

DUNLOP MEDAL DINNER

Friday 5 February 2021

I would like to join Carrillo in my thanks to the Governor, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, the Chairman and CEO of Asialink. I thank China where I was made and Australia where I am shaped.

I consider myself very lucky to be born in China and grow up in Australia. I speak two languages, Chinese and English, on a daily basis and I read, write and think in both. This has always enabled me to see the world from an alternative point of view. I have two large loving families in both Australia and China. I have my wonderful friends in both countries as well as others in different parts of the world--- America, England, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Italy, Switzerland and more You may think I am boasting but it is true. I also know that I am not the only lucky one in this room who has family and friends around the world. This is our world today: modern communication technology has not only brought us closer to each but also allowed us to know about others.

Australia is a migrant country with people from so many different places in the world. I often say that Australia is a small country compared with China, but I actually only learned how big the world is when I became an Australian. Diversity is a wonderful thing. Every year, millions of birds migrate from Siberia to Australia to escape the harsh winter. Scientists say that migratory birds help to protect our wetlands and enrich our natural habitat. The diversity of people in our society has also helped to build a richer Australian culture and identity.

In recent years, there has been increasing fear in our society about those who are identified as "Other" -- people with different colour skins, who speak different languages or believe in different gods. For some time now, the Government 's policy towards immigration, especially towards asylum seekers and refugees, has been shameful. Some commentators warn that racism has been rising in Australia, especially during the recent pandemic. I believe this is correct, but these bad influences have not taken Australia back as far as the time of the White Australia Policy. I always believe Australians are a generous people. We take pride in helping others. There are so many Australians who devote their lives to the service others --- the CFA, the Flying Doctors, Refugee relief agencies, volunteers for the homeless. So many people are always willing to offer a helping hand to the most vulnerable in our society and the world. Australians are curious. We love to travel and explore the world. We may not always understand what we see but we are not afraid to discover the unknown. Of course, we are not perfect, there are so many hurdles to climb. We need to learn how to accept and respect difference in race, culture and religion, and we must celebrate diversity. My personal experience as a migrant to this country has been a journey

of discovering, learning, understanding, respecting and accepting. I would not be where I am today if I hadn't had the support and faith of my wonderful families and friends.

Allow me to tell you the story of a very special man whom I met on third day after I had landed in Australia. His name was Erwin Aladar Rado. Erwin was the founder of Melbourne International Film Festival, a Hungarian Jew who arrived in Australia in 1939. He was a photographer and an accomplished pianist but with only one arm. He spoke four languages fluently and was learning Japanese in his 70s when I met him. Erwin had been asked by a friend to be my referee for my postgraduate study at Swinburne Film and Television School. I had to meet him before he would agree to write the reference. His very first question was why I wanted to take a postgraduate course at the Swinburne Film School? I said to Erwin that Swinburne was a wonderful school where I really wanted to study to extend my knowledge of film making. Erwin wasn't impressed and told me that I was not being honest with myself. "You don't need more study", he said, "and you won't learn any more than you already know. You graduated from one of most prestigious film schools in this world and probably you already know more than your teachers here how to make films. Why do you really want to go to Swinburne?" I remembered that I was on the edge of tears because I thought that I had failed to get the reference. In desperation I mumbled, "I want to learn to speak English well, to understand different voices so I can find my own voice to tell stories in a bigger world".

Happily, Erwin wrote the reference. I was accepted and became the first international student of the Swinburne Film and Television School. Erwin Rado passed away in 1988, the year I made my first documentary film at SBS Television. In searching to understand the voices of others, I gradually found my own. Now when I can speak English, I have the freedom to explore the bigger world and have my voice heard.

I am very grateful to be awarded this Medal which I dedicate to my families and friends for your supports and your belief in me.

Thank you!

Ziyin Gantner