

Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy
Revisiting Chinese Canadian Communities Panel

Opening Address

September 16, 2010

Friends & Scholars:

I am delighted to be here to deliver the opening address for this panel on Chinese Canadian communities. Many of you know that it's one of my favourite topics.

I would like to thank Dr. Jack Leong for bringing this panel together. At the same time, I would like to congratulate my dear friend, Prof. Emeritus David Lai, on his new book, *Chinese Community Leadership: Case study of Victoria in Canada*, which served as the inspiration for our panel today.

David will be speaking about Chinese Gateways in China and in Canada, a topic of which he has an in-depth understanding. On our travels, we see Chinese arches in many different parts of the world – that is - where there are Chinese settlements. Incidentally, the last one we saw was in Havana, Cuba. David will be speaking on the importance of these arches to Chinese life and culture, both in China and abroad.

As the Honourary Patron of the Ottawa Gateway, I believe it is about time that we have one in our capital city. Since it is a gateway in Ottawa, there is a Northern Chinese Royal Arch consisting of nine roof sections, decorative tiling, and glazed animal figures on top. This is the most striking addition to Ottawa's Chinatown in 80 years. It is a little Chinatown with a huge gateway, and it is because of Beijing's involvement, since Ottawa is twinned with Beijing, and a crew sent from China has been working on it since this spring. I can't wait for the official unveiling this fall. I have no doubt that David will soon be studying the architecture of this new Chinese arch, its meaning and its affect on tourism in Ottawa's Chinatown, particularly since Canada finally has approved destination status.

Prof. Eric Fong and Dr. Jack Leong will focus their talk on the city of Toronto - on how immigrants are living and adapting to life here. Is multiculturalism working? Are immigrants integrated or are they marginalized?

From my own experience, I am a big supporter of multiculturalism. To me, multiculturalism means uniting people from many different cultures; it is not meant to isolate groups from each other. I believe that the concept of multiculturalism cannot remain static, it needs to grow with the changing Canadian demographics. Now that Asian Canadians are becoming an increasingly large percentage of our population, multiculturalism is being challenged.

We can see this in the current backlash against immigrants. The federal government's reaction to the recent ship of Tamil refugees on the shores of B.C. brings to mind historical examples such as the Komagatu Maru incident in 1914, the ship full of Jews fleeing Nazi Germany being turned away by Canada in 1939, when it was said that "one (Jew) was one too many," as well as the irrational fears of the Chinese boat people from Fujian in 1999. We know that many Tamils are fleeing a brutal civil war in

Sri Lanka. I am not suggesting that Canada should take in criminals, but our Refugee Board needs to have the capacity to separate genuine refugees from thugs. However, this is not the time to discuss the effectiveness of our Refugee Board.

Here in Toronto, I am very distressed to see the backlash expressed in the current level of support for the mayoralty candidate, Rob Ford, a man who has said immigration to Toronto should be curtailed, and has opined that Oriental people are slowly taking over! He seems to forget that we are all Canadians. Those who work hard have a right to succeed. The fact that he has any support at all says something about racism in this city. We need to question our complacency about our success as a multicultural society.

I would like to thank Prof. Joseph Wong, who has the role of discussant and moderator at the end of the presentations. I look forward to listening and learning this afternoon.