

Interviewer: So just to start, can you please state your name, title, and affiliation?

Dr. Lien: Yes, I'm Pei-te Lien. I'm professor of political science, but also Asian American studies, feminist studies and Black studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Interviewer: Thank you. Can you tell us a little bit about your personal background, so specifically where you're from? What was your home or family life like growing up?

Dr. Lien: Yes. And Asian American people, like to know where I'm really from. And for me, it's the same. I was not born in this country. I was born in Taiwan, and I've been raised there until actually college education. And so, I enter, in the United States, to pursue graduate school.

Interviewer: And how were you introduced to the field of political science?

Dr. Lien: Yes. By accident. Or. Yes. So I was a English major, in Taiwan. And so that, you know, that was sort of very desirable discipline at that time. And most people after graduation, they would come to communications in abroad. And so I did that mass communication, a master's degree. My first study at University of Michigan. But for some personal matters, I decided to get married and have children. I didn't finish my degree. Okay, so years later, when I get divorced and I actually, as a foreigner, I have no degree. Actually, I in the United States, I have to make a living. So that's my best decision is to return to school. And so I return ed to graduate school at that time, University of Florida. But I have to start all over again, in the master's degree. So my master's degree is actually mass communication and journalism. And at that time, people know the reason that I return to graduate school is to get a job. But again, as a person, non -native English speaker, my advisor basically said that it would be difficult for you and to try to survive as a journalist in United States. And he suggested that perhaps you want to look a little bit at the neighboring, you know, out at, you know, it's, location where, yeah, it's kind of next building and which houses, sociology and political science. And I was basically just look at their website, you know, decided somebody call M. Margaret Conway, who study political behavior. Very few women, actually, at that time in the discipline, decided that maybe I can talk to her. And she mentioned that she would adopt me, and she did. And that was the, you know, what best decision for me. And for her, I believe she laid it out. And I think that's. You think?

Interviewer: Where did you attend undergrad?

Dr. Lien: That was actually in Taiwan National Taiwan University. So I as an English major.

Interviewer: And can you tell us a little bit more about either your undergrad and graduate school experience?

Dr. Lien: Oh, yes. I just came from a panel, they talked about I was glad that I grow up, I grow up in authoritarian society. So I sort of know how people feel about in an oppressive world. In the classroom, I was never given the opportunity to speak up. Instead, you know, it's just about taking, focusing on taking all that information that was give n you know, the benefit, of course, you get really focus right on this knowledge of factual knowledge. Hopefully, in something that sort of retention, you know, it's about memory rights. So we are also very good test takers. So that kind of does so so that is my very different background as I come to the U.S. eventually become, you know, the professors and and actually in the classroom as a graduate student, I become outspoken in the sense I kind of making up for the opportunity to speak up because I wasn't given that opportunity already before arriving in the United States. In the classrooms.

Interviewer: Were you a first generation scholar?

Dr. Lien: Actually, if you were asking this question, in the context of Taiwan. It was actually my parents were actually bold, came to Taiwan as refugees from China, and therefore they actually got a they got a college degree. So at that time, it was actually quite, we were considered quite educated people in Taiwan. But then I came to the United States alone, and then, you know, particularly when you get divorced and have two children, actually, at that time, it was really difficult, because, you don't have support and I and the worst thing is that I couldn't actually tell my parents that I got divorced because it was a shame for them. So I do need to, you know, lift myself up. And also, I always tell my children, I'm giving you the good example that you need to study hard and always study. And they did turn out very well academically. And so it was just my my, my entering the field is a little bit different from others.

Interviewer: Did you have any mentors along the way that made an impression on your career and if so, who?

Dr. Lien: Yes, in the political science field, that would be, M. Margaret Conway of the University of Florida. She was one of the very early political science woman, who's dedicated, to the studying of political behavior, particularly political participation. And so, at the time, with her permission, that I am able to study something that out of political science that I'm not studying at that time, that was actually a particular group that I didn't find in the textbook in the, the classroom. That's Asian -American. And so I decided I wanted to do something on that. You know, that so that other people can actually learn about that, you know, later on. Thank you.

Interviewer: And how would you characterize the political and social environment in the US while you were in undergrad or graduate school? You can also talk about Taiwan as your experience. And were you involved in social and political activism during those times?

Dr. Lien: Right. Actually, so even though I'm in Taiwan, but we kind of had to experience the war, the Vietnam War at that time and also the protests earlier. So we did I did learn from the television about what the U.S., you know, all these commotions and later, and I was in college actually, at that time, I have a classmate who were refugees from Vietnam. And I remember specifically that day, April when several of my classmates cry because they lost their country. They were from South Vietnam. They had no country to return to. So, yes. So the political events, do have some real impact even in my friendship. And so I have been, even though I am I was not a political science major, I have been always interested in public affairs and then journalism. And I was hoping that maybe I would do something, but then eventually become research on political behavior. And so I feel that I'm still very lucky to be able to carry, you know, whatever that make me passionate about.

Interviewer: Thank you. And can you tell us about your research trajectory? So, what was your dissertation topic? What is your current main area of focus? And were there any particular scholars whose work has influenced you throughout your career?

Dr. Lien: Yes. So I decided that I wanted to pursue what I didn't see in political science at that time. Therefore, the choice is actually to do something. Asian Americans and also at that time, because I was English major, then become a journalism, you know, student. And so I think interesting public what the public think, public opinion and but the method to study that is actually it was political science that helped me, you know, improve, that how do you survey a large population and representative in matters so that what you report about what people think is

can actually reflect what the real world looks like? And so when I study, when I said I wanted to study Asian Americans and the difficulty, in terms of surveying the opinion is that there's none, first of all. And and also, how do you know that they find a population who are willing to talk to you as you represent the other? So that I had to go through survey research. And so I do have one, not only my own dissertation, advisor who actually could not help but she permit me to do that. And I was actually have a remote mentor who actually we never really met until years afterward. He was actually a UCLA professor called Dan Nakanishi. Right. And later on, of course, we have the Dan Nakanishi Award to a kind of remembrance of his passing. But it was he was very influential. He was very generous. And to help out somebody who just expressing interest, wanting to study something like other people say, that's impossible. And people, people you won't have a job. That's what people say you won't have a job. You know, people don't know about the importance of research. But I said, but that's what I'm wanting to do with actually, I'm going to do it for my children. They are Asian Americans. I'm studying that so that I can become a better parent. So that's it's actually the private motivation actually.

Interviewer: We're shifting gears a little bit here. What is being a political scientist of color mean to you?

Dr. Lien: That is, of course, I didn't become political science by choice. But I was really lucky in that. Then I find out also, then I have a niche position. So few people are like me in the profession at that time, and I chose the topic also, it's considered I can pioneer, you know, in daunted, you know, in there going to a new field. So the politics being being a woman of color here, it's just really just being a pioneer. And I happened to be an Asian, immigrant woman of color. I think many layers of that identity, that I just feel like I was able to actually study myself, studied my community, studied at the future generation for my own children. It's all about me surrounding the community and learning myself and help others learn about our experiences. And so I feel like that even though many people will say, yeah, I can see many disadvantages, but I can also see how do I leverage that, into something that become a niche position.

Interviewer: And what challenges, if any, have you faced throughout your career either due to your race, gender, or your chosen field of study?

Dr. Lien: Yes. I guess I can begin with, so I want to study Asian Americans. And in my for my dissertation, I actually try to apply for funding. I tried to, you know, survey research takes a lot of money. So I try to apply for NSF. And at that time I it was a it was kind of a so a major reason

I didn't get the funding, is actually they said that why do we need to spend money on Asian American? Why is it important to study Asian American like unimaginable right now to understand that, but that was indeed the comment. And so I didn't get that. But of course everything is a silver lining. I mean, I didn't get that, therefore I was able to, you know, ask Professor Nakanishi, what can I do? And he actually introduced me to several survey done by the Los Angeles Times, at that time. And it happened to include some Asian Americans in the series. And so that's that kind of now gave me the opportunity not only to graduate early because I only need to do secondary analysis, because I have tried and didn't get that so my committee couldn't fault me for not wanting to and, you know, try to get money, but then because I actually did have a, I think, good enough of a, research proposal. So when I finish and find a job in both, joint positions in political science and ethnic studies, I was able to eventually get the NSF money and which become the nation's one other eventually the one of the nation, actually the nation's first, Asian American Survey political survey.

Interviewer: That's amazing. Thank you so much. And in your view, what is necessary in order to further diversify the discipline and make it more equitable and welcoming to scholars of color?

Dr. Lien: And I'm glad that you say further diversify. Definitely. The field has been diversify a lot in that way. Because I entered the field in as assistant professor, you know, like some years. Right. And so a lot has happened, those associations certainly play a very important role. Right. We have this, you know, the I program here, inclusive program here. And so in terms of further, it's actually need to be addressing the challenges of the times, then we have a managerial challenge in these tumultuous times. And how do we try to reach out, support those who are struggling. I was wondering about whether or not we could have this kind of mutual aid, fund or some kind of emergency fund to help people who are particularly in trouble. So that is the funding side. But it could be some activity doesn't really need to be money, but it could be about opportunity to, association could take, some leadership role in terms of either organizing, or supporting, things such as teaching, try to help educate, try to help educate. How do you deal with how do you, you survive, actually the challenges behind you. So there are many people, that knows about different ways to do it, but it just so many of us also, you know, every time, we don't know. So if we try to engage and learn about others and open up, to, for people to try to chime in and help each other out, I think that's how, you know, usually the way how people survive hard time is to try to support each other in association could play a facilitating role in that.

Interviewer: Touching on what you're already saying here, in addition to existing diversity, equity and inclusion programming, what is your advice to associations like APSA or WPSA on how to best support scholars of color as they approach different milestones in their career? So their dissertation completion, tenure and promotion and then career advancement.

Dr. Lien: Yeah. So this is interesting different because you are talking about professionalization, right? We all want to be part of that profession. But you know, I'm in the field actually oftentimes I'm also challenging the profession. You know, it turns out, you know, we see we kind of from a critical lens, particularly minorities. I feel privileged in that I'm able to see something that sort of majority in see I can see such as I'm immigrant parent, woman. So I can see that I have a hard time, to try and survive had it not because of the kind of the family support. I wouldn't be able to pay the tuition. I wouldn't be able to turn down the TA -ship, because I need to focus on studying so that I can graduate early to make income. So. So we, as a minority, we, have different life situations. Therefore, we sort of more understanding of the difficulties, some people face. And, so I'm appreciative of the association that actually created, all these kind of minority serving, you know, that the status committee of whatever try to help, you know, taking your opinion and advice of different groups, so continuing their great efforts, you know, I hope it's, you know, we are all in the funding cut situation, and hopefully the association doesn't need to experience anything. But I think these programs are actually very valuable for all your constituencies of the very diversified, population. It is really oftentimes it's the association.

Dr. Lien: We can say this is why the it you know, we have different publications such as PS and that professional field. How do we do teaching and how do we do surveys? And sometimes we publish there, you know, in addition to the journals. So sometimes we cite that in a classroom, you know, in my own teaching evaluation, like women of color. Some students say, you know, I don't understand your English. Right? That is a kind of challenge. And then we can actually cite a PS article and say, look, the actual research shows that minority, a woman of color, and they do face this kind of downside, challenges in the classroom. And therefore, our colleague will evaluating our tenure case. You know, we can back up with that scholarly research that says this is not me. I'm in a structure and I'm in a society. You know, that sort of put me down. And so they became more understanding of my, you know, challenges in, you know, you know, not as great evaluation, but there is a reason. And so, yeah, the association sort of play in the role, an important role in there. So it's through publication, right through the kind of different kind of publication. You get to do that. And so I, I guess, you know, you sort of certainly I know there's some kind of legal defense fund or something that kind of need some times you have individual cases or something, sometimes they just need association to back them up so that I can comment on the, so support and you find resources and other kind of research, funding for that. But it's the

association. I think it's, it's play a very important role. You know, too many people, you know, just more than the association.

Interviewer: Shifting gears one more time, you've held a number of leadership positions, including APSA and WPSA. What, in your view, makes a good leader?

Dr. Lien: A good leader, actually. So I was not born in either. I was not the kind of leader that was, characterized in the U.S. society, and I never imagined to be a leader, but it was actually, first of all, when I moved across the country, I experienced some life disadvantages. Then I suddenly realized I in the minority because I was a privileged person. I'm white, right? You know, with educated parents, and I was living very privileged class in my home or at home in origin. But it was when I became a minority. Then I realized that, oh, I can emphasize and I actually see or share a lot of concerns with a lot of minorities in this country. So I became a minority opinion. Minorities. And so, so in that process, and I feel like I need to speak up, you know, I need to vote. I need to get into citizenship so I can vote. Because if I don't do that, people just this, you know, don't I don't even count, you know, as parents, you know, when they see you as a immigrant that might be used, they just don't even. Kennedy really is surging, getting the vote. They just don't talk to me either assume I don't speak English or because I don't have the role and things like that. So I feel like I need to carve out a space for myself. But beginning with seizing the opportunity to volunteer association, did open up opportunity, and I began actually, with WPSA because I was not even looking at the call, you know, for, for community service. And I thought, oh, they asked me to do something. Okay, I'm going on to volunteer. So just there, it just really just speaking the volunteer word. You, when you log in, people try to see and try to see that you maybe you'll be able to do something. So eventually you kind of climb up the ranks, in that way.

Interviewer: Can you tell us a little bit more about your experience with the APSA or WPSA conferences, any stories?

Dr. Lien: Yes, for the APSA that it's about beginning, actually with the, the two things. One is the related group there was actually a related group, Asian Pacific American Caucus. The reason why it has that is actually because we were frustrated by ability to find out people accepted into the program because usually they would say, oh, it's not not, it's not good enough. But we cannot form a panel for that, right? Either that you're not good enough or you don't have enough to form a panel. So we know that one benefit of being a related group is actually you have a guaranteed

panel space. That was actually our private motivation for, you know, right. Had several allies of allies, to do that. And so, yes, association does provide us space or guaranteed space that so that's very important. And and so and then we set association the status of the caucus will be able of course, will also create networking, networking opportunities for junior scholars and students who are a lot of people questioning whether or not, you know, there's value in terms of studying Asian American. We just tell them that, well, at least you get places for them. You in that, you know, the premier association that the meeting. Right. And the other thing is the status committee. Right? The Asian -American, the status committee, right, it's also something the, several of the, the pioneer thing, that the APSA was able to do, that basically just paying attention to people who are other than, the White population about in the profession and then recognizing that they have different needs, different, you know, so we also, I believe, is also have a panel space or a status committee space. It's more about professional development rather than a scholarly presentation. But that's of course, is a very equal part, equally important part, you know, professionalization.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that. And do you have any advice for junior scholars coming up in the profession now?

Dr. Lien: You know, the first thing, when we have a first entering cohort of the graduate students, I always say, please become APSA member. And I also tell them for so many years I mention my mentor, M. Margaret Conway, and I only missed one APSA meeting actually and when she noticed that, you know, that first, you know, you know, back in the actually late and she realized that I missed that. She scolded me, for that. Yes. She. So how can you miss this meeting if there is only one meeting that one year that you need to attend? That's the APSA meeting. And that's the best advice, that I receive. And I would also pass it out. You know, that is really, the opportunity. So I thought that. That's right. You know, tremendous amount of value actually provided by the association in terms of, you know, you know, you know, minority and you don't know anything, you know, newcomers for a generation, whatever. And this is the professionalization and network, that you have built up, for people who don't feel I like they belong. And is there anything else you would like to share with us today? Well, I really just appreciate the association will value somebody who was like, I was not even born in political scientist and the first generation. And somehow I got embraced into, the service, you know, the association in, in this room. So there so I served on the council and I serve on the, you know, status committee. And I also serve on the program, co-chair. And so I was able to kind of help shape what a association look like, and what we all anticipate, what should the discipline, be looking forward to, in terms of, you know, scholarship, but also in terms of the directions, our, you know, way how do we what kind of things, what kind of issues, that people care about and that we want people, you know, to get exposed to, not just in the in the annual meeting. And so

and also we, I believe, John Ishiyama and I and also, Wallace we basically have one of the best, I believe, most inclusive, annual meeting program, you know, at that time.

Interviewer: Okay. Great. Thank you so much.

Dr. Lien: You're welcome.

Interviewer: This concludes our interview today.