

Remarks to a Reception for Canada-China Friendship Society

Gary Levy

Co-President of CCFS

January 20, 2014

Excellency Zhang Junsai,

Your excellency, on behalf of the Canada-China friendship Society I want to thank you for the kind invitation to this reception. It is an occasion our members look forward to each year. This is a special event for me as it is my first official function as the new co-president.

I say co-president because our Executive discovered, to paraphrase the words of a famous former female Mayor of Ottawa, Charlotte Whitton that “it takes at least two men to do the work of one woman.” We were fortunate to have had a very good woman, Lorraine Farkas, as our President for the last 4 years. I want to thank her for her tremendous contribution.

I want to thank the other members of the executive who have undertaken to help fill Lorraines shoes.

Our Co-president, Roy Atkinson, is unable to be here as he had a previous commitment – in Arizona -- but no matter how good the weather is there I am sure he is going to regret missing this event.

The Society had a very full year in 2013 with outstanding speakers, several of whom are here tonight. I want to thank them for their support of the Society

The topics included:

- Leadership Change and Economic Policy
- China’s Innovation Strategy
- Investment in Canada by State Owned Enterprises
- The Labour Union movement in China
- Challenges to Canadian Foreign Policy.

Not all the topics dealt with economics and politics. One session looked at the history of political art in china, another looked at the new National Museum. We even had a session featuring a contemporary Chinese Reggae Group.

We sent delegates to China for three events. A conference on urban development in Beijing was attended by Professor Benjamin Gianni, Crystal Sun and Gregor Campbell. We also sent two health professionals, Cal Martell and Helen Moscicky, to an international elder care conference in Nanjing. We also sent two students, Adèle Grandmaison and Kevin Chen to the International Youth Camp in Shanghai and by all accounts they had a wonderful experience. We will be sending two more students this year. We thank all the delegates for representing us at these events. We have a newsletter, an internet site and recently one of our members, Marilyn Collette started a China Book Club which meets monthly to discuss books on China.

The program for the coming year is equally ambitious. Our traditional banquet to mark the Chinese new year will be held on Sunday February 9. Open to members and non members, it is our main fund raising event and helps to pay for all the other projects. So if you would like to support the Society and enjoy a ten course meal please consider coming out to this event. You can register and purchase a ticket here, after the reception, or you can buy a ticket online.

Among speakers scheduled for the coming year we have the current Mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson, who will speak about his visit to China last year. We hope to have a session on the influence of Confucian ideas. A professor from the School of Architecture at Carleton has agreed to speak about sustainable cities in China. Our next speaker, in February, will be Jeff Fuchs who recently chronicled his 8 month journey on one of the world's great trade routes, the Tea Horse Road stretching 6000 kilometers through the Himalayas and traversing a dozen cultures.

We hope, at some point during the coming year, to work with other interested groups to sponsor a Chinese Film Festival.

As you mentioned, Mr. Ambassador, in your remarks there is a long history of people to people relations between Canada and China. Many of our members are extremely knowledgeable having travelled, studied or worked in China. My interest is much more recent and my knowledge more modest.

I visited for the first time in 2006 after many people told me incredible things were happening in China. I went and discovered they were right and have returned four times visiting various parts of the country.

Whatever the Canada-China relationship has been in the past, and there have been good and bad periods, I am convinced that China will become more and more a source of inspiration and ideas for Canadians.

In my own limited experience I can think of several areas:

Our transportation planners, for example, should be inspired by the marvelous high speed rail system. (The Shanghai to Beijing train, which is about the distance of Ottawa to Winnipeg is done in under 5 hours -- with two stops!)

Our politicians and public servants should be seeking ways to incorporate some of the discipline found in the five year planning process into our much more chaotic public policy process.

Our economists should be examining the operation of the autonomous cities concept and the new urban free trade zones that have brought tremendous development.

Our political scientists and lawyers should familiarize themselves with the “one country two systems” philosophy and the Basic Law that successfully integrated the disparate interests of Hong Kong and mainland China.

Even our environmentalists could learn something from the enthusiastic way China has developed its national park system having created more than 225 national parks since 1992 The ones that I have seen, tiny Putuoshan in the east and the large Zhangjiajie National Forest in Hunan province are amazing places.

Speaking of parks I think urban planners in every Canadian city could take a lesson from China about the intelligent use of public space in urban settings. I am sure the list could go on and on.

There will always be irritants between our respective governments. But as we have learned from many years dealing with our good neighbour to the south, the closer the relations the more the irritants.

Whatever is happening at the government level I believe the average Canadian has everything to gain from increasing engagement with China. It has been and will continue to be a great pleasure for our Society to work with the Embassy to further

that objective. Once again thank you so much for your hospitality this evening.
Happy New Year, Bonne anniversaire, Xīnnián kuàilè!