

To many Americans - particularly perhaps to you, who share with one of our greatest provinces an outlook on the Pacific - it must have seemed curious that Canada should for so long have paid little attention to the Far East; and this in contrast to the close and continued interest which Americans have maintained from quite early times. There are, of course, historical explanations for this difference. The United States - a great Power for many years - has for long had political and commercial interests which are world-wide. In the Far East you developed in the last century the "Open Door" policy towards China. The opening of Japan to Western influence dates from the exploits of Admiral Perry a hundred years ago. You have held overseas possessions in the Orient. The Philippine Republic - now your sovereign ally - these islands have been an active, living link over several generations between your country and the East.

Before the war, on the other hand, Canadian interests in the Far East were, even relatively, much less substantial and intimate. It is true that we had considerable commerce with and economic interests in Japan. Any many Canadian missionaries, businessmen and travellers journeyed to and from the Orient. But these relations were not of great political consequence nor of general concern to Canadians, to the large majority of whom Asia was mysterious and remote.

It was, I think, natural that such attention as Canadians were willing to give to their country's external affairs should, until quite recently, have been centred almost exclusively in the United States and in Europe. You were our great and powerful neighbour, with whom we were in continual contact in the multitudinous affairs of our private and national existence. The United Kingdom, at the doorway of Europe, was the centre of the old British Empire and, after 1931 of the new Commonwealth of Nations. To the Commonwealth we were attached by strong ties of loyalty and interest. The relatively peaceful process by which Canada attained her independence did not create among Canadians the same reservations about the "other side" of the Atlantic that were still widespread in this country even a generation ago. And the greatest volume of Canadian trade was conducted through a three-way channel with the British Isles and the United States. Further, the two great races to which most Canadians traced their origins were Anglo-Saxon and French. Finally, Canada had already been involved in one war to prevent a German conquest of Europe and seemed likely to be drawn into another.

So the most compelling factors in Canada's external relationships up until the Second World War combined to fix the attention of Canadians on this continent and on Europe. It should also be noted that, in the twenties and thirties, much of Canada was still undeveloped, large areas even unexplored. The ten million-or-so Canadians who made up the country's population in 1930 had plenty to preoccupy them at home. The Far East was far away and unknown. The great stirrings that were taking place among the millions of Asia attracted the interest of few and the study of only a handful of "specialists" in Canada's infant Foreign Office.

During and since the last Great War, this situation greatly changed. And the beginning of the change might fairly be marked from those fateful days in 1941 when, in the course of one of the first of that series of disasters which shook the free world, Canadian soldiers, scarcely arrived in Hong Kong to bolster the little garrison, were overwhelmed in the fury of the Japanese onslaught.