

World Yee 5th Convention Youth Forum Report

世余青年專題討論 余尚琳

Date: Sunday, August 5th, 2012; 1:30pm-4pm
Speakers: Judge Bill Yee & Dr. Henry Yu.

Bill Yee is a BC Provincial Court judge who has been involved in leadership and community initiatives in Vancouver from his days as a student to life in the workforce.

Henry Yu teaches in the History Department at the University of British Columbia. His research interests are trans-Pacific migration and the understudied history of Chinese Canadians.



Both Judge Yee and Professor Yu addressed the importance and empowerment of knowing one's ancestral language, especially in the face of today's global economic shift towards Asia, particularly China. Additionally, they shared stories of their personal experiences growing up in and around Vancouver and its Chinatown.

The forum began with opening remarks by Jim Yee and society youth members Vanessa Yu, Jaime Yee, and Andrew Wong.

Jim welcomed the distinguished panel of two Chinese Canadian achievers from the same Yee clan but with different career paths, and an audience consisting of a youth group from the Vancouver chapter, other youth delegates and their supporters from around the world ready to

absorb lessons from these role models. This youth conference would be a first at any Yee Family Convention. The youth conference will conclude with the formation of a World Yee Youth Committee, to trail blaze a path for youth to stay engaged with their Family Association.

Professor Henry Yu was the first to speak, immediately engaging audience members with his direct, personable, and humorous delivery style. Throughout his presentation, Henry candidly shared personal anecdotes of his experiences being raised in Vancouver and speaking Chinese in his home with his parents. Language, in fact, became a shared topic of interest between both Henry and Bill.

While growing up, Henry spoke of falling victim to the ignorance of youth by refusing to sit down at the kitchen table with his father and learn new Chinese characters as was the norm in his household for many years. In hindsight he views the importance of being versed in one's mother tongue and consequently values the teaching of Chinese to his own children. While Henry's own parents may have been insistent on having him learn the language during his childhood, interestingly enough, they have a different approach with Henry's own children who are Chinese-Japanese Canadian. More specifically, they feel it is too difficult to communicate with their grandchildren in Chinese and prefer English, to Henry's disappointment!

With language-learning having been an issue, Yee youth members felt was a particularly relevant one, especially as many of the society's youth were born in Vancouver, one of the ideas proposed by the World Yee Youth Committee was to create a language-bursary program to encourage our youth to learn or master Cantonese and/or Mandarin.

As the forum continued, discussion on language evolved into one on identification with one's own Chinese heritage. An audience member pointed out some Chinese-Canadian youth feels the need to separate themselves from their native ancestry. Growing up in Canada, it becomes easy being influenced by North American culture and by friends who were either Canadian-born or have been acculturated.

In fact, while on the verge of throwing in the towel during his Master's Degree in European

History at Princeton University, Henry's advisor suggested he branch out and look into the history of a people with more meaning to him. Since then, Henry has built a strong

academic career out of connecting people with their Chinese heritage, encouraging all his students to learn about their family history and spearheading the highly acclaimed project Chinese Canadian Stories.

Judge Bill Yee was born in China but spent the majority of his life in Canada where he became involved in politics while a student at UBC and soon after began practicing law in Vancouver. Chinatown was, in fact, where he first established his law practice.

As with Henry, Bill heavily stressed to the youth in the audience the value of learning Chinese, particularly in the context of employment as the

potential to develop overseas connections to East Asia, notably China, have become more and more relevant.

The forum was a successful event featuring two compelling speakers who had valuable take-home advice for all who participated. Forum coordinators were pleasantly surprised that the conference room was filled to the brim with the audience being a mixture of youth delegates, chapter board members, volunteers, and interested parents. The speakers did a great job engaging all corners of the room.

Vanessa Yu and Jaime Yee

