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Introduction –Exploring and Expanding the Political World Pioneered by Don T. Nakanishi

Andrew Aoki & Pei-te Lien

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Like many milestones, this issue of *Politics, Groups, and Identities* points both forward and backward. The issue itself was inspired by and is in part a tribute to a pioneering figure in the field, Don T. Nakanishi (hereafter “Don”), who helped to lay out the contours which the articles in this special issue are helping to fill in. The research presented here is a testimony to the breadth of Don’s vision, while it also exemplifies the recent growth and expansion of scholarship on Asian Pacific American (APA) politics.

Don was on the front lines in the early battles for acceptance of racial and ethnic studies. He fought hard—and eventually successfully—to gain recognition for the scholarly validity of Asian American studies. Don’s legacy goes well beyond this, however. Throughout his career, he epitomized the engaged scholar that remains a model for many who study U.S. racial and ethnic politics. In addition, his vision of the potential scope of APA politics helped to define it as its own field of study, one that went well beyond voting behaviour or opinion studies, and he anticipated the growing body of scholarship examining transnational influences, an approach which can be captured in a 2x2 table that attempts to visualize the research agenda laid out by him over thirty years ago.¹ Table 1 shows how the articles in this volume would fall into the four cells as they explore but also expand the dimensions suggested by Don.

¹ See Nakanishi (1985) for his classic statement. .

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Don was a leader in blazing the scholarly trail for the study of APA politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1969, while a junior at Yale, Don and Glen Omatsu organized Asian American students on campus. Working with Yale Mexican American students, Don also helped to establish a chapter of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano Aztlan (MEChA). In 1970, he and Lowell Chun-Hoon co-founded *Amerasia Journal*, “the first national periodical dedicated to scholarship, criticism and literature on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” (Ishizuka 2009, 220). After graduating from Yale and earning a Ph.D. in political science at Harvard, Don taught political science and Asian American studies at UCLA, eventually gaining a tenure-track appointment in the UCLA Graduate School in Education in 1982. When he came up for tenure four years later, he became the center of an epic battle that would last three years, during which time UCLA students, elected officials, and many others would rally to his cause, culminating in his being granted tenure in 1989.²

Don epitomized the scholar-activist, always ready to assist the communities he studied. He served on many boards, including the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund Board of Directors, to which President Bill Clinton had appointed him. He led the way in demonstrating that Asian American registration and voting was low, despite the relatively high socioeconomic status that would usually predict high rates of turnout.³ For two decades, he directed the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA. In 1976, he

² For chronological summary of Nakanishi’s tenure battle at UCLA, see Matsuda (2009). See Minami (2009, 152-65) for a more extensive discussion of the tactics and strategy employed in this struggle.

³ See, for example, Nakanishi (1998).

began the collection of roster data on Asian American and Pacific Islander American individuals in government positions, an effort which, in 1995, became the *National Asian Pacific American Almanac*, an annual publication he co-edited with James Lai.

In addition to teaching and mentoring countless graduate and undergraduate students who sought to study APA politics, Don also helped to expand the study of race and politics. In 1995, he joined a group of scholars who founded the American Political Science Association (APSA) Organized Section on Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP), a section that has played a significant role in expanding the space for scholars interested in the study of race and ethnicity. In 1999, Don helped to organize the REP section's program for the APSA conference in Atlanta, where the Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC) was formed. At the APSA annual meeting in Washington, D.C. the next year, Don was one of the speakers at the first-ever panel sponsored by APAC, and, in 2001, he served as co-editor (with Andrew Aoki) of a *PS* symposium on APA politics, the first such symposium to appear in a political science journal.⁴

Subsequent scholars have built considerably on Don's trailblazing efforts. The same year that the *PS* symposium appeared, Pei-te Lien published the first scholarly monograph offering a comprehensive view of Asian American politics (Lien 2001). In the following years, there was robust growth in data collection, including the groundbreaking Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS), fielded after November 2000 elections. The PNAAPS was the first national survey of Asian Americans to be conducted in multiple languages. Given that a majority of APAs were immigrants, multilingual surveys were a necessity, a practice that was continued with the 2008 National Asian American Survey (NAAS) and its later iterations. Other

⁴ The articles appeared in *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34:3 (September 2001): 602-644.

surveys have also been conducted in multiple languages, including the Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), which had large samples of Asian American, Black, Latino, and White voters in both its 2012 and 2016 rounds. The infusion of these large-scale survey datasets has been an enormous boon to scholars of APA politics, especially those who employ quantitative methods.

As a result of these developments, we have witnessed the birth of a new generation of scholars who would fuel the growth of conference papers, journal articles, and monographs on APAs and US electoral politics. Another reflection of and contribution to this growth has been a mini-conference (“conference-within-a-conference”) on APA politics that has been held in recent years at the annual meeting of the Western Political Science Association. Scholarship on voting and elections and public opinion is still the most prevalent, but research in other areas that employ non-quantitative methodologies has proliferated, too. A parallel growth is seen in the teaching of Asian American politics, either as a stand-alone course or as part of the offerings on US ethnic and racial politics. Andrew Aoki and Okiyoshi Takeda (2009) contributed significantly to this trend when they published the nation’s first comprehensive textbook on Asian American politics about a decade ago.

The current volume provides more evidence of this growth. Several of the authors have been through their graduate training in the last decade or so. When Don was beginning his career, much of the research focused on East Asian Americans, but this issue’s contributions reflect a much wider range of representation of the ethnic origin of both authors and their research subjects as well as inclusion of research that pays greater attention to gender, intersectionality, and new geographic areas (e.g., Texas and Pacific Islands). With unprecedented breadth and depth in coverage and by employing a rigorous standard of scholarship in this commemorative volume—the

nation's first full journal issue on APA politics in a mainline outlet, we certainly hope it can set a new milestone, not only in research, but in teaching and learning, of Asian American politics specifically and US racial and ethnic identity politics in general.

The first several research articles in this issue illustrate some of the work that has been sparked by the greater availability of survey data. Many of these articles are helping to fill in a specific corner or corners of the contours (as shown in Table 1) that Don sketched out in his earlier writing on APA politics.

The first article examines a question central not just to the study of APA politics but to American politics more broadly: how does one community of color perceive the struggle of another? Drawing on the 2016 CMPS, Merseth assesses Asian American support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. With some echoes of the pioneering work of Michael C. Dawson (1994), her analysis finds that Asian American feelings of linked fate—both with Asian Americans and with other communities of color—predict higher degrees of support for BLM.

Phoenix and Arora also draw on the 2016 CMPS in their examination of the role of emotions in mobilizing Asian Americans as compared to that of other racial groups. Building on prior research done on Latinos, they seek to understand the roles that anger and fear play, concluding that fear for Asians is a stronger motivator of political participation than is anger.

Phillips and Lee turn to the understudied question of gender differences among Asian Americans. They draw on the growing NAAS data series, finding not only that Asian American women seem to face more barriers to incorporation compared to their male counterparts, but also that this varies by ethnic subgroup (e.g., there is a considerably greater gender gap for Filipino Americans than for Chinese Americans in the effects of education on female voting turnout).

Raychaudhuri also examines intra-Asian variation, but her study of Houston area Asian Americans focuses on differences by generation in political socialization. She draws extensively on interview data in her analysis, supplementing it with survey data of residents in the same metropolitan area in Texas.

McCarthy and Hasunuma also use qualitative methods in their exploration of efforts to create memorials to the Korean “comfort women” of World War II. Their work highlights the way that transnational factors can be important elements in APA politics. McCarthy and Hasunuma’s complex story also shows the fascinating ways that international and local political pressures can interact, as Don had long maintained.

While there have been major advances in our knowledge of APA politics, huge gaps remain. de Leon and Daus seek to address one of those—on the political behaviour of Filipino Americans. Drawing on interviews with politically active respondents, their thick but preliminary study calls attention to the community’s feelings of marginalization and neglect by the political parties. Their report offers reasons for what they perceive to be the political invisibility of Filipino Americans and suggestions on how to improve the situation.

The de Leon and Daus article helps to pave the way for further research and also invites discussion, creating a nice transition to our dialogue pieces. That section’s articles are meant to stimulate conversation about the ways that APA politics is conceived, what it encompasses, and how it is taught.

The first article in the Dialogue section summarizes important battles over sovereignty in Hawai‘i, providing a valuable overview of an often-overlooked aspect of APA and American politics. Goodyear-Ka’opua provides a status report on the efforts of indigenous groups in Hawai‘i, helping to illustrate how Pacific Islander Americans

have some unique concerns that are very different from the typical issues addressed in the study of Asian American politics.

The next dialogue piece also explores complexities of APA politics, examining how race and gender interact to influence and motivate community activists in their pursuit for social justice. Filler's study provides further food for thought about how APA politics should be conceived and practiced and linked to research and action projects in feminist studies and ethnic studies.

The following article raises those questions more explicitly. Collet explores the scholarly vision of Don T. Nakanishi, arguing strongly for attention to the transnational dynamics that Don highlighted over three decades ago, and which became the focus of his post-retirement research and writing, efforts left unfinished by his abrupt passing in 2016. Collet's piece serves as a wonderful reminder and call for action to help finish Don's work.

While there have been significant strides in research on APA politics in recent decades, it seems useful to ask how much that research has made it into the textbooks that educate the next generation of Americans. Takeda assesses this through a study of widely used American government texts, and finds that APA politics has a very small presence, even if there has been some modest improvement over time.

The final part of this section explores a new question that is also very old: is there an Asian American political theory (AAPT)? Fred Lee argues that AAPT is more than simply the intersection of political theory and Asian American politics, characterized to a great extent by the broad approach that Don advocated four decades ago. Charles Lee commends this bold effort to outline the contours of AAPT and suggests that there be more cross-pollination of the empirical and theoretical approaches to Asian American politics, perhaps built into graduate training. We suggest for anyone

wondering about the fruits of such a combination consult Michael Dawson's *Black Visions* (2001), one of the most impressive examples of the melding of sophisticated empirical methods and political theory. Edmund Fong also welcomes Fred Lee's effort, but questions whether the act of definition is itself too limiting. For Fong, if AAPT exists, it coheres around an effort to erase disciplinary boundaries and surmount the ideologies that created those boundaries in the first place. We decided to publish these reviewers' comments on Fred Lee's piece, for the quality of intellectual exchange between the reviewers and the author exemplifies what a dialogue essay should and can do. A full version of Charles Lee's commentary is available online.

This volume closes with a review essay assessing a sample of recent monographic scholarship on APA politics. Prepared by someone who knew Don from his graduate student days and shares his visions, perspectives, and passion for advancing the APA community, Watanabe offers substantial evidence for the growth of this subfield, in breadth as well depth, and he concludes with a poignant hope that the new generation of scholars will continue to be deeply engaged with issues of concern to the communities that they study, a passion which drove Don throughout his career. We cannot agree more with this call for action.

Together, this collection of new research and writings on APA politics stand as a tribute to the research agenda that Don helped to establish while they also push the boundaries of that research agenda ever farther. We are grateful to the many reviewers who have so generously provided valuable feedback (often multiple times) to help strengthen each piece in this collection, feedback that often had to come in a very compressed time frame necessary for the timely release of this issue. We know we can speak loudly for all the authors (especially junior scholars) in their deep appreciation for the time and energy you took to provide critical and sage advice to help significantly

improve the manuscripts. We also appreciate the invaluable and timely assistance from the PGI office, especially the editor-in-chief Nadia Brown and assistant Kristen Smole. Finally, we regret that due to spatial and other professional concerns, we were unable to accommodate all the thoughtful submissions. Our appreciation for your support is all the same. We hope you enjoy reading this collection as much as we do and find it useful for your teaching and research as well as your community engagement.

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TABLE 1: Articles in this issue, categorized along dimensions suggested by Nakanishi (1985)

	Non-electoral	Electoral
Non-Domestic	McCarthy & Hasunuma, Collet	de Leon & Daus, Collet
US-Domestic	Merseth, Phillips & Lee, Goodyear, Filler	Phoenix & Arora, Phillips & Lee, Raychaudhuri, de Leon & Daus

Others: Political Theory (PT)--Lee, Pedagogy-Takeda