

# The AACCP Newsletter

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## An Interview with Fiona Ma

Interviewed by Philip Chin

Fiona Ma is the California State Assembly Majority Whip and has been representing California's 12th Assembly District, which includes western San Francisco and parts of northern San Mateo County, since 2007. From 2002 to 2006 she was a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors representing San Francisco's Sunset District. Prior to her election to this position, she was the part-time district representative for State Senator John Burton with a regular job as a CPA. Despite being a freshman in the Assembly she was appointed to the Majority Whip position by then Speaker of the State Assembly Fabian Núñez in recognition of her strength as a fundraiser and as one of the outstanding politicians of the Democratic Party in California.

### **What do you do as the majority whip in the State Legislature? What are the challenges and rewards of the job?**

As majority whip I help make sure the Democratic caucus members are on the floor and ready to vote on bills that are important to the Democratic caucus. One challenge is meeting the needs of every member. In that challenge comes a great reward; working with so many different kinds of personalities helps me be a better person.

### **Many people I've talked to want to ask you about education, education, education. They refer back to a golden age of California public education when we led the nation in per pupil spending and ranking. Why aren't we there today and what are you and the state government trying to do about it to bring us back there? Also, why is California spending increasing amounts of money on prisons while cutting back on education when crime is clearly linked to a lack of education?**

As our state grows, so too does the need for resources. As a strong believer in the public education system I support fully funding

public education. Ideally, our teachers would be better paid, we would have more teachers, the goals of the Master Plan would be achieved by ensuring every student would have a guaranteed spot in higher education that is fully funded and paid for. But as we have seen in recent years, there has been a revenue problem. I support looking at ways to gain additional revenue such as closing tax loopholes and taking a look at possibly reforming Proposition 13 so homeowners are protected from increasing property taxes but ensure that businesses are paying their fare share. As a CPA, I understand the bottom line. Democrats want to be able to have more per pupil spending, and we understand that no one wants more taxes. But in order to maintain California's economy and improve educational outcomes, we need to do more for our children.

### **Many voters say they want better education or more prisons but are the same voters that say they don't want to pay higher taxes. How do you reconcile the contradictory expectations of the voters with the state's financial situation?**

Sadly not everyone can have their wants met, especially when it comes to these hard pressing issues. In a perfect world there would be no taxes, no prisons and an education system that rises above the rest. Many voters understand that there is a price that needs to be paid in order to provide essential services including ensuring public safety and providing a first class education to our state's children. Just last week a group of wealthy Californians signed a letter to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and the legislative leaders volunteering to be taxed at a higher rate to balance the budget. The legislature faces a budget that contains a \$15 billion shortfall.

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## Where are you from?

### No, I mean where are you really from?

An Editorial by Leonard D. Chan

Okay, I don't have the statistics to back this, but August and September appears to be moving season. You may come to this conclusion as I have by noticing all the rental moving trucks and all the advertisements for houseware and furniture. Kids are headed back to school and meeting new classmates, and adults are meeting their new neighbors and new co-workers.

Something that you may hear or even ask others is the question "Where are you from?" I'm not sure if this question still carries the racially charged meaning it use to have, but I still know people that get very upset when they hear it. So what's wrong with this question?

### **What's really being asked?**

For those of you that may have never been asked the question or are not acutely aware of its potential to offend, here's the problem - what is the question really asking? Does the question imply that the person being asked doesn't look like they belong here?

As someone that has been on the receiving end of the question - what goes through my mind is that the questioner is either trying to figure out my nationality or my ethnicity. If the questioner is curious about my ethnic origin, I don't really have much of a problem with that. But if the question is one of nationality, I start

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## Give Us Your Feedback

Please feel free to send us your reviews, comments, and book suggestions. You can contact us at -  
aacpinc@asianamericanbooks.com

### Up Coming Events

Here are some events that AACCP will soon be attending. Invite us to your events.

Date/Time	Event	Location
Sept. 25-27	California Council For History Education	Hyatt Regency Santa Clara, CA
Other Event of Interest that AACCP May Not Attend		
Sept 6 Sept 7	Peering through the Portal	CounterPULSE San Francisco, CA
Sept 7 12-1pm	Ann Bowler will be doing a reading of The Adventures of the Treasure Fleet	SF Asian Art Museum San Francisco, CA
Sept. 13	Midori Kai Arts & Craft Boutique	MV Buddhist Temple Mountain View, CA
Sept. 14 11am-4pm	Chinatown Mall Culture Fair	Historic Chinatown Mall Sacramento, CA
Sept. 27 6pm	San Mateo OCA's 21th Anniversary Asian American Achievement Awards	S. SF Conv. Center S. SF, CA
Oct. 4-5	Kaiser Permanente San Francisco International Dragon Boat Festival	Treasure Island San Francisco, CA
Oct 11	China Disabled Person's Performing Art Troupe	Center for the Performing Arts San Jose, CA
Nov. 15 8-3pm	National Pacific Islander Educator Network (NPIEN) 7th Annual Education Conference	Paramount High School 14429 S. Downey Ave. Paramount, CA

## An Interview with Fiona Ma

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**One of the issues that you're working on is getting the financing together to build a high-speed railway across California. Why spend billions on that when there are so many other things that California needs?**

I've become convinced that reliable, fast, clean trains can replace single user auto trips. We can't be last in the world when climate change is such a global problem that requires all of our commitment. An investment in high speed rail will improve the quality of life for all Californians. High speed trains will take cars off the road, alleviate congestion at the airports, provide over 100,000 new construction and permanent jobs, and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. California is light years behind the rest of the world. Japan has had high-speed trains for over 40 years and France for over 25 years. Other countries with high speed trains include: China, Russia, Germany, Italy, South Korea,

## Editor's Message

Hello Everyone,

Here are some miscellaneous notes from readers and friends of the organization that have emailed me about their articles and events.

Rick Ayers, a professor that writes article for the Huffington Post, sent me an article that critiques the musical South Pacific. Have a read at - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/emsouth-pacificem---musi\\_b\\_99550.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rick-ayers-/emsouth-pacificem---musi_b_99550.html).

Journalist William Wong sent me an article on his thoughts about the Olympics. You can read the article at [http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/uschina/ee\\_chinaandme.shtml](http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/uschina/ee_chinaandme.shtml).

Poet, teacher, and writer, Genny Lim, will have her collaborative poetry, dance, and music work, called Peering through the Portal, performed on September 6 and 7th. For more information go to <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/40132>.

Ann Bowler, author of Adventures of the Treasure Fleet, will be doing a reading at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum on Sunday September 7th at 12 noon. <http://www.asianart.org/family.htm>

An email from Ken Jue informs me that the Cantonese Opera Association Silicon Valley will host a performance by the China Disabled Person's Performing Art Troupe on October 11th. For more information go to Cantonese Opera Association Silicon Valley website. <http://coasv.com/c2/>

Thank you Fiona Ma for answering our interview questions and thank you Philip for conducting the interview.

That's all for now everyone.

Bye.

Leonard Chan  
Executive Editor

And even Turkey is developing a system that is close to completion. Funding for the system in California will be split 1/3 by the state, 1/3 by the federal government, and 1/3 through private financing. High-speed rail will generate revenue and easily pay for itself. It will help California meet our ambitious greenhouse gas emission goals and improve everyone's quality of life.

**Another issue that you've been working on is banning lead from toys, especially those imported from China that has made the news lately. A friend of mine recommends toys featured on NBC's "Today Show" and while she supports your efforts said that testing and enforcement would be a logistical and financial nightmare; you'd either end up with empty store shelves at Christmas or fewer but more expensive toys depending on how long a grace period the toy industry**

**was given to absorb the legislation's impact. How would you respond?**

Last year I authored AB 1108 to make California the first state in the country to ban the chemical-phthalates in toys. Phthalates interfere with the hormone system and have been linked to reproductive defects, premature birth, and the early onset of puberty, which is a cause of breast cancer. I am happy to report that Congress recently passed legislation to ban the chemical from toys at the federal level. Many of the large retailers have already agreed to remove toys and the European Union and 13 other countries have already banned phthalates.

Safe alternatives exist and many companies have been producing phthalate free products for years, so the new federal ban should have little to no impact on the price or selection of toys on store shelves.

**What are Asian American politicians doing to ally with the growing Latino majority in the state?**

As a member of the API legislative caucus, I work closely with the Latino caucus on issues of mutual concern. I have authored legislation to halt human trafficking and to provide paid sick days to all California workers. These are two issues that I believe have major impacts on both communities.

**What are some of the measures that you've authored or are currently supporting that directly helps Asian Americans?**

For the last year, I've worked in San Francisco to make people aware of the impact of hepatitis B in California's diverse communities, especially among Asian Americans. Through the Hep B Free campaign, we've tested thousands of San Franciscans, provided vaccination and treatment information, and formed a network of groups committed to ending hepatitis B. However, there are people who are learning they have chronic hepatitis B, but who lack health insurance. Current law makes them wait until they are disabled to get help. This year I authored AB158, which would expand Medi-Cal benefits to non-disabled people diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B. Approximately 280,000 Californians are infected with chronic hepatitis B. People with chronic hepatitis B have a higher risk of developing cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer. Early treatment of hepatitis B can reduce the risk of progression to liver disease and liver cancer. Current law makes uninsured Californians wait until they are disabled to get Medi-Cal assistance. AB 158 recognizes the cost savings of early treatment.

**Oftentimes smaller Asian American and Pacific American communities in California with their own unique community problems are forgotten when seen against the much larger populations of Chinese and Japanese Americans. Have you authored or are supporting any legislation specifically designed to help forgotten communities such as the Samoans, Tongans, Cambodians, and Hmong?**

This year I authored AB 3084 which encourages social studies instruction on World War II to include instruction on the role of Filipinos in that war and accurate history of the contributions of the Filipino American veterans. The bill encourages the instruction to include a component drawn from personal

testimony, especially in the form of oral or video histories of Filipinos who were involved in World War II and those men and women who contributed to the war effort on the home front.

**Voters oftentimes wish for "bipartisanship" but most of politics, especially in California, appears to be an endless recitation of what is wrong with the other party. Is there anything you can say that is complimentary of the Republicans? How can politicians work together in Sacramento to achieve bipartisanship as some readers might add, "without killing each other?"**

Republicans are elected, just like Democrats, to represent their constituents, and for the most part I believe many of my Republican colleagues represent their districts accordingly. I work closely with my Republican colleagues on issues where we are able to agree. I have co-authored a number of Republican bills and vice-versa. I believe that it's important to reach out to the other side of the aisle in order to help bring positive change to the state. During my first year, I was able to get 7 of the 8 bills that were sent to the Republican Governor's desk signed, and I hope to have a similar track in years to come.

**Do term limits have an effect on the relationships between legislators?**

Whenever people are limited in their time together, relationships are affected. Many members in the Assembly are freshman, so we were all on a learning curve. I was fortunate enough to work for Senator John Burton for seven years, which helped me to have a leg up when I came to Sacramento. While it's sometimes difficult to develop lasting relationships because there is a new class of legislators coming in every two years, I have made it a priority to reach out and get to know my colleagues before they are sworn in so when the transition happens there is an existing relationship. I was a supporter of the recent initiative to modify term limits to bring more stability to the two legislative houses by allowing members to serve all their service time in either house.

**Everyone always asks about the problems of the state. What are we doing right in California?**

California is a leader on many issues. For example, my toxic toys bill was a first in the nation law that was used as a model for the federal legislation that was passed by Congress. I am hopeful that California will shortly become the first state in the nation to have high-speed trains. The state is moving forward with creating a more unified community in which basic rights are being afforded to everyone. While being involved with the budget, I've learned how important it is to protect essential services that many in the state rely on and I believe the final budget will make minimal cuts to education, public safety and health care.

**What are your personal ambitions for the future? Any interest in running for governor or other statewide office?**

For now, I'm focusing on what I can do with the position I am currently in, and on getting this budget done. In regards to possible future plans, I am taking everything one step at a time. I have enjoyed serving in the Legislature as the Majority Whip representing San Francisco.

## **Where are you from?**

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to wonder - does this person go around asking this question to everyone or are Asian Pacific Americans really seen as the eternal foreigners?

### **The guessing game - are we being prejudice?**

We all do it - I think it's instinctual. It's in our nature to try to guess and figure out the others around us. Being able to distinguish between dangerous and friendly people and situations has served us fairly well throughout the ages. But when the guessing game fails to represent someone accurately or in a fair way, that's what we normal perceive as being prejudice.

Each one of us is a member of countless groups with a multitude of different characteristics. Membership in a particular group does not paint the full picture. I am Asian American and this is an

important part of me, but this barely begins to describe all of who I am.

### **Maybe it's time for a better question.**

If you want to know my ethnic origin, maybe you should just ask that. If you ask me where I'm from and I answer San Francisco, be honestly interest in knowing that.

I've known some people for years without knowing their full ethnic make-up. In such cases, I sometimes feel a little lacking as a friend - shouldn't I have known their ethnicity sooner? But perhaps learning ones ethnic origin doesn't have to be prioritized first. If you really want to get to know someone, maybe it's time to come up with a better starting question.

Have any suggestions? I'd love to hear them.

## ADDITIONS TO OUR WEBSITE

The following books are discounted for subscribers to our newsletter. The discounts on these books end September 19, 2008.

	<p><b>Something for School</b></p> <p>By Hyun Young Lee 2008, 31 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Just in time for the start of school, <i>Something for School</i> is about a little Korean girl name Yoon and her first awful school experience. Follow along as Yoon learns how to handle the situation and discovers that her identity goes beyond her outward appearance.</p> <p>Item #3516, Normally \$15.95 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$12.76</b></p>
	<p><b>Outside Beauty</b></p> <p>By Cynthia Kadohata 2008, 265 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Take a Holly Golightly (from <i>Breakfast at Tiffany's</i>) like character and give her four daughters fathered by four different men and you have <i>Outside Beauty</i>. This book by award winning author Cynthia Kadohata explores the life of a nontraditional family where a single mother and her daughters struggle to stay together through financial hardships, bad relationships, and a custody battle.</p> <p>Item #3517, Normally \$16.99 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$13.59</b></p>
	<p><b>The Moon Princess</b></p> <p>Retold by Hazuki Kataoka and David Battino Illustrated by Kazumi Verkler 2008, 24 pages, Story Card Format.</p> <p>This is a wonderful version of the classic Japanese folktale Kaguya-Hime (the Moon Princess). Hazuki Kataoka and David Battino's version of the <i>Moon Princess</i> is part of a series of stories that they produce which use the traditional Japanese Kamishibai style of unbound storycards. Illustrations are featured on one side of the card while the stories are written on the other side, thus making this an ideal format for story telling between a reader and an audience.</p> <p>Item #3518, Normally \$24.95 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$19.96</b></p>
	<p><b>Yao Ming</b> <b>The Road to the NBA</b></p> <p>By C. F. Xiao Translated by Philip Robyn 2004, 254 pages, Hardback.</p> <p>Going through withdraw from the just finished 2008 Summer Olympics in China? Perhaps this book is just the biography that could help you get over it. <i>Yao Ming: the Road to the NBA</i> is an interesting book on one of China's greatest athletes. Through this book you'll learn about the basketball player Yao Ming and, at the same time, learn about life as an athlete in China.</p> <p>Item #3519, Normally \$18.95 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$15.16</b></p>
	<p><b>Strangers From a Different Shore</b> <b>A History of Asian Americans</b></p> <p>By Ronald Takaki 1998, 591 pages, Paperback.</p> <p>We are featuring this book this month for those of you that may be taking an Asian American Studies history course this fall or for those of you that are just looking for a comprehensive book on the subject. UC Berkeley Professor Ronald Takaki's <i>Strangers from a Different Shore</i> is certainly still one of the best books on Asian American history and an excellent starting point for those of you that are just beginning to learn about the Asian American experience.</p> <p>Item #1581, Normally \$16.99 ... for newsletter subscribers <b>\$13.59</b></p>

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