

III. BACKGROUND

I accepted the challenge of preparing a report on the feasibility of establishing a Canada Foundation for Asia and the Pacific because I am convinced it is an idea whose time has come. For nearly two decades I have been active in Pacific commerce – specifically with Japan: first, as a lawyer in the 60's assisting in the negotiations of joint ventures between Canadian and Japanese companies, and later in the 70's, as President of a Canadian company which became the world's largest exporter of lead and zinc concentrate to Japan. Travelling back and forth across the Pacific on a regular basis during this time, I came to admire what was being done by the Japanese people with respect to their economic development. They had both the wisdom and confidence to take a long term point of view, as well as the ability and discipline to achieve it. I was further impressed by their energy and determination in pursuing knowledge of the West, including its cultures, customs, languages and technology. I began to realize that the kind of progress they were having was to be of a long duration, that it would bring about considerable changes in their part of the world, changes that would also have dramatic repercussions in Canada.

I became convinced that we had to begin in Canada to be more than just reactive to their success; that we had to take a new and more forceful role in Asia and the Pacific if we were to establish a new base to move more confidently and successfully into the future. In particular, I felt we had, in turn, to learn from Asia and the Pacific, just as they had learned from the West. We had to come to grips with understanding Asian and Pacific societies better: understand their philosophy, their religions, their cultures, in order to fully grasp the idea systems which fuel their organizational achievements – achievements which are the cornerstone of the extraordinary developments taking place in the Asia Pacific region.

This kind of comprehensive undertaking is even more urgently needed today as the economic and social challenges facing us in Canada are of much greater magnitude than we have ever experienced or expected. Unless we begin to understand the psychological and philosophical underpinnings of Asian and Pacific societies, we will not be able to adapt successfully to the challenge they represent.

In 1980, when I heard people advocating for the first time publicly the creation of an Asia Pacific Foundation to meet this need, I became involved. In 1981 I undertook to conduct a study of its feasibility for the Department of External Affairs. At first, I thought it would take only a few months to talk to a small group of interested people and then write a short report. I was not prepared for the snowball effect that the announcement of the study would have, or the interest that would be generated in different regions of our country. Almost immediately there was a flood of inquiries, letters and phone calls. In addition, the Pacific-Asia Cultural and Economic Exchange Society of Victoria and the Vancouver Mokuyokai Group organized meetings, and four major universities organized their own independent symposiums.