

The BC Project

The Integration of the British Chinese into Politics

Introduction

The BC project is a non-partisan, voluntarily run organisation that seeks to elevate the presence of the UK Chinese community in the British political arena. Founded by Christine Lee, the BC Project was launched at the House of Lords on 31st Oct 2006 under the sponsorship of Lady Anelay, and was officially manifested at the House of Commons on 25th January 2007 under the sponsorship of Andrew Dismore MP.

The core team of the BC Project is a group of British Chinese professionals who are unanimously passionate about helping to raise the British Chinese community's profile and make our voices heard in the public arena. The project is about achieving a fair, just and inclusive democracy for the Chinese people in Britain – one that offers rights to all and demands responsibility from all.

We aim to highlight how the British Chinese can make a very real difference on issues affecting themselves and their communities on a daily basis. The fact that c.30% of the British Chinese community are not even on the UK electoral register is hard proof of how disenfranchised some of us are compared to other communities.

Ultimately, our aim is to develop and put in place a practical, lasting framework that will focus on the following areas:

- **Education**
- **Participation**
- **Representation**

We want to foster reciprocal relationships between ourselves, those keen to get involved in politics and those already established in the political arena – constantly developing through contribution and collaboration eventually strengthening our political stance and unity as a community.

Our vision is all-inclusive and non-discriminatory. Everyone is invited to get involved, ranging from migrant Chinese who are unsure of their political rights all the way through to prospective MPs requiring support and a platform for promotion.

Education

Knowledge is a key that can open many doors. Understanding is the beginning of change.

Education is not just about learning “How to be a politician”; it encompasses training and information provision at all levels from youth programs, local community groups, up to the political level.

Our vision involves equipping all sections of the Chinese community with all the information they need about the way this country is run today, how it affects them on a daily basis, whatever walk of life they are currently in.

Encouraging parents to show an active interest in politics. If parents have a mindset that what goes on in British politics is something that concerns them, they would influence their children into this positive way of thinking. Learning begins from home. Chinese speaking parents tend to encourage their offspring to study subjects to make a good living and have professional status rather than read a degree in politics related subjects. This also works vice versa, by encouraging children to become politically aware, they in turn influence their parents to take an interest.

Through education, we will raise general awareness of how the British law making process works and thus hopefully encourage more British Chinese to want to become a part of that.

Our education programme will, broadly speaking, encompass:

- The development of an educational programme encouraging our target group of 18 to 25 year olds to become more engaged and involved with politics and its surrounding issues.
- Holding seminars and presentations at which key public figures will be speaking, to introduce people to politics.
- Providing a programme which will allow people who are genuinely interested to shadow MPs in the House of Commons.
- Planning guided trips to visit the House of Commons.
- Arranging meetings with MPs and attending presentations by key figures.
- Working with the media across press, radio and television to promote interest in our initiatives and political education in general.
- Online presence is vital and as such we will launch a BC Project website which will be an integral tool to enable the community to share information, enable communication and commentary within the community. Some of the education objectives we intend to achieve through our site include:
 - I. Providing an easily accessible, searchable, guided resource for political information. Topics will include political basics, civic awareness, political process, significance of voting, individual rights, how the British political and public appointments system works, nationally, regionally and locally, etc.
 - II. Providing the latest news on political issues affecting the Chinese community.
 - III. Promoting political awareness campaigns resulting in tangible reports, presentable to government.
 - IV. Collating political views from different people in the community. Analysing these views and using them to further develop our strategy - feeding back in to the project.
 - V. Hosting Q&A sessions online, possibly with prominent community or political figures..
 - VI. Providing both a UK and Chinese specific discussion forum for political debate.

Participation

The message we want to give to the Chinese community is simple – without political participation, we do not have a voice. If our voices aren't heard we fail to have any influence in key decision making processes.

As mentioned in the previous section, c.30% of the British Chinese population are not registered on the electoral register. A third of us haven't even taken the first step towards enfranchisement. Votes are important, empowering and using it places the British Chinese INSIDE of the decision-making process. To forget about it is to lose one's voice altogether, which only serves to compound our reputation as the 'silent minority'.

We have identified the following points that we need to address in order to encourage political participation in the Chinese community:

- The power of voting. People must be made aware of the real power of their vote. They need to believe in what voting actually achieves, if not for the country, then for the local community itself, for future generations.
- Activity as a member of a pressure group.
- Expressing views through the media – as opposed to keeping silent while not causing a fuss.
- Engaging in political discussion.
- Becoming involved in their own local community, i.e. taking on roles in the school governing body or NHS trust, etc.
- Standing as a candidate for election.
- Membership of a political party - awareness of what they're all about – civic engagement.
- The citizen as a consumer – knowing your rights.
- Seeking grievances through the courts.
- Participating in the British legislative system.
- Being proactive politically in furthering the aims of the BC Project.
- Promoting awareness campaigns to Chinese communities on how Chinese participation can influence the political process, inspiring them to be politically active in all areas of public life.
- Encouraging a greater sense of citizenship within the Chinese community, both locally and nationally.
- Promoting a positive British Chinese identity to both community and government.
- Encouraging government, the main political parties and opinion formers to make the ideal of an inclusive democracy a reality. Monitoring their progress towards it.
- Spearheading a campaign to target voting amongst the Chinese youth, challenging the typical excuses of apathy and laziness.
- Teaming up with existing Chinese political figureheads in the community to interact with and encourage newcomers.

Our participation initiatives will include the following three key areas:

- **Personal /Individual:** Encouraging each member of the British Chinese community here in the UK to get personally involved in the political process whether that be voting, getting involved at local council level or whichever area is most relevant.
- **Within the scope of the BC Project:** We aim to encourage and initiate the involvement of networks of people and organisations which can help to further the goals of the project.
- **Public /Community:** There is power in numbers and as a community we must work in a more cohesive manner in order to power ourselves forward into the public arena. We aim to facilitate pro-active participation at a higher level on behalf of the community.

Representation

Unless we begin to see greater Chinese political representation at all levels of public life, British democracy can never truly address the real needs of Chinese communities.

We wholeheartedly support anyone who stands for a position in politics. Irrespective of political affiliation, the BC Project will provide any possible tools and resources to help them progress for the good of the community.

We will provide the support necessary to those wishing to put themselves forward for a decision making, public position whether that be as a councillor, an MP, or as a member of a public committee. Many of us are simply unaware of the plethora of working groups out there that contribute to making key decisions in this country which we hope will change through our education programmes. It's our vision to increase British Chinese representation across the board in all of these areas. We want to be a key part of the decision-making process and education is the first step to making that a reality.

Currently there is a real lack of Chinese political role models in Britain. We hope to identify role models at all levels of society (civic, media, community, etc) and encourage them to promote our initiatives to the wider community.

Our programmes will address the following:

- Demonstrating the very real benefits of Chinese representation to the Chinese communities, and society at large.
- Raising our profile in mainstream society by interacting and exchanging ideas with other groups. We have a vibrant culture with many different facets which should be embraced and celebrated with other UK communities.
- Inspiring the Chinese community to be politically active in all areas of public life, to know that our actions, however small, can make a difference. Disenfranchisement is a real and disabling problem for our community. Many Chinese people believe that they have no influence over the everyday way in which the country is run. We will encourage Chinese people to be involved in public bodies and key decision making processes which will ensure that the concerns of the Chinese community are high on the public agenda both locally and nationally.

Conclusion

The BC Project wants to create an easier road into public involvement in the political and public arena and support all those representing our community

There is a lot to do and a long way to go. However, the BC Project takes a simple and flexible approach to the issues at hand. The focus is on developing a practical framework which will provide resource, support and encouragement for all those who are interested in politics and social issues which concerns us, e.g. crime, tax and immigration.

We actively seek support from all parties and people including media friends who have a genuine interest in the Chinese community. We aim to provide channels and resources for people who want to have their voices heard or stand up for the issues that affect them and our community. In short, this should include every British Chinese!

We will act as a cohesive force, pooling and sharing resources together effectively, taking issues and individuals to a place where they can make a difference. Through the involvement of more and more people, our numbers will grow, feeding in to the project, creating a vast support network, ultimately improving our ability to serve the people and community.

BC Project Core Members:

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Appendix

The BC Project is a subgroup of North London Chinese Association. NLCA is a registered charity which is helping to support and fund the BC Project to help them to achieve their aims. The BC project is also supported by a variety of different organisations and Chinese community groups, as well as politicians and Government bodies which we have listed below:

House of Commons, including:

Mr Andrew Dismore MP	Chairman of the Chinese in Britain All Party Parliamentary Group
Mr Barry Gardiner MP	Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Forestry
Mr Ben Chapman MP	Chairman of the China All Party Parliamentary Group
Mr David Cameron MP	Leader of the Conservative Party
Mr Nick Clegg MP	Leader of the Liberal Democrats Party
Mr Stephen Timms MP	Minister of State for Competitiveness
Mr Damian Green MP	Shadow Minister for Immigration & Chairman of Parliamentary Mainstream
Ms Dawn Butler	MP for Brent South
Mr Mark Field MP	MP for Cities of London & Westminster
Mr Simon Hughes MP	MP for North Southwark and Bermondsey
Mr Frank Cook MP	MP for Stockton North
Mr Stephen Pound MP	MP for Ealing North
Mr Peter Bottomley MP	MP for Worthing West
Ms Rosie Cooper MP	MP for West Lancashire

House of Lords, including:

Lady Anelay	Opposition Chief Whip in the Lords
Rt Hon. Lady Ashton	Leader of the House of Lords & Lord President of the Council
Lord Avebury	Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and for Home Office
Lord Dholakia	Deputy Leader Liberal Democrats; Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Communities
Lady D'Souza	Convenor of the Crossbench Peers

UK Chinese Embassy, including:

Counsellor Yuan Song Jiang	Counsellor & Consul General
Counsellor Lin Xu	Counsellor