

Remarks at a State Dinner Hosted by President Jiang in Beijing

June 27, 1998

President Jiang, Madame Wang, members of the Chinese Government, fellow guests; I am honored to be here representing the people of the United States in the Great Hall of the People which reflects the impressive progress of the Chinese people in the 20th century.

We Americans first saw it on our televisions 26 years ago when President Nixon became the first American leader to visit China. Those were the very first live pictures of China ever seen in my country. Across the United States, Americans were filled with great hope as relations resumed between our two great nations.

That visit changed history. It reminded us of the warmth each nation felt for the other, long before the cold war. It recalled our alliance in World War II and our long history of commercial relations dating back to the infancy of the United States. We were trading together before our Constitution was written. Even the tea that our Founding Fathers threw into the Boston Harbor in 1773 to protest British taxes was from China.

For most of our history we have looked upon China as a distant friend across the sea. As the Bamboo Curtain opened, Americans and Chinese learned about each other all over again. Starting with pandas and ping-pong players, we have built a broad and friendly relationship.

Today China and the United States cooperate across a wide range of enterprises, in business, in the arts, in the academic world, and in the personal friendship that unites Chinese and Americans. More than one million Americans trace their roots to China. Every day, Chinese Americans build a better America, as entrepreneurs and architects, artists and public servants. And we form lifelong bonds with the thousands of Chinese students who study with us every year, teaching us their culture as they learn from ours.

Americans are proud that many of China's leaders spent time in the United States. Dr. Sun Yat-sen visited six times between 1896 and 1911, and he was in Denver when he learned he would become China's new leader. The great teacher, Hu Shi, was a student in New York when he pioneered a new system of expressing vernacular Chinese, an idea that changed China forever. I look forward to seeing Beijing University during its centennial year, a monument to Hu Shi and so many other friends of America.

As two great nations, the world looks to us to set a good example. In the last few months, we have seen how much we can and must do together, in our strong response to the crisis in India and Pakistan, our efforts for lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, our cooperation to stem the flow of dangerous weapons around the world. In so many different ways, we are upholding the teachings of Mencius, who said: "A good citizen in one community will befriend the other citizens of the community; a good citizen of the world will befriend the other citizens of the world."

Mr. President, the American people admire the great strides China has taken. Your people are leading lives inconceivable just a generation ago. Your phenomenal growth over 20 years has opened new worlds of possibility, for jobs, for more schools, for greater mobility, for instant access to the outside world. We Americans appreciate the mutual respect of our relationship, a relationship based on cooperation, candor, and recognition of each nation's values and traditions.

An ancient Chinese proverb tells us: "Be not afraid of growing slowly; be only afraid of standing still." Let us commit to keep moving forward together, turning small steps into giant strides for our people, our nations, and the world.

I ask you now to please join me in a toast to the President and the First Lady of the People's Republic of China and to the friendship joining our two peoples and the future we will build together. Gan bei.