁷ Ron Unz, “Why National Review is wrong: Value added” *National Review* 46, 21 (November 7, 1994): 56–58.

⁸ Grace Siao, “Feinstein Meets with 40 LA Asian Leaders,” *AsianWeek*, February 23, 1990.

⁹ Some cursory studies have been conducted. Fugita and O’Brien (1991, 151–52) commented on Japanese-American contributions on the basis of a survey. Espiritu examined the 1985 campaign contributions of Michael Woo and the 1987 campaign contributions of Warren Furutani, candidates in Los Angeles city elections. Tachibana reports on the funding of a few candidates by Asian-American donors.

¹⁰ Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

¹¹ The full collection of FEC individual contribution reports is very large. There were 341,237 records in 1980, 168,383 in 1982, 260,581 in 1984, 274,635 in 1986, 436,294 in 1988, 530,328 in 1990, 888,224 in 1992, 838,212 in 1994, 1,229,605 in 1996,

derstanding in this area should not be confined to anecdotal evidence when the hard facts are accessible.¹²

This chapter sets out to subject a growing consensus about Asian-American political behavior to empirical tests. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate that the common understanding of Asian-American campaign contributors is largely a myth, perpetuated by journalists and pundits. I proceed by first describing the Federal Election Commission (FEC) data and then providing an overview of the data extraction process. Second, I argue that Asian-American contributors to federal campaigns are primarily symbolic contributors, i.e., their main objective is not to gain influence from members of Congress but to contribute to campaigns in a more symbolic manner. Third, I note the surprisingly strong and unexpected patterns that are evident from the data to support the claim that many of the contributions from Asian Americans are symbolic in nature. Lastly, I expound on the implications of these results on our overall understanding of the dynamics behind campaign contributing.

and 1,005,184 in 1998. Overall, then, there are about 6 million records to parse for these 10 election cycles.

¹² Even surveys, often the best sources of individual-level data, seem to be of limited usefulness, since they conflict markedly in their accounts of campaign contribution levels. For instance, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) examined data from the National Election Studies (1952–1990). In this time period, they report, the percentage of people who contributed to campaigns peaked in 1960 at 11.6%. The average for the time period was 8.84%. Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993), 61. However, other surveys report much higher numbers. For instance, in a 1993 *Los Angeles Times* Poll of six southern California counties, 12% of Asian Americans, 21% of whites, 9% of blacks, and 5% of Latinos reported that they had contributed to a campaign. Pei-te Lien, *The Political Participation of Asian Americans* (New York: Garland, 1997). These numbers are significantly higher than those reported in the NES data set. Moreover, a 1984 statewide California poll detected even higher numbers. In that poll, 18% of Asians, 20% of whites, 17% of blacks, and 12% of Latinos reported that they had contributed to a campaign. Carole J. Uhlaner, Bruce E. Cain, and D. Roderick Kiewiet, “Political Participation of Ethnic Minorities in the 1980s,” *Political Behavior* 11(1989): 195–221. Within the Asian-American subcategory, 15% of the Chinese, 26% of the Japanese, 16% of the Koreans, 14% of the Filipinos, and 18% of other Asians reported that they had donated money. Lastly, a 1996 Texas statewide poll reported that 19% had contributed to a campaign. The breakdown for ethnicities has 15% of Asians, 17% of Latinos, 20% of blacks, and 24% of whites contributing money to campaigns. The reports from different surveys are clearly discrepant. More to the point, the inconsistency in numbers across polls is strikingly irreconcilable. Further, all of the polls report numbers that seem to be too high to be plausible given what we can glean from objective records.

The Federal Election Commission Data

Instead of relying on questionable surveys, pundits' accounts, or journalistic news stories to lend insight into the questions of campaign finance, a more reliable method is to examine the actual contribution records. The best source of objective data to answer these questions comes from the Federal Election Commission (FEC). Candidates running for federal office are required to file records of their contributions with the FEC. A downside of the FEC data is that candidates must report only the names of individual contributors who contribute more than \$200.¹³ Since this clearly excludes some contributors, this bias against the small contributors should be noted. In addition, the FEC began collecting data only during the 1978 elections, following the 1974 amendments to the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA).¹⁴ Hence, we are unable to undertake a long historical study of campaign finance. Fortunately, this time period excludes very few Asian-American candidates since, outside of Hawaii, few Asians ever sought office until quite recently.¹⁵

The FEC data are limited in scope. For each donation, in addition to the amount, date, and recipient of the donation, we know, at most, the name, address, and occupation of the donor. Given the lack of personal information about each donor, it is difficult, then, to relate much of the campaign contribution dynamic to

¹³ While campaigns are not required to report contributions under \$200, many campaigns do report these contributions. Hence, many of these contributions are included in the data set.

¹⁴ The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was originally passed by Congress in 1971. In response to revelations from Watergate that large amounts of campaign funds were being "laundered" through secret foreign bank accounts, Congress passed amendments to FECA in 1974. FECA, the most sweeping campaign reform legislation in U.S. history, required federal candidates to disclose fully their contributions and expenditures, established campaign expenditure limits, and set limits on contributions.

¹⁵ There are a few exceptions, including two victorious candidates. From 1956 to 1960, Democrat Dalip Singh Saund won three primary elections (one uncontested) and three general elections in California's 29th district. Following redistricting, he won the primary but lost the general for the 38th district in 1962. In 1976, S. I. Hayakawa won a four-way Republican primary and then triumphed in the general election as well to represent California in the U.S. Senate. In 1906, Benjamin Chow ran as a Socialist candidate in Massachusetts's 1st district. He received only 3.87% of the vote. In 1950, Democrat Charles Komaiko lost the general election for the 12th district of Illinois. Kirpal Singh contested but lost Republican primaries for California's 2nd district in 1962 and 1964. In 1972, Benjamin Chiang and Richard Kau won Republican primaries in California's 2nd and 41st districts, respectively, but both lost their general election contests. Jesse Chiang lost the 1974 Republican Senate primary in Washington. In 1976, Melvin H. Takaki won the Republican primary but lost the general election in Colorado's 3rd district. That same year, Edward Aho won a few hundred votes in Michigan's 11th district, running as the Human Rights candidate. In 1978, Democrat Rajeshwar Kumar (a write-in candidate in the primary) lost Pennsylvania's 19th district in the general election to Republican William F. Goodling.

individual characteristics. Despite this unfortunate situation, an insight into how to utilize the FEC records is that one group—exactly one group—can be reasonably identified on the basis of name alone, Asian Americans.¹⁶ In this study, four different ethnic name dictionaries were used to identify Asian contributors, one each for the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese groups.¹⁷ Each contributor's name was checked against these dictionaries for a match to one of the Asian ethnic names. This amounts to checking each of the 6,085 names in the dictionaries against each of 6 million contributions. Hence, to create a data set for examining Asian-American contributions, a minimum of 36.5 billion comparisons need to be performed.¹⁸ The final data set includes only Asian-American contributors (over 60,000 contributions). This data set is difficult to cull, but rich indeed, and invaluable for researchers interested in Asian-American campaign finance behavior.

Motives behind Campaign Contributions

One especially interesting aspect of Asian-American campaign finance behavior is the dynamic behind the contributions. That is, why do Asian Americans contribute money? Are they trying to influence politicians in the manner that has

¹⁶ This procedure is more accurate than one might initially guess. For Koreans, for instance, Kim is by far the most common surname. Twenty-two percent of the Korean population has this surname. In addition, because Kim is a surname not found outside Korea, it is safe to assume that anyone with the surname is of Korean descent. It is followed by Yi (also Lee), which accounts for 15% of the population. Following Yi, are Pak (9%) and Choe or Choi (5%). Together, these four surnames account for about half of all Koreans. The next most common names are Chong, Kang, Cho, Yun, Chang, Im (also Lim), Shin, Han, O, So, Ryu, Kwon, Hwang, An, Song, and Hong. Each of these names accounts for about 1% of the Korean population. All together, these names account for about 80% of the population.

Intermarriage obviously produces some complications in this scheme. However, people with clearly ethnic first names can be identified through name matching.

¹⁷ The Chinese dictionary includes 521 names. The Japanese dictionary includes 4,818 names. The Korean dictionary includes 334 names. The Vietnamese dictionary includes 63 names.

This is not an exhaustive list of the Asian nationalities. Other groups were left out for practical, not substantive, reasons. For instance, the Filipino group is a very substantial component of the Asian-American group. However, their surnames closely resemble Latino surnames, so it is virtually impossible to obtain an accurate count of Filipino contributors. Hence, candidates such as Gloria Ochoa, who ran in the 22nd House District in California in 1992, and A. R. "Cecy" Groom, a Democrat who ran for the 39th House District in California in 1998, are left out of the analysis.

¹⁸ Only a decade ago, a task this large would have been prohibitively complicated for readily available computers. However, the revolution in the PC market now makes seemingly gargantuan sorting and comparing tasks feasible with typical desktop computer.

been popularized as a result of the campaign finance scandals? Or is there little evidence of such motivations? Although the campaign finance scandals focused primarily on figures such as John Huang and Charlie Trie and their connection to party organizations such as the DNC, their behavior and the motivations that underlie their behavior have clearly been transferred to the individual Asian-American contributor. Because the media portrayed their actions as politically strategic, all Asian Americans are now viewed as behaving in the same light. Here, I do not explore Asian-American contributions to party organizations or to Political Action Committees (PACs). Instead, my analysis is limited to individual contributions to federal elections. The implication from the scandals is that the strategic influence-buying behavior is ubiquitous across contribution types.

In general, there seem to be two main reasons why people contribute to campaigns. They may do so symbolically, that is, they support a candidate they admire, often because the candidate is in some way similar to themselves. This type of contribution is not strategic in the sense that the potential of the candidate to win the election is not a primary concern and is not heavily weighted in the decision to contribute. Contributions to ethnic candidates could certainly fit this description. The other motivation behind campaign contribution is strategic and falls under the rubric of an investment. These contributions are given with the expectation of some future benefit. This type of giving is strategic in that the contribution is directed toward one's own interest, and so relies on an assessment of a "reasonable" chance of "paying off." The anticipated return may be as direct as a personal kickback or as indirect as expecting the representative to cast roll call votes of which one approves. Certainly, the idea that cash contributions might be used as a vehicle for peddling influence is obvious from the various limitations that have been suggested in the provisions to FECA and the concerns raised in *Buckley v. Valeo*.¹⁹

The origins of a contributor's actions are, of course, known only to himself. However, some insight into the psyche of the contributor can be gained by observing the pattern of the contributions. For instance, if Asians give predominantly to Asian-American candidates, then this would provide evidence of symbolic giving. Moreover, this evidence would be bolstered if we further found that many of these Asian-American candidates were never serious contenders. It is hard to argue that

¹⁹ Indeed, Congress has attempted on several occasions to curb the disproportionate influence of the wealthy. In 1907, a federal law was passed to prohibit direct contributions from corporations. In 1925, after the Teapot Dome scandal over cabinet-level bribery, the Corrupt Practices Act was passed. The act required disclosure of campaign funds. In 1943, labor unions were prohibited from direct contributions. In 1971, FECA was passed. In 1974, after the Watergate scandal, FECA was amended. In 1976, the Supreme Court in *Buckley v. Valeo* overturned key aspects of FECA because they were violations of First Amendment free speech rights. Congress then rewrote FECA to preserve most of its features. Many individuals, however, still attempt to bypass these limitations as is evident from the savings and loan scandal in the 1990s and the Clinton/Gore campaign finance scandals.

Asians are being strategic if they are donating predominantly to Asian-American candidates who have little chance of attaining political office. If, however, contributors primarily donated to their own representative or to candidates who seem likely to be able to return favors to them, then this would appear to be strategic investment.

There are two questions at hand: whom do Asian Americans contribute to? And, why do they contribute? While we cannot determine, with certainty, why Asian Americans contribute, whom they contribute to provides insight into their motives. Ascertaining who Asian Americans financially support is a large but feasible task.

Assessments of Campaign Contributions

To assess Asian campaign contributors, I first examine the types of contribution received by two sets of candidates. The first set is comprised of candidates who are Asian American, those who, if elected, would provide descriptive representation. Most people, politicians included, probably could not name more than a handful of Asian-American candidates. This is not surprising since the majority of Asian-American candidates for the U.S. Congress have been low-profile candidates who lost their campaign bids and thus never served in Congress. Few Asian Americans have won House elections, or even garnered a significant proportion of the vote.²⁰ The second set of candidates is comprised of representatives whose districts have relatively high proportions of Asian Americans, those who are in a position to provide substantive representation. For present purposes, the threshold for “relatively high” is more than 10% of the constituency being Asian American. Across the country, there are 23 of these congressional districts.²¹ These representatives are the most likely to provide substantive representation for Asian Americans. Because of their unique position, they are also likely to receive campaign contributions from Asian Americans. We are comparing, then, the contributions to the two groups that are most likely to provide either substantive or descriptive representation to the Asian-American community.

²⁰ Appendix A lists some of the most low-profile Asian American campaigns. Table A-1 lists Asian American candidates who ran for federal office, but did not report or did not receive any campaign contributions. Table A-2 lists Asian-American candidates who received donations, but never actually mounted a candidacy.

²¹ Most of these districts are in California, though there are three in New York, one in Illinois, and one in Washington. Twenty-two of these districts are listed in Table 3. Robert Matsui’s district is 13% Asian but is not listed in Table 3, since he is covered Table 2. There are three additional districts that are approximately 10% Asian (districts 27, 37, and 41 in California). Thanks to Okiyoshi Takeda for pointing out this distinction. See also Takeda (n.d.).

Certainly, Asian Americans have reasons to contribute to both sets of candidates, though the reasoning differs. One set offers an outlet for symbolic contributing while the other offers an outlet for strategic contributing. In addition, both sets of candidates have justifications for courting Asian-American contributors, though their modal appeals differ. One set purports to provide substantive representation while the other set would provide descriptive representation. A few can offer to provide both types of representation. In general, symbolic contributions are given to achieve descriptive representation while strategic contributions are intended to lead to substantive representation. These two styles are not mutually exclusive since Asian Americans may contribute to a viable Asian-American candidate running for office in their own district. Given that all of these candidates have incentives to court Asian-American contributors, I proceed now to detail whose appeals are heeded with the most enthusiasm.

Asian-American Candidates

Tables 1 and 2 summarize campaign contributions for the first set of candidates described, Asian Americans who ran for federal office in the 20-year period 1978–1998. Table 1 is divided into two parts, Table 1A and Table 1B. Both Table 1A and 1B provide the same information, but Table 1A is a summary of campaign contributions given to Asian-American candidates who ran for office in California while Table 1B covers all other states except Hawaii.²² Table 2 is devoted to the careers of Robert Matsui (D–CA–5) and Norman Mineta (D–CA–15) since they had the two longest-standing careers of any (non-Hawaiian) Asian American in the House.

A brief look at Table 1 reveals several overwhelming characteristics of the campaigns of Asian-American candidates. First, Asian-American candidates generally do not run for office in districts with particularly high proportions of Asian constituents. It seems counter to initial expectations that of the districts where Asian Americans ran for office, the average percentage of the constituency that is Asian American would be relatively low (7.0% with a standard deviation of 5.0). There are certainly districts with much higher percentages of Asian Americans. California districts, for instance, top out at 28%. In another four districts, Asian Americans comprise over 20% of the constituency. While districts with high percentages of Asian Americans do attract some Asian-American candidates, they do not attract many. These districts are all represented by non-Asian representatives. This pattern contrasts sharply with the patterns found among blacks and Latinos.

²² For an analysis of the Hawaii data, see Cho (2001). Since Hawaii is a majority-Asian environment, it is clearly a special case, and I have excluded all Hawaiian candidates from the analysis in this chapter.

Table 1A. Individual Campaign Contributions to Asian-American Congressional Candidates in California, 1978–1998

Candidate	Race	Year	Contributions				Primary Election		General Election		
			N	Amount	Asian	Ethnic	Ethnicity	Vote %	Major Opponent	Vote %	Major Opponent
Rose Ochi (D)*	CA–30	1982	25	\$17,500	84%	67%	Japanese	14%	Matthew Martinez		
Dan Wong (R)*	CA–34	1982	9	\$5,100	100%	100%	Chinese	46%	Paul R. Jackson		
Lily Chen (D)*	CA–30	1988	137	\$112,548	96%	98%	Chinese	26%	Matthew Martinez		
Sang Korman (R)*	CA–21	1988	121	\$99,000	99%	100%	Korean	14%	Elton Gallegly		
—*	CA–21	1990	281	\$172,800	99%	99%	Korean	32%	Elton Gallegly		
—*	CA–24	1992	112	\$75,600	96%	100%	Korean	24%	Tom McClintock		
—*	CA–24	1994	68	\$46,800	96%	100%	Korean	16%	Rich Sybert		
Jay Kim (R)+	CA–41	1992	644	\$319,590	85%	85%	Korean	30%	Charles Bader	60%	Bob Baker
—+	CA–41	1994	740	\$374,258	85%	85%	Korean	41%	Valerie Romero	62%	Ed Tessier
—+	CA–41	1996	635	\$361,340	81%	93%	Korean	58%	Bob Kerns	58%	Richard Waldron
—*	CA–41	1998	351	\$235,182	89%	94%	Korean	26%	Gary Miller		
Albert C. Lum (D)*	CA–30	1992	263	\$172,588	86%	96%	Chinese	16%	Xavier Becerra		
Elsa Cheung (R)**	CA–8	1994	13	\$5,000	92%	85%	Chinese	100%	Uncontested	18%	Nancy Pelosi
Doris Liu (R)*	CA–15	1994	3	\$1,750	33%	33%	Chinese	34%	Robert Wick		
Peter Mathews (D)*	CA–38	1992	30	\$14,771	83%	100%	Indian	26%	Evan A. Braude		
—**	CA–38	1994	542	\$270,219	85%	100%	Indian	100%	Uncontested	37%	Steve Horn
—*	CA–38	1996	80	\$34,931	66%	100%	Indian	49%	Rick Zbur		
—**	CA–38	1998	156	\$67,969	88%	100%	Indian	100%	Uncontested	44%	Steve Horn
Mark Takano (D)+	CA–43	1992	137	\$72,926	65%	82%	Japanese	29%	Raven L. Workman	46%	Ken Calvert
—+	CA–43	1994	262	\$120,405	53%	37%	Japanese	70%	Raven L. Workman	38%	Ken Calvert
Kyo Paul Jhin (R)*	CA–24	1996	60	\$31,850	93%	89%	Korean	22%	Rich Sybert		
Matt Fong (R)+	CA Senate	1998	11,171	\$7,995,453	27%	89%	Chinese	45%	Darrell Issa	43%	Barbara Boxer

Reported Asian Contribution Percentages are Percentages of Total N Contributions. Reported Ethnic Contribution Percentages are Percentages of the Total Asian N Contributions. Federal election data compiled from FEC reports. Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (1980–1998), *America Votes* (1980–1998), and Congressional Directories. Reported opponent in primary elections reflects the candidate who received the most votes. Primary Vote Percentages reflect the percentage of the candidate’s “own-party” vote.

* Candidate lost his/her primary election.

**Candidate was unopposed in his/her party’s primary.

+ Candidate ran in both a contested primary election and a contested general election.

Table 1B. Individual Campaign Contributions to Asian-American Candidates outside California, 1978–1998

Candidate	Race	Year	Contributions				Primary Election		General Election		
			N	Amount	Asian	Ethnic	Ethnicity	Vote %	Major Opponent	Vote %	Major Opponent
Jesse Chiang (I)***	WA Sen.	1982	1	\$500	0%	0%	Chinese			1%	Henry Jackson
Soleng Tom (D)*	AZ-5	1982	4	\$3,000	100%	100%	Chinese	17%	Jim McNulty		
Tom Shimizu (D)+	UT-2	1986	99	\$72,570	11%	91%	Japanese	62%	Douglas Bischoff	44%	Wayne Owens
S. B. Woo (D)+	DE Sen.	1988	1287	\$1,063,158	93%	93%	Chinese	74%	Ernest Ercole	43%	Michael Castle
+	DE-AL	1992	994	\$485,366	93%	92%	Chinese	50%	Samuel Beard	38%	William Roth, Jr.
D. Bhagwandin (R-C)**	NY-6	1992	39	\$16,375	85%	100%	Indian	10%	Uncontested	19%	Floyd Flake
Jay W. Khim (R)*	VA-11	1992	40	\$23,150	60%	96%	Korean	16%	Henry Butler		
Glenn Sugiyama (D)*	IL-9	1992	50	\$28,851	28%	79%	Japanese	23%	Sidney Yates		
Esther Lee Yao (R)*	TX-25	1992	206	\$108,732	91%	99%	Chinese	45%	Dolly Madison McKenna		
Neil Dhillon (D)*	MD-6	1994	496	\$263,038	86%	99%	Indian	18%	Paul Muldowney		
Binh Ly (R)*	FL-19	1994	31	\$20,860	62%	89%	Vietnamese	40%	Peter Tsakanikas		
Puall Shin (D)*	WA-2	1994	193	\$125,985	77%	97%	Korean	18%	Harriet A. Spanel		
Ram Uppuluri (D)*±	TN-3	1994	261	\$94,771	77%	74%	Indian	20%	Randy Button		
Nimi McConigley (R)*	WY Sen.	1996	79	\$42,750	72%	100%	Indian	7%	Michael Enzi		
Yash Aggarwal (D-L)+	NY-20	1996	184	\$79,034	90%	100%	Indian	67%	Ira Goodman	38%	Benjamin Gilman
Cheryl Lau (R)*	NV-2	1996	168	\$85,805	83%	96%	Chinese	24%	Jim Gibbons		
J. Misir (R-C-I-FR)**	NY-6	1996	12	\$5,950	83%	100%	Indian	100%	Uncontested	15%	Floyd Flake
Paul Park (D)*	IL Sen.	1996	53	\$20,400	98%	100%	Korean	1%	Richard Durbin		
John Lim (R)+	OR Sen.	1998	428	\$302,406	93%	91%	Korean	63%	John M. Fitzpatrick	34%	Ron Wyden
R. Nag. Nagarajan (D)*	IN-6	1996	18	\$6,676	100%	100%	Indian	19%	C. J. Dillard-Trammell		
*	IN-6	1998	1	\$500	100%	100%	Indian	24%	Bob Kern		
David Wu (D)+	OR-1	1998	1388	\$672,293	35%	92%	Chinese	52%	Linda Peters	55%	Molly Bordonaro

Reported Asian Contribution Percentages are Percentages of Total N Contributions. Reported Ethnic Contribution Percentages are Percentages of the Total Asian N Contributions. Federal election data compiled from FEC reports. Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (1980–1998), *America Votes* (1980–1998), and Congressional Directories. Reported opponent in primary elections reflects the candidate who received the most votes. Primary Vote Percentages reflect the percentage of the candidate’s “own-party” vote.

* Candidate lost primary election. ** Unopposed primary. *** No primary. + Contested primary and contested general election.

±Ram Uppuluri is Japanese and Asian Indian, but received little support from the Japanese community. See Shankar and Srikanth (1998).

Table 2. Campaign Contributions for Robert Matsui and Norman Mineta

Candidate	Race	Year	Contributions				Primary Election		General Election	
			N	Amount	Asian	Japanese	Vote %	Major Opponent	Vote %	Major Opponent
Norman Mineta (D)*	CA-13	1978	178	\$43,245	30%	94%	100%	Uncontested	59%	Dan O'Keefe
---	CA-13	1980	109	\$23,875	35%	97%	100%	Uncontested	59%	W. E. (Ted) Gagne
---	CA-13	1982	40	\$27,746	28%	73%	100%	Uncontested	66%	Tom Kelly
---	CA-13	1984	50	\$33,220	24%	58%	100%	Uncontested	65%	John D. Jack Williams
---	CA-13	1986	72	\$43,450	33%	92%	100%	Uncontested	70%	Bob Nash
---	CA-13	1988	120	\$74,965	33%	72%	100%	Uncontested	67%	Luke Sommer
---	CA-13	1990	346	\$151,193	31%	81%	100%	Uncontested	58%	David E. Smith
---	CA-15	1992	575	\$266,401	31%	61%	100%	Uncontested	64%	Robert Wick
---	CA-15	1994	603	\$279,023	25%	60%	100%	Uncontested	60%	Robert Wick
Robert Matsui (D)	CA-3	1978	563	\$157,561	36%	76%	36%	Eugene T. Gualco	53%	Sandy Smoley
---	CA-3	1980	54	\$26,875	35%	84%	89%	Ivaldo Lenci	71%	Joseph Murphy
---	CA-3	1982	54	\$33,546	15%	88%	100%	Uncontested	90%	Bruce A. Daniel
---	CA-3	1984	23	\$15,953	13%	100%	92%	Bill Watkins	100%	Uncontested
---	CA-3	1986	92	\$61,991	15%	86%	100%	Uncontested	76%	Lowell Landowski
---	CA-3	1988	212	\$135,743	16%	73%	100%	Uncontested	71%	Lowell Landowski
---	CA-3	1990	653	\$328,700	34%	80%	100%	Uncontested	60%	Lowell Landowski
---	CA-5	1992	186	\$88,300	20%	76%	100%	Uncontested	69%	Robert S. Dinsmore
---	CA-5	1994	283	\$146,539	20%	74%	100%	Uncontested	68%	Robert S. Dinsmore
---	CA-5	1996	254	\$136,000	26%	77%	100%	Uncontested	70%	Robert S. Dinsmore
---	CA-5	1998	167	\$76,700	10%	71%	100%	Uncontested	72%	Robert S. Dinsmore

Federal election data compiled from FEC reports. Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (1980–1998) and *America Votes* (1980–1998). Reported Asian Contribution Percentages are Percentages of the Total N Contributions. Reported Ethnic Contribution Percentages are Percentages of the Total Asian Contributions.

*First elected in 1974.

Black and Latino districts are overwhelmingly comprised of minority voters and nearly always elect a black or Latino representative.²³

Second, of the total number of contributions that Asian-American candidates receive, the percentage that comes from Asian-American contributors is very high. On average, Asian-American contributors account for 59.3% (with a standard deviation of 32.9) of the total number of contributions. This number is even higher (79.2%) with a smaller standard deviation (23.5) when the Japanese candidates' contributions are left out of the computation. For the Japanese candidates, the average drops to 27.2% with a standard deviation of 15.9%. Neither of these percentages is even remotely close to the much-lower percentage of Asian Americans that comprise the respective districts. On average, the difference in percentages of Asian-American contributors and Asian-American constituency is 52.4. Evidently, Asian-American candidates are able to garner support from many Asian Americans outside of their own districts. Consider, for example, S. B. Woo's contributions. He received over 93% of his contributions from Asian Americans while Asian Americans comprise only 1.4% of his constituency.

The support that the broad Asian-American community provides for Asian-American candidates is further evidenced in the numbers of in-district contributions. "In-district" contributions are contributions that are given to campaigns in a contributor's own district. Of the Asian Americans who contributed to S. B. Woo's campaign, for instance, only 3.5% lived in his state. Indeed, on average, only 24.4% of the contributions that Asian candidates receive from Asian Americans are from their own constituents. Asian Americans are clearly willing and even happy to support Asian candidates regardless of whether the candidate will be their own representative or even a representative from their own state! This pattern is not evident among candidates of other ethnicities. As we can see from Table 3, candidates generally receive more money from their own constituency.²⁴

This broad support from the Asian-American community is broad only in the geographical sense. That is, while Asian Americans will cross districts, counties,

²³ Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson, eds., *Controversies in Minority Voting: The Voting Rights Act in Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992); David Lublin, *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

²⁴ In-district contributions are determined by examining the zip code of the contributor. This method is not entirely accurate since some contributors do not list their zip codes and none of the contributors lists the four-digit extension for their zip code. Since some congressional districts include only parts of some zip codes, not having the four-digit extension leaves one unable to determine if some contributors should be included in a congressional district that does not include that entire zip code. In these calculations, if a zip code was partially included in a certain district, the contribution was counted as an in-district contribution. This results in an overcounting. Hence, the percentage of contributions that have come from outside the district is a conservative estimate. Lastly, though some contributors did not list a zip code, the number of these was small and does not account for much error in the estimates.

and states to lend support to a fellow Asian-American candidate, they generally will not cross ethnicities. Indeed, Table 1 provides strong evidence against the notion of Asian-American pan-ethnicity. Though journalists and activists virtually always speak of “Asian-American politics” and an “Asian-American identity,” with regard to campaign finance, these concepts remain abstract and lack concrete and widespread evidence. Contributions to Asian-American candidates come predominantly from Asian Americans of the same ethnicity. To use S. B. Woo as an example again, note that over 92% of his “Asian-American donations” were specifically from Chinese Americans. Evidently, Asian-American candidates do not try or are not able to tap the campaign chests of the other Asian-American communities. On average, 84.6% of the Asian campaign contributions come from contributors of the same ethnicity.

Several contribution patterns have already emerged. The patterns for Asian-American candidates stand in stark contrast to the contributions that other candidates receive. Consider the numbers in Table 3 that summarize contributions to candidates who have represented areas with comparatively high concentrations of Asian Americans in the 1990s. The patterns that were so clear in Tables 1 and 2 are not evident in Table 3. They are not absent, but rather now appear in an intriguingly opposite manner. These non-Asian candidates receive less money from Asian Americans than one well-versed in journalistic accounts would have expected. The percentage of their funds received from Asian Americans is far less than the comparable Asian percentage of their constituencies. The sole exception to this rule is Representative Gary Ackerman (D–NY–5). He received over 18% of his donations from Asian Americans even though Asian Americans make up only 11% of his constituency. The average, however is 5.2% (4.6% without Ackerman) while the average percentage of the constituency that is Asian American is 16.3%. Contrary to initial expectations, then, Asian-American campaign donations do not figure prominently in “Asian-American districts.”

We have already seen from Tables 1 and 2 that Asian Americans do, as the pundits report, contribute significant amounts of money to political campaigns. Hence, lack of resources is not the problem. Nor is the problem a lack of efficacy. The pundits’ reports are misleading, however, in that while Asian Americans do have money and they do contribute, they do not contribute much to their *own* representatives. Instead, they choose disproportionately to fund Asian-American candidates of their own ethnicity running in other areas. They are not, as previous accounts imply, a source of funds for all candidates. Initial assessments seem to indicate that Asian Americans are less interested in establishing influential channels to their own legislators than they are in contributing symbolically. Apparently, the determining trait is not the district composition but the race of the candidate. The preliminary evidence is that Asian-American candidates are anomalies because the patterns of their contributions run counter to those expected from a “strategic contributor.”

Table 3. Campaign Contributions to Candidates Who Represent Areas with Comparatively High Concentrations of Asians, 1990s

Candidate	Race	State	Year	Total Contributions		Asian Contributions			In-District Contributions		% Asian in District
				N	Amount	N	Amount	Percent	% Total	% Asian	
Xavier Becerra (D)	House	CA-30	1992-1996	166	\$82,285	8	\$3,958	4.8%	10.99%	11.43%	21%
Tom Campbell (R)	House	CA-15	1996	2378	\$1,695,340	69	\$47,400	2.9%	10.54%	23.53%	11%
Ron Dellums (D)	House	CA-9	1992-1996	305	\$176,569	45	\$37,467	13.9%	27.17%	26.71%	16%
Robert Dorman (R)	House	CA-46	1992-1994	766	\$282,179	7	\$3,700	0.9%	3.11%	26.67%	12%
David Dreier (R)	House	CA-28	1992-1996	427	\$194,847	15	\$10,083	3.6%	30.27%	42.86%	13%
Anna Eshoo (D)	House	CA-14	1992-1996	548	\$278,388	20	\$7,795	3.8%	54.18%	42.65%	12%
Bob Filner (D)	House	CA-50	1992-1996	621	\$293,053	11	\$5,267	1.7%	16.96%	19.92%	15%
Jane Harman (D)	House	CA-36	1992-1996	1104	\$594,197	15	\$9,083	1.3%	11.27%	18.58%	13%
Tom Lantos (D)	House	CA-12	1992-1996	155	\$78,337	7	\$4,950	4.1%	19.00%	42.06%	26%
Zoe Lofgren (D)	House	CA-16	1994-1996	381	\$202,492	29	\$14,495	7.1%	36.07%	53.29%	21%
Matthew Martinez (D)	House	CA-31	1992-1996	55	\$34,911	6	\$3,050	11.1%	24.73%	73.33%	23%
George Miller (D)	House	CA-7	1992-1996	167	\$93,439	2	\$617	1.1%	21.44%	22.22%	14%
Nancy Pelosi (D)	House	CA-8	1992-1996	346	\$223,417	22	\$12,867	6.3%	56.61%	76.30%	28%
Richard Pombo (R)	House	CA-11	1992-1996	554	\$228,643	14	\$4,475	2.4%	80.22%	83.99%	12%
Dana Rohrabacher (R)	House	CA-45	1992-1996	280	\$144,147	29	\$17,683	9.7%	28.53%	24.17%	11%
Ed Royce (R)	House	CA-39	1992-1996	489	\$197,203	46	\$17,174	9.2%	26.07%	21.56%	14%
Pete Stark (D)	House	CA-13	1992-1996	150	\$96,472	3	\$1,917	1.8%	1.17%	6.67%	19%
Sidney Yates (D)	House	IL-9	1992-1996	219	\$135,892	1	\$167	.13%	3.15%	0.00%	10%
Gary Ackerman (D)	House	NY-5	1992-1996	731	\$496,635	141	\$100,804	18.2%	42.65%	26.17%	11%
Thomas Manton (D)	House	NY-7	1992-1996	267	\$138,059	15	\$8,850	5.1%	20.41%	37.66%	11%
Nydia Velazquez (D)	House	NY-12	1992-1996	296	\$128,563	7	\$2,433	2.1%	10.20%	16.68%	19%
Jim McDermott (D)	House	WA-7	1992-1996	46	\$20,731	2	\$950	2.9%	41.28%	11.11%	11%

Federal election data compiled from FEC reports. Other data compiled from the *Almanac of American Politics* (1980–1998). Reported Asian Contributions Percentages are Percentages of the Total *N* Contributions. Numbers reflect a rounded, nonweighted average of the indicated time span.

Patterns among the Contributions

Thus far, we have examined only two types of candidacies, Asian-American candidates, and candidates for election in districts with a high percentage of Asian constituents. The following analysis includes all campaigns that received at least 25 contributions from Asian Americans. This set of campaigns is somewhat eclectic, but it is a good choice for examining the issues at hand, since including all congressional races in the data set is clearly not optimal, and excluding races where Asian contributors have given a sizeable number of contributions would be even odder. This is the set of races where Asian Americans contributed money, and my goal is to determine if there are characteristics that define the candidates that they chose to support. If there is some pattern of contributions among this set, it should give us an indication of where Asian Americans prefer to contribute.

In the search for patterns of contributions in this data, I examine two different but related aspects of donation rates. In particular, I am interested in campaigns that mobilize Asian Americans as well as campaigns in which Asians provided a high percentage of the funds and thus are arguably in an influential position. Mobilization and influence are defined by observing that campaigns that receive a large *number* of contributions (or dollars) from Asian Americans are clearly able to mobilize the Asian-American contributor, and campaigns that receive a large *percentage* of their funds from Asian Americans can be characterized as the campaigns where Asian Americans exert the greatest degree of influence. These two sets of campaigns need not be identical.

One pattern that is immediately evident is that serious candidates (those with a reasonable chance of running a victorious campaign) receive a lesser percentage of their funds from Asians. This tendency seems clearly unstrategic. Asian money flowed to low-profile, often less-than-serious and not hotly contested races. In this respect, Asian contributions seem to be primarily symbolic rather than successful strategic investments. There are few reasons, other than the symbolic ones, to fund these hopeless candidates. While Asians may not have known which candidates were the best investments, the presence of safe seats, incumbents, and low-quality challengers made them high information situations; the eventual victor of these races was not surprising.

If we compare Asian-American campaigns to the campaigns of candidates of different ethnicities, we note that the Asian-American campaigns receive the bulk of the Asian funds. This finding strikes at the foundation of journalists' and pundits' claims that Asian Americans are a source of funding for all. Instead, the evidence points to Asian groups behaving in a much more ethno-centric fashion. Although Asians do fund other candidates, their influence is greatest and most evident in Asian-American campaigns. The only exception appears when we examine the ethnicities separately. The Japanese support for Japanese-American candidates is not as strong or evident. Much of this effect can be attributed to the cases of Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui, congressional incumbents who were able to

procure funds from a wide array of sources. However, one should note that this effect is not a general incumbency effect, since there are several other Japanese candidates in the data set.

Lastly, when we examine only Asian-Americans candidates, other patterns emerge that lay further claim to the conjectures that have been offered. In particular, the proportion of funds received from Asian Americans *increases* as the seriousness of the candidate's bid *decreases*. "Hopeless" candidates receive the most funding (proportionally) from Asians while the most competitive candidates received the lowest proportion of their funds from Asians. Apparently, competitive candidates need additional funding and a broader base of support than the Asian-American community can provide. Moreover, part of the reason why they are competitive is because they are able to solicit money (and, one assumes, other support, including votes) from a broader base of voters. Hopeless candidates, on the other hand, are unable to find many sources of money. Strategic contributors are not willing to invest in a hopeless candidate, so the only source of funds for these losing, long-shot candidates is nonstrategic/symbolic contributors.

If we examine the dollar amounts, instead of the percentage of funds, the story is unchanged. Asian-American candidates mobilize the Asian contributor, with Japanese candidates again being the only serious exception. Some other, not very surprising, patterns are evident as well. Senate races garner more contributions, and candidates who lose in the primary bring in fewer contributions than candidates who go on to run in the general election.

These data provide considerable insight into Asian campaign contributors, and the findings differ significantly from the story that circulates in the popular press. It is evident that Asian contributors do not fit the image of the classic investor contributor, or at minimum, are extremely unsuccessful in trying to fill that role. That is, it is possible that they are attempting to be strategic, but are failing miserably. Instead, Asian money generally seems to flow into the coffers of Asian-American campaigns, which rarely seem likely to succeed. On average, they are less influential in their own representative's bid and in the campaigns of successful candidates. And Asian-American campaigns are the ones that are most successful in mobilizing Asian contributors.

The Timing of Contributions

Notwithstanding the evidence thus far that Asians seem to be more symbolic than strategic in their contributions, note that the observed patterns may be consistent with a strategic motive that has not been examined yet. In particular, strategic motivations may be evident in the timing of the contribution. That is, a good strategy for Asian-American contributors is to provide the seed money for a campaign by giving money early in the campaign with the purpose of inducing further contributions from other potential contributors. Contributing in this manner, could be strategic rather than symbolic, but ultimately unsuccessful. That is, Asian donors

may be choosing long-shot candidates, but trying to boost their odds by making early donations. This is quite different behavior from donating to plainly hopeless candidates as an act of ethnic solidarity.

The strategic timing of contributions can be seen in both a short-term as well as a long-term context. The short-term context occurs within an election period. Here, contributors would try to induce other contributors to give before the election occurs. In contrast, the long-term context spans several years. The strategy is to get a candidate elected, and then to shift attention elsewhere; once the candidate is in office, he can rely more on his incumbency advantage and less on support from a particular ethnic group. American candidates rely less on Asian-American contributors when they are established politicians. If this were true, Asian-American contributors would constitute a large proportion of contributions in the first few elections, but after the candidate becomes an incumbent, this type of seed money would diminish.

In the long-term context, there are only two candidates to observe, Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui. The plot in Figure 1 shows the pattern of their contributions beginning in 1978. Lines are fitted to the observations. From the plots, it appears that the proportion of their Asian contributions coming from Japanese donors decreased with time. Asian-American contributions, while largely stable, had been on a slight decline as well. While the lines slope downward, statistical tests indicate that this trend is not significant; the trend is not steep enough to provide evidence that Asian contributions changed over time. However, there is statistical evidence of a declining reliance on Japanese contributions over time. Hence, there is some evidence that Asian-American candidates tend to rely less on contributors of their own ethnicity over time. However, there is no evidence that reliance on the broad Asian-American group declines over time. The claim that there is no pan-ethnicity among Asian Americans, then, may be premature. Indeed, based on these results, the conjecture that a pan-ethnic identity is emerging cannot be discounted.

To explore whether Asian Americans employ the “seed money strategy” in the short-term context, we consider the candidates listed in Table 1. For some of these candidates, this timing strategy is either not evident or not successful. Thus, a number of candidates listed in Table 1 can be safely excluded from the analysis. First, we can exclude from this analysis candidates who do not receive some threshold number or amount in contributions. Here, this threshold number of contributions is somewhat arbitrarily set at 60. Since we are interested only in whether candidates benefit from receiving money from Asian Americans early in their campaign, the candidates who receive few contributions clearly belong outside the analysis. This leaves 27 races to consider. Second, of the remaining candidates, the candidates who receive at least 85% of their funds from Asian Americans are also excluded. Certainly, the money that these candidates have received from Asian Americans has not successfully been deployed as seed money. This leaves just 10 races to consider.

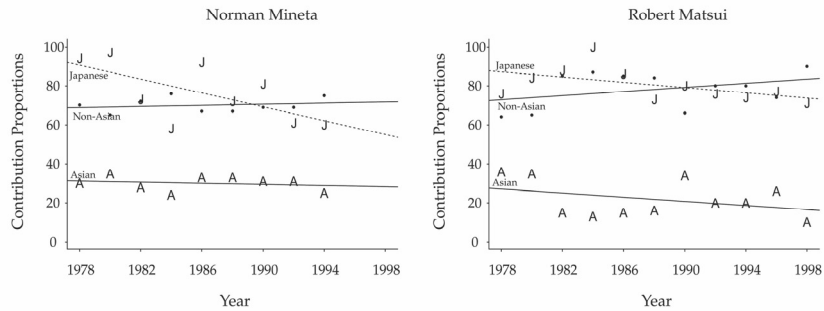


Figure 1. Regression lines for the proportion of contributions from different groups to Norman Mineta and Robert Matsui. The “A” indicates the proportion of contributions from Asians. The “J” indicates the proportion of Asian contributions from Japanese. The dots indicate the proportion of funds from non-Asian contributors.

Since there are so few races to consider, we can look at the contribution patterns for each race in some detail. An examination of each of the 10 races reveals that Asian Americans were not strategic or unsuccessfully deployed the seed money strategy. There is not a single case where we can statistically reject the hypothesis that proportions do not change over time. Hence, in the short-term context, there is little evidence of a successful “seed money” strategy. Asian-American contributions are not heavily weighted toward the beginning of the campaign but are dispersed evenly throughout the campaigning season. In most cases, they account for most of the contributions in any given week. That is, the money does not seem to induce very many non-Asian contributors. By and large, Asian-American contributors bear the brunt of funding Asian-American candidates and are unsuccessful in inducing others to take up their charge. Their giving is not front-loaded, as we would expect if there were a concerted effort to push candidates into the spotlight with an early burst of cash.

Conclusion

This examination of the behavior of Asian-American campaign contributors reinforces a key finding about voting and Asian Americans, that they do not act politically as a monolithic bloc. Instead, the interests of the different ethnic groups diverge on a number of political issues (Tam 1995). There is some evidence that the different Asian-American groups may coalesce as future generations come of age, but there is no certainty that this unity will emerge (Cho

1999). Despite the evidence, journalists and activists continue to trumpet “Asian Americans” as a force to be reckoned with today, claiming that those who court the Asian-American campaign donor will reap great rewards. Media accounts almost always slip into unbridled use of the umbrella term “Asian American.” The popular media aside, a little thought and analysis lead one to conclude that many barriers must still be overcome before the notion of pan-Asian ethnicity becomes anything more than a favored and desired moniker among activists. Instead, the patterns of campaign contributions mirror voting trends by displaying few traces of pan-ethnic solidarity.

The journalistic accounts are more correct, however, when they speak of Asian Americans as potentially active and influential political participants. Asian Americans do contribute to campaigns and often contribute significant amounts, showing that they can and do have political causes to support. The media image, nonetheless, exaggerates the depth of Asian pockets and overplays the expansiveness of their interests. With regard to the funding of congressional candidates, Asian Americans are nationalist and nonstrategic in their expression. There is every reason to believe that many campaign contributors use cash to try to gain influence on policy. Since Asian Americans appear not to be strategic backers of plausible winners, the desire to buy influence cannot be generalized to them. In fact, when we examine the set of individuals who contribute to Asian-American campaigns, the evidence runs strongly to the contrary. Even in districts where Asian-American influence is presumably the highest, i.e., districts where they command a significant proportion of the electorate, the desire to buy influence through campaign contributions seems almost nonexistent. Rather, Asian Americans appear to be more concerned with expressing ethnic solidarity.

In this respect, the widely publicized 1996 campaign finance scandal involving John Huang and Charlie Trie further twisted an already distorted image. There is, to be sure, evidence that Asian-American donors do try to influence politicians through campaign contributions. While there continues to be widespread dissatisfaction with how the 1996 events and commentary unfolded, there is little debate that large sums of money and Asian Americans were involved. These sums are outside the scope of this paper since they primarily involved donations to presidential campaigns and the Democratic National Committee. It may be that an elite group of Asian Americans is very strategic in these more national situations, or that various Asian-American elites who participate at this level are more sophisticatedly strategic political actors than the individual contributors we have examined. This claim remains to be tested. My point is that donors at the congressional level are a large and significant group, and that their actions fall squarely within the realm of symbolic expression, and not strategic investment. Overlooking this fact would be a serious oversight. Allowing the media to distort the image of Asian-American contributors is unwarranted and unsupported by the hard facts.

Appendix

In the course of compiling the data for this project, I came upon a couple of other categories of Asian-American candidates. There is some argument to be made for including these candidates in the data set. However, the arguments against including them are more compelling. Table A-1 and A-2 list the campaigns of these Asian-American candidates who were left out of the analysis. Table A-1 lists Asian-American candidates who ran for office but did not report or did not receive any campaign contributions. As we can see from the elections results, none of these candidates was a very serious contender. Hence, there may be a separate story to be told, and an intriguing dynamic to unfold, but these candidates should not be considered as part of the main data set.

Table A-2 lists another set of candidates who are Asian American, but were also left out of the analysis. The candidates in Table A-2 differ from those in Table A-1 in two important ways. First, all of the candidates in Table A-2 received and reported campaign contributions. In some cases, the money raised was significant and far more than was raised by some of the candidates that were included in the analysis. However, these candidates were not included because of the second important difference that these candidates exhibit, that is, unlike the candidates in Table A-1, none of these candidates actually ran in an election. Hence, there is little reason to include the candidates listed in Table A-2 in the analyses. However, to be complete, I do list, in this appendix, both the aborted Asian American campaigns and the campaigns that did not raise any money.

Table A-1. Asian-American Candidates with No Reported Contributions

Candidate	Race	District	Year	% Asian In District	Primary Election		General Election	
					Major Opponent	Vote %	Major Opponent	Vote %
Homer Cheung (R)	House	GA-4	1978	1%	Uncontested	100%	Elliot H. Levitas	19.0%
Milton S. Takei (P&F)	House	CA-19	1978	3%	Uncontested	100%	Robert Lagomarsino	4.0%
Khushro Ghandi (Labor)	House	NY-37	1978	0.1%	Uncontested	100%	Henry J. Nowak	0.3%
Tod Hiro Mikuriya (Lib.)	House	CA-8	1980	8%	Uncontested	100%	Ronald Delums	5.0%
Echo Goto (R)	House	CA-29	1984	1%	Uncontested	100%	Augustus F. Hawkins	13.0%
Mas Odoi (R) [†]	House	CA-31	1984	8%	Henry C. Minturn	40.6%		
Ronald T. Shigeta (R)*	House	CA-31	1986	8%	Jack McMurray	31.3%		
Stephen P. Shao (I)	House	VA-2	1986	2%	None		Owen Pickett	8.6%
Eunice Sato (R)	House	CA-31	1990	11.5%	Uncontested	100%	Mervyn M. Dymally	33.0%
Elizabeth A. Nakano (P&F)+	House	CA-30	1992	21%	Maria Munoz	52.0%	Xavier Becerra	7.39%
Dianand Bhagwandin (R-C)	House	NY-6	1994	6%	Uncontested	100%	Floyd Flake	19%
John A. Furutani (R)	House	CA-26	1994	7%	Gary E. Forsch	15.6%		
Emma Wong Mar (P&F)*	House	CA-9	1994	16%			Ron Dellums	5%
Linh Dao (I)	House	CA-15	1995	11%	None		Tom Campbell	5%
Gene Hsiao (I)+ [‡]	House	TX-7	1996	6% [‡]	Robert R. "Randy" Sims, Jr.	58.9%	Bill Archer	2.1%
Norio Kushi (Natural Law)	House	VT-AL	1996	1%	Uncontested	100%	Bernie Sanders	0.3%
Lih Young (D)*	House	MD-8	1996	8%	Donald Mooers	7.5%		
Linh Dao (R)*	Senate	CA	1998	9.1%	Matt Fong	0.4%		
Krista Lieberg-Wong (Green)	House	CA-31	1998	22%	Uncontested	100%	Matthew Martinez	5.0%
Krista Pham (R)* [†]	House	CA-45	1998	11%	Dana Rohrabacher	8.4%		

Data compiled from the Almanac of American Politics (1980–1998) and America Votes (1980–1998).

[†] Candidate contributed to his own campaign.

Linh Dao ran in a special election to fill the seat left vacant by Mineta's resignation.

* Candidate lost his/her primary election.

[‡] 1994 figure. The 1996 figure was unavailable due to redistricting.

Table A-2. Aborted Campaigns of Asian-American Candidates

Candidate	Race	District	Year	Total Contribution		Asian Contribution			Ethnic Contributions			% Asian in district
				N	Amount	N	Amount	Percent	N	Amount	Percent	
Norman Mineta (D)	House	CA-15	1996	211	\$49,358	123	\$16,933	34.3%	103	\$12,775	75.4%	11%
Lily Chen (D)	House	CA-30	1992	7	\$5,800	7	\$5,800	100%	6	\$5,500	85.7%	21%
Michael Woo (D)		CA	1988	4	\$2,700	1	\$700	25%	1	\$700	100%	
S. I. Hayakawa (R)	Senate	CA	1980	3	\$650	0	0	0	0	0	0%	5%
	Senate	CA	1982	78	\$59,521	11	\$9,500	14.1%	11	\$9,500	100%	5%
S. B. Woo (D)	Senate	DE	1990	68	\$32,945	66	\$31,945	97.1%	66	\$31,945	100%	1%
March Fong Eu (D)	Senate	CA	1988	214	\$154,950	175	\$125,950	81.78%	149	\$107,950	85.1%	5%
Alfred Lui (I)	House	NY-12	1992	16	\$6,116	15	\$5,916	93.75%	15	\$5,916	100%	20%
Chung Nguyen (D)	House	CA-46	1994	8	\$8,000	8	\$8,000	100%	8	\$8,000	100%	12%

Data compiled from FEC records, the *Almanac of American Politics* (1980-1998) and *America Votes* (1980-1998).

