

# Forging a new path

Businesses owned by Asian women are growing, but cultural differences can get in the way. Not anymore, says a group that teaches everything from handshakes to assertiveness.

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At home in Garden Grove, Janny Kim keeps her opinions to a minimum and her voice low. In school, the 22-year-old student of California, Riverside is candid, inquisitive and offers strong opinions. She's rewarded for her traits.

Cultural differences and racial stereotypes keep the behavior balance between home and school. The strain of the balance act is why Kim and other UC Riverside students drove 40 minutes to the first Asian Women of Orange County meeting in its first month.

Founder of the group, Kim, no relation to the senior Kim, is a Fullerton businesswoman who is a bilingual job candidate. She started the group to help young women get started in business and provide encouragement and working opportunities for women.

Opportunities – and the competition – are growing. The number of businesses owned by Asian women is rising by leaps and bounds, according to the National Federation of Women Business Owners. Between 1987 and 1991, their numbers increased 20 percent.

Latest information, from the U.S. Census, tallies 305,700 Asian women-owned businesses generating \$2 billion in sales. In California, the state with the highest density of such businesses, there are 117,300.

## Getting started

Local Asian businesswomen want to challenge additional expectations



**HELPING HAND:** Yukari Aoi, left, and Essie Cha practice a firm handshake, one of the first things discussed at the first meeting of Asian Women of Orange County last month in Brea.

Kim when she couldn't find a local Asian women's business mentoring group to join. She founded the group under the direction of Jacque Daniel, a networking expert and author, whom she met when she attended a regular women's networking group in Yorba Linda that Daniel hosted. She was the only Asian woman there.

So, Kim drew up a mission statement and sent e-mails to anyone she could think of while Daniel booked a space for their first soiree.

More than 25 businesswomen and aspiring businesswomen, including the UC Riverside students, showed up.

"This is a wake-up call for women. We have to change, and we have to do something,

husbands."

Kim is a member of New York-based Asian Women in Business. It has no local chapter, and charges a membership fee. AWOC is free.

Joining the group is not most of its members' first foray into business, although the group does hope to help fledgling entrepreneurs get started. Most members already have built companies, sent their daughters to colleges and worked the family business for years, said Bonnie Wong, president of New York-based Asian Women in Business. The group is just a way for them to come together to share and support.

Pat Okawa, who attended the meeting, said the group

to mentor young aspiring businesswomen. She says her journey is almost over, and she is too tired to fight. The Fullerton woman graduated from the University of Hawaii, Manoa, in the early '60s when women, especially Asian women, were discouraged from cultivating a business.

Even though many Asian women are in business, there aren't any forums for Asian women, Wong said. Men dominate most of the business groups Asian women can join.

"Two men get together and they talk about sports. Men have a way of talking without talking about anything personal," said Wong, who used to keep up with sports statistics just to join the conversa-

John Wang, president of New York-based Asian Business Development Center.

"We know that women do run businesses and do a lot of the work on their own person out front," Wang said. "Women are capable of running businesses. The stereotypes soon have to be replaced with new views."

Wong said most women don't mind if they own a small business, but don't like it when it brings in more competition for their job or business.

"There are a lot of reasons because of that," Wong said. "Women can do it and bring in a few dollars, but they cannot get too successful."

Yet Peter Sina, president of the Asian Women's Association of Orange County, says women don't like jumping into a new world. Women account for 20 percent of paid members, he said.

"Women are more conservative than the men," he said. "The women who join our monthly mixers."

Even so, the women find it easier to ask questions and talk about problems and dreams with other women because of their shared background.

"With Asian women, there's a cultural background. They want to be one who understands shares that immediate. All women need, and there are men's groups – but women groups."

Already AWOC has set some of its goals.

A Japanese graduate got a job as a

Others made firm handshakes