

# Skadden Celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month

## Why is Asian and Pacific Islander representation important to you?



**Faiz Ahmad**  
Partner, M&A / Wilmington

Representation matters. I didn't know many other South Asian lawyers in the U.S. until, early in my career, I attended a conference for the newly formed North American South Asian Bar Association and saw a thriving community practicing in all areas of the profession. Representation matters outside of our profession, too. The books I read as a kid rarely had characters like me. My 9-year-old loves basketball and recently read *Zayd Saleem, Chasing the Dream* by Hena Khan, about a boy trying out for his school's basketball team. He burst into our room excited that Zayd was just like him and had grandparents just like his. Representation matters because it shows us what is possible, that we belong and that there are opportunities for each of us.

Asia is a broad landscape covering many different regions, cultures and traditions across the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent and East Asia, and we can't paint it with one brushstroke. As a first-generation Bangladeshi-American, I think about everything my parents gave up to lay roots here so that I could have greater opportunities. My mother, who fled civil war in a conservative Muslim country, wanted me to have the autonomy she did not. It's very important for me to make my parents proud and show them that their sacrifices led to my education and independence. It's my responsibility to use my privileged platform as a partner at a world-class firm like Skadden to pay it forward in helping others — including immigrants like my parents — and serve as an example for the next generation of minorities trying to forge a path in the legal industry.



**Anita Bandy**  
Partner, Securities and Commodities Enforcement; White Collar Defense and Investigations / Washington, D.C.



**Winston Hsiao**  
Partner, Litigation / Los Angeles

Asian representation means validation that we not only belong in American society but can truly thrive here. For me as a child, it meant wanting to see Asian American athletes, actors and other public figures. The current wave of Asian representation in the media and public sphere is wonderful, and I think growing up as an Asian American now is much different than it was when I was young. That's real progress. It's the same with law. When I joined the firm, there were few Asian partners across the landscape of Big Law. Here at Skadden, in the last class of promoted partners we had several Asian Americans — a tremendous step. For young associates joining the firm, it really does matter to see the successes of people who look like them.

Seeing people with similar cultural and regional backgrounds succeed is not only inspirational, it's also impactful and can lead to the creation of community. I'm fortunate to be surrounded by strong role models from both the South Asian and broader Asian communities. Sometimes, however, the richness, diversity and struggle of Asian culture gets glossed over by macro narratives and cultural zeitgeist. Asian American is an incredibly broad term, and the use of this descriptor can homogenize the Asian experience without emphasizing the true variety of lived experiences. Empowering our communities to carry our complete identities, backgrounds and individual and shared heritages in our personal lives and in the workplace will push against the perception of a monolithic "Asian" identity and redefine what it means to truly achieve Asian representation.



**Gurjot Kaur**  
Associate, M&A / New York



**Emily Lam**  
Partner, Tax / Palo Alto

Asian representation is critically important — including in the law and from a business perspective. It's just one aspect of a very broad-based view of diversity that spans everything from race, gender and sexual orientation to socioeconomic and educational background. There are so many different lived experiences in this country and this world. We've learned that diversity of thought, perspective and approach leads to better ultimate outcomes. My parents are first-generation Chinese immigrants, and I grew up on the East Coast with one sister. I'm now raising two half-Chinese boys in Northern California. It's vital that folks see people that look like them in some way, shape or form, in all aspects of society, so that they don't feel artificial limitations on their dreams and in thinking about what they can become.

Asian representation is important in a melting pot like America. People with diverse viewpoints often contribute new ideas. Asian representation means having a seat at the table — in order to be effective, we have to represent and provide feedback on societal matters of concern. For instance, in the development of emerging technologies, representation is crucial so that new innovations do not reinforce historical biases. Representation is also meaningful in other ways. I remember how happy Asians were, here in New York, that Jeremy Lin was on the Knicks. Representation is powerful.



**Kenny Lee**  
Senior Human Resources Project Lead / New York



**Serena Patel**  
Associate, Corporate / Chicago

Asian Americans comprise a large, incredibly diverse group that is increasingly represented in a wide array of fields. However, in many instances this representation is not reflected in leadership. It's essential for Asian Americans to hold positions of power and authority, as it demonstrates to a younger generation that there is a path to long-term success in a given organization, and that the organization is truly open and accessible to those with a similar background to them. No single experience can define what it means to be Asian American, but as our representation in leadership grows, we're able to see more people with whom we can develop organic connections and in whom we can see ourselves. Representation in leadership provides an invaluable sense of belonging, inspiration and inclusion.

Not only am I Indian, but I am also an immigrant. On a daily basis, I feel the need to break stereotypes of what others think people from India are like. I often field questions like, "Where are you really from?" or "How do you speak English so well if you grew up in India?" At the same time, the model minority myth for Asians is also true — the belief, held by many, that Asians are more represented than other minority groups in the United States. It's a double-edged sword, and both stereotypes can hurt. It's a challenge to navigate this in my career where people may not realize they hold these stereotypes but are constantly trying to figure out where I fit or why I don't fit neatly in either bucket.



**Vasundhara Prasad**  
Associate, Litigation / Boston



**Jennifer Szeto**  
Office Administrative Director / Boston

Traditionally, Asian women are taught to stand back. Not in my family! I was taught to stand out. That's what I think about when it comes to representation. We need to lead the charge — know our worth and make sure, by demonstrating strength and pride, that those who follow us do, too. Every day I think about how I can be the best parent to my daughter. Growing up, I struggled with always being the token Asian, and I know my daughter will have similar challenges. I strive to provide footprints for her to follow when navigating this complicated landscape. Representation is extremely important. Role models like Connie Chung stood out and inspired generations of Asian women. I, too, hope to be an inspiration for my daughter.

In the past, Asian Americans have been greatly underrepresented. When I was growing up, this was the only Asian actors on television was Pat Morita on "Happy Days." This was hard. When you watch TV, you want to look like what you see, and I certainly did not look like anyone. As a first-generation Filipino-American growing up in Southern Maryland, very few people, besides my family, looked like me. It's extraordinarily important, now that there are so many Asians on TV and in the movies, and young people can see that we haven't been pushed aside or forgotten. I don't watch award shows anymore, but this year when Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan both won Oscars, I cried. I said to myself, "Oh, they look like me."



**Rose Weller**  
Executive Assistant, Partner/Counsel Secretary / Washington, D.C.



**Dwight Yoo**  
Partner, Capital Markets; Financial Institutions / New York

While Asian populations in the U.S. are incredibly diverse, Asian Americans face many common issues. My parents immigrated to the U.S. a few years before I was born. As a second-generation American, I feel fortunate to have access to opportunities unavailable to my parents. But I am surprised that many misconceptions persist. I still hear from time to time statements suggesting that Asian Americans overwhelmingly are successful and well represented. Such statements, however, disregard the diversity of Asian American experiences in the U.S. and, in my mind, disadvantage poorer communities. And in the corporate world I see, Asian Americans are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions. To address these misconceptions, Asian American representation is particularly important to me.