

Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy, Co-Editor
The China Challenge – Sino Canadian Relations in the 21st Century
Notes for Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal Launch
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About a year and a half ago, I received a letter from Professor Huhua Cao indicating that the University of Ottawa Press intended to put together a textbook tentatively entitled “China in the 21st Century”. He asked if I could write a piece for it. Since I was in the midst of writing my own book on Canadian immigration, but wishing to help him, I offered to send a speech I delivered at the University of Waterloo’s *China Conference*.

Shortly thereafter, I was asked to obtain other material for the book. I approached academics, policy makers and former diplomats. Before long, I found myself agreeing to co-edit the publication. I neglected to think about the effort involved. It turned out to be a lot more work than I or my office anticipated. I want to thank my policy advisor, Carol Reichert, whose contribution towards this end was immeasurable.

This book is a collaborative dialogue between academics, business people, policy makers, former diplomats, and politicians, sharing our collective areas of expertise towards an effective China strategy for Canada. I remember my father telling me in the 1970s that the 21st century was going to be China’s century. At that time, I really believed it was wishful thinking, but then he knew Deng Xiaoping was opening China to the world and he turned out to be right.

I have traveled to China frequently over the past 40 odd years, and I always take the opportunity to speak to people. I am amazed at the speed of progress. Yes, there is still a long way to go, but China has had the good fortune of learning from the West’s industrialization experiment, and has been able to skip many of the pitfalls that befell western countries for centuries. China is rapidly developing alternative energy, building electric cars and going into high tech manufacturing, such as electronic equipment for hospitals in the developed world. China has a space program that expects to compete with the U.S. and Russia by 2020. According to the *Globe & Mail*’s Report on Business within 20 years half of the world’s airplane production is expected to come from China.

So what is the Canadian policy towards China? Despite the stature of Norman Bethune, the popularity of Dashan, and Pierre Trudeau’s early efforts to establish diplomatic relations with China in 1970, until December 2009, many of us were concerned. As China became an increasingly important player on the world stage, both economically and politically, Canada failed to take advantage of its trade potential as the second largest economy in the world, while other countries – most notably Australia – increased their trade with China exponentially. Essentially, we fell behind our global competitors because we were too dependent on the U.S. We do know that over the past decade Canadian companies have exported 30% less south of the border.

Canadian business leaders are calling for Ottawa to chart a long term strategy for Asia and to penetrate deeper into the future “global centre of economic gravity”. If Australia can aim for 12% of their school graduates to speak an Asian language by 2020, why can’t we?

I believe the catalyst for a change in policy towards China was the severe global economic downturn in 2008, and the continuing economic crisis in the United States. Our policy makers must realize that the U.S. has annual bilateral consultation arrangements with China at the highest level. China has almost replaced Canada as America's largest trading partner, and the appointment of Gary Locke as the U. S. Ambassador to Beijing highlights the importance of the relationship.

There is an understanding in many Canadian circles that our future prosperity is tied to increasing trade with China and other Asian markets. With 1.5 million Chinese Canadians living in Canada, and more than a 1/4 million Canadians living in greater China, engagement with China is certainly preferred. Now, we finally have renewed engagement, and the relationship between Canada and China is back to its 2005 level, while in the past 5 years the Chinese economy has grown by 60%.

Positive developments are the recent negotiations by Trade Minister Ed Fast with China on the Foreign Investment, Promotion and Protection Agreement. But are we doing enough? Despite the increase in overall trade and investment numbers, Canada's share of China's foreign trade has actually dropped from 2% to just over 1%.

Right now, Canada doesn't have an Asia strategy, and as John Manley, President of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives said, New Zealand has gained exports from reforms and it's time Canada does the same. Without leadership and a consistent dialogue, our provincial premiers have a difficult time when they lead their trade missions to China.

And, instead of talking, the West also needs to listen to China. What is suitable for Western democracies may not be suitable for China. As my father used to say, "...you can't ask people to eat bread when they are used to eating rice." It is time to have more engagement between Canadians and Chinese citizens because we can only influence our friends. And besides, it is the best and most effective way to advance our fundamental beliefs in the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

What comes to mind is the recent focus in the press on the little Chinese girl, Yue Yue, who was run over repeatedly. Onlookers didn't help her. We know that this kind of thing happens in North America as well so it is not just China. I am bringing this up because today's launch is in the McGill Law Faculty and the legal aspect of this case may be of interest. The reason for negligence in Yue Yue's case was partly explained by the legal system in China because sometimes those who assist strangers are liable for the costs of their medical treatments.

I think that if Canadians could have an open discussion on such matters with the Chinese, we could have an influence on their legal system. A good example would be the provision in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms where it states that it is the duty of everyone to help a person in peril, and that they will not be liable if injuries result from their assistance. In Ontario, there's the Good Samaritan Act whereby those who help strangers are not held liable.

Books like *The China Challenge* - the first of a series - gather viewpoints from different segments of our informed population and are crucial in establishing a non-partisan strategy towards China. Canada has a lot of catching up to do, and China also has a lot to learn from us.