

October 10, 1973

**Verbatim Transcript of the First Meeting between
Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Zhou Enlai**

Citation:

"Verbatim Transcript of the First Meeting between Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Zhou Enlai", October 10, 1973, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MG26-O19, vol. 151, file 151.4 (Ivan Head - Travel and Events - October 1973 - Prime Minister's Visit to China - Objectives and Substance - n.d., 1973), Library and Archives Canada. Obtained by James G. Hershberg. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121972>

Summary:

Zhou Enlai and Pierre Trudeau discuss Canada's overarching foreign policy positions and Sino-Canadian relations. Trudeau says that Canada wants to be "a strong country with a strong identity."

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

DRAFT VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT OF THE FIRST
MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU
AND PREMIER CHOU EN-LAI, OCTOBER 10, 1973.

TRUDEAU: China represents a land of realization and 'promise, a part of the world which all would like to visit, and we are privileged to be here. It is now three years since our governments opened diplomatic relations. Since then, there have been a number of exchanges in the areas of the economy and trade, science and technology, culture and sports. We hope that we will be able to continue to maintain our impetus in these areas so that the movement begun three years ago may keep on and lead to greater success. We must both profit from this meeting by learning more about each other, both as governments and peoples. There are changing power relationships throughout the world. Canada has a large area but a small population. We need good relationships with important countries like China. We want China to understand our politics and aspirations and vice versa.

I understand that there is agreement on both sides to have our officials hold meetings at the same time as we meet. This will allow us to concentrate on certain subjects. It would be a good idea if officials could discuss in some detail the following subjects: trade and economics, science and technology, cultural exchanges, consular and legal matters. This way, we could make progress in detail on subjects in which we are both interested. We would like to explain to you some of the roots of our national domestic and foreign policy, so that we can better understand some of our points of agreement and divergence (between our two countries) and so that we can make progress in understanding each other's policies by understanding more about each other's countries. In this way, while we make progress toward general understanding, hopefully our officials will make more detailed progress and will report to us for the last day.

If this way of proceeding is agreeable to you, I could begin now to explain a little about Canada's approach to politics, or wait until tomorrow, whichever is preferable.

CHOU: We agree with your proposal. Your officials and mine can discuss specific matters, particularly trade, culture and science, consular and legal matters, and medical public health programs. It will be better to have these discussions either in the mornings or the evenings, as then we and the members of our entourage can discuss matters of both sides in smaller groups in order to enable Chinese officials to know something about Canadian politics. You are welcomed to speak about Canadian domestic politics and foreign policy today. If there is time, I will also say something, or I will speak tomorrow.

TRUDEAU: Is there a deadline for today's meeting?

CHOU: That is up to us. As there is no banquet this evening, we have no deadline.

TRUDEAU: It is always a risk to ask a practising politician to speak about his country. I will paint in broad strokes a picture of Canada to explain the basis of our domestic and foreign policy. I apologize if I begin by saying some things which are well known to you. It is necessary to stress them because our foreign policy is a reflection of some basic needs and facts of Canadian politics, economics, and cultural realities.

Canada has the second largest land mass of any country in the world and yet it has a population of only 22 million. To the south there is the strongest military and economic power in the history of the world. To the north across the pole is also a very strong military power. If there were nuclear war, Canada would be in the middle and it would be a battleground or a no-man's land over which ICBMs would be flying.

CHOU: As I said in my political report made to the Party Congress, that is a sandwich, as described by Chairman Mao, but Canada is a piece of tough meat which is difficult to bite into. While your population is relatively small, your country has great potentiality. A country of 22 million is not a small country. Any country with a population over ten million is at least a medium-sized country. It depends on whether the people are strong.

TRUDEAU: The Premier understands very well our motivation for wanting to be a strong country with a strong identity. Our geography explains many details of our foreign policy. It explains our very great interest in nuclear disarmament and our desire to have friends outside of the north/south axis, across the north Atlantic in Europe, and across the Pacific in Asia. So if our geographical situation describes one main aspect of our foreign policy, namely our desire for peace and disarmament, our proximity to the United States explains the second aspect, the desire for sovereignty and independence. The real and lasting danger is that Canada's economy and even its cultural independence could be diminished if we did not counteract this problem through other elements of our foreign policy which I shall explain.

The very strong economic presence to the south of us creates a problem and we have tried to diminish that influence in various ways. One of them is to exercise greater control over foreign investment; another is to reject the option of continentalism with the United States, which would entail the integration of our two economies at the risk of diminishing our sovereignty. We are trying to establish trade and commercial relations across the Atlantic and across the Pacific which would reduce our vulnerability to economic actions by the United States. It is in this context that we are making a great effort to establish new trading relationships with other countries. It is in this context that our Trade Minister was the first minister to visit China, and there are in this delegation many officials interested in discussing trade and trade relations with China as we have done with many other countries.

The United States presence, which is a friendly one but a very gigantic one, is also evidenced in many spheres other than the economic one. Politically, it is one of the reasons for which we have remained active in NATO, as we have wanted to have access to other nations than the United States, and not to be alone in talking to the United States

about problems of military alliance. For the same reason, Canada has been very active in the maintenance and development of the Commonwealth of Nations. This is a forum in which we are able to talk to nations of every continent, with whom we are able to exchange ideas about politics and economics.

CHOU: This summer was the first time for the conference of Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth to be held in the capital of Canada.

TRUDEAU: This is true. This was our way of expressing our desire for the institution of the Commonwealth to remain strong and to remain a forum for exchange of ideas. The year before, we hosted the Conference of Francophonie, l'Agence de Coopération. This was a modification of the Commonwealth.

CHOU: Was the Conference of the Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth which was held in Singapore the first time that such a conference was held outside the United Kingdom?

TRUDEAU: There was a conference which was called in Nigeria, but it was called rapidly and was of a special nature. The first regular meeting was in Singapore. This reflects the desire of the members of the Commonwealth to ensure that it is not an association which is dominated by Britain and that all participate as equals. The Francophonie Conference was not intended to be dominated by France, though this was perhaps not so easily achieved. This conference involved 23 or 24 countries where the French language was at least the second official language. Besides Belgium and Luxembourg and the former colonies of France, I believe some Indo-Chinese countries participated in certain of the meetings. This conference, which was held in 1971, was not at the head of government level, but rather at the ministerial level. I spoke to President Ahidjo of Cameroon who displayed a certain scepticism about the Francophonie Conference, since the members could not speak as equals with President de Gaulle, as others could with Prime Minister Wilson in the Commonwealth Conference. In these two different types of association, you have examples of Canada's desire to establish links of friendship with countries around the world. You find in that a reflection of the infrastructure of our country where French and English are our national languages.

CHOU: I had not known that the French-speaking countries had held a meeting in Canada. Our Foreign Ministry is already studying this question. This is really something important for a member of the Commonwealth to convene a friendly meeting of French-speaking countries, even if it is not at the level of heads of governments. Did Zaire take part? (TRUDEAU: Yes) I spoke about these problems bilaterally with the President of Sénégal, but he did not attend those meetings. By that time, de Gaulle had already given up power and Pompidou was President. M. Pompidou's visit was the first contact I had with him.

TRUDEAU: Could Ahidjo speak as an equal with President Pompidou?

CHOU: I didn't ask.

TRUDEAU: This is not a criticism of France. The Commonwealth has grown organically starting with the 5 Dominions and adding the other countries that became independent, whereas Francophonie is an intellectual creation of the President of Sénégal and the President of Tunisia, and allows the nations involved to have closer relations with a country like Canada or Belgium without having to go through France. It is a way of ensuring our foreign policy reflects not only our Anglophone but also our Francophone part. It also represents an effort on the part of Canada to diversify its contacts and associations in its cultural life as well as in its political, economic and social life. Nothing of this is by way of criticism of the United States, but as you are aware, it is so powerful and so close. As I once explained, it is like sleeping with an elephant; even when it means no harm, every grunt and groan is a danger for the mouse sleeping with it. Some of our policies, like the protection of the environment in the Arctic, have differences from those of shipping nations like Britain, France and the United States. In the same way, on questions of the Law of the Sea, of protecting our fishing and seabed resources on the continental shelf, we have interests which are different from those of the shipping nations. In the case of the legislation protecting the Canadian Arctic which was opposed by some of the shipping nations, we found it useful to have discussions with the Soviet Union which had problems similar to ours in the Arctic and the same interests in preventing shipping which might pollute the Arctic.

CHOU: How is the development of the shipping industry in your country?

TRUDEAU: It is not very large. There is some on the east and west coasts and on the St. Lawrence. At the present stage, we cannot compete with Japan or even Sweden. We are trying to help our shipping industry to become competitive.

CHOU: You don't have a large fishing fleet that sails to remote seas?

TRUDEAU: No. Most of our fishing fleet is inshore. As for the coastal waters, we see fishing fleets of many nations coming to fish off our continental shelf. That is why our policies for the Law of the Sea Conference are not dissimilar from those of China. We want to see that fishing resources are not depleted and decimated. We want to have the right to manage our resources so that the stock will renew itself. I think these examples show that, like every country, our foreign policy is an attempt to develop Canadian interests based on our geography, the cultural make-up of our population and on economic and political realities.

CHOU: Today is the 10th of October and, in Moscow, two big shipping countries are debating this question. They may or may not reach agreement. This is only one of their major controversies which have now extended into the sea. Your energy resources are great, are they not?

TRUDEAU: We are self-sufficient in our energy resources in the long term. We export some oil to the United States and import oil from Venezuela and the Mid-East; we export coal to Japan and we import coal from the United States. We are evolving a policy to ensure self-sufficiency in the event that there is an interruption of our overseas supplies.

CHOU: What is your annual output of oil?

TRUDEAU: I don't know. We will have to check.

-5-
CHOU: The figure that we have for you from 1970 is over 69 million tons.

TRUDEAU: How does this compare to oil production in China?

CHOU: You produce much more than we do. Our annual output this year was a bit over 50 million tons.

TRUDEAU: We are exploring for further resources.

CHOU: Perhaps you know more about your underground resources than we do about ours.

TRUDEAU: We have developed some technical expertise in searching for and exploiting oil resources, especially offshore. Our offshore drilling rigs, for instance those made in Halifax, are as advanced as any in the world. This is perhaps an area where our experts could talk about technical exchanges.

CHOU: Have you started to turn out offshore oil?

TRUDEAU: Some oil has been found off Sable Island and Newfoundland. None of these finds, however, are commercially significant. In the area of natural gas, apart from the natural gas which is abundant in the western provinces of Canada, there have been important finds of natural gas in the Arctic Islands. These have been corked, because we can't yet bring it out in an economic fashion.

CHOU: It is better to keep them underground, then they will not be destroyed or wasted.

TRUDEAU: Like your archeological treasures? (HONOURABLE OFFICIALS: HO! HO!)

CHOU: Do you have any boundary question with the Soviet Union? How do you delineate your boundary?

TRUDEAU: There is a great expanse of ice and sea between the tip of Ellesmere Island and the islands belonging to the Soviet Union. We have defined our sovereignty as extending to the groups of islands on the continental shelf in northern Canada. There are various approaches. One approach to establishing sovereignty is to draw sector lines to the north pole. We have used another as well. We passed legislation giving ourselves the right to control shipping in order to protect the environment.

CHOU: Does this extend into the eastern hemisphere?

TRUDEAU: The lines (of demarcation) are meridian lines going to the north pole. In the west they go from the meridian dividing Canada and Alaska; in the east, there is the meridian between Ellesmere and Greenland. Under this theory, there would be five countries who have established sectors: Canada, United States, Soviet Union, Norway and Denmark.

CHOU: Fortunately, you have the Arctic Circle which serves as a mediator. That is why there are no controversies?

TRUDEAU: As you know, it is one thing to make a case in international law. It is another thing to make it stick. In addition to using the meridians, we have pollution prevention legislation to protect the delicate and frail ecological balance in the Arctic from oil spills which destroy the birds and whales and deprive the Eskimos of their livelihood. Because populations have become increasingly aware of environmental problems, our legislation has found support amongst public opinion in many countries.

CHOU: We have supported your sovereignty; we share your views, in the same way that we have adopted a sympathetic approach to the claims of Latin American countries regarding coastal waters.

TRUDEAU: I would like to express the gratitude of the Canadian people for the sympathy and understanding of the Chinese Government position. We will have many occasions to support each other in the Law of the Sea Conference. Canada has the longest coastline in the world. We therefore have important interests. We hope the shipping nations will not prevail over such interests as the preservation of fishing resources. In this area this could be a concrete benefit of our relations and friendship.

CHOU: I would like to thank you for supporting our legitimate rights in the United Nations since 1971, since your support has great influence, especially in Latin America.

TRUDEAU: Our activity in the United Nations is another forum for diversifying our foreign policy. It is a forum not only for political but also for economic questions. Canada can establish relations and press for goals which are not in the interests of strong military nations but are important for peace in the world. As in the Commonwealth, NATO, Francophonie and the UN Organizations, we can exchange ideas and establish friendly relations on subjects of common interest. We are happy that the People's Republic of China is not only active in the United Nations, but it is taking an increasingly active part in the agencies and organizations of the United Nations.

CHOU: We should thank various countries in the world for supporting us. Canada was also one of the first countries in the 1970's which recognized us. The 1970's are a period in which international problems are most complicated. We can exchange views. Starting from the time when Prime Minister Trudeau left for his visit, perhaps the biggest local war since 1967 has been going on in the Middle East. Two countries which are not finding it very easy to carry on negotiations are now doing so in Moscow. Theirs are not like ours, which have no contradictions but are carried on in our common interest. Do you have very heavy military and financial burdens in NATO?

TRUDEAU: We have about 5,000 men in Germany. Until 1969 there were 10,000. This force was halved in 1969 in order to bring them back to Canada. Our first military priority is to protect our own sovereignty. After that comes our alliances. Besides NATO we also have a military alliance with the United States, NORAD. In 1969, we revised our foreign policy as we thought it was more important to exercise our sovereignty in Canada than to leave troops in Europe 20 years after the creation of NATO. We felt that the European countries did not need as large a Canadian presence as previously. We keep some troops there to indicate our desire to continue to be active in NATO and also to provide a counterbalance with NORAD by participation in a bigger alliance. Apart from the protection

of our own sovereignty, our defence forces are primarily involved in the protection of our sovereignty under the aegis of the United Nations.

CHOU: You have already withdrawn your troops from Indochina?

TRUDEAU: At the end of July. At the Paris talks we laid down certain conditions. One was that we be invited by the Powers participating in the war. Another was that they should have a genuine desire to keep the peace. We knew that we were not strong enough to keep the peace. When both sides continued to fight, there was no peace to observe so we said "We shall go home".

CHOU: During the Paris Conference, Canada was very determined it would go home. About 20 years ago, I attended the Geneva Conference and met Chester Ronning. He had a good attitude, but his hopes did not come true. Ronning was not in the discussions on Indochina, but on Korea. There was only an armistice agreement in Korea without a peace treaty. But though nothing came out of the talks, at least there is no fighting. Despite the acts of the other side, the Chinese peoples' volunteers took the initiative and withdrew in 1958. From 1958 to 1973, there has been no conflict. So without a peace agreement, sometimes it is still possible to avoid conflict. The situation of détente is hard to talk about. We will discuss it tomorrow.