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MISPERCEPTION,  
MISUNDERSTANDING  
AND MISCALCULATION:  
HOW CHINA SEES CANADA  
IN THE WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

The study of international relations (IR) is a burgeoning field in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In so many ways, its emergence as a legitimate discipline is due to the country's explosive economic growth, rising international profile and well-documented and much discussed rise – or re-rise, as some Chinese will remind you. Just as the world is increasingly drawn to China, more and more Chinese are increasingly tuned in to world events, from the fallout of the global financial crisis to the nagging war in Afghanistan to the World Cup in South Africa. China's thirst for the world is arguably as strong as the world's thirst for China. So what does Canada mean to China? Scouring China's libraries, one will find only a handful of books on Canada – some general histories, but also the occasional study on NGO development or aboriginal rights, but virtually nothing on China's relationship with Canada. China's top universities have no resident Canada specialist, though a mass of Chinese scholars take to Canadian universities every year. IR journals analyze China's relations with Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, but mention nothing of Canada. In discussions of the G8, Canada earns only passing mention, as if a formality. To China, Canada is a benevolent, though distant, addendum. If Canada and China indeed share a 'special relationship,' it is one of many.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'étude des relations internationales est un domaine en plein essor en République populaire de Chine. La légitimation de cette discipline s'y explique à maints égards par la fulgurante croissance économique du pays, l'affirmation de sa dimension internationale ainsi qu'une ascension largement commentée et documentée, que certains Chinois préfèrent qualifier de résurgence. Exactement comme le monde se tourne de plus en plus vers la Chine, les Chinois s'intéressent donc chaque jour davantage aux événements du monde, qu'il s'agisse des retombées de la crise financière, de l'interminable conflit en Afghanistan ou de la Coupe du Monde en Afrique du Sud. Alors, comment perçoivent-ils le Canada? En fouinant dans les bibliothèques chinoises, on ne trouvera qu'une poignée d'ouvrages sur le sujet : quelques manuels d'histoire générale ou de rares études sur l'action des ONG et les droits des autochtones. Mais presque rien sur les relations sino-canadiennes. Aucune des grandes universités chinoises n'accueille en résidence des chercheurs canadiens, contrairement aux universités canadiennes, prises d'assaut tous les ans par des boursiers chinois. Les publications chinoises consacrées aux relations internationales traitent des rapports du pays avec l'Asie, l'Afrique, le Moyen-Orient et l'Europe sans jamais faire mention du Canada. Et dans les comptes rendus des travaux du G8, le Canada n'est cité qu'au passage et par simple formalité. Aux yeux des Chinois, le Canada fait ainsi figure de contrée lointaine et bienveillante, d'appendice dans les affaires du monde. Et s'il entretient avec la Chine « une relation privilégiée », comme il l'affirme, ce privilège est partagé par de nombreux autres pays.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Canadian International Council, its Senate or its Board of Directors.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of international relations (IR) is a burgeoning field in the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>1</sup> In so many ways, its emergence as a legitimate discipline is due to the country's explosive economic growth, rising international profile and well-documented and much discussed rise – or re-rise, as some Chinese will remind you.<sup>2</sup> Just as the world is increasingly drawn to China, more and more Chinese are increasingly tuned in to world events, from the fallout of the global financial crisis to the nagging war in Afghanistan to the World Cup in South Africa. China's thirst for the world is arguably as strong as the world's thirst for China.

Nevertheless, China's study of international relations is still in its embryonic stages. IR professors recount stories of being taught by Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, since 'rightist' teachers had been sent to the countryside for re-education.<sup>3</sup> The remnants of that revolutionary zeal, even 30 years later, have not entirely dissipated: in books, 'imperialist power' is used interchangeably with the United States;<sup>4</sup> the French Revolution of 1789 is a 'capitalist revolution'; the Korean War is the 'War to Resist American Aggression and Aid Korea'.<sup>5</sup>

Hegemony is a dirty word to Chinese ears. Far from its original Greek meaning of 'leader', the term in Chinese musters memories of the fabled Warring States period, when China was carved and manipulated by ruthless regional leaders in their quest for supremacy.<sup>6</sup> No wonder China's leaders consistently reject notions of China one day becoming a hegemonic power. So China is 'developing', not 'rising'.

Despite China's profound history in statecraft and diplomacy, the study of IR is still very new here. Books on the rise and fall of great powers,<sup>7</sup> on China's interpretations of Joseph Nye's 'soft power' or the structural inequalities of the world system<sup>8</sup> – overall, themes most pressing to China – dominate the prevailing literature on international relations.<sup>9</sup> In particular, IR theory is a source of great interest and discussion, wherein Chinese theorists grapple with Western notions of power and structure, and China's participation among a liberal, capitalist world order.<sup>10</sup>

Some of China's neighbours earn considerable attention in the literature: Russia before and after 1991,<sup>11</sup> Japan before and after 1945<sup>12</sup> and the contradictions of the Korean peninsula.<sup>13</sup> Other regions are seemingly of little interest: Vietnam and southeast Asia in general earn only scant attention, and curiously, India warrants very little mention, despite its looming importance to China and security to Asia in general.

So what does Canada mean to China? Scouring China's libraries, one will find only a handful of books on Canada – some general histories, but also the occasional study on NGO development or aboriginal rights, but virtually nothing on China's relationship with Canada.<sup>14</sup> China's top universities have no resident Canada specialist, though a mass of Chinese scholars take to Canadian universities every year. IR journals analyze China's relations with Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, but mention nothing of Canada. In discussions of the G8, Canada earns only passing mention, as if a formality. To China, Canada is a benevolent, though distant, addendum. If Canada and China indeed share a 'special relationship,' it is one of many.

1 For a broad-based view of China's foreign relations in the post-Cold War era in English, see Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations*.

2 For a solid discussion of the importance of global status to China, see Deng, "Better than Power."

3 For a discussion on 'rightism' in the post-Cultural Revolution era, see Baum, *Burying Mao*.

4 Zhang, *Shijie Xiandai*.

5 "Kang Mei Yuan Chaoxian Zhanzheng."

6 The literature on the Warring States period is robust. For a brief introduction, see Lu, *Baihua Benguoshi*.

7 For example, Huang, *Dangdai Baguo*.

8 For example, Gu, *Zhanhou Guoji Guanxi*.

9 Wang, *Zhongguo Guoji Guanxi Yanjiu*. This book features extensive research on questions relating to Chinese foreign policy, including chapters on sovereignty, realism, structuralism, constructivism, globalization, etc.

10 For example, see Yan, *Guoji Zhengzhi*.

11 For example, Du, *Eluosi Waijia*; on Stalin's foreign policy, see Zhao, *Sidalin Guoji*; on Sino-Soviet relations until 1991, see Shen, *Zhongguo Guojishi Gang*.

12 For example, Zhang and Zhang, *Riben Zhanhou*.

13 For example, Chen, *Lengzhan Tongmeng*.

14 A rare exception includes Guo and Li, *Zhongjia Liang Guo*. It is noteworthy that this publication was made possible by Canadian Studies Grant of the Department of External Affairs and International Trade.

## HOW DOES CANADA FIT IN WITH CHINA?

The question of where Canada fits into a greater Chinese strategy is not easy to answer. In fact, China's strategy itself is an endless cause of debate. "China doesn't have a strategy. And it doesn't need one," says well-renowned IR scholar Jin Shanrong of Renmin University.<sup>15</sup> The notion of strategy, to a multitude of Chinese specialists, implies something planned, inflexible, if not belligerent – something both Chinese discourse and practice have adroitly sidestepped.

China's relationship with Canada, while nothing new is not exactly a source of exoticism. Canada's relationship with 'new' China, born of the victorious communist revolution in 1949, was for several decades one of isolation and animosity, if not missed opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Only with Sino-American rapprochement, and Trudeau's insistence, was Canada finally willing and able to break through and establish relations with the PRC.<sup>17</sup> For many Chinese, it was long overdue.

This is thematic of the relationship in general, with Canada playing a minor though constructive role behind the greater drama of China and the United States. Canada, married to the American camp by ideology, economy and culture, would prove useful as a temperate voice of reason to the United States. But Canada's utility in the triangular dynamic has always been in question: what are the benefits of passing through Ottawa before heading to Washington or Beijing? And where does Ottawa now fit in as Washington and Beijing have their own direct contact? It seems Canada's exalted utility as a reliable intermediary has passed; the middle power is a dying breed.

The limits of contact between Canada and China have not merely been structural. Canada, constrained by circumstance and choice, was never able to stray too far from American influence. This reticence – what some Canadian foreign policy scholars call the small 'c' of Canadian conservative foreign policy – has often been interpreted in China as a sign of Canada's lack of commitment to China, and a major impediment to deepening a potentially significant strategic relationship. The limits of Canada's influence in China, therefore, have been largely self-imposed.

The perception of Canada's cold feet is not without substance. Even after establishing relations with the PRC in 1971, Canada only reluctantly distanced itself from Taiwan, trying to have the best of both worlds – an economically thriving island democracy with the economic potential of the mainland behemoth. Indeed, it was the 'Canada proposal' which sought to give the PRC a seat in the United Nations while keeping Taiwan's seat.<sup>18</sup>

Taiwan is a source of constant sensitivity among China's hawks and doves alike, a non-negotiable mainstay among the great flexibility of China's current foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> As Sino-Canadian relations deteriorated rapidly over the spring and summer of 2006, the Harper government was forced to reiterate its commitment to 'one China,' the lowest common denominator and bedrock of China's relations with the world, as a means to resuscitate the relationship from the brink of collapse. The relationship has yet to fully recover.

15 Interview with Jin Shanrong, April 2010.

16 Beecroft, "Canadian Policy towards China."

17 Frolic, "The Trudeau Initiative," 189.

18 Fritzen, "Sino-Canadian Relations," 297-312.

19 For a greater understanding of the importance of Taiwan to the mainland, see Chu, "The Evolution," 245-78. For a historical review of Mao Zedong's relations with the Guomindang, see Mo and Chen, *Mao Zedong Yu Guomindangren*. For a more militaristic view of the relationship, see Chen, *Mao Zedong Yu Jiang Jieshi*.

## CANADA AND CHINA: FRIENDS OR ACQUAINTANCES?

Canada is a distant speckle in the Chinese consciousness, occasionally referred to in conversations about relatives who emigrated to Vancouver or Toronto, or the de facto ambassadors of goodwill like Norman Bethune or TV personality Da Shan who have come to stand for Canada in the collective Chinese imagination. Whether from lack of knowledge of the relationship or simply from the Chinese cultural ethic of 'saving face' which seeks to avoid outward conflict or embarrassment, political impediments between the two countries are almost never brought up.

Overall, Canada is viewed as quite a good place: a big country with a small population, a wealthy and stable economy and a generous social system. Multicultural, bilingual, stable and democratic are all admirable achievements. But they do not make Canada a model for China.

The reasons for this are as multifarious as they are self-evident. Apart from vast asymmetries in power, population and geography, Canada and China have charted fundamentally different courses. China's history has been one of pre-eminence and grandeur, regional dominance against periods of bloodshed and brutality, in short, a history of rising and falling dynasties.<sup>20</sup> China has grappled with the monumental challenges of an enormous population, a multiethnic empire, internal rebellion and dissent and invaders from abroad. Canada, on the other hand, was born neither of revolution nor civil war nor anti-colonial struggle; it was created almost by accident, if not at least by circumstance, signed off over a table and handshakes. It never suffered through crumbling central authority, long marches, devastating wars, collectivization campaigns or social revolutions – no revolutions of any kind, in fact.

There is no question that Canada and China live in two very different realities. 'Peace, order and good governance' sound strange next to the principles espoused by Mao Zedong before the crowd in Tiananmen Square in October 1949, or to those elaborated by Deng Xiaoping some 30 years later under the banner of 'opening up'.<sup>21</sup>

While the birth pangs of the contemporary Chinese state are well documented, the threat of extinction which ultimately gave rise to the Chinese revolution is often overlooked.<sup>22</sup> It was the product, long and drawn out, of a century of spiritual and existential crises.<sup>23</sup> And it was only with the threat of extinction that a 'sinified' version of communism emerged as the solution to the profound political, economic and social crises that had dragged China to the brink of collapse. By contrast, Canada was thriving in the early years of its existence as an independent though timid nation, bound faithfully to Britain, though increasingly dependent on the United States. In short, these histories could be no further apart.

Historical and cultural differences alone are not enough to explain the divide between Canada and China, for, as IR scholar Liu Qingjian reminds us, today's China has cultivated friendly relations with virtually all countries, especially in the developing world, regardless of the vast disparities between them.<sup>24</sup> In fact, as some Western scholars fret over the possibility of a 'Beijing consensus,' China has become a model for many developing nations.

This seeming abundance of goodwill can be misleading. Indeed, herein lies the trap in dealing with China: distinguishing between a fruitful and productive relationship and one that merely avoids outright conflict. The difference is not merely semantic. Decades of 'quiet diplomacy' between China and Canada have yielded a series of photo ops and high-level visits, but it was of dubious substance, as the Harper government has eagerly pointed out. Upon reaching office, the Harper government promptly criticized the commitment of previous governments to a friendly but vacuous bilateral relationship with China. The Liberals had lost sight of both the national interest and the national ethos.

20 For a solid English history of contemporary China (from the fall of the Ming to today), see Spence, *The Search for Modern China*.

21 For a brief introduction to the founding principles of the PRC, see Chen, *Zhonghua Renmin*, 1-9. For a more detailed discussion, see Xie, *Zhongguo Dangdai Waijiaoshi*, 1-24.

22 For a detailed though not unbiased history of the Chinese Communist Party, see the two volumes: Central Research Department of the Chinese Community Party, *Zhongguo Gongchandang Lishi: 1921-1949*.

23 Wang, *Zhongguo Jinxiandai*.

24 Interview with Liu Qingjian, May 2010.

However, as the relationship has stabilized, neither Harper's confrontational public diplomacy nor the Liberals' private one has seemed to bear fruit. In fact, it seems regardless of the government's approach to China, either moralistic and headstrong or handled with kid gloves, Canada has been sliding further from the Chinese radar. In analyzing Chinese perspectives of Canada and the vast structural inequalities between them, we will begin to understand why this is so.

## TRADE AS A SIGN AND TREND

Bilateral trade has been a clear though regrettable indicator of the limits to the Sino-Canadian relationship. In the long list of countries doing business with China, Canada is among the leaders. It bests heavyweights like India, Brazil and Mexico in two-way trade. But this is only part of the story. Among developed economies, Canada has only been a modest contributor to China's economic story. For all the rhetoric around Canada consistently 'punching above its weight' as a middle power devoted to multilateralism, Canada's sway has very much been tempered in its dealings with China. And this is not without comparison.

In terms of two-way trade, Canada is a welterweight. Well behind Japan, Russia, South Korea, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and even the Philippines, Canada is slipping from China's economic radar. According to Statistics Canada, China has slipped from being Canada's second biggest export market to its fourth.

The Harper government's early chill of the relationship is not solely to blame. In a report released in early 2009, the Fraser Institute reported that Malaysia and Australia, both with smaller populations than Canada, have done more business with China.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Australian exports to China have soared in recent years. Moreover, Australia is on the positive end of a healthy surplus with China, much unlike Canada, which has grappled to counter a tide of growing imports from China since the early 2000s.<sup>26</sup> Only with considered effort has Canada managed to balk Chinese imports to Canada while its exports to China crawled upward. But this balancing act has come at the expense of greater two-way trade and a cooling of relations in general. In short, Canada is not fully taking part in China's economic growth.

How has Canada largely missed out on the greater Chinese economic story? The question has consumed scholars, vexed policymakers and frustrated the business community. On the one hand, Canada is poised geographically to benefit from China's economic rise, certainly much more than the Netherlands or Italy – two countries which do more two-way trade with China than Canada does with China.

As if adding insult to injury, in December 2009, Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade, raved about the 'almost unlimited' opportunities for Sino-Canadian trade.<sup>27</sup> This has been pabulum for Canadian business interests – and certain Chinese ones as well – but in reality, little has come from Canada's rhetorical commitment to China. Canada has tried to lure China into its vast resource sector, particularly minerals, gas and oil. While the Chinese for their part have made known their interest in energy diversification, Ottawa looks skeptically at Chinese ambitions. In the end, the alarm has produced 'more thunder than rain.'<sup>28</sup>

On a related note, China's recent granting of 'Approved Destination Status' to Canada is unquestionably helpful – and something Canadian policymakers have sought since the 1990s. Estimates indicate that travel by Chinese to Canada would increase by up to 50 percent over the next five years; each 50,000 visitors would be worth around US\$95 million to the economy. In 2008, nearly 160,000 Chinese visited Canada.

But the main dilemma remains: with 40 years of goodwill between the countries, why has so much potential gone to waste?

25 Tiagi, "Canada's Economic Relations with China."

26 National Bureau of Statistics of China. "Wo Guo Tong Geguo," 730-731.

27 Campbell, "Potential for Canada-China Trade."

28 Evans, "Canada and Global China," 150-68.

## HOW CHINA SEES CANADA IN THE WORLD: A STORY UNTOLD

So how does China see Canada in the world? In many cases, Canada's respected international image is watered down by the smoothness and benevolence of its bilateral relationship with China. Canada is the forgotten number eight in the G8, the unsuspecting rotating member of the UN Security Council, the 'Ottawa' in the Ottawa Process<sup>29</sup> and one of the major authors of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Canada's profound contributions to the international community, whether through peacekeeping, international assistance or greater international activism in general, are little known in China because, simply put, these are issues China has yet to consider relevant to its own interest and vision of world order.

China does not participate in the G8, but instead is a leading force in the revamped G20; it is a permanent member of the Security Council, not just a rotating member; it has been an active though largely uncreative participant in multilateral organizations and it has been most notoriously unbending on revising the norm of sovereignty, especially for humanitarian reasons. While Canada calls for the democratization of states *within* the international system, China calls for democratization of the international system. China has only reluctantly budged on issues of humanitarian intervention, whereas Canada has largely led the charge. In so many ways, Canada and China are doing very different things in the world.

China is seen as a ruthlessly pragmatic and calculating power, what Avery Goldstein has called 'neo-Bismarckian.'<sup>30</sup> This claim is often not without substance. However, Robert Kaplan's thesis that China is an 'amoral power' – as are all rising powers in the beginning – is a bit overdone. China's thick strain of realism seems more in line with E.H. Carr's thesis, that the two central elements of international politics are power and morality, and the trick is in finding a balance between the two.

The idyllic debate inherent to Canadian foreign policy between interests and values is a debate that virtually does not exist in China. Indeed, China does not have such a luxury: its interests are its values, and vice versa.<sup>31</sup> But this is not to say that China does not have a vision of the world. In fact, China's vision of the world, however muddled by history, rhetoric and an internal struggle between modernity and tradition, is more normative than prescriptive, and not nearly as structural, transparent or even predictable as some observers wish. But a vision does actually exist.

China envisions a peaceful and harmonious world of mutual respect and benefit. This vision lives in the well-renowned 'Five Principles of Coexistence', in the reform movement's commitment to 'peaceful development', as well as in President Hu Jintao's very Confucian 'harmonious world' vision. However quixotic this may sound to the cynical observer, China's leadership and public are readily committed to it.

Where Canada stresses 'human security,' China stresses national sovereignty; where Canada stresses democracy promotion, China stresses economic development; where Canada stresses good governance, China stresses stable government. However much China may seem behind the normative tide of a more active humanitarianism and a more flexible norm of sovereignty, these fundamental gaps in perceptions and objectives have no doubt limited the depth of the relationship – and they will no doubt limit the relationship in the future.

In short, Canada enjoys a stability which China has longed for throughout its history, but has only been able to achieve periodically. Conversely, China bears the colossal potential which Canada, though 'rich, large and new' in Joe Clark's words, will never be big enough to inherit the world system – a prospect many onlookers believe to be China's inevitable birthright.

29 The Ottawa Treaty or the Mine Ban Treaty, completely bans all anti-personnel landmines. As of April 2010, there were 156 States Parties to the treaty. Two states have signed but not yet ratified while 37 states are non-signatories to the Convention, making a total of 39 states not party. See "International Campaign to Ban Landmines."

30 See Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*.

31 For an enlightening discussion on China's understanding of its self-interest, see Xu, *Zhongguo Guojia*.

As a stable and prosperous democracy, bounded by oceans and the world's greatest power as a neighbour and good friend, Canada lives in a much different reality. China's neighbourhood is not nearly so amiable. Bordered by several fragile states, including the perennial headache of North Korea, not to mention great powers such as Russia, India and Japan, China no doubt lives in a more challenging, if not outright dangerous, environment. Its reality is shaped by legitimate security challenges, including border disputes which have even in recent decades exploded into violent conflict and even war. By contrast, Canada's wars, few and far between, have invariably taken place abroad, across oceans and in distant lands. As a result, the Canadian perception of security has been shaped by an overarching sense of morality. A developed global conscience, the hallmark of Canadian foreign policy, is the product of Canada's unique circumstance among nations. But it is not necessarily the ideal of all states.

With its growing status and recognition, China's morality has consistently been under question. And this censure has been a source of unrelenting sensitivity for the country's leadership and public alike. Western governments, squeezed by the media and various constituencies, have carried the torch in the campaign to chastise China. But the rigorous moral standards set by Western governments has at times taken on the overtones of a moral crusade, one which has created a siege mentality among many Chinese policymakers and academics, who increasingly question how China fits in among democratic, capitalist Western states.

This is not to say that China does not care about bloodshed in Darfur, democracy in Myanmar or electoral fraud in Zimbabwe. But it cares about these issues in much different ways. Of course, the cruel irony is that many of these issues are very much as bound to the Chinese national interest as they are to the Canadian worldview.

China's behaviour in the world has been a constant source of discussion. Chinese policymakers and rhetoricians insist that China is committed to a vision of 'harmonious world' and 'peaceful development'; meanwhile Western analysts wonder about revisionism and the fate of the status quo. The notion of 'strategy' implies a more calculated, systematic approach.<sup>32</sup>

Consider the ominous ululation the western media has often beat towards China's 'neo-colonial' march into Africa, the image of a colossus descending ravenously on a helpless continent.<sup>33</sup> China's presence in Africa is often viewed as entirely negative and as part of a concerted and coherent strategy. The reality is not so. Instead, a more scattered, piecemeal approach to fulfilling China's sizable domestic economic needs while building bridges into the developing world seems much more likely and logical.

Another source of tension is China's uncritical support of the world's nastiest tyrants, from Kim Jong-Il's nightmarish North Korea to Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe to the renegade generals in Myanmar. Unsurprisingly, China's relations with these countries earn almost no mention in the state-run media or academic literature. But criticism has not always fallen on deaf ears. Increasing pressure over Sudan has led to a recent spurt among the academic community.<sup>34</sup> Chinese media and policymakers have successfully spun criticism into the rhetoric of Western powers bent on destabilizing China.

Regrettably, Canada is member to the greater perception – and misperception – of China as an immoral power. Prime Minister Harper's promise to not sell out to the 'almighty dollar' adds vitriol to an already visceral discourse about dealing with China as a sort of Faustian deal, that the economic benefits of a good relationship bear a heavy moral cost. Concerns over human rights, greater political participation, cultural autonomy in Tibet and Taiwanese referendums are consistently thrown out as simplistic and often misunderstood remedies holding back the West's wholehearted acceptance of China in the international community. These ostensible impediments fail to understand the profound significance and complexity these issues hold for China, whether cultural and sociological as in human rights or even existential as in the case of Taiwan or democratization. Instead, Canadian policymakers have fallen prey to the influence of a media eager to cast shots across the Chinese bow under the

32 Zhou, *Da Zhanlue Fenxi*.

33 "The New Colonialists." For a Chinese perspective of China's economic role in Africa, see Li, *Zhongfei Jingji Gaige*. For a discussion of China's role in African civil society, see Liu and Shen, *Feizhou Feizhengfu*.

34 Long, *Chaoyue Feizhou Moshi*.

false pretense that greater pressure creates greater change. And it has come at the greater cost of a deeper, more fruitful bilateral relationship.

## THE SOBERING REALITY: THE LIMITS OF CANADA'S REACH

Regardless of the cyclical debate over the 'private' diplomacy of the Liberals or the 'public' diplomacy of the Conservatives as the better approach to influence China, the reality has proven far more sobering: Canada's reach in China is extremely limited. Where it does possess influence, the product is subtle if not unseen. The so-called 'special relationship' captures Canada's delusions of grandeur, which features an economically mighty and morally superior Canada teaching a politically and economically adolescent China how to chart both a successful and moral path in the world.

It is ignorant, insulting, yet the historical inheritance of how Canada has dealt with China, as part of a broader mission *civilatrice* which has seen Christianity, trade and immigration as the ways to mould the Chinese character. But it is a vision which fundamentally neglects the basic asymmetries between both countries, if not reverses these asymmetries altogether. Indeed, as bilateral relations deteriorated in 2007, there was a growing belief among Chinese academics and policymakers alike that it was Canada that needed China, not the other way around.

Often the countries seem to be working towards opposite ends. While the Harper government proudly lays down its most severe sanctions on Myanmar, China uses incentives to stabilize the regime on its border. While Canada publicly scolds the Sudanese government and presses for intervention in Sudan, China bolsters its relations with the government in Khartoum.<sup>35</sup> While Canada calls on Zimbabwe to respect human rights, the Chinese government reiterates its commitment to noninterference to the Mugabe government.

In general, greater questions loom over how China will participate in an international system that Canada has worked so hard to construct and maintain. Debates over Chinese revisionism question China's loyalty to the international system, one built on liberal and democratic principles, and ones which for over two decades kept China out in favour of a democratic, though diminutive Taiwan. The birth pangs of the Chinese revolution were ones felt in isolation, which forced Chinese hands into a decade-long marriage of convenience with the Soviet Union, and ultimately prolonged suffering and conflict in Asia.

So, in 1949 as now, it becomes clear that what matters to China in the world does not necessarily matter to Canada and vice versa. Perhaps it is no surprise that Canadian and Chinese definitions of the 'special relationship' between them have very different meanings.

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35 For a solid understanding of the Chinese perspective on Darfur, see Liu, *Quanzhou Shiyexia*.

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## THE CIC CANADA-CHINA RELATIONS PROJECT

Bilateral relations between the governments of Canada and the People's Republic of China are a matter of strategic interest to Canada. Recent changes in the frequency of high-level visits, the effective style and content of bilateral communications and perspectives held about each country by various sectors of each other's society all suggest that the Canada-China relationship has changed significantly in recent years. Yet China remains vitally important to Canada for a variety of reasons and in a variety of sectors. Political and diplomatic cooperation on issues of direct bilateral concern and also on issues of global import remains critically important. Commercial and trade ties linking Canada with the world's third largest and fastest growing economy are of obvious importance. Cultural and civil society ties, including immigration patterns and the ancillary effects they generate, are also important. In these and other matters, the Canada-China relationship will likely grow in importance in the years to come. While the diversity of links between Canada and China militates in favour of giving due attention to a multiplicity of commercial, academic and civil society links, bilateral cooperation at the federal/central government level remains important.

In keeping with CIC objectives to advance research and dialogue on international affairs issues of importance and interest to Canadians, the CIC Canada-China Relations Project has focused on supporting research and analysis toward building a policy framework for Canada's relationship with China. The project's activities have been developed along three thematic areas that reflect issues of common concern: a) Chinese domestic institutional and normative contexts for engagement; b) Economic relations; c) Collaboration on global issues such as environment, health and security.

- a) Domestic Context for Engagement: The Canada-China relationship can be most effective when it is grounded on complementarity of interests, which in turn requires mutual understanding of domestic normative and institutional conditions in both countries. Canadian initiatives with China, ranging from WTO compliance and business regulation to human rights, can be effective only if they are designed and implemented in light of China's domestic conditions, ranging from popular norms to governmental structures and policy priorities. Similarly, China's success in nurturing productive relationships with Canada will require appreciation of Canadian domestic conditions. The papers for this thematic area were commissioned and directed by Professor Jeremy Paltiel of Carleton University.
- b) Economic Relations: Economic relations between Canada and China are critically important. Economic relations include bilateral trade and investment relations, and also extend to local effects of economic conditions and behaviour. In the trade area, Canada's strengths match up extremely well with China's needs. In trade and investment relations, efforts to promote normative and institutional accommodation in China for Canadian business objectives are consistent with Chinese development policies and also serve important Canadian interests in the areas of good governance. As well, national economic behavior by the two countries in response to changing economic conditions at the global, regional and local level have important effects on the Canada-China relationship. The papers for this thematic area were commissioned and directed by Yuen Pau Woo, President of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada.
- c) Collaboration on Global Issues: The importance of China's responsible participation in systems for addressing global policy concerns in areas such as environment, health and security cannot be overstated. Yet China's participation in the global community can be distorted by its responses to apprehension and competition from other global actors, particularly the United States, the European Union and Japan. Canada has a significant role to play in supporting China's responsible participation, not only through direct bilateral programming but also through our capacity to deploy good offices, legitimation and other soft power resources both bilaterally and globally. The papers for this thematic area were commissioned and directed by Professor Brian Job of the University of British Columbia.

The papers here presented in connection with the CIC Canada-China Relations Project offer informed, nonpartisan recommendations for a variety of stakeholders in Canada, including the government and private and public sector institutions and individuals, with a view toward furthering the development of healthy long-term relations between Canada and China. While historical and current conditions may result in disagreement as to how best to manage the Canada-China relationship, China's importance to the world requires our attention. We hope that the papers presented here can further the process of understanding and effective engagement that will strengthen the foundation for productive relations for the long-term interests of both countries.

**Dr. Pitman B. Potter**

*Chair*

*CIC China Working Group*

The Canadian International Council (CIC) is a non-partisan, nationwide council established to strengthen Canada's role in international affairs. With local branches nationwide, the CIC seeks to advance research, discussion and debate on international issues by supporting a Canadian foreign policy network that crosses academic disciplines, policy areas and economic sectors.

The CIC features a privately funded fellowship program and a network of issue-specific Working Groups. The goal of the CIC Working Groups is to identify major issues and challenges in their respective areas of study and to suggest and outline the best possible solutions to Canada's strategic foreign policy position on those issues. The CIC aims to generate rigorous foreign policy research and advice.

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