



COMMUNITY SUMMARY REPORT

ASIAN CANADIAN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Lethbridge and Surrounding Areas

OVERVIEW

This document serves as the community summary report of the Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogue in Lethbridge and Surrounding Areas that took place on January 11, 2025, 2pm to 5pm, at the Multicultural Centre on 6th 6th ave. South Lethbridge, Alberta. It covers key event details including the project's background and rationale, the speakers and panel of community leaders, the organizations that were represented and highlights of the panel's storytelling session and the dialogue with community.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The path to settlement for newcomers and the full and meaningful integration of racialized Canadians can be an arduous and challenging journey. Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino Canadians make up a substantial part of the workforce in food and health service sectors as essential workers, providing support to Canadians during challenging times. Yet, they and other immigrant communities have been blamed, scapegoated, and mistreated during the pandemic and in social issues such as employment and housing crisis. Their contributions, participation, and resilience – whether recent or historical – are largely unrecognized.

Through the power of conversation and storytelling, Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogues were organized in key locations across Alberta (Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Calgary) to increase knowledge and understanding about East and Southeast Asian Communities (centered on Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese), provide a safe space to connect and network with fellow community members and inspiring leaders, as well as discuss next steps for greater and collective impact towards advancing inclusion and equity in Alberta. With the theme No Canada Without Me, the dialogue enhances the importance and value of everyone who consider Alberta and Canada their home.

ACCT Foundation demonstrates its commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by engaging Indigenous Elders from Siksika Nation, Tsuut'ina Nation, and Bearspaw First Nation— to begin the project in a meaningful way. The project's panel of speakers and community leaders from the East and Southeast Asian communities, gathered in a 3-hour sharing of culture, history, and purpose with the Indigenous elders. A land acknowledgement also marks the beginning of each dialogue, giving recognition to those who were here before us, encouraging our communities to start integrating Truth and Reconciliation in their projects as organizations and in their settlement and integration as Asian Canadians in Treaty 6, 7 and 8. As we acknowledge the land, we called upon our collective culture and traditions to work together, build relationships, have deeper and meaningful collaborations across cultures and generations to create an inclusive space for everyone.

This project is funded by the Government of Alberta's Ethnocultural and Anti-Racism Grant Programs and presented by ACCT Foundation and ACT2END Racism Network. The Asian Canadian Intercultural Dialogue in Lethbridge and surrounding areas is supported by the Filipino Canadian Association of Lethbridge Alberta and Nikkei Cultural Society.

SUMMARY

Participation

Approximately 30 participants attended the Lethbridge Dialogue from the Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Korean communities, immigrant serving organizations, cultural associations, service providers, media, and non-profit organizations from Lethbridge, Calgary and Taber. The following organizations join those represented by our speakers:

1. Chinese Language School
2. City of Calgary
3. Filipino Canadian Association of Lethbridge Alberta
4. Filipino Society of Taber
5. Filipinos Rising
6. Lethbridge Local Immigration Partnership
7. Lethbridge Senior Citizen Organization
8. Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden
9. Nikkei Cultural Society of Lethbridge and Area
10. Southern Alberta Chinese Association

The dialogue was facilitated by a panel of community leaders from Calgary and Lethbridge:

1. Anna Ko | President, [Calgary Korean Women's Association](#)
2. Anne-Marie Pham | Founder, [Calgary Vietnamese Youth Association](#)
3. Cesar Cala | Chair, [Filipinos Rising](#) (FRIENDS)
4. Deanna Oye | President, [Nikkei Cultural Society of Lethbridge and Area](#)
5. Jae Shim | Founder & Owner, [Shim Law](#) | Advocate for Multiculturalism & Inclusion
6. Ken Richardson | Director, [Calgary Japanese Community Association](#)
7. Kevin Okabe | Executive Director, [National Association of Japanese Canadians](#)
8. Marichu Antonio | Adviser, [Association of Filipino Canadian Community Leaders in Rural AB](#)
9. Patti Pon | CEO, [Calgary Arts Development](#)
10. Teresa Woo-Paw | Chair, [ACCT Foundation](#)
11. Vic Visitacion | President, [Filipino Canadian Association of Lethbridge Alberta](#)

Dialogue Highlights

INTRODUCTION

To familiarize everyone with each other, Anne-Marie Pham facilitated an interactive activity called "Who's in the Room?" where participants were asked to stand if they identify with a particular category

such as who was born in Canada, born outside Canada, works with youth, is part of an organization, then those who are standing were asked some follow-up questions (which Asian country were they born in or which Asian community or organization they are a part of) to encourage networking and possible collaborations. This activity provided the opportunity for the participants to get to know each other, their connection to the Asian community, and identify shared advocacies and interests.

Hon. Rob Miyashiro, MLA of Lethbridge-West, opened the program and the community dialogue with his story and leadership journey in Lethbridge. MLA Miyashiro stressed the need for events like this dialogue, to come together as an Asian community, and to represent the Asian community.

This was followed by a presentation of the background and rationale of the project by Teresa Woo-Paw. She also shared the goals of the dialogue: 1) share experience, stories, issues and concerns, 2) spark imagination and inspiration, 3) generate greater insights and understanding of individual realities, community impact and systemic issues. The Dialogue also aims to build connections, start conversations, and increase the understanding of the diversity and complexity within the Asian Canadian communities.

PANEL STORYTELLING SESSION

The storytelling of the panel of community leaders focused on the histories and leadership journeys of East and Southeast Asians in Alberta and Canada, which included challenges like the Chinese head tax, Japanese internment, Vietnamese refugee struggles, professional restrictions for Filipinos, and Korean gender barrier. Together with their leadership and community building approach, the panel demonstrated how Asian Canadians responded to these challenges with remarkable resilience, cultural values, and creativity underpinned by a strong sense of community through cross-cultural collaboration, professional mentorship, settlement support, unified efforts to combat anti-Asian racism, and the development of support networks to overcome systemic barriers.

The dialogue in Lethbridge is unique in the sense that there is a significant Japanese pre-war population in the regions, including in the Okinawan community. The strong presence of the Japanese community in Lethbridge is evident through the ongoing efforts of the Nikkei Cultural Society, the Nikka Yuko Japanese Garden and the meaningful collaborations they have with other organizations. From the panel, the Japanese community leaders, Kevin Okabe, Deanna Oye, and Ken Richardson shared their personal stories that reflect the history of the Japanese people in Canada from the first arrivals in the 1900s, forced relocation to and internment in Southern Alberta, mostly in Taber and Lethbridge) during World War II, to the impacts that these have in the next and future generations of the community.

Considering the significant Japanese and growing Filipino populations in Lethbridge together with the increasing presence of other East and Southeast Asian communities, Asian Canadians are urged to leverage their growing presence in cities to influence policies and systems. Marichu Antonio highlights the importance of active presence and participation, “we are always seen as clients, it is important that we see ourselves as assets” to shift the perception of the broader community and see Asian Canadians as leaders.

These trailblazing leaders have founded and established organizations that are creating significant impacts in the community. They also shared their groundbreaking achievements in legislature,

institutions and broader community: Teresa Woo Paw became the first Asian Canadian woman elected to the school board, as well as the first Asian female elected to Alberta's Legislature and appointed to the cabinet. Patti Pon broke barriers as the first woman of color elected to the Calgary Stampede Board of Directors. Marichu Antonio made history as the first woman of color to be named Citizen of the Year by the City of Calgary.

They shared their remarkable leadership stories to demonstrate that such accomplishments and recognition are achievable to Asian Canadians in Alberta. More importantly, they showed how the impact of these recognitions creates greater ripples of change.

The panel also stressed that history, culture and traditions are important in understanding our stories and how we navigate the world. Cultural values shape how the different Asian groups build community and respond to challenges. Cesar Cala mentioned the Filipino concept of bayanihan, which embodies being a hero for one another, while Ken Richardson referred to the Japanese Kaizen principle, which focuses on making incremental improvements to become a little better with each step.

The panel of community leaders concluded their session by emphasizing that the true power of these stories lies on the preservation of history, intercultural collaboration, innovative support systems, civic and political leadership development, and sustainable community building. As Anne-Marie Pham said, "I really believe in us not just building a community and supporting each other but also finding ways to collaborate amongst the various Asian communities because we share unique stories of migration and integration and common stories of anti-Asian racism, integration, and that bamboo ceiling."

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

The Community Dialogue continued with panel speakers facilitating smaller groups, providing participants the opportunity to share their stories and experiences. While guide questions were offered to steer the discussions, participants were encouraged to engage and share in an organic and natural manner. With community leaders fluent in their first languages, participants were offered to share their stories in the language they prefer.

Community members openly shared their individual and collective struggles and achievements, which closely resonated with the panel speakers' narratives and presentations. They expressed their appreciation for Lethbridge, highlighting its advantages such as greater employment opportunities compared to larger cities, more affordable living expenses, milder winters, and a family-friendly atmosphere. At the same time, they identified challenges within the community, including limited access to programs and services, intergenerational conflicts, experiences of racism and discrimination, gender inequities, language and professional barriers, divisions within the community, and immigration-related issues such as culture shock and concerns about survival.

Current Initiatives

The Asian Canadian community in Lethbridge recognizes the importance of community building, youth engagement and settlement support that is reflected in their current projects:

1. Cultural Festivals

Appreciation of culture and traditions are recognized during heritage months and annual cultural celebrations through flagship events such as the Lethbridge Filipino Heritage Festival, Japanese Winter Light Festival, Asian Heritage Festival, Korean Festival, and Diwali.

2. Youth Engagement

Asian Canadian communities remain committed to fostering youth engagement by continuing initiatives such as sports activities like basketball and volleyball, cultural programs that highlight talents in singing and dancing, first language education, martial arts training, as well as endeavors in art and music.

3. Community Events

Sports, (Basketball, Volleyball tournaments), Christmas or end-of-year parties, cultural performances and informal get-togethers are common in Asian communities in Lethbridge. Some of these activities offer opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration.

4. Asian Canadian Organizations

There are associations and groups that are already formally and informally organized that engage their respective community members through sports (basketball and volleyball tournaments), informal get-togethers, cultural performances, and annual celebrations (ex: Christmas or end-of-the year). The Filipino community is very active in sports as they believe this brings their community together despite some division. SACA (Southern Alberta Chinese Association) sponsors and organizes volleyball tournaments and the Heritage Festival that invites inter-community interaction. The Japanese community has first language sessions which are accessed by their youth and other non-Japanese community members.

Several Asian Canadian community leaders are actively collaborating with institutions and organizations to sustain and expand their programs. This opens up avenues for cross-collaboration with other leaders from Asian communities in Lethbridge and the surrounding areas, fostering unity and amplifying their collective voice in advocating for support.

Community Issues and Challenges

The community shared challenges, including intergenerational conflicts, experiences of discrimination, the attrition of cultural identity, and the pressing need for cultural preservation. They also identified the need for funding support, accessible community spaces and support services as priorities for the Asian Canadian communities.

1. Intergenerational Issues.

A prominent issue highlighted during the table discussions is intergenerational conflict within families and communities. These challenges often stem from differences in generational dynamics (such as between parents and children), age (older and younger individuals), and immigrant status (those who moved to Canada compared to those born in Canada). These lead to family conflicts, community fragmentation, and overall mental health concerns.

Children feel pressured and confused when parents encourage them to participate in Canadian activities while maintaining cultural ties. As an example, second to fourth generation Chinese students who live in smaller communities like Lethbridge have a stronger sense of belonging within their Asian community, but the lack of diversity often makes them more visible as minorities, which potentially leads to challenges like stereotyping, microaggressions or limited access to multicultural resources and networks.

2. Access to Programs in Sports, Education and Arts.

Participants expressed concerns about their community experiencing limited access to opportunities in areas such as winter sports, education, and the arts. Additionally, one participant highlighted how cultural differences influence preferences for winter activities, potentially shaping how various groups engage with these opportunities.

3. Access to Funding programs

Asian Canadian organizations, community associations, and informal groups in Lethbridge and area offer various programs for their respective communities. However, they face significant challenges in securing funding to sustain these initiatives. These challenges include high venue rental cost, heavy reliance on sponsorship that can exhaust the businesses and companies, lengthy and complex grant application forms and processes that demand considerable volunteer time, the uncertainty of the funds awarded after applying and the limitations in implementing projects due to funder's standards and compliance guidelines.

4. Discrimination

Participants in the community dialogue recounted incidents of microaggressions, discrimination, and racism in environments where they should feel safe and protected, such as schools, workplaces, public spaces, and institutional systems. Discrimination caused by language and accent was a common experience reported in the group discussions. The discussion also addressed the harmful effects of the model minority myth—the stereotype portraying Asian Canadians as "ideal immigrants" who work diligently and avoid complaints. While seemingly positive, this stereotype was highlighted as a significant obstacle, as it hinders access to resources and obscures the genuine difficulties faced by the community.

A Filipino community member recounted that, prior to the growth of the Filipino population, locals would often stare at them upon their arrival, likely driven by curiosity or a lack of familiarity with their presence in the community. This underscores the challenges that immigrants experience as they navigate to their new home.

Moreover, discrimination and potential human rights violations have been reported in elderly care homes, highlighting a critical need for staff to receive training in cultural competence and inclusive care practices.

5. Education

The Filipino community expressed great concern on the decreasing number of youths enrolling or continuing in post-secondary school due to high cost of post-secondary education, the rising cost of living, accessibility and availability of student loans, and the preference to work and earn money immediately after high school.

6. Facilities and Space

Participants feel that there is lack of adequate and accessible facilities and spaces for the Asian Canadian community. Community leaders shared that venue rental costs are high, which is an immediate barrier to community engagement initiatives. There is also an observed lack of retirement homes and facilities for the elderly (from ethnic communities). The importance of space and access to venues is also evident in the ongoing proposal from community to allocate a shared open space or garden dedicated to all Asian communities.

7. Professional Recognition

The complex and often inaccessible process of recognizing professional credentials is another prominent concern in the community. Asian professionals who migrated to Canada face this persistent barrier to their professional integration in their chosen fields. This struggle can force skilled professionals into roles that do not align with their expertise, leading to underemployment and de-professionalization over time. Such systemic issues not only hinder individual career growth but also impact the long-term potential and contributions of the community.

8. Divided Community

Internal conflicts within communities are also an issue that emerged in the group discussions, specifically within the Filipino and Japanese communities. The Japanese community shared that they have multiple sub-groups – such as the pre-war immigrants, post-war immigrants, recent immigrants, and non-Japanese members interested in the culture – each having their own ideals and values on culture and tradition, making it difficult bring everyone together. The Filipino community, while they are close-knit also reported that leadership and personal conflicts lead to these divisions, which hinder full community participation and meaningful engagement.

9. Cultural Preservation

Participants are concerned with preserving their culture mainly through the decline in using their first languages. Filipino families worry about the growing tendency to communicate primarily in English at home. Similarly, the Japanese community struggle to maintain theirs since most ceased speaking Japanese due to the pressure to assimilate after the internment experience.

10. Cultural Identity

The question “where are you really from?” surfaced as a common experience amongst the participants. They shared that saying one’s nationality or “Canadian” is not enough. A Filipino parent had to explain to the school administrator that she was the mother, not the nanny. A participant shared that “Children are often assumed that they can’t speak English based on their appearance.” A Japanese community member mentioned that they are “very much like a hyphenated person of color”, they have to say an ethnicity first then Canadian – i.e. Japanese-Canadian – as an acceptable answer, while his white-presenting siblings can just say Canadian.

This issue is deeply rooted in systemic racism and extends beyond person-to-person interactions, affecting more critical experiences such as navigating customs or crossing borders. These encounters often reflect biases and discriminatory practices that underscore the broader challenges faced by Asian Canadians.

11. Participation and Collaboration

The lack of participation and cross-cultural collaboration emerged as a key issue during the group dialogues. While the Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Chinese communities organized their own groups and associations, there is minimal or no collaboration across these communities. While some of the communities are opening their events to include other cultures, the dialogue participants expressed their common desire to collaborate to have a stronger voice and achieve greater results.

Areas for Action

The following themes have emerged as areas for action from the community dialogue in Lethbridge and surrounding areas:

1. Network and Community

Building on the momentum of the first Asian Canadian intercultural dialogue the community is encouraged to initiate projects that promote meaningful connections, such as starting a directory, mentorship programs, skill-share sessions, or organizing a follow-up intercultural dialogue. These efforts will uplift various sectors of the Asian community, including youth, business, professionals, essential workers, and elderly. Moreover, they can leverage on the growing businesses owned by east and southeast Asians in Lethbridge and the prominent leadership of Filipinos in managerial roles within the restaurant and retail industries.

2. Intergenerational Initiatives

Informative sessions on historical contexts and activities such as intergenerational dialogues within each and across Asian communities will help in understanding the deeper issues of intergenerational and family conflicts. These initiatives will identify corresponding action points and collaborative measures that will also address challenges in cultural identity and preservation.

3. Build the Asian Canadian Community in Lethbridge

Collaborative approaches emerge as crucial for future success. Cross-cultural coalition building enhances collective impact while resource sharing maximizes community benefit. United advocacy strengthens community voice, and joint programming creates opportunities for shared learning and growth. As Cesar Cala reflects: "We need to find ways in which we could work together and identify some of those key places and points of cooperation."

The current proposal to have an Asian park or a multicultural park similar to the Nikka Yuko Garden, where each community will have their own area to feature their culture, is a good starting point to collaborate.

The Asian Canadian community in Lethbridge and area should build on the growing interest from the youth and from the dialogue participants to continue intercultural and intergenerational conversations about community experiences and challenges. Participants expressed that they appreciate the knowledge sharing of history, challenges, and successes of other Asian communities.

4. Explore Funding Opportunities

Group participants and facilitators suggested several funding opportunities based on their challenges, advocacies, and needs. These include casino licensing, partnering with an umbrella organization, and exploring collaborative grant applications. The Lethbridge Community Foundation and the Alberta Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women have opportunities for non-profit and community organizations. It was also identified that informing local MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) about the challenges with the grant applications will be helpful.

5. Professional Recognition

There is an urgent need to develop and implement improved processes for recognizing foreign credentials and integrating immigrant professionals into the workforce. This issue requires a multi-faceted approach, including exploring legal options to challenge discriminatory practices in professional regulation and investigating the impact of housing market issues on professional integration. Clear action items and responsible parties need to be assigned to address this complex problem.

6. Cultural Preservation

Building on existing activities and programs such as cultural celebrations, first language learning sessions, martial arts, and the programs offered by various organizations while introducing more intentional and intercultural initiatives to highlight the histories of the Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Korean communities in Alberta and Canada, can serve as a meaningful step toward cultural preservation.

7. Youth Engagement

The community places great value on its youth, recognizing their potential to be future leaders who will preserve and uphold their culture and heritage. Existing initiatives within the Japanese, Filipino and other Asian communities offer opportunities for expansion and innovation in youth programs. Intercultural youth activities will build knowledge and capacity of Asian Canadian youth at the same time strengthen the community as a whole. Moreover, harnessing the youth's interest in social justice and equity will foster collaborative actions to address long-standing issues of racism and discrimination. Organizing cultural and intercultural youth associations, youth groups or school clubs will inspire the youth to be more immersed in the Asian Canadian culture at the same time form meaningful relationships that will achieve greater outcomes.

8. Capacity Building

Capacity and knowledge building on various skills and information based on the needs that were identified is a key step in addressing the challenges the community is facing. Cross cultural sharing of skills, knowledge, and programming will be beneficial for the whole community. Information sessions on financial management, student loans and RESP (Registered Education Savings Plan) for youth and parents, which are usually offered at no cost by banking institutions, may help in addressing some of the challenges to enrolling in post-secondary education.

Further, while community building is already a well-established practice among the dialogue participants, capacity building for effective outreach strategies was identified as a need to increase community engagement.

9. Community and Mental Health Services for Asian communities

Community and mental health services tailored to Asian communities are crucial to addressing their unique needs. Expanding mental health services can help tackle pressing issues, such as addiction within the Chinese community, while recognizing the varying mental health challenges among racialized groups. Elderly care services must be inclusive and culturally sensitive, with staff trained in multicultural awareness to meet diverse needs effectively. Programs focused on mental health, well-being, and addiction already exist and can be further enhanced, with particular emphasis on women's health in South Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian communities. Additionally, mental health care should consider the experiences of refugees and displaced individuals, ensuring that services address the trauma and challenges associated with migration and resettlement. These initiatives can provide a comprehensive approach to fostering well-being within Asian communities.

10. Representation

The Asian Canadian community has the potential to increase their individual and community voice not only through intercultural collaboration but also through authentic representation and participation in institutional programs, events, and activities. Community members are encouraged to participate in sessions on policies, planning and development, and community building programs initiated by public institutions, government, and agencies such as the City of

Lethbridge, school board, Alberta Health, and Lethbridge Police Services. Diversity in decision-making roles is crucial to have effective policies and systems in place. Having representation at the table ensures inclusion in policies and funding decisions.

FEEDBACK

The dialogue received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants, with many expressing enthusiasm for more intercultural, collaborative programs and events. Participants appreciated meeting new people from other Asian communities in Lethbridge, Taber and other surrounding areas. Learning about the history, contributions, challenges and success stories of other Asian communities was also a highlight for most participants. Recommendations for the organizer include more time for the small group discussions, offer an online option for community members, organize more dialogues similar to this, and time management for the panel session.

ATTACHMENTS

- Background Paper on the History, Contributions, and Participation of Asian Canadians in Alberta (focused on Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese communities)
- Project Background Slides presented by Teresa Woo-Paw
- Community Slides by panel speakers
- Note: Full audio recording of the dialogue will be available on the ACCT Foundation website and social media platforms.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about this community summary report or if you'd like to connect with ACCT Foundation, please email: breyesong@acctfoundation.ca or events@acctfoundation.ca.

=====

Prepared by:

Beng Reyes Ong, Project Lead, ACCT Foundation