

Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

**Roundhouse Reunion 2008
Hakka conference**

**Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Toronto
Toronto, Ontario**

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Consul General Zhu, friends:

Thank you for inviting me to the Roundhouse Reunion 2008.

I am here this morning because of my Hakka ancestry. As some of you already know, my mother was Hakka. I am going to tell you a little about my background.

My mother's grandfather, Wong Tuen, went to the West Indies as a young man, and we believe he worked as a labourer because he ended up with very rough hands. Like many of the Chinese diaspora, he returned to China with savings and new skills – and in particular, he had a good command of the English language, which enabled him to become a court interpreter in Hong Kong after he got married.

Great-grandfather Wong returned to his ancestral village, Ho Pak Kiu, and bought lychee orchards, peanut farms and rice fields. We were asked by relatives when we visited the village to return the next time during lychee season, so that we could pick the fruit ourselves.

Great-grandfather Wong had a peanut oil factory which was very profitable because peanut oil has always been the favourite cooking oil for the Chinese. As for his rice fields, during the 2nd World War, many of his descendants went back to the village from Hong Kong because of severe food rationing after the surrender. In the ancestral village, they had plenty to eat.

I think by far the most interesting thing he did was building a large European style home and a gun tower, the two being connected by a bridge

on the upper floors. The bridge and the gun tower were reminiscent of medieval architecture in Europe, the gun tower having the same features for defense as a castle. The house was in the early 20th century style, with beautiful carved wood railings, and the floor of the main hall was laid with tiles imported from Europe. I have been to China many times, but have never seen a house like it!

It was really too bad that it was not a roundhouse complex because it would have been even more fascinating. I am most interested in learning more about them during this conference. As for great-grandfather, who wanted to show that he had made it abroad, it wouldn't have been cool to build a roundhouse, would it!

It was his wish that his descendants would return to the village one day, so he had the entrance of his home painted with a large picture of "Hundred birds returning to the nest." I am one of those descendants who returned, which made me feel connected to my Hakka heritage.

My father, who was *punti*, used to tease my mother about being a big-footed Hakka woman. My mother was quite a bit larger than me with strong bones. We all know that Hakka women traditionally shouldered a lot of responsibility for the economic life of the family, taking an equal role alongside their men, in the fields, in business, on construction sites, and at wars. For that reason, they never bound their feet. I believe I have a lot of that Hakka spirit in me. We will be hearing a lot more about that topic from our conference speakers.

Also, during this conference, our presenters will be talking a lot about Hakka leadership in various fields, in China and abroad. Here in Canada, we all know about Hakka entrepreneurship in Michael Lee-Chin and Ray Chang, just to name a couple.

In the study of the Hakka Diaspora, you will be entranced by Cheuk Kwan's tour of Chinese Restaurants of the world. He featured five owners of Hakka heritage, in some of the most unlikely places.

Here in Canada, there is always the question of how to maintain our ties to our roots, while being full participants in Canadian society. Thanks to Conferences like this one, we are able to better understand who we are, and play a role in shaping Canada's future. Thank you.