

Commentaries on Helen Tai's Electoral Success and American Political Dynamism

# American Political Dynamism

By: Paul H. Tai

If you take Helen's electoral victory as bordering on the extraordinary, consider two other cases. One is Ismael Fernandez, an immigrant's descendent from Mexico, who was elected a Councilman of Wilder City, Idaho, when he was 19 (the other four councilmen of the city were all Latinos).

The other is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She defeated last June Joseph Crowley in a Democratic Party primary in New York City. Crowley is a ten-term Democratic Congressman and a powerful leader of his party in the House of Representatives. And who is Ocasio-Cortez? She is 28 years old, a maintenance worker and a waitress until a few months before the primary, and her mother was born in Puerto Rico.

Other, more prominent and more incredible, cases of individuals' winning electoral offices in nearly impossible situations, come to mind. Think about Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama. One had long been known only as an actor, and the other, a Black community worker, unknown at all to the public at large. Before they jumped into the political fray, who could imagine they would one day become the presidents of the United States, the most powerful persons of the world?

What account for the conversion of these nearly impossibilities into reality? The answer to this question can be traced to the common traits of all the political aspirants noted above: convictions, persistency, and charisma. Yet another all-important factor is below the surface: two powerful currents in the American mainstream. They show up in the form of the Federalists v. State Sovereignists at the beginning of this nation, the Unionists and emancipationists v. the Cessionists around the era of the Civil War, the Big Business v. the Progressivists in the late 19th century and the early 20th century, and the civil rightists v. anti-civil rightists since the 1960s.

Encapsulating all these conflicting forces are what we now call Liberalism and Conservatism. The former seeks to adapt to changes brought by the progression of history; the latter tries to preserve the existing political order in the aftermath of changes. The parties that represent these two political currents may be called the



Helen Tai with Paul H. Tai

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Democrats and the Republicans or some other names. And they sometime switch sides in terms of political preferences. Democrats in the American south prior to the 1970s are, for example, now called Republicans.

These two currents, which often clash and occasionally collaborate, make up American political dynamism. If you join either side and if you possess conviction, persistency, and charisma, you are likely to win in elections.

This little pedantic exercise on American political participation is intended to encourage young aspirants to seek political offices in the present age of divisiveness and gridlock. It also underscores the various comments on Helen's electoral experiences, as noted below.

右图：

6月5日，由弟弟戴怡康（Michael Tai）为其手持美国宪法，戴怡平（Helen Tai）在宾夕法尼亚州众议院宣誓就职该州议员。

戴怡平的竞选成功具有重大意义：

- 34年来第一个民主党当选为州议员
- 第一个少数族裔作为本区的代表
- 第一个本区的妇女代表
- 宾州有史以来第一个中国女众议员



公民的社会参与（civic engagement）是美国社会和民主的基石。然而由于历史文化上的一些原因，在美国的不少华人常常感觉难以参与到美国社会。一方面是因为缺乏华人榜样，觉得无从下手；另一方面，我们很多人可能没有意识到华裔参与社会的重要性。由于缺乏积极的社会参与，一定程度上造成了我们或者我们的孩子们被认为缺乏交流技能和领导力，缺乏对他人的关心和有感召力的个性，并缺乏广泛的社会关系和资源的利用和分享。

初闻戴怡平竞选成功成为宾州首位华裔州众议员，虽然与戴女士素未谋面，但我心中不禁为她也为华二代们感到无比的骄傲。骄傲激动之余，也备受鼓励。戴女士提到父母是华裔移民，努力工作，重视子女教育，造就了今天的她。我们华裔社区中不乏勤奋、有想法而且敢作敢当的能人。只要我们积极社会参与奠定基础，有能服众的观点和理念来赢得选民的信任，我们或者我们下一代中的任何一员，都有可能成为明天的戴女士。卡梅儿学区理事会的郑琳女士就是我们身边最好的榜样。

为了给华裔社区提供学习交流 and 成长的平台，美国华人联合会（<https://ucausa.org>）、Civic Leadership USA（<http://civicleadershipusa.org>）和印地华人社区将在今年秋天举办“公民社会参与及领导力论坛”。具体信息届时会推出。

千里之行始于足下，努力提倡社会参与，改变华裔的命运，从我们自己做起，从社区的自愿者做起来。最后引用戴女士的话作为结语言：“身为少数不放弃，否则永远是少数。”

——谢超瑜