

UC Davis

UC Davis Previously Published Works

Title

A Review of Higher Education in 2022 for Chinese Americans

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8vd7z1pn>

Journal

Wind Newspaper

Author

Jue, Thomas

Publication Date

2022-12-28

Peer reviewed

Opinions

Opinion: A review of higher education in 2022 for Chinese Americans

By Prof. Thomas Jue / 陳煦活教授

December 28, 2022

Updated: January 1, 2023 9:32 a.m.



The controversy over abolishing SAT or other standardized testing as a merit-based admissions criterion will challenge the University of California. Courtesy UC Davis

After 154 years, the University of California permits another Chinese American to break a glass ceiling in 2022 in its Board of Regents. Carmen Chu becomes the second Chinese American woman to serve as a UC Regent.

Chu's public service trajectory started from the Budget Office when Mayor Newsom appointed her in 2008 to replace the embattled Supervisor Ed Jew. In 2013, Mayor Ed Lee appointed her to serve as Assessor-Recorder to fill in for Phil Ting, who became a State Assemblyman. In 2021, Mayor London Breed appointed Chu to replace former City Administrator Naomi Kelly, who departed during the Mohammed Nuru imbroglio at Public Works.

Her experience in resolving political conflict will serve her well as she grapples with the looming issues facing higher education. Hopefully, she will use perspectives from the Chinese community to balance and inform her policy formulations and decisions.

For Chinese Americans, education stands as a paramount aspiration and a socio-economic ladder to escape the stigma of exclusion.

Even though the 1943 Magnuson Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Judy Chu's 2012 resolution expressed the House of Representatives' regret over the Act, the legal precedent supporting the Exclusion Act remains as a lethal sword for a demagogue to wield.

The courts have never overruled the reasoning that supported an act targeting a select ethnic group. As politicians whip up anti-immigrant sentiments that seed anti-Asian hate crime, the weapon metaphor feels so very real.

Yet, Chinese Americans have never accepted submissively discriminatory policies and do not focus only on just getting ahead as the model minority would stereotype. Instead, they have fought over the years for equality and just treatment as the US Constitution espouses and guarantees, especially with respect to immigration and education.

In 1884, a few years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Mamie Tape protested her exclusion from Spring Valley Primary School in San Francisco because of her Chinese ethnicity. The California Supreme Court ruled unanimously in her favor in *Tape v Hurley* (1885), which stood like a harbinger of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision in 1954. However, the court ruling did not enable Tape to enroll in Spring Valley, because during the court deliberation, the California Legislature passed a bill to enshrine its bald intent: a separate but inferior education for the Chinese.

Education continues to animate Chinese Americans, who constitute about 1.5% of the U.S. population. Asian Americans comprise about 6%. During the recent San Francisco Board of Education recall, Chinese Americans participated quite actively and voiced their opposition to members preoccupied with removing any slave owner overtone in school names, with spewing racist Asian American tropes, and with sacrificing merit-based admission at Lowell.

The controversy over abolishing SAT or other standardized testing as a merit-based admissions criterion will challenge the University of California, especially if Asian American enrollment diminishes disproportionately as some have already predicted.

The settlement in the *Kawika Smith v UC Regents* precludes standardized testing until 2025. What happens after 2025 remains uncertain, even though UC has no current plan to activate standardized testing after 2025.

Caitlin Flanagan, however, has challenged the rationale supporting the abolishment of the SAT in her provocative Atlantic article, "The University of California is lying to U.S.: Does getting right with contemporary concepts of anti-racism mean reviving one of the state's most shameful tradition?".

UC has contested Flanagan's article, but her thesis should still provide a basis for thoughtful discussion. Will the policy of abolishing SAT really reach the intended goals? Does the policy conform to the goals articulated in the Master Education Plan developed in 1960 as codified in the Donahoe Higher Education Act?

The CA Master Education Plan established a laudable, coherent educational plan with the UC, California State University, and Community College systems to provide efficiently higher education opportunities for all Californians regardless of their economic means.

Yet, it maintained a merit-based ideal: academic progress should be limited only by individual proficiency.

Chu will grapple with these complex, contentious issues to ensure access to higher education without sacrificing academic excellence, which underpins UC's current leadership role in training the next generation to pilot innovation and new ideas, to energize the US economy, and to preserve global well-being.

As she leans in, she should also lean on the Chinese American experience to craft equitable and effective policies for higher education. In doing so, she will find informed perspectives about the role of education in evolving US culture toward a pluralistic and equitable society.

* Professor Thomas Jue is teaching at the University of California at Davis