

Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Students at Fudan University in Shanghai, China

April 30, 1984

The President. Madam President and all of you -- please, be seated -- I'm delighted to be with you today. I'm especially pleased to be here because, as I have already told Madame Xie, I feel I have a family tie to Fudan University. You see, the president of this university and my wife, Nancy, both earned degrees from Smith College in America.

As an avid sports fan and one-time sports announcer on radio, I want to use this opportunity to express my admiration for Fudan University's championship men and women's volleyball teams. And before I say anything else, I want to congratulate Fudan University on acquiring a powerful American Honeywell computer.

As students, you may be asking yourselves some of the same questions that American students ask, questions I asked when I was in college myself: "What kind of a world am I preparing myself for? Will I be able to raise my own family as well as, or maybe better than, my parents raised me?"

My own college days, years, took place some 50 years ago. It was a difficult time in America then. We were in a great worldwide depression, and I used to wonder what kind of place I could find for myself after graduation. But here we are 50 years later, and our people, the American people, enjoy a standard of living that was undreamed of back then.

Each decade during those past 50 years, real income per person in America rose an average of nearly 30 percent. And today, in America, we have taken -- or things we take for granted that didn't even exist 50 years ago -- television, computers, space flights, and so many more things, including the very means of travel -- space or the jet travel brought me here to this country.

Yes, hunger and sickness still exist in many parts of the world and in our own land. But thanks to breakthroughs in agriculture and medicine, today more people on Earth eat better and live longer than ever before in the history of our planet. As a matter of fact, I have lived some 20-odd years longer than my life expectancy when I was born. Now, that's a source of annoyance to a number of people in my own country. [Laughter]

But the key to all this progress has not been minerals, electricity, or building materials, but the human capacity for intelligence, imagination, and wonder and the opportunity to put all of them to use.

Here in China, for example, centuries ago wood was used only for our most basic needs like keeping warm. It was the ingenuity of the human mind that devised methods of turning wood into paper, transforming civilization by making it possible to store and exchange the written word. In the United States just a few years ago when we thought of

sand, we thought of little more than deserts and beaches. And today we use that sand to make the computer chips that guide satellites through space.

I'm convinced that each of you stands at a great beginning. The Chinese people have skill, ingenuity, and a rich heritage. And those of you who are privileged to come to this university will help lead your country to new prosperity. If I could offer one piece of advice to remember in the years ahead, I would suggest this: It's not so much what's inside the Earth that counts but what's inside one's heart and mind, because that's the stuff that dreams are made of. And China's future depends on your dreams and your faith and determination to make your dreams come true.

And now I thank you again for my being here, and I'd be very happy to entertain a few questions in the limited time that we have, if you have some.

Q. Respected Mr. President, just now you recalled your life 50 years ago when you were young. So, now could you specify which aspects of your university life impressed you most and which of these experiences turned to be most helpful to your later political career?

The President. All right. Well, you know, I went not to a large university like this. I went to a small liberal arts college similar to Smith College. And the funny thing is it was literally all of it. I majored in economics, and so, therefore, my studies certainly have played a part in what I'm doing now. [Laughter] I had two other great interests in addition. One was athletics, and I played football, basketball, ran on the track team, swam. And when I got out of school in that Great Depression, when even our own government was telling people on the radio not to go leave home looking for work because there was none -- more than a fourth of our work force unemployed -- believe it or not, it was the athletics that got me my first job in radio as a sports announcer.

And from there I went to Hollywood, because the other great interest that I'd had besides going to the classes in the college was in student theatricals, acting in plays and dramas. So, I wound up in Hollywood. And I have to say that today, while not only the economics and the athletics still serve me in good stead in the job I'm in. You'd be surprised how much being a good actor pays off. [Laughter]

Someone else?

Q. Mr. President, in recent years, Fudan has been developing academic exchange with a number of American universities, and we're looking forward to the further expansion of such exchange and collaborations. So, my question is, what do you think are the prospects of the further promotion of such ties?

The President. I think the prospects are very good. Indeed, I have been talking to your national leaders about that very thing. We have more than 10,000 of your students in our universities and colleges in America right now. A lesser number of ours are here. But we discussed this whole thing of making this exchange even better and more even and

definitely want to continue it. And I had the opportunity just before leaving to come here of meeting with about a dozen of those 10,000 who came to the White House, and we had an opportunity to visit. And they're fine young people. And you'll be very proud of them when they come home.

Q. Mr. President, just now you mentioned the role of young people in the progress of the world. And I think the future of the world belongs to the youth. And we Chinese young people are confronted with the task of realizing our modernization program and maintaining a world peace. So, I'd like to know how the American young people are preparing themselves for such a changing world.

The President. I think they're doing it very much the same as you are right here. There was a period when there was a kind of rebellious spirit in our land, and many young people -- not a majority, but enough of them to make quite a crowd -- were somewhat disillusioned, and they wanted to throw away all the values of the past, all the things that we've learned to believe in. And, you know, this is true of every generation. We all think that the generation that went before us didn't quite do things right, and we were going to make some changes and all. But be very careful. Don't throw away the values that have been tested through time and that have proven over the centuries that they are basic values essential to civilization and to what we call civilization.

There's since that time -- and I see it here also -- there has been a change. And our young people all over America are determined to make a place for themselves in the world of tomorrow. They're working hard. They're serious about it. And I think there's been a return now to acceptance of the basic values that have always made for civilization. And you have to remember this also: Every generation stands on the shoulders of the generation that went before. And so, you see farther because you're standing taller than we did and can look farther. But at least give us the credit that you're seeing farther because you're standing on our shoulders. Don't settle for the same level of view that we have. Realize that you are to look on and beyond and progress.

Q. Mr. President, I'm a student of international politics. So, I would like to know, after your trip to China, what measures are you going to take to further improve Sino-American relations?

The President. Well, this, too, was the subject of the discussions that I have had with Chairman Deng and Premier Zhao, President Li, others in your government.

We signed this morning some agreements that had to do with commerce and trade and broadening the ability for exchange and for partnerships such as the one that I just visited here in Shanghai when I arrived, before I came here, the Foxboro Company, which is a partnership between the People's Republic and the Foxboro Company of Massachusetts in our own country. We talked of all these things, as to how we can broaden the base of friendship and understanding and knowledge of each other. And this includes that part with the exchange of students and all.

We have signed an agreement with regard to double taxation and eliminating the unfairness of double taxation so that there can be a better opportunity for the people of your country and ours. We are continuing to negotiate on a number of issues that are of concern. Cultural exchange -- right now in Beijing, and then I understand it's going to go to other cities -- is an art exhibit from one of our art museums in Brooklyn, New York. You, in turn, are going to send your art treasures to our country for our people to understand better.

So, I guess it comes down to something that's a favorite saying of mine: We only get in trouble when we're talking about each other, not when we're talking to each other. So, we're going to be talking to each other a great deal.

Q. Mr. President, what part do you think the American universities have been playing in the development of science and technology in United States? And in face of the new technological revolution, what are they doing about it now?

The President. I didn't hear the last part of the question -- the last part.

Q. In face of the new technological revolution, what are they doing about it now? What are the universities -- of the American are doing about it now?

The President. Oh, well, our universities have played a fantastic role in this development. The research that is conducted in our universities -- and there is someone right near to me right now who knows a great deal about that, because in addition to Smith, she also went to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, one of our great technical engineering schools -- --

Madam Xie. Thank you.

The President. -- -- and I think could give you all the information that you would need about the research -- [laughter] -- that is going on in our universities. They have been the center of research in our country. And the future is unlimited.

Well, I was talking to the mayor on the way over here today about his generation and mine -- he's a few years younger than I am, but we're still of the same generation -- and our generation, you are going to see marvelous things. I'm not sure that you will see the great change or transition that we did in our single lifetime, because when I was very young, living in a small town in America, you traveled in horse and buggy.

I can remember my first automobile ride. There were no airplanes then, there was no television, there was no radio, and there was certainly no travel in space. But we have -- in one generation, we have gone from horse and buggy to the Moon in a spaceship. And all of that -- those are the building blocks that you have with which to go forward from here. And don't be afraid to dream and make your dreams come true.

Someone else?

Q. Mr. President, your China trip will soon come to its end. Could you tell us what impresses you most during this visit, and what impressions you especially want to convey to American young people when you are back home?

The President. What impressed me most? I'm still sorting it out. [Laughter] It's a kaleidoscope.

One thing above all that impressed me almost before we got to the Guest House in Beijing when we flew in the other day was the warmth and the friendliness of you, the Chinese people, toward us. It was a most and has been a most heartwarming experience ever since we've been here. We shall remember it for a long, long time.

But then was the vitality, the changes that are taking place -- the program of modernization itself, the courage that it took to embark on that, and then the manner in which it's succeeding. And coupled with that, which helps make it a kaleidoscope, was then also the few glimpses that we had of the great heritage, a civilization that began here long before it had begun anywhere in the world. You had gone through so much of civilization before, in the West, the Roman Empire ever even came into being or fell.

And the first was the trip to the Wall. Now, I've seen pictures of it on television; I've seen motion pictures and everything. I wasn't quite prepared for the feeling that I had standing there and looking at the almost impossibility of that structure, and then to think that a people did it several thousand years ago. And I was getting a little bit weak in the knees from climbing one of the steep slopes. [Laughter] And then I said to myself, but a few thousand years ago, people were climbing this slope carrying rocks. [Laughter]

And then yesterday, we go to Xi'an and go down in the pit and stand there with the terra cotta warriors -- and to think in terms of all this. And you know -- well, you probably know this already, but there were no two of them alike. You know, you could think of 800 terra cotta warriors, and they would all be the same. No, they all had different faces; they had different hair combs, and I almost had an eerie feeling that they might speak to me. [Laughter]

But the mix of the great civilization and heritage that you have -- and today, of the speed and drive of your modernization program. And I just go home with a dream in my heart that we perhaps have started a friendship here between two great peoples -- not an alliance; I admire the position of being nonaligned that you have -- but being friends and neighbors, and that we will be friends and neighbors. And we can be such a force for good in the world if we are.

Q. Thank you for your kind audience, Mr. President. Please take back best regards from us, the students of Fudan University, to the American people, especially to American students. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

Mr. Liu. Well, on behalf of the students and in my own name, I should like to thank Mr. President again for having come over to our classroom and talk to us. And we all appreciate your beautiful speech, the gracious things you said about China and Fudan University, and your superb answers to our questions.

Thank you.

The President. Well, thank you very much. Thank you all.

Can I take just a second for something? The press will get very annoyed with me; they've heard me tell this so often. But just a few weeks ago, we had a visitor in our land -- the President of France and his wife, Madam Mitterrand. And in the White House at a state dinner, Nancy was accompanying the President, I was accompanying Mrs. Mitterrand, into the dining room -- everyone standing around the tables. And Nancy and the President stayed on this side of the room, and Mrs. Mitterrand and I sat at the other side of the room -- and I tell this just as an example of how close you can come to a diplomatic crisis.

Suddenly, Madam Mitterrand stopped. And we had the room to cross yet. And I leaned forward to tell her that we were to go on over there. And the butler ahead of her was motioning her on. And she said something very quietly and calmly over her shoulder to me in French, which I did not understand. [Laughter] And, again, I gave the signal. And, again, she repeated what she'd said to me. And then the interpreter caught up with us and told me what she was saying. I was standing on her gown. [Laughter] She couldn't move. [Laughter]

Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 3:10 p.m. in a classroom at the university, where approximately 170 students from the international politics, foreign language, electrical engineering, physics, and biology departments had assembled for the event. Liu Gou Seng, an associate professor of English, was conducting a class on Shakespeare as the President entered the room.