

**About Face:
Explaining Changes in Canada's China Policy, 2006-2012**

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Paper presented to the Annual Meetings of the
Canadian Political Science Association
University of Victoria
6 June 2013

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Zhou Enlai, premier of the People's Republic of China from 1949 to 1976, once famously said that for China "there is no small matter in foreign affairs" (cited in Yang, 1995: 91). By this he meant that Chinese foreign policy decision-making on all issues, large and small, is deeply centralized at the very highest levels of the political leadership. Certainly for the contemporary leadership in Beijing, relations with Canada have clearly been "no small matter." On the contrary: after the Conservatives under Stephen Harper defeated the Liberal government of Paul Martin in the January 2006 elections, the new Conservative government came to office with a distinctly unfriendly attitude towards the People's Republic of China. The government in Beijing worked assiduously to disabuse the new Harper government that Sino-Canadian relations could be built on the same formula that the Chinese used to characterize relations between China and Japan—"cold politics, hot economics."¹ It took several years, but the Conservative government slowly shifted its policy, the shift in the Canada-China relationship tracking the Conservative trajectory towards a majority government in 2011. But by that time, as Paul Evans has noted, "Conservative policy had returned very close to where Paul Martin had left it five years earlier" (2011: 24).

What accounts for this dramatic shift in Conservative policy? We will argue that the turn to China that began in late 2008, and intensified in 2009, reflected two broad themes and three policy shifts. Thematically, we will argue that the Conservative government's strategic turn to

¹ In the mid-2000s, the government in Beijing began to use "cold politics, hot economics" (*zhènlěng jīng rè* 政冷经热, literally, frosty politics, hot economics) to describe relations with Japan that were marked by excellent trade and investment ties but political relations that were sour and at times even unfriendly.

Beijing, and its decision to actively court China's favour, was not only firmly driven by its domestic agenda, but also tied to a different perspective on Canada's role in world affairs. These themes are characterized by policy shifts in approaches to multilateralism, trade and energy policy, and people-to-people links, all framed by a cemented confidence derived from electoral success.

First, there has been a distinct move away from Canada's traditional position in the international arena as a "helpful fixer" focused on liberal internationalism and multilateralism. The label perpetuated the tenacious Canadian myth of international altruism commonly associated with the Liberal Party. In explicit contrast to the policies of its predecessors rooted in quiet diplomacy, the Conservatives clearly subscribe to the power of direct dealings and summit diplomacy. Nurturing the relationship with China speaks to Canada's marginalization in Asia Pacific regional initiatives, as well as perhaps the prime minister's surprise at incidents such as China's decision to abruptly cancel a meeting between Harper and former President Hu at the 2006 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit.

Second, Harper's commitment to the idea of Canada as an "energy superpower," coupled with his ties to Alberta, naturally align with improved relations with China. The Asia Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative, a key plank in the Conservative government's Asia strategy, represents a fortuitous opportunity to promote improved relations driven by the imperative to diversify exports away from the United States, and Chinese interest in oil sands exploration. Additionally, the proposal of the Northern Gateway pipeline as national strategy (Paltiel, 2009) demands the sustained interest of the Chinese. These initiatives are highlighted in the context of the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA) that is awaiting ratification by the Canadian parliament and represents arguably the largest trade agreement Canada has signed since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Third, and perhaps the most critical, if also the most nebulous element of the relationship, is that of people-to-people links. It can be argued that Canada's most potent advantage in its relationship with China may be the number of Canadians with strong personal or professional connections with China. Since 2004, China, the Philippines, and India have been top sources of immigration to Canada, with China the second leading source in 2011 with approximately 122,100 immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2013). In 2011, 22,500 student permits were issued to Chinese students and nearly 250,000 Chinese visited Canada, increases of 28 per cent and 25 per cent from the previous year, respectively (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2011). These are the kinds of the ties that the Conservatives have learned how to use, both electorally and economically.

Canada could not pretend that China's rise left it with a choice to engage. Experience commensurate with success likely prompted the realization that "Regardless of their ambitions, rising powers change the world by virtue of their very existence and present a wide array of challenges and opportunities for middle powers" (Manicom and O'Neil, 2012: 202). Middle powers such as Canada must develop strategies to exploit this dynamic and the Conservative government under Harper has revived the relationship through careful and controlled policy outputs and small but politically significant gestures under the umbrellas of the Conservative domestic agenda and convictions regarding Canada's appropriate place in the world.

Policy towards China under the Conservatives

Canada's contemporary approach to China must be seen in the context of the broad historical contours of China policy as it evolved over the decades since the end of the Second World War (Burton, 2011; Evans, 2011; Manicom and O'Neil, 2012; for a revisionist view, see Gilley, 2008). Following Canada's recognition of the People's Republic of China in October 1970, the broad secular trend down to 2006 was for increasing engagement between Canada and China at a governmental level, with an intensification of high-level visits after a temporary disruption after the Tiananmen massacre of June 4, 1989. Under the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien, prime minister from November 1993 until December 2003, particular emphasis was put on encouraging strong economic relations between Canada and China, mainly through the use of massive trade missions, dubbed "Team Canada" missions (Keating, 2004: 125–26). The emphasis on China was continued by Chrétien's successor, Paul Martin, Jr., who took over in December 2003. Martin was convinced of the importance of China, and keenly accepted a "strategic partnership" agreement offered by the People's Republic of China.² The agreement was signed on September 9, 2005 during a visit by President Hu Jintao to Canada, a development that Paul Evans, at the time co-chief executive officer of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, suggested "could transform Western Canada, distress the Americans, and alter the political economy of Canada" (Evans, 2005). Martin also announced the Pacific Gateway Act, which committed \$590 million to infrastructure projects designed to increase Canada's connections to Asia.

But within five months, Martin and the Liberals had been defeated by the Conservative Party of Canada under the leadership of Stephen Harper, which won a minority in the general election of January 2006. This election transformed the Canadian-Chinese government-to-government relationship. For the Conservatives came to power in 2006 with a highly simplistic view of international affairs. The foreign policy section of the Conservative election platform, a mere 171 words long, was overwhelmingly devoted to coded criticisms of the previous Liberal government's approach to the People's Republic of China: "But too often," the platform stated, "Liberal foreign policy has compromised democratic principles to appease dictators, sometimes for the sake of narrow business interests." Instead, the platform promised that a Conservative government would "articulate Canada's core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, free markets, and free trade—and compassion for the less fortunate—on the international stage" (Conservative Party of Canada, 2006: 44).

While the new Conservative government continued the Asia Pacific Gateway—rebranding it as the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative—it changed much of Canada's existing approach to China, abandoning the rhetoric of "strategic partnership," and began to pointedly cause a deterioration in the government-to-government relationship.

² While the Martin government touted the "strategic partnership" with China as a mark of Canada's specialness in Chinese eyes, since Beijing reserves this term for key close relations (Jiang, 2009: 892), in fact strategic partnerships (*zhànlüè hǔabàn guānxì* 战略伙伴关系) were an exceedingly common tool in Chinese diplomacy, and part of China's global strategy: see Goldstein, 2005: esp. 130ff.

Some of the Harper government's moves consisted of small slights: for example, in September 2006, seven months after the new Conservative government took office, Peter MacKay, the minister of foreign affairs, was still having difficulty finding time in his schedule to meet the PRC ambassador to Canada, Lu Shumin (Chase, 2006; Evans, 2011: 21). Others were designed to embarrass, such as MacKay's assertion on CTV's Question Period, that the government was "very concerned" about the scale of Chinese "economic espionage" in Canada, claiming that there was "a fair bit of activity here" (Canada.com, 2006). Others still seemed designed to anger the Central People's Government in Beijing: in June 2006, for example, the Conservative government permitted one of its backbench MPs, David Sweet (CPC: Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale), to introduce a motion in the House of Commons giving Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, honorary Canadian citizenship, a move that was followed in October 2007 by what amounted to a state visit by the Dalai Lama featuring a high-profile meeting with Harper. Other high-profile cases of human rights were also trumpeted. Shortly after coming to office, the Harper government granted asylum to Lu Decheng, one of three dissidents jailed for splashing paint on the portrait of Mao Zedong in Tiananmen Square. Lu had escaped to Thailand, where he had been arrested, and the intervention of the Canadian government thwarted PRC efforts to extradite him to China (Oziewicz and Curry, 2006). Likewise, the Harper government openly pressed the case of Huseyincan Celil, a Canadian citizen of Xinjiang Uyghur origin who was imprisoned by China on charges of terrorism (El Akkad, 2012).

Other moves appeared to be designed to do nothing more than annoy the Chinese government. In November 2006, for example, Harper claimed that he would not stop pressing human rights on the Chinese government just because Beijing was threatening the economic relationship. "I think Canadians want us to promote our trade relations worldwide," he said, "and we do that, but I don't think Canadians want us to sell out important Canadian values. They don't want us to sell that out to the almighty dollar" (CBC, 2006). Much more insulting was Harper's refusal to join other world leaders in Beijing to celebrate China's first Olympic Games in 2008. In short, as Jiang Wenran put it, "While the world is busy engaging China, for obvious reasons, Harper's handling of Canada's China policy has been, by design or default, exactly the opposite" (Jiang, 2009: 905).

Not surprisingly, the government in Beijing did not respond kindly. On the eve of Harper's first Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Hanoi in November 2006, the Chinese government abruptly cancelled a planned meeting between President Hu Jintao and Harper; Hu and Harper ended up meeting for a mere fifteen minutes in a hastily-organized pull-aside in Hanoi (Jiang, 2009). Canadian support for Celil was widely interpreted in China as support for the separatist movement in Xinjiang; by all accounts, Chinese authorities took great pleasure in frustrating the efforts of Canadian consular officials to monitor his trial in Urumqi and provide him with consular assistance (El Akkad, 2012). Following the warm reception accorded to the Dalai Lama in 2007, Beijing's angry rhetoric was ratcheted up: a spokesperson for the Chinese Department of Foreign Affairs accused Canada of "conniving" with Tibetan "splittists" (Freeman, 2007), and described the 40-minute meeting between Harper and the Dalai Lama in the prime minister's office as "disgusting conduct" (Freeman and York, 2007).

However, while the government-to-government relationship cooled in the three years after the election of the Conservatives in 2006, the economic relationship between the two countries continued to develop. By 2009, China became Canada's third largest export market and second largest import market (Tiagi and Lu, 2009; however, see Chen, 2010 for an argument that Canada "underperformed" relative to other countries in the early 2000s). And at the governmental level, a dialogue on economic matters continued despite the chill in the political relationship.

These trends prompted observers of the Chinese-Canadian relationship during this period to adapt the "cold politics, hot economics" trope from East Asia to characterize the evolving Sino-Canadian relationship (Jiang, 2009: 906; Evans, 2008: 131). But this approach did not last long. As Evans put it (2011: 22), the Harper government started looking for a ladder to get out of the hole which it had dug in its relations with China as early as the fall of 2007. The "turn" in policy began even before Harper announced calculated snub of China on the issue of attending the 2008 Olympics. Maxime Bernier, appointed minister of foreign affairs in August 2007, found time to meet the Chinese ambassador within two weeks of his appointment. In 2008 and into 2009, a series of ministerial visits to and from China was organized. In September 2009, the Dalai Lama visited Canada again, but this time neither Harper nor Bernier met him.

The government also moved to increase Canada's official diplomatic presence in China. In April 2009, six new trade offices were opened, even though the missions in Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, and Guangzhou (in addition to Hong Kong) were, in the views of a Foreign Affairs inspection report, bursting at the seams (DFAIT, 2010). But the new missions underscored the desire of the Conservative government to increase economic linkages.

The "turn" in Canadian policy was capped by reciprocal visits at the highest level: Harper visited China in December 2009, and President Hu Jintao visited Canada in June 2010. Harper took the opportunity of the trip to signal a significant change in Canadian policy (Harper, 2009). For its part, the Chinese government took the opportunity to cause the prime minister to lose some face: the premier, Wen Jiabao, openly scolded Harper in front of the Canadian and international media for taking so long to visit China. But then, in a distinct echo of the "tribute system" of imperial China,³ the Chinese government bestowed a significant benefit on the visitors, granting Canada "approved destination status" (ADS), which allows travel agents to promote Canada as a destination for Chinese tourists, a concession that was estimated in 2009 to boost Canadian tourist revenues by \$100 million per year. The fact that the ADS decision came as a last-minute surprise to Canadian officials (Schiller, 2009) suggests the tribute-like nature of that particular meeting, nicely mirroring the valuable gifts (*huí cì* 回賜) that the "Son of Heaven" routinely showered on kowtowing tributaries.

But having made its point, the government in Beijing then worked cooperatively to improve the bilateral government-to-government relationship. During Hu Jintao's reciprocal

³ We acknowledge that how one describes the system of international relations in East Asia before the period of Western dominance is highly contested. As Zhang Feng notes, "The term 'tribute system' is a western invention devised no later than the nineteenth century and translated back into Chinese as *cháogòng tǐxì* (朝贡体系)" (Zhang, 2009: 574). For an argument about the utility for contemporary international relations theory of an examination of these practices, see Yongjin Zhang (2001).

visit to Canada in June 2010, a number of memoranda of understanding were signed, including an agreement by China to reopen the Chinese market to Canadian beef. During this meeting, the idea of the “strategic partnership” was back on the table, and in his speech welcoming Hu to Canada, Harper waxed enthusiastic about the relationship, referring to the friendship between the two countries five times, and ending with the observation that “our mutual respect grows with each encounter” (Harper, 2010a). And, indeed, by the time that Harper gave a speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and the People’s Republic of China in October 2010, he claimed that “it is clearer than ever that the strategic partnership between Canada and China has never been more promising” (Harper, 2010b). More importantly, the tone of the prime minister’s speech was positive, upbeat and friendly, with just thirty seconds devoted to the issue of human rights (Harper, 2010b: video 0:06:30-0:07:00).

The bilateral relationship improved further after John Baird was appointed as the minister of foreign affairs to replace Lawrence Cannon, who lost his seat in the general election of May 2, 2011. Baird came to office committed to strengthening the relationship. Noting that “China is incredibly important to our future prosperity,” Baird said, “My government gets it and as Canada’s new minister of foreign affairs, I get it” (Travis, 2011), adding that visiting China was a “huge” priority (Perkins and Hoffman, 2011).

Baird’s appointment also saw the final resolution of a contentious extradition case that had been a sore point in the relationship since the late 1990s. Lai Changxing, a Xiamen businessman, had fled to Canada in 1999 after he had been charged in a massive smuggling, tax evasion, bribery and corruption scandal. In 2000, he applied for refugee status, giving him some protection against extradition while his case was heard. Although the Chinese government had promised Canada in 2001 that Lai would not be executed if he were found guilty of the charges against him, the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien had refused to extradite him. After his refugee claim was denied in 2002, Lai appealed the decision unsuccessfully, and then appealed the subsequent deportation order on the grounds that his life would be at risk if he were returned to China. In 2007, a federal court ordered another risk assessment, but the case had lingered, and Lai was even granted permission to work in 2009.

However, the Chinese government let it be known that it would raise the case with Baird during his visit to Beijing. By coincidence—or not (see Mickleburgh, 2011)—there was sudden movement on the case. Nine days before Baird’s departure, Citizenship and Immigration Canada issued its determination that Lai would not be at risk; he was arrested by Canadian authorities, and would have been extradited before Baird arrived in Beijing had a court not temporarily stayed the deportation (Mickleburgh, 2011). Lai was returned to China the day after Baird’s visit ended, and sentenced to life in prison in May 2012. Although Lai had not been deported before his visit, Baird left in no doubt that the Harper government was not unhappy to see Lai returned to China, noting that “both the Canadian people and the Chinese people don’t have a lot of time for white-collar fraudsters” (Clark, 2011).

Baird’s trip to Beijing in July 2011 was yet another step in the warming of the relationship, perhaps best reflected in how Baird described China in interviews, referring to China as “a friend” and even as “an important ally” (Clark, 2011). The visit galvanized the pace of government-to-government negotiations on a number of files, so that by the time that Harper

visited China in February 2012, there were a large number of “deliverables” that could be announced. They included negotiations on foreign investment promotion and protection; the uranium trade; avoidance of double taxation; air transportation and civil aviation; quarantine and food inspection; cooperation on canola disease mitigation; fisheries cooperation; cooperation on sustainable development; transnational crime, extradition, and dealing with the proceeds of crime; student mobility, exchanges and scholarships; parks and other protected areas; multiple entry visas for Chinese citizens; the upgrading of Canada’s mission in Chongqing, more than twenty commercial agreements, together with the agreement to loan Canada two giant pandas for ten years for collaborative research on conservation (Harper, 2012a).

The most telling indicator of the shift in the relationship was the signing of the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA) with China at the APEC Summit in Russia in September 2012 (Harper, 2012b). Signing a trade agreement of this significance, particularly prior to the US and EU, provided a foundation for Ottawa to pursue more robust relations with China, and dispel criticism that Canada had become intractably marginalized in the Asia Pacific. The agreement, the government argued, had the potential to be one of Canada’s largest and most important trade agreements since NAFTA. The FIPA outlines rules and mechanisms to ensure equitable national treatment of each other’s investors, minimum standards of treatment, and most-favoured-nation treatment. The agreement also delegates dispute resolution to closed-door arbitration by an international mediator, which represents the crux of much of the criticism levied against the FIPA.

Analyzing the About Face

How to explain the significant “turn” to China by the Conservatives so soon after their election in 2006? We suggest that both exogenous and endogenous factors pushed, and pulled, the Harper Conservatives into abandoning the simplistic China policies that they had brought with them to power in 2006. We identify three possible factors: an emerging desire on the part of the Conservative government to reposition Canada in global politics; a desire to respond to the global financial crisis; and a recognition that people-to-people links across the Pacific could—and should—be used for electoral advantage.

A New Approach to Canadian Foreign Policy?

We argue that the “turn” on China should in the first instance be placed in the larger context of the Conservative government’s efforts to achieve a more comprehensive transformation of foreign policy. Canada’s international affairs tradition is axiomatically associated with the ideas and practices of liberal internationalism. In the early days of the Cold War era, the Liberal governments of Louis St. Laurent and Lester B. Pearson solidified Canada’s tendency to self-identify as a middle power that thrived in a rules-based system characterized by a strong commitment to multilateralism. John W. Holmes’s characterization of Canada’s “middlepowermanship” (1970: 36) spoke to Ottawa’s pragmatic recognition of Canada’s place in the world and need to cooperate in the common interest (see also Nossal, 2010). Tom Keating (2013) has most clearly articulated the functionality of the multilateral system for a country with Canada’s capacities. And Alison Brysk (2009: 67) has even elevated Canada to a “global good

Samaritan” through its use of multilateralism. Canada relies on the current normative order to articulate its perceived international role as a middle power with limited capacities.

Multilateralism, whether pursued as an end in itself or the best means through which Canada can achieve its objectives, has long been a crucial component of Canadian foreign policy.

Under the Harper Conservatives, however, multilateralism has not been as salient. For example, in 2011 Canada quietly withdrew from an organization focused on improving public health in the far north that it had helped establish. In 2012, the government announced that Canada would withdraw from three United Nations organizations—on tourism, on the sustainable use of tropical lumber, and on international exhibitions, and in March 2013, Ottawa withdrew from the UN Convention on Desertification. Rather, bilateralism seems to suit this government and its emphasis on international strength. Thus, since the Conservatives came to office, Canada has concluded nine bilateral free trade agreements, and is in talks on a dozen more. In addition, Ottawa has concluded negotiations or signed FIPAs with sixteen states, including China—more bilateral trade agreements than any previous government.⁴

This shift away from multilateralism is clearly reflected in Canada’s approach to China, and East Asia generally. Canada has found itself on the sidelines of key Asian initiatives, including several ASEAN-related activities, the Shangri-La Dialogue, and, until the autumn of 2012, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. At the same time, Ottawa-Beijing relations have increased and Ottawa has expressed its determination to engage with China on a level playing field. This government is asserting its own approach to international affairs as part of their broad transformation as they gained confidence commensurate with experience and their almost visceral rejection of the internationalism and “middlepowermanship” espoused by the Liberal Party. Ottawa has demonstrated that it does not buy into the long-standing idea of Canada as a middle power. As Harper put it in 2003, “Canada now relies of what is essentially a ‘weak nation strategy’—multilateral participation to conceal and deny dependency on its key ally [the United States]” (Harper, 2003). After seven years in power, two with a majority, this is a government that finally has a grip on how to achieve its objectives and clearly will not accept Canada playing the international community’s “fifth business.”

Ottawa is now pursuing more direct relations with Beijing with a mindset that reflects the Harper government’s commitment to the idea of a robust Canadian state. Gone are the grandiose Team Canada trade missions, replaced with feel-good, if vapid, displays of public diplomacy, such as Beijing’s gift of pandas. By turning away from the complex and multifaceted practices of multilateralism, the Prime Minister’s Office has been able to remove from the foreign affairs portfolio all but the most trusted members of the CPC cadre, such as John Baird. This speaks to the tight grip the prime minister keeps on all officials and particularly those from DFAIT. Budget cuts have hobbled the department, and mid-level diplomatic engagement can be embarrassingly spartan: for example, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the chef for a 2012 party

⁴ Even the trilateralism implicit in the North American Free Trade Agreement, never popular in official Ottawa even under the Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, has been further abandoned by the Conservatives (Carleton University Canada-US Project, 2009).

hosted by the Canadian embassy in Beijing was restricted to using only donated ingredients and vegetables from the ambassador's garden (Clark, 2012).

By contrast, money is spent on relatively small gestures that are, however, sufficiently meaningful to suggest that the prime minister appreciates the importance of *miànzi* (面子) or "face." For example, while the Canadian embassy in Beijing was being forced to cut back on its entertainment expenses, the Canadian government spent \$2.5 million on a new visitors' centre at the Norman Bethune Memorial House in Gravenhurst that receives upwards of 15,000 visitors a year, mostly mainland Chinese and recent immigrants (Allemang, 2012). More recently, Prime Minister Harper welcomed two pandas to Canada for a ten year stay at a cost of more than \$1 million each annually (CTVNews.ca, 2013). These initiatives suggest a new understanding of how to approach relationship-building with China, as well as the prime minister's refusal to see foreign policy as much more than an extension of his own agenda.

Responding to the Financial Crisis in the US?

Much has been written linking Canada's turn to China with the economic downturn in the United States, but there is also a strong association between the health of Canada's bilateral relationship with China and the level of Chinese interest and extent of investment in Canada's energy and resource sectors (Jiang, 2010, Dobson, n.d.). Dissatisfaction with the near-total dependence on the United States for exports of Canadian oil has given rise to the articulation of another "Third Option," the diversification agenda embraced by the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau in the 1970s. Canada's desire to diversify exports coupled with China's goal of import diversification "constitutes the mainspring of Canada-China's energy collaboration" (Houlden, 2012: 7). The financial crisis has reoriented international trade and forced governments to reconsider their natural affiliations.

While the Conservatives may have axiomatically identified with US and European trading partners, someone must have whispered in the prime minister's ear that for every 10,000 yuan of GDP generated, China uses as much as three times the global energy average (Jiang, 2010: 6). Ottawa would likely have had a difficult time dismissing the importance of incidents such as PetroChina pulling out of a \$4 billion deal with Enbridge for work on the Northern Gateway pipeline in 2007, the ascension of China over the US as the biggest market for BC lumber, or the protracted and ill-fated negotiations over the Keystone pipeline. It must have been all-too-clear that to achieve his objective of "energy superpower" — a term Harper used in a 2006 speech in London (Harper, 2006)— the old "strategy of engaging globalization primarily intermediated by leading US firms and production networks [was] ill-suited for the next stage of globalization" (Poon, 2012: 23).

Moreover, the provinces were leapfrogging the federal government in their pursuit of trade ties with China. In Canada there is no constitutional prohibition against international activity by the provinces, a permissiveness that provides them with considerable latitude to conduct policy in certain spheres. Québec, for instance, has an office in Beijing, while British Columbia has offices in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. Ontario exported over \$1.64 billion in goods to China in 2009, an increase of over 200 per cent from 2004. Provincial premiers routinely lead sizable trade missions to the country, and actively promote positive relationships with their Chinese counterparts. The encroachment of non-central government actors on federal

jurisdiction over international policy-making could have factored into the Harper government's decision to assert itself.

Canada's turn to China has its clearest physical manifestation in the Asia Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative (APGCI) and specifically the push to build a pipeline from the oil sands to the BC coast. The APGCI is geared towards facilitating comprehensive investment and policy measures in the service of a transportation network as part of supply chains between Canada and Asia. It is as much a cultural project as it is an infrastructure and commercial project. At the federal level, it represents one of the few articulated national strategies and provides ample opportunities to express new conceptions of national interest in the spirit of Canada as an "energy superpower."

The most lucrative element of the Canada-China relationship lies in energy. In addition to the possibilities of the Northern Gateway pipeline, Canada is poised to become a major Asian supplier of natural gas, opening the door for massive expansion in the energy relationship. Recent acquisitions include CNOOC's \$15 billion bid for Nexen and PetroChina's purchase of 60 per cent of the Athabasca Oil Sands Corporation in 2009 and the 2012 deal to control 20 per cent of Shell's Groundbirch project in BC (Smart, 2012). These kinds of projects clearly have the potential to add to Chinese FDI numbers of about \$12 billion in 2012, and Canadian exports to China of about \$19.3 billion in 2012 (Industry Canada, 2013a, 2013b).

One must look no further than Kitimat, British Columbia, to understand the scope of the impact that China has had and will continue to have. In recent years, Kitimat has supported a \$3 billion upgrade to the Rio Tinto Alcan smelter plant, a \$4 billion plan by Kitimat LNG to build a plant to process liquefied natural gas (LNG), a massive project led by Shell Canada worth an estimated \$12 billion, and increased shipping traffic in the Douglas Channel, all to feed Asian—predominantly Chinese—demand (Hamilton, 2012). These numbers will likely grow considerably once the FIPA is ratified. The concern that the Harper government was unprepared to cooperate with the Chinese resonated loudly in Alberta and across the country. When PetroChina withdrew its support for the Enbridge project in 2007, the vice president of its parent company, China National Petroleum Corporation, Yiwu Song, pointedly blamed the Canadian government for not resolving various sticking points (Scott, 2007).

Developing a productive relationship with Beijing also responds to the long-standing concerns of the oil and gas community in Alberta. The idea of Canada as an energy superpower that is committed to a new definition of the national interest that corresponds with Conservative ideology reimagines Brian Mulroney's famous admonition to "dance with the one who brung ya." What Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson (2013) call the end of the "Laurentian consensus," or a clear shift away from Toronto and Montreal elites, is one of the factors that resulted in a Conservative majority. There is little doubt that Alberta benefits from improved Ottawa-Beijing relations, and the turn to China shows that Harper is well aware that Alberta plays a crucial part in the broader electoral strategy of the Conservative Party of Canada. Provisions such as the demand to keep Nexen's headquarters in Calgary as part of the CCNOC deal speak to the importance of ensuring that Alberta's interests are advanced by the federal government.

The investment agreement with China also reflects the importance of the economic factor in the change in policy. With no comprehensive strategy for handling investment from

China, Ottawa launched a joint study with Beijing to explore areas for potential bilateral growth. The suggestion that Canada upped the threshold for environmental review of resource extraction projects from \$330 million to \$1 billion as a result of pressure from Asia exemplifies the potential, if not the reality, of Chinese influence. This asymmetry (Canada's trade imbalance with China had grown to \$31 billion by 2010) is heightened by Chinese laws prohibiting foreign investment in China without first partnering with a local firm (Manicom and O'Neil, 2010).

According to Jiang (2010: 17), multiple Chinese sources have claimed that Harper's turn to China was an important prerequisite for renewed Chinese investment activities in Canada. Solidifying this rehabilitation was likely part of the prime minister's calculations, both for his domestic agenda and his vision for Canada internationally. Harper subscribes to the idea that strong bilateral ties are often more robust than multilateral frameworks (Sussex, 2011), but it is likely that he also recognizes that there is strong support in Canada for intensified trade links with China (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2012). Moreover, the paucity of such formalized, in-depth trade agreements with China among other like-minded states may have attracted the Harper government with an eye to elevating Canada's international stature as well as the potential contribute to a national interest that promotes oil and gas as national strategy.

Discovering the Importance of People-to-People Links?

Canada is the most Asia-connected country in the world in terms of people-to-people links. Ten percent of the overseas Chinese population resides in Canada and China is a top source of immigration to Canada, which results in a flow of people that surpasses every other OECD countries; more than 1.3 million Canadians are of Chinese origin, with the majority living in Toronto or Vancouver, making Vancouver arguably the most "Asian" city outside Asia (Zhang, 2010). This sketch fits with Canadian perceptions of themselves as an immigrant society where discourse on diaspora populations looks inward at how these communities shape Canadian public policy (Welsh, 2011). It is rare to consider the dynamic, multidimensional, two-way flows of contemporary Canadian migration; yet this is precisely the key to understanding the salience of the concept of people-to-people links in the Canada-China relationship. Regarding education, for instance, Canada is the only country in which provincial governments accredit schools abroad. This system allows 69 elementary and secondary schools in China to issue Canadian diplomas, and many of these students choose Canadian post-secondary institutions, further changing the face of Canada and influencing Canadian policy (Cosco, 2011).

The example of tourism further demonstrates recent economic sectoral changes that may help explain the Harper government's 2009 change of heart. When Canada was finally granted Approved Destination Status in December 2009, it was one of the last western countries to receive it, five years after the United States and a full decade after Australia. In 2009, Ottawa was estimating that ADS would increase tourist revenue by \$100 million per year (Schiller, 2009). In fact, since then, Canada has seen a jump of about 25 per cent in the number of Chinese visitors, and in the first five months of 2012, residents from China made over 115,000 trips to Canada (Hoffman, 2012), with the Canadian Tourism Commission predicting that Chinese travellers to Canada would spend \$491 million in 2012, with potential figures reaching \$800 million by 2015 (Morton, 2012). Such dramatic growth is bound to get some attention in Ottawa.

These kinds of people-to-people links pave the way for meaningful foreign policy engagement, but also a potentially significant constituency for the Conservative government. In addition to mounting public pressure, Jiang argues that the realization of an electoral liability was a critical force in the Harper turn (Jiang, 2010). Both in his rallying of immigrant communities and his ability to present his government as the more prudent economic choice, part of the turn is clearly rooted in a recalibration of electoral strategy. China—and more specifically Canada’s relationship with Chinese Canadians—has become a partisan issue in political discourse, a clear variable in the change in the Harper government’s behaviour regarding China (Manicom and O’Neil, 2012: 223).

In 2006, the Conservative caucus had few Chinese Canadians; it had a number of MPs members who had a vociferous, if simplistic, tendency to rail against human rights violations perpetrated by the Chinese government. A number of Conservative members were active in the Parliamentary Friends of Falun Gong: Rob Anders (CPC: Calgary West), Scott Reid (CPC: Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington), Stephen Woodworth (CPC: Kitchener Centre), and a Conservative senator, Consiglio Di Nino (Ontario). This change in strategy required the imposition of a certain discipline on voices within the Conservative caucus. Considerable limitations were placed on Conservative members of parliament, who are no longer allowed to pursue their personal ideological agenda. For instance, in 2008 Rob Anders’ (CPC: Calgary West) compared the Beijing Olympics with the 1936 Berlin Olympics—and was publicly disavowed by his own party’s leadership (Cuthbertson and Rynor, 2008).

However, this critical approach clearly alienated Canadians of Chinese origin, and was eventually abandoned in favour of an approach that sought to target Chinese Canadians, “to help them realize that their convictions and interests would be better represented by the Conservatives than by any other party” (Flanagan, 2011: 106). This change in strategy was in the first instance driven by Harper’s minister of citizenship, immigration and multiculturalism, Jason Kenney, who sought to change the ways in which the Conservatives reached out to Chinese Canadians. Kenney had long agitated for a Tibetan state, had been a long-standing supporter of the Dalai Lama, and had actively and vocally encouraged reform in China; despite these inclinations, he learned how best to voice these views in a way to maximize support for the Conservatives. Indeed, Kenney is generally credited with much of the success the CPC had in 2011 in immigrant communities. His own office staff is very diverse and he himself notes that the CPC fielded more candidates of Chinese descent than any other Canadian political party. He pushed for an apology for the Chinese head tax. He regularly reads Chinese Canadian newspapers. When the Conservatives won a majority government, many immigrant voters, particularly those from Asian backgrounds, “aligned themselves with voters in western Canada, forging a new Conservative coalition” (Ibbitson, 2012). This is a new face, both for the Conservative Party and for political discourse in Canada.

This constituted a new approach to public relations that understood that Canada should “empower [its] citizens of Chinese origin to foster closer links to China and enhance Canada’s image” (Paltiel, 2009: 113). Such an approach tended to blur the lines between partisanship and policy, with Kenney’s office often releasing partisan materials on official ministry letterhead, which, Myer Siemiatycki has argued, is “unduly ethnicizing politics in Canada” (quoted in Friesen, 2010). In short, the Harper government sought to fortify the bridge between diaspora

communities and foreign policy by exploiting what may be Canada's strongest asset in its relationship with China, the breadth and scope of Canada's people-to-people links with China.

Conclusion

Rarely does one see such a dramatic reversal in foreign policy as the one we saw in the case of Canadian policy towards China between 2006 and 2012. While there are a number of possible explanations for the about face, we have argued in this paper that we cannot understand the change in policy by looking purely at either broad systemic factors, such as the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis, or domestic factors. Rather, we suggest that the abandonment of the simplistic and overly ideological approach that the Conservatives brought with them to office in 2006 has to be understood as a consequence of the interaction of global and domestic forces. The turn reflects the steadfast commitment the Harper government has to its domestic and international agendas, a thorough understanding of how to work the Canadian electoral system, and a clear willingness to come about in order to save face.

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