

**The Importance of Community among Chinese Canadians
Chinatown Conference, Edmonton, May 4, 2013**

Good afternoon Minister Klimchuk, Consul General Liu, friends, scholars, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this very important conference on Edmonton Chinatown. From my experience of 14 years in the Senate of Canada, having travelled across Canada and meeting many Chinese Canadians in different communities, plus my academic research on Chinese immigration, I realize that the Chinese 2 communities are strong today because of unity in our common purpose.

I have observed that all immigrant groups suffer from infighting, often because there are members who put their self-interest before that of the group. At the same time, politics in their home countries can always get in the way as it did in the Chinese communities. So, what is it that had enabled the Chinese Canadians, as a group, to stand out and excel? Is it because, as Asians, we have settled in Canada the longest? Is it because of our educational achievements, or our language and culture? Maybe a bit of all that, but there's more.

Recently, at a Chinese New Year banquet, I was sitting next to the CEO of a very important Canadian corporation

who said to me that there is 3 now cohesion in the Chinese Canadian communities despite the influx of the Mandarin speakers from Mainland China, which was not always the case since the end of the 1990s. This shows that others do notice. I believe that all Chinese Canadians must continue to be united in order to be a strong force to be reconned with, by the Canadian government and by mainstream society.

A few weeks ago, one of the questions, in my interview with a Hong Kong magazine was, whether I thought the reaction of the people of Hong Kong towards the influx of Chinese from the Mainland reminded me of the Canadian reaction towards earlier Chinese migration to Canada. That actually brought to mind how those of us who were born here or have lived in Canada for many years viewed the newcomers from 4 Mainland China since the late 1990s. I've heard similar complaints here like those of the Hong Kongers towards Mainlanders.

You would all know the derogative term FOB, (fresh off the boat), a description used by Chinese Canadians towards new Chinese immigrants. I remember the term being used frequently when I was first appointed to the Senate of Canada in 1998, and it was also around that time when immigration to Canada from Mainland China overtook the numbers from Hong Kong.

It is human to fear the unknown and the uncertainty that newcomers bring with them that will change the status

quo. Change can be good or bad, but it is up to everyone involved to make sure that there is positive outcome. How do we do that?

What can we learn from the past? 5 I am now going to share my reflection on the importance of community along the journey of Chinese settlement in Canada. This journey can be divided into different periods –

- 1. Those who came before Chinese Exclusion in 1923**
- 2. Family reunification after the repeal of Chinese Exclusion in 1947-**
- 3. Immigration based on the points system, established in 1967-**
- 4. Immigration of entrepreneurs and investors from Hong Kong from the 1980s –**
- 5. And from 1998 on, the large numbers from Mainland China**

Historically, we see a trend of ethnic Chinese helping each other. During the Second World War, when young Chinese Canadians were needed 6 to enlist for dangerous assignments behind enemy lines, it was seen as an opportunity to lobby the Canadian government for citizenship rights.

When Chinese Exclusion was repealed in 1947, Chinese were able to obtain Canadian citizenship, and apply for the immigration of their family members left behind in China. Notwithstanding that there were human rights groups which helped to lobby the government, the first group of activists within the Chinese Canadian communities were the Tusheng (the Canadian born Chinese).

From the bachelor societies, the immigration of women and children became the first step in the building of Chinese communities across Canada. We had activists like Foon Seen and Jean Lumb and many others who lobbied the Diefenbaker 7 government for family reunification and the relaxation of immigration rules. By the mid 1950s, regulations were relaxed to allow immigration of fiancées so that young Chinese Canadian men could marry women from China, which contributed to the growth of the Chinese Canadian communities.

When the younger generation of Chinese immigrated to Canada, many were shocked by the conditions the older generation lived in, which dispelled the image of Gumsan as a land of plenty. They wanted independence from the older generation who in turn called them “Commie kids.” There was tension in the Chinese communities.

The new immigrants were proud of their Chineseness, and looked down on the Tusheng as 8 bamboo, which is closed on both ends, meaning that they were neither Chinese

nor Canadian. Even the Tusheng girls were criticized as not suitable as wives! On the other hand, the Tusheng were proud of their English language skill and their acculturation in Canada, so, more tension in the Chinese Canadian communities.

Something happened in the 1950s that united the new comers with the Canadian born Chinese, and that was the federal government's accusation that a large number of Chinese immigrants entered Canada illegally. There were RCMP raids into homes, offices and even safety deposit boxes, and being Chinese meant being under suspicion. I was a student at McGill then and remember the furor in the Chinese community in Montreal. At that time, there was only one MP of Chinese origin in Ottawa, Douglas Jung, a Tusheng, who 9 was in the Diefenbaker government. He explained in parliament that, the irregularities in Chinese immigration were caused by the discriminatory Canadian immigration law towards the Chinese.

Having the right to vote meant that politicians had to listen to their constituents. The Minister of the Department of Immigration, Ellen Fairclough, offered amnesty to all who had entered Canada illegally if they would come forward to regularize their status. The positive outcome of all this was unity in the Chinese Canadian communities across Canada.

In the early 1960s, Canada was experiencing a shortage of labour, and the immigration rules were relaxed. By 1967,

the points system was established in order to attract immigrants with skills and education, irrespective of countries of 10 origin. It was then that Chinese women could enter Canada independently. During this period, many of my former schoolmates from Hong Kong immigrated to Canada because their education and skills were needed, and jobs were plentiful.

During this period, there were increasing number of ethnic Chinese students in Canadian universities - Canadian born, permanent residents as well as visa students. Everything seemed to be going well, and then, in 1979 (Sept. 30), CTV W5 aired the program “Campus Giveaway” accusing Asian-looking students, irrespective of merit, for taking away university spaces from white students. This again united the entire Chinese Canadian population. We saw the formation of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Council of Chinese Canadians in Ontario against W5 (CCCO), and other Ad Hoc committees followed in other cities, 11 including Edmonton. Little would CTV know how it had united all Chinese Canadians across the country.

Ultimately, in April 1980, the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) was established, giving the community an official voice to defend our rights as citizens.

Around the same time as the W5 incident, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was negotiating the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China, and many Hong

Kongers planned to leave the colony for fear of loss of freedom under Communist rule. This provided western democracies the opportunity of attracting the wealthy and entrepreneurial emigrants from Hong Kong. Canada was no different under the Mulroney government, and it became the first 12 country of choice for the people of Hong Kong. Since then, Hong Kong became the top source area for immigrants to Canada until the latter part of the 1990s.

This wave of immigrants brought with them educational training and language skills, huge investments and business acumen. Because of their large numbers, together with the wealth they brought, we again saw systemic discrimination from some members of Canadian society. The descriptions of “monster homes” and “unneighborly houses” were common. All of a sudden, anyone from Hong Kong was considered “rich.” This was most evident in B.C., and I believe that was why Prime Minister Mulroney appointed David Lam See Chai to be the Lieutenant Governor of B.C. (1988)

During his tenure and thereafter, the Hon. David Lam, along with many others, achieved a lot to dispel the perceived notion that all new Chinese immigrants were money-grabbing individuals who didn't care about Canadian society. It was during this period that many Chinese shopping malls were built, and the affluent moved into exclusive residential areas and sent their children to

private schools. In time, the Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong became non-issues in mainstream society. By 1998, not only did immigrants from Hong Kong decreased greatly in number, many who immigrated returned to Hong Kong or went into Mainland China because of economic opportunities.

By 1998, ethnic Chinese were still the largest group of immigrants coming into Canada, and this time, they were mandarin speakers from Mainland China. I was a Senator then, and had a lot of opportunities to speak to members, as well as attend many functions, in the Chinese communities across Canada.

Perhaps my observation was mainly in Toronto, but I noticed that the ethnic Chinese were divided into those who were born in Canada, those who came from Hong Kong who speak Cantonese, and those who speak Mandarin from Mainland China, and then those from Taiwan. Their functions and celebrations were very separate and up till the last few years, there was no crossover. In other words, they didn't help each other and didn't attend each other's functions, even though I would attend all of them.

I remember someone from Mainland China asking me why I attended the Taiwanese function and not their Mainland Chinese function. My answer was that I wasn't in Toronto whenever their gala was held. At that time, there was the "them" and "us" mentality. When I was asked to be

the Patron of their Education Foundation, of course I accepted, and remained in that position until I took early retirement from the Senate last September.

The Chinese communities were fractured until recently. I suspect it was because of the article “Too Asian,” that came out in the November (10) 2010 issue of Maclean’s magazine, which again attacked ethnic Chinese university students, similar to “Campus Giveaway” that happened in 1979. Trying to divide Canadian 16 society into “white” and “the other” in multicultural Canada was unacceptable and irresponsible for a taxpayers-subsidized national magazine.

Many of you are familiar with the article so I won’t go into this in detail, except my observation that, again, that article united Chinese Canadian communities with a common cause.

I have observed, in recent years, in Toronto at least, how the different groups I mentioned earlier have come together socially and philanthropically. Now, when I attend Chinese Canadian functions, I no longer see the divide that existed before, and it was also observed by the CEO of the large Canadian corporation I mentioned at the beginning of my talk.

Historically, Chinese Canadians have always helped each other in times of need. I should hope that we don’t need systemic discrimination to raise its head for us to remember

to assist those who come to Canada after us. It is not because we have been helped before, but because reaching out with a helping hand to someone, in a new country, who is from the same cultural and linguistic background as ourselves, is always needed and appreciated.

This Chinatown Conference helps to preserve the history of the Chinese community in Alberta, and serves to remind all of us that we were here before Canada became a country, and that we have contributed immensely in the building of a strong multicultural nation.

Thank you