

Lawyer, property developer and philanthropist Jason Yeap OAM is investing in the future of the University and his own community.

Jason Yeap has great confidence in the University of Melbourne. Not only has he made a significant gift to research at the University, he is an enthusiastic member of the board of *Believe – the Campaign for the University of Melbourne*.

His dedication is admirable, particularly as he did not study at the University of Melbourne. However, he said making the decision to support Melbourne was quite simple.

“I believe it is the best-placed university in Australia to be a major leader in the region,” he said.

“If we want to get involved in educating our future leaders, we need to have a leading university in Australia. I believe that because of the standards that the University of Melbourne has attained over the years, and the efforts it makes, it can continue to be number one in Australia and, with a bit of financial assistance and a bit more investment, one of the top in the region.”

Mr Yeap has pledged \$250,000 to the Asia Institute, a School of the Faculty of Arts, to investigate a topic close to his own heart: why Asian-Australians are under-represented in public and political life in Australia.

“We are recent migrants to this country, and I would say that we are a reasonably successful group, but the representation of Asian-Australians in Australia is not proportionate to the population that we have,” he said.

“It is especially strange given our success at all levels in schools. If you look at the VCE results, the musical talent, the talent across health and indeed all areas, Asian-Australians are so successful academically. Yet when they reach their 40s and 50s they have disappeared. They are stuck in middle management.”

Mr Yeap, who migrated to Australia from Malaysia in 1978, said he hoped researchers at the Asia Institute would be able to uncover the reasons for this, so that work can start on addressing the issue.

“The ultimate aim is to have an Australia that is very integrated; a better Australian community,” he said.

“Society is changing and I am very conscious that Australia should have the optimum group of people representing it in everything. I do truly believe there is a pool of talent that is increasing in size, and which we must not exclude.”

Mr Yeap’s gift – which he hopes will be bolstered by donations from others – will be used to fund research into the role of Asian-Australians in the Asian Century.

The project is looking at what factors prompt and hinder participation in public and political life, and what can be done to increase the presence of Asian-Australians in these areas. Ultimately, recommendations will be made to government.

Professor Pookong Kee, Director of the Asia Institute, said: *“This is an important issue to tackle, particularly in the wake of the launch of the Government’s Asian Century White Paper. We are extremely grateful for Mr Yeap’s support and for his commitment to research at the University.”*

Mr Yeap’s gift to the University of Melbourne is just the latest demonstration of his generosity towards his adopted country. He has long been a supporter of the National Gallery of Victoria, and was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2010 for his service to the arts and to the community. He also donates to his alma mater, Monash University, and believes those with the means to give should do so.

“If I can support a cause that makes this country more understanding, more embracing, and more tolerant, and helps it become a better country, I should do it. If I can contribute even one small piece of the puzzle, I should. I want to be able to say at least I tried,” he said.

“A lot of people have said to me it is just a matter of time until Asian-Australians become more prominent in our society. I can accept that or I can accelerate the process. If I can be a catalyst, why would I not want to accelerate it? We are in the Asian Century. We need to capture this opportunity.”



L-R: Dr Gao Jia, Associate Professor Nana Oishi and Professor Pookong Kee from the Asia Institute