

**UCSB Academic Senate
Academic Senate Council on Research and Instructional Resources**

Application for 2021-22 Faculty Research Grant

APPLICANT INFORMATION

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PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE

Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Representation of Asian Americans

Amount Requested

\$6,000

The Department/Unit that will be receiving/administering the funds:

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Previous Funding Record for this Project

This is a continuation of a project that has previously received funding support from the Senate.

My writing plan was significantly delayed by family medical emergencies involving my parent in Asia, then I was unable to apply for continuous funding last March due to COVID-19 related challenges to my teaching responsibilities.

Subvention

No.

Past Funding Support from the Academic Senate for Other Projects

I have received funding support from the Senate within the past three fiscal years, and the progress/results and current balance are as described here:

Other Research Support

I do not have start-up funds.

I do not have other extramural research support.

I do not have other research support.

Recent Publications

I have recent publications.

Use of Human Subjects

This project does not involve the use of human subjects.

Pearl Chase Funds

This proposal is not a request for the Pearl Chase Funds.

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Gender, Ethnicity, and Political Representation of Asian Americans

In the world of U.S. minority politics, Asian Americans (AAs) have been considered the privileged people whose socioeconomic achievements have earned them the label of the “model minority.” Among elected officials of color, AAs have been found to obtain the highest levels of education and family income, while also having the highest rate of foreign-birth (Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016). How has the paradoxical group image of “being privileged, but of a foreign kind” influenced the political socialization, campaigning, and governing experiences of US elected officials of Asian descent? What motivated them to run for the first office? To what extent are there gender, ethnic, and geographic differences in the challenges and opportunities these women and men faced in their trajectories to office and in their political representation? And how and why have some been able to advocate for the interests of the intersectionally disadvantaged among their constituencies? What policy impacts have AA women and men in elective office been able to make throughout history? These are the key research questions for this book project which has been under contract with the Oxford University Press since 2019, but progress in completing the manuscript has been disrupted by COVID-19. A main purpose of this grant proposal is to seek continuing funding support for hiring graduate student assistance to facilitate the final stage of manuscript preparation and to help handle the tedious editorial needs in the follow-up steps leading to the publication of the book in summer 2022.

Whereas the U.S. nation has a pathetic record of women’s descriptive representation in elective offices, recent research shows that women of color, including AA women, have experienced higher growth rates and better gender ratios than white women in recent decades. In the 2020 presidential election cycle, three of the Democratic presidential hopefuls were AAs and one of them, Kamala Harris, halted her own campaign and became, months later, the running mate of Democratic Party presidential candidate Joe Biden. And yet, despite these remarkable electoral successes, Asian Americans continue to suffer from a most severe case of underrepresentation when compared to other major US racial and ethnic groups. According to Sedique, Bhojwani, and Lee (2020), of the 7,383 state legislative positions in 2020, only 2% were occupied by Asians, when they are 7% of the population. Similarly, my analysis of data released by the Reflective Democracy Campaign shows that among the 1,180 elected city officials in the largest 100 US cities in 2020, only 36 or 3% were Asian. These statistics are somber reminders of the prolonged struggles for Asians to seek political incorporation in America and the continuing challenges and barriers they face in becoming candidates and elected officials.

It is also worth noting that the growing presence of AA women and men in US mainstream politics took place in the tumultuous context of surging white nationalism, heightened anti-Black racism, rising xenophobia, and open hostility against immigrants, religious minorities, and women leading to the election of Donald Trump and during his presidency. The advent and onslaught of COVID-19 (dubbed “Wuhan virus” by President Trump) beginning in early 2020, followed by a year of dramatic spike in anti-Asian racism and hate violence—with the killing of six Asian immigrant women in Atlanta being the latest round of tragedies, only add to the

urgency and need for the proposed research to help mainstream America comprehend the relative unknown but remarkable history of resilience and triumph for a historically excluded and majority-immigrant community in the present day. By examining the political trajectories of Asian immigrants and their US-born descendants to popularly elected offices and by assessing the content and impacts of their leadership and representation, I also hope to contribute to the diversification of the studying of immigrant political incorporation and democratic inclusion from the perspective of Asian Americans and in a time of unprecedented national and global crisis in governance. Ultimately, I believe this project can help enhance knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and challenges in creating a more reflective democracy not only for the AA community but also for other U.S. minority communities.

This book project features a longitudinal, multiethnic, gendered, and mixed-method approach to help interpret the significance of the rising presence of AA women and men in elective office and assess how their experiences are structured by the intersecting identities related to race, ethnicity, nativity, and gender. In agreement with Ong's (2003) assertion that the "true empowerment" of AAs "should not be measured by political firsts but by a legacy of political succession" (p. 337), I adopt a longitudinal timeframe of investigation that includes pioneering figures in each ethnic community dating back to early to mid-20th century in Hawaii to the early 21st century in California and elsewhere. By putting women of color's experiences at the center of analysis, I explore how the trajectories of AAs to office and their experiences of representation are gendered, shaped by their immigrant background, and specific to certain ethnic groups/communities. Like Abdulla and Freer (2008), I apply a progressive concept of leadership inspired by Alice Walker's (1983) notion of womanism, where "womanist leaders are community-connected and tend to see their formal positions as extensions of grassroots movements" (p. 97). This perspective is useful to help connect stories of individual socialization, ethnic identification and involvement, to community mobilization and political representation.

Over the past five years, I have collected both primary and secondary data of qualitative and quantitative nature to conduct analysis. Examples of the primary qualitative data I gathered include in-depth interviews with select elected officials, community organization leaders, and local experts. I also consulted peer-reviewed academic publications, reports by interest organizations, and articles in US mainstream and ethnic media, along with campaign statements of candidates and elected officials from their websites. A main piece of the quantitative data is a unique database of the population of AA elected officials serving in 1980-84 and in 2014-20. Assisted by several of our graduate and undergraduate students, I constructed this database based on verified information initially collected from rosters of AA elected officials published by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center as well as the online political database maintained by the Asian Pacific American Institute of Congressional Studies. These data are supplemented with a systematic collection of individualized information available on-line of each elected official's personal background and trajectories to current office. Selected demographic information such as

the size and share of the AA population in states and municipalities represented by AAs is also collected from decennial US Census 1980-2010 to help construct the jurisdictional context.

To recap, this book project aims to provide a longitudinal, multiethnic, and gendered view of the emergence of AAs in popularly elected offices at the national, state, and local levels. Because of the breadth of the scope of research involved and the complexity of the data collection and analytical processes engaged, I am seeking continuous funding for research assistance to help assemble the manuscript and satisfy the editorial needs for academic publication. Below is a sketch of the content in each main chapter of the proposed book.

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter begins by laying out the complexity and inherent contradictions in studying the political experiences of the Asian American community. I justify the need for employing intersectionality as a framework for analysis and the adoption of the womanist leadership praxis as a model of social justice-focused political representation rooted in the Asian American Movement and other social movements and grassroots activism practiced by people of color. I also argue for the need to identify an Asian American version of the womanist leadership praxis for advancing social justice and use it as a filter to screen elected officials for inclusion and focused interpretation in the narration for the rest of the book. In addition, critiquing the traditional benchmarks for studying political incorporation, I propose a sequential notion of political representation for interpreting the Asian American experience, especially for those holding offices at state and local levels.

Chapter 2 Gendered History of Immigration and Political Socialization. This chapter begins with a brief review of the gendered history of immigration and settlement patterns of the Asian population by major ethnic or national origins. This historical account helps contextualize the significance of international migration in the political socialization of pioneering women and men in elective offices as well as other trailblazers in each Asian ethnic community. The narration is organized in chronological order by the year of winning the first office, segmented by geographic state, ethnicity, and gender. I present information salvaged from scarce and scattered accounts of these pioneers regarding their family background, political socialization, and motivation to run for the first office. Then, I interpret the impacts of immigration generation, traumatic political events, ethnic and gender identities, and family class background on the socialization and politicization of those individuals who were elected to office after the political “firsts” and who played a significant role in the development of political incorporation in each major Asian ethnic community to the present day.

Chapter 3 Evolution of the Electoral Landscape: Expanding Gender, Ethnic, and Geographic Horizons. Moving beyond the individual trajectories, this chapter provides an aggregate level view of the evolution of the electoral landscape that began in the territory and state of Hawaii. I analyze the growth and transformation of the population structure of the APA community since 1965 to help contextualize the continuities and changes in the contours and makeup of the Asian Pacific American elected officials (APAE) population in periods between 1980 and 2020. I

appraise the various gaps in descriptive representation by gender, ethnicity, and nativity among APAEOs across levels of offices nationwide and between Hawaii and California, the top two states in the number of APAs elected into offices. Then, focusing on Asian city council members in California and using data collected over eight time points, I appraise the issues of political sustainability in political incorporation and the relationship between demography and ethnic representation over time. Finally, based on data of the entire body of Asian state legislators in California serving in or before 2020, I examine the significance of local officeholding in political ascension and how much electoral reforms such as term limits could help or hurt their political fortunes.

Chapter 4 Getting Connected and Elected with Parties and Other Organizations. This chapter returns to the individual narrative but focus on the roles of political parties and other (mostly community-based) organizations in their campaigns for the first office and, for some, higher offices. After presenting a statistical profile of the partisan orientations of APAEOs in the present day, I explore the individual formation of partisan ties (or not) to either the GOP or the Democratic Party, by plan or by chance, in largely chronological order and by partisan label. Whereas the extant literature suggests that newcomers and minorities cannot count on political parties to support their candidacy and initial campaign, my analysis finds a more complex picture, with nuanced differences and certain significant deviations from the main narrative of party neglect. By comparing the Democratic Party in Hawaii and California, I trace the evolving role of the party in the incorporation of APAs in both states and the unique place of local party clubs in California. I illustrate ethnic-specific and gendered partisan patterns with selected individual campaigns. The chapter ends with an analysis of the increasingly prominent role played by ethnic nonpartisan and nonethnic partisan organizations in the recruitment, training, and campaign support of APA women and men interested in seeking or retaining elective offices.

Chapter 5: Advancing Justice: From Community Activism to Substantive and Symbolic Representation. This chapter begins with a review of past research on the multiple, interrelated dimensions of political representation and their distinct manifestations among Asian Americans. After providing a snapshot of the scope of issue priorities and the relative importance of social justice concerns among APAEOs serving in 2020, I resume following the paths to legislative halls of those pioneering and other significant figures in the electoral history of the APA community featured in preceding chapters. I present, in largely chronological order, separate accounts of legislative achievements for advancing justice for different communities and causes, in both historical and contemporary times, including responses to COVID-19 by the APA delegation in the 116th Congress. I interpret these legislative actions taken mostly at the federal level through ideas of bridge feminism, and link it to legislative activism at the subnational level through the lens of a womanist leadership praxis which connects legislative action with local, grassroots organizational based activism. I argue that this analysis highlights the racialized and gendered processes through which legislators at the federal, state, and local levels enact their roles as social justice advocates and the need for a womanist conception of transformative

leadership to address persistent and growing inequities impacting the intersectionally disadvantaged in the community.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. This chapter is still in the drawing board, but it will review the major findings and key takeaway points from each of the preceding chapters. I will incorporate the unique experiences of campaigning and serving in the COVID-19 pandemic to underscore the significance of the raced and gendered experiences confronted by the many trailblazers in each ethnic community featured in preceding chapters. Why is there a pathetic lack of women in U.S. electoral politics? It is not just AA women who are underrepresented in government but women of all colors. However, the story is not as simple as “they just don’t run for office.” Instead, by focusing on the AA experience, I believe the story is way more complicated and beyond the individual level factors. Also, even if my focus is on elected officials and their campaigns and governing, these are not the only stories to tell. There are professional and volunteer campaign workers and their organizations which helps populate the infrastructure of empowerment. I hope to pay proper tribute to the unsung heroines and heroes who fought to advance the marginalized status of their communities and to eradicate all forms of injustice. In the end, I hope to offer lessons learned and tips for prospective candidates and elected officials on how to get prepared and be ready to navigate the system both inside and outside the community when opportunity arises.

Potential Impact

The proposed book-length project features a longitudinal, multiethnic, gendered, and mixed-method approach to help interpret the significance of the rising presence of Asian American women and men in elective office and assess how their experiences are structured by the intersecting identities related to race, ethnicity, nativity, and gender. By examining the political trajectories of Asian immigrants and their US-born descendants to popularly elected offices and by assessing the content and impacts of their leadership and representation throughout history, I also hope to contribute to the diversification of the studying of immigrant political incorporation and democratic inclusion from the perspective of Asian Americans and in a time of unprecedented national and global crisis in governance. I am convinced that this project can help enhance knowledge and understanding of the opportunities and challenges in creating a more reflective democracy not only for the Asian American community but also for other U.S. minority communities.

Proposed Budget for Lien. The sole purpose of the proposed budget is to secure adequate money for hiring hourly graduate research assistance to help prepare and complete the book manuscript and deal with tedious editorial needs in the follow-up steps of academic book publishing. I current have \$0 research money due to my inability to prepare for a research grant proposal last March. Because I was teaching two large 120-person lecture classes in the winter quarter, I was counting on the “spring break” to prepare a proposal, only to have the plan disrupted by COVID-19, when I had another large undergraduate class and a senior seminar to prepare for the “virtual” spring quarter. Now that I am seriously overdue in delivering the book manuscript, I am in dire need for research money to hire one or two graduate student(s) who can help with four tasks. The primary task is to help prepare the references section of the book manuscript from various annotated bibliographies on race, gender, ethnicity, and political representation in general and specifically regarding Asian American women and men candidates and elected officials. The second task is to help update and manage different segments of a proprietary and continuously evolving database of Asian American elected officials between 1980 and 2020. A third task is to help document and update individual life stories of key elected officials featured in the manuscript. And a fourth task is the preparation of a detailed index for the book once it is going into production.

Graduate student research assistance of 24% employment (@\$25/hr for 240 hrs)= \$6,000

Total request= \$6,000

Past Funding Support from the Senate

I have received funding support from the Senate in 2019. As proposed, I used the money to hire graduate student research assistant to help with several tasks. First, to help document, update, and manage a proprietary and continuously evolving database of Asian American elected officials. Second, to help collect and update individual life stories of key elected officials throughout history. Third, to help update an annotated bibliography on gender and race regarding Asian Americans. And fourth, to help track and document legislative accomplishments for Asian Americans serving in the 116th Congress and in CA state legislature since the 1990s. The information gathered was immensely useful to help advance my preparation of the book manuscript. And I was able to prepare and present a total of four conference papers, which has served as the basis of the chapter drafts in the proposed manuscript. However, due to the scope and complexity of the project, in addition to unexpected personal and contextual challenges, I have been behind in my research and I am applying for continuous funding support from the Senate to help complete the project.

Lien's List of Recent Publications (2019-2021)

Lien, Pei-te. 2021. "Tracing Roots of Attitudes toward Race and Affirmative Action among Immigrant Chinese Americans: Learning from Undergraduate International Students." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* (forthcoming)

Takeda, Okiyoshi, Pei-te Lien, and Sara Sadhwani. 2021. "The Study of Asian American Politics: Looking Back, Looking Forward." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54(2): 226–28.

Lien, Pei-te, Loan Le, Okiyoshi Takeda, Sara Sadhwani, and Andrew L. Aoki. 2021. "Are Asian Americans a Meaningful Political Community?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54(2): 232–34.

Feng, Jeff, and Pei-te Lien. 2020. "How AAPIs in Congress Responded to COVID-19." *AAPI-Nexus Journal: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Policy, Practice, and Community* 7(1/2): 289-330.

Aoki, Andrew, and Pei-te Lien. Eds. 2020. *Asian Pacific American Politics—Celebrating the Scholarly Legacy of Don T. Nakanishi*. New York: Routledge.

Conference proceedings:

"Are We There Yet? Exploring Local Political Incorporation of Asian Americans in California." Prepared for presentation at the 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, April 1-3, 2021.

"Immigration Generation and Political Incorporation of Asian Americans into Popularly Elected Offices." Presented at the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, originally scheduled to meet in San Francisco, CA, September 10-13, 2020.

"Advancing Justice: Interpreting the Roots and Elements of Substantive Representation by Asian Pacific American Elected Officials." Presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 29-September 1.

"Understanding Substantive Representation by Womanists among Asian American Elected Officials." Presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, San Diego, April 18-20.