



Judicial Spotlight: Tani Gorre Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California

by Constance J. Yu, Partner Sideman & Bancroft LLP

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On January 3, 2011, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye was sworn in as the 28th Chief Justice for the California Supreme Court. On taking on the role of the highest ranking judicial officer for the State of California, the Chief Justice became the first ever Asian American Chief Justice not only in State of California, but in the country. The Chief Justice has been a judge for the past twenty plus years, initially appointed to the Sacramento Municipal Court bench in 1990 by Gov. George Deukmejian, Jr., with whom she served as a legal affairs senior staff member. Prior to becoming a judge, Tani Cantil-Sakauye served as an Assistant District Attorney in Sacramento. In 1997, Gov. Pete Wilson elevated her to Superior Court, where she established and presided over the first domestic violence dedicated court. In 2005, she was nominated to the 3rd District Court of Appeals by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, and in 2010, Gov. Schwarzenegger nominated her to the Supreme Court to serve as the Chief Justice, which nomination California voters confirmed, by an overwhelming 67% majority of votes, for a twelve year term.

The daughter of a Filipina farm worker and a Filipino-Portuguese plantation worker, the Chief Justice is a second generation Filipina American, born in Sacramento. She graduated from U.C. Davis in 1980, and from U.C. Davis School of Law in 1984. In 1994, she married Mark Sakauye, a Sacramento Police Department Lieutenant (now retired), whose family was in internment camps during WWII. She has always been dedicated and committed to ethics, professionalism and civility in practice of law and is a longstanding member of the Anthony Kennedy American Inn of Court. Throughout her meteoric rise through the judicial ranks, Tani Cantil-Sakauye has maintained a perspective that is a culmination of her personal experience shaped by her family's heritage and humble beginnings:

"It's my ancestors' history, my family's history that gives me perspective, so when the branch is under challenge and the branch is under attack and we are having problems, that's not hard. Hard is when you have to work in the fields. Hard is when you can't marry the person of your choice and you have to go out of state like my uncle did to get married to his white wife. Hard is when you're told to queue up and leave your home in 48 hours and you're gone for four years and you come back to nothing. That's hard....What I'm doing is challenging."

The Chief Justice recently took time to speak with CMCP in an exclusive interview. Learn more about the Chief Justice in a podcast at [CMCP's website](#), in which she talks about her views on being the top judicial officer of California; changes to the Judicial Branch and what it means for practitioners; California Case Management System; role of jurist and administrator; televising trials; effect of budget cuts on California courts; invitation for practitioners' proposals for courtroom efficiencies; hot topics before the Supreme Court; composition and diversity of the Supreme Court; tips for briefing and oral argument before the Supreme Court and much more....

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1. <http://newamericamedia.org/2010/11/filipina-cantil-sakauye-wins-california-sc-chief-post-others-shine-in-us-polls.php>

2. Quoted from "California's Chief Justice: The 'Living, Breathing Example of the American Dream,'" *Pacific Citizen*, May 6, 2011, by Lynda Lin, Assistant Editor.

About the Author

Constance J. Yu is a partner of Sideman & Bancroft LLP in San Francisco. Her primary practice areas are civil litigation and business crimes defense. Ms. Yu advises clients in criminal investigations involving corporations, former government officials and private individuals in financial and other business disputes. Sideman & Bancroft LLP is a certified Women Owned Business Enterprise. The firm is the largest women-owned provider of legal services in the Western United States, certified through National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firm (NAMWOLF) and Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).