

Asian civil rights discussed

By **Melissa Chi**
News Editor

If someone is asked to change his or her name for the convenience of others, it is considered offensive, said Larry Chan, associate general counsel of Bowling Green State University.

A panel discussion titled "Asian American Immigration, Equal Opportunities and Civil Rights," was held Saturday in the Student Union Building. The event was organized by the 80-20 Initiative, "a national, nonpartisan, Political Action Committee dedicated to Asian-Americans through a SWING bloc vote, ideally directing 80 [percent] of [the] community's votes and money to the presidential candidate endorsed by the 80-20, who better represents the interests of all [Asian Pacific Americans]," according to the 80-20 Initiative Web site. It was also sponsored by the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

The moderator of the panel discussion, Yueh-Ting Lee, associate vice president of analysis and assessment in the human resources department and a psychology professor, started the discussion with a current event where Asian-Americans are seen by some as victims of racism.

Texas Rep. Betty Brown said voters of Asian descent should adopt names that are "easier for Americans to deal with" during a House testimony on April 7. The remark caused uproar among Asian-Americans across the country, which led to an apology by Brown.

"Even though we have voted in the first black president and even though we have voted in many other elected officials who are of color, we are not as the media tries to portray; they say we're in a post-racial society," said Morris Jenkins, who was one of the panelists and associate professor of criminal justice at UT. "Racism still exists, and this is just another indication of it,"

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Fan Zhang (right), an attorney for Wagoner & Steinberg, Ltd., speaks at a panel discussion along with fellow panelists Morris Jenkins (middle) and Larry Chan (left), during a discussion titled "Asian American Immigration, Equal Opportunities and Civil Rights" in the Student Union Building on Saturday.

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Jenkins said, in reference to the legislator's remark.

Fan Zhang, attorney at law for Wagoner & Steinberg, Ltd. based in Holland, Ohio, who was on the panel, talked about a civil rights lawsuit against a county near Cincinnati after a client of his, whose visa expired, was arrested by the sheriff's deputy. Zhang said the client was stopped while walking in downtown Cincinnati, only because he looked Asian.

"There is injustice here, of course, but on the other hand, there is hope," he said. Under the immigration laws, his client should have been deported. However, because the arrest was a violation of civil rights, the authorities did not have probable cause to arrest him, and the case was dismissed.

"If you truly believe your right [is] violated, and you want to fight, I believe at

least you have a chance here to achieve something," Zhang said

Jenkins speculated that a number of anti-immigration laws stem from a culture of fear.

"Instead of hiding from the other and fearing the other, we should embrace the other because we all are the other, if we look at America," he said.

Zhang said the U.S. should exemplify the Canadian immigration system.

"U.S. is losing to Canada for lots of very bright and young scientists, doctors, engineers, simply because normal U.S. immigration system for getting green cards for

employment takes too long," he said.

Zhang said throughout his decade-long career of practicing law, he never experienced unequal treatment from the judges.

"I haven't seen any judges here who showed [prejudice] to any Asian-American or colored people," he said.

Jenkins encouraged other social justice groups, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League and Latino organizations, to communicate with Asian-American organizations.

"I truly believe that we can make a change in this

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Morris Jenkins
Associate Professor,
Criminal Justice

country; I really believe in the revolution," he said adding that being politically active can make a difference.

According to the group's handout, the greater Toledo area has approximately 10,000 residents of Asian origin or descent, based on the U.S. Census data in 2007.

Zhang said the blame doesn't all go to the current American system.

"I think as Asian-Americans, sometimes, we are called 'perpetual foreigners;' it is part of us to be blamed, [and] I think we should really learn from our fellow African-Americans here," he said.

"I know just from the traditional Chinese point of view, we don't want to get involved; we view the court system as unpleasant. We don't want to get in politics; we don't want to get into the court; we don't want to solve the things by ourselves," Zhang said.