



Kim Richard Nossal, “An ‘A-Strategic’ Power: Canada, China, and Great Power Transitions,” in *After Afghanistan: Reflections on Canadian International Security Policy*, eds. James Ferguson and Francis Furtado (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 151–61. (Page turns indicated thus: [152].)

In the assumptions that underpin the notion of strategic rationality in international affairs, governments pursue foreign and defence policies that advance the national interests of their respective countries. Even when governments appear to behave in ways that ignore this calculus, national interests will eventually push governments, including Canadian governments, toward rational strategic behaviour. Canada’s approach to the Asia-Pacific region, however, suggests otherwise. In the twenty-five years since the end of the Cold War, Canadian foreign and defence policy in the region has been driven not by strategic rationality but by what, for want of a better term, might be characterized as “astrategic” rationality.

The word *astrategic* captures an important notion. It describes an approach to foreign and defence policy not informed by the sustained, logical, or interrelated ideas that one normally finds at work in strategic thought and international relations. Instead, it is grounded in a mixture of personal and idiosyncratic ideas about the world, electoral gamesmanship, and ad hoc responses to external pressures. There is no better example of this than how Canadians and their governments have responded to the rise of China. In many countries, the emergence of China as a global power has prompted strategic debates about how best to manage the emerging power transition.¹ In contrast, Canadian policy towards China has evolved in an entirely ad hoc way, with short-term domestic [152] political and economic goals prevailing over any serious strategic debate about China or the politics of power transition.

This chapter examines why Canada is an astrategic power. Ordinary Canadians, who do not appear to be upset when their government eschews strategic rationality, mirror the Harper government’s astrategic approach. As such, there is something deeper at work in Canada’s

¹ For example, Quansheng Zhao and Guoli Liu, eds., *Managing the China Challenge: Global Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009), which surveys national debates in the United States, Japan, the European Union, India, Southeast Asia, and Latin America about the rise of China.

strategic culture.² In particular, Canada's policy towards China confirms the importance of geographic location in shaping a country's strategic culture. Simply put, Canada's proximity to the United States has conditioned Canadians to avoid thinking about world politics. Indifference to a changing balance of power overseas naturally follows.

Great Power Transition Theory

No academic enterprise depends more on the assumptions of strategic rationality than the burgeoning literature on great power transitions in global politics. The dominant assumption is that, when relations among the great powers are in flux, smaller powers must make strategic choices. In this circumstance, states choose from a toolkit of strategic options drawn straight from classical balance-of-power thinking about international relations. This school suggests that countries will engage in bandwagoning or balancing strategies or variations of them: soft or hard balancing, complex balancing, hedging, or accommodating.³ Although the binary bandwagoning/balancing approach is highly contested, it is a not-uncommon way of thinking about how states are responding to the rise of China.⁴

However, this way of conceptualizing the responses of large, middle-sized, and small countries to China's rise assumes that those countries will make strategic decisions on the issue. In other words, a country's government will make a series of strategic decisions, usually following, or accompanied by, discussion among the attentive public, on the most appropriate way to respond to the shifts in global politics produced by China's emerging prominence as a global power. The broader public discussion is likely to be marked by an engagement among state officials and academics, those in think tanks, peak associations, non-governmental organizations, and media commentators. This engagement is likely to be publicly articulated so that the broader public has some sense, however inchoate, that a discussion on the issue is occurring.

² Alan Bloomfield and Kim Richard Nossal, "Toward an 'Explicative Understanding' of Strategic Culture: The Cases of Australia and Canada," *Contemporary Security Policy* 28, 2 (2007): 285–306; Kim Richard Nossal, "Defending the 'Realm': Canadian Strategic Culture Revisited," *International Journal* 59, 3 (2004): 503–20.

³ See, for these various options, Robert Ross, "Balance of Power Politics and the Rise of China: Accommodation and Balancing in East Asia," *Security Studies* 15, 3 (2006): 355–95; Gilbert Rozman, "South Korea and Sino-Japanese Rivalry: A Middle Power's Options within the East Asian Core Triangle," *Pacific Review* 20, 2 (2007): 197–220; Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, 1 (2005): 7–45; Evelyn Goh, "Great Powers and Hierarchical Order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing Regional Security Strategies," *International Security* 32, 3 (2007–8): 113–57; Evan S. Medeiros, "Strategic Hedging and the Future of Asia-Pacific Stability," *Washington Quarterly* 29, 1 (2005–6): 145–67; Evelyn Goh, "Understanding 'Hedging' in Asia-Pacific Security," *PacNet* 43, 31 (2006), <http://csis.org/media/csis/pubs/pac0643.pdf>; and David Chan-oong Kang, *China Rising: Peace, Power, and Order in East Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁴ For critiques of bandwagoning/balancing, see Mark Beeson, "The Declining Theoretical and Practical Utility of 'Bandwagoning': American Hegemony in the Age of Terror," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, 4 (2007): 618–35; Terry Naramore, "China and Europe: Engagement, Multipolarity, and Strategy," *Pacific Review* 21, 1 (2008): 87–108; and Mark Beeson, "Hegemonic Transition in East Asia? The Dynamics of Chinese and American Power," *Review of International Studies* 35, 1 (2009): 95–112. Also see Rosemary Foot, "Chinese Strategies in a US-Hegemonic Global Order: Accommodating and Hedging," *International Affairs* 82 (2006): 77–94.

[153] In most countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such a process of strategic discussion and decision making is unfolding. The debate is particularly pronounced in smaller countries, especially South Korea and Australia.⁵ In each of these countries, power transition theory, however flawed its premises might be, is at work.

However, power transition theory does not anticipate the case of a country that will be affected by great power changes but where such strategic discussions and decisions do not take place. Canada is such a country. After the Conservatives under Stephen Harper defeated the Liberal government of Paul Martin in the general election of January 2006, the new Conservative government quickly abandoned the Martin government's approach to China, marked by an attempt to develop a "strategic partnership" with Beijing.⁶ But the Harper government never made a set of clearly articulated strategic decisions about how Canada should respond to China and its emerging place in global politics. On the contrary, there was a pronounced strategic silence on the issue of China. Although Prime Minister Harper and members of his cabinet gave a number of speeches on China between 2006 and 2015, none addressed China's rise and its strategic implications for Canada.

Since China's emergence as a major economic power, there has been some discussion among Canadian elites on Canada's policy towards China, but that discussion has tended to focus almost entirely on the economic dimension of the Sino-Canadian relationship, albeit with a contrapuntal discussion of Chinese intelligence, espionage, and cyber-attack activities in Canada.

Most importantly, there has been no debate in Canada about how to respond to a rising China. If Canada is bandwagoning, balancing, accommodating, or containing China, one would not know it from Canadian debate or policy behaviour. Instead, there is a clear assumption in Canada that the impact of China's rise on broad patterns of global politics is not sufficiently important to warrant public discussion.

Canada's Approach to China

During the Harper era, Canada's approach to China was clearly driven by narrow interests that were predominantly economic and electoral. The broad outlines of the Harper government's China policy are well [154] enough known that they do not need to be rehearsed here in detail.

⁵ See Derek McDougall, "Responses to 'Rising China' in the East Asian Region: Soft Balancing with Accommodation," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, 73 (2012): 1–17; Ross, "Balance of Power Politics"; Rozman, "South Korea"; David C. Kang, "Between Balancing and Bandwagoning: South Korea's Response to China," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9 (2009): 1–28; William Tow and Richard Rigby, "China's Pragmatic Security Policy: The Middle-Power Factor," *China Journal* 65 (2011): 157–78; James Manicom and Andrew O'Neil, "Accommodation, Realignment, or Business as Usual? Australia's Response to a Rising China," *Pacific Review* 23, 1 (2010): 23–44; Michael Wesley, *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia and the Rise of Asia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011); Hugh White, "Power Shift: Rethinking Australia's Place in the Asian Century," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 65, 1 (2011): 81–93; and Baogang He, "Politics of Accommodation of the Rise of China: The Case of Australia," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, 73 (2012): 53–70.

⁶ Wenran Jiang, "Seeking a Strategic Vision for Canada-China Relations," *International Journal* 64, 4 (2009): 891–909.

Essentially, the Conservatives came to power in February 2006 with a distinctly critical view of China as an authoritarian dictatorship for which the new government would have little time. In 2006 and 2007, relations between the two governments became exceedingly frosty. The Harper government went out of its way to goad Beijing by undertaking initiatives such as giving the Dalai Lama honorary Canadian citizenship and welcoming him to Ottawa on what was tantamount to a state visit, and giving asylum to one of the dissidents who had splashed paint on the portrait of Mao Zedong in Tiananmen Square. Harper also pointedly refused to go to the Beijing Olympics in 2008. For its part, the Chinese government retaliated by pointedly cancelling meetings with Harper and making Canadian efforts to support Huseyincan Celil, a Canadian citizen of Xinjiang Uyghur origin imprisoned by China on charges of terrorism, as difficult as possible. When Harper was criticized for jeopardizing the economic relationship with China by being tough on human rights, he was unapologetic: “I think Canadians want us to promote our trade relations worldwide,” Harper said, “and we do that, but I don’t think Canadians want us to sell out important Canadian values. They don’t want us to sell that out to the almighty dollar.”⁷

But beginning in 2008, even while Harper was snubbing China by refusing to attend the Beijing Olympics, a slow shift started to occur in Canadian policy towards China. Ministerial visits between the two governments increased. Canada’s diplomatic presence in China was expanded, attention to the Dalai Lama diminished, and a new spirit of cooperation emerged between the two governments, culminating in high-profile visits by the prime minister to China in December 2009 and February 2012 and the signing of a raft of bilateral agreements. As Paul Evans has noted, by the end of this “turn,” “Conservative policy had returned very close to where Paul Martin had left it five years earlier.”⁸

However, while the Harper government progressively abandoned the policy positions on China that it had brought to office in 2006, and embraced an approach that sought to stress friendship and cooperation in the government-to-government relationship, there is no evidence of much strategic content in Canada’s approach to China. To be sure, more sustained mentions of the multilateral context of the relationship began [155] to appear in Canadian statements during President Hu Jintao’s visit to Canada in 2010, when Harper expressed his desire to work with Hu at the G20 to seek a new consensus on international financial regulation and “to work together in pursuit of economic stability, a cleaner safer environment, improved health and security in the developing world and effective international action against terrorists and rogue states.” In 2012, the joint communiqué spoke of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region: “Canada and China have important shared interests in promoting peace, security and sustainable development regionally and globally,” and they agreed “to work constructively with other countries in the region to enhance peace, security and stability in Asia-Pacific.”

⁷ “Won’t ‘Sell Out’ on Rights Despite China Snub: PM,” CBC News, November 15, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/won-t-sell-out-on-rights-despite-china-snub-pm-1.570708>.

⁸ Paul Evans, “Engagement with Conservative Characteristics: Policy and Public Attitudes, 2006–2011,” in *Issues in Canada-China Relations*, ed. Pitman B. Potter and Thomas Adams (Toronto: Canadian International Council, 2011), 24.

This multilateral language seems to be tacked onto an agenda overwhelmingly focused on the bilateral relationship and matters of material benefit to Canadians. These bilateral and material elements of Canada's China policy did not appear to be placed in any larger policy context, in some cases because other policy issues were no longer mentioned. For example, individual cases of human rights largely dropped from sight after the turn in favour of reference to more general principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Likewise, on the issue of espionage, the Conservatives stopped talking about it once they came to power, even though in opposition they had been persistent critics of the Liberal government's refusal to raise the issue of Chinese spying.⁹

But certain issues were never mentioned by the Canadian political leadership in discussions about China either before or after the turn. Military issues, in particular, have not been mentioned, including the rapid growth of military spending in China, the pursuit of a blue-water navy, the successful testing of a fifth-generation fighter, the Chengdu J-20, and the issue of conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea. Nor have Canadian ministers talked about the larger strategic issue of great power transition in public.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a common theme among observers of the relationship is that Canada's policy towards China is marked by a lack of strategic reflection. Fred Bild, a former Canadian ambassador to China, concluded his survey of Canadian policy by noting that "I trust that this narrative of Canada's evolving approach to foreign policy conundrums will have demonstrated that an absence of overriding strategic [156] objectives was generally the rule."¹⁰ In a similar vein, Paul Evans worried that the Harper government embraced "a strategic partnership without a strategic dimension."¹¹ Derek Burney, who served as Canadian ambassador to South Korea in the 1980s and ambassador to the United States from 1989 to 1993, surveyed some of the ways in which the military balance of power in East Asia would shift and asked

where does Canada see itself in this evolving chess game? Standing aloof may give us the privilege of neutrality but would more likely confirm a position of continuing irrelevance. In order to make prudent choices, we need, first, a clear formulation of how our national and global interests can best be served and of the extent to which we are prepared to contribute responsibly in the region that is likely to dominate in the decades ahead.¹²

⁹ Karina Roman, "The Cons and Libs on Chinese Espionage ... Back in the Day," CBC Inside Politics Blog, June 23, 2010, <http://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/politics/inside-politics-blog/2010/06/the-cons-and-libs-on-chinese-espionageback-in-the-day.html>.

¹⁰ Fred Bild, "Canada's Staying Power: A Diplomat's View," in *The China Challenge: Sino-Canadian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Huhua Cao and Vivienne Poy (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2011), 29.

¹¹ Evans, "Engagement with Conservative Characteristics," 27.

¹² Derek Burney, "Canada Must Outgrow Its Juvenile Relationship with China," *Globe and Mail*, April 4, 2009, <http://v1.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20090409.wcoessay0411/business>.

In a similar vein, Wenran Jiang has been persistent in his view that the Harper government needed to fashion a “comprehensive and nonpartisan China strategy.”¹³ In 2012, he was still complaining that “we have no plan, no strategy, there is really nothing in place in terms of dialogue with China.”¹⁴ These views were confirmed by David Mulroney, Canada’s ambassador to China between 2009 and 2012. In a wide-ranging critique published in 2015, Mulroney argued that Canada’s China policy was marked by “muddle” and a lack of careful strategic thought.¹⁵

Explaining Canada’s Astrategic Approach

Why is there so little interest in the dynamics of power transition in Canada’s China policy? It is tempting to point to the Harper government as the primary reason. After all, the Conservatives came to power in 2006 with a highly simplistic view of foreign policy, a simplicity underscored by the fact that much of the party’s foreign policy platform was devoted to coded criticisms of the previous Liberal government’s policies towards China: “Too often,” the platform stated, “Liberal foreign policy has compromised democratic principles to appease dictators, sometimes for the sake of narrow business interests.” Instead, the platform promised, a Conservative government would “articulate Canada’s core values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, free markets, [157] and free trade – and compassion for the less fortunate – on the international stage.”¹⁶

This, Bruce Gilley argued at the time, was a new phenomenon in Canadian-Chinese relations: “For the first time,” he wrote, “the mandarins of Canada’s China policy – Sinologists, business interests, ‘old friends of China,’ and steady-as-she-goes bureaucrats – are being challenged” by what he saw as a democratizing process in Canadian foreign policy. Drawing on a favourite duality in China, Gilley noted that “the *zhèng* [正] (official, appropriate, civilized) is being challenged by the *yè* [野] (wild, barbaric, uncivilized).”¹⁷ In this view, the Harper government’s policy towards China was a reflection of a particular ideological view of China as a totalitarian dictatorship that should not be “appeased” on human rights issues. Rather, the Conservatives would pursue a “purer” policy that would not “appease dictators” or “sell out” principles for “the almighty dollar.”

Moreover, such an ideologically driven policy was seen to further one of the primary goals of the Conservative government – to remake Canadian politics and replace the Liberals as the country’s dominant political party. An important part of this broader political/electoral process was to distance itself from its Liberal predecessors in the minds of voters. This

¹³ Jiang, “Seeking a Strategic Vision for Canada-China Relations,” 908.

¹⁴ Quoted in Sneh Duggal, “Measuring Harper in the Middle Kingdom,” *Embassy Magazine*, February 1, 2012, <http://www.embassynews.ca/page/view/measuring-02-01-2012>.

¹⁵ David Mulroney, *Middle Power, Middle Kingdom: What Canadians Need to Know about China in the 21st Century* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2015), esp. 266–71, 300–302.

¹⁶ Conservative Party of Canada, *Stand Up for Canada: Conservative Party of Canada Federal Election Platform 2006*, 44, http://www.cbc.ca/canadavotes2006/leadersparties/pdf/conservative_platform20060113.pdf.

¹⁷ Bruce Gilley, “Reawakening Canada’s China Policy,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 14, 2 (2008): 121.

distancing dynamic was seen across a range of foreign policy areas, but it was particularly marked in the case of policy towards China because of the salience of the issue in the Conservative critique of Liberal policy.

In this view, the evolution of the Conservatives' China policy was little more than a series of ad hoc adaptations to those original conditions. Thus, when Canadians of Chinese origin, heavily courted by the Conservatives to change their historical tendency to vote Liberal, reacted negatively to the calculated snub of the Beijing Olympics, the Conservatives simply shifted their position. Likewise, with the prime minister's increased exposure to Chinese leaders at summit meetings, particularly the newly prominent G20 following the global financial crisis of 2008, the trope of "appeasing dictators" became increasingly untenable, and the government simply shifted its position. In short, between 2006 and 2010, the Conservative *yè* became increasingly civilized, so that by 2012 there was no difference between its approach to China and that of the Martin Liberal government. However, there was little strategic rationale behind that shift other than the "almighty dollar."

[158] Although it can readily be argued from the evidence that the Harper government's China policy has not been driven by a consistent strategic view of the rise of China, it is less evident that this was purely a Conservative phenomenon. Canada's other political parties did not have fundamentally different views on China or its rise. In June 2010, Michael Ignatieff, the Liberal leader, outlined the party's "new" foreign policy. China was only briefly mentioned. The Liberals promised to sign a Global Networks Agreement, described as a "next-generation agreement that goes beyond trade and investment," with China and India and to reintroduce Team Canada missions, albeit "modernized" and "renewed."¹⁸ When Bob Rae, the Liberal foreign affairs critic, outlined his approach to foreign policy in November 2010, China was mentioned only en passant: a reminder that John Diefenbaker had sold wheat to China in the 1960s, a criticism of Harper for having "insulted" China, and a promise that a Liberal government would negotiate a Global Networks Agreement with China.¹⁹ Shortly after Justin Trudeau took over the Liberal leadership from Ignatieff in 2013, he revealed his thoughts on China. Asked which nation he admired most, Trudeau stated: "There's a level of admiration I actually have for China. Their basic dictatorship is actually allowing them to turn their economy around on a dime."²⁰

Likewise, the New Democratic Party (NDP), the official opposition between 2011 and 2015, did not have a markedly different position. Thomas Mulcair, elected as party leader in March 2012, revealed his views on China during the party leadership race. There was just one mention of China in his foreign policy platform: "Leading toward a world of citizens means seeking trade opportunities with emerging democracies like India while recognizing the serious challenges presented by a growing global dependence on China – a state that still oppresses

¹⁸ Tonda MacCharles, "Michael Ignatieff Unveils New Liberal Foreign Policy," *Toronto Star*, July 12, 2010, http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2010/06/15/michael_ignatieff_unveils_new Liberal_foreign_policy.html.

¹⁹ Bob Rae, "Canada's Place in the World: How Can We Fix Our Foreign Policy?," speech at the Canadian Club of Toronto, November 24, 2010, <http://www.liberal.ca/files/2010/11/Bob-Rae-Foreign-Affairs-24-11-10.pdf>.

²⁰ "Justin Trudeau's 'Foolish' Remark Sparks Anger," *CBC News*, November 9, 2013.

ethnic minorities and political dissenters.”²¹ Likewise, it is clear from a press conference given by the NDP’s foreign affairs and international trade critics (Hélène Laverdière and Brian Masse, respectively) that the party did not have a well-developed China policy. Laverdière, a former foreign service officer on the China desk in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), waffled when asked about the NDP’s traditionally strong support for Tibet, and Masse revealed a deep protectionist streak regarding trade with China.²²

[159] For its part, the policy towards China articulated by the Bloc Québécois was highly limited. China was not mentioned in the party’s platforms in 2008 or 2011. But as Canada’s only self-professed “splittist” party, the Bloc Québécois, not surprisingly, articulated a China policy that expressed explicit support for Tibetan rights.²³

On one issue, there was cross-party agreement: the suppression by the Chinese authorities of Falun Gong. A number of NDP members of Parliament (MPs) under the leadership of Bill Siskay (Burnaby-Douglas) took the initiative to protest the Chinese government’s persecution of practitioners of Falun Gong by forming the Parliamentary Friends of Falun Gong in October 2009. Although most of its active members were from the NDP, there were a number of MPs from other parties, including Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Liberal, Etobicoke Centre) and Diane Bourgeois (Bloc Québécois, Terrebonne-Blainville). Several Conservatives were also active in the group, including Rob Anders (Calgary West), Scott Reid (Lanark-Frontenac-Lennox and Addington), Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre), and, Consiglio Di Nino (a Conservative senator from Ontario). However, these Conservatives were on the margins of the party. Indeed, Anders’s criticism of China was so virulent—he actually compared the Beijing Olympics with the 1936 Berlin Olympics—that he was publicly disavowed by his party’s leadership.²⁴ Although Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party of Canada, elected to the House of Commons in May 2011, was not a member of the group, she also took up the cause of Falun Gong, presenting petitions, asking questions during Question Period, and generally pressing the Harper government on the issue.²⁵

In sum, there was virtually no difference between the Liberals and the “newly civilized” Conservatives. For their part, the NDP, Bloc, and Greens defined China policy almost exclusively in terms of human rights. Like the Conservatives, the other parties had a strategic approaches to China, never giving any indication that they considered the broader strategic implications of the rise of China and what that will mean for Canada.

Gilley argues that “the reconfiguration of the economic and political environment resulting from the rise of China is less acute for Canada, whose external environment will

²¹ Thomas Mulcair, “Taking the Next Steps on the World Stage,” 2012, <http://www.npd.ca/tom>.

²² Hélène Laverdière and Brian Masse, “Concerns about Harpers [sic] Visit to China,” February 6, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZCJR5u3j2g>.

²³ See Students For a Free Tibet Canada, [https://sftcanada.wordpress.com/2011/03/..](https://sftcanada.wordpress.com/2011/03/)

²⁴ Richard Cuthbertson and Becky Rynor, “Calgary MP Compares China to Nazi Regime,” *Calgary Herald*, April 16, 2008, <http://www.calgaryherald.com/life/Calgary+compares+China+Nazi+regime/452916/story.html>

²⁵ Green Party of Canada, “Greens to Stephen Harper: Don’t Sell Out Human Rights to ‘Almighty Dollar,’” media release, February 6, 2012, <http://www.greenparty.ca/en/media-release/2012-02-06/greens-stephen-harper-dont-sell-out-human-rights-almighty-dollar>.

continue to be shaped far more by the geographically contiguous US than by distant China.”²⁶ James Manicom [160] and Andrew O’Neil make a similar point. They argue that one of the compelling explanations for differences in the degree of strategic concern in both countries is distance, not so much geographic distance as distance from the hegemonic power, the United States. In their view, distance from China and proximity to the United States shape the relative Canadian indifference to the strategic questions posed by the rise of China.²⁷

But the astrategic response of Canadians, particularly political elites, to China’s rise must be seen as something much more general than either Gilley or Manicom and O’Neil suggest. Rather, the taken-for-grantedness of Canada’s geostrategic location is so deep that it can be argued that Canadians no longer think about world politics in *realpolitik* terms. On the contrary, for many years now, Canadians have been encouraged by their governors to embrace a “security imaginary” that denigrates the very notion of *realpolitik*, and this, it can be argued, has created a double feedback loop. Not only do Canadians tend not to respond to policy arguments framed in strategic terms, but also many of their politicians no longer conceive of world politics in such terms. Even the few politicians who might be inclined to see the world in realist terms tend to be discouraged from framing arguments in such terms, anticipating how little resonance *realpolitik* discourse has in Canada. As John Scott Cowan, president of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, reminds us, “the very word ‘strategic’ is an uncomfortable one for Canadians ... Rarely has Canada had real involvement in developing grand strategy ... Historically Canada has done grand strategy largely by proxy, letting others lead.”²⁸

Conclusion

The notion that Canada, out of a sense of “national interest,” would be pushed to think strategically about China has not played out. On the contrary, in the past two decades, Canadians have become progressively more inclined to steer away from thinking strategically about the future of the Asia-Pacific region. In other countries, one sees robust debates about what the rise of China and the transition of power will mean for their national interests. In Canada, what debate there has been on the implications of the rise of China, and what role Canada can or should play, has tended to be at the margins of policy. To be sure, there has been [161] no shortage of calls for a more strategic approach to China policy.²⁹ But most of these suggestions

²⁶ Bruce Gilley, “Middle Powers during Great Power Transitions,” *International Journal* 66, 2 (2011): 245.

²⁷ James Manicom and Andrew O’Neil, “China’s Rise and Middle Power Democracies: Canada and Australia Compared,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 12 (2012): 22–25.

²⁸ Paul Chapin and George Petolekas, “The Strategic Outlook for Canada,” *Vimy Papers* 5 (2012): 11, <http://www.cdainstitute.ca/index.php>.

²⁹ Wenran Jiang, “Meeting the China Challenge: Developing a China Strategy,” in *Canada among Nations 2006: A State of Minorities*, ed. Andrew F. Cooper and Dane Rowlands (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 251–68; Charles Burton, “A Reassessment of Canada’s Interests in China and Options for Renewal of Canada’s China Policy,” 2009, http://tibet.ca/_media/PDF/chinareport.pdf; Barry Carin and Gordon Smith, “Working with China towards a New International Institutional Architecture: A Strategic Partnership with Canada on Global Issues of Mutual Interest,” Canadian International Council China Paper 3, 2010.

focus on trade and economics rather than the broader issue of the long-term transfer of power in the region. The Conference of Defence Associations’ annual *Strategic Outlook*, which includes a focus on the defence, foreign policy, and trade implications of China’s growing military capability, concludes that “the time is right for a comprehensive review of Canada’s strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific.”³⁰ But policy makers in Ottawa show little inclination to discuss China in a strategic way. Rather, they have reflected a broader, astrategic culture that has proven to be successful in Canadian politics over the past four decades.

[Endnotes: pp. 275–78]

³⁰ Chapin and Petrolekas, “The Strategic Outlook for Canada,” 33–35.