

Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

The Richard Charles Lee Canada- Hong Kong Library Official Opening

March 6, 2008

President Naylor, Chancellor Peterson, Chief Librarian Carole Moore, Director Jack Leong, honoured guests, family & friends:

Thank you all for being here to celebrate this amazing new home for the ever growing collection of research material on everything that has any connection with Hong Kong.

On the cover of the January 28th edition of Time magazine was the name Ny.lon.kong, which stands for New York, London and Hong Kong. The article talks about how the three connected cities drive the global economy, the key to their successes, and the challenges they now face.

Some of you here may dispute the importance of these three cities in the global economy, but my point is that Hong Kong is recognized as a global financial centre.

I still remember the Hong Kong of my childhood, which was an unimportant dot on the world map. When I first came to Canada, ages ago, as a visa student, I was a resident of Royal Victoria College at McGill University. The girls I met would often ask me where I was from, and when I said Hong Kong, their follow-up question would always be, “where’s Hong Kong.” Today, nobody asks that question anymore.

Why is that? Hong Kong has no natural resources, and the series of islands that make up Hong Kong are hilly with very little fertile land. It does, however, have a good harbour which was originally inhabited by fishing families and pirates. Hong Kong’s success is entirely dependent on its human resources - who are well educated, entrepreneurial, and hard working.

This Library is the Canada-Hong Kong Library. You may wonder where Canada comes into the picture. Some of you may know that Canadian contingents (the Winnipeg Grenadiers & the Royal Rifles) were sent to

defend Hong Kong during the 2nd. World War, and this Library has a considerable collection on this topic, including copies of letters from POWs written during that period. The Director, Jack Leong, is vitally interested in our veterans of the Battle of Hong Kong.

Among the Canadian population, there are 1.3 million citizens living in Canada who are of Chinese ancestry, and the majority of them are from Hong Kong, or they came to Canada via Hong Kong. Also, at present, there are ¼ million Canadians living in Hong Kong, which makes it the largest group of Canadians living abroad. Such is the very close connection between Canada and Hong Kong.

As I mentioned earlier, Hong Kong has become what it is today because of its human resources. It is citizens like Richard Charles Lee, known to some of us here as father, grandfather or uncle, who helped to transform an insignificant colony into a major financial centre. It is, therefore, only fitting that this Library is dedicated to his memory.