

**Inaugural Asian Canadian Studies
Lecture:**

Are We Too Asian?

East Hall

**University College, University of Toronto
15 King's College Circle, Toronto, ON**

University of Toronto

November 28, 2012, 5 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Good evening Minister Chan, President Naylor, Principal Ainsley, professors, students and friends:

Thank you for being here in support of the Asian Canadian Lecture series. I want to thank, Prof. Emily Gilbert and Prof. Eric Fong for inviting me to present this inaugural lecture at University College.

Before I start, I would like to congratulate UC for their vision. The college started a minor in Asian Canadian Studies this past September, in the Canadian studies programme under the direction of Prof. Emily Gilbert. It is a first among Canadian universities and it is very timely, because today, 11% of the Canadian population is of Asian heritage, and our numbers are growing rapidly.

This evening, I would like to share with you how “Asian” Canada has become, the views of some

of our leading business leaders and thinkers, our present government's policy towards Asia and Asian immigration, and the position of our institutions of higher education.

You probably recognize the term “too Asian” which is reminiscent of the infamous Maclean's article published in November 2010. Since the end of 2010 to today, there have been frequent discussions about our identity as Canadians, in the media and among academics. Prof. Minelle Mahtani accuses the Canadian media of creating a divide between “us” and “them” through distorted coverage on race. Of note is the interest of journalists, over the past couple of years, in negative portrayals of Asian parenting – such as Tiger Mom and Eagle Dad.

Many of you would have seen the *Globe and Mail* editorial headline on Oct. 2010 “Strike

Multiculturalism from the national vocabulary.”
And a year later, on Oct 7, 2011 “Canadians show ambiguity towards multiculturalism.” And there are many similar articles. The word “multiculturalism” is often used selectively to refer to visible minorities in Canada, the same way the derogative term “hyphenated Canadian” is used. Remember, a French Canadian is not a “hyphenated Canadian,” so why should others who are proud of their heritage be “hyphenated”?

This summer, we had the controversy about the female scientist on the design of our \$100 bill. To picture a female scientist is a step forward, but the presumption that only Caucasians are Canadians, in today’s Canada, is many steps backward.

What are the feelings among Canadians?
Consider a poll that was done last year by the Assoc. of Canadian Studies that found that two thirds of

Canadians favour a country composed of people from different ethnic backgrounds, and three quarters support young people preserving their cultural heritage. So, is the media trying to erode public support for our diverse country?

Canada had a very good reputation internationally, and other countries are interested in our approach towards multiculturalism and immigration. In March 2011, I was invited to speak at the Trans-Atlantic Conference on Minority Political Participation, at the EU Parliament in Brussels. There were representatives from many European countries, England and the U.S. I was the only Canadian speaking about the situation in Canada.

At that conference, I learnt that we are doing well in comparison to many other countries, despite the large influx of immigrants within our small

population over the past 40 years. I realized that this has a lot to do with the fact that the majority of our immigrants come from Asia, with our cultural traditions of hard work and respect for good education.

This September, I was in Finland to speak to the Åland parliamentarians about the Canadian policy on multiculturalism, immigration and bilingualism. Not only are European countries interested in how Canada integrates its diverse population, Åland also has a particular interest in our policy of bilingualism because it's a province like Quebec, which is unilingual, Swedish being the language, within the bilingual country of Finland.

One person I met at the Copenhagen airport, who had just visited Toronto, wondered why there were so few police on our streets despite our very

diverse population. Europeans are impressed, so we must be doing something right.

However, from what you've read in the press, and from the reaction of the Governor of the Bank of Canada this summer, our large Asian immigration over the past 40 years doesn't seem to have made a dent in the Canadian psyche. But, the lack of police presence on our streets can be explained by a poll done by the Assoc. of Canadian Studies this spring, that a strong majority of Canadians believe that Canada's multicultural model should be exported to other countries, and 80% of young people enthusiastically agree that it is easy for Canadians from different racial, religious, and cultural communities to form close relationships with each other.

Now let's look at the federal government. We have seen the sudden about turn of the Harper

government in their foreign policy, particularly towards China, at the end of 2009. So, are we getting mixed messages?

In September, the *Globe & Mail* interviewed the Chinese ambassador, Zhang Junsai, regarding the idea of a free trade agreement between Canada and China, spurred on by the \$15 billion Chinese take over bid of Nexen Inc. of Alberta. The fact that this was a half page article in the investment section, with a photograph of the ambassador in front of his residence, suggested that this idea had been floated among business leaders and within the Harper government. However you feel about this trend, China, and Asia, are definitely on the government's radar.

The September issue of *Policy Options* Magazine, published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) was titled "Canada in the

Pacific Century.” It was the result of an initiative of the same name spearheaded by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. There were many articles written by prominent thinkers and business leaders, and they were all about the importance of Asia to Canada. The editor, L. Ian MacDonald, wrote that, with the world rebalancing towards Asia, ...Canada must rebalance with it. The chapter titled “China’s Future and Canada’s Choices,” written by Brian Bohunicky, President of Baker Group International, argued that the Canadian government, business and society must learn to engage and understand China, because, if China continues to rise, we must rise with it, or risk stagnating on the side lines. What’s even more significant is that, how China fares in their multi-dimensional development will define this century.

Many in the business and academic world believe that the different levels of government need

to take the lead by raising Canadian awareness and knowledge about Asia and Asian languages.

A leading independent progressive think tank, *Canada 2020*, published a book in November 2011 called *The Canada We Want in 2020*” The authors stressed the importance of the transnational community – those Canadians living and working in Asia, and the Asians in our midst, because Canada needs to catch up with our competitors - the U.S., Europe and Australia.

One of the authors, the President of the Asia Pacific Foundation, Yuen Pau Woo, said, “Canada’s people-to-people ties with China are arguably longer, deeper, and more profound than those of any other Western country.” In other words, Canadians of Chinese heritage are a great human resource.

Dominic Barton, global managing director of McKinsey & Co., suggested that our government

should appoint a minister for Asia, and create a cabinet committee on Asia.

Now you'll see how relevant UC's new Asian Canadian minor is, because it will not only impart knowledge, but also help build the people-to-people linkages that Canada desperately needs. And, instead of being stigmatized by retrogressive journalism, Canadians of Asian heritage should be recognized as a great resource for Canada because we are a natural link for Canada across the Pacific.

Besides reaching out to Asia for business, what is the conservative government's policy towards Asian immigration?

As mentioned earlier, immigration is the reason for our present large percentage of Canadians of Asian heritage in our population. However, over the past 6 years, immigration applications from Asian

countries have dropped by more than half. The conservative migrant selection policy changes show that they favour some countries over others. This is reflected in the overall fall of the total number of applications from the top 10 source countries. The decline from the Philippines, China, India and Pakistan was much greater than from English and French speaking countries.

We all know that minister Jason Kenny deleted the backlog of 280,000 foreign skilled worker applications that were submitted prior to 2008. This is now facing a legal challenge, but I won't go into that this evening. What we should be concerned about is the fact that, under the Harper government, immigration has become about headhunting and not nation building.

We have seen an increase of temporary workers coming into Canada. Just last year alone, almost

191,000 temporary migrant workers were admitted into Canada in comparison to 157,000 economic immigrants. According to the Maytree Foundation, this year Canada has taken in 300,000 temporary workers. Canada now has between 300,000 and 450,000 temporary workers. This policy runs counter to Canada's immigration policies of the last 50 years, which regarded immigrants as full and equal members of Canadian society.

This government has also reduced family reunification, giving priority to younger family members instead of parents and grandparents. The uproar from the immigrant communities brought about the announcement by Jason Kenny on Nov. 5 that the government would "bite the bullet," and allow 25,000 parents and grandparents to come as immigrants next year. However, no new applications will be processed before 2014 in order to prevent the backlog from growing. There will also be a new

family reunification programme “that limits intake to a level that is fiscally sustainable.” Perhaps this is one of the reasons that we have seen a drop in applications from Asian countries because families are very important to us. The fact that Asian economies are strong also means that there are many more opportunities for their young and well-educated population to remain in Asia.

Here in Canada, the majority of Canadians have a positive view of our multicultural policy, especially our youth because they have friends in their schools from different parts of the world.

I have often been asked to speak at schools and universities, so I am aware of the diversity in our classrooms where there are many Asian faces. You can say the same when you walk down our streets, or go into stores and restaurants in most of our

major cities. Even western restaurants have adopted ingredients from Asia, such as Bak Choi, and Asian restaurants and supermarkets are everywhere in cities like Greater Toronto, Greater Vancouver and even in Ottawa. Seeing people of all cultures using chopsticks has become very common.

Asian Canadians have become the majority in some of our cities, such as Richmond, B.C., Markham and Brampton in Ontario. When we go out, we often see families of mixed marriages, and these are on the increase because most Canadians of my generation don't have any problem with inter-cultural marriages among our children. And, many Canadians have adopted children from Asia.

I am aware of the traditions of many Asian cultures. In my case, I was always taught to work hard and learn to put up with difficulties, never to

waste anything, especially food, and above all, value a good education. This has helped me through life, and I'm better for it. Those who follow these teachings are good for Canadian society, so why are we being portrayed negatively in the press? In a backhanded way, the Maclean's article suggests that Asian Canadian success threatens the dominant Caucasians in society. It also implied that those who look Asian are forever viewed as foreigners, no matter how many generations their families have been in Canada. The reality is that Canadians come in many different shades.

Why are Asian Canadians viewed as a threat to mainstream society? Let's look at why we are sometimes referred to as "the model minority."

Asian Canadians value education, and are known to excel at it. There is a Chinese saying - hard work makes up for less knowledge. I remember

myself as a 15 year-old, in a boarding school in England. For the first time in my life I was exposed to Shakespeare, and didn't understand a word of it. I decided to lock myself in a small room one Saturday afternoon, and read the passage over and over again until it made sense to me. Well, it worked! That's how much our culture influences the way we do things.

There's a presumption that Asian Canadians are more educated than the general population in Canada, and have more advanced degrees, but I am actually surprised by the statistics I find. Comparing Canadians aged 25-44, who have University Degrees or Certificates –: non-immigrants stand at 24%, while visible minority 2nd generation immigrants are almost double that number. Within this group, the highest percentage are Asians, with those of Korean descent at 64% and that of Japanese descent at close to 48%, still double that of non-immigrants.

Now, let's look at employed Canadians holding postgraduate degrees between the ages of 25 to 44. Non-immigrants stand at just below 7%, and 2nd generation visible minorities are double that number. Asians again make up the highest percentage, with those of Korean descent at 3 times that of non-immigrants.

But then, the question is - are these academic achievements translating into success in the employment market?

At a first glance, the answer is no. On average, 2nd generation visible minority makes less than 2nd generation non-visible minority. However, some groups, particularly 2nd generation Chinese Canadians are earning more than 2nd generation non-visible minority immigrants. They are followed by those of Japanese, Korean and South Asian

descent. The last group is comparable to non-immigrants in the same age group despite the disparity in education.

According to Statistics Canada, at least one group of Asian Canadians, Chinese Canadians, have been found to represent a high proportion of those in scientific and technical fields. And purely anecdotally, many in the health field are now drawn from the Chinese and South Asian Canadian communities. So it would not have been inaccurate to put an Asian scientist on the \$100.00 bill. The controversy suggests to me that some people in Canada are profoundly uncomfortable with the change in its demographics. It makes me wonder what percentage of the population has to be Asian before the depiction of Asian Canadians could be considered Canadian.

Just because those of Asian heritage are regarded as academic high achievers, does that mean they have no EQ? This August, I had the pleasure of attending the North American Asian American Professionals Conference in New York to receive the NAAAP 100 Award. As usual, I tried to participate in as many programmes as possible, and one of the speakers was Don Liu, a Korean American, who is general counsel for Xerox Corporation. Don was the keynote speaker at the Saturday luncheon. The title of his speech was “Confessions of a pussycat father.”

Don spoke about the importance of soft skills like the ability to make friends, socialize and enjoy life besides high academic achievements. It’s important that when parents encourage their children to excel in school, they also encourage them to join clubs, get involved in volunteer activities, and

make friends. This was the way we raised our sons, as any parents with common sense would do.

When we look around us, we can see that Canadian culture is seamlessly becoming “Asianized.” What about our universities? Are they becoming “too Asian”?

On September 14, Jason Kenny announced that Canada has welcomed its 20,000th permanent resident through the Canadian Experience Class programme, and that person was Gaurav Gore from India, who obtained a Business Administration degree from U. of T., and is now working for a Canadian bank. I remember this immigration programme being in existence in the 60s and the 70s, allowing international students who graduated from Canadian higher educational institutions, who had job offers, to apply for permanent residency. I am glad this programme has been revived.

This summer, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Canada is lagging behind when it comes to productivity and innovation. It noted that we spend less on research and development, have fewer patents, and our productivity is lagging behind that of other OECD countries. Even though we have weathered the economic storm better than other OECD countries, the report noted that we could not continue to depend on natural resources for our economic future. In 2010, Canada was ranked 14 out of 17 countries in terms of innovation.

We are in direct competition with other OECD countries for international students. According to the OECD indicators of 2010, Canada has 4% of the world's share of international students, while Australia has 7%, U.K. 12% and U.S. 20%. I am going to compare Canada to Australia, since both

are part of the Commonwealth, geographically large with a small population. Australia has a much larger share of international students despite the fact that their population is smaller than ours. So, Canadian universities need to attract not only more, but the best international students, many of them happen to come from Asia.

According to the Conference Board of Canada 2010 report, “at every level of analysis, immigrants are shown to have an impact on innovation performance that is benefitting Canada.” And where will this innovation come from? It is likely that it will come through immigration. Not only will foreign trade increase by the hiring of newcomers, a diversity of perspectives is very important to innovation.

Do you know that almost half of the scientists in Canada are immigrants? And, although immigrants

represent 20% of our population, over 35 % of the 1800 holders of Canada Research Chairs are foreign born. Immigrants also receive proportionally more literary awards. Just look at the winners of the Giller Prize, 29% of them are immigrants. An increase in immigration also equates to an increase in trade.

A new task force on international education, reports that international students are the key to Canada's future prosperity. It urges Canada to almost double the numbers, offering scholarships to the world's best and brightest that can spur innovation. The report noted that international students are Canada's eighth largest job generator, ahead of the aerospace industry. International education is our 11th largest export, and the single largest export to China.

Even though Canada is behind our competitors in attracting brilliant minds to our universities, I am going to give you significant examples of our success. One needs look no farther than Canada's university presidents to see how successful immigration has been in attracting some of the world's best minds from Asia to Canada.

The current President of the University of Western Ontario, Dr. Amit Chakma, was born in southeastern Bangladesh. He moved to Algeria to study chemical engineering before coming to Canada to pursue his postgraduate education at UBC. His goal as president is to position Western among the top 100 universities in the world.

The president of the University of Alberta, Dr. Indira V. Samarasekera, was born in Sri Lanka, and came to Canada to complete her Ph.D. in metallurgical engineering. At the University of

Alberta, she is devoted to building a global institution that works with the international community to find solutions to shared challenges.

I don't need to tell you that Asian Canadians are also heavily represented among Canada's innovators and entrepreneurs, and we are more likely to be self-employed.

A good example is Aditya Jha who moved to Canada from Singapore 18 years ago, although as with many immigrants, his was a circuitous route. He originates from India. He co-founded a technology company in Toronto in the mid-1990s which he sold to Sun Microsystems in 1999 for \$100 million U.S. He now runs a charity POA Education Foundation, which aims to nurture the entrepreneurs that Canada needs.

One of Canada's top businessmen, Robert Fung, was the founder of Vancouver's Salient Group, which focuses on urban development. He was born in Canada and remembers feeling different as one of the few Chinese in his class. He believes the tide is turning for immigrants and visible minorities in Canada, and that there will be a change in Canadian leadership. Fung says, "...the current school age children are fluent in Western as well as Asian languages and culture. It is becoming seamless. As the global economy shifts east, the strength of our historic connections will merge with the strength of our emerging demographics to create a power of dialogue and business potential."

Last November, *The Economist* published an article "The magic of diasporas: how migrant business networks are reshaping the world." The article argues that rich countries should welcome migrants who represent 3% of the population of the

world. It mentioned that there are more ethnic Chinese outside China than the entire population of France, and that 22 million Indians live abroad. The kinship networks and local knowledge of the diaspora population foster trust, which is needed in establishing businesses in emerging markets. An example is that much of the foreign direct investment in China passes through the Chinese diaspora.

One of the interesting things about living between two cultures – between the culture of our peers and that of our parents – is that many Asian Canadians develop cultural adaptability of East and West. Just as we use two very different languages, we draw on two different sets of behaviour, and cultural norms. I do this all the time. It’s a matter of switching my mind set to think like a Hong Konger or think like a Canadian. This sensitivity to cultural nuances is a very valuable skill that makes the Asian

Canadian diaspora a huge potential asset in building bridges with the rapidly developing markets in Asia. Many Asian Canadians are now going overseas, and this group of individuals – almost 3 million strong – represents on the ground expertise that Canada can draw on.

The question is, is our government making good use of this valuable resource? To my knowledge, that's not the case.

In the British paper *The Guardian* this September, (Sept. 14, 2012) there was one pronouncement that really caught the eye - that there's trouble brewing in Canada and Canada's good international reputation is in doubt. There was a list of problems mentioned in that article, and immigration was one of them. One important note was, over the past year, the Harper government had radically adjusted the criteria for successful immigration applications as

well as cutting resettlement programmes. Since the Conservative came into power in 2006, the refusal rate for Canadian citizenship applications has doubled, and the number of immigrants from Asian countries such as China and India has halved as I have mentioned earlier. Despite the fact that this government needs Asia for its future prosperity, and appreciates the brain gain through immigration from Asia, its overall policy seems to aim in making Canada less Asian. The writer, Jonathan Kaiman, believes that there is a resurgence of deep and ignored undercurrent of racism in Canada.

The immigration system that has contributed to our success in the past, and which is the envy of other nations, is gradually becoming undone, and the perception of Canada as a humanitarian country is diminishing.

In conclusion, are we too Asian? While Canadians are quite comfortable with the Asians in our midst, our federal government is changing its immigration policies, resulting in receiving less immigrants from Asia, while, at the same time, it hopes to benefit from the burgeoning economies of Asia. Our business leaders and educators believe Canadians should have better understanding of Asia. And if Canada is to remain competitive among OECD countries, and for the sake of the future prosperity of Canada, our university campuses can look even more “Asian.” How will the media react then?