



Harmony in a New Country – Achieving Success through Community Commitment

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As the personal representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth of Canada in British Columbia, it gives me great pleasure to bring to each and everyone of you warm greetings.

When I read the full name of our Convention – word by word – thoughts came to my mind and I have decided to build my talk around each word and to share with you some personal experiences in each case.

I went to Vancouver, Canada, about 27 years ago with my wife and three very young daughters. We spent a month and a half living in a single room in a small hotel while I hunted for a job. I had been a Banker all my life and got a job offer from a Canadian Bank. Unfortunately, they wanted me to work for them – not in Canada, but in Hong Kong! So, without a job, I took a risk and went into business for myself. My company grew considerably so that upon my retirement, following which I took on the position of Lieutenant Governor, I had business activities in British Columbia, California and Arizona. I guess this qualifies me also as a Chinese entrepreneur.

For the last five years I have served as the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. The Government House in Victoria covers an area of

36 acres of gardens (21 different gardens) and the Government House itself, where my wife and I reside, has more than 100 rooms. The Ball Room, if used as a Concert Hall, can seat 300 people.

Many friends from the United States have asked me, "If you are the Lieutenant-Governor, who is the Governor?" Well, there isn't one. The Lieutenant-Governor, – a traditional title – is the Queen's representative and the Head of State of British Columbia. So, often my American friends wished me well and hoped that one day I would be appointed the Governor. But there is no Governor, the Lieutenant-Governor is the Governor. In fact, I am the first Lieutenant-Governor of Chinese race in the Commonwealth.

I entertain a minimum of 2,000 people a month at Government House and send out letters and cards and other mail items, totalling at least 1,000 a month. I attended, last year alone, 391 appointments and functions and spoke at most of these.

Why am I telling you this? Because I want to share some experiences with you that demonstrate the opportunities available to immigrants in Canada, a multicultural country



that believes in equality of people, regardless of place of birth.

As I told you earlier, my talk will be based around the name of the Convention. There are four key words:

WORLD. CHINESE. ENTREPRENEUR. CONVENTION.

WORLD – We use the word 'World' to demonstrate how big this Convention is when in reality the World is becoming a village – a global village, according to the world-famous Canadian scholar, Marshall McLuhan. In a village, everyone knows what goes on in his or her neighbour's household, "Say, why are you having chicken for dinner two evenings in a row? You must be rich!"

The events in Tiananmen Square and in the Gulf War, with electronic telecommunication, happened as if they were in our own living room.

Things are happening faster than ever. The movements of people, material, ideas, culture and communication are increasing at high speed. Political boundaries are no security and no wall can keep out the interaction of ideas and people.

I observe two things:

The First thing is that after the Opium War the mystery of an invincible China was destroyed and China suffered miserably at the hands of foreign and imperialistic powers. This is not news but since the end of the Second World War, the world seems to have turned friendlier toward the Chinese.

There was an editorial in the Times-Colonist, a respected daily newspaper in Victoria about the time of my installation as Lieutenant-Governor which stated:

"The choice of David Lam is a welcome reminder of how far Canada has come in its attitude to citizens of Chinese extraction. The Tale of the Chinese in Canada is cause for national shame and British Columbia's contribution has been more shameful than most. It spans about 130 years and many volumes of systematic oppression, intimidation and denial of basic rights. It is somehow fitting that the

Capital City which nurtured such raw hatred and bigotry will soon have as occupant of its most prominent residence, a distinguished member of that racial group..."

That was the reponse of the press as I began my Office. The reponse of the citizens as I prepare to leave Office is to pay up to \$25,000 Cdn. to sponsor a table at my Farewell and Tribute dinner. The money of course always goes to community projects which contribute to harmony in British Columbia so that immigrants never again will suffer the shame of "systematic oppression, intimidation and denial of basic rights."

I've asked Canadians not only to 'tolerate' newcomers but in fact, to 'celebrate' – yes, to 'celebrate' – that we have newcomers to Canada.

The newcomers Canada must celebrate in the 21st Century are visible and racial minorities and not only the white European immigrants which Canada at first tolerated and now celebrates in the 20th Century.

Immigrants in the past came in at the bottom of society and the economic order and "paid their dues" before being 'celebrated'. Chinese entrepreneurs do not and should not follow that path. We should not be so superficial in our understanding of how any society works, however, to believe because a high government official and even an official entrepreneurs immigration program welcomes you, that all ordinary citizens take the same view.

Citizens resent some of the cultural mistakes made out of ignorance when newcomers face new situations in a new land. This misunderstanding can turn an innocent mistake into a racial barrier. Newcomers may impress governments and business leaders with their wealth and economic success. Your children will only be welcome in the schools and playgrounds of your new land, however, if you and they work as hard in achieving harmony in social, cultural and sport endeavours as you did in building your fortunes. Canadians have a saying "Money is not enough". This can be code for racist bigotry. It is also true in that a



newcomer must not hide behind his money or his big house. He must actively participate in activities which build harmony in the community.

The second thing I observed is that this kind of good-will may change – partly due to ignorance on our part to deal with situations in the new country, partly due to misunderstanding by the local people.

Before coming to Hong Kong, I was told that a very authoritative and influential writer in the United States suggested that the post-Confucianism in Asia and the fundamental Islam of Iran may join forces to destroy the west.

I usually pay a lot of attention to University professors, writers, and people in the media, as they can influence public opinion, and politicians are usually moved by what they perceive as public opinion.

Don't count on the welcome given us automatically continuing. We need to pay more attention to promote good-will, understanding and harmony.

Now - CHINESE - the second word.

What is Chinese? Visual, audio, spiritual, cultural or what?

David Lam appointed Governor – newspapers in the world – Chinese appointed Governor of British Columbia.

If Chinese means Han Chinese – How about Manchurian? – what else should be included?

How about language? I speak Potunghua, Guangzhouhua and Shantouhua. Does that make me more Chinese than someone speaking only say, Guangzhouhua?

How about culture? I have studied Confucianism. I have read Laozi. I graduated from Lingnan University and spent many years in post graduate studies in America.

I am also a Christian – a Baptist. How Chinese or how much of my Chinese-ness is affected by my bi-cultural upbringing?

What if we say whoever possesses a Chinese soul is a Chinese. I know I am not saying China soul because the cultural China will not be restricted to the political or geographic China. Does a Chinese soul or

Chinese spirit qualify a person to be accepted as Chinese? Then what is the definition of the Chinese soul? If we say the Chinese soul has the spirit of harmony, compassion, dignity, entrepreneurship, we could be right. How about the Chinese values based on Confucianism teaching – personal integrity, family unity, caring for one's community and country. How about promotion of education, of trust and loyalty to friends and work, of justice, warmth, of a hard-work ethic, how about morality, a sense of right and wrong?

I will be satisfied if, like the little Canadian girl told her mother: "I'm Canadian. I'm not Chinese."

The mother said, "You are Canadian, you are Chinese – you are Chinese-Canadian."

The girl said, "I'm not!"

Mother said, "Go and look at yourself in the mirror. People will always look at you and call you Chinese. So let's look in our mirror and say no further."

We all recognize that wherever we live in the world and no matter how little we know about our Chinese heritage and culture, we are visibly Chinese and will be presumed to be Chinese by those who meet us. We should therefore strive to be genuinely Chinese and retain our culture, language and value system because whatever we are or become in cultural and value terms, the world will define us as being 'Chinese' by virtue of the fact that we look Chinese.

The third word – ENTREPRENEUR.

Entrepreneur is a French word. As a Canadian – French is the other official language of Canada – I am pleased that this is a French word.

French is a beautiful language. My wife and I spent many days in Vancouver and in Quebec City learning the language by what is called a Total Immersion Method – all day long, no other language was used except French.

After 1-1/2 months, and a large investment, I could carry on a simple conversation. But, I have now forgotten most of it. The cost now works out to be about \$100 per



word or something like that.

Okay. The dictionary defines 'Entrepreneur as the owner or manager of a business enterprise, who by risk and initiative attempts to make a profit.'

I believe each of you, today, is among the millions of Chinese who have proven to be fabulously successful entrepreneurs. Most of you have demonstrated to the world your ability to make fantastic profits.

What makes your achievements so immense is not just the magnitude of your profits but the fact that most of you invariably did it from the most humble beginnings. Further, most of you did it as a visible minority in societies which were frequently hostile to immigrants.

Entrepreneurship is very much in the character and the very nature of the Chinese. It seems that most of the adults of the more than 1.17 billion people in China are seeking to immediately become entrepreneurs of some magnitude. Even if they are employed by government or industry they are striving to create some little business on the side. The party cadre or academic intellectual during the day goes home to become a risk-taking entrepreneur in the evening. This is very different from historical China, when such people went home to devote themselves to intellectual and cultural pursuits.

In this talk, however, it is not my intention to talk about entrepreneurship in China, but rather in diaspora - in particular Canada and the United States.

In the last 27 years or so, while in business in Canada and the United States, I noticed that there are a few things Chinese Entrepreneurs should really pay attention to. Somehow they do not seem to be paying too much attention at all.

In Canada, most of the mainstream Canadians want to exercise a process which I will call - ABC. Perhaps, because western Canada and the western United States are relatively younger countries and people tend to show a kind of western hospitality to newcomers, they readily want to show welcome signs to let the newcomers know that they are welcome and accepted. A neighbour, for

instance, would look at the newcomer, ready to say "hello" and introduce themselves. This is a sign of Acceptance. Acceptance is very important - it gives the message that you are wanted, and wanted as an equal partner.

Newcomers, because of cultural differences, I guess, often avoid an instantaneous show of warmth, they often avoid eye contact, avoid meetings, avoid saying simple greetings, like "Good Morning", "How are you?", "Hello," and "Thank you." Cross cultural communication is more than just learning the language, it is also learning how foreigners communicate warmth and acceptance like eye contact.

The B in the ABC process is Belonging. I urge newcomers not to put each foot in two different boats. Learn to be a Canadian. I say, "Commit to call Canada your home." I do not mean to overthrow or deny our Chinese heritage but a priority in the short run is to create a sense of belonging and establish your place and identity in your new community.

I have told them not to confuse wealth as a virtue - because your neighbours won't. Feel that you Belong. That is B. Belonging. If you belong, people will support and protect you.

C is Commitment to your new community. This is very Confucian - personal improvement, unifying the family and managing well in the community.

Commitment is not simply cheque writing. It means to me, more like making a statement, that you are proud to be a member of your community and that you want to serve by giving your time, talent and money. The caring, sharing, serving and giving spirit is more important than the amount. It is the spirit rather than the money that builds harmony.

This completes the process of A, B and C, but, so often I see A, and no B, and no C. I also urge newcomers to seriously learn, at least one more culture.

In learning a new culture, I do not necessarily mean a new language - that is desirable but it is after all, only a skill. The key to learning a culture is to achieve understanding,



thus to avoid ill-will through misunderstanding.

I always urge Canadians to hire more newcomers to enrich their company's understanding of others. My friend, Graeme McDonald, then CEO of Canada's Asia-Pacific Foundation, told me he gave a talk in Central Canada on the same theme as mine. At the end of the talk, an elderly gentleman, with a rather bad temper and manner stood up and said, "I don't speak xxxx Japanese! None of my staff speak xxxx Japanese! I've never been to xxxx Japan and we've never done any market research or taste testing in xxxx Japan and last year I sold \$41 M to Japan!!

My friend couldn't think of a polite reply but he thought about this and then hired an economist, who had been harassing him for a job, to do a two-month study of this gentleman's business with Japan. The economist learned that the entire business totalling \$41 M went to one large Japanese trading firm. That firm employed a team of six young men whose full time job was taking that \$41 M worth of nearly fully processed food product to the retail market.

They did a lot of taste tests.

They talked to customers in the Japanese supermarkets.

They worried about whether the size of the package would fit in the smaller-sized Japanese refrigerators.

They worried about what colour of the package would look "appetizing".

They added a few spices and they sold the finished product for \$261 M! I am sure they made a profit of no less than \$200 M, while this rather rude, elderly gentleman in Canada made, perhaps \$2 or \$3 M.

The important thing is that the Japanese control the market through understanding and research. The Canadian has no protection because come next year, the Japanese could buy from others. The Canadian did not sell \$41 M of his product; his product was bought for \$41 M and he had absolutely no control of the market.

Another point on understanding is also, to me, quite important. It has to do with

philanthropy. So often I hear Hong Kong entrepreneurs in Canada say, "Wait until our company makes money, then we will give." There is nothing really wrong with that kind of logic, but, for a better relationship, for showing a caring spirit, wouldn't it be better if you formed an Advisory Council of local Canadians to advise on giving and declare that X% of the Corporate profit, when realized, will be designated for charity to recipients as suggested by your Advisory Council, instead of talking in circles, often nonsensical mumble-jumble all the time.

So far, I am talking about the business level, but at the home level, it is also extremely important. Instruct your children or wife, or whoever is at home, that when Boy Scouts or Girl Guides or the School Choir, or whatever legitimate groups of young students come by, to give \$5.00 or \$10.00 or to buy some chocolate bars, instead of claiming, "I don't speak English!" Never treat them as beggars and ever slam doors on them.

Don't let the young Canadians grow up to be racist. What do you expect if youngsters tell each other, "Don't go to the Chinese homes - they never give."

Chinese entrepreneurs need to exercise more and more caution. There are three things in the society, almost everyone wants to control: (1) Wealth, (2) Political Power and (3) Social Status - including recognition and acceptance.

I was told that Thais of Chinese extraction make up 12% of Thailand's population, but control more than 50% of the private sector. I do not know for sure about other countries but I believe Chinese control a disproportionate amount of wealth to their population.

So, of the three things I mentioned earlier, we may have wealth, but we have no real protection, no political power and status. Sometimes our lives are so uninteresting and so focused on profit that we have nothing to offer our neighbours, our friends and even our children, except money! This poses a great danger for us, to say the least.

Now the 4th word is CONVENTION. The



dictionary defines a Convention as a large formal assembly of a group with a common interest. I know we have common interests but I certainly hope it is not simply making more money.

I would like to believe our common interest is to help each other define, promote and practice something which in the long run will help World Chinese Entrepreneurs. Help them so they can help each other and help China. Ultimately, we will help to promote peace and harmony in the world.

My time has run out so let me conclude by quickly giving you two stories. One has to do with the importance of networking, another has to do with the need to help each other. Interdependence, I call it.

The first story: I don't know whether you have had any experience planting Bamboo but Bamboo is a special kind of plant, although considered quite common, nevertheless, very useful, and essential to the Chinese life style.

After planting the first clump of Bamboo roots and watering it regularly, one may be quite puzzled to find that for the first few years it does not seem to be growing at all. Suddenly, it shoots up all over the place growing as much as 50 metres in one month! Once established, a Bamboo grove cannot be killed easily. They keep coming up in all seasons - even in the winter - that is why we have winter Bamboo shoots. Interestingly, when the plant decides to call it quits and die it will usually give a one year warning - by giving a once in a lifetime blossom.

What was the plant doing during the first few years after planting? Networking. Underground, they were busy connecting each other and growing into a strong network. I believe Henry Fok has shown great leadership in networking at this Convention. I know the

network started in Singapore, now it is really coming together in Hong Kong and will grow from strength to strength.

The second story: When we are young we want independence as soon as possible; when we are old, however, we become dependent. There was this man who stopped every morning in front of a village shop and set his watch to the grandfather clock in the shop. One day the owner came out and said, "I'm glad you set your watch to my clock. My clock keeps the most accurate time."

"How do you know?"

"Because it strikes at exactly the same moment as the Church bell rings at 12:00 Noon."

The man said, "Oh, my God. But, I am the Bellringer in the Church Tower!" This is interdependence. We need each other and we need to help each other.

Chinese in all parts of the world need and can certainly help each other. Together we can help China. In this respect, I'm not talking of just investing more money but rather some long-term building of infrastructure so critically needed for China's future. I'm speaking about the building of railroads, roads, telecommunication systems, education - Universities and schools, power generation, oil exploration, helping the intellectual, the educator. If a University professor earns less than a hotel waitress, what should we do to help? I know I have admired a lot of my friends in Hong Kong involved in infrastructure building in China, Li Ka-shing, Henry Fok Ying-tung, Jim Wu, Lee Chau-kee, Cheng Yu-tung, Gordon Wu, to name a few. They are certainly role models to a lot of World Chinese Entrepreneurs.

Thank you again for this opportunity of sharing a few thoughts with you.