

## 3 minute speech

Contributed by Lachlan  
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### General Debate Speech

Yunn Lee, a Youth MP at the The 1997 NZ Youth Parliament (25 - 27 May), gave this 3 minute speech in the General Debate.

Mr Speaker,

Chinese New Zealanders have been a part of NZ Society since the 1860s and it is not until now that we have our first Chinese MP, whom I represent.

I draw to your attention the plight of young Asians in our country, particularly those who are ethnically Chinese. We are a mere 2.3% of New Zealand's population yet it seems that there are more Asians these days especially in Auckland. A common theme among the variety of newly arrived Asians and long-standing Asians that I spoke to, was the feeling that Asians have been used as political tools and targets for the media. This was strongly felt in the last general election where it seemed politicians had sensed an uncomfortable mood in NZ and built up a large social reaction to win votes. This has had a serious effect on Asian youth.

Asians are vulnerable because we are not well understood. Newspapers and TV project stereotypical images. Attitudes towards Asians are passed on from media to parents to children to school. It is plain ignorance, the lack of cultural understanding, that stereotypes thrive upon.

Asians have been thought to be taking jobs and yet accused of working overseas and not contributing to NZ. Taking employment from others and getting jobs in other countries are two totally contrasting accusations - how can this be? Generalisations of what Asians do, without the data to back it up affect the whole community. I push for government leadership in better communication with the Asian community and better research into any allegations that concern the Asian community so that people base their opinions on facts and not myths.

I can't speak for everyone, but I know that most young Asians will look hard at their identity and being a New Zealander. There are many young Asians who consider themselves New Zealanders just as we do. Is it not a natural right to identify yourself? Isn't your identity your own commitment? Should Asians be made to feel that we don't belong simply because we look distinctive?

Up 'til Intermediate school I was surrounded by none of my own race. Sometimes I'd even forget I was Chinese. Now at my highschool about 20% is Asian. There has been tension but I have witnessed an improvement in attitudes over the past five years. I hope this will happen throughout New Zealand.

We question our identity when we are asked things like "Where do you come from?". There are Asians who don't "come from" New Zealand, if the question implies a birthright, but they are passionate and committed to New Zealand and that is what matters. Asians battle with being New Zealanders and being Chinese. The word "Asian" itself denies identity. It covers such a range of ethnicities and lumps us all into one heap. Any part that is attacked then affects us all.

What young Asians want is Social Acceptance. This calls for understanding and cultural awareness for all of us.