



How to save face:
Peiwu Cong at the CORIM

Description

China's Ambassador discusses China-Canada relations with Pierre Marc Johnson

By Luc Archambault

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On Tuesday, April 13, the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Canada, **Peiwu Cong**, was received at the podium of the **Council of International Relations of Montréal (CORIM)** at the very request of the Ambassador, according to the CORIM.

What was to happen? A reordering of litigations between China and Canada? Faced with the tongue-in-cheek of Chinese representatives in the past, what to expect from such an intervention? A one-sided discourse, a point-by-point lesson without the possibility of repartee?

A trap that the CORIM, with the chairman of its board of directors, **Pierre Marc Johnson**, has been able to avoid. Mr. Johnson, therefore skilfully facilitated this discussion, this exchange where he was able to ask questions to the Ambassador. He even pressed him at times, especially on the question of the two Michaels and their conditions of detention as well as their rights to legal representation. But the Ambassador was able to avoid direct answers, wading through the swampy official discourse of the ruling CCP (by throwing, like a joke: "Between 90% and 95% of the Chinese population approves our government's initiatives"!), thus plunging into the ideological stagnation of a one-sided discourse.

Faced with the tongue-in-cheek of Chinese representatives in the past, what to expect from such an intervention? A one-sided discourse, a point-by-point lesson without the possibility of repartee?

Mr. Cong even defended the intervention of mainland China in Hong Kong, accusing the demonstrators of opting for chaos and reminding us, poor naïve Westerners, that there was no democracy under British rule in Hong Kong but it has flourished there since the 1999 handover. And to counter this chaos, China, by respecting the freedom of expression of all its citizens, has regained control of the situation by implementing its national

security law.

Asked about the two Michaels, the Ambassador maintained that the Middle Empire is far from an authoritarian state, but a state respecting the Rule of Law (although ignoring international jurisprudence, which Beijing sees as foreign interference in its internal affairs). But about the two Michaels, as a good diplomat, he ended with a rather clever trick of the trade (“Let’s see how this situation will play out”... despite the pronouncement of the sentences by the Chinese courts) like nothing should be regarded as impossible under a people’s dictatorship.



Image: Tony Fischer via StockPholio.net

China still hopes to build bilateral relations with Canada, develop the various common interests shared by the two countries, and continue the exchange of international students (although the number of Canadians studying in China is but a fraction of the Chinese students here in Canada). China, according to the Ambassador, is not seeking to expand its hegemony. It does not see its historical role through the lens of imperialism. It promotes democracy, helps the poorest countries through its peacekeepers, seeks to promote a level of sustainable development and wants to defend the international order.

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The Ambassador concluded his public relations exercise by mentioning the danger of a decoupling of our respective economies, the risk of a rise in protectionism and the collapse of free trade on a global scale. Nevertheless, our questions about the collapse of China’s birth rate, the increasingly weakened food intake by the pollution of groundwater in agricultural areas and the massive purchase of farms and piggeries here in Canada as a direct result to compensate for this growing lack, remained unanswered.

All in all, an interesting exploration led subtly by Pierre Marc Johnson, wanting to be incisive at times but coming



up against the tongue-in-cheek attitude of a master in the art of talking in circles.

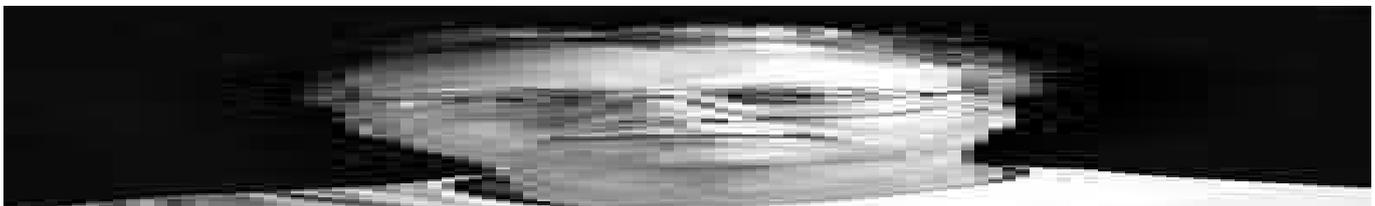
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Luc Archambault, writer and journalist, globe-trotter at heart, passionate about movies, music, literature and contemporary dance, came back to Montreal from an extended stay in China to pursue his unrelenting quest for artistic meaning.



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