

**AAI 2 CONFERENCE REPORT:  
SENATOR PENNY WONG'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS  
29 JUNE 2007  
Provided by Jen Tsen Kwok (University of Queensland)**

On Friday 29 June 2007, Senator Penny Wong, Shadow Minister for Workforce Participation and Corporate Governance, delivered the keynote presentation for the AAI 2: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Australian Identities conference (Rydges Carlton, Melbourne). She was introduced by Professor Don Nakanishi, Director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Centre. Penny provided conference delegates with a measured account of her own life as a girl raised between Malaysia and Australia, her formative experiences of marginalisation in this country, and a searing polemic upon the limitations of identity politics in achieving political goals. Framing this within her own reticence to expend political capital through visible characteristics such as being young, Asian and female, she spoke to a societal vision in which every Australian citizen has the opportunity to actively participate in political and civic life, a society where rights and obligations are not doled out by the powerful but shared by all.

Her argument, framed by a notion of citizenship that facilitates social membership within a community, was that it is in fact the end of marginalisation, not the recognition of difference, which represents the very purpose of political life. Arguing in the context of a swathe of 'values peddlers' and in particular Howard's capacity to define and redefine those who are to be excluded, she argued with open irony for social membership in the terms that he had once invoked, an Australian identity 'which belongs to all Australians,' an Australian identity that is the political plaything of no-one.

Penny reflected throughout her presentation on the legacy of progressive politics, the role of identity politics in forging disparate social movements that have achieved recognition and rights, the ethical principles that have focused upon the collective good. In due course, Penny appealed to knowledge makers and cultural practitioners as bearers of this political heritage, to approach diversity anew, move beyond their commitments to diversity as a good unto itself, and begin the hard work of defining the political frameworks in which diversity can exist.

Her presentation was concise, running for about twenty minutes. After this she answered and dodged questions about factions, her status as role model, her relationship with the Chinese community and the place of multiculturalism in ALP policy.