

# INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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"Pacific Overtures"

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Peter Bird Martin  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
4 West Wheelock Street  
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755

Dear Peter,

There is something about an ocean vista that justifies staring out into space for hours at a stretch, watching for a sea change in the tide of human history; waiting in earnest for something that never happens. I have been hearing a lot of sweet music about the dawn of a New Pacific Century. What pulls me away from the alluring gravity of the phrase are contrapuntal concepts like national interest and Western Civilization and the mantra of the 1990s, "international competitiveness." As I stand facing West toward the Orient and think about a New World Order, one based on harmonized structures in a planetary political ecology, I am struck by the inclement facts of enduring racial animosity and ethnic conflict almost everywhere, even in Canada. Besides that, it is raining, raining, raining; instead of a tranquil Pacific sunset, all I see is fog.

Canadians who do not live in British Columbia often betray a jealous heart and a narrow vision by disparaging the self-indulgent trendiness of the place. They call this province "Lotus Land," and think that nearly everybody here has their head in the clouds. The critics are only correct in a literal sense. The weather forecast for yesterday, today, tomorrow and the foreseeable future is for clouds and rain with occasional sunny breaks. What this means is that at any given moment, somewhere way off in the distance, there are a few rays of light slanting downward towards a shimmering patch of saltwater swells. It is a constantly shifting circle of light on a distant horizon; somehow, it never reaches us, nor we it.

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Stephen Maly is an Institute Fellow studying the cultural and ethnic "nations" of Canada.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

I have been curious to learn what members of the Overseas Chinese community think about what's been going on recently in the People's Republic, so I went to see the closing ceremony of the Tiananmen Memorial Art Exhibition at the Asian Center on the University of British Columbia campus. The exhibit was called "Echoes After the Storm," and all the work was by young Canadians of Chinese ancestry. A piece by David Li, entitled "Light," was a 48" by 86" magnified photo image of heavy iron chains with sunlight filtering through, barely. Ka-Sing Lee's "The Square; 1989-90" was a photo collage with 26 faces, no names attached. I couldn't help but notice that 18 of these people, presumably victims of the Army crackdown, were wearing glasses. (There always seems to be a high correlation between overworked eyes and the fallen front ranks of modern revolutionary movements.)

There was also a big canvas signed "Mr. China" that featured a painted black melange of mangled spokes, wheels, and metal tubing against a white background. Apparently, the painting was meant to be seen as the vestige of a work of performance art. The printed explanation went like this:

Materials:       one thousand bicycles  
                  one tank

Performance:    15 days  
                  Video camera behind bikes  
                  Then a tank crashes through  
                  The performance is finished.

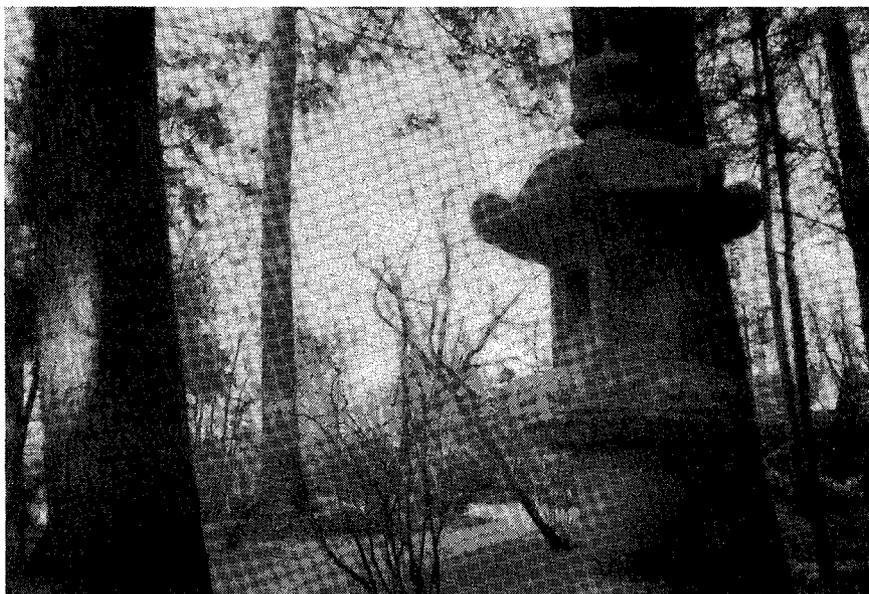
The last item in the show was a rock video in which standard shots of an assortment of musicians holding onto earphones and each other were interspersed with documentary film footage taken in Beijing during the huge demonstrations of June, 1989. There were pictures of a crushed bicycle, a woman in tears giving the "V" sign, young men with bloodied heads, and that unforgettable scene of a lone protestor standing in front of a tank. The chorus went: "People the world over/Stand up for Freedom/Remember Tiananmen Square." The video was replayed over and over again on the gallery's television monitor. The tune was inscribed in my memory bank the way a stylus cuts a groove into phonographic wax.

I joined a crowd of nearly 100 people to hear the personal accounts of Raymond Chan, an engineer at UBC and a member of the Vancouver Society in Support of the Democratic Movement in China, and Jiye Mao, a graduate student of commerce who also represents the Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars in Canada. Both young men recently returned from Beijing after brave but largely unsuccessful attempts to persuade Chinese government officials to allow imprisoned dissidents open, public trials.

Chan and Mao professed that the Communist regime is taking advantage of the world's focus on the Gulf war and intensifying its persecution of pro-democracy activists. I found out, in the course of these remarks and subsequent reading, that under Chinese law, defendants are permitted to meet their government-

appointed lawyers for the first time only seven days before their secret trials begin. According to a January 28 story by Sheryl WuDunn in the *New York Times*, about 98 percent of defendants are found guilty; the task of the lawyer is usually to plead for leniency rather than for acquittal.

After the closing ceremony, I stopped to rest inside the verdant cloister of the Nitobe Memorial Garden. My pamphlet described this 2.4 acres of organized stillness as "the most authentic Japanese garden in North America." I read the inscription on a plaque honoring Dr. Inazo Nitobe, an internationally known educator and "Apostle of Goodwill among Nations." Bright epitaph! Perhaps it is still reasonable to hope, notwithstanding ugly flaws in the neo-Confucian justice system, that a serenely amiable culture will evolve in the New Pacific.



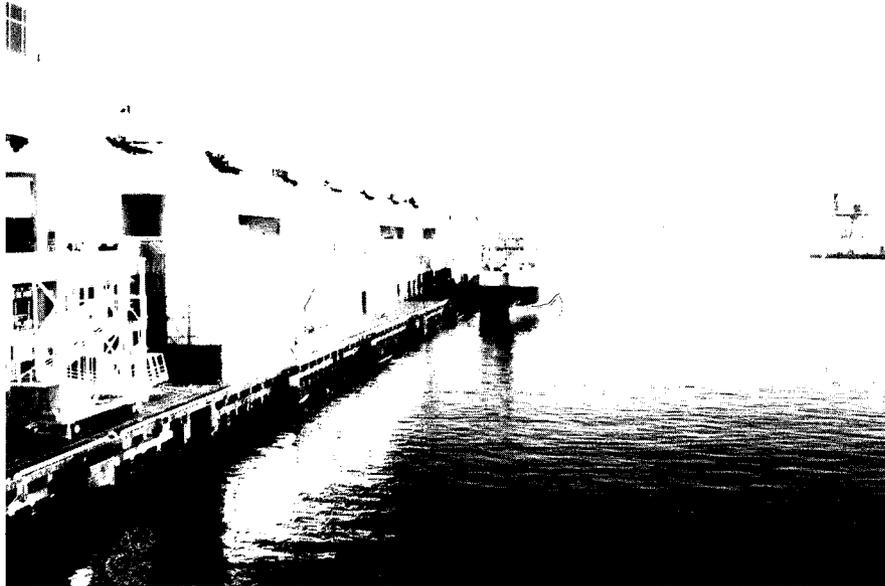
### Business As Usual?

"You know, of course," says Dr. Graeme MacDonald, President and CEO of the Asia Pacific Foundation, "that only three or four people were actually killed in Tiananmen Square." I don't know; I am taken aback. The brochure I carried home from the art exhibit said "hundreds and perhaps thousands" of Chinese citizens were killed in the brutal melee of June 4, 1989.

I had asked Mr. MacDonald if, in the course of his work to foster greater understanding among business executives and government officials from Canada and various Pacific Rim countries, he had also had to contend with pressure from locally-based groups in support of overseas dissident movements. He had caught my drift.

MacDonald cited recent findings by Asia Watch and human rights organizations to confirm his surprisingly sanguine body count. "There may have been hundreds of others killed in Beijing,

outside the Square, during the few days of rioting," he continued, and then hastened to add that he does not care for the current Chinese regime and did not enjoy living in China the several years he was there. "But," he said, "I see no reason why Canadian firms should not continue doing business with the PRC."



My discussion with Dr. Macdonald took place in the Asia Pacific Foundation's spacious sixth floor suite at Canada Place, the gleaming white edifice with teflon "sails" constructed to serve initially as the nation's pavilion at Expo '86 and thereafter as a trade and convention center. The building juts out into the harbor on Burrard Inlet like a giant cruise ship.

I looked out the window, and through a vertical column of swirling ducks and gulls and seaplanes and helicopters I saw twin peaks of bright yellow sulphur from the prairies, ready for loading onto bulk cargo freighters with names like Dragon Fortune and Kitaura Maru. It would be mixed with potash to make fertilizer: Western Canada's raw materials have played an important role in the ongoing socio-ecological drama of the Green Revolution, a cultural disaster of a different order, and a topic for discussion at some other time.

I have read that there is no cultural unity in the Pacific. The region hosts too wide a diversity of languages, customs, religions and political ideologies to engender a pan-Pacific identity. I have also discovered that there is no Chinese or Japanese emigre "nation" brewing on the western fringe of Canada. There is a long history of racial discrimination--it started when Chinese laborers were imported to help build Canada's railroads, and got worse in the 1920s, when the Exclusion Act kept them from coming to this country for several decades. There are large Oriental populations rooted in Canada's Chinatowns; Vancouver's is the second largest in North America,

after San Francisco. Most of the approximately 100,000 Chinese people in the Vancouver area are second or third generation Canadians. They speak Canadian English, often adding the familiar "eh" to the end of their sentences just like everybody else. This brings me to an unsurprising but still significant conclusion; the dominant culture of this part of Canada is business. What makes Vancouver different from other business-oriented localities in North America is the startling degree to which its economic future is being determined by recent arrivals from Hong Kong, Japan, China, and other countries in Asia.

### The New Competition

I went to a wine and cheese get-together in the Board Room of the Pan-Pacific Hotel, part of the superstructure of Canada Place. The event was hosted by UBC's Pacific Rim Club. There were 50-60 people in attendance, mostly students with Asian faces. There were some members of the business community bunched up around a platter of blue cheese, and I spied a VP from the Asia Pacific Foundation talking with the Club organizers. Senator Pat Carney, the most prominent of the scheduled speakers, did not appear. I had hoped to question her about a proposal she used to talk about during the Meech Lake constitutional debate: that British Columbia quit Canada (if Quebec does first, or Ottawa keeps alienating the West) and form a new state called "Pacifica." But she had been called away to Ottawa on urgent business, as politicians so often are these days in Canada.

Instead we heard a few student leaders invoke some platitudes about competitiveness and then listened to a bank executive with many years' experience in Hong Kong (but now resident in Vancouver) talk at great length about competitiveness. He addressed the audience as "the pillars of Canada," and exhorted them to apply their budding business sense to improving the country's balance of payments. I have never heard someone so fully immersed in commercial affairs appeal so directly to young people's patriotism. This is another aspect of the coming Age of the Pacific, wherein trade and finance are recognized explicitly as the foremost levers of power.

The banker outlined several of Canada's major difficulties in penetrating Asian markets, one of which is the lack of an aggressive mentality to match that of the Americans, the Australians, the Japanese, all of whom have been implementing ambitious trade strategies in the region for some time. He talked about a reluctance among Canadians to adapt themselves to the linguistic and cultural rigors of trading in such a diverse area.

The speaker finally reached his bottom line: "It is time we paid more credence to the skills and experience of our recent arrivals from Hong Kong and other parts of Asia." It sounded at first like a pitch to hire a poor immigrant, but it wasn't that at all. What he meant was that Pacific-oriented Canadians will

most likely have to go to work for a rich immigrant. In the British Columbia of the future, whether it stays part of Canada or not, more and more people will be employed by Hong Kong developers, Taiwanese trading families, and Japanese-owned holding companies.

In a book entitled *The New Landlords: Asian Investment in Canadian Real Estate*, Donald Gutstein presents a detailed verbal map of who owns what in downtown Vancouver. I eventually got lost in its maze of transactions costs, commission fees, property values, and the like, but the intended destination was clear enough, and graffiti artists had already pointed the way with a single painted word: Hongkouver. Gutstein also connects a lot of dots in a story the newspapers carried about the Regatta, an immense waterfront condominium complex we walk past on Sunday strolls. A lot of Vancouverites got plenty steamed when they found out that all of the units were advertised and sold in Hong Kong before anybody here could even make an offer.

Graeme MacDonald had a related story: in a long weekend search for a house to rent, he did not encounter a single landlord who is not Chinese, except for the two who were Japanese. He has dedicated his professional life to combat anti-Oriental racism, but believes a backlash is inevitable. I also talked with a woman who operates an immigrant counseling service. She has had to do a complete turnabout in the last year. Her firm used to try to sensitize Anglo-Saxon Canadians to the customs of the Orient; now the main task is to convince Asian newcomers not to engage in ostentatious displays of wealth (like buying each of the kids a BMW in which to drive to school), because it rubs long-time residents the wrong way. People from Hong Kong have difficulty understanding this attitude, I am told. They wonder why, in a business culture, success is greeted with resentment instead of applause.

### Lingua Franca

The language of business is English. A scant 10,000 people in this province speak French, Canada's other official language. You can watch French language television programs and listen to a francophone radio station in Vancouver. Both are heavily subsidized and meet national standards of quality. But a whole lot more people in this area watch the local production Chinese channel. We do that sometimes, just for fun. There are game shows and soap operas and action dramas. We're never really sure what's going on; the subtitles are no help, because they are written in Chinese (or Japanese?) characters.

Alice and I go to the Little Mountain Neighborhood Centre several times a week to help people learn English. We volunteered to serve as tutors in a literacy program funded by the Greater Vancouver School Board. (1990 was the U.N.'s International Year of Literacy, and now we are into a Literacy Decade.) Our trainer informs us that the main objective is to help local residents who never learned how to read or write to overcome a variety of fears and handicaps and end the crippling isolation of illiteracy. As it turns out, the vast majority of

people who show up at the Centre are immigrants from China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Japan, India, Pakistan, Fiji et. al. (About one quarter of Vancouver's residents are Asian-Canadians, and an estimated 70 percent of immigrants come from Asian countries.) As newcomers to Canada, they are eligible for five months of free English language training, but B.C.'s English as a Second Language (ESL) facilities are overwhelmed by the demand. There isn't enough money and there aren't enough teachers, so the literacy centers are filled up with literate New Canadians. Gary Pharness, the man in charge of tutor training, compares the government's inadequate financial commitment to someone who invites the new neighbors over for dinner but doesn't care to make sure there's enough food to go around.

This is interesting and sometimes exhausting work. The range of reading and writing skills one deals with at each session is remarkable. A man from Taiwan who has lived in Vancouver for six months can barely utter the English names of his children, let alone write them down. A Chinese woman who has been in Canada for nine years can read a large-type John Buchan novel but cannot write a wholly-intelligible page of prose. I work with a Chinese foursome who always sit together and read aloud and repeat nearly everything I say and then take turns giggling while the others dive into their dictionaries. We tutors frequently resort to drawing stick figures and hurried, Pictionary-style sketches to map out a concept, but how do you draw a word like courage?

Many of these "learners" (that's a bit of literacy jargon) are highly educated adults--they know more about everything than I can ever possibly teach them about the English language. Mr. Liao from Taiwan, for example, struggles valiantly with the few English words he has mastered to tell me that in his home country he was an international businessman. This affable, middle-aged guy can speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, a little Korean. His aim is to sell pollution abatement technology throughout Southeast Asia. His wife speaks better English than he does--she was a schoolteacher--and as he and I gesture and nod at each other she uses a hand-held computer gizmo that translates Chinese characters into English words and phrases. These folks are obviously highly motivated; no one has had to coax them out of a private cave of shame and self-doubt. But where are the representatives of that 15-20 percent of Canadians who the statisticians claim are functionally illiterate? Where's their competitive spirit?

We've been told to be wary of some of the Cambodian refugees with violent, shadowy pasts, and in other parts of the city there are scarily frequent reports of Asian gang warfare. In the last two weeks, people have been shot in the head, murdered in restaurants, and robbed of their jewelry in Chinatown. Just after the latest war news from the Gulf the other night on TV, we watched a squad of camouflaged cops with automatic rifles surround a suburban house in which two Chinese thugs were holding an elderly woman captive because of her son-in-law's gambling debts.

So far, none of these battles have spilled over into our neighborhood. The most disturbing encounter I've had is with a prim, elderly Japanese woman. After I helped her correct a set of neatly printed paragraphs about that day's successes in the shopping mall, she drew me in close to her powdered cheek and whispered, "Don't you think there are too many Chinese people here?"

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In his 1985 collection of essays entitled *Pacific Shift*, philosopher William Irwin Thompson talks about the "modernizing and deracinating world economy." He also says that Americans are "afraid that the 21st century could see Japanese momentum added to Chinese mass to create an unstoppable Asian velocity in the future." I submit that Canadians have the same fear, and would add that racism cuts across all sorts of ethnic and national identities; it's not restricted to the caucasian majority. Deracination cannot come soon enough in this North Pacific quadrant of the global economy.

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#### A Short Tale from "Hongkouver"

Alice and I found an ad for a used bed in the classifieds. We went to check it out. A short, thin, demure looking Chinese woman in slippers and those stretch pants with loops for the feet answered the door and bade us enter. This place was what irritated locals refer to as a "monster house," with tons of beige brick on the outside and palatial rooms filled with priceless furnishings inside. Everything looked new, fresh out of an expensive showroom. We were looking at millions of dollars worth of barely used everything. (The bed, fortunately, was going fairly cheap.)

It was hot inside. Dragging the mattress and box springs down the carpeted stairwell was hard work. Our hostess offered us a Diet Pepsi. We accepted, and sat in the kitchen, which had a view of the untouched back garden area and several of the much smaller, older houses in the neighborhood. She said she was moving back to Hong Kong. Her husband was already there.

"Is he in the diplomatic service or something?," I asked, leaping to a faulty conclusion.

"Oh, no no no--business," she replied. "Vancouver is too small, too slow; in Hong Kong there are more people and there is lots more money."

She and her husband would sell this house, she told us, which they had had built from scratch last year, and buy a cheaper one to rent out while they were away. That way, they could retain their residency in Canada but still make a fortune in Hong Kong. When they return to Vancouver, in three or four years, they could raze the rental unit and build another monster. Their

apartment in Hong Kong would simply be abandoned "when the Communists come in." She seemed to have the big picture all worked out, but was still in a bit of a quandary over whether to sell or store the furniture.

On July 1, 1997 (Canada Day!), China will assume full sovereignty over the British colony. Canadian immigration authorities expect several more waves of middle class immigrants from Hong Kong well before the deadline. This genial woman's story helped to confirm some understandings about what constitutes lots of money and middle class status in Hong Kong society. The business columnists say ten percent is considered a good return on investment in Canada, whereas in Hong Kong sharp businesspeople (many of whom are women) double and sometimes triple their money in as many years. In China Tide, journalist Margaret Cannon says the typical middle class family makes between \$50 and \$75 million per year; only those who earn over \$100 million annually are considered upper class. The lady with the bed insisted she was "merely" in the "upper middle" category.

As we finished our drinks, she confessed a minor indulgence. "I bought a Louis Vuitton handbag the other day. I'm not sure why, really--they cost so much and they're really just like any other handbag." Then she broke into a big smile. "It's because my sister has three Louis Vuitton's already. Isn't that ridiculous?!"

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One of the connecting tissues between this anecdote and a more general understanding of British Columbia's cultural trajectory is the federal government's investor and entrepreneur categories for immigrants. The fast-track to Canadian citizenship is to invest a minimum of \$350,000 in B.C., Ontario or Quebec (\$250,000 in the other provinces) and keep the money parked there for five years. To date, only about 500 people have fulfilled the pricey investor requirements, but they have brought tens of millions of dollars into the economy. Entrepreneurs must convince Canadian immigration authorities that they have the wherewithal to set up a new business or offer new incentives to old ones. As Margaret Cannon explains the rules, "they must provide hands-on management and, above all, they must provide new jobs or retain ones that would otherwise be lost." About three-quarters of all business immigrants fit this category; the remainder are self-employed--generally accountants, engineers, and franchise owners. Since the program was initiated in 1986, British Columbia has received about 30 percent of the total number of all types of business immigrants. Their presence has not gone unnoticed.

During each of the last two years, about 200,000 people emigrated to Canada. Half of them came from Asian countries, and most of these have settled in Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. By the year 2000, there will be over one million more

Canadians of Asian origin. Many will be poor, but others will command enormous sums of capital and occupy positions of influence and authority in Canada's largest metropolitan areas.

People preoccupied with exports and imports will probably view the influx with alacrity--what better way to forge strong commercial ties with the rapidly growing economies of Asia than to have Asian-Canadians at the helm of big business. ESL will probably become a major industry. Vancouverites in particular will have to learn to accept their landlords, or become more competitive.

Cheers, and Gung Hay Fat Choy! (Happy Chinese New Year)

*Stephen Maly*



Dr. Sun Yat Sen Park, Chinatown, Vancouver, British Columbia

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