In May 1929, the Canadian Department of External Affairs (DEA) formalized diplomatic ties with Japan by opening its Tokyo legation. Although the third of its kind, Canada's Tokyo legation initiated and managed bi-lateral relations with a degree of autonomy unparalleled by those in Washington and Paris. Within this newfound autonomous space was room for each of Canada's diplomats to negotiate, internalize, and perform their roles differently. This thesis investigates how and why First Secretary Hugh Keenleyside, Minister Herbert Marler, and Second Secretary Kenneth Kirkwood – the vanguards of Canadian national self-representation in the Pacific – engaged and employed that personal and national autonomy, studying their reactions to and participation in transnational political and cultural exchanges at the imperial Japanese capital. Their dissimilar experiences meanwhile act to demonstrate the complexities of those exchanges and highlight the various motives and opinions prevalent amongst Canada's late-interwar social political, and intellectual elite.

By adopting the perspectives of the individual as its primary subject of analysis, this study contributes to an extant literature that has regularly portrayed the DEA and its foreign offices as unitary practitioners of a singular ideology or policy. Furthermore, the individual voices of Canada's first ranking official in the Japanese capital are recovered from the silencing effect of top-down, national-political analyses that have so dominated the field. Finally, it eschews teleological readings of the period preoccupied with Europe, a North Atlantic Triangle, and the 'road to war' narrative, thus providing a new view of an understudied aspect of Canadian international history.
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The embassy in Tokyo is Canada's third oldest "foreign" legation after Paris and Washington (the High Commissions to other Commonwealth states were not considered "foreign" by the Canadian government in those days). The reason for the legation's creation had much to do with anti-Asian feeling in the Canadian province of British Columbia during the first half of the 20th Century. The British government was hesitant to anything that might be seen to undermine Imperial unity, but finally in May 1929, the Canadian legation opened. The first "minister" was Sir Herbert Marler. The embassy soon added trade and political roles to immigration. Construction of the chancery was completed in 1934. In 1938 the minister came back to Canada without being replaced.