

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here this evening to speak with you a little about the past, and a lot about the future. About an area of the world that many of you know intimately. An area of the world with which I hope and believe Canadians will become more and more familiar and comfortable. Asia is a small part of our past. It will be a huge part of our future.

Asia. The orient. To this day an evocative world. Of China traders and the treaty ports. Of great Hong and Taipan. Of a highly structured and virtually impenetrable Japan of Shoguns and Samurai. Of the Celebes, Ceylon and the Kingdom of Siam. Of Indian princely states, sweltering plantations and cool hill stations. Romantic images of the past built from truth into myth by too many novels, too many films. And yet hidden in those images are elements of reality, reflections of a different but highly-cultured segment of the human mosaic. Wealthy in gold, in silks, in spices, Asia drew Europeans, North Americans, Russians from the time of its earliest openings.

Our images of the romantic Asia of earlier times seem to be empty of identifiable Canadians. And yet Asia has drawn Canadians from the time of our earliest travels. After all, Canada was only explored partly by frustrated China-hunters trying to find their way through or around North America. Our founding fathers knew that our country must stretch to the Pacific - that was their goal. They named the railway that united our country the Canadian Pacific, and they chose "from sea to sea" as a motto.

Even as we found the national will to create the dominion of Canada, Canadians were wending their way deep into China, starting schools in Korea, teaching in Japan. By the time of our coming of age as a nation, after World War I, we had Canadians officially posted in China, in Japan, and in Australia. And in 1929 we opened our first fully-fledged national legation in Tokyo, the third non-Commonwealth capital in which we were to establish an independent diplomatic presence. By the time the war broke out we had missions as far afield as Kobe and Shanghai. Those missions reflected our Pacific trade and the anticipation of greater ties.

For five decades we have helped provide Asia with the two foundations of progress - stability and economic development. We fought for Asian independence in World War II. We fought in defence of freedom in Korea. We have played a peacekeeping role in Indochina, and Kashmir. We are now providing peacekeeping in Afghanistan and in the Gulf.