

Toast at the Welcoming Banquet in Beijing

1989-02-25

Well, President Yang and Premier Li, distinguished guests, Barbara and I are delighted to be returning once again to China. I first came here in 1974 and departed at the end of 1975. And since then, including this visit, I have been back five times, and Barbara six times. And each time we come, we are fascinated by the dynamic change and growth, all of which takes place against an extraordinary, unchanging backdrop of a great culture several thousand years old.

There's a Chinese proverb that says: "One generation plants a tree; the next sits in its shade." And there's a timeless wisdom in that. But thanks to your courageous reforms -- and I don't minimize the difficulties -- the Chinese people are planting great and sturdy trees, some of which are bearing fruit right now for this generation.

Today the people of China have more opportunities to express themselves and to make important decisions in their personal and professional lives. And your new and farsighted economic program is already improving the lives of the people, as it will for generations to come. The expansion of your international relationships is also creating new possibilities for peace, prosperity, and world leadership, and the United States welcomes the enlarged role that China has taken in the world.

When I first arrived in Beijing in 1974, it was a period when our two countries were just beginning to renew contact after almost a quarter of a century of estrangement. And it wasn't easy. There were great differences between us. But in the principles of the historic Shanghai communique, signed 17 years ago this coming Monday, we found a common basis for moving beyond those differences to find our shared interests. So, together, we helped to plant a tree, and we should keep planting trees.

We value the new relationship our two countries have established with each other. Our friendship is continuing to develop, and that's good, for a relationship must be strong enough to tackle the areas of disagreement as well as those of common interest. And it must be based on respect for the individual as well as the integrity of the states. We remain firmly committed to the principles set forth in those three joint communiqués that form the basis of our relationship. And based on the bedrock principle that there is but one China, we have found ways to address Taiwan constructively without rancor. We Americans have a long, historical friendship with Chinese people everywhere. In the last few years, we've seen an encouraging expansion of family contacts and travel and indirect trade and other forms of peaceful interchange across the Taiwan Strait, reflecting the interests of the Chinese people themselves. And this trend, this new environment, is consistent with America's present and longstanding interest in a peaceful resolution of the differences by the Chinese themselves.

The United States and the People's Republic of China have also found common interest in a growing economic relationship. When I came here in 1974, our two-way trade

totaled about 0 million, and now it is some billion. And for this we must credit the reforms China embarked upon 10 years ago under Chairman Deng Xiaoping's farsighted leadership.

And we've seen greater exchanges in education as well, with tens of thousands of Chinese students now studying in the United States, just as thousands of U.S. scholars have studied and taught in the farthest corners of China.

And we've developed an active program of military cooperation that is forging ties of friendship between our defense establishments, even as we've found a diplomatic unity in our shared opposition to policies of international aggression and domination. Our two countries, as nuclear powers, as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, have a special responsibility for preserving world peace. We owe it to mankind to work together for peace and international stability.

The United States has pressed forward with the Soviet Union in the arms reduction process, achieving under the INF treaty an agreement to eliminate U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles, on our insistence, from Asia as well as Europe. We are mindful of the danger posed to other countries by the proliferation of deadly weapon technologies, including chemical weapons, particularly in the regions of the world that are marked by conflict.

The prospect of improved relations between China and the Soviet Union inspires hope for new progress in the search for self-determination and peace for the Cambodian people and stability for Korea.

There can be little doubt that even as the people of our two countries are watching this meeting, the world as a whole is watching the larger movement of our two great nations as we build even firmer bonds across the vast ocean that joins us.

Barbara and I have had the great good fortune to travel around your vast and beautiful land as guests of the Chinese people. We went from the high plateau of Tibet to the great city of Chengdu, where we visited the home of your Tang poet Dufu and where we later personally opened the first American Consulate in the western part of the People's Republic of China. And we then had the unforgettable experience of traveling by boat through the hauntingly beautiful and historic Yangtze, the Gorges, where we relished the history of the Three Kingdoms and could almost hear the poet Li Bo's description of "the monkeys who screamed from the two sides without stopping." And then on to Wuhan and the first bridge to span the Yangtze, and finally Guilin and the beautiful Li River, where we saw the mountains and waters of your paintings and poetry.

Barbara and I are grateful for the friendship and kindness that we have been shown over the years by the Chinese people. And the expanding relationship between your country and ours has been a source of satisfaction to us as well. Let us continue then to work together, to plant trees together, so that the next generation, ours and yours, can sit together in the shade.

So, please, let me ask all of you to join me and Barbara in a toast: To the health of President Yang; to the health of Premier Li; to the health of Chairman Deng and General Secretary Zhao; to Barbara's and my dear close friends here tonight; and to Sino-American friendship: Ganbei. [Cheers.]

Note: The President spoke at 8:15 p.m. in the Western Hall of the Great Hall of the People.