

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY



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SITUATION BRIEF # 56

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At a time of massive shifts in the geopolitical plates of governance, trade and economic relationships a pattern is now discernable. It sees nation states own-sourcing, or friend-shoring the production of commodities while at the same continuing to globalize travel and communications. This is prompting a realignment of power-blocks and interstate relationships.

Oddly perhaps, this provides immense opportunities for a new ambassadorial role of culture.

In recent book, *Global Trends in Museum Diplomacy: Post-Guggenheim Developments* (2020) Natalia Grincheva, drawing on numerous sources, advances the argument that as actors on the world stage (if they so choose) cultural institutions wield a very unique form of “soft power ... and ability to amplify discourse, accelerate cultural change, and contribute to cultural intelligence among the great diversity of city dwellers, visitors, policy makers and leaders”. Museums, for instance, as non-state actors of diplomacy have leveraging powers on the global stage. She further observes that “While cultural diplomacy is shaped by the politics of geopolitical interest and foreign policy agenda, cultural relations “grown naturally and organically without government intervention”.

Cultural relations and cultural diplomacy depend on people-to-people exchanges and connections. And despite a rising tide of post-colonial revisionism, the cultural sector in general still occupies an envied position of trust in the popular imagination.

The inscription of Victoria on the UNESCO World Heritage List would position the region's rich cultural heritage on the global stage. This paper explores some of the opportunities that could emerge.

In 2022 Canada finally published the much-anticipated document, *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*. This is now public policy. A simultaneous publication, *The Indo-Pacific: New Strategies for Canadian Engagement with a Critical Region* compiled and edited by Dr. Fen Osler Hampson, Goldy Hyder and Tina J. Parks assembled a collection of essays, some by the editors, others by such luminaries as the Hon. Jean Charest, Ian Burney, and Nadir Patel, explored in detail the rationale for a Canadian Indo-Pacific Strategy, a country-by-country analysis of situational opportunities for Canada. It looks mainly at expanded trade relationships – and some economic sector implications. The key take-way from both documents is the realization that Canada must pivot to the Indo-Pacific as that is the future of global economic and population growth, and along with it a concomitant shift in the balance of power.

A few highlights which anchor Canada's 2022 policy document. Forty countries, four billion people, 47.19 trillion-dollar in economic activity will expand to comprise 50% of the world's GTP by 2040. The top five countries (China, Japan, India, Korea and Australia) already boast a GTP of 29.3 trillion dollars American (compared to 17.2 trillion dollars for the entire European Union). These 40 countries contain 65% of world's population, 67% of its indigenous population, and 37% of world's poor. Canada enjoys a 226 billion dollars 2-way merchandise trade and 64.4 billion dollars in 2-way capital

investment flows. The region includes 6 of Canada's top 13 trading partners.



The *Policy* asserts Canada is a Pacific country. On the Pacific Rim it shares 25,000 kilometers of coastline and trading relationships that go back centuries. We are constantly re-discovering the depth Indigenous People's migration and trade networks over millennia. Half of new Canadians come from this region and the Indo-Pacific provided this country's largest diasporas. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians travel extensively in the region; more than 80,000 students from these countries come to study here.

While not all these countries are functional democracies, Canada shares some fundamental values, particularly related to sustainable development goals which address issues such environment protection, mitigation of the effects of climate change (emissions reduction), poverty alleviation. Recent stumbling blocks such as the "Two Michaels" dispute with China, and security differences with India, while seeming serious at the moment, should be considered temporary setbacks when taking in the long view.

Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy lays out five interconnected objectives,

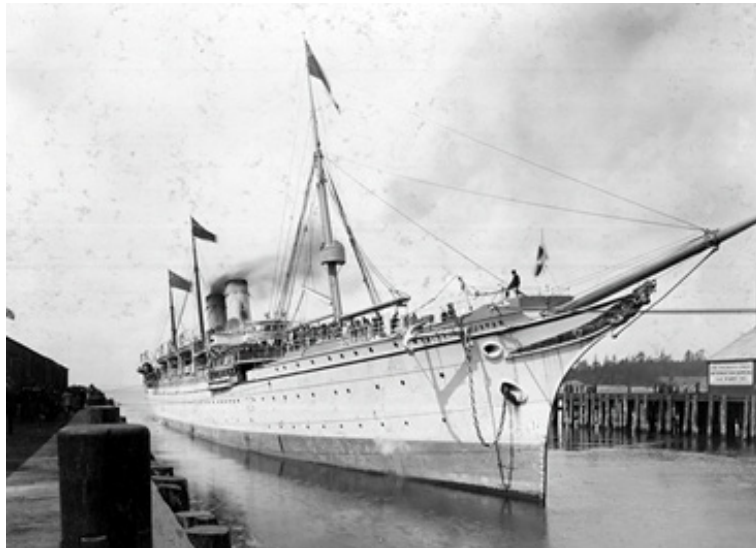
1. Promote peace, resilience and security
2. Expand trade, investment and supply chain resilience
3. Invest in and connect people
4. Build a sustainable green future
5. Canada as an active and engaged partner to the Indo-Pacific.

Evidence of Canada's embrace of the Indo-Pacific Strategy can already be seen by increases in diplomatic presence and activity, particularly increases in trade commission offices, exchanges at the political level, and more evident here: expansion of facilities at Pacific Command in Esquimalt along with an increased frequency of naval tours-of-duty. In addition, Canada participates with Japan and Korea in policing illegal fishing through Operation North Pacific Guard.

While this wake-up call of the opportunities available through Indo-Pacific engagement might appear novel to the political establishment of central Canada, to students of Victoria's rich cultural past this may seem *deja vu*. The ancient connections of West Coast Indigenous people to the Pacific Rim have already been mentioned. However, Vancouver Island has a 300+ year history of Pacific relations, beginning with the European explorations, trade, and later settlement. Fur and otter pelts were traded into China; the Hudson's Bay Company traded Lekwungen-caught fish with Hawaii, and Victoria's first resident consul represented Hawaii. Canada will shortly establish its first diplomatic representative there!

In 1865 Esquimalt replaced Valparaiso, Chile, as HQ for Royal Navy Pacific Command. Victoria took defensive actions while looking out over the Pacific starting with Crimean War (1853-6), two World Wars, and the Korean War. The remains of defensive gun batteries litter our local coast line and Fort Rodd Hill defensive revetments are a National Historic Park. Between the World Wars and

into the 1960s Victoria was a retirement destination of British military officers and civil administrators from Britain's vast Pacific colonial enterprise. Victoria was port-of-entry for Chinese gold-rush and later railroad workers. In the early years of 20th century Japanese and East Indians arrived to work, invest, prosper and settle. The legacies of both Chinese and Japanese early diasporas are evident in our urban landscape: Chinatown and the annual blossoming cherry trees that line our boulevards memorialize two nationalities but also remind us of the years of discrimination they suffered (Only recently has this situation been addressed through formal apologies and some financial recompense.) Today the City peacefully welcomes a growing community of Philippine immigrants. So, of all Canadian population centres, Victoria enjoys a geographical, cultural and historical advantage.



The *Indo-Pacific Strategy* articulates a network of institutions around which to build its diplomatic and economic engagement. Foremost is our membership in ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Partnership), and the Pacific Island Forum. These are essentially talk-shops for trade, economic development and global issues such as climate

change. Security is at the core of the Five Eyes alliance. However, the core of Canada's economic and trade interests is covered by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnerships (CPTPP - Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam) although at the last minute, unfortunately, the United States refrained from joining. Canada is seeking to expand its free trade and economic partnership agreement within the region, along with separate trade and investment agreements (FIPPA's).

Free trade treaties with China and India are "on hold" but a free trade agreement with Korea has just been signed. Canada is seeking to up the ante by negotiating a Canada-ASEAN free trade agreement.

Canada is supporting the empowerment of Indigenous peoples through the Indigenous Peoples Economic and Trade Cooperation Arrangement (IPETCA). Science, Technology and Innovation partnerships are being strengthened with Japan, Korea, India, Singapore and Taiwan. Canada intends to join the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity and also a Digital Economic Partnership Agreement with Singapore, New Zealand and Chile for the mutual protection of national cultural sectors.

While this alphabet-soup of institutions and initiatives may appear as a bureaucratic quagmire it is important to understand the structure, and key players, in Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy. These are the reference points in the network which will make it work. They also provide the off and on ramps for the flow of people, goods, money, and just as important: ideas. And ideas are the building blocks of culture.

One section of the Indo-Pacific policy document is titled "Investing in and connecting people". It contains a number of observations and proposals, many of them indicating cultural heritage sector opportunities. First is encouraging

the strengthening and deepening of ties among Indigenous peoples of the Indo-Pacific along with encouraging a general appreciation of their unique art forms and traditions.

Canada looks to expand and improve educational opportunities for international students. Academics, experts, civil society groups are encouraged to build new international networks to broaden multi-lateral dialogue to topics of mutual interest. Canada's existing diaspora communities should be supported in bringing their unique cultural expressions to Canadians through ties with their homelands.

Against the background what might Victoria's role as a UNESCO World Heritage Site on the Indo-Pacific entail? First and foremost, it would position our region in a category which our own South Island Economic Partnership think-tank has articulated as "world class". And it would do so within a set of cultural heritage indicators. While the profile would include a set of heritage sites, tangible and intangible cultural assets, it would also require a serious re-assessment of own community narrative: that is, how we got to be here.

For instance, over last 200 years Victoria's view of itself has been defined by its British cultural legacy. This, despite the fact that rarely, if ever, were British migrants a majority in the population. However, under the cultural hegemony of the colonial power structures other voices were either ignored or actively suppressed through economic, social and political discrimination. Now it is important to bring forward the narratives of our minority and diaspora communities starting with those of First Nations, then Pacific Peoples, Chinese, Japanese and East Indian diasporas. While putting minority stories forward we should also not forget exemplars in Victoria's history who stood out by espousing what we call "liberal values" today. Governor James Douglas invited a significant black migration from San Francisco that contributed mightily to founding

of the City. Judge Sir Matthew Bailey Begbie, from his Supreme Court bench, staunchly defended minority rights in the face of racist activist local governments and individuals. He was founding President of a major Victoria institution for local power brokers, the Union Club of British Columbia, but made sure the Club's constitution admitted a membership open to all "gentlemen" without discrimination according to "race, creed, or religion". In the 1920s Victoria played host to a vigorous suffragette and feminist movement clustered around such celebrities as Emmeline and Silvia Pankhurst and Nellie McLung. Its organizing focus was the women's membership-only Alexandria Club. The trajectory of these stories comprising personalities, memories, monuments, art and literary deposits, among the roiling mix of ethnic, religious and racial beliefs of the early settlement period, should provide a counter-weight to the white male Anglo-Saxon path-to-confederation, a story-line that still dominates public perception today.

To this end Victoria needs to enable the region's Indigenous heritage to speak, perhaps with a dedicated cultural centre and by bringing back more Lekwungen names to features of the urban landscape. The world-class Asian arts collection of the Art Gallery of Victoria, the Japanese garden legacy still evident today, the Chinatown Museum, Chinatown itself and the vigorous Chinese Canadian visual arts legacy are other places to start. For instance "Kanaka Row", the Hawaiian settlers answer to Chinatown, does not survive but it needs to be marked.

Putting back our Indo-Pacific cultural legacy into our shared heritage narrative provides a platform for the City to engage as a major player in cultural diplomatic outreach in support of Canada's declared Indo-Pacific Strategy. Local First Nations, many who claim part "Kanaka" ancestry, could participate in cultural exchanges with indigenous peoples throughout the Pacific. Former

Victoria Mayor, Alan Low, made a trip to his home-town China to re-establish ties, and mend the generational divide, between his Canadian and Chinese families. More of this could be encouraged. Chinatowns were common to the Pacific Rim (San Francisco, Vancouver, Melbourne, Manila, Bangkok, Singapore). Intercity thematic tours could be organized. Goldrushes were a common driver of itinerant travel during the middle years of the 19th Century: California, Queen Charlotte Islands, Fraser River, Klondike impacted Victoria directly, but then elsewhere: South Africa, Australia, Alaska, New Zealand. This maritime "gold rush" circuit hosted the movement of trade-goods and people.

A similar common interest links nineteenth century historic ports on the Indo-Pacific Rim. Walk across the Maidan, Kolkata, and views to the massive bulk of the Victoria Memorial could be mistaken for our own Victoria Parliament Buildings. Similarly, the harbour-front "old towns" of Singapore, Melbourne and Hobart, Australia, Christchurch New Zealand, Capetown South Africa and Valparaiso Chile, Lower-town San Francisco, Lahaina Hawaii (if rebuilt) along with parts of the Shanghai Bund: all – echo variations on Victoria's mid-nineteenth century ornate quick-build commercial street-fronts. Many of Victoria's pioneer entrepreneurs, professionals, mariners, remittance-men and grifters etched trails of fame, fortune, attitudes and ideas – fulfilled and frustrated dreams – on this network.

While Victoria shares many historico-cultural commonalities with these various stopping points around the Indo-Pacific rim, Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy is to build-out on a network of multi-lateral arrangements and institutions. A number embassies and high-commissions such as those in Delhi and Tokyo have exhibition facilities. And others play a role in arranging Canadian art exhibition and cultural performances. Opportunities for cultural exchanges are myriad.

In 2019, resulting from an inquiry under the leadership of the Hon.

Pat Bovey, the Senate report Cultural Diplomacy at the Front Stage of Canada's Foreign Policy was published. The report recommends a closer alignment of Canadian trade initiatives and a Creative Export Strategy. The Department of Canadian Heritage is the lead government agency in partnership with the Department of Global Affairs on the file. Initiatives involving a cultural diplomacy component are numerous and varied, ranging from music, film, arts or animation festivals, international conferences on the conservation of heritage to major sports games. A simple start would be to organize cultural exhibitions and performances to accompany trade missions. The Bovey Senate report urges Canada to develop and implement a comprehensive cultural diplomacy policy for Canada. It anticipates an enhanced (and funded) lead role for Global Affairs in bringing together actors from the other levels of government and civil society, but also enhancing capacity of Global Affairs missions throughout the world to lead such a Cultural Diplomacy Strategy through training and skill development for the staff of diplomatic missions. More cultural attaches would greatly help such an initiative.



As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, with connections through the United Nations cultural networks, Victoria could engage directly as serious non-state actor in Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. However, it would have to look for lead institutional partners. Our community includes the University of Victoria's globally focused academic disciplines and agencies with a focus on international outreach. The Institute for Global Studies, the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, and the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives would be obvious partners. Royal Roads University offers a graduate certificate in Asia Pacific Trade and Investment. Research collaborations, student exchanges, international cooperative education assignments and academic conferences could form outreach opportunities to link Victoria to a network of Indo-Pacific communities which share Victoria's history and current concerns in natural and cultural heritage. Local civil society institutions already work cultural heritage east-west connections. The Royal BC Museum currently hosts an international travelling exhibition: *Angkor: Lost Empire of Cambodia*. The Asian Arts collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria provides a focus for international curatorship events and cultural tours of Asia. Artefact collections of Victoria's Maritime Museum and the CFB Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum document Victoria's historical links to the far reaches of the Indo Pacific over 300 years but also provide context for Canada's renewal of interest, and action, on these same waters.

Victoria seeks to be "world-class" across its various economic and social sectors. UNESCO World Heritage Status would give it such a platform. The challenge is for our local institutions - governmental, academic, civil society - to explore Canada's expanding trade, security and cultural agreements for cultural diplomacy opportunities - and seek to play a major role in the declared national Cultural Diplomacy Strategy.

Observations

- Victoria’s Cultural heritage influencers need to critically re-examine the popular community narrative of Victoria’s settlement history with a view to bringing forward the memories of Indigenous and diaspora minorities and adjust the perceived legacy of the “road-to-Confederation ” and related central Canadian political biases.
- Numerous local communities of interest could be brought together to chart a “world-stage” strategy for Victoria itself. Leadership roles could be assumed by local institutions such as the University of Victoria, the Royal BC Museum, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and civil society groups drawn from the military, home-land ethnic organizations, faith communities and others.
- Victoria is noted as refuge for Canada’s retired diplomatic community. Engagement of this cohort could assist Victoria’s attempt to build international connections.
- The Province of British Columbia hosts the Consular Corps of BC, an official body representing the regular and honorary consular official of some 80 countries resident in the Province. Here would be a starting point for official outreach by the City of Victoria, as the capital of the Province.

Sources

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