

# CSIS uncovered Chinese plan to donate to Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation

ROBERT FIFE OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

STEVEN CHASE SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY REPORTER

OTTAWA

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau arrives at Ngurah Rai International Airport ahead of the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia November 14, 2022. G20 MEDIA CENTER/REUTERS

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China appears to have targeted [Justin Trudeau](#) in a foreign influence operation after he became Liberal Leader in 2013, according to a national security source who said

Beijing's plan involved donating a significant sum of money to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

The source said the Canadian Security Intelligence Service captured a conversation in 2014 between an unnamed commercial attaché at one of China's consulates in Canada and billionaire Zhang Bin, a political adviser to the government in Beijing and a senior official in China's network of state promoters around the world.

They discussed the federal election that was expected to take place in 2015, and the possibility that the Liberals would defeat Stephen Harper's Conservatives and form the next government. The source said the diplomat instructed Mr. Zhang to donate \$1-million to the Trudeau Foundation, and told him the Chinese government would reimburse him for the entire amount.

The Globe and Mail is not identifying the source, who risks prosecution under the Security of Information Act. Mr. Zhang did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Trudeau's Liberals swept to power in October, 2015, with a majority government. Seven months later, Mr. Zhang attended a Liberal Party fundraiser at the Toronto home of Chinese Business Chamber of Canada chair Benson Wong, where Mr. Trudeau was the guest of honour.

Just weeks after the May fundraiser, the Trudeau Foundation and the University of Montreal announced that Mr. Zhang and another wealthy Chinese businessman, Niu Gensheng, would donate \$1-million "to honour the memory and leadership" of Pierre Trudeau, who as prime minister opened diplomatic relations with China in 1970.

Of the \$1-million, \$200,000 went to the Trudeau Foundation, which provides scholarships, academic fellowships and leadership programs. Another \$50,000 went to pay for a statue of the elder Mr. Trudeau, and \$750,000 went to the University of Montreal's faculty of law to fund scholarships, which include grants that help Quebec students visit China. Pierre Trudeau graduated from the faculty and later taught there.

The Prime Minister's Office suggested in a statement on Monday that Justin Trudeau was unaware of Mr. Zhang's donation. "Following his election as Leader of the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister withdrew his involvement in the affairs of the foundation for the duration of his involvement in federal politics," press secretary Ann-Clara Vaillancourt said.

Mr. Trudeau has been under growing pressure to call a public inquiry into Chinese interference operations in the 2019 and 2021 elections, after The Globe and Global News reported that China had covertly supported candidates, most of them Liberals, in both campaigns. The Prime Minister has said the outcomes of the elections were not affected.

Mr. Trudeau told reporters Monday that Morris Rosenberg, a former head of the Trudeau Foundation, had been selected in summer 2022 to write an independent report

that will assess the effectiveness of a government panel that monitored the 2021 election for foreign threats. The Privy Council said in a statement that the report is complete and will soon be released.

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The Conservative Party immediately raised concerns about Mr. Rosenberg's involvement, which was not widely known before this week, and referenced the \$200,000 donation to the foundation by Mr. Zhang.

Mr. Rosenberg, a former deputy minister of foreign affairs, was chief executive of the Trudeau Foundation between 2014 and 2018. He was "involved in facilitating a controversial \$200,000 donation from influential CCP official Bin Zhang, who was also intimately involved in Trudeau's 2016 billionaire cash-for-access scandal," the Conservatives said in a Monday news release. That scandal revolved around private fundraisers the government held with wealthy donors, who were given opportunities to meet with Mr. Trudeau and other senior ministers.

"This discredits the report and proves we need a separate investigation, and the government should fully cooperate with the House committee studying this very issue," the party said, referring to the procedure and House affairs committee. "Serious questions must be asked about this appointment, and whether the Liberals are actually taking this threat against our democracy seriously."

Mr. Trudeau said on Monday that a public inquiry is not necessary, because the matter of Chinese interference in the past two federal elections is being studied by the House committee. He added that he hopes the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians will also study foreign interference and make recommendations on "how best we can protect our democracy."

### **Chinese election interference and CSIS**

- **THE DISCOVERY**

The Globe reported that China employed a sophisticated strategy in the 2021 federal election campaign. Classified documents revealed the campaign's goals were to ensure that a minority Liberal government was returned in 2021 and that certain Conservative candidates identified by China were defeated.

- **THE TACTICS**

Disinformation campaigns, undeclared cash donations and the use of international Chinese students, studying in Canada, as campaign volunteers to support preferred Liberal candidates.

- **THE MONEY**

The Globe reported that Beijing's political interference plan involved donating money to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. Following The Globe's reporting, the foundation announced it would be returning the the donation.

- **THE RESPONSE**

Politicians and former Trudeau advisors have been calling for a public inquiry into China's election interference. Former Governor-General David Johnston has been named special rapporteur to review the findings of two closed door panels investigating Beijing's interference activities.

Guy Saint-Jacques, who was Canada's ambassador to China until October, 2016, said Mr. Zhang had told him before the 2015 election that he planned to make donations in Canada in memory of the senior Mr. Trudeau.

"He said young people in Canada don't seem to know much about Norman Bethune and the great contribution he made to China, but also former prime minister Mr. Trudeau. He said we will want to erect a statue," Mr. Saint-Jacques said. Mr. Zhang also gave \$800,000 to the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine in memory of Mr. Bethune, a Canadian doctor who worked alongside Mao Zedong's Communist Party during its takeover of China.

Mr. Saint-Jacques wondered about the source of this largesse. Chinese President Xi Jinping had poured billions of dollars into the United Front Work Department, a Chinese Communist Party organization that advances Beijing's interests abroad, including by making political donations, co-opting politicians and offering paid trips to China. Mr. Saint-Jacques noted that Mr. Zhang was often present at events when Canadian politicians and officials visited China.

"I cannot claim he is someone who is recycling money from the United Front Work Department but, if I look at what he is doing, clearly the activities that he supports favour the Chinese regime by celebrating people who are old friends of China and so on," Mr. Saint-Jacques said.

Mr. Saint-Jacques said that during this period of time Chinese officials would often tell him they wanted Mr. Trudeau to become prime minister.

"The Chinese are smart, because after eight years [of Stephen Harper] there is a good chance that the government will be defeated," he said. "When Trudeau was elected, some Chinese officials were extremely pleased. They said red is good and blue is bad."

"It was clear they were very pleased and they thought the relationship was improving – and of course they did." He noted that the Trudeau government initially sought to negotiate a free trade deal with China.

With a report from Laura Stone