

OPINION-EDITORIAL

TWINNING EXPANDS ON COOPERATION BETWEEN B.C. AND ASIA

By Ida Chong
Minister of Community Services

Dec. 7, 2007

(665 words)

Imagine taking British Columbia, as it is right now, and then adding a community the size of Victoria to it, everyday, for the next twenty years. That is exactly what's happening in China today, as urbanization creates demand for new infrastructure. The growth is incredible to think about, amazing to see, but, it is the opportunities that stem from it, that are most exciting.

As B.C.'s Minister responsible for local government, I just returned from an extensive [10-day mission](#) to the People's Republic of China. My visit was focussed on building the relationships British Columbia communities and those in China already have and forging new ones towards a new level of economic strength.

During this mission, I visited Luogang, Shunde, Shanghai-Pudong and Zhongshan among other areas, and witnessed first-hand the drive for development and the desire to partner with British Columbia.

We know there are abundant economic opportunities to be explored with Asian markets. B.C.'s goal to connect with Asia could provide as much as \$76 billion in increased trade and 255,000 jobs by 2020. The Chinese are well aware that sailing times from Prince Rupert to China are up to 58 hours faster than from any other of North America's west coast ports. And with the huge increase in Asia-Pacific container traffic forecast, Prince Rupert's new container terminal is ready and already poised for expansion to respond to this huge potential.

In 2005, Premier Gordon Campbell hosted the Governor of Guangdong, Huang Huahua, along with a 600-person delegation to British Columbia. That mission celebrated the 10th anniversary of the protocol which declared the two as sister-provinces – a relationship which has developed and been nurtured by both provinces since that time. So it was particularly gratifying for me to build on this foundation during my recent visit. I was honoured to sign a ***Memorandum of Understanding for Supporting the Establishment of Robust Twinning Relationships*** between Local Governments in Guangdong and B.C. This [MOU](#) opens the doors for B.C.'s local governments who wish to explore the potential of China's wealthiest province. With a gross domestic product twice that of British Columbia, and a population of more than 80 million people, Guangdong presents a huge opportunity for collaboration.

B.C.'s communities and local government leaders can be the key to this collaboration. That's why we are encouraging local governments to examine the exciting possibilities to twin with communities in Asia to strengthen their local economies and cultural connections. International twinning is a way of promoting development and forming relationships among local governments, businesses, education centres, organizations and individuals. From what I saw during my mission, the potential is limitless.

To support this, we've developed, along with the Union of BC Municipalities, a [Twinning Toolkit](#) so communities have a 'how to' guide to establishing new international twinning arrangements. With [55 existing twinning relationships](#) between B.C. local governments and Asia Pacific partners, there is a real critical mass we can build on.

Local governments have a vital leadership role to play, advancing the sister-city relationships that already exist towards greater economic robustness. During my recent mission, the City of Victoria took such a step, renewing its sister-city relationship with the City of [Suzhou](#) to focus on this next level of economic opportunity.

We have much to offer, and the Chinese have a huge appetite for innovation and development, particularly in the environmental protection field and see us as invaluable partners towards that end.

As a result of my visit, I've gained a real sense from local Chinese government leaders of the interest they have in British Columbia. They know we are serious about building links to this growing region. As phenomenal as the growth there is, the fact is, there are many opportunities that exist, that British Columbia can help to fill.

Now is our time.

Through twinning with communities in China, and Asia more broadly, we can open the door to the many economic opportunities that exist, and in doing so solidify B.C.'s position as Canada's Pacific Gateway.