

Words of wisdom from China's ambassador to Canada

Zhang Yijun, China's ambassador to China, urged Canadians to be more aggressive when it comes to doing business with China. "What is needed is more effort," he told a Canadian Chamber audience last summer at the Island Shangri-La Hotel. "There's a Chinese proverb that says you can't just watch the flowers from horseback, you have to get down to see them."

Good fields of opportunity include telecommunication, energy and agriculture. "Canada has the advantage in that we are both big countries," said Zhang. While Canadians may find some things different in China than in the West, he added, it is not necessarily an impediment to doing business.

Zhang said he would like to see more Canadian industry leaders visit China and meet their counterparts. "It's much easier when top people meet. It's a much shorter process than from below."

Ambassador Zhang accompanied Chinese Premier Zhou Rhongji when he visited Canada last spring. There, Rhongji dined with then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and gave a speech at a forum organized by the Toronto law firm Goodman & Goodman.


In Canada, Zhang says he urges business people to become more knowledgeable about China. "People at the Toronto Forum seemed surprised that the Chinese economy is so strong. We had a 12.8 per cent increase last year and 14.2 per cent in the first quarter of this year," said Zhang.

At the same time, he cautioned that the Chinese government may take steps to curb inflation, which last year ran as high as 15 per cent in 35 major cities. "There's no intention to clamp down on inflation too much," he told the Chamber, since the leaders have clearly indicated that they want economic reforms to continue. "We don't want to stop the growth, just make it more steady," he said.

Finally, Zhang urged those present to consider areas of China which were just opening up. "These not-so-famous areas may not have good trading facilities today, but they may tomorrow." ♦

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