Rice University’s Oral History for Esther’s Repository

Prepared in June 2022

**Childhood and Education:**

I was born about a year before the end of World War II in a remote town in northwestern China in 1944.  My military father was assigned to fight against the local warlords during Japan’s invasion of China. Because of the scarcity of food and basic supplies, I suffered severe calcium deficiency and was unable to walk until two-year old. I was near death twice due to serious illness.  My mother prayed hard and vowed to do her very best to raise me if I could survive. Two-three years later, I was growing well like a normal child. After we moved to Taiwan in 1949, to my mother’s surprise, I was not only healthy but also strong and full of energy like a town boy and often got into troubles with neighborhood kids.

Schooling and piano competition

To tame me like a typical girl, my mother sent me to dance lessons. But no luck. In my fifth-grade class, there was a so-called privileged student whose parents were working in Hong Kong. She and her older sister stayed in Taiwan alone.  They had an imported piano, but no one could give them lessons.  So, I recommended my mother whose minor was music in Jin-Ling Women University in Nanking. Instead of charging tuition, mother and I could practice piano in their house daily. Unfortunately, they moved to Hong Kong a year later. My compassion for playing the piano was so strong that I had overcome many obstacles to get 30 min of practice daily. I could write a book about my journey of piano practice - smiles. Three years later, my parents finally could afford an imported piano. In the following five years I was committed to piano practice at the expense of any after school leisure activities, i.e., reading novels, and going to the movies with classmates. My time was only divided for schoolwork, piano practice and Sunday church activities. At that time, the hymens Living for Jesus and Have Thine Way Lord have become my guiding songs throughout my purposeful life.

My ambitious dream to become both a medical doctor and concert pianist did not come true. I did not pass the test for the medical school at the National Taiwan University but was able to devote to a long-hour piano practice daily by majoring Education at the National Taiwan Normal University.  Under the best piano professor’s instruction, I was able to win the nationwide piano competition at age 20. Actually, I began performing before the competition and ended my public performance with my farewell concert on the eve of my departure for the US. I was awarded a graduate assistantship in Education at Northern Illinois University.  After I finished my master’s degree, I married Stanton Yao who was working on his Ph.D. at Purdue University. Since Stanton could not finish his dissertation on schedule as expected, to meet our financial needs, I had to apply doctoral assistantship for Ph.D. Two years later, we both received our Ph.Ds. from Purdue University in June 1971.

**Wife, mother and professor**

After getting married, I was committed to be a stay-home housewife and mother of two young girls in the early 1970s. My first full-time job began in 1975, as an Assistant Professor with University of Houston/Clear City. Four years later I became tenured associate professor until I resigned due to government appointments in 1992. I often jokingly graded my career as “B” but “A” for being a wife and a mother. Yet, my devotion to serve people in a broad spectrum never ceased throughout my life.  In addition to the OCA, (Organization of Chinese Americans) and OCAW in Houston, I also established, organized, and participated in a number of non-political community organizations, events and activities. Consequently, I was honored by the University of Houston/Clear Lake with the Distinguished Service Award for my accomplishments in both academic and non-academic sectors.

In January 1998, I resumed my academic career at Southern Arkansas University as a full professor of Education. The following fall, I accepted the position as the Department Chair of Education at DePauw University. I continued to pursue my career in Higher Education until I retired from Troy University/Montgomery as the Dean of the Graduate School in January 2006.

During my tenure at the three above mentioned universities, I also served the public through my appointments.  I was appointed by Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas to serve on the Early Childhood Education Commission. Later I was appointed to serve as a board member on the Teacher Education Committee of Indiana Professional Standards Board, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the US Department of Justice’s National Advisory Committee on Violence Against Women.

**Chinese Churches – 1972 to 1982**

Religion has played a guiding role and always the major ingredient of my life since my baptism at age 12.

After moving to Houston from Purdue with my late husband, Stanton in February 1972, I felt the calling to a vast land to plant the seeds of the gospels.  To reach out to more than 200 Chinese American families in Clear Lake City (CLC), where the Johnson Space Center is located, I came up with the ideas of forming a Chinese class for American-born Chinese children and a Chinese American Family Discussion Group on parenting skills. Both started in the Spring 1972, soon after our arrival in CLC. There were only two additional Chinese Christian families in the area: Peggy and Herbert King who had been there for several years then, and Cynthia and Ronald Chen who arrived shortly before our arrival.  For more than three years, prior to my teaching appointment with University of Houston/Clear Lake (UHCL) I devoted myself to these two above-mentioned groups in addition to beginning my column writings.

Meanwhile, we moved to Sagemont, closer to Houston city and joined a local Chinese Mission which later became Houston Chinese Church. I played the piano while Stanton directed the choir.  I also directed the choir briefly and had the Cantata, No Greater Love, with slide presentation for an Easter celebration.

We moved back to Clear Lake City (CLC) soon after I was offered a full-time position as an assistant professor with the University of Houston/Clear Lake in August 1975.  God answered my prayers by providing all our needs for His mission in Clear Lake City. Our new home with a large living room was purchased for the bi-weekly Christian fellowship.  We invited the pastor from the Houston Chinese Church to CLC to preach regularly. To attract local Chinese Americans, I prepared the best Chinese “Dim Sums” that were not available in Chinese restaurants at the time.  From this bi-weekly fellowship, the Clear Lake Chinese Church was later formed with the support of the Houston Chinese Church.  I was active as a pianist, babysitter and cook for the Sunday lunches.

**Space City Chinese School** **Founded in** **March 1972** **(later named Clear Lake Chinese School)**

I started the weekend Chinese Class at our two-bedroom apartment in Clear Lake shortly after our arrival in Clear Lake from Purdue in February1972. At that time, my first daughter, Faith, was only three-month old. I believed that American born Chinese (ABC) should be able to speak Chinese. At that time, daily Chinese classes were only available after regular American schools in Cantonese in Chinatowns. They were designed for those early Cantonese speaking immigrants’ descendants.  Later Chinese immigrants who arrived after WWII, especially after the new immigration policy effective in 1967, were highly educated and lived in an integrated community. Their children could not attend the Chinese classes/schools held in Chinatowns. In addition, back to the early 1970s, Chinatowns could only be found in major cities in the East and West coasts.  Thus, I started a weekend Chinese class named Space City Chinese Class, for those new immigrants’ children.  The classes were staffed by volunteer mothers initially.  With the support of Cynthia Chen and Peggy King, this new concept of Chinese class was formally established in March 1972. Cynthia was responsible for “operation”; I was responsible for teaching the Bible stories in Chinese and Peggy oversaw the singing in Chinese. All three of us were Christians and committed to Jesus. Since we relocated to the Sagemont area, the class had to be moved to the Nassau Bay Baptist Church in fall 1972 with Peggy’s church membership.

This Space City Chinese School was growing so rapidly that it caught the attention of the Ministry of Overseas Chinese (MOC) of the Republic of China (Taiwan). The minister of MOC and some legislators even came to Nassau Bay Baptist Church to visit the school. Their visits were covered in the Central Daily News published in Taiwan. Some interested parents from other parts of the greater Houston areas also came to learn about it so they could establish their own Chinese schools locally, including the well-known Evergreen Chinese School in Houston. Very quickly, this weekend type of Chinese schools spread throughout the US.  Now there are thousands of them in North America.

Between 1972 and 1981, my community involvements consist of the
**Space City Chinese Family Discussion Group in 1972**

**Chinese Amateur Musicians Association in 1972**

**Women Voters’ League in 1975**

**Young Musical Festival in 1979**

**Kuang Jen Children’s Symphony from Taiwan in 1981**

**Minority Business Women Workshop** **Held on August 22, 1981**

**Annual Chinese Lunar New Year Festival at UHCL** **launched on Feb. 8, 1982**

As the number of Chinese students at UHCL increased, I became the faculty advisor to the Chinese Student Organization. For the Lunar New Year of 1982, with support from Chinese students and community supporters, I launched an annual Lunar New Year Festival and celebration on February 8, 1982. The purpose of the event was to introduce Chinese culture to local Clear Lake residents. The program consisted of Chinese food stands, displays and sale of Chinese artifacts, Chinese traditional costume shows and demonstration of Chinese painting and calligraphy.  I, by myself, wrapped and deep fried several hundred thin skinned/wrapped egg rolls for sale to raise money for the Chinese Student Organization of UHCL. This annual event lasted for many years and generated great public interests in Chinese culture and traditions.

The details of these events could be found on my foundation’s website. www.fnplweb.org

**Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and OCAW beginning in 1978 - 84**

​My involvement in the Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Organization of Chinese American Women (OCAW) led to my political participation.

Many right-wing Chinese Americans in Houston went to the street in 1979, to protest President Jimmy Carter’s recognition of the People’s Republic of China. As a professor of Multicultural Education, I fully understood the importance of the political muscle of minorities and immigrants as related to their motherland. Traditionally, politics was a risky business in China and could easily lead to the annihilation of an entire clan. Yet, I learned of the successful political involvement of the Jewish Americans. Thus, I contacted the OCA with its HQ in Washington, DC and established the Houston Chapter. I asked an American born Chinese (ABC), Mr. William Derbing, a NASA employee to serve as the first president.  Later, I was also recruited by OCAW for forming a Houston Chapter. The filed documents related to both organizations’ formation, activities and newspaper clippings can be found on my website.

I gradually concluded my non-partisan community activities after I became involved in the Republican Party even though I still played an active role in Chinese Church and Chinese School until the mid-1980s.

**Political involvement**

**How did Dr. Lee become involved in the GOP beginning in 1980?**

The original documents of all the referred events are organized chronologically under the Resource Room of my website. [www.fnplwebl.org](http://www.fnplwebl.org) My political resumes at various stages of my life can be found in my bio and vita sections**.
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GOP Involvement in 1980**I had a very interesting launch of my GOP/Republican involvement. Might be a little bit ironic.

Recognizing my leadership via Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA) and Organization of Chinese American Women (OCAW) involvement, Ms. Esther Kee, a Chinese American volunteer of the National Democrat Committee contacted me in Feb. 1980.  Ms. Kee was trying to recruit me to support President Carter’s re-election. Initially, I was excited by such an offer to become an appointed delegate to the National Democrats Convention.I took the offer and my decision seriously. To make sure that the philosophy of the Democrat Party was consistent with mine, I went to the university library to study the platforms of both the Democrat and Republican Parties. At the end, I realized that the Democrat Party is not the one for me.  Thus, I decided to take part in the Republican Party from ground zero without any connection and knowledge.One day, I learned from the local newspaper that the Bay Area Republican Women’s Club was having a meeting and Vicki Hapke was the contact person. So, I called Vicki who quickly paid a home visit with a lot of books about the philosophy of the party and party leaders, such as the president Ronald Reagan and Congressman Jack Kemp.  She immediately recruited and led me to the Reagan’s reelection campaign. Since then, Vicki had become my political mentor in TX until Vicki’s relocation to other state. All my GOP involvement in a chronological order can be found on the FNPL website.

**GOP Involvement in 1981**
**​**In 1981, I and my family began hosting dinners and receptions at home for politicians and political candidates to meet with local Chinese and non-Chinese voters.

I was active at the Bay Area Republican Women’s Club and supported their events as an event host and speaker. I worked tirelessly for various campaigns at local and state levels and was active in the district and state conventions committees.  However, later, most of the GOP club women supported my opponent during my 1992 Congressional primary race. She was a white woman but not a club member.That tells something about racial discrimination.

The year of 1982 was a busy one for me to campaign for the re-elections of both State Representative Randy Pennington and state senator Buster Brown by hosting events and dinners.

At that time, Texas was still predominately controlled by the Democrats. It was nearly impossible to defeat any Democrat candidate in Texas. Most of my supported Republican candidates at both state and federal levels were defeated. Not a good experience but I determined to turn the blue state into a red one and continued pressing on. Later the two defeated candidates became the State chair, Mr. George Strake, Jr. and Russ Mather as County chair. They both supported Asian/Pacific Americans’ planning meetings and special events.

Gradually, I learned the rope to be elected as a delegate to the Senatorial district #11 convention and the state convention after two years of active involvement in the party in 1982. Meanwhile, I was also involved in the Asian Republican groups at the national level.

At the national level, the National Republican Committee (RNC) had several auxiliary and coalition organizations to bring specific groups of citizens into the Republican Party, such as women, young people, college Republicans and National/Ethnic Heritage Groups Council (NRHGC). The NRHGC consisted primarily of some European national and ethnic groups. A small Chinese group was headed by Mrs. Anna Chennault who was widow of General Chennault of Flying Tiger. This immigrant auxiliary group did not involve much at the grassroot level, possibly due to language and cultural barriers. As a result, they were not much valued by the Republican National Committee (RNC).

Later, in order to gain more voting power, the Chinese group within NRHGC expanded into an Asian American group, named Asian American National Republican Federation. I was asked forming a state chapter in Texas because of my track records with OCA and OCAW as a doer, an organizer, not just a talker.

In the summer of 1982, I founded the Texas Chapter of Asian American National Republic Federation (TAANRF) under AANRF. In order to reach out and empower more people as I did with OCA Houston Chapter, I only organized and founded the group but encouraged other people assuming the chairmanship. However, it was not an easy task to recruit Republicans from the Asian community, especially among the Chinese. Traditionally, American born Chinese whose ancestors arrived in the US prior to the 1882, the pass of Chinese Exclusion Act, were referred as Old Overseas Chinese (OOC). They tended to vote for Democrats like Japanese Americans rather than Republicans. Thus, it took a great effort for me to invite a Chinese American businessman, Bill Ong, from the Houston OOC community as the first chairman for TAANRF. I galvanized the new Asian immigrant groups who were more interested in Republican Party, including the Sikhs from India and Southeast Asian refugees. Meanwhile, I served as program coordinator for the officers’ inaugural ceremony/banquet with more than 500 attendees held at the Adams Mark Hotel, Sunday, October 24, 1982, 7:00-10:00 pm. I invited all the 1982 GOP statewide candidates and office holders.  Mrs. Anna Chennault, a Chinese American Republican activist in Washington, DC was invited to speak for this inaugural event. The national chairman of AANRF, Ben John Chen, also flew in from NYC. I delivered an opening speech. This was the first time I met Mrs. Anna Chennault. Unfortunately, the TAANRF did not function well under the leadership of Bill Ong and his successors. Later, the young organization ceased growing and began diminishing even I continued promoting interaction between elected office holders and Asian/Pacific Americans, including the campaigns for a non-partisan Houston mayor, GOP governor Bill Clements, and Congressman Ron Paul.

In 1983, Democrat Mark White became the new governor after GOP governor Bill Clements was defeated in Nov. 1982. Yet, I believe that Asian/Pacific Americans should be involved in both parties. I organized the first annual event “Statesman of the Year” to honor American political leaders.  During the Chinese Lunar New Year celebration, the newly elected Governor, Mark White, was the first one to be honored at the banquet of Statesman of the Year in 1983.  This annual tradition is continuing even up today.

Since then, more Asian Americans have been involved than ever and got excited about Reagan’s reelection in 1984. Many AANRF members thought they were on the right track to attend the GOP national convention. Yet, THEY DID NOT KNOW THE REAL PROCESS. Their enthusiasm to travel to Dallas for the convention in 1984 resulted in a painful lesson as outlined in the section of GOP 1984 in the FNPL website.

**GOP Involvement in 1984 - A very Special Year!!**

This was a major and busy year for all political activists. The newly formed Texas AANRF chapter was two-year-old. The primary goal for me, as a new chair, was to rally Asian/Pacific Americans (APAs) politically as much as possible at all levels. In addition to the congressional races, most APAs were more interested in the reelection of President Reagan. Not all people (APAs) immersed themselves, as I did, into the mainstream GOP grassroot activities such as volunteer work at campaign offices for phone bank, mailing, walking, yard signs. . .  After being elected to be a delegate from a precinct, and a senatorial district, I was also appointed to be an alternate delegate to the 1984 National GOP Convention in Dallas.

**Before the GOP ‘84 National Convention in Dallas on August 20-23, 1984 --**

Attending a political party’s national convention is quite an honor and experience for many people, including me back to 1984. Since my husband had no interest in attending the convention, I offered the extra ticket to Don Wang, a Chinese American business leader who had expressed great interest in getting into mainstream politics.  Since then, I basically “introduced” him into the political arena by involving him in as many political events as possible including speaking opportunities at various events.  He later became the founder and chairman of the Metro Bank in Houston. He has been politically and economically very active and successful in the Houston area since 1984.

However, the painful lesson of the 1984 GOP National Convention shared below was the turning point for my future political focus and direction. Ultimately, this event led to the birth of Texas Asian Republican Caucus (TARC) in the following year. It has become the **Texas Asian Republican Assembly** since June 8, 2013**.**

The incident at 1984 GOP National Convention in Dallas was a disappointing challenge for AANRF. I witnessed the enthusiastic Asian/Pacific Americans with the AANRF being misled and unable to enter the convention arena without proper credentials. They did not know the proper process to become a delegate. They need to be involved at the local level. In fact, anyone could get involved and to become a delegate without any ethnic affiliation. Their affiliation with the National Republican Heritage Group Council only offered them the empty titles with no connection of delegate election and selection at state level. I was convinced that it was imperative to form an Asian/Pacific American Republican organization directly under the existing official GOP state party. Soon after the GOP 1984 convention, I consulted the GOP state chair, George Strake, Jr., who advised me to form an auxiliary organization like the Republican Women’s Club under the state party. Immediately, I began to form the Texas Asian-American Republican Caucus (TARC) directly under the state GOP.

It was a challenge to form an Asian/Pacific American GOP group due to its ethnic/cultural diversity.  I started contacting several ethnic community leaders and began to draft the By-Laws and Constitution with the expertise of a Korean American lawyer, Tim Seo. After many meetings and discussions for more than one year, the final version was adopted on March 2, 1986. The Executive Committee was selected and formed.  The By-Laws and Constitution were ratified, adopted, and signed by all attendees. The details of all the meetings and minutes can be found in the FNPL website.

Between March and December of 1986, I worked diligently to get five local chapters organized in addition to the membership at large: Bay Area Asian Republicans, Greater Houston Chinese American Republicans, Harris County Sikh American Republicans, North Texas Republican Asian Assembly and Vietnamese American Republican Party. All the membership lists are posted on the FNPL website.
 **At the 1984 GOP Convention – A Hidden Agenda??**Technically, political conventions are not open to the general public. Only delegates, convention workers, political party staff, media personnel, and invited guests, i.e., spouses are permitted to enter the building with proper official credentials. There were no other Asian Americans from Texas in the convention, except Don Wang and me. During the Convention, I only met two other Chinese American delegates, David Chan, then a candidate for state treasury of Oregon and Anna Chennault from Washington, DC.

The planning for a political National Convention takes months prior to the Convention as I personally experienced during President Bush’s re-election in 1992. Behind the TV screen, there are many political and social activities designed and scheduled for different states delegates and political players. Various committee meetings are held during and prior to the convention dates. The most important committees are platforms/resolutions, and rules/regulations. The committee members begin their tasks months prior to the Convention. Everything is strategically planned and executed including speakers at all events especially the major general assemblies.As mentioned earlier in the year of 1982, I was zealous but inexperienced while forming the Texas Chapter of Asian American National Republic Federation (TAANRF) in the summer under the Asian American National Republican Federation (AANRF). AANRF was loosely organized by a New York businessman, Ben John Chen with the encouragement of Anna Chennault who was an active GOP operator in Washington, DC. Mr. Ben John Chen, chairman of the AANRF formed a group of about 30 – self-designated delegates - from NYC to the Convention site in Dallas. These NYC visitors thought they would be at the Convention floor/arena as the TV screens always showed. Sadly, without proper credentials, they all ended up in a meeting hall with close circuit TVs outside the Convention Center.

On August 21, 1984, during the Convention, Anna Chennault rallied the AANRF visitors to sign a resolution to request an eminent Asian American to second the nomination of the president or the VP on Wednesday. She was hoping that she would be the chosen one. Since I was one of the two known Asian Americans who had the credentials to enter the convention, Mrs. Chennault asked me to hand deliver the resolution to Mr. James Baker who chaired the convention. Without knowing the last-minute impossibility, I faithfully accomplished the assignment. Obviously, Mrs. Chennault was not familiar with the nomination process that was arranged long in advance. Undoubtedly, these New Yorkers were very disappointed and felt being used. As a result of this painful encounter, I decided to guide the Asian Americans in Texas DIRECTLY under the State GOP Party. Eight years later, I was able to see the fruit of my efforts at the 1992 GOP National Convention in Houston. **After the 1984 GOP Convention –**The disappointing lesson at the 1984 GOP Convention induced the birth of Texas Asian Republican Caucus (TARC). Yet, the growth of TARC was not easy. I realized that sharing and training were as important as galvanizing APAs directly under the structure of the Republican Party. APAs need to know that all the delegates with voting powers were either elected at the state level or appointed at both state/national levels i.e., by the White House and Republican National Committee (RNC).

Following my tireless campaign efforts for Reagan’s reelection victory, I was appointed to serve on the ***National Advisory*** and Coordinating Council on ***Bilingual Education*** (1985-87) under Secretary William J. Bennett.

In addition to “nourishing” the newly formed Texas Asian Republican Caucus (TARC) with the support of state GOP Chair, George Strake Jr., I was involved in two major campaigns.  State Senator Buster Brown was running for state Attorney General while Texas Railroad Commissioner Kent Hance was running for governor. Unfortunately, they both lost their races.

**The year of 1986** was a very active and productive year in all domains for me. This year, Vice President George Bush was organizing his presidential campaign committee by forming the Fund for America's Future. I was one of the few Texans selected to serve on this honorable exploratory committee for Bush's presidential bid.

Politically, a giant step was taken by the Asian/Pacific Americans in Texas. Texas governor Bill Clements was elected again after Democrat governor Mark’s White’s single term. Many Asian/Pacific Texans were involved in the campaign. Following the victory, they organized a delegation to attend Governor Clements’ inauguration in Austin in January 1987.

In addition to my visibility in the political arena at city, state and national levels, professionally, I published several academic articles in education. My professional growth and political development were recognized and was invited by the Republic of China's (ROC/Taiwan) government to attend a policy making conference in Taipei.

**GOP Involvement in 1987**

This was the first year of the Texas Asian American Caucus (TARC) with new officers elected on December 27, 1986. Unfortunately, this newly formed group did not grow under the first chairman as expected. Thus, there is very limited information about TARC for the year of 1987. By the end of 1987, new officers were elected, and I was elected as the chair and Dr. Y. T. Huang of Dallas as the co-chair. My top priorities were to develop the newly founded TARC as rapidly as possible and encourage TARC members to become involved not only at local and state levels but also at national level.   Following the election, I sent out a memo to Executive Committee members and Chapter chairmen on November 24, 1987 to outline the goals and tasks for the upcoming Presidential election in 1988, including a directive to revitalize all local chapters.

At the national level, I was involved in the National Republican Asian Assembly’s (NRAA) inaugural conference held in Arlington, VA from June 14 and 15, 1987. I was a member of the Banquet Committee and tried to invite Asian American Texans to attend and even arranged meetings with GOP presidential candidates such as Senator Bob Dole and Republican National Committee (RNC) staff for them. I looked for opportunities for Asian American Texans for political appointments at both state and national levels.

In the same year, I was appointed to serve on the Congressional Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development from 1987-1990. This subcabinet level of appointment required frequent travelling to meet heads of state of foreign nations and American cities for public hearings.

**The Congressional Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development** was established in May 1987 as mandated by the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) passed by the US Congress in 1986. This subcabinet level, bi-partisan commission consisted of 10 members appointed by the US Congressional leaders. Six were appointed by the Senate majority and minority leaders and four were appointed by the House leaders.  I was appointed by Senator Bob Dole who did not know me personally. I was the only Asian American on the Commission and one of the two female commissioners. This Commission consisted of former governor, scholars, ambassador, cabinet members, lawyer and business leaders.

The mission of the Commission was to identify diverse factors leading to illegal migration from Central America and Caribbean and to determine the forms of economic collaboration that could mitigate the issues. The Commission visited several nations in South and Central America and Caribbeans to consult their heads of states, governmental officials, business leaders and researchers regarding the issues related to undocumented immigration.  In addition, a series of public hearings were held in those US cities impacted by the influx of illegal immigrants.  The Commission also visited some newly established maquiladora plants along the US/Mexico border cities. In 1989, the federal government put in place specific procedures and requirements for maquilas under the “[**Decree for Development and Operation of the Maquiladora Industry”**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquila_Decree).[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquiladora - cite\_note-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maquiladora#cite_note-8)Maquiladoras industry consists of those plants and companies that allow factories to be largely duty free and tariff-free for export. These factories take raw materials and assemble, manufacture, or process them and export the finished product. The activities and accomplishments of the Commission could be found in the scanned executive summary. Additional information could be searched via internet.

For some researchers’ interest, here is the background of my appointment. Since President Reagan’s reelection, Asian Americans had made good progress in terms of working with the White House. Mr. Rudy Beserra, a special assistant (1982-88) to President Ronald Reagan in the White House’s Office of Public Liaison, was very supportive and accessible to the Asian American community.  He held White House briefings for Asian American leaders periodically. (Later, he retired from Coca Cola as a Sr. VP.) Treasuring the accessibility to Ronald Reagan’s administration, I became a friend of several White House staff members during 1984-1988. During a drop-by visit with Mr. Beserra one day in late 1986, he told me that the Congress just passed the new immigration reform bill.  He encouraged me to pursue an appointment with the Commission created by the Bill.  Later, he told me that the appointments of ten members were not by the President but by the Congress. Although Rudy was not involved in the appointment process, his information shared with me was very beneficial. As a result, through my political network, I was able to contact the Senator Bob Dole’s office. At that time, he was the Majority leader of the US Senate. I expressed my interest in the Commission to Senator Dole’s staff, Jo-Anne Coe. She was the first female Chief Secretary of the US Senate and was in charge of the appointment process. Finally, she informed me of my appointment via a phone call in Spring 1987.

## **GOP Involvement in 1988 Presidential Election**This was a very challenging year for two major endeavors: 1) revitalizing the TARC for the general election in November; and 2) involving GOP presidential election after President Reagan’s second term. Many TARC meetings and events were held and recorded in the section of “Birth of TARC” on the FNPL website. Regarding the presidential election, to my fellow Republican peers’ surprise, I supported non-Texan Senator Bob Dole during the 1988 GOP primary in Texas. It’s my personality to stand firm with my principles.

## There were two reasons for my decision to support Senator Dole in the 1988 Texas primary. Frist, I appreciate his recognition of my contributions to the Party even though he did not know me personally but appointed me to serve a Congressional Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development, 1987-1990. He trusted my professional expertise and recognized my political achievements. Second, Senator Dole recognized Asian Americans’ strength and contribution in this great nation and was accessible to Asian Americans via various functions and public statements. During the primary, I encouraged other Asian/Pacific Americans under the leadership of Helen and James Chang to support Bush instead of joining me for the Dole’s campaign because it was predicable that Bush would win the primary as a native son. The newly involved Asian/Pacific Americans needed positive results for their campaign efforts. Meanwhile, I was working hard for Senator Doles’ campaign among other voters to narrow the gap with Bush/Quayle as much as possible. Being a loyal Republican, after the Texas Primary in March, I continued supporting the GOP primary winner George H. Bush/Quayle wholeheartedly. My photo with the vice president candidate Dan Quayle at the rally for his Houston trip was published on October 3rd by the Houston Chronicle.In this same year, I also campaigned for Senator Phil Gramm for his reelection and Congressman Kent Hance’s bidding for Texas Railroad Commissioner again as the files show.  ​

## **In 1989.** As usual, the odd-numbered years only hold local elections.  During the Houston mayoral race, I mobilized Asian Houstonians to support the incumbent, Mayor Kathy Whitmire and hosted a big gathering for her to meet with Clear Lake residents in my house.

**Between the years of 1990-1991**, I was appointed for two full-time positions with state and federal governments. It was an honor for me to take academic leave from the University of Houston/Clear City. I was appointed by the Republican Governor Bill Clements to serve on the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles as a board member in January 1990. Unexpectedly, I was asked by the White House to serve on the US Dept. of Education as the deputy director six months later.

During my appointment with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles I was hoping to integrate my academic expertise with Texas criminal justice systems. I had an "ambitious" plan to make an impact on the Criminal Justice System in Texas with the support of the Governor's office. Meanwhile, I was also engaging in a research project on inmates. Unfortunately, I was unable to finish up both endeavors, but my short service was recognized and commended by the Governor.

Political appointments usually are “rewards” for people’s “contribution” - either through influence or financial donations to certain campaigns. The ranks of appointments are highly correlated to the level of one’s “contribution.” It’s a very simple and practical reality. I fully understood the “games”, but I guarded my Christian principles as much as possible during my entire political involvement.

There were two reasons for that I was unable to obtain my desirable appointment with the Bush Administration. In addition to the fact that I did not support then VP Bush in the 1988 primary, someone who did not want to see my political advancement also sabotaged my appointment. My photo with dictator President Daniel Ortega of Nicaragua during my congressional commission’s official visit created concerns of the White House. Even though the situation was explained by the chairman of the Commission, the damage was done.

**My Congressional Campaign**

1. **Background**: Hoping to have a better appointment during Bush’s second term that was commemorate with my credentials and background, I decided to campaign harder than ever to cumulate more “chips” during President Bush’s reelection.

In the early spring 1991, while I was serving President Bush at the Dept. of Education, I went to Mr. Ron Kaufman, the political director of Bush’s White House and sought his advice for my role in the upcoming reelection of President Bush. I asked him if I should stay in Washington, DC or return to Houston to campaign for President Bush.  Since President Bush’s popularity was sky high after the victory of the Desert Storm, Ron felt the President was very safe to be reelected without any problem.  Unexpectedly, he pointed out that the Democratic controlled Congress needed more Republicans to support President’s agenda.  He suggested that I ran for Congress in Houston.

It was a struggle for me whether I should take Ron’s advice. I prayed and analyzed a lot after meeting him. I even retreated to the Holiday Inn in Chevy Chase in NW of Washington, DC to seek God’s guidance.  After consulting family and church pastor, I finally decided to run as a calling and mission in the summer of 1991. I felt it was about the time for Chinese Americans to be visible in the national political arena, especially, the Republican Party. At that time, there was no Chinese American congressman representing the growing Chinese American population in the US. Most of Chinese or Asian American elected officials at state level was affiliated with the Democratic Party including all Japanese American legislators in Congress.

1. **The purpose** of my congressional campaign was not for personal gains or interests but for the Asian Americans as a whole. My goal was to inspire and galvanize the Chinese/Asian Americans, particularly the younger generation regardless of the outcome of my campaign. I used the analogy of ladder climbing to symbolize my efforts as the first giant step to reach the political top regardless of the results. I was not afraid to lose because I strongly believed that the foundation, I laid, would lead Chinese/Asian Americans to a higher ground. There were four political advantages to my candidacy: 1) Redistricting in Texas after the 1990 census added three more congressional seats. 2)  The newly drawn district consisted more middle class and professional voters than before. 3) The popularity of an incumbent Republican President would enhance the victory of a Republican candidate.  4) The 1992 GOP National Convention held in Houston would provide Republican candidates with more media exposure than usual.
2. **Actions taken**: Within weeks, I resigned from the US Department of Education (USDOE) position and resumed my teaching at University of Houston/Clear Lake (UHCL) in fall, 1991.  Before I left USDOE, I was invited by the UHCL president to be their summer commencement speaker in August.

Soon upon my return to UHCL, I contacted my friends around the country to organize fund raising events throughout the country in the fall, 1991. As a long-time community activists and newspaper columnist with the World Journal with worldwide circulation, I was able to share my message at fundraising events throughout 14 cities in the USA including New York City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Phoenix, Chicago, Albany, NY, Dallas, and Washington, DC. My reputation as a political activist at both state and national levels also attracted and motivated many Chinese immigrants. During the campaign, I pointed out the dire needs for Chinese Americans to take part in the mainstream politics based on the historical lessons and the fact of having no representation in the Congress.  I shared my conviction to Chinese Americans’ political participation and my struggles in the Republican Party with my contributors.  I informed them with great optimism that I had the support of the local Jewish and Black communities in Houston even though they traditionally voted for the Democrats. They felt a minority Congresswoman will certainly better represent them than a white Democrat and pledged their support after the primary.

The challenge for me was to win the primary and then the minority groups in the district could vote for me during the general election where no separated voting places for Democrats and Republicans.  Although I could not guarantee of my victory, I assured my supporters that my campaign will pave the way for future generations. Indeed, my campaign inspired many Chinese Americans who started running for local, state and federal offices soon after my close call defeat.  Those candidates finally realized that it was possible to run and even to win an election. Meanwhile, those Chinese American community leaders who took part in my campaign and fundraising efforts became involved in partisan politics and made great stride.

1. **campaign process:** Immediately upon my return to UHCL I set up the campaign office in my house. The dining room converted into volunteers’ working area. I hired the leader of College Young Republicans at UHCL. He was smart and competent to get the campaign organized but was soon terminated for dishonesty with campaign expenses. He was found to use my campaign funds and spent time for his own congressional campaign in a different district. He later became Congressman Steve Stockman twice but was convicted on 23 felony counts in 2018. Subsequently, he was sentenced to serve ten years in prison, and was ordered to pay $1,014,718.51 in restitution. He was one of the last few people pardoned by President Trump prior to the end of his presidency.

After Stockman’s waste of my campaign time and resources, my campaign was quickly reorganized by a consultant group from Dallas. They hired a campaign manager, a campaign coordinator and a secretary.  With a local Chinese merchant’s generosity, the campaign HQ moved to one of his empty offices. Although the campaign was well organized and operated by the “professionals” the price tag was high.

My campaign inspired and encouraged many Chinese American volunteers in Houston as well as around the nation. Mrs. Isada Lee of Clear Lake worked nearly as a full-time volunteer while my dining room was still constantly filled with local tireless volunteers. They prepared mailers, various signs and delivered and placed the yard signs. Later, on the eve of the election day, the main streets in the I-610 loop areas were saturated with my street signs.  Unfortunately, many of them were removed by some people within hours.

My opponent was Dolly Madison McKenna, a white investment banker. She was not a member of any Republican group and did not even live in the district. Her residence in Houston was much shorter than mine. Yet, she had the support of the lily-white Republican Women’s Clubs including the Bay Area club which I had contributed my time, resources, and leadership for various campaign functions greatly for years. Obviously, racial background became a major factor during a competition. At that time, the Capitol Hill’s Roll Call magazine in Washington, DC pointed out this congressional primary was unprecedented expensive one in GOP history.  At the end, the difference between McKenna and me was only around 1200 votes.

Houston Chinese Americans could have delivered the difference of 600 votes – divided the 1200 votes by two, if they had the faith and commitment to my campaign. A year earlier, a native young female Chinese American ran for Houston City Council but only received 6% of the votes. Thus, local Chinese Americans did not expect that I could have a close race and felt no need to come out to vote for me. From this close race, many Chinese Americans realized that they should not have underestimated their own candidates and political strength.

 **e) The results and impacts:** Although I lost by a narrow margin, my campaign inspired and boosted many other Asian Americans’ confidence in their political endeavors. I was proud of my “fight” and pleased with the impact in the following years. There were only four Asian American congressmen prior to 1993, excluding those in Hawaii, which had its unique political environment. Among these four, three were Japanese Americans from CA and one Indian. After 1993, a total of 16 Asian/Pacific American (APA) congresspersons were elected. In addition, currently there are quite a few APA public office holders throughout the US. In the year of 2020, there were 12 Asian/Pacific Americans running for state-wide office in Texas.

In the state of Texas, a Houston immigration lawyer, Gordon Quan, later was elected to the City Council in 1999. Mr. *Quan* was elected the first Asian-American to serve as an “at large” member of the *Houston City Council*. In 2002, he was selected as City of Houston Mayor Pro-Tam. Dr. Martha J. Wong was also elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 2002. The 8th term state Senator, Mrs. Angie Chen Button of Dallas, recognized my inspiration to her political endeavors at her November 2021 fundraiser in Houston.

1. **Self-reflection:** I learned several lessons from my unsuccessful campaign. First, I over trusted the campaign professionals’ advice without trusting my own judgement and listening to my own intuition. Both of my first campaign manager, Steve Stockman and subsequent consultants took advantage of my well-funded campaign. Then, the campaign strategies adopted by the consultants, based on an expensive survey against immigration, might have damaged my candidacy greatly.  The sentiments of anti-Japanese imported cars and immigration policy were undoubtedly a bad timing to my race as an Asian immigrant. I was portrayed by my opponent as a Japanese immigrant on TV ads. My consultants insisted to “hide” my Asian face without TV ads nor public appearance, only radio ads. Meanwhile, the consultants used a negative campaign to “define” my opponent with “tons” of mailers. This tactic was truly against my belief and personality. I was only “allowed” to walk with my volunteers in certain precincts and to continue my fundraising schedule.
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I was leading based on the early absentee votes. I am convinced that the negative campaign, and stealth candidacy had negative impacts on voters’ decision toward the end. Obviously, my conservative candidacy was well received initially by voters until my negative mailers bombarded voters.  I should have insisted on my own intuition instead of relying on the well-paid consultants.

As I predicted and promised, my campaign did have the ripple effect in the political arena. Possibly these lessons paved the road for two future Chinese American city council persons within two years and one state representative within six years. They were all American born Chinese and have no language barrier. At the national level, Chinese Americans are no longer exploited by the Democrat Party and are equally represented and recognized in the Republican Party. In 2000, Republican President Bush had one Chinese and one Japanese American cabinet member: Secretary Elaine Chao of the Labor Department and Secretary Norman Mineta of the Transportation Department. No previous administration, either Democrat or Republican, had any Asian American cabinet member.

**Being a Campaign staff at Bush/Quayle ‘92**

I was not discouraged by my unsuccessful congressional race in Houston, March 1992. After the congressional campaign, I reiterated my desire to support President Bush's reelection to Ron Kaufman, then the Political Director of the White House during President George H. Bush's administration. Mr. Kaufman complimented my close race and granted my request to work for the Bush/Quayle’92 campaign HQ as the national coordinator for Asian and Pacific American Coalition (APAC) for Bush/Quayle '92 from June until November 3, 1992. (Note: The complete documentaries for this section were archived in the Bush President Library in College Station, Texas. Copies of the documents were also archived in Rice University’s Fondren Library.)

I was the first full-time salaried Asian-American campaign staff ever appointed at a presidential campaign headquarters. I believed it was a good opportunity to mobilize Asian/Pacific Americans for the President's reelection. Previously, GOP presidential campaigns never had a paid staff in charge of Asian/Pacific American voting affairs; I was the first one. In 1988, Cindy Daub, the Korean wife of a congressman, oversaw the Asian/Pacific American voters as a volunteer.

In fact, many Asian/Pacific American leaders and GOP activists were fighting for this position since the beginning of 1992. People believed that this influential and powerful position would lead to a major political appointment if President Bush were reelected. In the Asian/Pacific American political circle, no one expected me to head this effort since I was busy with my own congressional race for months.
Being the National Coordinator for Asian/Pacific Americans for Bush/Quayle’92, commencing in May 1992, I assumed extensive responsibilities.  I began to work at the Bush/Quayle campaign HQ in L Street until the end of the campaign in November. My major responsibility was to reach out, organize, galvanize and turn out both Asian/Pacific American and non-Asian/Pacific American voters throughout the nation. I reached out more than 20 Asian/Pacific American groups and organized them according to their ethnic background at both state and national levels. Each ethnic group had its own national chair, state chairs and steering committees. I made sure that those long-time and well-known Asian Republicans, such as Anna Chennault, Elaine Chao and John Tsu were recognized in the organizational structure.  Meanwhile, I also included the new “blood” who were energetic and able to deliver the planned tasks. It was a very delicate task to ensure fraction-free interactions among all APA diverse groups and community leaders. Through my travel and coordination, I planned many campaign events in conjunction with the schedule of both President Bush and Vice President Quayle.

In addition, I also compiled a list of Asian newspapers/media outlets throughout the country and worked with them closely.  The Asian/Pacific American voters were well informed of the events, issues and position of BQ'92. The new high-tech internet then made the information dissemination much faster than ever. During my more than 5 months at the campaign HQ I was assisted by several young and full-time volunteers including Luke Bellocchi, who later became a legislative staff member at the US Congress.

My disappointing memory of the 1984 GOP Convention remained fresh while I was playing an important role in the Bush/Quayle ’92 national campaign. My experiences at the 1984 GOP National Convention in Dallas as an alternate delegate inspired me to form a mainstreamed Asian/Pacific American auxiliary, named Texas Asian Republican Caucus under the Texas GOP. Now, it became Texas Asian Republican Assembly. At the 1984 Convention, I witnessed how enthusiastic Asian/Pacific Americans were misled to attend the Convention without the required credentials and left outside the Convention. They were not advised or guided correctly to become a delegate or an alternate. Since then, I encouraged and involved Asian/Pacific American (APA) activists to take part in my grassroots efforts through the Texas Asian Republican Caucus (TARC). My own congressional campaign in 14 cities in 1991-1992 further reinforced my commitment to increase APA’s mainstream participation.

Being the National Coordinator for Bush/Quayle campaign, I was determined to double or even triple the number of Asian/Pacific American delegates and alternates in 1984.   I advised and organized Asian/Pacific American leaders to become delegates and alternates at the 1992 GOP National Convention in Houston, my home city. I informed them of the selection process through either their local elections or appointments. As a result, the number of the APA of 1992 national delegates and alternates was unprecedented and record breaking. This time, I was elected as a full-pledged delegate from my own congressional district. The documents can be found at the Bush Presidential Library in Texas.

The Bush/Quayle ‘92 campaign took a big downturn after the 1992 National Convention in Houston. President Bush was defeated by Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. Based on my analysis, the failure of the race was attributed by the following three major facts: 1) The top campaign leaders were over complacent. They refused to attack Clinton’s Jennifer Flour’s case and other scandals to keep on the high road; 2) The campaign was over controlled by right-wing advisors who only focused on the family issues but totally ignored the economic conditions and pocketbooks of the general voters; and 3) Bush’s poor performance at the debates with Clinton.

However, I believe in loyalty and commitments even at the expense of my own career interests. I was determined to narrow down the margins as much as possible for all my involved campaigns. This time, I demonstrated the same level of loyalty to Bush/Quayle '92 as I did with Senator Dole's campaign in 1988 primary. As the polls started turning against Bush after the GOP National Convention, some campaign staff and political appointees began jumping of the ship. At that moment, I was notified by the University of Houston/Clear Lake to either return for the fall semester to teach or resign from my tenured position due to my lengthy leave.  I chose to relinquish my tenured and secured professorship and decided to stay with the presidential campaign to the finish line as I always did. In the last two months of the campaign, I worked tirelessly to turn out Asian/Pacific American’s votes, spending more than 16 hours daily at the campaign HQ. Based on Time Magazine's report, Asian/Pacific Americans had the highest percentage of votes for Bush/Quayle with 60% as compared with other groups. I was very pleased with and proud of the results.

**ACCC – America China Chamber of Commerce**

**​**With my teaching experience in Multicultural studies and my bilingual/bilingual background, I was at times as a business consultant on cross-cultural training for both public and private sectors, i.e., FBI, GM, Exxon and Houston Police Academy.  My consultation was well sought after shortly following the opening of the China market in mid-1980s. I also wrote articles for Business Magazine to alleviate the frustration experienced by American companies and businesspeople in the newly opened China market.

My departure from the tenured position with University of Houston/Clear Lake offered me an opportunity to serve the business community after my appointment with the Bush/Quayle '92 reelection campaign. In the summer of 1993, I founded America China Chamber of Commerce (ACCC). Under my leadership, several trade delegations went to China for possible joint-venture opportunities.  I also delivered many speeches around the country to promote cross-cultural understanding, including state sponsored conferences on investment opportunities in China.

**Publications and speech engagement**

​​I am a bilingual writer and have published eight books, authored several newspaper/magazine columns, and nearly 100 professional journal articles. I occasionally wrote opinion pieces for newspapers on special issues. I have been invited to speak on various topics, primarily about life and politics at churches, regular TV programs and my own podcast and YouTube channels.

**Second Chapter of personal life** – I remarried 6 years after ending a nearly 30 years of marriage. Thank God’s mercy and blessings; both my career and marriage have been turned out beyond my expectation. I retired as the dean of the Graduate School of Troy University in Montgomery after moving to a lake front residence with both mountain and water views. Learning is never ended. My husband, Bill, and I have learned more history, geography, culture, and people through our travel to 49 states with RV and more than 130 nations. Most important, I have gained a much better understanding of America and Americans during my retirement. In addition to travel, boating, sailing and flying with our four-seater airplane, I have continued my hobby of gardening with beautiful flowers indoors and outdoors.