THE OCTOBER HANDSHAKE OF 1970
Making Sense of Canada’s Recognition of the People’s Republic of China

by

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Abstract

After two decades of a disappointing relationship between Canada and the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—seriously damaged during the Korean War and relieved by wheat sales after the Great Leap—Pierre Trudeau’s government wanted to end China’s isolation. The new prime minister was determined to ensure that his country could recognize the Communist regime. Even more surprisingly, Ottawa’s opening of relations with Beijing would soon be followed by Washington. Such words as “rapprochement” were therefore repeated in North America as this extraordinary diplomatic event began to unfold in the late 1960s.

In hindsight, Sino-Canadian rapprochement seems full of contradictions: at a time when Canada’s closest ally was still fighting in Vietnam, and when the Chinese were shouting anti-imperialist slogans during the Cultural Revolution, how could it be possible that Ottawa and Beijing wished to become friends? The central question this thesis poses and answers is why the two governments suddenly shifted positions at such a politically sensitive moment. Offering different ways to understand this thirty-year-old question, the thesis re-examines Trudeau’s and Maoist China’s remarkable, but often forgotten, diplomatic breakthrough. Indeed, although Canadians were paying closer attention to the nation’s “October Crisis” in 1970, the “October Handshake” in Stockholm between representatives of Canada and China in the same month was also a
significant event. The success of such a diplomatic achievement could be seen in the Sino-American rapprochement that followed and in China’s new place in the world community. Drawing on various historical records, including materials from the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Queen’s University, this study explains the agreement between Beijing and Ottawa in 1970 as the coincidence of three crucial conditions: the rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances at the time, a favourable internal political climate, and the matching mentality of the extraordinary players from both countries. Furthermore, while existing accounts of Sino-Canadian rapprochement highlight both countries’ external relations, this thesis will argue that an exploration of the dynamics of domestic politics and the roles of individual leaders can expand our understanding of decision-making during the process of normalization of relations between China and Canada.
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Furthermore, my engagement with Professor Hill as her research assistant since my undergraduate years have provided me with tremendous insights into the dynamic political relationship between China and Canada. For instance, our publication of the academic article “Sun Yat-sen and Canada: The Role of Morris Cohen and Chinese Canadians in the Militarization of the Guomindang, 1922-1925” has provided me with fruitful research experience in both countries. Studying with Professor Hill at Queen’s makes me realize that there are probably few pursuits in life more rewarding than the study of history. It provides me with many invaluable lessons about who we are, how we got here and where we are going. As a graduate student, I have found the Queen’s History Department to be a wonderful intellectual environment.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: What Brought the Two Strange Bedfellows Together?

On February 1, 1971, Canadians witnessed a remarkable turning point in diplomatic history when an envoy from China arrived in Ottawa to establish an embassy. On the same day in Beijing, some Chinese people felt puzzled when they saw a Canadian flag being hoisted above the new Canadian Embassy. After all, the event marked the first time in more than two decades that Communist China had enjoyed diplomatic relations in North America.

In retrospect, the Sino-Canadian rapprochement seems incongruous in its historical context. Not only was Canada’s closest ally and neighbour at war fighting in Vietnam, not only was the violent Cultural Revolution making China more anti-imperialist than at any other period of its history, but it was Canada’s decision-maker choosing to normalize relations with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), when leaders in Ottawa certainly knew that the decision would cause tensions with the United States. There were apparently different elements of surprise at the time for both Chinese and Canadians who were living in a world that was divided between two hostile camps. Indeed, the PRC had been isolated since 1949, when Mao Zedong took control, and Canada suspended
diplomatic relations with China. By then, Ottawa’s decisions were clearly a manifestation of Cold War geopolitics characterized by East-West confrontation and China’s isolation. Two decades later, anti-imperialism was still a clear component of the PRC’s foreign policy throughout the early phase of the Cultural Revolution. Given that Canadians had fought against Chinese troops on the Korean War battlefield, Canada was sometimes regarded by the Chinese as simply a partner of American imperialist policy. If the Chinese leaders were to act according to their Cultural Revolution rhetoric, then normalization of relations would not be possible. On the other side, a policy of rapprochement towards Red China would unquestionably anger Canada’s closest ally. To Washington, it was one of the most irritating Canadian foreign policies of the era. Therefore in 1966 and 1967, the chances for any relationship between China and Canada seemed slim.

In order to fully understand the context of the historical Sino-Canadian rapprochement of 1970, it is important to first explore the political atmosphere between Beijing and Ottawa immediately after Canada’s failure to recognize the PRC. Shortly after the inauguration of the PRC on October 1, 1949, bilateral relations became icy when the Korean War broke out in July 1950. When the Korean conflict erupted, the attitude of the United States toward Communist China hardened and the Canadian government considered it prudent to put its recognition plans on hold. More importantly, as the United Nations (UN) declared in February 1951 that the PRC’s role in the Korean War was that of an
“aggressor,” major obstacles appeared in the path of official recognition and Canada put the question aside.¹

Since the day that the Korean War became a major conflict between the Chinese and UN forces, Canadians could no longer remain uninvolved as Ottawa took an active role in the war. Some Canadians believed that Communism was a threat to the world and fought in the Korean War. With Canada’s increasing involvement in the military conflict, the Chinese felt more suspicious towards Canadians, especially when there was open hostility in the war zone between the Chinese “volunteer fighters” and the Canadian Army under the UN flag.² In Chinese eyes, the image of Canadians changed from “foreign friends” to “enemy aliens.” According to a Canadian missionary, those who were still in the PRC at the time were seen as enemies, and some as international cultural spies:

I, a foreigner, had the alternative of leaving the country [the People’s Republic of China]. This alternative became realistically the only choice later on when China joined the cause of North Korea, making me an “enemy alien”… for I was automatically classed as an anti-revolutionary, especially after the outbreak of the Korean War when all North Americans were enemy aliens.³

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Katharine Hockin’s account shows that “anti-revolutionary” actions, in the Chinese eyes, were committed by North Americans. For Mao’s people, the Canadians and Americans were not much different throughout this period, as they were both “imperialist” nations threatening new China’s survival. After all, Washington strongly pressured Canada to reassess its attitude toward the Chinese Communist regime. And Canadian decision-makers did follow the neighbouring giant’s lead and agreed to send soldiers to Korea. It is not difficult to understand why Beijing would assert at the time that Washington intimidated its Canadian “satellite” to fall into line during the Korean War. With Canadian military and Chinese “volunteer fighters” facing each other on the battlefield, discussions of official relations ceased.

As always, history matters to China because its people could not forget that the once-powerful Qing Empire declined and was humiliated by the West. This historical baggage has changed the course of China’s development and had great consequences for East-West relations in the twentieth century. As Margaret MacMillan describes in her book The Uses and Abuses of History, “Chinese history was presented as the story of the centuries-old struggle of the Chinese people to unite and to progress in the face of determined interference and oppression from outside. China’s failure to get the 2000 Olympic games, the Opium Wars of the early nineteenth century… and the Japanese invasion in the

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twentieth century were all wrapped up into one uninterrupted imperialistic design to destroy the Chinese nation.”

This Chinese mindset and historical context would help to explain why the breach between China and Canada was widened when the Canadians started to fight with the UN forces and the Chinese attempted to save Kim Il Sung’s North Korean regime from certain defeat.

The puzzle is this: When the situation seemed unfavourable for rapprochement given that Canada-China relations had broken off in the early 1950s, how did the normalization of diplomatic relations become possible twenty years later? In other words, how could capitalist Canada and Communist China eventually establish diplomatic relations in October 1970? What were the favourable conditions? These are the questions that this thesis addresses regarding the “October Handshake of 1970,” which coincidentally happened during the same month as Quebec’s “October Crisis.”

Before advancing further arguments on the opening of relations between Ottawa and Beijing, it would be surprising if the parties concerned were not eager to provide their own different explanations to the puzzle. For example, in Taipei’s perspective, the reasons behind the sudden Sino-Canadian rapprochement were mostly economic. An article on “The Story of the Canadian Recognition of the Communist Bandits,” which was published by Taiwan’s United Daily News (Lianhe Bao) at the time, is a good representation of this school of analysis. It claimed that the drastic switch took place simply because

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Canada hoped to expand its sales of wheat to the PRC. But was Pierre Trudeau really concerned with wheat sales? If so, did he take other considerations into account? On the Chinese side, what were the concerns of Mao Zedong, Chairman of the PRC government and of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)?

Most scholarly works address the topic of Canada-China rapprochement through a “high politics” approach, which is said to encompass what matters most to states, such as national sovereignty and security from external attack. “High politics” analyses highlight factors external to the state such as the Cold War superpower competition and the structure of the international system. Chapter 2 explores the established explanations further, discussing geopolitical constraints and opportunities between Beijing and Ottawa. It points out that what brought Canada and China together at the negotiation table were their uneasy relationships with the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. It was becoming clear in the West that Maoist China had become diplomatically isolated and that its leaders were deeply worried about a possible attack from the Soviet Union. Not only were there clashes between Chinese and Soviet troops in the late 1960s, but also there were reports that the Kremlin leaders might decide

9 Ibid, 2.
to drop bombs on Chinese soil. Facing these challenges, the Chinese had apparently decided to seek new allies.

At the same time, Trudeau’s Canada felt uncomfortable about the influence of the United States and the associated constraints on Canadian foreign affairs. Trudeau’s government wished to distance itself from Washington and demonstrate national autonomy. In fact, in late 1968, the U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers, after learning Canada’s plan to recognize the PRC, reportedly told his Canadian counterpart, “We hate like hell what you are doing...” In spite of these strong words from south of the border, the newly-elected prime minister went ahead, reversing two decades of Pacific policy by officially recognizing China. Geopolitical and strategic considerations were crucial in this regard. Interestingly, some mainland Chinese news articles also described Canada as a victim of pressure from the United States during this tense period of the Cold War.

Although the “high politics” approach, which is widely used in existing literature addressing Sino-Canadian relations, provides good insights and analyses on global elite action with its emphasis on the international arena, such as the Cold War situation, it is insufficient to explain the overall puzzle. After all, by divorcing elite action from mass attitudes, sole concentration on high politics

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10 Cheng and Shi, 296.
in the study of Sino-Canadian rapprochement can sometimes prove irrelevant. For instance, without a fundamental alteration of public attitudes in Quebec, the prospects for Canada’s recognition of the PRC would continue to be dim. Moreover, interaction in both states’ own societal and technological needs also played an important role in the normalization of relations. Within this context, Chapter 3 demonstrates the importance of a favourable political climate and “low politics,” which can be described as all other concerns of states that happen nearer to the people, including socio-cultural changes and other domestic dynamics.\textsuperscript{13} It will argue that 1968 seemed a strange time for Ottawa to establish formal relations with Beijing, but was actually a more favourable moment than sometime in the 1950s. It was in 1968 that Mao began to realize at least some of the damage of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, after the movement had created great turbulence throughout China. Because the Cultural Revolution had purged many veteran technocrats during its radical early phase in 1966 and 1967, the Chinese government hoped that the establishment of diplomatic relations with Canada would soon begin to provide China with access to North American technology and strategic information.\textsuperscript{14}

In the same year, things also began to move on Parliament Hill in Ottawa with Canada’s election of a new prime minister. At the time of Trudeau’s first federal election victory in 1968, Canada had not formally recognized Communist

\textsuperscript{13} Ripsman, 2.
China for almost two decades. Instead, Canada recognized the Republic of China on Taiwan as the legitimate government of China and maintained diplomatic relations with Chiang Kai-shek’s government in Taipei. The reasons for Canada’s position were complex. One had to do with the province of Quebec, which held many seats in the House of Commons. For many years, the Liberals depended on support in Quebec to win the majority vote at the federal level. When it came to the party’s China policy, what the people of Quebec thought about the Communist regime was important consideration for the federal Liberals. Throughout the anti-Communist years of the provincial premier Maurice Duplessis (1936-39; 1944-59), distrust of Maoism and the PRC had been widespread in Quebec. But with the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, public opinion began to change. As the Duplessis era ended and the strong power of Catholic church also started to decline, fewer people in Quebec viewed rapprochement with the PRC as dangerous move. In both China and Canada, therefore, circumstances favoured a sharp policy change. Negotiations aimed at the restoration of diplomatic ties began.

The “October handshake of 1970” happened not only because of external environmental pressures and internal dynamics, but because the personal histories of political leaders also affected their crucial decisions in the normalization of Sino-Canadian relations. Indeed, whether circumstances or individual human agents create history is always an interesting question for

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historians. Unfortunately, the role of human agency is often overlooked in modern historical research. Chapter 4 of this thesis situates itself at the individual level of analysis and focuses on the personal dynamics and motivations of Trudeau and Mao. Pierre Trudeau, a labour lawyer from Montreal, had journeyed to China as a private citizen in 1960 when the Great Leap Forward was taking place.\textsuperscript{16} Eight years later this private citizen had become the most powerful public figure in Canada. As prime minister, Trudeau articulated a China policy for Canada more clearly than his predecessors. In 1970, his administration established diplomatic relations with the PRC. Pierre Trudeau’s convictions broke a logjam over the issue of the recognition of the PRC and set a pattern for the United States and other Western countries to follow.

In some situations, even though political leaders might agree that a particular policy is a sensible one, it takes a strong leader to actually push it through. Pierre Trudeau and Mao Zedong played parallel roles. Sino-Canadian negotiations had been a challenging process and there had been times when it looked as though the establishment of diplomatic relations would be impossible. This is most evident with regard to the Taiwan question: Mao’s government wanted radical concessions on Taiwan, while Canada’s diplomats were ready to give some ground but sought to avoid public accusations of selling out an ally of the United States. From Mao’s point of view, the new relationship with Canada

would cause greater pressure and embarrassment for the government of his rival Chiang Kai-shek in Taipei. As long as the Chairman was convinced of the benefits of rapprochement with Canada, he had the absolute authority to direct his diplomatic staff to deal with Canadian officials. As for Trudeau, his priorities in China were always pragmatic. For the new prime minister, a great world traveler who had twice traveled to China before entering politics, a friendly China could provide an avenue for business and more. It had never made sense to Trudeau that his country should neglect a populous Asian power like the PRC. Unlike his predecessors in many ways, Trudeau had clearly expressed his concerns about the PRC’s isolation from the international community at the very beginning of his first leadership campaign. Of course, Trudeau was sometimes criticized for uncritically accepting Beijing and giving too much away to Mao’s government, particularly on the Taiwan issue.

It appears that Ottawa and Beijing needed one another by the late 1960s. Sino-Canadian rapprochement was actually a four-sided process which involved not only Canada and China, but the Soviet Union and the United States as well. After providing a historiographical review, this thesis will then start with a discussion about why the explanation of this diplomatic breakthrough needs to include the geopolitical context (the focus of Chapter 2) in which extraordinary players (Chapter 4) appeared at the appropriate moment or within the right domestic political climate (Chapter 3). Indeed, it is also crucial to note that

although the traditional “high politics” approach provided insightful explanations by highlighting factors of Canada-China rapprochement external to the state, this would still be insufficient to explain the “handshake puzzle.” Adopting a broader approach, this thesis will show that a further exploration of domestic dynamics and individual-level analyses can expand our understanding of the decision making of Ottawa and Beijing. It argues that these dynamics influenced the critical decisions that Pierre Trudeau and Mao Zedong made about the normalization of Sino-Canadian relations. In other words, these three components altogether (“high politics,” “low politics” and the role of individual leaders) are important in understanding the origins of rapprochement—not just one. Although these three things are being examined separately in this thesis, the interactions of these conditions could also be seen. Each had a great impact on the decision-making of the two sides during this historic breakthrough in diplomacy.
Illustration 1.1
Pierre and Margaret Trudeau’s Official Visit to Communist China, 1973

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau is the first Canadian Prime Minister to pay an official visit to the People's Republic of China. During his visit, Canada and the PRC signed a consular agreement which allowed the opening of consular missions in each country.

Source: CBC Archives

Historiographical Review:
The Impact of High Politics, Low Politics and Personal Dynamics on the Handshake Decision

The opening of diplomatic relations between Canada and China is a significant chapter of diplomatic history. In fact, of more than forty Canadian diplomats and government officials whom scholar B. Michael Frolic interviewed, “every one believed the normalization of relations with the People’s Republic was Canada’s most notable foreign policy achievement.” 18 Even though

Canada’s recognition of Communist China deserves a distinctive place in history, academic debate about the origins of the “October Handshake” is relatively thin, and scholarly publications on Sino-Canadian rapprochement are seriously lacking.

For years, discussion of Ottawa’s recognition of Beijing in October 1970 has usually focused on the level of “high politics” and the ending of Communist China’s international isolation and the related political dynamics in Washington and Moscow. Some of the existing works place a strong emphasis on external environmental pressures in their analyses on Sino-Canadian relations and a number of them suggest that Ottawa’s rejection of close relations with the PRC before 1970 was a “Cold War problem” that the Canadian government had to “solve.” As Bruce Gilley states in his article “Reawakening Canada’s China Policy,” “Virtually every scholarly work on the Canadian switch from non-recognition of China during the period of Maoist terror to recognition in 1970 has portrayed the former as an aberrant policy driven by some combination of

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Washington Cold War sentiments and hopelessly ignorant misunderstandings of China.”

This “high politics” approach to analysis usually pays closer attention to Canada’s national and international security concerns, and regards the rationale of Ottawa’s China policy as mainly about escaping from Washington’s influence and helping the population of the PRC to end its isolation. And this portrayal of recognition as an escape from external influence or isolation, and in a sense as a shift from darkness to light, has become the mainstream view of the history of Sino-Canadian rapprochement.

However, this approach has its own limitations in historical research. As Niall Ferguson points out, events were neither historically determined nor currently constrained by various forces. Thus, in his view, only individuals and their decisions determine history. And in the context of Ottawa’s unprecedented official recognition of Communist China, Ferguson’s approach can lead us to consider whether Sino-Canadian negotiations could have failed or never taken place from the very beginning, if there had not been right leaders to push through their idea. Furthermore, Ferguson urges historians to see any given period in the past as it was seen by those who lived it, rather than by those who

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know how it came out. Indeed, in his article, Bruce Gilley seems to have committed this fallacy. Gilley argues that Pierre Trudeau’s government should be ashamed of itself, as it chose to embrace the Maoist tyranny and simultaneously abandon democratizing Taiwan. For Gilley, Trudeau’s decision to recognize Maoist China was a sad chapter, or in his words a “sorry episode,” of Ottawa’s postwar foreign policy because his decision was simply nurturing continuing authoritarianism in China.

It is apparent from Bruce Gilley’s criticisms of the “October Handshake” that what mattered most to him throughout this discussion of the merits of Trudeau’s handshake decision is the democratic angle of human rights. And thus, for Gilley, Trudeau should be blamed as “recognition was not based on the promotion of liberal internationalism.” However, in this sense, Gilley could also be criticized for failing to look at the alternatives contemporaries considered. Gilley should make clear what the evidence was for his alternative scenarios. For instance, when Gilley argues that Trudeau should have been more critical of the Great Leap famine when he was visiting the PRC in 1960, the author once again does not take into account the lack of information available at the time. As Trudeau’s biographer John English states, “Even if the travelers failed to learn

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23 Gilley, 123.
24 Ibid, 122; Gilley defines the high ideals of “liberal internationalism” as “the advance of universally recognized and widely accepted human rights and the creation of effective and legitimate international institutions.” (Gilley, 121)
about the horrible events in the countryside simply because they did not ask enough questions…[they—including Trudeau] would likely not have received honest answers if they had.” 26  In other words, Gilley has to look at the alternatives that were presented to Trudeau for which there is evidence, and which might have pointed to a meaningful difference. In response to Gilley’s criticism of Trudeau’s recognition decision for not taking human rights considerations into account, Paul Evans also states, “Gilley’s revisionism commits the intellectual error of projecting current values and perspectives onto an earlier era when political leaders and the public viewed China and China policy through a different lens.” 27 After all, it is important for historians to keep in mind that an imaginary scenario is only legitimate if one can show that the alternative being discussed is one that contemporaries seriously contemplated. The history of Canada-China rapprochement should be understood with a more realistic principle of historical cause.

In order to examine the multiple aspects of a complex bilateral relationship, individual-level and “low politics” analyses will also be explored to increase our understanding of the decision making throughout the process of establishing diplomatic ties. Although these two components have received less attention in the past, they should not be overlooked. In addition, both English-language and Chinese-language primary sources, such as media reports and

26 English, 352.
Trudeau’s travel diaries, have been consulted. It is also important to point out that this thesis will have a stronger focus on the Canadian side, due to the lack of access to the relevant PRC archives, which remain closed to the public. Some previously unavailable materials will also be used, such as a sound recording of Trudeau’s question and answer session with students recovered from the Queen’s University Archives. On November 4, 1968, Pierre Trudeau visited Kingston and received an honorary degree from Queen’s University. According to the Queen’s Journal, Trudeau accepted the degree, but requested a meeting with the students. Therefore, on the same autumn evening, Queen’s students waited in line and packed into Grant Hall with windows open so those unable to enter could still hear. Those who attended found Trudeau’s warmth and energy filled the event. The Queen’s Archives recently released the 1968 sound recording, taped at a time near Trudeau’s initiative to open relations with Beijing. With regard to the importance of individual-level analyses in this research, this archival discovery came as a pleasant surprise. Although criticized by Bruce Gilley as being deeply illiberal for “abandon[ing] democratizing Taiwan,” Trudeau provided a good portrait of

28 Sound Recording of Prime Minister Trudeau holding a Question and Answer session at Grant Hall, Queen’s University, November 4, 1968. Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University Archives, 1968.
29 The Journal, November 6, 1968.
30 Ibid.
31 Gilley, 122-123.
himself and his political beliefs when being challenged by a Queen’s student in this sound recording:

**Student:** Mr. Trudeau, during your years since you were a university student, you’ve traveled most of the distance on the political spectrum everything left of centre. I was wondering if you can explain to us, why you’ve changed your political philosophy from the times you were an editor of Cité Libre, and a severe critic of the Liberal Party, to your present philosophy which allows you to be the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada and Prime Minister?

**Trudeau:** There is a big mistake here. Just because the Liberal Party has changed its philosophy, you shouldn’t assume that I’ve changed mine.

*(laughter and big applause)*

**Trudeau:** I was a very severe critic of the Liberal Party. But I was also a very severe critic, as you know, if you’re a reader of Cité Libre, of the Conservative Party, and the New Democratic Party (then called the CCF Party). I was a teacher of law, but I was also a writer and a political critic...and I felt free. I hope...to criticize every party when I thought it was making mistake. I was looking at politics as an outsider, as many as you are, trying to point out the flaws.

I also, as many as you do, recognize some real qualities in all of the parties—and I was advising my readers to vote sometimes for one party, and sometimes for another. It’s just a matter of historical record that I was never in any party. I’ve never joined any party until I joined the Liberals about six weeks before my election... *(laughter in the audience)*... I did that because I wanted to keep my intellectual and personal freedom. I wanted to be able to play the role, once again, of political critic.32

*(applause)*

Of course, being a political critic and being a prime minister have very different political freedoms and responsibilities. Their access to information would not be the same. And they also faced various levels of constraints and opportunities when exercising their power. Just like the development of Sino-
Canadian relations, external constraints and changing geopolitical circumstances often play an important role during the decision making process. The next chapter takes a forensic look at the origins of normalization of relations from a “high politics” angle.

Illustration 1.2
Audience of Pierre Trudeau’s session at Queen’s University on the evening of his LL.D., 1968

On November 4, 1968, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau answered Queen’s students’ questions on almost anything—from his foreign policy direction to his personal political philosophy. The special event took place in Grant Hall with students outside banging on the doors wanting to get in.33

Source: Queen’s University Archives

In short, for political historians, the “1970 handshake” is essential in the study of the history of Canada-China relations because it marked an end of one era and the opening of another. In a larger context, the rapprochement itself could also be used to look at the two countries’ relationships with the world.

33 The Journal, November 6, 1968.
community at the time. For instance, the People's Republic of China was welcomed into the United Nations only a year after the Sino-Canadian handshake. For many years other countries had proposed resolutions to admit the PRC, but the United States consistently enlisted opposition to the resolution. Ironically, within the same year, President Richard Nixon announced that he would pay a state visit to China the following year. As the leader of one of the important countries in North America, Prime Minister Trudeau’s foreign policy, including his government’s recognition of Maoist China, had a direct impact upon American attitudes and policies. Therefore, it is important for this thesis to illustrate how for both Trudeau and Mao, the personal, domestic and external worlds all directed developments in Sino-Canadian relations.
Chapter 2

Beijing and Ottawa

Introduction: Uneasy Neighbours and Geopolitical Considerations

The normalization of relations between Canada and the PRC took place during the Vietnam War, which was a tricky period. While the leaders in Beijing could not abandon their allies in Hanoi, Ottawa could be expected to avoid angering Washington by engaging in talks with an ally of its adversary. Why did China and Canada suddenly decide to engage one another in these circumstances? This chapter argues that the changing geopolitical environment led the two countries to explore new directions in their foreign policy that resulted in improved bilateral ties. In order to understand this remarkable rapprochement, it is necessary to first examine the geopolitical context of this period, as both Canada and China had their own strategic reasons for seeking normalization of relations.
The “Washington Factor”: Canada Needed a Policy of Independence

To begin the discussion, it is significant to note that Canada was prepared to recognize Mao’s new government after the 1949 Communist victory. However, this did not happen and the Canadian Consulate in Shanghai was closed down in 1952, mainly because of the pressure from the White House, which adopted an increasingly hardline attitude towards Chinese Communism.34

Indeed for many years, the Canadian decision-makers treated Sino-Canadian relations as a triangular form of diplomacy involving Washington as well as Beijing and Ottawa. This is reflected in the fact that the scholarly study of Canada-China relations has been overshadowed by Sino-American relations. The bilateral relationship with the United States was an inescapable element in Canadian thinking during the Cold War period.35 In Canadian foreign policy before the Trudeau era, Ottawa and Washington agreed for the most part about relations with other countries. They shared many interests, had the same “friends,” and shared membership in military alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).36 There were also times that they fought and died

side by side against a common enemy—for example, the Chinese “volunteer fighters” during the Korean War. Yet they too shared the world’s longest undefended border.

Because relations with its southern neighbour had played a crucial role in Canada’s history, they also affected ties with other countries. Thus, Canada’s relations with China were affected by relations with the United States. For instance, during the tense Cold War years, U.S. laws forbade American companies to sell goods to “enemy” countries, including the PRC. Washington claimed that these laws extended to Canadian branches of American companies. Canadians sometimes protested the loss of jobs whenever a Canadian branch was compelled by its parent company to cancel a sale. These problems arose in dramatic form as early as the late 1950s when the U.S.-based Ford Motor Company vetoed a proposed sale of five million dollars worth of vehicles made by Ford Canada to the People’s Republic of China. As Ford Canada was only a subsidiary of the Ford in Detroit, a request of this sort surely had to be approved by its parent company. Although the issue was formally discussed at a meeting between Prime Minister John Diefenbaker and President Dwight Eisenhower, the sale nonetheless failed to materialize. For the former prime minister, this was surely not the only case of American intervention. As he

37 Ronning, 179.
39 Ibid, 64.
stated, “…when the Canadian government decided to approve the sale of wheat to Communist China on credit terms, opposition to Canada’s policy was so strong that the Kennedy administration endeavoured to prevent a Canadian corporation, whose parent company was in the United States, from supplying Canada with the necessary loaders so that the wheat could be shipped to Communist China.” 42 Many Canadians considered such interference in Canadian affairs to be completely unacceptable. They felt that Canada was too closely tied to the U.S. economy. 43 And because Canada’s economy was so much smaller, Canadians had become dependent on Americans for their prosperity. As Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s experience with automobile and grain sales to China demonstrates, their dependent relationship as traditional allies made it difficult for Ottawa to act independently of the United States. Often the economic well-being of Canadians rose and fell with decisions made south of the border.

Although Canada and the United States were the closest trading and business partners in the world, the two countries were not equal economic partners. Throughout the Cold War period, the Canadian economy was much smaller than the American economy, and the interests of Canadians and Americans did not always match. For example, Washington’s dismay over the “loss of China” to Communism in 1949 was surely stronger than Canada’s, as the

Nationalist government was a United States ally in Asia and the White House thus felt greatly frustrated by its defeat during the Civil War. And this traditional close relationship did therefore present some problems. As Prime Minister Diefenbaker further described the difficult situation during his administration, “Canada took the stand that while it would not sell strategic material to communist countries, including Cuba, trade in non-strategic commodities should be encouraged. This was regarded as heresy in Washington in 1961.” The Prairies provinces’ sales of wheat to the PRC were caught within such political realities. As the Canadian prime minister handled the United States as well as he dealt with China to guide the course of Canada-China relations, management of this intricate process was often a true test of political leadership. According to Maxwell Cohen’s article “A China Policy for Canada” (1958), “it is clear that we must live easily with our neighbours and our great friends and if they feel so deeply about a third party, we cannot ignore that feeling except at the possible peril to the friendship itself.” This argument by a legal scholar at McGill University clearly captured the mood of the time. As a country with only one close neighbour, Canada sometimes faced the limits of its political autonomy when it came to the formulation of its China policy.

The American opposition to suggestions about recognizing the Chinese Communist-led government in Beijing was connected with the resurgence of

45 Diefenbaker, 45.
American right-wing politics in the 1950s. The right-wing view that China was Moscow’s ally and thus a U.S. enemy became dominant. Communism was a monolith in this view, which seemed to imagine somebody at a control panel in Moscow who pressed buttons to which Communists all over the world responded. American prejudices were confirmed by the experience of the Korean War. Therefore, it was not surprising in 1954 when President Dwight Eisenhower expressed his serious concerns about Ottawa’s attitude toward Beijing’s possible entry to the United Nations to Louis St. Laurent, making American opposition bluntly clear to the Prime Minister of Canada. As Jamie Glazov describes the conversation between the two political leaders, “He [Eisenhower] stated firmly that if China were given a seat [at the United Nations], the United Nations would leave the United States and the United States would leave the United Nations. St. Laurent promised not to act on the issue until after the presidential election.” Ottawa, according to China-born Canadian diplomat Chester Ronning, took the U.S. President’s strong reactions seriously. In the face of such threats, Canada’s ability to assert its own foreign policy agenda was in question. Canadian foreign policy, as John Holmes suggested, was actually “determined by American policy—not by American pressure but by the fact of

47 Quo and Ichikawa, 388.
49 Ronning, 182.
American policy.”\textsuperscript{50} Political dynamics over relations with China inevitably stirred some Canadian officials’ resentment toward Washington during the 1950s.

Things did not change much during the 1960s. This can be best illustrated by what Prime Minister Lester Pearson told a CBC reporter in a 1965 interview: “I have always taken the view that if there is a division of opinion in your own country on a particular item of foreign policy, such as recognition of Red China... then it seems to me the reaction of the United States becomes even more important. If you can’t make up your own minds... then you should be very careful about not getting into trouble with your friends.”\textsuperscript{51} Obviously, Pearson’s message to the CBC reporter was that it was absolutely necessary for Ottawa to be cautious and maintain a healthy bilateral relationship with its neighbour in the south. That is to say, the Pearson administration found that having friendly ties with Washington would be more essential than establishing formal relations with Communist China. Indeed, when Pierre Trudeau was first elected to succeed Pearson in 1968, the U.S. government still did not approve of the idea of Canada’s recognition of the PRC. It is important, however, to note that although the Canadian government had helped to give birth to NATO, Trudeau himself did not see his country’s close alliance with its southern neighbour as an insurmountable challenge to the pursuit of normal relations with a Communist-

\textsuperscript{50} Holmes, 215.

led country in East Asia. The mindset of this new administration in diplomacy was unquestionably different from the previous one. Therefore when Trudeau was prime minister, relations with the United States remained cordial but cool.

In fact, before the new prime minister came into power, not only did Canadian diplomats feel a loss of independence over the People’s Republic of China, but Canadians generally shared such feelings and some hoped to become more independent of the White House’s guidance in international affairs. To illustrate, China’s national Beijing Opera troupe paid a brief visit to Toronto and a few other large Canadian cities in the early 1960s, and was very well received. However, the U.S. authorities made an official announcement that any U.S. citizens who bought tickets to watch the Chinese opera performance on Canadian soil were violating American law. According to Margaret MacMillan, “When a few determined Americans came anyway, they were welcomed by Canadians who were irritated, as so often before and since, by the American government’s attempt to enforce American laws outside the United States.”

Although difficult to measure precisely, the dominating attitude of the American superpower inflamed anti-Americanism in Canada. Because Canada and the United States shared a vast continent, Canadians worried about their sovereignty and wished to stand up to the invisible force of American influence. When it came to issues such as the direction of foreign policy, they became increasingly

52 Peter C. Dobell, Canada’s Search for New Roles. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1972): 137.  
53 MacMillan, 165.
willing to distance themselves from their neighbour to the south and develop closer political and economic ties with other countries. A powerful current was already flowing in favour of the opening of Sino-Canadian relations when Trudeau succeeded Lester Pearson.

Unlike his several predecessors who were reluctant to formally recognize the PRC, Pierre Trudeau did not wish to maintain American confidence by making political compromises, as St. Laurent had done in dealing with Eisenhower. So he promptly called for a re-evaluation of Canadian foreign policy in April 1968. With this changing political context, a move to recognize China would probably fit well within the prime minister’s new strategy to create counterweights to a dominating relationship with the American authority. In Glazov’s view, “Canadian-American discord over China reached a significant level... as Canadians increasingly supported recognizing China and grew increasingly frustrated about not being able to do so.” As a newly-elected leader, Trudeau did not want his administration to be publicly portrayed as the willing puppets of American imperialism. He wished to shift his foreign policy in a more independent direction, so that the public would feel more comfortable after achieving a greater political distance from the United States. Trudeau’s new foreign policy direction at this point not only indicates the independent

55 Glazov, 72.
thinking in his administration, but also demonstrates that the geopolitical element, or namely the “Washington factor,” was a significant consideration throughout the decision-making process.

It is therefore reasonable to argue that Ottawa’s attitudes toward détente with Communist China were pragmatic under Trudeau’s leadership, as his government regarded this normalization of relations as a showpiece of independent Canadian diplomacy. As B. Michael Frolic puts it, “…Canada could break from American influence and embark on a path that diverged from officially held American positions. At a time when anti-Americanism was gaining strength in Canada, the recognition of the PRC could be viewed as an act of emancipation from unnecessary American tutelage, a vindication of the ‘third option’ in Canadian foreign policy.”  

In other words, it would be difficult to deny that one of the political beneficiaries of the Sino-Canadian rapprochement was Pierre Trudeau himself, as he was able to build a stronger prime ministerial image by demonstrating to the public that his newly-elected government managed to escape political influence from its traditional ally in the south.

To some observers, Canada was nothing more than a junior partner in North America. Canada’s rise to middle power rank did not mean much to them. This time, however, Canada was involved in a significant diplomatic decision in which Washington was not an ally. The new policy approach toward

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57 Frolic, 43.
China demonstrated that the Canadian government had decided to seek a more assertive and independent role in world affairs. For many years, it was no secret that Canada’s major concern regarding foreign affairs was its relationship with the United States. In comparison, the PRC obviously did not rank as high as the United States did on Ottawa’s policy agenda, as one can see by the reluctance to recognize China throughout the St. Laurent, Diefenbaker and Pearson years. Therefore, this dramatic move of the Trudeau administration immediately gained the attention of the PRC press. Indeed, almost all Chinese writing on Canada around this period of time made reference to American economic penetration and the concerns this raised about the Canadian government’s ability to pursue independent foreign policies. For example, during the week of Ottawa’s official recognition of the PRC, an editorial in the People’s Daily seized the opportunity to mock both the White House and the “hegemonist” Soviets by referring to Pierre Trudeau’s decision to re-establish relations with China as evidence that “the attempt of one or two ‘superpowers’ to control the internal and external policies of other countries has become more and more unfeasible.”

American-Canadian friction over the China issue quite often provided opportunities for the Chinese Communist newspapers and magazines to fiercely attack the “U.S. imperialist” on the world stage.

Red Flag (Hongqi), the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) widely-circulated theoretical journal, was one of these platforms. In the 1960s, it

59 People’s Daily (Renmin Ribao), October 15, 1970.
published a number of articles elaborating on the party officials’ view that Canadians were struggling to liberate themselves from the “imperialist control” of the United States. In a book review article published in Red Flag in 1964, the author Shi Mu described Canada as an “American satellite.” In Shi’s words, “…while in name Canada is considered a self-governing member of the British Commonwealth, it is in fact under American monopoly capitalist economic, political and military control, and has become a ‘U.S. satellite’… But whenever there is oppression there is resistance; wherever there is aggression there is a struggle to oppose aggression. Canada is no exception.”

When this analysis was published, the PRC had expressed a growing interest in the political role of the “middle powers” on the international stage, such as Canada. As this quotation suggests, observers in the PRC detected the beginnings of a widespread Canadian movement against Washington’s domination, which a CCP publication argued had reduced Canada to the level of an American satellite. Although the Red Flag article also emphasized that Canada’s economic difficulties could only be solved by reducing dependency on American capital, the dominance of which had reached “threatening” proportions, the author expressed optimism in the conclusion: “Today, the glorious example of the victory of the Cuban people in their struggle against the United States has strengthened the Canadian people’s confidence in striving for national

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60 Shi Mu, 33.
liberation.” It is interesting that Canada was sometimes seen by the Chinese as a promoter of imperialist values, and in other circumstances as an economic hostage. The choice of expressions, of course, was different each time, as terms were chosen to suit the specific purpose of an article or editorial. In this case, a sympathetic tone was adopted by the CCP journal to describe Canada as a victim of imperialism. As the author adds toward the end of the article, “With the increase in American control over Canada, and with the gradual deterioration of the strength and status of U.S. imperialism thanks to blows from the world’s people and the uneven development of capitalism, the Canadian people’s patriotic struggle against the United States will develop with each passing day.”

The cultivation of relations with the PRC was a significant example of an independent Canadian foreign policy, which would be welcome across Canada at the time when anti-Washington sentiments were high. Furthermore, as Canada and China were both Pacific countries, it would only be natural for them to foster closer political and economic relations. In the view of Trudeau’s new government, the advantages of a repaired relationship with Communist China would outweigh continuing non-recognition. And just like the Canadians’ considerations on rapprochement, international conditions inevitably came to the

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61 Ibid, 35.
62 Ibid, 35.
minds of the Chinese policymakers too. But in Beijing’s case, the Chinese leaders’
calculation had more to do with the Soviets than the Americans.

The "Moscow Factor":
China Abandoned its Policy of Isolation

Before the "October Handshake" of 1970 between Beijing and Ottawa, Mao Zedong’s China was often characterized as isolated. This was certainly true during the 1960s when the foreign policy of the PRC was dominated by the break with the USSR, at a time when most ties with First World nations had already been broken off. Indeed, the Sino-Soviet split, as the break in relations with the Soviet Union is known, did not occur suddenly. Relations became strained after Nikita Khrushchev’s open attack on Joseph Stalin in 1956. Mao felt that he should have been consulted beforehand over such a significant shift in Communist thinking. Viewing this incident as the beginning of a long-term danger, Mao also feared that Khrushchev’s public denunciation of the cult surrounding his predecessor would subsequently be used to put pressure on Mao himself to repudiate his own personality cult. Then three years later, Khrushchev angered Mao once again by speaking disrespectfully about him. Khrushchev said that Mao was an “old boot” that ought to be thrown out. As Lev Deluisin, the Soviet Ambassador to the PRC, recalled in a documentary interview, “They [the interpreters] had to translate ‘old galosh’ and they translated it as ‘old boot,’ but
in Chinese it means both ‘old boot’ –and prostitute. Therefore, when Kang Sheng heard those words, he took it that the Great Leader was being called an ‘old whore’.” True, the word “boot” was commonly used to describe an immoral woman or prostitute in the Chinese language. Unquestionably, this had enraged Chairman Mao.

Among other dissatisfactions with the Soviet Union, the Chinese leaders felt that they had not been treated as equals by their ally when Moscow made plain that it was withdrawing its promise to provide China with nuclear technology in the late 1950s. As Chih-yu Shih states in his book The Spirit of Chinese Foreign Policy: A Psychocultural View, “When the Test Ban Treaty, which had the effect of constraining China’s nuclear development, reached its conclusion period, the brotherly relationship broke down totally. One must recall that the typical Chinese psychoculture has tremendous difficulties in accommodating the breach of brotherhood... The Sino-Soviet split had reached the point of no return during this period.” In other words, Beijing could no longer depend on Moscow for nuclear arms. By the early 1960s, it had been clear that the Soviet refusal to help the Chinese develop an atomic bomb had caused worsening relations between the two countries.

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In Beijing’s view, the Soviet Union was soon pouring oil into the fire as the Kremlin refused to assist the Chinese during their brief border war with India in 1962. Actually, the Soviet leaders not only refused to support their Chinese ally, but openly sought to improve relations with Jawaharlal Nehru’s government. For the Chinese leaders, Moscow’s position was all the more irritating given that the weight of evidence tended to support the PRC’s position that the Sino-Indian border had not been legally demarcated while the Nehru government’s contended that it had been. It was apparent that the Russians were keen to establish good relations with India. These accumulated disagreements between the Chinese and Russian leaders eventually culminated in the open break between the two countries. Beijing changed the direction of its policy toward the Soviet Union. As Margaret MacMillan suggests, “By the end of the 1960s, Mao and what was left of the foreign policy establishment in Beijing were convinced that the chief threat to China, greater even than the U.S., was the Soviet Union.”

Chinese leaders at least became very suspicious of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Soviet policy of “peaceful coexistence” with the capitalist world seemed to Mao to be a betrayal of Communist principles which required hostility toward and the eventual overthrow of all non-Communist systems. During the late 1960s, armed clashes occurred between Chinese and Russian border patrols along the frontier further divided the two states.

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67 MacMillan, 133.
68 Shih, 82.
69 Garver, 77.
When two major clashes occurred in 1969 in the most explosive area of the Sino-Soviet border, which was Damansky Island in the Wusuli River, Soviet spokesman immediately claimed that the border ran along the Chinese bank of the Amur and Wusuli River. The Chinese, however, claimed that it ran along the middle of the river. Accordingly, Damansky Island was claimed by both China and the Soviet Union. Armed confrontation between Chinese and Soviet forces on the island resulted in casualties on both sides. Furthermore, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia a year earlier, which was followed by the “Brezhnev Doctrine,” raised the possibility of a Soviet attack on China. Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had then proclaimed that the Soviet Union had the right to interfere in the internal matters of other socialist states which deviated from socialist doctrine. As Shih notes, “After the Soviet troops invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Chinese revolutionary began to imagine that the Soviets would also ‘Czech’ China.” MacMillan also describes how the Chinese reacted by succinctly summarizing their worries in one line: “If Soviet forces could intervene in Czechoslovakia, why not in China?” Apparently, the Chinese leaders were greatly alarmed by the Soviet justification for invasion and feared that this might be a foretaste of something even more threatening, as Soviet diplomats were reportedly asking Western diplomats, “What would you say if we dropped a few

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71 Ibid, 6.
72 Shih, 115.
73 MacMillan, 133.
bombs on China’s industries?”74 With rumours also circulating that Soviet forces were planning a preemptive strike against the Chinese nuclear installation in Xinjiang, believed to be the People’s Republic’s only nuclear facility at the time,75 it is therefore not surprising that Beijing immediately denounced the invasion as a “monstrous crime” and “barbarous aggression.”76

Clearly, Beijing felt that the danger of a Soviet attack was very real throughout this period because Sino-Soviet clashes were becoming more intense and frequent. As John Garver has stated, “the Soviet military paper Red Star announced that the Soviet Union was ready to take any action necessary, offensive or defensive, to help the Chinese people liberate themselves from Mao’s rule. Soviet broadcasts called on genuine Communists in China to overthrow Mao, while Uighur language broadcasts to Xinjiang implied that Soviet assistance would be forthcoming if Xinjiang Uighurs rebelled against Chinese rule.”77 While Soviet broadcasts called on the Chinese people to rise up, the Chinese government was aware of its own military weaknesses. Thus, during the time when the Russians encouraged the Chinese to free themselves from Mao’s rule, political leaders in Beijing began to think seriously of reconciliation with other centres of power like Canada.

74 Ibid, 134; Garver, 77.
77 Garver, 305.
As the PRC and the Soviet Union became adversaries, Chinese policymakers were assessing both the costs of isolation and the potential benefits of any reduction of diplomatic friction. It is important to note that the peak of the border crisis was in March 1969, only one month after China and Canada began negotiations on formal recognition in Stockholm. China’s isolation from the international community was indeed almost total at that point, and even its territorial integrity seemed in jeopardy. Isolated and feeling insecure, the Chinese leadership therefore wished to explore possibilities of adopting a rapprochement approach, in order to limit the vulnerability of the PRC in the international political arena. As B. Michael Frolic has described the situation, “In the midst of the Cultural Revolution, and locked in a bitter dispute with her former close ally, the Soviet Union, China was signaling a willingness to rethink her relationship with the non-Communist world.” 78 It was in this difficult context that the PRC decided to negotiate with Canada, with the hope that Ottawa would support its official entry into international security bodies such as the United Nations. Thus, it became possible for the new Trudeau administration to move forward on its China policy. An opportunity for Sino-Canadian rapprochement arose in the late 1960s, at the height of the Sino-Soviet conflict.

Viewing from a “high politics” angle, Communist China regarded Canada not just as a source of agricultural products, but also as a testing ground for its

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78 Frolic, 41.
experiments in the field of normalizing its international conduct. For those scholars who pay close attention to the level of “high politics” of Sino-Canadian relations, the geopolitical factors, such as the PRC’s internationally-isolated status and the possibility of a war between its people and the Russians, were all significant. In *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China’s Search for Security* (1997), Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross argue, “For China the escalation of Sino-Soviet conflict in 1969 and the prospect of a Soviet nuclear attack raised the costs of its strategic isolation...” Academics such as Nathan and Ross argue that the Chinese policymakers began to think seriously of reconciliation with Western countries, as the Chinese government was aware that an isolationist policy would jeopardize its national security. They have made a persuasive argument that Beijing wished to normalize relations with Ottawa as a way to test the water and see if the rapprochement approach would work well. Global geopolitics was one of the major causes of the official re-establishment of Sino-Canadian ties.

**Conclusion:**

**Sino-Canadian Relations as a Four-sided Relationship**

There is a case for saying that Communist China’s entry into the modern world community took place in October 1970, when the PRC established formal

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79 Ibid, 48.
80 Nathan and Ross, 65.
relations with Canada. In fact, relations between Ottawa and Beijing may be seen as a four-sided struggle involving Canada, China, the Soviet Union and the United States. As this chapter demonstrates, Sino-Canadian rapprochement was mutually self-serving, as Prime Minister Trudeau’s and Chairman Mao’s governments each approached the normalization of relations in the light of its own interests.

Before Trudeau came to power, whenever it came to formulation of policies toward the PRC, the fundamental reality facing Ottawa had always been the country’s geographical contiguity with the United States. For many years Canadian prime ministers had prioritized good Canadian-American relations. Consequently, such a preference made recognizing China difficult. In many situations, Ottawa had postponed decisions regarding its policies on Beijing. But unlike its predecessors, the Trudeau administration wished to strengthen Canada’s independence in world affairs. The newly-elected prime minister and his government were determined to expand relations with the PRC early in their terms and regarded the normalization of relations as a showpiece of independent Canadian diplomacy in an independent Canada.

Changes in the geopolitical climate between China and Russia also had an impact on the Chinese leaders’ thinking. Facing a threat from his Soviet neighbour, Mao Zedong realized that his country was seriously isolated in the outside world. And unwilling to wage any full-scale war, his government understood that it needed friendships and alliances, or at least, reduced hostility.
As Mao reportedly often said of the United States and the Soviet Union, “...at any given time successful struggle against them can only be waged if one alone is a principal enemy and the other, temporarily, recedes to second place.” Canada, in the meantime, was the country with which Beijing wished to hold discussions about an improved international position to win a permanent seat in the United Nations and to deter possible Soviet attack. Indeed, shortly after Canada opened relations with China, Washington followed suit and the Sino-American détente also successfully deterred a Soviet attack on the PRC.

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Chapter 3

1968:
The Year of a Favourable Political Climate

Introduction:
Times were Ripe, Finally...

To change the world was a Canadian ideal during the late 1960s. The political and cultural climate of the decade was one of rebellion and change. As newspaper columnist Robert Fulford states in his article “1968: The Bogus Revolution,” “All protests were against institutions in the West, none against Mao or the Soviets. It seemed that an entire generation had turned political.” As people questioned everything, of course, they included their country’s relations with China. In 1968, the new Liberal Party leader Pierre Trudeau offered a youthful and vigorous approach to government and foreign affairs. His fresh ideas and air of moral strength appealed to the young, and also gave new hope to the older generation of voters. They were impressed with his ideas on foreign policy toward China and the rest of the world. Trudeau’s main objectives

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included an independent Canada, one that would formulate its own China policy without external influence. As Canadians had just celebrated their nation’s hundredth anniversary in July 1967, the changing political climate was conducive toward public discussion on the future direction of Canada’s China policy. Strengthened Canadian nationalism called for more independence in the determination of foreign policy. Optimism about the benefits of change, moreover, set the tone in this period’s political climate.

Conversely, on the Chinese side, disastrous political radicalism continued in 1968. Mao Zedong himself had come to realize at least some of the damage that the Cultural Revolution had caused. During the first two radical years after the official launching of the Cultural Revolution, Premier Zhou Enlai had tried to limit the Red Guards’ violence to protect key infrastructure such as the railway system. Zhou then decided to turn to the outside world for ways to repair China’s industry and other damage from the marauding Red Guards—who saw themselves as “the vanguard of the new revolutionary upheaval.” After its public quarrel with the Kremlin leaders led to the withdrawal of Soviet experts in 1959, China was in urgent need of advanced technology for its developing industries. For Chinese leaders, one of the quickest solutions would be to establish diplomatic relations with countries like Canada to gain access to Western technology and necessary expertise.

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84 Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999): 574.
This chapter discusses developments in domestic politics in Canada and China respectively which made it possible for each government to open relations with the other.

**A New Canada in 1968: Conditions Brought by Trudeau-era Nationalism and a Post-Duplessis Quebec**

“Peace” and “love” were the watchwords in 1968, the year of the initiatives of Sino-Canadian negotiations. Just a year earlier, Canada celebrated its centennial anniversary of Confederation. Canadian nationalism was at a peak and the economy was doing well. Most Canadians could not remember the hopelessness of the Depression. Many could not remember the shock of World War II. Even the Cold War, when people lived in fear that some American or Soviet general would “push the button” and start a nuclear war, was fading from people’s minds. Many put aside differences within the country, and enjoyed their pride in Canada and its place in the world.

Although the decade was ending on an optimistic note, violence was nonetheless evident everywhere. For many people it came to a head in the brutal Vietnam War. In their eyes, the war revealed that the United States could be ruthless in pursuing its goals. As the 1960s was coming to an end, some “draft dodgers” burned their draft cards and fled to Canada to avoid fighting in a war they could not believe in. Many of those who stayed in Canada included
American students at Canadian universities with student deferments. As Canadians were witnessing growing anti-American sentiment, “independence from the U.S.” was a common theme throughout this period of time. These sentiments could also be reflected in different public discussions about the nation’s China policy direction, for Ottawa had often followed Washington’s path during the past decades. It is interesting to point out that, according to John Holmes, Ottawa’s involvement in China did not centre on support for the Guomindang regime during the Chinese Civil War and therefore Canadians never had the feeling of “losing China” as did their American neighbours.\textsuperscript{85} In other words, Canadians never had strong feelings of commitment to the Nationalist government in Taiwan as the Chinese government.

Canadian media generally supported Ottawa’s move to open relations with China. A \textit{Globe and Mail} editorial of February 14, 1969 used “Canada’s Course is Right” as its title and praised the situation in which “Mr. Sharp [the Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time] and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau have finally set Canada upon the realistic course and the right course, and if it takes perseverance and courage to pursue it, then we trust these qualities will not be wanting.”\textsuperscript{86}

In many ways, 1968-1970 was a special period of rapid change within Canadian society, while there was also a simultaneous trend of reforms around

\textsuperscript{85} Holmes, 104.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The Globe and Mail}, February 14, 1969.
the world. Surrounded by such atmosphere, Ottawa’s China policy was also experiencing its dramatic changes in this context of political change and reform. According to Margaret MacMillan, the centenary celebration in 1967 provided a good opportunity for many Canadians to rethink their country’s policy direction toward China. As she describes, Trudeau “understood that Canadians were increasingly willing to distance themselves for the United States. Canadians had just celebrated their centenary as a nation, and perhaps to their own surprise, were enjoying a burst of cultural activity and of Canadian nationalism.”87 As Pierre Trudeau was sworn in as Prime Minister not long after the nation’s centenary celebration, he decided to take advantage of this political mood of the country and demonstrate to his voters that he would not be submitting to American pressure while in office.

In the meantime, it is significant to point out that the previous governments’ wait-and-see policy approach toward the PRC was partially related to public opinion in Quebec at the time. Before 1960, the Liberal and Conservative governments understood that to officially recognize Communist China would upset many voters in Quebec, as anti-Communist sentiment was traditionally strong in the province. After all, Quebec was a major province which held a significant number of parliamentary seats in the House of Commons. In order to win a majority government in federal elections, both

87 MacMillan, 165.
major parties needed Quebec’s support. So whenever it came to the issue of establishing formal diplomatic ties between Canada and the PRC, Quebec’s public opinions would always matter for these party leaders. However, in a period of changing political mood since the 1960s, Quebeckers’ negative feelings toward the normalization of relations with Beijing had also been turning around, after the death of Premier Maurice Duplessis, the Union Nationale leader who was widely known for his hatred of Communism.

During his years as Quebec Premier, Duplessis introduced provincial legislation which allowed his government to close down any place being used to propagate Communist ideas. Through such means, Duplessis hoped that Communist literature would be eliminated in his province. Indeed, throughout his era, the Catholic church in Quebec was generally mistrustful of Chinese Communists and any Communist regimes committed to a policy of world revolution. Of course, the PRC’s image was further damaged by its role in the Korean and Vietnam conflicts. In 1960, when Pierre Trudeau’s Two Innocents in Red China was published in Quebec, the Roman Catholic Church denounced Trudeau for describing his traveling experience in the PRC positively. Because anti-Communist views were widely influential in the province, Quebeckers were

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89 Herbert F. Quinn, The Union Nationale: Quebec Nationalism from Duplessis to Lévesque. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979): 126.
90 Ibid, 126.
less likely than other Canadians in the rest of the country to favour formal recognition of Communist China.\textsuperscript{92} This partially explained why previous federal Liberal and Conservative leaders were mostly reluctant to take the political risk of recognizing the PRC, as this might cost them a significant number of votes in Quebec.

This situation changed soon after Maurice Duplessis, “le Chef” of Quebec, died in September 1959. The period of Duplessis’s reign was later referred to in Quebec as “The Great Darkness” due to his anti-Communist and ultra-conservative policies.\textsuperscript{93} After his death, Quebec society was caught up in rapid socio-cultural change away from his anti-Communist, church-oriented policies toward a socially liberal, secular society. As a result, Quebec’s public opinion regarding the idea of opening relations with the PRC were also changing in a dramatic way. As Paul Evans suggested in his study, \textit{Canadian Public Opinion on Relations with China: An Analysis of the Existing Survey Research}, “One that is worthy of further study is the matter of the ‘turnaround’ in Quebec between 1959 and 1964. Canadian opinion on China changed over time but nowhere more quickly or dramatically than in Quebec during these five years.”\textsuperscript{94} According to Evans’s statistical findings, throughout this period, respondents in Quebec were willing to change their views on the recognition issue. In 1959, only 18.1\% of

\textsuperscript{92} Paul Evans, \textit{Canadian Public Opinion on Relations with China: An Analysis of the Existing Survey Research}. (Toronto: University of Toronto-York University Joint Centre on Modern East Asia, 1985): 12.


those surveyed favoured recognition, which was indeed less than half of the
Canadian national average. Five years later, the level of Quebeckers’ support had
more than doubled and stayed at the percentage of mid-to-high-40s during the
post-Duplessis decade in the 1960s.\(^95\) (See Table 3.1)

Table 3.1
Percentage of Quebeckers Supporting Recognition of the PRC, 1959-1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Should</th>
<th>Should Not Recognize</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1959</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1964</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 1966</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


So why was there such a drastic shift of opinions toward Maoist China? The Quiet Revolution in Quebec, along with the decline of anti-Communist values, helps to explain the change. On the political front, the death of Maurice Duplessis left the Union Nationale in a state of collapse. In 1960 the provincial Liberals under Jean Lesage won their first Quebec election since World War II. Quebeckers were ready to look at their province and its place in their country and the world in a new way. This was how the Quiet Revolution, a period of

\(^95\) Ibid, 12.
dramatic change in Quebec society, had begun. The goals of the Revolution can be succinctly summarized as to speedily modernize Quebec.  

For instance, during the 1960s, education was overhauled. The province’s educational services were now secularized rather remaining subject to control by the Roman Catholic Church, which traditionally held strong anti-Communist views. Furthermore, the provincial government also passed laws that guaranteed the rights of labour unions and provided social benefits. The socio-political atmosphere of the Duplessis reign and its anti-Communist philosophy was fading, and was replaced by the wholesale changes brought by this period of Liberal activism throughout the Quiet Revolution. As a result, during the 1960s, a growing number of Quebec communities began to have fewer worries about Chinese Communism that had been common during the Duplessis years. Within this changing political context, it is therefore not surprising that Evans discovered that “with the exception of the Roman Catholic church in the 1950s which opposed expanded relations, several Protestant denominations in the 1960s advocated” formal diplomatic ties between Canada and Communist China. Interestingly, some elements of Canada’s external relations were indeed inherent not only in the context of the Cold War, but in domestic Canadian politics and provincial history as well. Paul Evans’s findings show that

98 Thomson, 89.
the Canadian public feelings toward formal recognition of the PRC during the 1960s were less and less hostile. In the meantime, China-born Canadian Christian minister James G. Endicott and his Canadian Peace Congress continued to push the politicians in the Parliament to improve relations with the People’s Republic.\textsuperscript{101} The political climate and timing were becoming more suitable when the 1960s came to an end, with the improvement of domestic political conditions and changes of social atmosphere contributing to sustained discussions about formal recognition.

Domestic economic considerations also contributed to Canadians’ generally positive opinions toward recognition. Opinion polls demonstrated that public support for establishing diplomatic relations with the PRC had seen a substantial increase in Canada throughout the 1960s (See Table 3.2). In Bruce Gilley’s view, this was related to local commercial ambitions. As he explains, “Public opinion towards relations with China was warmed after the Canada Wheat Board sold a large lot of wheat and barley to China in 1960 worth CA$60 million (the equivalent of CA$420 million today, or eight percent of its total annual exports). The reason for this sale, of course, was that Mao had imposed upon China the largest famine in human history.”\textsuperscript{102}


\textsuperscript{102} Gilley, 122.
Table 3.2
Percentage of Canadians Supporting Recognition of the PRC, 1950-1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Should Recognize</th>
<th>Should Not Recognize</th>
<th>No Opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On Parliament Hill, most members of the major parties favoured official recognition of the PRC.\textsuperscript{103} Liberal MPs agreed with the government’s initiatives to open formal diplomatic relations with China, as did the members of the New Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{104} Opinions within the Progressive Conservative Party were more diverse, particularly with former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker being dissatisfied with such a move.\textsuperscript{105} But indeed, it is interesting to point out that the PC Opposition Leader Robert Stanfield, who lost three times to Trudeau, also believed in the need to develop ties with China. His formal visit to Communist China in 1971, as the federal Leader of the Official Opposition, even took place earlier than Trudeau’s official trip in 1973.\textsuperscript{106} As John Holmes states in his article “Canada and the Pacific,” “There was little opposition in Canada to the move [to

\textsuperscript{103}David Taras, ed., Parliament and Canadian Foreign Policy. (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Foreign Affairs, 1985): 75-76.
\textsuperscript{104}Harbron, 5.
\textsuperscript{105}House of Commons, Debates, March 24, 1969, 7003.
start negotiations with Beijing], and the Prime Minister would have been ridiculed if he failed to go ahead with his promise.”

After all, while public opinion did not matter a great deal in Maoist China, what domestic Canadians thought about the Communist regime was certainly an important consideration for local parliamentarians. Although Ottawa occasionally would have liked to go ahead with rapprochement in the past, something would always go wrong in timing, as various political crises stood its way throughout the 1950s. Finally in 1968, things began to move as Canada elected a new prime minister, and the time was right for Ottawa to make a move towards Beijing.

Illustration 3.1
Conservative Leader in a “Mao Suit”

Robert Stanfield, Federal PC Leader of Official Opposition, was measured for a “Mao suit” during his visit to the People’s Republic of China in the summer of 1971.


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A Backward China in 1968: 
China’s Growing Need for Canadian Expertise after Recent 
Radical Damage

While the Quiet Revolution had an impact on the public feelings in Quebec toward Sino-Canadian rapprochement, the government in Beijing was suffering from the damage inflicted by its own Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The early phase of the Cultural Revolution before 1968 represented not only a period of isolation, but also the lowest point of the PRC’s foreign relations. While no new diplomatic ties were established during these chaotic times, existing external relations were also seriously damaged. During the radical period between 1966 and 1967, the PRC’s foreign policy-making apparatus was attacked by extreme leftists who claimed that it had submitted to subversive bourgeois influences from the foreigners with whom they interacted. Red Guards then sacked their country’s own foreign ministry and terrorized its personnel.

Meanwhile, the top leaders in the Zhongnanhai complex in Beijing were particularly alarmed by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, which happened in 1968. China’s leaders were seriously disturbed by the Brezhnev Doctrine, which claimed Moscow’s right to intervene in any socialist state that showed

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109 Robinson, 1104.
110 Ibid, 1104.
signs of heading the wrong way or straying from its path. Later, the Chinese government likened Leonid Brezhnev to Adolf Hitler. Obviously, the Chinese ultra-leftists’ negative feelings against Moscow ran especially high during this period of the Cultural Revolution. The Soviet media responded by denouncing the turmoil within the People’s Republic as the product of insanity within the Chinese Communist elite. The Soviet leaders were critical of Mao and regarded the Cultural Revolution as a strong piece of evidence that Mao was nothing but a fanatic adventurer who was not only destroying his own party but weakening the global cause of socialism. As a result, the Sino-Soviet dispute became increasingly bitter.

The political consequences of these strong and angry exchanges were surely damaging to China’s interests. Moscow had already withdrawn its technical experts and much of its other assistance, affecting Maoist China’s economic development program. Consequently, the rapid economic and industrial development characteristic of the early 1960s was sacrificed, not only because of the withdrawal of Soviet technocrats, but also by the restructuring of enterprise management practices which contributed to falling productivity. For example, Communist workers were encouraged to “struggle” against their

113 CBC News, June 8, 1967.
114 MacMillan, 133-134.
bosses. This way, not only the Chinese workers had reduced incentives to produce, but the managers, who truly feared that their workers would denounce them, would have little incentive to make them produce. Output fell under these circumstances. National grain production reportedly fell substantially in 1968 and industrial output decreased by approximately 13% in 1967 when, according to economic predictors, it should have increased by about 5%. It was not until 1969 that industrial productivity rose to a level above that of 1966.

Making the situation worse, many senior technocrats and experts had been purged during the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the trial of the Gang of Four in 1980 provided some stunning figures on the persecution suffered by Chinese scholars and experts in this chaotic period. As Harry Harding reports claims from the indictment in that trial, that “53,000 scientists and technicians in research institutes, and 500 professors and associate professors in the medical colleges and institutes under the Ministry of Public Health were all ‘falsely charged and persecuted,’ and that an unspecified number of them died as a result.” Many of these top-notch experts in the scientific research and technological fields suffered terribly at the hands of radical Red

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115 Spence, 576.
Guards and their factions. A consequence was that it was not difficult for the members of a Canadian technical delegation, who visited the PRC in 1972, to discern the still-backward state of many of the Communist state’s capital-intensive industries.\footnote{Harbron, 20.}

Some scientists were luckier than others. One of the few areas that did not experience enormous setbacks was nuclear weapons development. In August 1966 a Central Committee communiqué backed by Zhou Enlai, who often tried to moderate Red Guard actions, announced that scientists would not be targets of the Cultural Revolution. As Jung Chang and Jon Halliday have pointed out, “Nuclear physicists and rocket scientists were treated extra well.”\footnote{Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, Mao: The Unknown Story. (New York: Anchor Books, 2006): 412.} Undisturbed by the Red Guards, China’s nuclear research facilities carried on with the momentum of the pre-Cultural Revolution period. Even during the most violent years of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and 1967, nuclear tests were successfully conducted.

When it became clear that immediate damage control was necessary, Premier Zhou Enlai played a key role. Zhou was not only an outstanding negotiator in diplomacy, but was also the country’s damage control expert on the domestic front. As Robinson suggested, “he [Mao] seems to have called on Chou [Zhou] to clean up the ‘mess’ created by his own revolutionary over-enthusiasm. In those periods, Chou’s work became extraordinarily important to Mao for,
perhaps, he hoped that through it the stage would be set for another revolutionary leap.”

Without Zhou, Maoist China might have entered into a more anarchic state at the peak of the Cultural Revolution violence. Beginning in 1968, the extreme radicalism of the Cultural Revolution was gradually modified under Zhou’s leadership.

In September 1967, Mao supported and promoted the idea that the central government should send in military units to protect infrastructure facilities and areas that remained targets for the Red Guards. According to Harding, “While defending the disorder of the previous twenty months (“Don’t be afraid of making trouble. The bigger the trouble we make, the better”), Mao acknowledged that this troublemaking had served its purpose and should now be brought expeditiously to an end. ‘The car will overturn if it is driven too fast,’ Mao warned. ‘It is therefore necessary to be cautious.’”

Thus, the Red Guard factions were dismantled entirely in 1968, while Mao and the central leaders began the “Down to the Countryside Movement” in December during the same year. In this movement, which lasted for the next decade, young high school graduates living in cities were assigned to collectives and state farms in the countryside. This movement was in part a means of removing Red Guards from the cities to prevent further social disruption.

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122 Robinson, 1109.
123 Harding, 221.
124 Lieberthal, 115.
As it was almost impossible for Beijing to seek further Soviet assistance for development, Zhou Enlai believed that what his country urgently needed now was to obtain advanced technology and scientific expertise from elsewhere, such as from Canada.\textsuperscript{126} The Chinese hoped to escape from their own unproductive economic period and make up for acknowledged deficiencies in technological and scientific skills which the economic planning had failed to achieve.\textsuperscript{127} As Sylvia DuVernet states in her book \textit{Canada-China Cultural Exchanges} (1989), “As it emerged somewhat from the xenophobic period of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese bureaucracy was primarily interested in promoting scientifically oriented exchanges. Sports exchanges were located at approximately the same level of importance, and cultural exchanges followed.”\textsuperscript{128} Beijing, in other words, could edge toward the normalization of relations with Ottawa as part of a policy seeking recovery from the scientific, economic and technological setbacks caused by the Cultural Revolution chaos. In this regard, the PRC pragmatically saw that a diplomatic relationship with Canada was in the Chinese interest, as the Chinese government needed external help in order to deal with national disorder. In general, leaders in Beijing hoped that the scientific, technological and academic exchanges with Canada could help China to acquire Western knowledge and expertise.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{126} Frolic, 48.
\textsuperscript{127} Harbron, 19-20.
\textsuperscript{128} DuVernet, 99.
\textsuperscript{129} Harbron, 20.
Although he was a firm believer in the Chinese Communist ideals on which the PRC was founded, Zhou was often seen as the Chinese premier who moderated the excesses of Chairman Mao’s radical policies within the limits of his power. In order to help his country to effectively build up vital knowledge and skills in the late 1960s and the 1970s, establishing exchanges between Canada and the People’s Republic was essentially part of Zhou’s national recovery strategies.

Soon after the opening of Sino-Canadian relations, Jeanne Sauvé, federal Minister of State for Science and Technology, headed an official Canadian scientific delegation to the PRC for a specific discussion of mutual scientific exchanges between Beijing and Ottawa in September 1973. As a result, Beijing’s goals were partially achieved in this sense. During the same year, the Canada-China Scholars’ Exchange Programme (CCSEP) was initiated, which was an “official exchange program between the two countries designed to enhance Chinese scholars’ and professionals’ knowledge and understanding of Canada.” Marking its thirty-fifth anniversary this year, the program was indeed the result of an undertaking by Zhou Enlai and Pierre Trudeau. Astute and skilful both in diplomacy and domestic administration, Zhou Enlai has been viewed as the leader who kept the PRC on track during the turbulence of the Cultural Revolution. As Trudeau biographer John English recalls from his June

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131 DuVernet, 98.
132 Canada-China Scholars’ Exchange Programme (CCSEP) pamphlet, undated.
2006 conversation with Thérèse Gouin Décarie, an eminent psychologist and Pierre Trudeau’s friend, “Years later, when asked by Thérèse Gouin Décarie and Vianney Décarie who had impressed him most among world leaders, Trudeau answered immediately, ‘Chou En-lai [Zhou Enlai].’”133

Illustration 3.2
Jeanne Sauvé’s Scientific Mission to Communist China, September 1973

Jeanne Sauvé, Minister of State for Science and Technology, headed an official Canadian scientific delegation to the PRC. The trip took place a month before the prime minister’s official visit. This picture of Sauvé was taken a decade before her China trip, when she was still working as a broadcaster in the CBC studio. She went to China again in 1987 during her term as Governor General.

Source: CBC Archives

133 English, 351.
Conclusion:
A Crossover between the radical Cultural Revolution and the Quiet Revolution leading to Recognition

Around the time of the launching of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, Prime Minister Lester Pearson stated that establishing formal ties with the PRC at the time was a “desirable” step in theory, but “impractical” as conditions both within and outside Canada had not really matured.\(^\text{134}\) By using the terms “desirable” and “impractical,” Pearson was implying that the political climate and timing for official recognition of the PRC were not favourable, even though the direction was correct. A month before his retirement from politics, Lester Pearson said jokingly in the House of Commons that when the time was right, he “might even be the first Canadian representative in Beijing.”\(^\text{135}\)

Political climate is a crucial element in political decision-making. To understand Canada’s relationship with China it is necessary to look back to 1968, to the beginning of an important watershed. The initiatives of 1968 in Sino-Canadian rapprochement took place in the midst of the Vietnam War, a politically sensitive period in many ways. Earlier, the direct confrontation of Canadian troops with Chinese soldiers in the Korean War put recognition totally out of the question during the 1950s.\(^\text{136}\) The PRC was feared and stereotyped by the Canadian public at the time. Nevertheless, things began to change

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\(^{135}\) House of Commons, *Debates*, March 27, 1968, 8125.

\(^{136}\) Ronning, 179.
domestically on both sides by the end of 1960s. The year of 1968 was a time when Canadians welcomed youth, colour and liveliness. They were tired of the same old faces that had long dominated the political scene for so long. In the high spiritedness that surrounded Canada’s Centennial year, they wanted fresh thinking. And Trudeau seemed the ideal man. Not only was the new minister of Justice much younger than most politicians, he had also done exciting things like visiting Communist China in a period when it was isolated from the Western world. Unlike his predecessors on the Parliament Hill, he had a new approach to foreign affairs and a deep commitment to an independent Canada. Trudeau expressed these views in response to a political studies professor’s question about his administration’s foreign policy direction during a special discussion session in Grant Hall on the evening in November 1968 when Trudeau received an honorary degree at Queen’s University:

We feel there has been too much emphasis traditionally on our historical relations with Europe, and Europe alone. We’ve lost a little bit in the sense that in our cultural policy, in our immigration policy, and even in our economic policy, everything seems to flow either as far as the country south of us, or across the Atlantic. We have not yet, I think, sufficiently realized that Canada is not only in the Western Hemisphere but it is also a Pacific nation, and not merely an Atlantic nation. Therefore, we want Canada to play its role in international affairs, in areas where it can play its role realistically.

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137 Toronto Star, July 2, 1967.
138 Sound Recording of Prime Minister Trudeau holding a Question and Answer session at Grant Hall, Queen’s University, November 4, 1968. Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University Archives, 1968.
Interestingly, during the same period of time in 1968 while Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai sought to repair the domestic damage brought by the early radical phase of the Cultural Revolution, Prime Minister Trudeau was at Queen’s University explaining his new diplomatic mission to expand relations with Pacific countries, which certainly included the People’s Republic of China. As Trudeau further explained his points to Queen’s students, “…because we’re a Pacific nation, because trading will be more and more important across the Pacific...both towards Japan, China, and Asiatic nations, and towards South America. We’re doing as much as we can in trying to intensify our commercial, cultural and political relations [with these countries]…” 139 With Trudeau’s election and the growth of his administration’s desire to strengthen ties with the Pacific region, it seemed that 1968 brought the best chance in over a decade for Canada and China to normalize relations. Moreover, at a time when Quebec was emerging from the darkness of Duplessis domination, along with the spread of strong Canadian nationalist values after the nation celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its Confederation, new circumstance clearly began to influence Ottawa’s China policy.

On the Chinese side, the PRC’s foreign policy had proved to be damaging during the era of radicalism, as it hurt Beijing’s reputation in the world. Meanwhile, just when Beijing leaders were alarmed about the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution also brought

139 Ibid.
serious turbulence on the domestic front. The Red Guard movement had
descended into factionalism, disorder and violence.\textsuperscript{140} Industrial output fell, and
the withdrawal of Soviet experts only worsened the problem. For China, in order
to find an immediate solution, the establishment of official relations with Canada
would probably promise access to North American technology and strategic
skills. Chinese leaders like Zhou Enlai hoped that Canada-China academic
contacts could be boosted after rapprochement, so that such exchanges would be
able to help the PRC catch up with crucial expertise. At the end, Ottawa and
Beijing witnessed the birth of different initiatives after recognition, such as the
official Canadian Scientific Delegation to China in 1973 and the Canada-China
Scholars’ Exchange Programme, which was approved by Zhou and Trudeau.

In brief, Trudeau seemed to be the man to lead the course of Sino-
Canadian relations into the seventies. The newly-elected prime minister was able
to lead Ottawa’s China policy to a new path because circumstances were
favourable for each camp to make a move towards the other. Occurring during
the same decade, China’s Cultural Revolution and Quebec’s Quiet Revolution
manifested the horror and the hope of a significant post-World War II year—
1968—and marked a watershed in the history of Sino-Canadian relations.

\textsuperscript{140} Harding, 184.
Chapter 4

Mao and Trudeau: Two Extraordinary Players

Introduction: Compatible Personalities?

The normalization of Canada-China relations took place during the Vietnam War, creating political complications for both countries. The friendly but somewhat awkward Canada-China relationship was established in the late 1960s by an interesting set of personalities. Pierre Trudeau was seen by many as an intellectual with strong beliefs in liberal political philosophy, who not only wanted to make Canada more independent but to bring China back into the international community and enable Beijing to occupy the China seat in the United Nations. This was a task that none of his predecessors had dared to assume. On the other side was Mao Zedong, the Communist poet and philosopher who firmly controlled his country and was committed to spreading the beliefs of Maoism abroad.

In a number of ways, people may find some striking similarities between the two political leaders. For instance, Mao Zedong’s philosophy was laid out and compiled by his followers in the famous Little Red Book around the same time that Pierre Trudeau wrote important articles outlining his political philosophy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Both political players were particularly interested in women. While groups of young women were chosen by the Chairman’s aides and attended to his desires in the Zhongnanhai complex, Trudeau’s diaries and biographies have revealed his remarkable relationships and intimacies with different women. Mao was a philosopher-king who possessed autocratic power, whose words were regarded as supreme commands. In Ottawa, as the prime minister of a new majority government, Trudeau too had great power to determine his country’s foreign policy direction on Parliament Hill. As he said in the late 1960s, “I had to push them [staff at the Department of External Affairs] on it. They kept sending me memos on reasons for delay [of recognition] and I kept sending them back saying I wanted to move.” After forming his own administration in 1968, Trudeau was finally able to place a stronger priority on his country’s relations with Beijing, leading to the historic “October Handshake” between the two governments in 1970.


143 English, 162-163.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that the role of individual leaders should not be overlooked when one examines this remarkable chapter of Sino-Canadian history. After all, there was nothing inevitable about Ottawa and Beijing coming to terms. Rather this normalization of relations came about because of the compromises, chances and decisions taken by two extraordinary players—Trudeau and Mao. In short, the two men were right for one other.

**Trudeau’s Trips to China: His Sympathy for the PRC**

Pierre Trudeau is much respected in the PRC. As Paul Gessell has noted in the *Ottawa Citizen*, “A few years ago, some Chinese diplomats in Ottawa listed the top three cultural exports they hoped to receive from Canada. They included, in no particular order, Celine Dion, Cirque du Soleil and the writings of (and about) Pierre Trudeau.”¹⁴⁵ In examining the improvement of Canada’s relations with China, the significance of Trudeau’s personal impact should be taken into account.

Born into a wealthy family in Montreal in 1919, Pierre Elliott Trudeau was always eager to know about the outside world. As a young adult, Trudeau traveled Europe, the Middle East, India and China. The future prime minister

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had indeed been in Shanghai witnessing the Chinese people’s hardships and struggles during the Civil War in 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek was about to retreat to Taiwan. Trudeau was a changed man while he returned to Canada, having become more socialist in politics and sympathetic to the poor. And his personal sympathy for the problems faced by poor workers became more apparent when he was involved in Quebec’s 1949 Asbestos Strike as a labour lawyer. In Chinese eyes, unlike his predecessors in Ottawa, Trudeau showed more understanding and sympathy for the Chinese people and their difficult lives at the time. After all, it was remarkable for Chinese to encounter a western political leader who had visited their country at the end of the Chinese Civil War. Trudeau’s descriptions of China in his books were sympathetic. He wrote, for instance, that one of his books had the “intention of correcting the notion of the Yellow Peril... The reader will have grasped one point, that the Asiatic tidal wave is not going to engulf the earth tomorrow.”

146 His co-authored book, Two Innocents in Red China, signaled a personal and later political commitment to this approach. The book also pointed out that China had been invaded forty times in the last century and a quarter, and was struggling to improve the conditions in which meant ninety-four percent of the population lived in only two-fifths of the country area.

147 Ibid, 150.
Compared to Pearson, Diefenbaker and St. Laurent, as a prime minister, Trudeau was praised for his better understanding of the PRC and his daring in foreign policy. Soon after he was elected, Trudeau commented on his country’s relations with the PRC by making it clear that “we shall be looking at our policy in relation to China in the context of a new interest in Pacific affairs generally.”

Overall, I think several elements in Trudeau’s personal experience influenced his attitudes towards the PRC. For instance, in September and October of 1960, Trudeau became one of the first Canadians to travel to the PRC with official permission since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. As China was virtually a closed society in 1960, this was rare among western personalities at the time. For Trudeau, it was significant to have personal contact in order to promote understanding and good relations among different countries. As Trudeau wrote in his memoirs, he always liked to travel “on foot with a backpack, in third-class coaches on trains, on buses in China and elsewhere, and aboard cargo boats on rivers and seas.”

In a CBC Radio interview recorded in 1968, Jacques Hébert, Pierre Trudeau’s traveling companion and co-author of Two Innocents in Red China, described Trudeau’s appreciation of the Chinese culture and memorable moments of their thirty-two-day tour in China, “In China [Trudeau] would never think of asking for bacon or eggs. He would have the snake soup or whatever.” As the memoir stated, “it seemed to us imperative that the citizens

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of our democracy should know more about China.”\textsuperscript{151} The authors state that they went to China to improve their understanding. Later, as a newly-elected prime minister, Trudeau acted on his personal conviction, supporting foreign policies that gave a more pragmatic character to Cold War détente by encouraging practical interaction and negotiations.

Would the Sino-Canadian rapprochement have occurred if Trudeau had not visited China? Trudeau claimed himself that he became committed to establishing official ties with the PRC during his 1960 trip. During his 1973 official visit to Beijing, he declared: “Thirteen years ago I sat in this Great Hall [of the People] thinking some day we should recognize this great nation.”\textsuperscript{152} Bruce Gilley concurs, observing that “Pierre Trudeau’s own motivations in opening links with Beijing… were formed during a visit to China that same year, 1960.”\textsuperscript{153} As part of his outlook as a “citizen of the world,” which is the title of John English’s recent biography of Pierre Trudeau, the future Liberal Party leader was inclined to seek areas of accommodation and understanding with Beijing.\textsuperscript{154} Both the Taiwan problem and the Cultural Revolution, in Trudeau’s eyes, would neither change his mind nor delay his decision.

\textsuperscript{151} Hébert and Trudeau, ix.
\textsuperscript{153} Bruce Gilley, “Reawakening Canada’s China Policy,” Canadian Foreign Policy, March 2008: 122.
Illustration 4.1
Two Innocents in Red Shanghai

Pierre Trudeau’s travelogue was published in Chinese in 2005. The Chinese edition of Two Innocents in Red China, featuring both Trudeau and Hébert on its cover, was launched in Shanghai.  

In his account of his visit to the PRC in 1960, Trudeau admired the Chinese for their enthusiasm for building a new China, and praised Mao for having inspired his people.  

However, in the eyes of critics, such as Jung Chang and Jon Halliday in their biography of Mao Zedong, Trudeau wrote “a starry-eyed book… which rejected reports of famine.” Chang and Halliday make reference to the fact that Trudeau and Hébert visited China in the midst of the Great Leap Forward, which was responsible for the deaths of up to fifty million people in peacetime. Bruce Gilley shares this view and criticizes Trudeau as well, “Like the French philosopher Michael [sic] Foucault—who

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156 Hébert and Trudeau, 150.
157 Chang and Halliday, 452.
praised Maoist China as having formed an ‘intimacy’ between party and people and who later engaged in a bizarre flirtation with the Iranian Revolution—Trudeau harboured a deeply illiberal admiration for Mao’s China…” Similar to Chang and Halliday’s views, Gilley condemns Trudeau for describing a fantasyland and ignoring the Great Leap famine in his travelogue, “The greatest famine in human history was reaching its awful height just as Trudeau and company traveled around China, yet our future prime minister sees only tables groaning under corn cake and spinach… Trudeau, to my knowledge, never apologized for his flippant descriptions of Maoist China.” Although visiting dignitaries could not see the effects of famine during visits to China in 1960, Trudeau later had opportunities to learn of the disaster. So what may be said about Trudeau’s uncritical reception of Maoist China and what role did this attitude play in the normalization of relations between Ottawa and Beijing?

Another important question is how might Trudeau respond to Gilley’s accusation? Would he apologize for “blind acceptance” of Maoism? A similar question has been raised about Trudeau’s attitude toward the violent crackdown in Beijing on the pro-democracy movement of 1989. In a new foreword to Two Innocents in Red China published in 2007, Pierre Trudeau’s son offered his own view on these difficult questions. As Alexandre Trudeau recalls, his father was indeed planning to take his family to visit China with him in 1989, but the family

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159 Gilley, 122.
160 Ibid, 122-123.
trip was postponed until 1990 due to the Tiananmen incident. Even a year later after the crackdown, Tiananmen was still on everyone’s mind within his family. As Alexandre Trudeau’s describes his discovery during that summer trip of 1990, “There was something puzzling about my father’s attitude toward China. Why did he not dwell upon the Tiananmen incident with our Chinese hosts?” It turned out that the former Canadian prime minister did not want to judge the Chinese for Tiananmen Square. In Alexandre Trudeau’s own words, “In allowing the Chinese government the mistake of Tiananmen, he was accepting his own inability to change the course of things.” Could the same be said about the elder Trudeau’s uncritical attitude toward the Great Leap famine? In a newspaper interview, Alexandre Trudeau responded to concerns such as those that Gilley, Chang and Halliday have expressed: “My father was very much for dialogue. Harsh judgments or condemnation of China would have shut down the possibility of dialogue and further diminished the West’s ability to influence China.” I agree that Pierre Trudeau was rejecting Cold War dogma in order to pursue increased dialogues with China. To illustrate with Trudeau’s own words in his 1967 speech, “So that is why we are doing it [establishing ties with the PRC]—because of its potential, because of its advance in many fields, [because it]
is a very important partner in the human dialogue.” It is significant that the word “dialogue” appeared frequently in public explanations of his policy.

When it comes to Trudeau’s decision to open relations with Beijing, Alexandre Trudeau’s analysis of his father’s motivation is quite valid. For the prime minister, it was certainly a mistake to leave such a large country in resentful isolation. Indeed, in this way of thinking, an improvement of Canada-China relations and more contact between the two countries would bring Communist China under more democratic influence. For Trudeau, an official recognition could do more than invite Beijing back to the world community. Sino-Canadian rapprochement would possibly be able to expose the PRC to democracy as well. Moreover, Trudeau was often quoted as saying that no significant international problems could really be solved without the active participation of the populous People’s Republic. And Beijing’s exclusion from international organizations would limit the United Nations’ ability to deal with significant issues such as nuclear proliferation. History had already shown Stalin’s creation of xenophobic feelings among the population of the Soviet Union to be a painful consequence of Western countries’ lack of recognition of the USSR for many years. The supporters of normalization of relations considered that if Canada and other countries really were to follow a similar path in policy toward China, another Iron Curtain would cut off Communist China

for the subsequent years. As Trudeau explained his China policy to the public before the election of 1968, “One of the facts of life was that the People’s Republic of China was the government of something like a quarter of a mankind… we felt we could not continue playing the game of pretending they did not exist in the society of nations…”\textsuperscript{166} It was in this context that Pierre Trudeau held the strong view that it was necessary to understand and be prepared to deal with the PRC for the sake of world peace.

Trudeau’s predecessors had lacked sufficient interest in China to risk the disadvantages connected with the official recognition. As F.Q. Quo and Akira Ichikawa comment on the previous Canadian prime ministers’ approach on Maoist China before the Trudeau administration, “in retrospect, Ottawa’s wait-and-see attitude, prompted by an overcautious diplomacy, contributed to its loss of control over the issue of recognition.”\textsuperscript{167} Pierre Trudeau decided to follow his work toward recognition of the PRC because he was personally committed to diplomatic dialogues and to diversification in Canada’s external relationships.

\textbf{Mao’s Calculation: Using Canada to Deal with Taiwan}

On the PRC side, Mao Zedong played a crucial role in Sino-Canadian relations because his approval of any establishment of formal ties was required.

\textsuperscript{166} Crenna, 17.
\textsuperscript{167} Quo and Ichikawa, 388.
Mao would make the final decision whether to accept what Ottawa had to offer at the negotiating table. One of Mao’s motivations for the normalization of relations with Canada, a so-called “American satellite,” related to President Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, his long-time political and military rival. Mao’s government not only expected Canada to de-recognize the Republic of China in Taiwan, which was a close ally of the United States, but also hoped to gain Ottawa’s vote and support in the United Nations to replace Taipei’s seat in that organization. As Pierre Trudeau analyzed Mao’s mindset and the cross-straits political dynamics in his travelogue, “The government of Mao Tse-tung [Mao Zedong] seems to take the attitude that it needs the world no more than world needs it… Time is on its side, and China is in no hurry—except on one point: Taiwan. The occupation of this island by Mao Tse-tung’s implacable and, so to speak, personal enemy constitutes an intolerable affront to the Communists.”

Since the Republican period, Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek had been a pair of bitter rivals. The two had worked together in a Guomindang-CCP alliance under Sun Yat-sen’s leadership but after Sun died Chiang took over the Guomindang and in 1927 struck violently against the CCP. Chiang later sought to destroy the CCP soviet in Jiangxi province during five military campaigns, eventually driving Mao and his comrades from southern China. After half-hearted efforts to cooperate in the military struggle against Japan from 1937 to 1945, the CCP-Guomindang struggle resumed. After losing the mainland to the

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168 Hébert and Trudeau, 150-151.
CCP’s forces in the Civil War of 1946-1949, Chiang and the Guomindang re-established the Republic of China (ROC) in Taiwan. Mao declared that Taiwan was a sovereign part of the new China and would be taken from the Guomindang rebels at the earliest opportunity. Conflict seemed inevitable. In a 1971 interview on CBC television, Chiang reiterated his belief that the Nationalists would recover the mainland: “I have full confidence that the Chinese mainland shall and will be recovered. My confidence has never wavered a bit.”  

For its part, the leadership in Beijing had been expecting an invasion by Chiang’s forces since the early days of the PRC. According to Adie, “By 1965, China’s leaders had been waiting for sixteen years for the U.S. and Chiang Kaishek to attack. The late [PRC] Marshal Chen Yi told the international press ‘my hair has turned grey in waiting.’ But World War III never came.”

During the late 1960s the leaders in Beijing were aware of intensive interaction between Washington and Taipei at the time. Military action against them seemed to be actively in preparation. The United States stood by an early promise to support Chiang and had provided the Taiwanese with naval protection, military materials and other assistance over the years. The presence of American ships off the coast of Taiwan during particularly tense times in PRC-ROC relations perhaps helped persuade Mao not to launch a military invasion. PRC forces were not in a position to invade Taiwan and Beijing had no wish to

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risk war again with the Americans so soon after the Korean War. So as the issue of the White House’s support for Taiwan remained outstanding, political leaders in Beijing tried to tackle the “Taiwan problem” by placing indirect pressure on Chiang Kai-shek’s government with moves toward better relations with countries which seemed to be the kind that the People’s Republic could do business with. Pierre Trudeau’s Canada was obviously one such country.

Because the two Chinas of Chiang and Mao had been in a state of confrontation since the Nationalists’ retreat to Taiwan in 1949, it is also important to understand Canada’s relations with the ROC. First, it is important to note that Canada and China began contacts in the mid-nineteenth century when groups of Chinese people came to Canada for gold and for jobs such as railway work. During that time, consular protection for these migrants was needed and the Qing government established two consular offices in Canada in 1909. Later, the ROC government continued this practice. And at the time when the Shanghai area was occupied by Communist forces in May 1949, Canada had recently established a Consulate-General in Shanghai and assigned George S. Patterson as Consular-General. But after the establishment of the PRC on October 1, 1949, Ottawa failed to give immediate recognition to Mao’s government. China’s new government then imposed restrictions on the operations of the Consulate-

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General in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{172} Subsequently after Beijing did not approve Patterson’s replacement in 1952, Ottawa closed the Consulate.\textsuperscript{173}

The Taiwan issue became critical in Canada’s relations with the PRC. For instance, when there were differences between Beijing and Ottawa during the rapprochement negotiations, the most crucial one had to do with the status of Taiwan. Mao Zedong emphasized that Taiwan was an inalienable part of Chinese territory, but Ottawa insisted that it was not appropriate either to endorse or to challenge such position. While Mao wished Canada to de-recognize the ROC, Ottawa tried to avoid betraying Taipei. Despite this, the Chinese leaders were quite comfortable in dealing with Canadians. One reason for this was that Canada, unlike the United States, decided not to set up an embassy in the Republic of China in Taiwan. Conversely, the ROC maintained an embassy in Ottawa until 1970 when Canada recognized the PRC.

During an interview in 1968 with a delegation of Chinese Canadians protesting against the possible recognition of the PRC in 1968, Mitchell Sharp, the Secretary of State for External Affairs at the time, emphasized that it had not been decided to recognize Communist China unconditionally, but only if a satisfactory arrangement could be arrived at.\textsuperscript{174} The inference was that the Trudeau administration would try to sidestep the Taiwan issue. At one point, Sharp even added that having a diplomatic relationship with both the PRC and

\textsuperscript{174} Toronto Star, December 2, 1968.
ROC at the same time was not out of the question.\textsuperscript{175} In other words, the Secretary was hoping that Ottawa could somehow maintain formal ties with Taipei even after recognizing Beijing, although that already seemed unlikely. The Canadian government generally hoped that the Chinese were eager to establish relations, and would not jeopardize the Sino-Canadian negotiations by raising the question of the status of Taiwan. But Ottawa was wrong. According to the \textit{Toronto Star} on June 23, 1969, Sharp expressed the view that the Chinese diplomats were conducting the negotiations slowly so as to avoid losing face by appearing too eager.\textsuperscript{176} It was clear that Beijing was actually in the driving seat throughout the whole negotiations of the Taiwan question.

According to Yao Guang, the Chinese Ambassador to Canada (1972-1973) who was also in charge of the Sino-Canadian negotiations in Beijing between 1968 and 1970, his side knew that it could convince Ottawa not to follow a “two-China” or a “one-China, one-Taiwan” policy.\textsuperscript{177} The Chinese side, as Ambassador Yao suggests, respected the Canadian government’s attempt to avoid the issue, but he also points out that “we are patient. We were prepared to wait for one hundred years or two hundred years until the Canadian side was ready. That was our policy.”\textsuperscript{178} The Beijing leaders were determined to get Canada to acknowledge that Taiwan was an inalienable part of China, and their

\textsuperscript{176} \textit{Toronto Star}, June 23, 1968.
\textsuperscript{177} Frolic, 45.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid, 45.
calculation was that the Trudeau administration would be willing to make compromises.

Therefore, when the Secretary of State for External Affairs was later asked again about the Taiwan issue by opposition MPs, he changed his position in the House: “I would hesitate to answer that question, but it [breaking diplomatic ties with Taipei] is quite possible.” In the end, the two sides agreed to a compromise with a Canadian statement of “taking note of” Beijing’s position about Taiwan in their joint communiqué. The Canadian government’s rationale behind the “take note” formula was that Ottawa was not in a position to endorse any Chinese government’s claims about its own territorial sovereignty. At the end, the official statement clarifies that “the Chinese government reaffirms that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China. The Canadian Government takes note of this position of the Chinese government.” It is important to point out that, in the Chinese view, Mao’s government also compromised during the negotiations, as it only required Canada “to take note” of its sovereign claim to Taiwan, to which Ottawa agreed.

Canada, while granting the official recognition to the PRC, severed simultaneously its diplomatic ties with the ROC. In a formal notification to the government in Taipei, Canada abrogated state-to-state diplomatic relations with

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179 House of Commons, Debates, January 24, 1969, 4768.
180 House of Commons, Debates, July 21, 1969, 11384.
Taiwan as an independent state. For Chiang Kai-shek’s government, Ottawa’s decision to de-recognize Taiwan was a serious blow. Spokesman in Taipei immediately warned that Canadian values were incompatible with those of a Communist system. Besides sending Ottawa a strong protest note, the ROC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also made an announcement expressing its position on the Sino-Canadian rapprochement:

The Chinese Communist regime was condemned by the United Nations as an aggressor in 1951 for its armed intervention in Korea...The Canadian Government, ignoring its friendship of a long standing with the Government of the Republic of China and in disregard of repeated representations by most of the free countries in the Asian and Pacific area, initiated talks with the Chinese Communists in early 1969. It is a matter of utmost regret that the Canadian should have finally announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Chinese Communist regime, one which poses the greatest single threat to world peace and security. It is unwise for the Canadian Government to extend a helping-hand to the illegitimate puppet regime at a time when the latter is already tottering. By this same act the Canadian Government has done serious damage to the rights and interests of the Republic of China. It, therefore, must be held solely responsible for all the consequences that may arise from its action.

In Taipei’s view, the Canadian government alone unequivocally and seriously damaged diplomatic relations with the Republic of China by recognizing Beijing as the legitimate government of China. Taipei worried that the severance of diplomatic ties would have domino effects on other nations. In Bruce Gilley’s

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183 China Post (Taipei), October 14, 1970.
view, “To abandon democratizing Taiwan for Maoist China without any promises was shameful…”

After all, throughout the Sino-Canadian negotiations, Mao’s government remained unyielding on the recovery of Taiwan. As the PRC-ROC confrontation often took the form of competition for the right to represent China in various international organizations, such as the United Nations and its Security Council, and armed conflict across the Taiwan Straits, Beijing unquestionably succeeded in this round by not only getting Ottawa to de-recognize its rival Taipei, but also receiving the Canadian support to unseat Chiang’s government in the UN. With his careful political calculations, Mao benefited from his “October Handshake” with the Trudeau administration.

Illustration 4.2
“Taiwan must be Liberated!”

This poster from 1966 shows representatives of the People’s Republic, including Chinese minorities and soldiers of People’s Liberation Army, holding Red Books and weapons. The Chinese slogan at the bottom can be translated as: “Taiwan must be liberated!”


184 Gilley, 123.
Conclusion: A Meeting of Pragmatists

To sum up, it is important to emphasize the centrality of the two extraordinary players in establishing formal ties between their two countries. From both the Chinese and Canadian perspectives, the development of Sino-Canadian relations during the late 1960s depended heavily on Trudeau, as he believed that the PRC should be brought into the mainstream of international politics. At the same time, the Chinese leaders felt that Trudeau exemplified the type of Western leader who could be dealt with successfully. According to B. Michael Frolic, from the Chinese perspective, Pierre Trudeau was the catalyst.\textsuperscript{185} Ambassador Yao Guang expressed this frankly, “Trudeau was brave...we do not know why Trudeau was able to do this and not Pearson.”\textsuperscript{186} In China, Trudeau was perceived as being more cosmopolitan and open in his world view than his predecessors. The Liberal Party’s official position on recognizing China resulted from Trudeau’s attitude as “a citizen of the world” as well as the leader’s personal sympathy for those countries that were still not part of the international community.

On the other side of the negotiation table, Mao Zedong was also a key figure. While others in the Politburo might have felt that the PRC needed new

\textsuperscript{185} Frolic, 45.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, 45.
friends, until Mao decided himself, this discussion could not happen. Mao was thus a significant factor in China’s establishment of formal relations with Canada.

Canada’s rapprochement with China occurred because of determined and pragmatic individuals. And the final push towards the rapprochement must also be connected with Trudeau’s elections in 1968 to be the leader of the federal Liberal Party and later the new prime minister.¹⁸⁷ Both leaders recognized an opportunity to enhance their political reputations and further national goals.

¹⁸⁷ Quo and Ichikawa, 387.
Chapter 5

Conclusion:
A “Great Leap Forward” in Canada-China Relations

The CCP leaders had regarded Canada with a mixture of admiration and distrust. Then in the late 1960s, normalization became possible between the two countries. Early in 1971, a delegation from the PRC, each member wearing Chinese fur hats and military-style suits, arrived in Canada and spoke in Chinese to a CBC Television reporter. With the translator’s assistance, the Chinese chargé d’affaires, Xu Zhongfu, read from his prepared statement telling the CBC reporter he was “convinced that our relationship will develop in a good way. I and my colleagues will make our due efforts.”\(^{188}\) With their initial arrival at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel, the same hotel in Montreal where John Lennon and Yoko Ono had conducted their love-in and recorded “Give Peace a Chance” about two years earlier, the delegation witnessed first-hand how Canada and the PRC were giving a chance to the peaceful opening of diplomatic relations. In his first Canadian television interview, Xu emphasized his message that Canada and China shared values such as a belief in peaceful co-existence and equality for their citizens.\(^{189}\)

\(^{188}\) “The National.” Host Lloyd Robertson; Reporter Ken Mason. CBC Television, February 1, 1971.

\(^{189}\) Ibid.
Scholarly understanding of this important moment in history has focused on the level of “high politics.” Literature on Sino-Canadian relations and the historic rapprochement tends to focus on the international elite action, linking the end of Communist China’s international isolation with political dynamics in Washington and Moscow. As reviewed in this thesis in the chapter on “Beijing and Ottawa,” changing geopolitical circumstances had mattered to both Canada which was concerned with national autonomy, and to China which sought security from external threats. In the case of Canada, autonomy or independence referred to the conviction that national foreign policy should not be determined by its giant neighbour to the south. In past years, the issue of whether Canada should Maoist China was inevitably connected to Ottawa’s relations with the White House. Within this context, a policy shift and formal recognition of the People’s Republic of China would demonstrate independent thinking in the new national government. The decision to normalize relations with Beijing would serve as a showpiece of Canadian autonomy.

The “high politics” approach to analysis of the question of rapprochement between Canada and China has emphasized Communist China’s international security concerns, and regarded the rationale behind Beijing’s approval of rapprochement as mainly a concern to end the dangerous national isolation. Chapter 2 discussed how the rapprochement was made possible by the cleavage between the PRC and the USSR as the Cultural Revolution heated up the rhetoric in a quarrel in the socialist family. Although the relationship between the PRC
and the Soviet Union was never an easy one, the Chinese leaders realized that their country was seriously isolated from the outside world. China sought a friendship with Canada at a time when the Soviet Union seemed to be a major threat. The “high politics” approach is useful in showing that when the international Cold War environment was altered significantly, opportunities opened for Canada’s China policy.

The Canada-China meetings held to negotiate the normalization of relations, where security and the Taiwan issue were discussed, were conducted by diplomatic representatives focusing on concepts, documents, words and syntax. This was the apex of high politics. However, in divorcing Beijing’s and Ottawa’s foreign policy-making apparatuses from popular attitudes and the dynamics of domestic politics, the stand-alone “high politics” approach to understand the normalization of relations is insufficient. To fully understand the complexities of the origins of the rapprochement, the relevance of “low politics” conditions should also be considered. Discussion in this study of political climate argues that both countries’ domestic needs also played a crucial role in the rapprochement process. For instance, the socio-cultural changes in post-Duplessis Quebec and China’s desperate need for technical expertise and scientific development contributed to the motivations behind the “October Handshake.” As low politics may occur near to the people and voters, it is important to note that in both countries domestic concerns shaped politics as well and therefore should deserve equal focus and attention. The shift in Quebec
voters’ attitudes and the parliamentarians’ previous concerns about losing their electoral support demonstrated that ordinary people could also play a decisive role in the development of Sino-Canadian relations.

As Chapter 3 shows, sharp changes in Ottawa’s China policy were favoured also as a result of the significant growth of Canadian nationalism, which was brought by their country’s centennial celebration a year ago. At a time when many Canadians wanted to see more independent foreign policy direction, the time was right for Canada to make a move toward China. At the same time, the PRC’s domestic need for Canadian technology for industrial modernization encouraged Beijing to adopt a more outward-looking policy at the beginning of the Trudeau administration in Canada. This was similar to how Canadian businessmen, who hoped to look for a greater market for their products, were also supportive of an improvement of economic and political relationships between Canada and Maoist China. Hence, the impact of low politics and ordinary people on the decisions to normalize relations should not be underestimated.

A further contribution of this thesis to the scholarly discussion of Sino-Canadian rapprochement is the unconventional view that great forces did not necessarily determine the direction of Sino-Canadian relations. Individual leaders played significant roles. This approach has led to exploration of how Trudeau’s personal association with China and Mao’s long-standing rivalry with Chiang Kai-shek influenced their critical decisions about the normalization of
relations. Chapter 4 therefore focuses analysis at the level of two extraordinary individual leaders. The chapter discusses how Trudeau’s personal history brought him and Mao’s country together. Trudeau’s earlier encounters with China were key in his decision to seek normalization, providing him with the conviction needed to push through his policy. Pierre Trudeau has been described as the only Canadian prime minister in recent history who could have normalized relations with Communist China. As the former PRC Ambassador to Canada from 1972 wondered “we do not know why Trudeau was able to do this and not Pearson.”

Trudeau’s travelogues in China offer a valuable way of understanding the future prime minister’s view of the PRC and the critical diplomatic decisions approved by him. Looking at Trudeau as someone who as a young intellectual visited China during the Civil War and later during the Great Leap Forward, it is understandable that he worried that China—the most populous country on earth—was living in isolation. This strong personal conviction on Trudeau’s part was significant in the normalization of Sino-Canadian relations.

As for Mao Zedong, the Sino-Canadian negotiations demonstrated that the Chairman had Taiwan on his mind. Mao and Chiang Kai-shek had been bitter political and military rivals for a long time. After Chiang ruthlessly crushed the Communists in 1927 and launched “bandit extermination campaigns” against Mao and his comrades, Mao led the Long March to Yan’an

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190 Frolic, 45.
and consolidated his leadership while on his journey. While the “Chiang Kai-shek gang” was now occupying Taiwan and was being defended by Washington, Mao wished it to feel pressure and embarrassment. A new relationship with Canada, along with Trudeau’s de-recognition of Taiwan, could help achieve this objective.

As long as Trudeau and Mao were convinced of the need for rapprochement, they had the authority to direct their diplomatic staff to move the negotiations forward. Both were influential political figures within their own state apparatus. Thus, in this case, there were no paths in the history of Sino-Canadian relations that would determine how things would work out. Only the actions of individual political players could determine whether the normalization of Canada-China relations could occur. Given that the impact of personalities in understanding the China-Canada policy-making process has been deemphasized in modern historical research, this study has sought to fill a gap.

It is important to note that the impact of high politics, low politics and personal dynamics on the decision-making processes in Ottawa and Beijing are all significant. Not only did both sides have concerns about issues such as national autonomy and security, they were also preoccupied with domestic considerations as they leaned toward the formal establishment of diplomatic relations. Without the right individuals to push the initiatives ahead, however,
the negotiations between Canada and China could have failed. As illustrated by Trudeau’s sympathetic attitude toward China and his determination to recognize the PRC, a political leader’s internal and external worlds may come together to give direction to historical developments like the remarkable “October Handshake of 1970.”

In retrospect, Trudeau’s concern with ending the isolation of the PRC seemed very unorthodox at the time and, also dangerous because of Washington’s angry opposition. Now, as the People’s Republic has not only ended its isolation but is also welcoming the world to the 2008 Olympic games, tensions sometimes develop between Canada and China. In 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper was snubbed by the CCP leadership. As was widely reported, Beijing delivered a diplomatic snub to Ottawa by rejecting a meeting between Harper and its President Hu Jintao because of disagreements between the two countries, including Canada's criticism of China's human rights record. While some critics argue that relations between China and Canada are currently in a bad state, others are more optimistic as Canada and China’s relationship continues to develop. As the academic and public discussions continue, Canada’s relations with the PRC should not be neglected. As Pierre Trudeau

\[193\] Gilley, 121.
once declared at Queen’s University, Canadians must always keep in mind that like China, Canada is a major Pacific nation after all.\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{195} Sound Recording of Prime Minister Trudeau holding a Question and Answer session at Grant Hall, Queen's University, November 4, 1968. Kingston, Ontario: Queen’s University Archives, 1968.
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