

## Draft Notes for a Presentation by Roy Atkinson Co-President of the Canada China Friendship Society of Ottawa on the Occasion of the CCFSO's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

### 1. Greetings

Charge D'Affair WANG Wentian, Mr. ZHAO Haisheng, Past Presidents of the CCFSO, Special Guests and CCFSO Members it is a great pleasure to be here tonight to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Canada-China Friendship Society.

My name is Roy Atkinson. I am the Co-President of the CCFSO. I share the duties of President with Gary Levy, who sends his regrets at not being able to be with us this evening. Gary is currently teaching a class on Canada China relations at the Guangdong University. We are looking forward to his return later this month.

On behalf of all of us gathered here tonight I would like to thank Mr. Wang and the Embassy for its generous hospitality and for celebrating the work of the CCFSO helping Canadians learn about China and understand it better. (Applaud)

Tonight's gathering is a milestone in its own right. This evening we have gathered here the largest number of members of a Canada-China Friendship Societies in Canadian history.

### 2. Anniversaries and the Next 40 Years

I would also like to thank Peter Larson, the first President of the CCFSO, for his insights into the vision that led to the founding of the CCFSO and the challenges they faced.

Anniversaries are a good time for looking both backwards at past challenges and accomplishments; and, forward to future opportunities and key priorities.

The world has changed dramatically in the last 40 years and I would like to take a few minutes to reflect on the CCFSO's current context, what we are seeking to do, and to share a few thoughts on the way forward.

Forty years ago only the rarest of insightful observers would have forecast China's enormous economic success and consequent influence on the world. Looking ahead China is on a trajectory that will be pivotal in global affairs, and China will be increasingly important to Canada.

Paul Evans 2014 book, *Engaging China: Myth, Aspiration and Strategy in Canadian Policy from Trudeau to Harper* opens with this statement:

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“Today’s overriding strategic question in capitals around the world is how to respond to the rise of Asia as a centre of gravity in world affairs and in particular the fourth rise of China as a major global player. ... Contemporary China is ... integrated into the world economy and a global force in diplomatic, military and economic terms. The choices of the Chinese government ... have impact virtually everywhere. It is difficult to think of a single global issue ... where the path to solutions does not run through Beijing as well as Washington.”

What a change from 40 years ago.

**Economic Growth, Innovation and Expanded Trade**

The spectacular growth in the Chinese economy underpins much of its return to global prominence. Looking ahead the stars may be aligned for that growth and influence to continue and for China to be a dominant force for expanding global trade.

China’s economic policy is clearly set on becoming a more innovative economy that will move up the value chain creating the capacity to compete for high paying jobs in sectors previous dominated by the more developed economies.

At the same time China’s \$1.2 trillion “One Belt, One Road” infrastructure-investment strategy will create the global infrastructure to enhance China’s capacity to expand trade in 60 countries by creating railway lines, oil and gas pipelines, highways and major ports that link China with central and Southeast Asia, Russia, parts of Europe, and potentially much the incentives for Canada and all other trade orientated economies are to reorient their trade policy to China.

Add to this President Elect Donald Trump’s declaration that he will withdraw the USA from the Trans Pacific Partnership, and China appears set to become the world’s leading force for expanding international agreements for rules based trade liberalisation and investment. In one stroke Trump’s election has increased the incentive for all trading nations to increase the priority that they give to China.

Already Vietnam, Malaysia, Chile and Peru have announced they would turn away from the U.S. led TPP trade deal and instead work on joining China’s 16-country trade bloc.

Australia also announced plans to enhance its trade relations with China.

China and Canada were already in the early stages of discussion on enhancing trade and investment treaties.

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All this suggests China is well positioned to expand its economy, and its trade and economic influence; and to become increasingly important not only to Canada but around the world.

### **Global Warming**

When thinking about global warming Dr. Evans may have been too inclusive. President Elect Trump has pledged to withdraw from the Paris Accord on Global Warming. Within days of his election China gave its continuing commitment to the Paris Accord thereby demonstrating that the path of global solutions to climate change now run through Beijing but for the foreseeable future not through Washington. China has effectively become the world's leader in the fight against global warming and the development of green energy infrastructure.

### **China Will be Increasingly Important in the World and to Canada**

These two examples illustrate why today, unlike 40 years ago, political and economic pundits are agreed that in the next 40 years China will be a critical participant in global affairs and increasingly important in Canada's future.

In all likelihood this will involve a some greater integration of our economies and societies, which will require government initiatives, agreements and treaties.

But as we have seen and are experiencing Government policies and plans can flounder for lack of a "social licence" from the population. The lack of support can be the result, in part of a lack of knowledge and understanding in the Canadian population.

## **3. Helping Canadians Learn about China and Understand it Better**

For 40 years the CCFSO's mission statement has remained unchanged. It seeks "to help Canadians learn about China and understand it better". While our mission has remained unchanged the context within which we operate has changed dramatically.

At our 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the establishment of Canada- China diplomatic relations John Curtis, recounted the extraordinary and creative lengths to which he had to go in **1973** to brief Pierre Trudeau on China's economy. There was virtually no useful information in the Canadian Public Service and John had to go to considerable lengths to tap his network of international experts to piece together his briefing note.

Peter Larson has told us, three year later in **1976** at the founding of the CCFSO things had not changed much in terms of reliable publically available information about China.

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No aspect of the CCFSO's 40 year old reality has changed more than the growing number of ways that Canadians can learn about China. It is now possible to study China at Canadian Universities, or on-line, or through an expanding array of books, or by joining a wide range of organisations.

For example:

- I recently Googled "China" and was provided with more than 3 billion links
- A Google search of "Canada-China" produced 45 million links

Clearly the amount of information about China has changed dramatically in the last 40 years.

With this tidal wave of information what is the role of the CCFSO in helping Canadians learn about China and understanding it better?

### **Curating the Big Issues**

It would be overblown to suggest that a small volunteer organisation like the CCFSO is able to "curate" the vast cacophony of information about China. However from our corner of the world it appears that much of the available information is conflicting, confusing or inconsistent, and often fails to provide intelligible insights into the Chinese perspective on the issue at hand. There is a clear need for better quality easily accessible information about China. That is where our intent lies.

In the Speakers Programme we strive to identify speakers with deep understanding of the issues at hand, who can speak with considerable authority to the big issues and reality in China; and, to explain the issue from a Chinese perspective together with the consequences for Canada.

If you want to know about China's environmental efforts you need someone like Art Hanson, a leading environmentalist who has been a senior international advisor to China for over a decade. He spoke to us 4 years ago and will again in April.

If you want deep insights into current and future issues affecting Canada-China relations you would have benefited from presentations from 3 recent Canadian Ambassadors to China shortly after their retirement. We are working to get Guy Saint-Jacques; Canada's recently retired Ambassador to speak to us in the near future.

If you want high level strategic insights into the future of Canada-China relations, I am sorry to tell you that you just missed Paul Evans, but he will be back.

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If economics are your thing we have had a dozen knowledgeable speakers in recent years.

### **History and Culture Are Essential for Understanding China**

We take the view that if you want to understand China better; you need to know something of its history and culture.

We seek to highlight Chinese culture in ways that enhance our understanding of China. One example was Victor Rabinovitch's presentation. Victor was for years the CEO of the Museum of Civilisation and a frequent guest in China as they planned and put together China's New National Museum, the largest in the world. Victor took us on a virtual tour of the museum that not only laid out the structure of the museum and its exhibits, but also interpreted for the audience the underlying meaning and messages about how China's government wanted to present itself to its own population and to the world.

Another example was Ming Tiampo's presentation at the time of the Ai Weiwei exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Her presentation, *"Ai Weiwei and the history of political art in China"*, took us through the long tradition of China's dissident political art and set Ai Weiwei's work with this context. She went on to explain the symbolism underlying many of the pieces in the Toronto Exhibition.

We have had impressive speakers about the philosophy and historic foundations of China's current political system, China's visual arts, traditional Chinese medicine, food culture, and calligraphy. The list goes on.

### **Book Club / China Study Group**

Our book club, organised by Marilyn Collette, functions more as a China Study Group doing deep dives into a wide cross section of subjects.

### **Electronic Media**

In addition through our web site and social media we are seeking to make balanced and insightful information about China available to Canadians.

## **4. Beyond Facts and Analysis**

Much of what I have described above can be thought of as left brain activities focussed on facts, logic and analysis. If there is one big lesson from the recent US Presidential election and the Brexit vote, people are motivated by more than facts and logic.

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An important part of our programme appeals to the emotional and creative sense of the right brain, in part by respecting Marshal McLuhan's dictum that the medium is the message.

Most prominently in this orientation is our annual Chinese New Year's Banquet which is filled with the pleasures of great Chinese food and shared good times.

Five years ago we were co-sponsors of a China movie festival. More recently we showed the Canadian debut of *Nowhere to Call Home*, a heart wrenching tale of a Tibetan widow's struggle to educate her son. Films can provide deep emotional and intuitive connections not available through more intellectual mediums. We are exploring ways to expand our film programme.

In addition within the Speaker's Programme there has been an element of "Story Telling". The tales of Alexandre Trudeau, Eric Enno Tam and Eric Fuchs described their adventures in China and highlighted their personal interactions with the Chinese people in widely diverse situations. This story telling can help to forge connections and understanding at a non-intellectual level.

### **5. 40 Years of Success**

It is remarkable that after 40 years the CCFSO is continuing to thrive as a volunteer group. Membership has risen from the handful that joined with Peter Larson 40 years ago to more 230 today. The membership of the CCFSO has for many years been larger than all of the other Canada-China Friendship Societies combined.

### **6. Looking Ahead**

In a world where China's global role and influence continues to grow, and the vast cacophony of confused and incomplete information expands there will be a continuing need for the services that the CCFSO is providing through our two pronged approach of curating the information around the big issues, and of providing opportunities to enrich the emotional and intuitive connection between the Canadian and Chinese peoples.

Last year at an Executive retreat we created a multiyear agenda: improving the speaker programme, starting Mandarin Conversation Groups, expanding use of Social media (Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn); better advertising and promotion, more films, and a better more quantitative approach to our management.

We have made some important beginnings with social media, online advertising, the Mandarin conversation groups, and we continue to explore the movie option.

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To make it work requires the effort and dedication of the volunteers that make up the Executive and a number of supporters. This year's Executive will bring new talents to bear on the challenges and opportunities.

Gary and I would like to acknowledge and to thank the past and present teams that have made all this possible. We are looking forward to future successes.

And, in closing, I can say without fear of contradiction, if anyone wants to be involved in this effort we will be delighted to welcome you to the initiative. Thank you.