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Canadian Federal Mandarin Memoirs: On the Formation of the Public Service Ethos

Zusammenfassung

Die Autobiographien von drei Spitzenbeamten und hochrangigen Karrierediplomaten, Arnold Heeney, Lester Pearson und Gordon Robertson, werden unter der Fragestellung untersucht, ob und inwieweit sie unsere Erkenntnisse über die Entwicklung der öffentlichen Verwaltung Kanadas bereichern können. Diese Analyse wird ergänzt durch einen Überblick über die Sekundärliteratur zu politischen Memoiren und ihrem zeitgeschichtlichen Wert. Insbesondere konzentriert sich diese Studie auf die Wurzeln des öffentlichen Dienst-Ethos, das in den Autobiographien zum Ausdruck gebracht wird.

Résumé

Cet article compare les autobiographies de trois hauts fonctionnaires et diplomates canadiens, notamment celles de Arnold Heeney, Lester Pearson et Gordon Robertson. La comparaison prend comme point de départ la question de savoir si et jusqu'à quel point ces œuvres peuvent éclairer nos connaissances à l'égard du développement de l'administration publique canadienne. Cette analyse est enrichie par un survol de la littérature secondaire sur des mémoires politiques et leurs valeurs historiques. Cette étude dissèque notamment les racines de l'éthique de l'administration publique qui se reflète dans les autobiographies mentionnées ci-dessus

1. Introduction

Senior executives and staff embark on a journey that is replete with monsters to slay, loyal allies, intrepid crews, and skilled and tenacious adversaries. Complicated loyalties create cross-currents that tug individuals in different directions as they navigate the winds of integrity and achievement, swirling with power and opposition. The journey requires skill, character, and tenacity, with no safe havens. (J. P. Dobell)

Dobell's characterisation of senior administrative life, while dramatically represented, emphasises what biographical materials best tell us – the tacit knowledge

of the actual professional world that the conventional study of public administration misses. In other words, conventional research, including that of case studies, “seldom illuminate[s] the full texture of life as it is experienced.”¹ Even cultural analysis drawn from more recent organisational theory, an approach that could effectively use biographical material, most often treats culture in a functionalist rather than symbolic, or “root metaphor,”² manner. It is this texture, however, that faithfully and most authentically captures the administrative world, its personalities, pitfalls and successes.

Even though public administration as a discipline has been oriented towards practice and professional development, at the expense of philosophical, theoretical and critical analysis, biographical materials are consistently neglected in research and teaching, due in large part to the dominance of system and organisational analysis and positivistic research methods. This paper is an attempt to explore a little developed area of Canadian public administration: the use of memoirs to achieve a more interpretive and critical understanding, in the sense of *Verstehen*, of the mentality of the Canadian mandarin. The purposes of this paper are therefore two-fold. First, arguments that have been made for using autobiography in the field are reviewed in order to advance a more comprehensive theory of memoir for public administration. Secondly, three representative memoirs of Canadian mandarins are examined for selective features typical of what the memoir brings.

The mandarins chosen reflect professional lives from three periods in Canadian public administration history: the early modern period (pre-World War II), the immediate post-WWII period of government service expansion, and the early onset of restraint in the 1970s through three memoirs that overlap in their coverage of these phases: Arnold Heeney’s *The Things that are Caesar’s: Memoirs of a Canadian Public Servant*, Volume I of Lester Pearson’s *The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, 1897-1948*, and R. Gordon Robertson’s *Memoirs of a Very Civil Servant: Mackenzie King to Pierre Trudeau*.

All three are representative of the mandarin tradition in Westminster administrations, described by Granatstein as a “coherent group united not only by their work but by their friendships [...] They operated almost anonymously within a tight and private little world—offices moments away from each other, homes nearby, clubs close at hand.”³ He further describes them as a predominantly Protestant Anglo-phone group, most of middle class background and born in Canada, however, educated largely at the graduate level in British and American elite universities. They shared a sense of nationalism, and were motivated to devote their careers to modestly paying positions through a belief “that public service was a civic virtue: they felt a duty to serve their country and its people.”⁴ As such, concludes Granatstein, “the mandarins formed an identifiable species, and they personally, or the influence they exercised, continued well into the sixties.”⁵

1 Dobel, 2003,16.

2 Smircich, 1983.

3 Granatstein, 1982, 2.

4 Granatstein, 1982, 10.

5 Granatstein, 1982, 17.

Employing a more analytic Weberian typology than Granatstein's empirical typology, the mandarin's particular role and function and exclusivity as a status group can be more deeply explored in a manner that allows for a broader comparison of memoirs across temporal and jurisdictional boundaries and for a broader interdisciplinary analysis.⁶ The mandarin is essentially a form of extra-patrimonial traditionalism, distinguishable from other civil servants by position in the hierarchy. As an ideal type, mandarin authority is vested in three necessary qualities: personal qualities including resilience, independence of mind, loyalty to ministers without sacrificing their own integrity or that of their office, and charisma; intellectual prowess; and technical attributes of sound judgment and discrimination.

The mandarin is theoretically open to all social strata yet dependent upon an elite literary or generalist education rather than managerial training. Through enculturation they act as specially educated, nationalised administrative agents overseeing national interests for political authority, often selected young as protégés being groomed for the highest positions.

They are a unitary status group within which little hierarchy exists, operating as an informal collegial system and enjoying considerable autonomy from the Head of the Civil Service. The type of authority enjoyed by a civil servant varies with level in the bureaucratic hierarchy: at lower levels it is predominantly 'legal-rational', however mandarin authority corresponds more with traditional and charismatic values. While at the apex of a bureaucratic hierarchy, mandarins are not part of the "bureaucratized" world in the manner in which they relate to political authority, to each other, and in some cases even to subordinates whom they patronise. In contrast to the more contractually and calculably determined public manager whose authority is based primarily on impersonal rules and objective competence, the mandarin typically displays not just a lack of familiarity and training in managerial tasks, but an uninterest bordering on impatience, contempt and cynicism for managerialism. Their brilliance is evident not in the mastery of organisational but of political problems for which they hold a virtual monopoly on providing advice to ministers over policy-related knowledge. Their administrative role is clearly quasi-political and based on tradition whose permanence is developed through convention resulting in a great variation in mandarin allocation of duties and personal *modus vivendi* with ministers, whose rights and duties are established under Royal Prerogative in the Westminster systems, thereby governed in their practices more by convention than legal-rational principle encoded in law.

The normative values associated with the mandarin, especially of responsibility and accountability to the public interest, are characterised by a preoccupation with higher order political end values, in other words, substantive rationality consisting of an ethos of official duty and of the public weal, and aspiration to a gentlemanly ideal. Their strong public service ethic allows them to overcome tendencies to self-interest, enabling them to live, in Weberian terms, for the state rather than from the state. The most important feature of mandarin authority is the ability

6 For a more detailed discussion of the mandarin in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, see Samier, 2001 and 2005.

of “speaking truth to power,” allowing them discretion over decisions and actions not bound by tradition.

2. The Value of Memoirs

Biographical writings, including primary sources such as memoirs, correspondence, diaries, professional travelogues, and dispatches, are important sources for qualitative research, particularly interpretive and critical practices oriented toward phenomenology and hermeneutics. Surveys and even interviews in the positivist tradition cannot capture the complexities of contextualised decision-making, power, interpersonal relations, and the role of character and personality. Biographical theory has been promoted for administration by a number of authors, including Edinger, English, Gronn and Ribbins, Oates, Ribbins, and Theakston.⁷ The purposes they identify for using biography are the following:

1. as detailed case histories, they provide evidence of the development and learning of administrative attributes;
2. they provide analytical ‘balance sheets’ on the ends to which administrators have directed their energies within the changing demands on them and the options available;
3. in comparative analysis they reveal career paths answering broader questions about selective criteria operating in various organisations, institutional arrangements, and societies (e.g. gender, class, race, personality);
4. they have an inspirational purpose in providing role modelling;
5. they provide case studies that allow for generalisations to be drawn;
6. they provide detailed information from which various theories and models can be tested;
7. they underscore the importance of historical study in administration.

I would add to these more realistic and detailed information about the relationships of administrators with political masters, the media and the public in addition to the internal culture of organisations, the role that personality, character and mentality plays, the construction and effects of ideology, and the importance of social class, education, ethnicity, etc., and other formational experiences in personal histories (e.g. travel, cultural activities, political experience, critical events). All of these factors influence professional practice, including personal networks, career path, and the type of influence administrators have on policy and its implementation.

The politics of organisational life is particularly difficult to capture outside of biographical sources due to its covert nature, usually relegated in public administration to cursory treatment in some leadership and ethics courses as the Machiavellian approach. For Dobel, memoirs “can reveal the depth, honor, and gravity of daily political life and strife as well as its absurdity, conflict, and heartlessness.”⁸ For Batteson and Ball, too, political memoirs treated through intertextual analysis

7 Edinger, 1964, English, 1995, Gronn/Ribbins, 1996, Oates, 1991, Ribbins, 2003, and Theakston, 2000.

8 Dobel, 2003, 17.

may provide “an illuminative potential in opening up twilight areas of political/ideological interplay” as it affects the policy process⁹ as well as the “climate within which the broad structure and intimate detail of policy is crafted and consolidated,”¹⁰ principles applying equally to the mandarin located at the political/bureaucratic interface.

Memoirs are indispensable sources for understanding normative dimensions of authoritative practice: administrative ethics (a point stressed by English¹¹), and the distinction officials must maintain between a public face and individual opinions, in other words, how truth is constrained by formal responsibilities and obligations. Since Mandarin memoirs are distinctively different from other civil service memoirs given the status, special role, power, and access to information they have, these writings are sometimes the only accurate or detailed sources on the policy and decision making process, subject as they are to micro-politics and the disposition of participant personalities that are not captured in formal record-keeping.

Autobiographical sources present problems, of course, some of which are inherent to the nature of the material. They are highly subjective, a function of the author’s preferences, political and moral values, and motivations, potentially shaped by self-aggrandisement, rationalisation, revenge, pride, and limited perspective, knowledge, or intellect. The value of memoirs can be affected also by poor writing skills, faulty memory, limited access to documents and other participants to reconstruct events, and poorly developed interpretive and analytical skills. Their use requires training in both historiography and literary criticism. Memoirs have to be interpreted through their individual styles, consisting of narratorial voice and persona, guiding metaphor (e.g. adventurer, soldier), rhetorical devices such as imagery, humour or irony, and genre (e.g. academic essay, travelogue, anecdote, epistolary form). Rather than hindrances, these qualities themselves are part of the world of the administrator, the Realpolitik and psychology that is the stuff of truth, of what Fairclough refers to as the “socially constructive” process.¹²

Biography helps to overcome a constraint in administrative life - invisibility. In part, this is a consequence of structural-functional approaches that tend to eliminate individuals from organisational study, but it is also aided by a professional ethos constrained by statutory requirements in many jurisdictions of secrecy, confidentiality, and anonymity required in the tradition of ministerial responsibility. This is complemented by a socialised obedience to authority, highly developed in bureaucratised organisations. A more cynical view of a self-interested administrative elite with their own class interests is expressed by Batteson and Ball: “They are occupationally manipulative, periodically selective and sometimes aggressively deceptive: appropriators of truth, facts, objective reality and recall nonpareil.”¹³ However, lifting the veil of secrecy and removing the mask of anonymity only happens in many circumstances when retired civil servants publish memoirs and

9 Batteson/Ball, 1995, 212.

10 Batteson/Ball, 1995, 207.

11 English, 1995, 213.

12 Fairclough, 1992.

13 Batteson/Ball, 1995, 202.

letters, and only then can the complex conditions under which senior officials worked be uncovered.

Most mandarin memoirs are what Robert Merton calls the “sociological autobiography,” utilising:

... sociological perspectives, ideas, concepts, findings, and analytical procedures to construct and interpret a narrative text that purports to tell one’s own history within the larger history of one’s times ... autobiographers are the ultimate participants in a dual participant-observer role, having privileged access – in some cases, monopolistic access – to their own inner experience.¹⁴

Merton further explains that:

The constructed personal text of the interplay between the active agent and the social structure, the interplay between one’s sequences of status-sets and role-sets on the one hand and one’s intellectual development on the other, with its succession of theoretical commitments, foci of scientific attention, planned or serendipitous choices of problems and choices of strategic research sites for their investigation ... full-fledged sociological autobiographers relate their intellectual development both to changing social and cognitive micro-environments close at hand and to the encompassing macro-environments provided by the larger society and culture.¹⁵

3. The Formation of the Mandarin ethic

Consistent with a more interpretive and hermeneutic approach to public administration, the themes investigated here arise largely from the texts themselves. One topic that receives consistent and detailed attention in the memoirs is the public service ethos as it reflects their personal values, their close professional relationships, and attitudes to political authority. Three aspects chosen here to investigate are: first, the nature of pre-professional life and the influences that most shaped their individual character and general ethos; secondly, the formation of their professional ethos in the pre-mandarin career; and finally, the nature of their public service ethic during their mandarin career.

Pre-Professional Life

Pre-professional and personal background for the purposes of this paper include relevant aspects of personal history, such as family origins, social class, early education and international (including wartime) experience, as well as professional preparation through higher education, recruitment, and professional experience prior to entering the civil service.

¹⁴ Merton, 1988, 18.

¹⁵ Merton, 1988, 19-20.

Arnold Heeneey places great emphasis on his family origins, beginning his family history three generations prior with antecedents who maintained a strong English identity and *esprits de l'empire* through residency in Ireland and later settlement in Carleton County, Ontario and Montreal. His father's vocation as an Anglican clergyman, and final appointment to a parish in Winnipeg, created a strong adoptive western Canadian identity, yet also reinforced British "sentiments and loyalties."¹⁶ Although of modest economic circumstances, the family's social status oriented them towards exclusive and higher education, in schools that were English by culture and curriculum. During a 1912 family visit to England, Heeneey visited London and Cambridge, for whom at the age of 10, they represented "everything that was noble and exciting."¹⁷ His childhood experience of the pageantry and heroic aspects of the First World War, led to "the whole impact of the war serv[ing] to emphasize and to exaggerate the British element in [his] experience."¹⁸

Only with study in English and French at the University of Manitoba, beginning in 1918, did an overt Canadian identity form, taken up as he was with general student attitudes supportive of political autonomy from Britain and a growing conception of national sovereignty. With the award of a Rhodes Scholarship in 1923, Heeneey began three years reading History at the College of St John the Baptist at Oxford, where his "intellectual appetites were sharpened" and capabilities developed.¹⁹ Due to the traditional tutorial system, he was exposed to a broad reading programme and disciplined weekly writing, characteristic of the academically-oriented humanities and interdisciplinary educational preparation of the mandarin in the Westminster administrations. He was most influenced, in his recollection, by T. H. Green's *Principles of Political Obligation*, for whom it "made on [his] awakening mind an impression of order and wisdom."²⁰ Perhaps more important, his years abroad provided for a broadened international perspective at Oxford, travel in Britain and excursions to the continent, however constrained this was by almost exclusive intercourse with the educated and socially prominent. Of most importance to his later career was a close friendship formed with Norman Robertson, also on a Rhodes Scholarship, that developed into a close collegial relationship in government, typical of close personal ties that formed the elite and exclusive status group character of the Canadian mandarin.

Heeneey's next educational and professional phase was legal studies at McGill University in preparation for the Quebec bar. What is most distinctive for later public service about this period is contact with influential minds and a cadre of similarly minded individuals who were to play a significant later collegial role, and an increasing and expanding sense of social and political awareness. Tutelage was provided by exceptional scholars at McGill and colleagues in his early legal practice (such as Louis St Laurent) and friendships formed through social and political organisations oriented toward reform such as the Canadian Institute of Interna-

16 Heeneey, 1972, 6-7.

17 Heeneey, 1972, 9.

18 Heeneey, 1972, 10.

19 Heeneey, 1972, 17.

20 Heeneey, 1972, 19.

tional Affairs and the Liberal Summer School. His growing dissatisfaction with, and involvement in, public problems was spurred by legal services provided to victims of the economic crash in 1929, other corporate and commercial cases, and service on the Quebec Protestant Education Survey. Heeney derived important practical training from these activities that were valuable in his preparation as a mandarin: "devising the procedures for the organization and the conduct of meetings," "investigative procedures and an organized deliberative process," and "the preparation of reports and recommendations."²¹

Of lasting influence, though, from his family values and traditions married to a socio-politically sensitive and broadening education, was a guiding ideal of "vocation" and "a responsibility to be of use in the world"²² translated into career terms as an overriding ethic of civil service. It was this underlying civic mindedness that led Heeney to consider entering public service in spite of a nine-year successful legal career in Montreal.

Lester Pearson's family heritage and values, roughly contemporaneous with Heeney's, are similar. Although more Irish than English, the Pearsons were stamped by a British identity and religious vocation, in this case Methodist, consisting of service to a number churches in Ontario. Pearson attributes to his family his "talent for diplomacy and ability to get along with people," "that rank and riches count for little among the higher values," and "to be kind and understanding to people I passed on the way up, since I would no doubt meet them again on the way down."²³ Important, too, was a high value placed on education and appreciation for teaching supporting scholastic ambitions.

His world expanded, as did a nascent nationalism, like Heeney's, through university education. His programme of studies included history and classics, largely taught at the University of Toronto by mostly Oxford-trained lecturers, including the notable scholar and later fellow public servant Vincent Massey. Having been born a few years earlier than Heeney, Pearson was of age during the First World War to join the service first as a stretcher-bearer in Egypt and Greece, and later in the quartermaster stores before officer training at Oxford in 1917 and training in the Royal Flying Corps, finally serving as an aerial navigation instructor in Toronto. In contrast, therefore, to Heeney, Pearson experienced the deprivations and hardships of military training and war, but also courage, comradeship, working with a broad representation of Commonwealth participants, and "learned quite a lot about pulling strings in a good cause."²⁴ Another important formative experience was the common despair and disillusionment of the First World War generation: "We spent hours trying to get some understanding of what we were being asked to do; to bring some reason to the senseless slaughter. For what? King and country? Freedom and democracy? These words sounded hollow now in 1918 and we increasingly rebelled against their hypocrisy."²⁵

21 Heeney, 1972, 27, 34, 35.

22 Heeney, 1972, 12.

23 Pearson, 1973, 5, 7, 8.

24 Pearson, 1973, 29.

25 Pearson, 1973, 36.

Pearson resumed his education returning to the University of Toronto for his final year, but after a brief look at law preferred after his war experience to work with an American meat packing company for two years rather than more years of study. His time in Chicago allowed him to become acquainted with both sides of the city, "slums, vice, crime and graft" but also its cultural richness and, through his uncle's connections, "as rich a country-club suburb as any American city possessed."²⁶ Initially with an academic career in mind, he went to St John's College Oxford on a Massey Foundation Fellowship to read History. Pearson, like Heeney, benefited from the tutorial system for intellectual training, and also took advantage of continental travel. Pearson's preparation, though, was broader, schooled both through war and work in a packing plant and the corporate world, and through the contrasting "intellectual and social life of an ancient university."²⁷ These contributed to his growing understanding of and desire to change "the follies of politics that led to war but neglected the evils of poverty and injustice."²⁸

Pearson's professional life prior to government was a lecturership in History at the University of Toronto. This contributed to his skills and knowledge, both of value in government service. Teaching provided an opportunity to develop lecturing and seminar skills in presentation, fostering the exchange of views and personal contact oriented towards analytical development. The programme content provided two important insights—an awareness of the lack of Canadian content contributing to his later nationalism, and a deep interest and understanding of international affairs and diplomatic matters, particularly "the necessity of international action for peace, and about [his] country's responsibilities in international as well as national affairs."²⁹ Academia also gave him a life-long friend and colleague in Hume Wrong, who later joined the Department of External Affairs on diplomatic postings, the most important as Ambassador to the US. A research summer in Ottawa introduced him to the House of Commons and O. D. Skelton, Deputy Minister of External Affairs. This last contact proved instrumental. It was at Skelton's invitation that Pearson successfully wrote the new foreign service exams, for which an elite education was advantageous given the papers that had to be written on international affairs, modern history and international law.

Robertson's history is different from Heeney and Pearson's in a number of significant ways. He was born in the next generation, just at the end of the First World War into a family of Norwegian-American and Scottish heritage, whose lives were more secular in the small town of Davidson, Saskatchewan. His father was a more domineering presence in the house, working as a farm manager, and whose social life consisted of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Masons, the Regina Rifle Regiment, and a number of livestock associations. His father's expectations of Robertson consisted of high standards in "industry and application" and manliness, expressed through "an unshakeable sense of the responsibility of the paterfamilias to

26 Pearson, 1973, 42.

27 Pearson, 1973, 50.

28 Pearson, 1973, 51.

29 Pearson, 1973, 53.

direct, form, and discipline"³⁰ which his son resisted. In part his father's values derived from a strong Scottish clan sensibility and identity.

Other formative experiences, apart from performance in schooling that earned him the Governor General's Medal at the end of high school, were those associated with the severe drought and depression in 1930s Saskatchewan during which he witnessed first hand its deprivation and human toll as well as the consequent rise of organised labour through the On-to-Ottawa Trek of 1935 and its infamous assault by police. Subject to the economic conditions of the depression, he worked at poorly paid labourer's jobs to earn the money necessary to attend university. Robertson's was a far less privileged and a lower social class origin than Heeneey and Pearson's.

However, in some respects his university education was similar, first studying history with Hilda Neatby at Regina College then political science with MacGregor Dawson at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, both notable and influential scholars. It was with the latter that Robertson's interest in national independence through Canada's development of dominion status was kindled. But perhaps more importantly for his sense of social responsibility and an atypical appreciation of equity through the rights of women, was his awareness of the discrimination Neatby suffered first under chauvinistic labour policies and secondly from the educational establishment when she challenged their impoverished educational philosophy in her book *So Little for the Mind*. It was also in Saskatoon that Robertson began a life-long friendship of some professional influence with Bill Lederman, who became a constitutional scholar and Dean of Law at Dalhousie University (for which he was awarded the Order of Canada).

Robertson also attended Oxford (Exeter College) on a Rhodes Scholarship in 1938, reading law, although the atmosphere had changed considerably since Heeneey and Pearson's time due to increasing war tension. As with Heeneey and Pearson, two important dimensions of studying abroad were the connections created of future value, with fellow Canadian Rhodes scholar at Oxford, Ed Ritchie, who became Canadian Ambassador to the US and Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs and Ray Labarge, later Deputy Minister of Customs and Excise. But his continental experience was distinguished by viewing fascist celebrations in Rome and Cologne, and the Nazi occupation of Danzig's city government during tours in 1939. The significance of studies at Oxford, though, Robertson writes little of, summing up with a quotation from the examiners' report from the competition for a Canadian Department of External Affairs third secretary position (held at Canada House in London): "while Robertson had been at Oxford, it had not taken."³¹ The distinguished examiners were the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, the future Ambassador to the US, Hume Wrong, and Lester Pearson, however, their judgement may have been biased, as Robertson notes for his Saskatchewan accent and lack of social polish, as he received Firsts in the later Oxford examinations.

30 Robertson, 2000, 7.

31 Robertson, 2000, 29.

There are a number of common values these three men came to hold serving as a foundation to their conceptions of public service. While family background was a significant factor, education and experience played a greater role in first attracting them to government, and secondly to the ethic of service. What is also shared, and typical of the mandarin Granatstein describes, is the integration and enculturation into a caste system of administrative privilege and power, but one which did not diminish their civic ideals.

Early Civil Service Career

It is here that Heeney, Pearson, and Robertson's careers most diverged. Heeney's entry position in the civil service was unique in that his entry position was as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, described by King as one that would "correspond in a way to that of a Deputy Head of a Government Department."³² Yet, in actual fact, Heeney was able to exercise very few of the formal duties one associates with the mandarin until his appointment to the Privy Council two years later. Pearson and Robertson's was more typical, serving first in junior positions, but moving rapidly up the administrative hierarchy (which in this early period of Canadian government departments was not yet the bureaucratically vast pyramid of the expanded civil service of the 1960s and 1970s).

Heeney prefaces his description of early years in the federal civil service with a lengthy description of the friendship between his father and Mackenzie King, a relationship based largely on shared interests in literature, concerns about the "deepening atmosphere of crisis in Europe" in the late 1930s,³³ a social philosophy inspired partially by the Christian gospel and by a compassionate attitude towards those suffering the economic and social problems of the 1930s in Canada. The importance of this personal relationship is the source for Mackenzie King's invitation to Heeney to accept the position of Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister. This patronage, or personal recruitment, is typical of the mandarin, in Heeney's case exercised through King's awareness through his friendship with Heeney's father of the son's "desire to become engaged in some form of public service"³⁴ and paving the way for appointment by discussing it with the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, O. D. Skelton.

The advice that Heeney records of being important in his decision demonstrates his strong moral inclinations towards the civil service. The arguments that he accepted as definitive were the opportunities to serve one's country, to exercise social conscience, and the opportunity to contribute to nation building.³⁵ However, at least during his first years of tenure, it was the opportunity to both be a witness to, and have a hand in, history: "From early 1940 my duties demanded constant attendance on cabinet ministers, especially when critical decisions were being taken. I became a witness of great events and observed at close quarters not only the

32 Heeney, 1972, 42.

33 Heeney, 1972, 40.

34 Heeney, 1972, 42.

35 Heeney, 1972, 44-45.

principal national performers but many of the leading allied actors as they crossed the Canadian stage."³⁶ His apprenticeship was enriched through close work with the existing mandarin, O. D. Skelton, Clifford Clark, and Jack Pickersgill, in whom he observed and was influenced by a number of professional qualities: exceptional judgment, loyalty, disinterestedness, indefatigability, and wisdom. It was for this reason also, that his major conflict with King was over involvement in politics: Heeney resisted this temptation through a strong sense of an apolitical sensibility necessary in public service.³⁷

Pearson's public service career began as First Secretary in the Department of External Affairs in 1928. His motivations for joining and subsequent satisfaction were derived from having "... arrived at the right time, at the beginning of a growth which during my years of service was to lead the Department, in the scope and importance of its activities, to a respected place among the foreign services of the world" and "the pleasure of working during this period with a group of civil servants of unexcelled quality."³⁸ Of those he singles out as exemplary, and deserving of elevation to the mandarin, is his evaluation of Harry Crerar: "Harry was serious, studious, clear-headed, with a great capacity for concentration on the problem at hand, and the industry and knowledge to make his concentration effective."³⁹

However, throughout his pre-mandarin appointments, including acting as secretary to two Royal Commissions, and serving at several international conferences on disarmament, on the Canadian delegation to the League of Nations (during Italian aggressions toward Ethiopia), and as Counsellor to the Canadian High Commission in London, Pearson also records learning other lessons, particularly in the area of diplomatic life from whose duties he concluded that "protocol seems often to be as important as power" for older sovereignties.⁴⁰

Like Heeney, Pearson worked in close contact with a number of exceptional mandarins, O. D. Skelton, Hume Wrong, Norman Robertson, and Hugh Keenleyside, in whom he appreciated well-trained minds, relentless capacities for work, and a distinguishing lack of self-interest.⁴¹ His view of their power was also balanced by an appreciation of the need for parliamentary control over what would otherwise become bureaucratic capture, even if mediated by a disinterested ethic.⁴² Additionally, his public service ethic was strongly enhanced by a consistent pursuit of Canadian nationalism and sovereignty in international relations, developed through his appointment as political secretary to the Canadian High Commission where he was astutely observant of the varying attitudes among national traditions in international relations and the duties and responsibilities necessary to Canada's increasing role on the international stage.

36 Heeney, 1972, 54.

37 Heeney, 1972, 56.

38 Pearson, 1972, 61.

39 Pearson, 1972, 87.

40 Pearson, 1972, 83.

41 Pearson, 1972, 71-72.

42 Pearson, 1972, 86-87.

Robertson demonstrates many of the same characteristics as Heeney and Pearson in terms of attitudes and values. He begins the government career section of his memoirs with an acknowledgement of the exceptionally gifted mandarins and to-be-mandarins, citing many of the same names in External Affairs and other departments: O. D. Skelton, Hume Wrong, Lester Pearson, H. L. Keenleyside, Norman Robertson, J. W. Pickersgill, Escott Reid, and Charles Ritchie. It was into this company that he began his civil service career in the Legal Division of External Affairs in 1941, promoted to Assistant to the Under-Secretary Norman Robertson in 1943 and so worked in close proximity with the mandarin during his early career.

The characteristics he records most valuing in this cadre—judgment, capacity for work, versatility, knowledge and depth of understanding—were abilities he aspired to, and acquired, through a great diversity of work including membership as secretary in the Canadian delegation to the United Nations founding conference in San Francisco in 1945.⁴³ With his appointment to the Prime Minister's office in 1945 under Jack Pickersgill, the demands of the position more closely resembled that of the mandarin: "Flexibility, versatility, energy, and a capacity to interpret – and to anticipate – King's often obscure and Byzantine reactions were the essential qualifications."⁴⁴ An additional shared virtue was Robertson's involvement with the drafting of the new Canadian Citizenship Act, and later involvement in the Constitutional conferences, as one of the newer civil servants imbued more with a sense of a separate Canadian political identity than the earlier generation who were primarily of a British imperial mindset.

Probably of most importance to Robertson's future career was the next position he held in the Privy Council under Heeney's tenure as Clerk, when the practices of the Privy Council office were organised and modernised. It was in this position that Robertson was best able to observe and learn from the deputy ministers of government in Ottawa, in all aspects of their role – technical, diplomatic, and administrative. What is most striking about his accounts, particularly of Arnold Heeney and Norman Robertson, is the strong professional ethic that emerges, in describing others and his own activities, an ethic that is grounded deeply in public service, in the community of senior staff, and in the role that individual character and personality plays in exceptional performance.⁴⁵

What consistently emerges across these memoirs is an emphasis on the personal. Contrary to much public administration literature, and certainly the more technocratic forms that are associated with the New Public Management, this golden age of the Canadian mandarin was composed of a diversity of individuals who, through their early professional lives, combined individuality with a shared ethos of service to society, professional disinterest, intellectualism, and the critical role of patronage seen as a form of mentorship. In most cases, their accounts are embedded in the political events of the day, their relations with political officials, and the

43 Robertson, 2000, 43.

44 Robertson, 2000, 48.

45 See Robertson, 2000, 75-79 especially.

necessity of challenging appointments that shape character and ability through their uniqueness.

4. Conclusion: The Mandarin Years

Heeney's mandarinat began with his appointment as Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to Cabinet in 1940. The times had changed significantly for the mandarinat in general, from those of his predecessor, E. J. Lemaire, who was "a courtly survivor of the earlier day whose civilized working hours seemed to be occupied chiefly in affixing his signature to copies of orders-in-council."⁴⁶ It was only with Heeney's appointments that a statement of new functions was created, in effect modernising (and heavily formalising) the roles into a multi-functionary set of responsibilities that carried with them much greater power and influence, but also obligations of a public service nature:

The secretary to the cabinet is one whose chief interest and concern remains the formulation, recording, and communication of the decisions of those who compose the cabinet of the day. It is and will remain the chief function of the secretary and his colleagues to do everything possible to facilitate and assist the deliberative process onward to informed decision.⁴⁷

Not only had the Second World War imposed greater demands on government, but Canada's increasing international role as a sovereign state required a more sophisticated and complex bureaucracy. As Heeney describes his participation in these, it is apparent that the mandarinat had a much more active role to play in state-building and policy development. In 1949 after the instalment of Louis St Laurent as Prime Minister, and the consequent shuffle in the senior ranks of the civil service, Heeney accepted the position of Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, attracted largely by Canada's new prospects in international relations taking a leading role in various United Nations meetings, in implementing the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and expanding missions abroad.⁴⁸

Heeney's final years serving Canada were spent abroad, first from 1952 to 1953 in establishing the new Canadian mission at NATO in Paris, followed by the Ambassadorship to Washington from 1953 to 1957, and again from 1959 to 1962. During the intervening period of these postings, from 1957 to 1959 he held the Chairmanship of the Civil Service Commission of Canada, and from 1962 until retirement in 1970, served as chairman of the International Joint Commission. It is, however, the former appointment that is selected here as indicative of the depth and consistency of his public service ethos in reforming the Canadian civil service. The principles adopted for reform were based on both retaining the virtues of tradition as well as responding to new national and international conditions, and providing

46 Heeney, 1972, 64.

47 Heeney, 1972, 80.

48 Heeney, 1972, 96-97.

for a balance between the freedom and flexibility required by administrative authority and a measure of central control to ensure a meritocracy and uniform standards.⁴⁹ And all of these were understood to be subject to the primary imperative of building and maintaining a “united Canada.”⁵⁰ Heeney sums up in his concluding chapter the essential features of the public service ethos, which he credits with the personal satisfaction derived from the vocation to which he gave his life: the recognition of merit over patronage, the importance of continuity in the senior levels of the civil service through political change, and representativeness in the civil service serving as an expression of national unity. Of most importance, though, are two other essential features. First, the dangers of over-bureaucratization of a “massive government machine” eroding the “sense of vocation which is so important to the quality of human achievement.”⁵¹ Secondly, a conception of public service that serves as its primary *raison d’être*: “The Public Service [...] exists only to serve the government and the people [...] In the Civil Service men and women from all parts of Canada work together and share a common direct responsibility and direct loyalty to the federal government.”⁵²

Pearson’s mandarinship began as assistant to the Deputy Minister of External Affairs, Norman Robertson from 1941 to 1942 before his posting as Minister-Counselor and then Head of mission in the Washington Legation (although elevated to an Embassy in 1944). Even during wartime, Pearson demonstrated classic mandarin values by focussing primarily on “a feeling of loyalty,” “good morale”, and getting the best out of people rather than the more managerial preoccupations with “technical organizational efficiency, or familiarity with form charts, flow sheets, and all the devices that now tend to substitute mechanics for man.”⁵³ Although the tendency Pearson exhibited in pressing ahead and taking initiative, as is typical with the mandarin ethos, was not “Mr. King’s ideal of a prudent bureaucrat.”⁵⁴ However, as Pearson relates it, it is the distinguishing qualities of the traditional mandarin that also makes him most suitable for diplomacy, particularly the social responsibilities that are least understood and accepted: “They can make friendships, and friendship is the foundation of official as well as of personal understanding. A diplomat who can not make friends, without exploiting that friendship in the wrong way, is never a master of the profession.”⁵⁵ It was these characteristics particularly that enabled Pearson to be so effective in international negotiations, along with his fellow mandarins and mandarins-in-the-making during this Golden Age of Canadian diplomacy during and following the Second World War, particularly with the founding of the United Nations.

The fruition of values, imbued in Pearson in youth, nurtured in higher education, and cultivated in his early career, came in senior appointments as a civil ser-

49 Heeney, 1972, 147.

50 Heeney, 1972, 148.

51 Heeney, 1972, 203.

52 Heeney, 1972, 202.

53 Pearson, 1972, 197.

54 Pearson, 1972, 222.

55 Pearson, 1972, 222.

vant. In contrast with much modern administrative and management training, the humanistic sensibility of the mandarin is demonstrated in one of Pearson's summative statements about his chosen vocation before entering politics. Much as Heeneey had, Pearson attributed his success to "opportunities for development in the field of international affairs [that] had been exceptional; in my departmental work, in international conferences and intergovernmental consultations, and in contact with many men of power and position whom I had been fortunate to hear, to observe, and, frequently, to get to know."⁵⁶

Robertson's tenure as a senior civil servant was the longest and latest of the three, beginning with his appointment as Deputy Minister of the complex Department of Resources and Development in 1953 and ending in 1979 after holding positions as Commissioner of the Northwest Territories (which combined duties of lieutenant governor, premier and cabinet as well as head of administration), as Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, and Secretary to the Cabinet for Federal-Provincial Relations. His long tenure, in administrative terms, saw the work of government expand exponentially, and become much more complex, particularly at the federal-provincial level.

Throughout his career at these levels, Robertson's account of senior administrative qualities remains relatively constant and consistent with those of Heeneey and Pearson. Under Pearson as Prime Minister he observed that "apart from a sound record and a knowledge of the public service, the fundamental qualifications for the post are good judgment, a temperament compatible with the prime minister's [or minister's], and complete reliability."⁵⁷ Later, Robertson displayed cynicism for Trudeau's "passion" for new managerial methods, such as ergonomics and mathematical modelling, attributing improvements in government instead to a number of other more qualitative factors: improved cabinet operations, a majority in the House of Commons, a more responsible leader of the opposition in Robert Stanfield, and "the methodical and penetrating scrutiny Trudeau directed at every cabinet document that came forward."⁵⁸ This was complemented by Trudeau's excellent cabinet chairmanship, whose sessions Trudeau referred to as "post-graduate seminars,"⁵⁹ interestingly an appellation that earns more denigration than praise in the current anti-intellectual climate of public management training. Robertson singles out, though, good judgment as the requisite talent for senior public officials,⁶⁰ borne out of character, personality and the successful tackling of exigencies, both political and administrative.

56 Pearson, 1972, 283.

57 Robertson, 2000, 215.

58 Robertson, 2000, 256-257.

59 Robertson, 2000, 257.

60 Robertson, 2000, 305.

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