

BOOK REVIEW

October 2025 Book Review

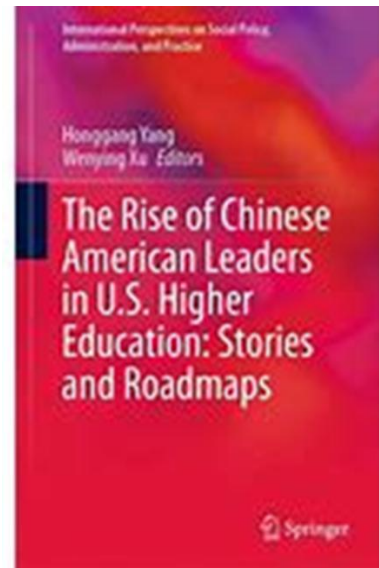
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The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps. New York: Springer, 2023.

Honggang Yang and Wenying Xu, eds.

In *The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps*, editors Drs. Honggang Yang and Wenying Xu present a compelling and timely anthology that shines a much-needed light on the rarely documented yet increasingly vital leadership journeys of Chinese Americans in academia.



With a forthcoming foreword by Dr. Lynn Pasquerella, president of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, this book offers 36 reflective chapters, a collection that celebrates leaders who have achieved excellence despite facing exclusion, racialization, and systemic barriers. The contributors, university presidents, provosts, deans, and senior administrators, span a wide range of disciplines and institutional types, giving the volume both credibility and a rich perspective.

Drs. Yang and Xu, themselves highly accomplished academic leaders and scholars, bring both insight and discernment to their curation. Their selection ensures representation across R1 universities, liberal arts colleges, and professional schools.

The contributors' impressive credentials reinforce the book's central thesis: Chinese Americans possess the intellectual, cultural, and administrative capacity to excel as academic

leaders—provided they are met with equitable opportunities within institutional systems.

The book's structure—36 individually voiced essays—offers accessible and diverse entry points into the lived experiences of these leaders. Each chapter provides valuable insight into leadership style, professional development, and the shaping influence of cultural identity. Particularly memorable are essays that draw from Confucian and Daoist traditions, such as Yueh-Ting Lee's "water-like leadership," which offer refreshing, non-Western frameworks for academic leadership that can resonate across cultures.

With a sweeping yet incisive historical frame, the book traces the legacy of anti-Asian racism from 19th-century exclusion laws to the more recent rise in xenophobia—heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic and the DOJ's "China Initiative." This framing underscores the volume's urgency and relevance to today's higher

education landscape. Throughout, themes such as racial profiling, exclusion from DEI conversations, and the “bamboo ceiling” are addressed with clarity and conviction.

The exploration of how values like humility, diligence, and deference—deeply rooted in many Chinese American leaders—are often misinterpreted through dominant (often white, male) leadership paradigms is especially thought-provoking.

Recurring motifs emerge across the collection: immigrant perseverance, intergenerational expectations, and cultural humility, all set against experiences of structural exclusion. The narratives highlight a persistent paradox—being celebrated for academic achievement while simultaneously being perceived as less suited for leadership roles. The editors skillfully illuminate how these very values, which contribute to effective and ethical leadership, can be undervalued in systems that equate leadership with overt assertiveness.

The book resonates deeply with broader struggles over representation, equity, and belonging in American higher education. By connecting personal journeys to the long continuum of racial exclusion—from the Chinese Exclusion Act to current geopolitical tensions—the volume makes clear that anti-Asian sentiment continues to shape institutional perceptions and policies.

Its relevance is further underscored by today’s complex sociopolitical climate. The stigmatization of Chinese scholars under national security rhetoric and the broader U.S.–China decoupling threaten not only individual careers but also the international collaborations that have long enriched higher education. While the editors acknowledge these forces, readers might find it valuable to see more direct engagement with how

such geopolitical shifts are altering pathways to leadership and reshaping institutional belonging.

At its core, however, this book is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and the power of leadership grounded in cultural values. Even where it focuses more on inspirational storytelling than deep structural critique, the effect is to affirm and inspire — particularly for emerging leaders navigating similar challenges. It encourages readers to imagine new forms of leadership that honor cultural heritage while also addressing systemic inequities.

Conclusion: Celebration and Invitation

Overall, *The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education* <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-42379-6> stands as both a celebration of achievement and a call to action. It honors those who have broken barriers while reminding us of the work still to be done. As a historical record, it is invaluable; as a roadmap, it invites the creation of new, inclusive pathways responsive to shifting ideologies, evolving definitions of leadership, and the imperative for cross-cultural understanding.

Finally, the book also poses timely and essential questions: What does it mean to lead when Asian American visibility in leadership remains rare despite significant academic prominence? And how can leadership evolve in an era marked by resurgent nationalism, global disengagement, and intra-ethnic complexity?

For scholars of race and education, higher education leaders, and all those committed to cultivating inclusive academic environments, this book is both a resource and an inspiration. It offers affirmation and mentorship to Asian American academic communities while encouraging the next generation to carry the work forward - building leadership that is both culturally grounded and transformative.