

Chantale Wong
Nominee to be the United States Executive Director
Asian Development Bank
Nominations Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
October 26, 2021

Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee, I am deeply honored to have been nominated by President Biden to be the next United States Executive Director to the Asian Development Bank. I am humbled by this privilege.

I would like to start by thanking some important people in my life for their support -- my mother, who is watching these proceedings with great pride from her San Francisco apartment, my daughter Sara, my sister Connie, as well as my dearest friend Peter and his wife Klaudia Levin. I would also like to recognize my mentor, the iconic Alice Rivlin, who we lost two years ago.

My history has shaped me and instilled in me the values and passions that make me who I am. I was born in Communist China. When I was six years old, in the middle of the tragedy of the “Great Leap Forward,” and at tremendous personal risk, my parents arranged to have me smuggled along with my grandmother to Hong Kong in the bottom of a boat. I can still smell the food in the galley that I wasn’t allowed to eat on that journey. That powerful and poignant memory is still with me today.

During the Cultural Revolution my father was sentenced to hard labor and my mother was a barefoot doctor in the countryside. That they even survived is a miracle and an experience too painful for them to recount. After I fled Communist China, I didn’t see and hardly communicated with my parents for 21 years and until I could get them out. I was raised mostly by Catholic nuns, who imprinted their faith and compassion on me. I can never repay my parents’ sacrifice or the Church’s grace. But I have tried to “pay forward,” living my life with the values that matter to me.

I came to Washington in 1989 after receiving a master’s from Harvard Kennedy School of Government and before that a master’s degree in environmental engineering from the University of California, Berkeley with a focus on wastewater management, and a bachelor’s in civil and structural engineering from the University of Hawaii. Ever since then, the consistent theme of my career has been dedicated to Public Service, environmental protection, and sustainable development.

I know Asian Development Bank well, having previously worked there first as a subject matter expert in Manila in 1999 focused on ensuring that the bank’s environmental assessments complied with their environmental and social safeguard policies. I led the development and publication of the Bank’s first Asian Environment Outlook in 2001, and then was appointed by President Bill Clinton as an Alternate Executive Director. I had the extraordinary privilege of being appointed by President Obama to serve as Vice President for Administration and Finance, and Chief Financial Officer, at the Millennium Challenge Corporation from 2011 to 2014.

I believe that, if confirmed, this foundation will have prepared me to be the Executive Director to largest regional multilateral development bank serving Asia and the Pacific. Over five decades of its operations, the Bank has contributed to a dramatic reduction in poverty from 1.5 billion people in 1990 to 263 million in 2015 in its developing member countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges, but the Bank has moved swiftly to expand pandemic support and boost financial commitments.

While I applaud Bank launch of Strategy 2030, if confirmed I will work to focus the Bank's resources on sectors, especially quality infrastructure, and countries where it can be most impactful; assure financial sustainability; and maintain world-class systems for governance, human resources, accountability, and oversight. Increased competition in the region from financiers with less transparency and weaker standards underscores one of the challenges the Bank must address.

In many ways the United States has been the irreplaceable partner in helping Asia lift so many people out of poverty and disease. American values of democracy, respect for human rights, and private enterprise remain the only viable path for sustainable, inclusive development and poverty reduction. Now we have the opportunity to re-engage with Asia and the Pacific to promote the President's infrastructure, public health, and environmental policies. Working with the Members of this Committee, we can have a permanent and constructive impact on billions of lives through presence, participation, and patience.

Again, I am so grateful to you all for your consideration of this appointment. I would be delighted to answer your questions.

Thank you