

# AN INTERVIEW WITH CHAMBER PRESIDENT, ELIZA CHAN

*The Chamber and China - Directions for the Future*

by Harold Mandel

## **Q1. WHAT IS THE CHAMBER DOING TO PREPARE FOR THE TRANSITION OF THE TERRITORY TO CHINA IN 1997?**

I think we have to appreciate and accept that 1997 is a process and not a date. In many ways that process of change started some time ago and will accelerate towards 1997 and continue beyond. The economic integration between Hong Kong and China means the centre of gravity of Hong Kong's relationship with China has shifted massively into the economic arena and away from the diplomatic and political one. It means that economically, 1997 has already happened. Partnership between Hong Kong and China is already a fact of life. I do not expect the change in sovereignty in 1997 to make much difference to the continuance of this economic integration.



Since the signing of the Joint Declaration in 1984, Hong Kong's various connections with China have multiplied many times over with the attendant consequence that Hong Kong's political, legal, and economic future is now more closely tied to China than ever before. As China's economy has grown, Hong Kong's role as the interface between China and the outside world has become more important and profitable.

Accordingly, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong is closely monitoring economic developments in China and in Hong Kong's domestic economy. The presence of Canadian business in Hong Kong - symbolized by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong, the largest Chamber organization outside Canada - is an effective and visible sign of the Canadian role and participation in Hong Kong.



The Chamber's role is to facilitate and promote Canadian trade and business with and between Hong Kong and



Chinese companies and enterprises. In fulfilling this role, we have organized activities such as fact-finding missions to the Pearl River Delta Zone, trade shows, and seminars highlighting the economic development of China and business potential of the Canada-Hong Kong-China relationship.



Additionally, the Chamber is now debating whether, in light of the economic interrelationship between China and Hong Kong, it should be redesignated as the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong and China and whether it should establish a branch office in China or formalize associations or affiliations with Chamber organizations in China. This debate is consistent with our belief that Canadian business will substantially ignore parochial issues relating to China as a whole.



## **Q2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CHAMBER'S MISSION TO SHANGHAI AND BEIJING?**

We consider it important to deliver the message to Chinese business that our Chamber is aware of the business potential of China and that we would like to expand the jurisdiction of our Chamber to enable us to better service our members and the Canadian business commu-

nity by providing business contacts and information relating to China.



## **Q3. HOW WILL THE CHANGES MADE TO THE CHAMBER'S CONSTITUTION HELP TO EXPAND ITS ACTIVITIES INTO CHINA?**

We have amended the constitution of the Chamber to permit us to explore various options which may present themselves in connection with enlarging the area of jurisdiction of the Chamber. These options will almost certainly include the establishment of a branch office in China or the establishment of close affiliations or associations with Chamber or trade organizations within China. The Chamber mission to Shanghai and Beijing is the first step in this process.



## **Q4. IN WHAT FORM DO YOU SEE THE CHAMBER'S INVOLVEMENT IN CHINA OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?**

The popular view, and one which incidentally I agree with, is that China's economic growth is irreversible and will steadily increase during the next decade and beyond. Hong Kong will remain for some time the premier gateway city to China and the Chamber, based as it is in Hong Kong, will continue to facilitate the fostering of business and investment activities between Canada, Hong Kong, Southern China, and indeed, Greater China. The expansionary growth of China's economy may not be 'smooth sailing' all the way, and there are bound to be tensions and issues which affect business relationships in the coming years. Hopefully, the Chamber, through its own network in Hong Kong and China or through a number of close associations with other trade organizations in China, will be in a position to provide a means through which issues, grievances, and problems can be discussed, clarified, and resolved. ♦