

# 2008 Asian Summit

04:56 PM by [elenastevenson](#)

A couple of weeks ago, I attended the 2nd Annual Asian Summit here in Cincinnati, presented by the Asian Community Alliance and hosted by Northern Kentucky University. I went with an open mind, not really knowing what to expect. It was good to meet people within the Asian-American community, but there was something missing—young people. So here's a recap. I hope my coverage encourages you to get involved with similar events in your city.

At the opening session, I scoped out the fruit and doughnuts, then looked around for a table to eat with. A couple of white college students sat at a back table, but I felt that NOT sitting with them was my personal stand against segregation. A bunch of middle-aged Asian women were very glad when I brought out my secret weapon—a brag book of my adorable sons, aged almost three and eight months. Now, if you've read my blog at all, you know that my husband is Korean. One of the ladies asked me, "Will you send your sons to Korean school?" I hedged a bit, feeling that decision was better left to hubby. We filed downstairs for the Opening Session. Lengthy introductions preceded the Keynote Speaker, Dr. Pawan Dhingra. He was a young Indian-American professor from Oberlin, a local private college. Thorough and organized, Dr. Dhingra gave an overview of the Asian groups in Ohio—when and why they came, percentages of the population, and issues they faced. For example, the Chinese who settled in Cleveland, Ohio faced the same discrimination as those in California Chinatowns—after a few incidents of intra-Chinese violence, the government forcibly closed all Chinese-owned businesses. He also touched on current issues, largely with non-Asian perceptions about people of Asian descent. As a "model minority," Asians are pitted against other minority groups. Because many Asians are well-educated and high-achieving, some see them as a threat. Moreover, the positive stereotypes detract from real issues that Asians face. The poverty rate for Asian people is just as high as for other U.S. groups. But because the public perceives Asians as "successful," they don't see those who are sweating in low-paying manufacturing jobs or eking a living from public assistance.

Dr. Dhingra opened the floor for questions. Mr. Tanaka, a middle-aged Japanese American, stood to speak. His voice trembled with emotion as he talked about the racism he had experienced. You could tell he had held it back for years in a desire to be polite and assimilate. "The message we get is, 'White is beautiful.' He pulled out a Macy's catalog, holding it up for all to see. "My wife and I are Macy's Card holders. I looked through this catalog. Not a single Asian face in the whole thing.' He put the catalog down. 'I promise you, I'm writing a letter to complain.'" Everyone nodded in agreement. Really, as visible as Asians are in our society, it is incredible that they'd be omitted. On a personal note, I refrain from supporting businesses and political candidates who don't feature diverse faces in their advertising.

I stood to put in a plug for Ningin, and also discuss the importance of better roles for Asians in film and TV. Several middle-aged people spoke up. An Indian gentleman said, "Where are the young people? We're tied to the past." An Indian lady near him said, "We need to stand up and be counted." Accents and English proficiency is a typical cause for discrimination. Dr. Dhingra pointed out, "If I'm in the mall and I hear German, it gets a different reaction than Arabic." (Earlier, he had pointed out that Arab Americans and Asian Americans were often lumped

together demographically). One point Dr. Dhingra made was especially cogent: “The fallacy is that Asian and U.S. cultures can’t be brought together. Yes, they can.” As evidence, he touched on second- and third-generation identity issue compromises. For example, Korean churches are seeing a mass exodus of young people. Some churches are creating English-language services, and some young people are exploring spirituality in small groups of peers.

Afterwards, we chose one of three Breakout Sessions: Racism, Immigration, and Aging. I chose Racism, where I met a Korean adoptee who’d just recently become interested in her heritage, as well as several people from the National Association of Asian-American Professionals (NAAAP).

Deepa Iyer, the Executive Director of South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), facilitated, and asked us to identify why we’d chosen the session. For almost everyone, racism was a personal issue. This session was more interactive—we discussed the differences among stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination, and looked at scenarios where racism surfaces in our everyday lives. I later found out that Deepa had emigrated from India to Kentucky, my home state, at age twelve. That had to have been bloody hard!

Unfortunately, an afternoon wedding forced me to leave before the catered Italian lunch (ironically, the Summit’s food choices were limited to the university’s catering service). But I still felt like I gained a lot from the day. Events like these, even in areas with low Asian populations, can do a lot toward building connections and raising awareness of racism. And they can’t hurt Asian-Americans in entertainment, either. I recall Justin Lin and the Finishing the Game crew visited some community organizations during their Grassroots Tour last year. And I bet it blessed the socks off of those middle-aged Asians to see their own people in film roles with broad appeal. So get out there! Be one of those young people, and let the ahjumahs see your brag book.

**Comments merged with the forum topic: [2008 Asian Summit](#)**

**Sakura** said 11/07/08 5:02 pm

I never knew there was an Asian summit.

**SeniorForever** said 11/07/08 5:13 pm

Seems more like a business thing than anything else.

**Hoc** said 11/07/08 5:21 pm

Thanks for the Ningin plug =)

Grassroot events such as the one you attended are very important in shaping understanding of Asian media and culture. We’re looking into possibly sponsoring or becoming more engaged in such events in the future.

**khmeresmily** said 11/07/08 5:27 pm

Yeah and also it seems more directed towards older adults.

**soybean** said 11/07/08 5:38 pm

Its still interesting to meet other successful Asians.

**MaimounahMasudi** said 11/07/08 10:52 pm

Ooooo the issues that they tapped on at this Asian summit are EXTREMELY important and many times these issues get swiped under the rug. We need more and more of these type of summits and somehow we have to attract the youth to them. They are after all, the future leaders of America.

**LilyPixel** said 11/08/08 3:57 am

What types of issues?

**japangirl** said 11/08/08 8:44 am

I've never heard of these summits before.

**MiaLerda** said 11/08/08 12:31 pm

Elena I am so happy you had a nice time. The summit sounds really interesting maybe next time we can get Ningin out there and have a ningin lecture of what we do and how we are trying to change these views on asian media!

**elenastevenson** said 11/08/08 3:04 pm

Sure thing, Hoc and Mia, and good ideas. I told a lot of people about Ningin there, and talked about my work on behalf of Asian-American film. Perhaps some Ningin business cards or postcards would be apropos for the next such event....

khmeresmily, I will say that they welcomed everyone, but they could have done more to bring in the youth. There were some younger people there....most community events like this start small and grow in scope and interest each year.

**MaimounahMasudi** said 11/08/08 6:15 pm

Lily: race for one it's always a huge issue for example the experience that Mr. Tanaka has gone through. Thousands of Asians have gone through it in this country and many have kept it to themselves internalizing their pains and that is not good. The issue of Asian Americans trying to make it in this country must be addressed on a higher scale. But even that is made somewhat difficult due to the "model minority" myth. Immigration is another huge issue. There are still countless Asian immigrants that are denied access into this country and how tough the adjustment is made for them when they get here. Many of them turn to a life of crime and they shouldn't have to. I think there must be more support in the Asian American community and from non-Asian communities to help solve this problem. It can be very difficult and I know that we can't just expect for a miracle to happen over night, but anything and everything is possible. You must begin somewhere and what the Asian Summit is doing is on a road to making it happen.

**cheekybodacious** said 04/22/09 11:45 pm

i never knew about this...

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