



CANADA CHINA FORUM
FORUM CANADA CHINE

加中论坛

20
25

REBUILDING CANADA'S CHINA STRATEGY IN AN ERA OF STRATEGIC RECALIBRATION

Emerging Leaders Dialogue 2025: Report

Rebuilding Canada's China Strategy in an Era of Strategic Recalibration

Ottawa | November 19, 2025

CANADA CHINA FORUM

Connecting. Collaborating. Changing.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
WHAT DELEGATES CONCLUDED.....	3
WHAT REMAINS UNRESOLVED.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
I. DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM IN CANADA–CHINA RELATIONS.....	5
A. NARRATIVES.....	5
B. CHINA COMPETENCY AND THE EROSION OF INSTITUTIONAL EXPERTISE.....	6
II. SECURITY, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF STRATEGIC COMPETITION.....	7
III. NAVIGATING MISTRUST AND INTERDEPENDENCE.....	7
A. STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND THE LIMITS OF ALIGNMENT.....	7
B. TRUST DEFICITS AND THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF DISENGAGEMENT.....	8
CONCLUSION: CANADA’S STRATEGIC RECALIBRATION.....	10
ABOUT THE CANADA CHINA FORUM.....	11
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	11
ANNEX A: PROGRAM.....	12
ANNEX B: TIMELINE OF KEY CANADA–CHINA DEVELOPMENTS, 2018–2026.....	13

Executive Summary

In November 2025, at the hinge of the Canada–China reset, the Canada China Forum convened its inaugural Emerging Leaders Dialogue in Ottawa: 32 delegates from industry, government, academia, and civil society from across Canada, meeting weeks after Prime Minister Carney and President Xi held the first Canada–China leaders’ meeting since 2017, and two months before the Beijing visit that produced a new [trade and economic roadmap](#).

The closed-door dialogue was hosted at the Wellington Building by the Honourable Yuen Pau Woo, Senator for British Columbia, and held under the Chatham House Rule, giving participants the ability to have open and frank discussion on a highly polarized and sensitive relationship. Views in this report are unattributed. Much of what the room debated has since been tested by evolving events both domestically and internationally. This summary presents the dialogue’s principal findings and the questions it left open.

What delegates concluded

- **How Canada frames the China question shapes everything downstream.** Delegates divided over the nature and scale of the China threat, and that division anchored their economic prescriptions. The alleged “police stations” episode, in which RCMP investigations followed intense media reporting but have produced no charges to date, was cited as a warning: where policy rests on intelligence that cannot be publicly tested, the threat narrative can become self-reinforcing. Others countered that real security concerns persist (the Hogue Commission found PRC interference in Canada’s democratic processes persistent and sophisticated) and that deeper interdependence invites concessions on sovereignty.
- **Canada’s capacity to understand China is thinnest exactly when it is needed most.** When the dialogue met, no major Canadian outlet had a reporter based in mainland China: the CBC closed its Beijing bureau in 2022 after more than 40 years, and the Globe and Mail’s correspondent has worked from Hong Kong since 2021. Academic China programs face funding cuts, exchange programs go undersubscribed, and diaspora Chinese-Canadians, wary of being labelled agents of foreign influence, are withdrawing from public debate. Competency means understanding China’s political, economic and societal institutions and five-year planning cycles, not language skills alone.
- **Security concerns are real, and technology keeps widening their reach.** The wind-up orders against Hikvision and [TikTok Canada](#) (the latter resolved in 2026 through binding undertakings after the Federal Court set the order aside), and the Communications Security Establishment’s finding that PRC state actors maintained access to federal networks, illustrate how the boundaries between commerce, data, and security have now blurred. Delegates nonetheless cautioned against reading the whole relationship through this lens, pointing to AI governance, climate, and global health as necessary lanes of cooperation.
- **Canada has more room for manoeuvre than its policy reflects.** The 2024 decision to mirror the US 100% EV surtax, rather than run an EU-style subsidy investigation with calibrated duties, was the room’s central example of narrowing policy space by default. The January 2026 renegotiation, cutting the tariff to 6.1% within a 49,000-vehicle quota, was struck bilaterally and criticized in Washington after the fact: proof that the degrees of freedom exist when Ottawa chooses to use them.
- **Disengagement has a price, and undifferentiated restriction raises it.** China’s 2025 retaliation covered over C\$2.6 billion in canola, pork, pea, and seafood exports, while extended national-security reviews of Chinese investment have multiplied since 2019 (Section III). Delegates argued for screening that distinguishes by sector, ownership, and region rather than treating all Chinese capital as uniform risk.

Arctic infrastructure, where some Indigenous communities welcome investment amid persistent deficits, shows what a blanket approach forecloses.

- **Trust will be rebuilt bottom-up.** Energy, agriculture, and climate are the practical “low-hanging fruit,” but it is academic exchanges, business partnerships, and civil-society ties that carry a relationship through political shocks, alongside mutual sensitivity on questions of sovereignty, particularly Taiwan.

What remains unresolved

If the sessions converged on anything, it was that Canada’s approach to China still lacks strategic clarity, shaped more by domestic politics and news cycles than by a long-term plan. Events since add a caveat: much of the reset was assembled through channels that became public only after the fact, so the outside view may mistake sequencing for drift. Six questions follow:

1. **What does Canada actually want from China?** A stabilized trading relationship, a hedge against dependence on the United States, or a broader strategic partnership? The answer determines how much risk is worth pricing in.
2. **Can the reset survive a shock?** A foreign-interference finding, a Taiwan crisis, or US pressure in continental trade negotiations would test whether re-engagement has institutional depth or only momentum. Beijing’s warnings after an April 2026 parliamentary visit to Taiwan offered a first, modest test.
3. **Who rebuilds China competency, and who pays?** Universities, newsrooms, and the government each hold a piece of the answer, but no one owns the file. The first two lack stable funding, and Ottawa has not made rebuilding China competencies and expertise anyone’s job.
4. **How should intelligence-derived claims be tested in public debate** without either dismissing real threats or letting unverifiable assertions drive policy?
5. **Is calibrated policy a one-off, or a template?** The EV quota and the March 2026 TikTok resolution, which replaced a wind-up order with binding undertakings and independent monitoring, both trade blanket measures for conditions. Whether that becomes the default across trade and investment files will reveal how differentiated Canada’s approach can become.
6. **How much of the relationship should run through quiet channels or Track 2 diplomacy?** Much of the reset was negotiated out of public view and disclosed after the fact. That bought room to move, at a price in public accountability. Where the line sits between discretion and disclosure is itself a policy choice.

The sections that follow take up each theme in turn. Annex B situates the dialogue within the arc of events from the 2018 rupture to mid-2026.

Introduction

“The question confronting policymakers is not simply how to repair relations with China, but how to navigate an international environment in which economic interdependence, strategic geopolitical rivalry, and political distrust increasingly coexist and interact.”

The Canada China Forum’s inaugural Emerging Leaders Dialogue (ELD), convened in Ottawa on November 19, 2025, brought together emerging Canadian leaders, policymakers, diplomats, businesspeople, and scholars from across Canada and abroad to examine the evolving strategic landscape of Canada–China relations. The discussions came at the tail end of a prolonged diplomatic freeze between Ottawa and Beijing, shaped by geopolitical tension, foreign-interference debates, and diverging security concerns.

Although the dialogue preceded the more visible policy shifts of early 2026, including Prime Minister Carney’s recalibration of Canada’s approach to China and his remarks on the international system at Davos, the discussions anticipated many of the tensions that have since moved to the centre of the policy debate.

Participants from government, academia, diplomacy, and industry aired a wide range of perspectives, and three themes emerged. The first was the erosion of Canada’s China expertise, tied to the need to re-examine the narratives that have shaped policy since 2018. The second, and most central, was security: participants, like the wider public, hold diverging understandings of China’s geopolitical ambitions, and the policy space is, paradoxically, both widening and narrowing under geopolitical pressure. The third was navigating mistrust and economic interdependence, raised in interventions on the costs of disengagement and on the opportunities and risks of greater dependence on China.

Taken together, the discussions suggested that the challenge facing Canada is structural: not simply repairing relations with China, but navigating a world in which economic interdependence, strategic rivalry, and political distrust coexist and interact.

I. Diagnosing the Problem in Canada–China Relations

“When policy debates begin with the assumption that China is primarily a security threat, the analytical framework tends to privilege evidence that confirms this interpretation.”

A. Narratives: The China Threat

The opening discussions focused on getting the diagnosis right. Public discourse often begins from the assumption that China represents a fundamental threat to Canada’s security and political institutions. Several speakers argued that starting there risks obscuring the underlying drivers of the bilateral rupture.

The events behind the rupture are, by now, familiar: the arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou, the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in China, the 2022 Critical Minerals and Indo-Pacific Strategies, the forced divestiture orders against three Chinese investors in Canadian critical-mineral companies that same year, the 2024 order to wind up TikTok Technology Canada (resolved in 2026 through binding undertakings after the Federal Court set the order aside), and the foreign-interference allegations that culminated in Parliament’s passage of *An Act respecting countering foreign interference* (Bill C-70, the Countering Foreign Interference Act) in 2024. Together, these events played a critical role in reshaping the domestic politics of China policy, reinforced the perception of China as an adversarial actor, and pushed Canada’s approach toward securitization.

However, some participants argued that the prevailing narrative risks becoming self-reinforcing. When policy debates begin with the assumption that China is primarily a security threat, the analytical framework tends to privilege information that confirms this interpretation, even when that information comes from non-public intelligence reporting rather than evidence that can be openly examined and tested. Several speakers suggested that Western discomfort with China's rise as a non-Western power has also shaped the tone of the discourse.

One example raised was media reporting on alleged clandestine Chinese “police stations” operating in Canada. Diaspora reports of harassment and foreign interference prompted RCMP investigations, but no charges have been laid to date. Participants used this case to illustrate the “intelligence-to-evidence” problem: claims that originate in intelligence are difficult to test publicly. Absent China-competent and sober voices in Canada's media ecosystem, they argued, such reporting can widen existing competency gaps, a risk that matters most when relations are already strained.

Participants emphasized that this does not imply a denial of legitimate concerns about China's policies. Rather, it highlights the importance of building Canadian competency on China, not only among journalists but among policymakers and the voting public. Canadian discourse on China has historically swung between alarmist and commercialist framings. Steering between them requires China-competent reporters, analysts, and citizens.

The discussion kept returning to a few basic questions: What does Canada ultimately want from its relationship with China? How should it balance values and interests amid geopolitical rivalry? And how far has the domestic discourse on China drifted from how diplomacy and commerce are actually unfolding?

B. China Competency and the Erosion of Institutional Expertise

“Canada's ability to interpret political, economic, and social developments in China has weakened at precisely the moment when such expertise is most needed.”

The most pressing theme to emerge from the dialogue was the erosion of China expertise within Canadian public institutions ranging from academic institutions to the public sector. Equally concerning is the private sector's investment in China-facing capacity: language skills, market intelligence, and on-the-ground presence, which has similarly contracted, leaving Canadian firms dependent on third-party analysis at precisely the moment when independent judgment about risk and opportunity in the Chinese market matters most.

Academic programs focused on China face funding challenges, and the number of Canadian students studying Mandarin or conducting field research in China has fallen sharply. Canadian students and young professionals have debated the value of investing in China expertise at all, questioning whether a career built on Mandarin fluency and regional specialization still offers a viable path for their future. The Canada–China Scholars' Exchange has the opposite problem: funding without enough participants.

Canadian institutions have also experienced a reduction in China-related expertise following budget cuts and the closure of several research initiatives. The losses extend to the media. The Globe and Mail's Beijing correspondent departed in 2021, and his successor has worked from Hong Kong, unable to secure a visa. The CBC closed its Beijing bureau in November 2022 after more than 40 years. Canada's major outlets now have no reporter based in mainland China, and the country's ability to interpret developments there has weakened at precisely the moment when such expertise is most needed.

Speakers emphasized that China competency involves far more than language training. It requires a deep understanding of Chinese political institutions, economic planning systems, social dynamics, and historical narratives.

Several participants highlighted China's five-year planning framework, which sets the country's medium- and long-term economic strategy. Unlike Western political systems, which operate on short electoral cycles, China's governance model emphasizes long-term planning and policy continuity. Misreading these structural differences means misreading Chinese policy signals, with real consequences for Canadian statecraft.

The discussion also addressed the role of the Chinese diaspora in Canada. Many diaspora communities possess linguistic and cultural knowledge that already strengthens Canada's analytical capacity and could do far more. However, participants noted that the current political climate has made some members of the Chinese diaspora reluctant to participate openly in China-related debates. Concerns about being labelled agents of foreign influence, or becoming targets of political or media scrutiny, have created a chilling effect on public discourse with some withdrawing from the debate entirely, so that the people with the deepest knowledge of China are the least present in Canada's conversation about it. As a result, Canada risks losing valuable expertise at a juncture when nuanced understanding of China is increasingly essential, not only to the bilateral relationship but to Canada's position in the world.

II. Security, Technology, and the Changing Character of Strategic Competition

"The Canada–China relationship now operates across multiple dimensions simultaneously: competition in some areas, cooperation in others, and strategic ambiguity in between."

Security was another major focus of the dialogue, and an underlying theme, particularly the growing intersection between technological development and national security.

Participants discussed the rise of techno-nationalism, data sovereignty, and the increasing securitization of economic and industrial policy shaped by the geopolitical tensions by China and the United States. China's state-driven approach to technological development, and its rapid advances in artificial intelligence, telecommunications infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing, have raised concerns among Western governments about the security implications of economic interdependence, technology exchange, and even academic cooperation. As Washington engages in pursuing selective accommodations, it demands tighter alignment from its partners and allies, which was evident in Canada banning Chinese telecom firms Huawei and ZTE from 5G and 4G networks over national security concerns. Any areas of cooperation, even in high-impact domains such as climate tech, were previously read through a security lens and weighed against the risk of friction with Washington; thus, leaving Canada with a narrowing band of engagement it can pursue on its own terms.

Speakers also highlighted the growing importance of non-traditional security challenges, including civilian cyber threats, supply-chain vulnerabilities, and digital surveillance technologies. Unlike conventional security concerns, these risks do not originate in the military domain. These issues blur the boundaries between civilian economic activity and national security. A procurement decision, a research partnership, an investment, or a data-hosting arrangement can now be read simultaneously as a commercial transaction and as a strategic exposure. As such, it could have a chilling effect on civilian economic activity when confronted with the possibility of such engagement being an issue of national security. Participants were careful to note that recognizing this blurring is not the same as accepting it as a governing framework. If every interaction is

treated as a security matter, the concept loses its capacity to distinguish genuine risk from ordinary commerce. Participants noted that it was imperative for the government to identify and clearly articulate the boundaries of acceptable engagement, specifying which sectors, technologies, and forms of collaboration are off-limits, which require heightened scrutiny, and which remain open. This would give businesses, universities, and civil society the ability to act with confidence rather than defaulting to avoidance in the absence of guidance.

At the same time, several participants cautioned strongly against interpreting the entire relationship through a security lens. AI regulation, climate change, disaster management, and global health were frequently cited as areas where bilateral and multilateral cooperation remains both necessary and possible for the common good. Participants further noted that several of these domains are not only sites of diplomatic cooperation but viable arenas for Canadian commercial engagement. Clean energy and climate technology, agri-food and agricultural exports, health sciences and biotechnology, environmental and water management services, education, and tourism were raised as sectors where Canadian firms and institutions hold genuine comparative advantage and where Chinese demand is substantial.

III. Navigating Mistrust and Interdependence

“Canada, participants argued, retains “degrees of freedom” in its policy decisions if it chooses to exercise them.”

A. Strategic Autonomy and the Limits of Alignment

A third major theme was Canada's strategic autonomy amid deep economic and security integration with the United States. Participants acknowledged the structural reality plainly: with the overwhelming majority of Canadian exports bound for the American market, with continental defence organized through NORAD and NATO, and with intelligence cooperation embedded in the Five Eyes, Canada cannot formulate China policy in isolation from Washington.

However, several speakers argued that Canadian policy debate often underestimates the flexibility that still exists within this structural constraint. Canada, they argued, retains “degrees of freedom” in its policy decisions if it chooses to exercise them. These include the authority to set its own regulatory standards on data, privacy, and AI governance; to determine which sectors genuinely warrant restriction and which do not; to sustain people-to-people, academic, and sub-national ties that do not touch sensitive technologies;

One example raised repeatedly was Canada's 2024 surtax order under the *Customs Tariff*, which imposed a 100% surtax on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs). While the measure aligned Canada with the United States in restricting Chinese EV imports, participants noted that China challenged it as inconsistent with Canada's obligations as a Member of the World Trade Organization. Some suggested that Canada could instead have used existing tools to emulate the European Commission: conduct a subsidy investigation into Chinese EVs and impose countervailing duties calibrated to the subsidies identified.

The EV tariff, revisited

The ELD took place before this issue was revisited. In January 2026, Canada and China reached a preliminary arrangement cutting the in-quota tariff on Chinese EVs from 100% (effectively 106.1% with the 6.1% MFN rate) to 6.1% on an initial annual quota of 49,000 vehicles (roughly the 2023–24 pre-tariff volume, and under 3% of Canada's new-vehicle market), with at least half of imported EVs to be models priced under C\$35,000 by 2030. In exchange, China cut its combined tariff on Canadian canola seed from roughly 84% to about 15% (effective March 1, 2026) and suspended anti-discrimination tariffs on canola meal, lobster, crab, and peas

through end-2026, covering an estimated C\$2.6 billion in agricultural exports. Canada's 25% steel and aluminum surtax and China's tariffs on Canadian canola oil and pork were left in place.

The arrangement illustrates the tension participants flagged: having mirrored the US tariff structure in 2024, Canada unwound it bilaterally and on its own timeline. The deal restored Canadian agricultural access, but drew public criticism from US officials, including President Trump, and domestic concern about the strain on Canada–US relations, notably from Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

Sources: [PMO, new strategic partnership with China \(Jan. 16, 2026\)](#); [Global Affairs Canada, renewed market access update \(Mar. 2026\)](#); [CBC News \(Apr. 2026\)](#).

The example pointed to a broader risk: when Canada automatically replicates American policy choices, it narrows its own toolkit. Alignment with Washington may be necessary in many areas, but it should not come at the expense of independent analysis and consideration from Ottawa. Measures designed for an economy of the United States' scale, and for a country in direct strategic competition with China, do not necessarily serve a middle power with different exposures, different vulnerabilities, and different interests at stake.

How Beijing reads Canada matters as well. Every decision is watched closely, and Chinese observers tend to interpret Canadian actions through the lens of US–China competition. Decisions made in Ottawa may register less as independent choices than as extensions of Washington's strategic posture. The consequence is twofold. Canada absorbs the reputational and retaliatory costs of positions it is seen to have inherited rather than chosen, while forfeiting the credit and the leverage that would come from being understood to act on its own reasoning. A country assumed to be following cannot negotiate as a principal. The implication is that Canada's policy credibility, in Beijing and internationally, depends in part on demonstrating that it can define its own strategic priorities.

B. Trust Deficits and the Economic Consequences of Disengagement

“The trust deficit between Canada and China now constrains economic cooperation in ways that extend far beyond traditional trade disputes.”

Economic engagement ran through much of the day, anchored by the trade and investment panel and a deep dive on Canada's export sectors.

Participants noted that Canada's economic relationship with China remains significant despite recent diplomatic tensions. Natural resources, agricultural products, and energy products continue to flow, and many Canadian firms remain active in the Chinese market: a commercial relationship that has proven more durable than the diplomatic one. But that resilience is concentrated in commodity trade rather than higher-value exports, leaving firms exposed to the sector-specific measures deployed against Canadian agriculture during political disputes, and managing that exposure with little guidance on where federal policy is heading.

Canada–China Trade, by the Numbers (2025)

- **Two-way merchandise trade** reached C\$124.09 billion in 2025, up 4.9% year-over-year, with Canadian exports rising 13.8% while imports grew 1.9%.
- Canadian exports to China totalled roughly C\$33.5 billion against about C\$90.6 billion in imports, leaving China as Canada's second-largest single-country trading partner.

- Export composition shifted sharply: energy exports rose to ~C\$9.5 billion (+77.8%) and minerals to ~C\$7.9 billion (+42.5%), overtaking agriculture, which fell to ~C\$5.9 billion (–33.2%) amid Chinese retaliatory tariffs.
- On the import side, tariff-targeted categories contracted: passenger-vehicle imports from China fell 68% following Canada’s 100% EV surtax, while steel and aluminum imports fell 38.8% and 32.2% respectively.
- China’s March 2025 retaliatory tariffs on Canadian canola, peas, pork, and seafood covered over C\$2.6 billion in exports and contributed to a 10.4% drop in China’s imports of Canadian goods that year.

Sources: [The China Institute, University of Alberta, Canada–China Trade in 2025](#) (based on Statistics Canada data); [Global Affairs Canada](#) (May 2026).

Source: ISED, Investment Canada Act [2018-2019](#), [2023-2024](#), and [2024-2025](#) annual reports, Table 4.

Investment policy also emerged as a source of friction, often framed as a binary choice: accept Chinese investment and compromise our values, or reject it. In practice, however, this framing is giving way to a more pragmatic approach under Prime Minister Carney, one that weighs the benefits of investment against specific, case-by-case risks rather than treating the question as all-or-nothing. Since the 2018 deterioration in relations, the federal government has screened Chinese foreign direct investment with increasing frequency under the national-security provisions of the Investment Canada Act: The prevalence of extended national security reviews, particularly s. 25.3 orders for review under the Investment Canada Act, increased dramatically after 2019: from the 2009-2010 to 2018-2019 periods, only 14 such orders were issued against Chinese investors. After the 2018 deterioration, from the 2019-2020 to the 2024-2025 fiscal years, 51 of these s. 25.3 orders were issued against Chinese investors. Chinese investment, in short, is now treated primarily as a national security concern. While participants acknowledged the legitimacy of security considerations, some argued that the policy debate has become overly restrictive. Chinese investors are also finding creative new vehicles and structures to invest in Canada, directing capital toward less sensitive sectors where scrutiny is lower and go unnoticed by the public-at-large.

Investment emerged as a question distinct from trade, and a more consequential one, because it shapes Canada's technological and industrial capacity rather than simply moving goods across borders. In electric-vehicle manufacturing, infrastructure, and resource development, foreign capital can accelerate build-out that Canada cannot finance on its own timeline, and restrictions carry long-term costs.

Participants acknowledged these are the sectors where Canada's capital needs are most acute, and that turbulence in the economic relationship with the United States has sharpened the problem. Diversification of capital sources has shifted from an aspirational strategy to a practical necessity, and is hard to pursue while narrowing the field of acceptable investors. The call was not for looser standards but for greater specificity and predictability in screening: clear thresholds, faster timelines, transparent reasoning. So that Canada restricts what genuinely warrants restriction while remaining a credible destination for the capital it needs.

The Arctic was cited as a case study illustrating this tension. Chinese firms have expressed interest in participating in infrastructure development in northern Canada, particularly in areas such as port construction and transportation networks. While the federal government has approached such proposals cautiously on security grounds, some Indigenous communities in the Canadian High North have shown greater openness to foreign investment, given the persistent infrastructure deficit in the region.

These discussions highlighted the difficulty of balancing economic opportunity against strategic risk. Participants largely concurred that the trust deficit between Canada and China now constrains economic cooperation in ways that extend far beyond traditional trade disputes.

The quiet channel

Much of the reset documented in this report was built out of public view and disclosed only after the fact. Minister Joly's July 2024 visit to Beijing was unannounced, and her deputy minister travelled there quietly beforehand. The Joint Economic and Trade Commission met in Canada in August 2025 with little publicity, surfacing weeks later in a leaders' readout. The Prime Minister's Office itself described the January 2026 breakthrough as the product of engagement "over many months" by cabinet, caucus, and officials. The TikTok wind-up order was resolved on consent under the confidentiality provisions of the Investment Canada Act, and Parliament has pressed for disclosure of an RCMP memorandum of understanding with China's Ministry of Public Security.

Quiet diplomacy has evident uses. It gives both governments room to de-escalate without domestic politics pricing every move, and the 2024-2026 sequence suggests most of the deals were assembled quietly and announced whole. But it carries costs the dialogue's themes anticipate: a public record that understates the policy's coherence, a Parliament that learns of commitments after the fact, and a citizenry asked to judge a relationship it cannot fully see. Where information is scarce, narrative fills the space. The dialogue itself, held under the Chatham House Rule, reflects the same trade-off in miniature: candour purchased with discretion.

The point is not that quiet channels are wrong. It is that they shift the burden: the less the public sees of the diplomacy, the more the country depends on China-competent institutions, in the media, the academy, and Parliament, to interpret it.

Sources: [GAC readout \(July 2024\)](#); [PMO readout \(Sept. 2025\)](#); [PMO release \(Jan. 2026\)](#); [The Canadian Press \(May 2026\)](#).

Conclusion: Canada's Strategic Recalibration

"Whether Canada can convert these assets into a durable China policy is the open question."

The Emerging Leaders Dialogue revealed a young Canadian policy community grappling with the structural realities of a changing international system. The discussions made clear that the deterioration of Canada-China relations cannot be understood solely as a bilateral diplomatic dispute. It reflects deeper transformations in the global order: the rise of China, the fragmentation of globalization, and the intensification of great-power competition between the United States and China. Framing the relationship as a problem to be repaired, several participants suggested, mistakes a symptom for a cause — and leads to a policy of waiting rather than deciding.

The dialogue also took stock of what Canada still has to work with: a diversified economy, a tradition of diplomatic engagement, strong educational institutions, and enduring people-to-people ties with China. These assets are real, but they are not self-sustaining. Each depends on Canada's China capacity that the dialogue identified as eroding: the expertise, the institutional investment, and the willingness to engage publicly without fear of being misread.

Whether Canada can convert these assets into a durable China policy remains the open question. What the dialogue demonstrated is a generation prepared to ask it: emerging policymakers and analysts who see the need to rethink assumptions that have gone largely untested since 2018.

That debate is now unfolding in Canadian policy circles: how to recalibrate Canada's approach in a world where cooperation, competition, and strategic rivalry will coexist for the foreseeable future. The dialogue's contribution was not to resolve it, but to insist that it be conducted deliberately, by people equipped to conduct it, rather than settled by default.

About the Canada China Forum

The Canada China Forum is a national network of Canadians under 35 committed to the Canada–China relationship. Through dialogues, mentorship, and professional and research opportunities, the Forum is building a generation of Canadian leaders who are globally minded and China-competent — and equipped to contribute to Canada's engagement with China in service of the national interest. Learn more at canadachinaforum.ca.

Acknowledgments

The Canada China Forum owes a particular debt to the Honourable Yuen Pau Woo, Senator for British Columbia, whose long-standing service on the Forum's advisory board and whose hosting of the inaugural dialogue at the Wellington Building made this gathering possible. We thank the Canada China Business Council for its generous sponsorship of the trade and investment panel, and the Canadian Meat Council for their Dialogue-wide sponsorship. We thank Minister Counsellor Zhongzhou Li of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, the Co-Chairs of the Canada-China Legislative Association (CACN) Member of Parliament Zoe Royer and Senator Hon. Clément Gignac for joining delegates to mark the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries: a milestone this dialogue was privileged to observe.

The Forum extends its warmest thanks to the University of Alberta's China Institute and the University of British Columbia's Institute for Asian Research, whose travel stipends and institutional support brought a new generation of students into the room. We are likewise grateful to the Canadian Meat Council for its sponsorship.

This report is the work of many hands. We thank Daniel Lincoln, Chief Financial Officer of the Canada China Forum, for leading the drafting with rigour and care, and members Jimmy Lou, Hannibal El-Mohtar, Colin Sawatzky, Dongwoo Kim, Arjun Gupta, Jacob Anderson, and Emma Huang, whose revisions sharpened both the argument and its clarity throughout. The Leadership Team took every care in reviewing it: Rasdeep Singh, Alex Nanoff, Demetria Hu, Johnsen Romero and Jonathan Kolodychuk. CEO Darren Touch provided the strategic direction that shaped the Dialogue and this report, and convened the partners and participants who made it possible.

Above all, the Forum is grateful to every speaker listed in Annex A for their candour and generosity, and to the delegates whose contributions this report seeks faithfully to synthesize. We are grateful above all to the speakers, moderators, and participants of the Emerging Leaders Dialogue, who engaged with difficult questions candidly and in good faith. The substance of this report is theirs; the responsibility for how it has been rendered is ours. The views expressed in this report reflect the themes that emerged across the Dialogue's sessions and should not be attributed to any individual participant or to their institutions. Discussions were held under Chatham House rules.

Annex A: Program

The dialogue opened with a welcome reception on November 18, 2025, followed by a full-day program on November 19 at the Wellington Building (Room W-120), Parliament Hill, hosted by the Honourable Yuen Pau Woo, Senator for British Columbia.

Time	Session and Speakers
8:30 AM	Welcome Remarks Darren Touch, Founder & CEO, Canada China Forum; Hon. Yuen Pau Woo, Senator for British Columbia
8:35 AM	Community-Building Introductions & Exercises
9:30 AM	Panel 1: Navigating a New Security Landscape: China's Strategic Posture and Canada's Response Robert Hanlon, Associate Professor and Chair, Dept. of Philosophy, History and Politics, Thompson Rivers University
10:15 AM	Panel 2: Trading Places: Finding a Better Balance in Canada–China Trade & Investment (sponsored by the Canada China Business Council) Graham Shantz, President, Canada China Business Council; Jeff Mahon, Director, International Business and Geopolitical Advisory, StrategyCorp; Henry Liu, Vice President, Power Corporation; Carlo Dade, Director, International Policy, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary
11:30 AM	Deep Dive: Trade in Practice: Realities and Resilience in Canada's Export Sectors Claire Citeau, Vice-President, International Trade, Canadian Meat Council
12:00 PM	Lunch: Reflecting on the 55th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations and the 20th Anniversary of the Strategic Partnership Minister Counsellor Zhongzhou Li, Embassy of the People's Republic of China to Canada
1:15 PM	Keynote: Canada–China Legislative Association (CACN) Zoe Royer, MP for Port Moody–Coquitlam; Hon. Clément Gignac, Senator for Kennebec, Quebec
2:00 PM	Government of Canada Briefing Eric Bertram, Director, Centre for China Policy Research, Global Affairs Canada
3:00 PM	Panel 3: Redefining the Relationship: New Approaches to Canada–China Engagement Guy Saint-Jacques, former Ambassador of Canada to China
4:15 PM	Panel 4: China Competency and the National Interest: Why Knowing China Matters in a Changing World Xiaobei Chen, Professor, Carleton University; Julia Bentley, Senior Fellow, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto
5:30 PM	Closing Remarks Darren Touch, Founder & CEO, Canada China Forum

Annex B: Timeline of Key Canada–China Developments, 2018–2026

The following timeline situates the November 2025 Emerging Leaders Dialogue within the broader arc of Canada–China relations: from the 2018 rupture, through the trade disputes and security decisions that followed, to the diplomatic re-engagement of 2024–2026 that the dialogue itself anticipated. It records publicly announced engagements only. A number of official and track-two exchanges in this period were not publicized, and several entries below, including the August 2025 JETC meeting, became public only through later readouts.

Date	Event
PHASE I: RUPTURE (2018–2021)	
Dec 1, 2018	Canada detains Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver at the request of the United States.
Dec 10, 2018	China detains Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.
Sept 24–25, 2021	Meng is released under a deferred prosecution agreement with US authorities; Kovrig and Spavor are released and return to Canada.
PHASE II: SECURITIZATION AND FIRST RE-ENGAGEMENT (2022–2024)	
Nov 2, 2022	Canada orders three Chinese firms to divest their minority stakes in three Canadian critical-mineral (lithium) companies.
Nov–Dec 2022	Canada releases its Indo-Pacific Strategy (November) and Critical Minerals Strategy (December).
Jun 20, 2024	Bill C-70, An Act respecting countering foreign interference (Countering Foreign Interference Act), receives Royal Assent.
Jul 18–20, 2024	Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly visits Beijing at Wang Yi’s invitation, the first visit to China by a Canadian foreign minister since 2017. The two sides commit to “pragmatic” engagement and regular ministerial-level discussions.
Aug 26, 2024	Canada announces a 100% surtax on Chinese electric vehicles and a 25% surtax on Chinese steel and aluminum, mirroring earlier US measures. The EV surtax takes effect October 1, 2024.
Sept 3, 2024	China launches an anti-dumping investigation into Canadian canola imports in response to the EV surtax.
Oct 2024	Canada’s Communications Security Establishment reports (in its National Cyber Threat Assessment 2025–2026) that PRC state-sponsored actors have maintained access to federal government networks over several years.
Nov 7, 2024	Canada orders TikTok Technology Canada, Inc. to wind up its Canadian operations following a national-security review under the Investment Canada Act. TikTok challenges the order in Federal Court.
PHASE III: TRADE CONFLICT AND RESET (2025–2026)	
Jan 28, 2025	The Hogue Commission releases the final report of the public inquiry into foreign interference in Canada’s democratic institutions.
Mar 8, 2025	China accuses Canada of disregarding WTO rules and imposes retaliatory tariffs on Canadian canola oil, meal, and peas (100%) and pork and seafood (25%), effective March 20.
Mar 19, 2025	Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly condemns China’s execution of four Canadians on drug-related offences.
Jun 5, 2025	Prime Minister Carney and Premier Li Qiang speak by phone and agree to “regularize channels of communication,” following a meeting of the two trade ministers earlier that week; both sides agree to convene the Canada–China Joint Economic and Trade Commission (JETC).
Jun 27, 2025	The Governor in Council orders Hikvision to wind up its Canadian operations within 120 days, following a national-security review under the Investment Canada Act.

Date	Event
Aug 2025	The JETC, dormant for years, meets in Canada to work through trade irritants. The same month, China imposes provisional anti-dumping duties on Canadian canola seed.
Sept 22–23, 2025	At the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, Carney says Canada should be “clearer about where we engage” with China, maintaining security “guardrails.” The next day he meets Premier Li Qiang at the UN General Assembly. The Federal Court dismisses Hikvision’s motion to stay the wind-up order (Hikvision discontinues its challenge in April 2026).
Oct 16–17, 2025	Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand visits Beijing and meets Wang Yi, as the two countries mark 55 years of diplomatic relations.
Oct 31, 2025	Carney and Xi Jinping meet on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Gyeongju, South Korea, the first leader-level meeting since 2017. Carney calls it a “turning point.”
Nov 2025	The Canada China Forum convenes its inaugural Emerging Leaders Dialogue in Ottawa (the subject of this report).
Jan 13–17, 2026	Carney, accompanied by Minister Anand, makes the first official visit to China by a Canadian PM since 2017. The two sides announce an updated Strategic Partnership and a trade roadmap: Canada cuts the in-quota EV tariff from 100% to 6.1% on a 49,000-unit quota; China lowers canola-seed tariffs from ~84% to ~15% and suspends anti-discrimination tariffs on canola meal, lobster, crab, and peas through end-2026. MOUs are signed spanning energy, combatting crime, wood construction, culture, and food safety.
Jan 20, 2026	Carney delivers a widely noted address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, describing a “rupture” in the rules-based international order and urging middle powers to cooperate.
Jan 21, 2026	On consent of both parties, the Federal Court sets aside the TikTok wind-up order and the government undertakes a further national-security review.
Jan 2026	A new pet-food safety and sanitation protocol is signed; China resumes access for Canadian porcine and bovine genetics.
Mar 9, 2026	Following the further review, Canada permits TikTok Canada’s investment to proceed subject to legally binding undertakings covering data security, protections for minors, and an independent third-party monitor.
Apr 1–4, 2026	Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne visits Beijing with the Governor of the Bank of Canada, meeting Vice-Premier He Lifeng and Finance Minister Lan Fo’an. Canada and China launch a Financial Working Group with the People’s Bank of China; Champagne invites He Lifeng to visit Canada in the fall.
Apr 2026	A Conservative-led parliamentary delegation headed by Senator Leo Housakos visits Taiwan (arriving April 7); Beijing subsequently warns against further such visits.
Apr 12–16, 2026	International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu leads Canada’s delegation to the China International Consumer Products Expo in Haikou, where Canada is Guest Country of Honour, and travels to Guangzhou, the first visit by a Canadian minister to South China since 2018. He meets Vice-Premier He Lifeng and Chinese EV makers, and witnesses the signing of 24 commercial agreements.
May 28–30, 2026	Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visits Ottawa, the first bilateral visit to Canada by a Chinese foreign minister since 2016, and meets Prime Minister Carney and Minister Anand on implementing the updated Strategic Partnership.

Selected sources (all links verified July 2026)

- [PMO: Prime Minister Carney forges new strategic partnership with the People’s Republic of China \(Jan. 16, 2026\)](#)
- [PMO readout: Carney–Xi meeting, Beijing \(Jan. 16, 2026\)](#)
- [PMO readouts: Carney–Li Qiang call \(June 5, 2025\) and meeting at UNGA \(Sept. 23, 2025\)](#)
- [GAC readout: Minister Joly meets Wang Yi, Beijing \(July 19, 2024\)](#)
- [GAC: Minister Anand to travel to India, Singapore and China \(Oct. 2025\)](#)

- [Finance Canada: Minister Champagne concludes visit to China \(Apr. 2026\)](#)
- [GAC: Minister Sidhu's visit to South China \(Apr. 2026\)](#)
- [GAC: Wang Yi's visit to Canada \(May 2026\)](#)
- [Parliament of Canada, LEGISinfo: Bill C-70 \(Countering Foreign Interference Act\)](#)
- [Foreign Interference Commission \(Hogue Commission\), Final Report \(Jan. 28, 2025\)](#)
- [Communications Security Establishment, National Cyber Threat Assessment 2025–2026](#)
- [ISED: Minister Joly's statement on the further TikTok national-security review \(Mar. 9, 2026\)](#)
- [The China Institute, University of Alberta: Canada–China Trade in 2025](#)