

Multi Nation Program



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Dr. Jessica Chou directs R&D for five of the 21st Century Foundation's research centers, and is an associate professor of Social Informatics at Yuan Ze University. She also serves as legal counsel to the National Communications Commission of Taiwan, and is a policy advisor for the National Information and Communication Initiative Committee of the Executive Yuan, which reports to the prime minister.

Dr. Chou's fellowship focused on U.S. policymaking generally, and telecommunications policy and its implementation more specifically. To that end, her program included meetings at both houses of Congress, the U.S. Copyright Office, federal agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission and Office of Science and Technology Policy, consulting and lobbying firms, think tanks and research centers, and Internet and telecommunications firms including Google, Qualcomm, Comcast and Verizon.

Dr. Chou discovered how the business of 'policy enterprise' has contributed to something of an economic boom for Washington, D.C., even as the rest of the country is experiencing an economic downturn. She focused on meeting 'policy entrepreneurs,' or consultants, strategists, lobbyists, advocates, and policy analysts in think tanks and research institutions who work to inform and/or persuade policymakers on particular issues. Dr. Chou looked at the different ways in which three categories in particular - policy analysts, lobbyists, and consultants - operate in terms of, for example, venue or mode of expression. She noted "the three together constitute a policy orchestra that plays symphony eloquently. The beauty of the Washingtonian economy lies in the pretty mature division of labor in the policy enterprise, enticing a high demand on talents and subsequently employment." She further observed that Taiwan's political environment does not support this type of policy enterprise because of the Legislative Yuan's deliberately weak oversight power and the lack of policy expertise in its *ad hoc* committees.

Dr. Chou remarked that Taiwan's politics and democracy are sometimes viewed as being "shallow and short-sighted," with elected representatives focused narrowly on their own constituencies rather than on the larger interests of the Legislative Yuan as a whole. She was surprised to discover that the U.S. Congress was largely the same, and that while style and substance may differ between Taiwan and the U.S., politics in both places cannot get away from its base. She recalled Tip O'Neill's famous observation that "All politics is local."

On telecommunications policy, Dr. Chou noted that the FCC has long viewed local fixed line competition as vital for industry development, and promulgated several mandates to spur competition. After passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, a series of mergers and acquisitions occurred which gave local markets duopolies with one telecommunications provider and one cable TV operator. The FCC in the past decade has misjudged the trend of telecommunications development, focusing on regulating fixed line while underestimating the impact of the booming wireless communications industry. Dr. Chou said, "In my opinion, the highly developed mobile communications in East Asia could serve as a benchmark for America to examine its local competition policy, whereas the network management policy in broadband access proposed by the FCC also pinpoints a direction for those countries to embark on fair competition in Internet transmission."

Dr. Chou's plans upon return to Taiwan include following up with people she met on fellowship about collaborative research projects, and implementing an Open Congress project in Taiwan, which will aim to disseminate information to the public about legislators' voting records and official statements.

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