

## **State Supreme Court Justice Liu and Yale students release Asian-American Law Study**

*Asian-Americans are the fastest-growing minority group in the legal profession. However, they significantly underrepresented in top ranks of the legal profession.*

By Skylar Dubelko – *Daily Journal*

July 19, 2017

[www.dailyjournal.com](http://www.dailyjournal.com)



Legal staff at the Japanese Internment Camp "Poston Camp No. 1" on Jan. 4, 1943.

From left, Cap Tamura, Franklyn Sugijama, Tom Masuda, Elmer Yamamoto, and Saburo Kido, who was the National President of the Japanese American Citizens League.

In 2015, an unusual petition ended up in front of state Supreme Court Justice Goodwin H. Liu. The case involved Hong Yen Chang, a Chinese native who came to the United States in 1872.

After graduating from Columbia Law School in 1886, Chang applied for admission to the New York Bar, but was turned down because he was not a citizen. After being issued a certificate of naturalization the same year, the New York Legislature passed a law allowing him to reapply for bar admission, and Chang was admitted in 1888.

Chang then relocated to California with plans to serve the large Chinese community of San Francisco. But upon moving for admission to the bar, a state statute voided his certificates of naturalization.

On March 16, 2015, Liu and the California Supreme Court granted a petition to posthumously admit Chang to the California state bar.

Chang's case, along with Justice Liu's observation that Asian Americans are significantly underrepresented in top ranks of the legal profession, inspired the first comprehensive study of Asian Americans in the profession.

The report, titled "A Portrait of Asian Americans in the Law," was authored by Liu, recent Yale Law School graduates Eric Chung, Xiaonan April Hu and Christine Kwon, and Yale law postgraduate associate Samuel Dong.

For over two years, they gathered data and reached out to the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association and its affiliates to conduct a national survey of over 600 Asian American lawyers, and to form a dozen focus groups.

“Part of the reason it took so long was because we had nothing to work with,” Chang said. “Theoretically, it’s hard to know what a representative group is.”

The study found that the number of Asian American lawyers has more than doubled since 2000, and that, while they are the largest minority group in big law firms, they have the lowest ratio of partners to associates.

“One of our findings is that Asian Americans do quite well in getting into law schools,” said Chang. However, the survey — which gathered data on basic demographics, political participation, law school experiences, career choices and experiences in the legal profession, and future aspirations — stated that, “Whereas Asian Americans are regarded as having the ‘hard skills’ required for lawyerly competence, they are regarded as lacking many important ‘soft skills.’”

Liu said he hopes this study will “provoke conversation and introspection by the Asian American community into what kinds of career choices people have made and how they have made them,” as well as spark a broader conversation about unique challenges and opportunities Asian Americans face in the legal profession, as well as possible directions for reform.