

The 2015 Canadian Election and Implications for China-Canada Relations

Gary Levy

Gary Levy is a Fellow with the Bell Chair in Canadian Parliamentary Democracy in the Department of Political Science at Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. He can be contacted by e-mail at infoparl@gmail.com

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I am going to speak about the recent election in Canada and its significance for China. Let me start with the conclusion. In my opinion the election result is good news both for Canada and for the relationship. In less than a year there will be a much more important election, in the United States, and I am not so confident that it will be good news. We can talk about that later but this paper will cover the following topics.

- Canada is not the United States
- An Historical Perspective on Canadian elections
- The Justin Trudeau Phenomenon
- The 2015 Election Campaign
- Engagement and Suspicion: China and Canada since 1970
- Implications for China-Canada Relations

Canada is not the United States

Canadians live beside the richest, most powerful country in the world. This is mainly a positive, and in any event, an unalterable fact. We are also accustomed to outsiders thinking we ARE Americans or that the differences between us are small and insignificant.

When you cross the border people look the same, speak the same language (except in Quebec which is French), drive the same cars, watch the same television shows and sports, shop at the same stores.

But it is no accident there are two (and not just one) nations in the north part of North American. Canada developed largely as a rejection of the American Revolution. Thousands of refugees fled north and made their home in what is now Canada. For years the two countries fought periodic land and sea battles over the border. The war of 1812 was the largest but not the only example.

There is much to admire about the United States but also some obvious differences from Canada. Gun control and the absence of a gun culture in Canada is one such difference. Race relations are fundamentally different in Canada due to the legacy of the Civil War in the United States. Our health care system is publicly funded and health care is widely considered to be a right rather than a commodity as it is in the US. And most importantly for this paper, our political institutions are British not American.¹

We follow the Westminster model. This involves different assumptions about the role of government. In the US system government is an evil to be checked and balanced at every level. Their founding fathers devised quite a sophisticated constitution designed to prevent the abuse of power. Not surprising gridlock is often the result since each institution, Senate, House, President, Courts can block the other.

¹ For a discussion of the differences between parliamentary and congressional government see Louis Massicotte, "So Close, and Yet so Far, Congressional Influences on Canadian Legislatures" in Timothy J. Power and Nicol C. Rae (eds.), *Exporting Congress? The Influence of the U.S. Congress on World Legislatures*, Pittsburgh University Press, Pittsburgh, 2006

The Westminster model is based on responsible government (means the government must maintain support of a majority in the House of Commons. It reflects an assumption that government is a neutral or even a positive force. A government with a majority in the House of Commons is a very powerful force (sometimes called an elected dictatorship). But that does not mean there are no checks.²

The checks are much more subtle. The most significant is simply self-restraint. No law says a government must resign if defeated in the House. It is an unwritten convention of the constitution. Similarly fair play and respect for opposition is central to a Westminster system. One of the greatest authorities on the Westminster system, Philip Norton, who is also a member of the British House of Lords has said that the distinguishing feature of the Westminster system is the concept of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.³ The second largest party is charged with criticizing the government and offering alternative policies and must always be ready to replace the government. No such concept is found in the American political system.

So the first point I want to leave you with is that in its essence Canada is a very un-American state and this is important for understanding the results of the October 19 election

The Conservative Party under Stephen Harper had embraced a more American approach to politics and its rejection signifies in many ways return to a more traditional Canadian approach to governance.⁴

² See Gary Levy, The Westminster Model: A Primer for New Members, *Hill Times* October 26, 2015
http://infoparl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/2015-10-26_westminster.pdf

³ Philip Norton, "Parliament and Political Parties, Speaker's Lecture Series," Democracy Live (24 January 2014),
online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/25879961>

⁴ A number of books have been written about the Harper approach to government. See for Brooke Jeffrey, *Dismantling Canada, Stephen Harper's New Conservative Agenda*, McGill-Queen's Press, 2014.

The 2015 Election in Historical Perspective

As shown in the following table Canada has been governed by two parties, Liberals and Conservatives since 1867 although the latter have changed their name on two occasions.⁵

An Overview of Canadian Governments and Prime Ministers 1867-2015

Party	Dates	Years	Prime Minister(s)	Majority	Minorities
Conservative	1867-1873	6	Macdonald	2	0
Liberal	1874-1878	4	Mackenzie	1	0
Conservative	1878-1896	18	Macdonald and others	4	0
Liberal	1896-1911	15	Laurier	4	0
Conservative/Unionist	1911-1921	10	Borden	2	0
Liberal	1921-1930	9	King*	2	1
Conservative	1930-1935	5	Bennett	1	0
Liberal	1935-1957	22	King, St. Laurent	5	0
Progressive Conservative	1957-1962	5	Diefenbaker	1	2
Liberal	1963-1979	16	Pearson, P.E. Trudeau	2	3
Progressive Conservative	1979-1980	1	Clark	0	1
Liberal	1980-1984	4	P.E. Trudeau/Turner	1	0
Progressive Conservative	1984-1993	9	Mulroney/Campbell	2	0
Liberal	1993-2006	13	Chretien/Martin	3	1
Conservative	2006-2015	9	Harper	1	2
Liberal	2015-???	1	J. Trudeau	1	0

• Does not include one Conservative Government that took office without an election but only lasted a few days in 1925.

The two parties replaced each other 15 times but since 1900 the Conservative have been in office only 39 years and the Liberal for 76 years which has earned them the nickname Canada's Natural Ruling Party. One of the objectives of Mr. Harper when he came to office was to change this. He saw Liberals as enemies rather than adversaries. Any and all means were justified in order to defeat them and keep them out of power. This was a departure from a more gentlemanly and civil approach to politics more characteristic of British politics that was the norm in Canada before Mr. Harper.

The table shows a trend toward minority parliaments where no single party has more than 50% of the seats so it has to count on support from other parties to stay in power. Canadians do not like coalitions and they have been tried only once during the First World War. Since 1957 we have had 11 majority governments and 9 minorities. None of the minorities were coalitions such as the British had from 2011-2015.

⁵ For more information on Canadian elections see Lawrence Leduc, Jon Pammett, Judith McKenzie and André Turcotte, *Dynaties and Interludes*, Dundurn Press, Ottawa, 2010.

The Table does not show the existence of minority parties of which there have been many since 1921 and their existence is directly related to the increase in minority government. The most important minority party is the New Democratic Party founded in 1921 and renamed in 1961. It is roughly the equivalent of the British Labour party, left wing, pro trade union although it was more an agrarian protest party at first.

In the 2011 election the NDP became Official Opposition thanks to overwhelming success in Quebec and the weak performance of the Liberal Party.

At the start of the 2015 campaign the NDP was leading the polls and widely predicted to become the first non-Liberal non Conservative party to form a government at the national level.

Another important minority party is the pro Quebec Independence Bloc Québécois which formed the Official Opposition in 1993 when the Conservatives were reduced to 2 seats. The Bloc itself was almost wiped out by the NDP in 2011 but managed to increase its number to 10 in the recent election. It only contests seats in the province of Quebec but Quebec has the second most number of seats in Parliament (78/338) so it is always an important battleground.

The Green Party has contested the last several elections but has only succeeded in electing one member, its leader, Elizabeth May, a well know environmentalist before she went into politics.

A very significant minority party was the Reform Party, which elected 52 members in 1993 and almost became official opposition except that the Bloc had 54. Reform brought a different philosophy to Parliament. They were a populist party more suited for an American political system than a Westminster one. They opposed the existence of the appointed Senate which is one of two Chambers in the Canadian House, arguing that legitimacy comes only from elections.

More importantly they embraced the Ronald Regan/ George Bush approach to government. They believe the free market does a better job than government in dealing with the needs of the people. They wanted lower taxes and privatization of some government services. They were sympathetic to military spending and generally pro-American foreign policy. They supported the US invasion of Iraq which was not supported by the Liberal government of the time.

Former Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a member of the Reform Party and was elected to Parliament in 1993. He later resigned to work in the private sector for a lobby group called the Canadian Taxpayers federation. The Reform Party was largely based in western Canada and it lost elections in 1993, 1997, 2000 before it decided to merge with the old Progressive Conservative Party to form the present Conservative Party of Canada..

Stephen Harper returned to public life and succeeded in merging the parties. He was elected leader of the newly formed Conservative Party and led the party in the 2004 election where he narrowly lost to the Liberals. The main issue was a spending scandal and the Liberals were unable to shake the image of the party as corrupt and irresponsible with public money. Harper won a minority government in 2006. Another minority followed in 2008 and finally in 2011 Canadians gave him a majority that allowed him to implement his platform from 2011-2015.

The Justin Trudeau Phenomenon

By now most people know that Justin Trudeau is the son of a previous Prime Minister, a rare but not unprecedented occurrence in western democracies. Perhaps less well known is the extent to which Justin Trudeau held a special place in the Canadian imagination even if he never became Prime Minister.

In 1971 Justin Trudeau became the first baby born to a sitting Prime Minister in nearly a hundred years. Several of Canada's Prime Ministers had been unmarried. Others were married but childless. The rest had grown children by the time they came to office.

Not only was Justin Trudeau's arrival much anticipated he was born on December 25, Christmas Day. In the Christian religion babies born on that day are always considered rather special.

Despite his father's attempts to shield him from the media, Justin's childhood was recorded by newspapers and photographers and his every step followed eagerly by Canadians. When his parents underwent a very public divorce Justin's welfare was the topic of speculation and gossip. He and his two younger brothers were raised by his now single father and Justin sometimes accompanied the Prime Minister on foreign trips where he met world leaders and famous people..

The elder Trudeau was a constitutional lawyer, a philosopher and a writer. In his youth he had been a left wing radical who travelled widely in Europe and Asia even visiting China in 1949 just before the founding of the PRC. He was engaged in launching the so called "Quiet Revolution" in his home province of Quebec which brought that province into the modern era.⁶

Justin followed a very different path. He studied literature and drama. He became a high school teacher of math and French. He devoted time to projects involving the family foundation but he showed little interest in politics.⁷

A watershed moment in his life occurred when Pierre Trudeau died in 2000. Justin gave the eulogy which was broadcast on national television. His touching farewell to his father left many Canadian with tears in their eyes.

In 2008 he decided to run for Parliament but the Liberal Leader at the time declined to allow him to run in his father's old seat or to give him another safe seat. So he chose a riding in the east end of Montreal that was held by the pro-independence Bloc Québécois. Trudeau became one of just 14 Liberals elected in Quebec.

His father had never enjoyed the campaigning involved in democratic elections. Justin, to the surprise of many, proved very skilled at the art of electoral politics and he was re-elected in 2011 when the Liberals were reduced to just 7 seats in Quebec and 32 in all of Canada, the worse performance in their long history.

The search for a new Liberal Leader began shortly after the election and Mr. Trudeau did not initially seem interested in the job. He kept a very low profile in Parliament and spent much time on outside speaking engagements. Many in the media viewed him as an intellectual lightweight whose only claim to fame was his father's name.

In April 2012 a number of celebrities were asked to help raise money for the Canadian Cancer Society. Trudeau accepted and challenged a member of the Conservative government to a boxing match with all proceeds from the sale of tickets to go to the Cancer Society. Trudeau had

⁶ In 1949 he was an active supporter of workers in the Asbestos Strike and he edited a book on the subject which argued that the strike marked the beginning of resistance to the clerical establishment and the business class that had long ruled the province. He later became founder and editor of *Cité Libre*, a dissident journal that helped provide the intellectual basis for the Quiet Revolution.

⁷ See Justin Trudeau, *Common Ground*, Harper Collins, Toronto, 2014 for more information on Trudeau's life.

taken boxing lessons since he was a child and no government members were willing to step in the ring with him.

However a young Conservative Senator, Patrick Brazeau, accepted the challenge. Brazeau had a background in martial arts and was a former reservist in the Canadian Armed Forces. He had a several kilo weight advantage and it was widely expected he would give Trudeau a physical beating.

Against the advice of his friends, family and political colleagues Trudeau went ahead with the fight which was scheduled for three rounds in a local convention centre. It was hugely attended and raised \$300,000 for the Cancer Society. The fight generated enormous publicity and took on a life of its own, even becoming the subject of a film produced by the National Film Board.⁸

Trudeau was clearly in better physical condition and the fight was halted by the professional boxing referee in the third round. Trudeau was declared winner with his opponent exhausted and in danger of being knocked out.

The publicity surrounding the fight put Trudeau back in the public spotlight at a time when many Liberals were wondering aloud if there was any future for the party. Some were suggesting it might be necessary to join with the NDP in order to defeat the Conservatives.

In October 2012, Trudeau launched his bid for the leadership of the Liberal Party amid much criticism for his lack of experience and the absence of substantial policy positions. He did reject any idea of a merger and in the end Trudeau won the leadership with over 80% of the vote.⁹

Asked what he thought about Pierre Trudeau's son former Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney said "he's young, articulate, attractive – a flawlessly bilingual young man. What's not to like with this picture? Anybody who treats Justin Trudeau with scorn or derision or underestimates him, does so at his own peril."¹⁰

When he became Leader the polls put the Liberals ahead of the Conservatives but over the next 12 months Trudeau made a number of comments that eroded his credibility, particularly when taken out of context and used in political advertisements by the Conservatives.

For example he said:

- Given the proper policies "budgets would balance themselves"
- Jokingly, perhaps the Russians invaded Crimea because they were in a bad mood having lost the World Hockey Championship to Canada.
- Stephen Harper's decision to send six fighter planes to join the Americans in bombing ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria was a reflection of the Prime Minister's insecurity about his masculinity.

At one point he was asked which country he most admired. Trudeau replied that he had considerable admiration of China for the way it had been able to turn its economy around and lift

⁸ *God Save Justin Trudeau*, https://www.nfb.ca/film/god_save_justin_trudeau

⁹ *Toronto Star*, April 14, 2013

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/04/14/justin_trudeau_wins_liberal_leadership.html

¹⁰ CTV News, April 8, 2013, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/brian-mulroney-on-justin-trudeau-what-s-not-to-like-1.1229406>

so many people out of poverty. This provoked outrage from a number of right wing groups who claimed it was an endorsement of dictatorship.

In part due to these missteps Mr. Trudeau saw his support in the polls drop from well over 35% to the low 20% leaving the party in third place behind the NDP and the Conservatives when the 2015 election campaign began..

The 2015 Campaign

The Conservatives were confident they could portray Trudeau as a young man who was simply not ready to be prime minister. They spend huge sums on advertising with this message including sarcastic remarks about his good looks and his hair which always seemed impeccably groomed.

Aside from a desire for change (Prime Minister Harper was trying for a fourth consecutive victory something not achieved since 1908) the economy was a big issue. Having finally balanced the budget after 6 deficits Mr. Harper promoted the same low tax, small government, free market agenda that has been synonymous with the new Conservative Party since it merged with the Reform Party in 2003. The New Democrats who led the polls also promised to balance the budget and to continue many of the Harper economic policies. They thought failure to do so would lead to heavy criticism about being big spending, irresponsible socialists so they ran a very cautious campaign. It was a fatal mistake.

The Liberals countered with a proposal for three years of deficits which they called investment and stimulus in order to promote growth, stagnant for a decade under Mr. Harper. Trudeau promised that after three years of stimulus he would balance the budget. Slowly over the long 78 day campaign this idea gained support and votes started to shift from the NDP to the Liberals with the Conservatives maintaining their 30% base.

Other issues emerged and the Liberals succeeded in portraying themselves as the clearer alternative to Harper. They proposed:

- to legalize and regulate the sale of marijuana,
- to cancel the purchase of the super expensive F-35 fighter planes
- to withdraw from the combat mission in Iraq and Syria (continue with training and humanitarian support).
- to repeal legislation to strip citizenship and deport dual citizens found guilty of terrorism or certain other serious crimes.
- To immediately accept 25,000 refugees from the Syrian civil war.
- To cut taxes for middle income Canadians and raise taxes on the wealthy

Mr. Trudeau benefitted from a new approach to leader's debates. The traditional two national televised debates (in English and French) were cancelled because the Conservatives wanted several privately sponsored debates. They expected Mr. Trudeau would be unable to match the more experienced Mr. Harper in discussion of public policy.

Before the first debate the Conservative Director of Communications said that if Mr. Trudeau showed up wearing pants he could probably consider it a success.¹¹ After 5 of these debates in two languages Mr. Trudeau was widely considered to have won a couple of them and he had dispensed with the perception that he was not ready to be Prime Minister.

The Harper style of governing was also very much an issue. His decade in office had been characterized by a lack of respect for opposition, by a win at all cost mentality, the use of some draconian procedures to limit debate. He pushed some the conventions of responsible government nearly to the breaking point.¹²

The media also turned on Mr. Harper. For years he had refused to hold press conferences and even during the campaign he imposed strict limitations on the number of questions by the press and tightly controlled public access to campaign events. Local Conservative candidates were encouraged to avoid the traditional all-candidates meetings. The Conservatives spent millions on negative advertising including a desperate one near the end that claimed Justin Trudeau would legalize prostitution.¹³

Mr. Trudeau improved as the campaign went along and he tried to project the sunny ways of optimism. In a marked departure from Conservative rhetoric that had demonized and attempted to destroy the Liberal Party for more than a decade, Mr. Trudeau told a cheering crowd that “the Conservatives are not our enemies, they are our neighbours” a line repeated in his victory speech.¹⁴

After years of American-style vitriol, division and scare tactics Canadians were hungry for a return to slogans and attitudes that used to give the perception, if not the reality, of Canada as a caring, generous, society and Canadians as modest, tolerant, do gooders.

On August 4, 2015 the day the election began Mr. Harper made a rather unusual observation to journalists. He said “a national election is not a popularity contest” He repeated this in an advertisement at the end of the campaign where he added “this election is not about me.”

In fact it was about him and Canadians had grown to dislike Mr. Harper. For various reasons they discovered they liked Mr. Trudeau. Books and articles will analyze the 2015 results in infinite detail and no doubt there will be lessons for the future and theories about what it means. In the meantime one obvious conclusion seems to be that Popularity Does Win Elections. Since the election Mr. Trudeau’s approach has boosted his popularity and while economic and other problems will eventually bring him back to earth it is fair to say that for the foreseeable future Canada is embarking on a new and potentially exciting path or as he prefers to say, Canada is back on its old path.

Now what did this election mean for relations with China. In order to answer that question we have to look very briefly at the history of the relationship.

¹¹ *Toronto Star*, August 5, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/trudeau-will-win-debate-points-if-he-comes-on-stage-with-his-pants-on-tory-spokesman-1.3180169>

¹² See Gary Levy, *The Confidence Game*, *Inroads*, Issue 25, summer/Fall, 2009.

¹³ *CBC News*, October 15, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-election-2015-negative-ads-ethnic-media-1.3270527>

¹⁴ *Maclean’s Magazine*, October 4, 2015, <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/ottawa/trudeau-takes-his-fight-into-enemy-territory/>

Engagement and Suspicion: Canada China Relations since 1970¹⁵

The history of China-Canada relations since diplomatic recognition in 1970 shows periods of engagement and periods of suspicion. Before looking at some of the major events of the last 45 years it is important to note three events that happened before 1970.

- In 1938 a Canadian doctor, Norman Bethune, joined the Red Army in the war against Japan. He performed emergency battlefield surgery and trained doctors in the most difficult conditions before he died of wounds in November 1939. A poem about his heroism, written by Chairman Mao, was read and memorized by Chinese school children for decades.
- In 1960 a private citizen, Pierre Trudeau, traveled to China for 32 days in the midst of the Great Leap Forward. He and a friend recorded their observations in a book entitled *Two Innocents in Red China*.
- In 1961 a Conservative Government concluded the biggest single grain sale in Canadian history to China. This was done at a time of extreme food shortages in China and when the United States had a trade embargo on China.

Engagement and Suspicion: Canada and China Since 1970

Engagement officially began in 1968 when Pierre Trudeau became Prime Minister just eight years after his trip to China. He asked the Canadian embassy in Stockholm to initiate talks with the Chinese government. Diplomatic Relations were established in 1970 and the specific wording of the agreement became known as the Canadian Formula and was repeated by many other countries over the next several years as China became fully integrated into the international community.¹⁶

Embassies opened in 1971 and a small Economic mission, headed by the Minister of Industry and including politicians, government officials, and businessmen visited China. In 1973 Prime Minister Trudeau made an official visit to China. An agreement providing for regular trade meetings between the two countries was signed, Military attachés were exchanged and the Canada-China Scholar's Exchange Program was established as well as an agreement on Civil Air Transport.

In 1979 the Export Development Corporation provided China with a \$2 billion line of credit over three years to help Canadian companies secure export contracts. A Protocol on Economic Cooperation was signed and in 1983 a General Agreement on Development Cooperation covering such areas as agriculture, forestry, energy, communications, education, environmental protection, human resources, poverty reduction was signed.

¹⁵ See Paul Evan, *Engaging China*, University of Toronto Press, 2014 for a review of Canada-China relations under each Prime Minister from P.E. Trudeau to Stephen Harper.

¹⁶ For a discussion of events leading to diplomatic recognition see Chen Wen Zhao, "On the uniqueness and far-reaching significance of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Canada", Papers on Past and Future in China-Canada Relations, Conference organized by the Institute of Asian Research &, the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, Shanghai, November 10-12, 2010

In 1984 Premier Zhao Zhiyang, paid an official visit to Canada and became the first Chinese leader to address the Canadian Parliament.

Engagement continued for a time under Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. President Li Xiannian, made a state visit to Canada in 1985. In 1986 Canada helped to put together a consortium of public and private companies to participate in studies of the Three Gorges Hydro project. Prime Minister Brian Mulroney visited China. He offered a five year, 350 million line of credit to support Chinese purchases of Canadian goods. The two sides sign an Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Tax Evasion. The Canadian Assistance Programme for China was doubled to 200 million dollars

Problems began in 1989 after protests in Tiananmen Square. Canada recalled its Ambassador and the House of Commons unanimously condemned the actions of the Chinese government. Most governmental relations came to a halt and in 1992 three Canadian Members of Parliament, were expelled from China after meeting relatives of the dissidents and trying to organize a public demonstration.

Later in 1992 a five day trade Mission led by the Trade Minister marked restoration of some government to government relations. Canada promised to support China's membership in the GATT, forerunner to the World Trade Organization.

The election of a Liberal government led by Jean Chrétien in 1993 marked a full return to the politics of engagement. In 1994 Mr. Chrétien made the first Team Canada trade visit to China, bringing nearly 500 political and business executives with him.

In 1996 the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress visited Canada as did the Vice Premier and Foreign Minister. Atomic Energy of Canada Limited signed a contract with the China National Nuclear Corporation for the sale of two CANDU-6 reactors

In 1997 President Jiang Zemin paid a state visit to Canada after attending the APEC Meeting in Vancouver. During the visit the two sides agreed to build a 21st century-oriented China-Canada partnership and signed many agreements.

In 1999 Premier Zhu Rongji made a week-long visit to Canada. The two sides signed the Environmental Cooperation Action Plan, A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Combating Crime and three Protocols on Quarantine and Health Requirements.

In 2001, 2003 and 2005 Prime Ministers Chrétien and Prime Minister Martin led Team Canada trade delegations one of which was the largest trade mission in Canadian history with nearly 600 participants, eight provincial premiers and three territorial leaders. Dozens of agreements were signed including a strategic partnership which provided a framework for future relations..

The election of the Harper government in 2006 signaled a marked change in the relationship. In one of his very early speeches Mr. Harper said that human rights would play a much larger role in Canadian foreign policy. Regarding China he said specifically that Canada will not “sell out” important Canadian values to promote trade with China¹⁷. In 2006 Parliament conferred honorary Canadian citizenship on the Dalai Lama and the following year the Prime Minister met with the Dalai Lama in his parliamentary office causing the Chinese Embassy to protest the meeting as interference in China’s internal affairs.

In 2013 after much negotiation the China National Offshore Oil Company purchased Nexen, Canada’s 6th largest oil company for 15 billion dollars. The sale was approved by the Harper government but future sales to state owned enterprises would be made only in exceptional cases.

In 2014 the Canadian Foreign Minister went on national television to publicly accuse China of espionage by hacking into a National Research Council computer system in Ottawa . China accused Canada of making irresponsible accusations lacking any credible evidence. A few days later two longtime Canadian residents of China, Kevin and Julie Garratt, were detained and accused of stealing military and defence secrets.

Despite these irritants in the relationship many bilateral agreements were signed or extended in the Harper era including China’s loan of two pandas to zoos in Canada for a ten year period. Mr. Harper made two visits to China in December 2009 and in February 2012. President Hu Jintao visited Canada for G20 meetings in June 2010. During the Harper years the Canada-China Investment Treaty and the Canada-Hong Kong tax Treaty were signed and in 2015 Toronto became the first RMB trading hub in North or South America. Most changes came as a result of intense pressure by the Canadian business community and despite objections from certain members of the Conservative Party and its supporters.

What the New Government Means for China

One consequence of the Harper government’s suspicious attitude toward China is the relatively low importance many Canadians now place on relations with China. In 2013 almost three times as many Canadians had a cold or unfavourable view of China as had a warm or favourable one.¹⁸ Twice as many Canadians want even closer ties with the United States compared to those who would favour closer ties with China

Justin Trudeau did not say much about China during the election campaign but since becoming Prime Minister he made it clear he wants to take a different approach to international relations. He stated that henceforth professional public servants and diplomats rather than party officials are going to have greater influence in policy making.

¹⁷ *Globe and Mail*, November 16, 2006 <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/harper-promises-he-wont-sell-out-on-rights/article971520/>.

¹⁸ Paul Evans, *Engaging China*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2014, p. 77.

One of his advisors on the government transition was Peter Harder who is also president of the Canada China Business Council. Already some Canadian academics have pointed out the opportunities that the new government enjoys to improve relations with China.¹⁹

In November at the G20 meeting in Turkey Justin Trudeau had a brief meeting with President Xi. Mr. Trudeau said he wanted to set a fresh approach in the relationship.²⁰ The Chinese President said that his country would always remember the bold initiative of Pierre Trudeau in establishing diplomatic relations. A former Canadian Ambassador to China observed that China tends to associate the good times to eras when the Liberals are in power. The challenge, he noted, “will be to move the relationship beyond some nostalgic notion of Canada-China relations and advance Canadian interests with a really important global player.”²¹

Foreign policy may have changed since Pierre Trudeau’s time but there is likely still a “Trudeau family philosophy” when it comes to China. It is best articulated not by Pierre or even by Justin but by his brother Alexandre who updated his father’s book in 2007.

He wrote: “Our societies will be better served if we reach out to China, happily and innocently, if we explore its depths, marvel at its opacities and yes occasionally tremble with awe at its rumblings and missteps. Instead of fearing China, we should share as much as possible in the great adventure of its people.”²²

My hope is that by the end of the Justin Trudeau era this attitude will spread among more Canadians and if it does we may expect to see significant developments in all aspects of China-Canada relations.

Good relations begin at the top and I think it is clear that from the Canadian side we now have leadership that favours better relations and will work toward re-establishing our place as one of China’s oldest and best friends in the international community.

¹⁹ See Wendy Dobson and Paul Evans, *The Future of Canada’s Relationship With China*, Institute for Research in Public Policy, Montreal, November 2015. <http://irpp.org/research-studies/policy-horizons-2015-11-17/>

²⁰ Canadian Press, November 16, 2015, <http://www.nationalnewswatch.com/2015/11/16/trudeau-vows-to-strengthen-china-relations-as-xi-praises-vision-of-pms-dad/#.VkpFZ03lsv>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Alexandre Trudeau, *Introduction to Two Innocents in Red China*, 2007, p. 33.