

Part of the Family

Alberta's man in China says that working closely with colleagues from DFAIT, the provinces and other government departments means that everyone wins.

Growing up in a Chinese community in Alberta, David Wong learned the benefits that come from being part of a tightly knit group. He was born Wei Hong Wong, the son of an immigrant father from the Guangdong Province of southern China who ran a series of Chinese restaurants in small towns and cities in Central and Western Canada. Little Wei Hong revelled in the support of his warm, self-contained clan. He knew no English when he arrived for his first day of school in Edmonton.

Over time, he assimilated into the wider community, at 21 adopting the English name of David

(Wei Hong became his middle name). He obtained a BCom and an MBA from the University of Calgary and worked for the federal and provincial governments, all the while dreaming of getting to China. Jobs promoting Alberta agriculture, trade and investment with Asia brought him there off and on starting in the mid-1980s. Later he was posted to the Canadian Trade Office in Taipei for five years, and he has spent the past decade as managing director of the Alberta China Office at the Embassy of Canada in Beijing.

Despite his roots and the fact that he speaks both Cantonese and Mandarin fluently, Wong, 60, is not actually considered Chinese there, "no matter how much I try to explain." He doesn't especially look Chinese—his birth mother was Caucasian. That, and the fact that when his father emigrated, the family name of "Huang" was anglicized to "Wong," which is not recognized in China, means he is not seen as Chinese. His Chinese name in Chinese characters on the back of his business card helps to explain his heritage.

Wong oversees Government of Alberta operations in Beijing, Hong Kong and Taipei, a booming region that has ties with the province in oil and gas, agriculture and education. Representing Alberta along with six locally engaged staff means working closely with colleagues from DFAIT, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, and with other government departments. "We're all part of the family here," he says of the various "co-located" offices in the mission. "The federal-provincial relationship is probably stronger outside of Canada than inside."

All managers are included in the mission's Operational Program Strategy. They meet weekly to share successes and brainstorm. "It gives everybody a chance to know what's going on," he explains. Wong says they are bolstered by working together, and their Chinese contacts don't differentiate between them. "We all carry the same flag."

Wong is pleased to be included among this close and dedicated community, a group of Canadians determined to further trade, investment and political relations with China. "I'm fulfilling my dream," he says.

Did you know?

Number of staff positions abroad by program category

	Total positions	Percentage
Consular	313	6
HOM	733	14.1
PERPA	716	13.8
Trade	906	17.5
Partner and co-locator	2,513	48.5
Total program	5,181	100

source: Annual Report on Canada's Network Abroad 2008-2009



Fulfilling his dream: David Wong stands in front of the Canadian embassy in Beijing.