

《留美学生演讲辱华:中国空气肮脏》

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A speech by a Chinese student at a University of Maryland graduation ceremony has been criticized as relying on "false facts and biases" and negative Chinese stereotypes.

Yang Shuping's speech focused on two major points: the fresh air and right to free speech enjoyed in the United States versus dirty air and "no democracy and freedom" in China.

"The air (in the US) was so sweet and fresh, and oddly luxurious," Yang told fellow graduates. "I grew up in a city in China where I had to wear a face mask every time I went outside, otherwise, I might get sick."

"Before I came to the United States, I learned in history class about the Declaration of Independence, but these words had no meaning to me - life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." "These words sounded so strange, so abstract and so foreign to me, until I came to the University of Maryland."

Besides her unflattering tone, Yang ignored some basic facts about her hometown Kunming, the capital of Southwest China's Yunnan province, which has some of the best air quality in China.

Yang's speech triggered indignation among Chinese students around the US, and social media users across the Pacific.

"As a proud UMD alumni, I am very disappointed in Shuping Yang's speech yesterday. The attitude she expressed was negative and disrespectful," tweeted Aquarius.

"I can attest to the fact that the air quality in Kunming is superior to other parts of China. Or at least it was when I was there a few years ago. It's a beautiful place," George Dunn, former educator at Ningbo Institute of Technology, Zhejiang University, wrote on his Facebook account.

Zhu Zhaoyu, another student at the University of Maryland, wrote on Facebook that "Yang Shuping's speech is full of bias and ignorance....U of Maryland, you owe all Chinese students an apology."

As video of Yang's speech went viral in China, users of Sina Weibo, China's answer to Twitter, also expressed their anger toward Yang's statements.

Weibo user "Eryaorourouroutuanzi" wrote: "I grew up in Kunming and never wore a mask when I was there. I am living in Vancouver, a city famous for its clean air now, and I am not feeling the air here is any different with that of Kunming."

Even the official account of Kunming clarified that the city was "green all year round with a very pleasant climate". "Kunming had 100 percent good air quality days up to May 8, and the air in Kunming is truly 'fresh and sweet' thanks to the flowers blooming in the city all year long."

As to Yang's other denigrating comments on China's democracy, weibo user "Jizhide two_dog", also a graduating student of University of Maryland, posted: "I took my undergraduate degree from the UK and went to graduate school in the US, but I've never forgotten my identity as a Chinese. I mind my manners abroad for fear of shaming my country, simply because I am a Chinese and I represent China when I am abroad."

"Overseas students should become a bridge between the two countries and deepen mutual understanding as well as removing misunderstanding, rather than degrading one's own motherland just for applauses of others," posted another weibo user "hello Wuhan".

"Catching the audience's eyes by degrading one's own country is unbearable," Zhu Lihan, former president of the Chinese Student Association at the University of Maryland, told youth.cn. "It is not only lack of consideration, but also ulterior in the intention of the University of Maryland to support such rootless and offensive speeches at the graduation ceremony."

In response to the outpouring of anger, Yang has changed her weibo account name, deleted all the posts, disabled the comments, and issued a public apology on Weibo on May 22.

"The response to my speech is far off my expectation and made me very upset," she wrote.

"I want to apologize and clarify my position... I deeply love my country and hometown and I'm proud of its prosperity... I hope to enrich the Chinese culture and make contributions to China using what I have learned overseas. The speech was just to share my experiences overseas and I had no intentions of belittling my country and hometown... I am deeply sorry and hope for forgiveness. I've learned my lesson, thank you."

Her speech has been compared with one made last year by Harvard graduate He Jiang, the first Chinese student to speak at Harvard's commencement ceremony. He earned loud applause from more than 30,000 audience members for his scientific perspective and fresh stories about China's rural areas.

To win the opportunity to speak, he went through three rounds of fierce competition, including drafts and auditions. Asked why he entered the competition, he said he "wanted more voices from China to be heard".