WHY CHINA AND AMERICA SHOULD BE FRIENDS

An address delivered before the University of Illinois, June 10, 1908

I deem it an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity of delivering an address before you this morning. I am a great admirer of this great and prosperous state, which at one time formed a part of the Northwest territory, for the government your Congress in 1787 made an ordinance forbidding the holding of slaves, granting entire religious freedom to every settler and encouraging schools and the means of education. The wise provisions of your forefathers you have regarded as inviolable and sacred, and this flourishing university stands as an eloquent monument to your efforts to fulfill both in spirit and letter the third clause of the ordinance which provides for the education of the people of this state. Blessed by nature with an unusually deep, rich soil, your land groans with its plentiful harvests of wheat, corn and oats, while in the wealth of coal, I am informed, your state is surpassed by Pennsylvania only. The breeding of cattle and horses constitutes a very important rural occupation and again I am informed that in this form of wealth alone, there is invested in this state more than a hundred million dollars. With your wonderful inventions and modern machinery you have built up the industry of iron manufacturing that ranks your state third among all the states. Yours is a wonderful patrimony. Which you have improved and developed to a hundred, a thousand times its original value.

I am glad to have the opportunity of saying a few words to you today, because most of you gentlemen come from this state of Illinois, which ranking third in the Union, wields an immense power in the shaping of public opinion and directing of public policy. When you gentlemen leave these classic halls and enter the world of politics, letters, professional callings or business, you will with your advantages in position and learning, exert a great influence for good or for evil over your neighbors and fellow citizens of this state.

When foreigners first came to my country, and they came not with any intention of introducing their civilization or with any desire of improving themselves with a study of ours, but merely bent on commercial gains,—I say when they came, they did not do so at our invitation. We were sufficient unto ourselves, we were satisfied with our own civilization, which had existed for thousands of years, and was developed without the assistance of outsiders, we did not care to force ourselves on other people and we did not like other people to come and bother us. Our ports were, nevertheless, opened against our will, and goods, including a noxious drug, were introduced into our country. Along with the products of the factory and the work-shop were introduced a strange culture and strange ideas, which however excellent they may be, were nevertheless the stamp of an alien civilization. We objected to the subversion of our ancient institutions, teachings and policy, which we believed were the embodiment of the best and highest civilization in the world. For centuries my country held the lordship of eastern Asia, all the neighboring countries acknowledging our superiority and paying annual tribute. Under the circumstances, was it at all strange that with the irresistible advance of the forces of the west and the immovable conservatism and stolidness of the east, misunderstandings should arise, misunderstandings which the west with its superior military and naval organization was not slow in taking advantage of? The foreign relations of China in the past have been one continuous story of relentless aggression and helpless resistance. There were mistakes and misunderstandings on both sides. Neither was entirely free from blame, as neither tried to understand the other.

But I am happy to say that within the past few years there has been a complete change of attitude, at least on our part in our foreign relations if not on the part of all other nations. We have made honest attempts to study your civilization and
have been convinced that there are many points in which you are superior to us. Casting our traditions and conservatism to the winds, we are endeavoring, with a sincerity and earnestness of purpose that do not admit of the least doubt, to adopt and assimilate your ways of thinking and acting. Reform is the cry of our people, reform that we may yet live and preserve our nation and race. Whether it be in the realm of politics and government, for the investigation and study of which a special commission was appointed three years ago to make a tour of the leading nations of the world, or in matters of modern education, for the control and direction of which a new Ministry was organized in 1903, or in military and naval re-organization, the success of which was attained by the maneuvers of our modern troops in the past two years, or in the development of our resources and the maintenance of our post and communications, or in the fostering of our domestic and foreign commerce,—in short, in every direction, we have tried hard to place ourselves in line with the nations of the west and win their sympathy and respect. From Their Imperial Majesties, the Empress-Dowager and the Emperor down to the humblest subject, all are working with might and main to understand and master the fundamentals of western civilization. We realize that this is the age of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, and that no nation or race, however strong and wealthy it may be, should or would say that it is sufficient unto itself and will learn or accept nothing from others. There is no longer an aristocracy of nations or races but only an aristocracy of genius and education:

I believe that our efforts to assimilate and adopt that civilization which we once despised and rejected are meeting the approval of the nations of the west and winning their sympathy. The public men of this country in particular have always stood for the progress of the Chinese Empire and in their public and private utterances have assured the world that the awakening of my country arouses not suspicion and alarm, but approbation and satisfaction. Public sentiment and opinion in this country, it seems to me, are also strongly in favor of a new and self-reliant China.

There is every reason, to my mind, for China and the United States to be the best of friends. Geographically, we are the two countries that have the longest coastline on the Pacific ocean. The course of events seems to indicate that the broad expanse of water between your west coast and our eastern shores, broad no longer with the introduction of your ocean Leviathans, is destined to assume an importance that will eclipse that of the Mediterranean Sea in former centuries. With your annexation and acquisition of the Hawaiian and the Philippine Islands, we have become next door neighbors, and you are naturally interested in the policy and in maintaining the peace around and about the Pacific Ocean. Your willingness to shoulder your burden in becoming a participant in the field of world-politics is heartily welcomed by us. It seems to us that your national growth and development along peaceful lines are destined in the next few generations to evolve not so much on your eastern states as on your western coast. Foremost among the nations of the world as the advocate of peace and exponent of justice and fairplay, your evolution as a Pacific power will guarantee the good order and peace of the Far East.

Since the day of Caleb Cushing, your Minister, who arrived in China in 1844, bearing a letter from President Tyler to the Emperor T'ai-Kuang, relations between China and the United States have always been friendly. Permit me to read to you a few sentences from the letter: "The governments of two such great countries should be at peace. It is proper and according to the will of heaven that they should respect each other and act wisely. Our Minister Caleb Cushing is authorized to make a treaty to regulate trade. Let it be just. Let there be no unfair advantage on either side." Mr. Cushing is rightly designated as a messenger of peace. Mr. Chester Holcombe, at one time your Charge d'Affaires in Peking, describes this
state paper as being in substance plain, frank and businesslike and in no sense boastful or arrogant. It seems to me that his characterization of the letter in question is equally applicable to all the diplomatic relations between the two countries, and this frankness and absence of arrogance has won the confidence and respect of our people, a confidence and respect that other forms of diplomacy and exhibition of force cannot and will not win. The Hon. Anson Burlingame, another of your Ministers, so won the esteem and confidence of our statesmen by his tact and ability that his suggestion to establish diplomatic intercourse with the treaty powers received a ready response. When he retired from his position of ministership in 1867, he was appointed by my government as envoy together with two associate Chinese Ministers on a general mission to the different governments having treaty relations with my country. Thus it may be said that the entrance of China into the family of nations took place on the suggestion and advice of an American diplomat. Feelings of good will and forbearance were aroused in Europe and in this country by sending out of this mission, although the sudden death of Mr. Burlingame at St. Petersburg three years later prevented the mission from being a complete success.

What characterized the attitude of the United States towards China at the very beginning of our intercourse has been maintained through succeeding Ministers and secretaries of state and Presidents. Recent actions of the United States in the Boxer uprising, in the matter of reducing the payment of the indemnity, and the generosity of your people in lending assistance when our Empire was saddened by the shadow of famine and hunger, are other instances of your friendship. "We recognize," spoke the representative of the Viceroy Tien Fang at the reception tendered to the Hon. William H. Taft at Shanghai, "that America is desirous of assisting China in fulfilling the object of which the tour of the Traveling Commissioners around the world was but one of the preliminaries, and while this is as it should be, we at the same time know personally what the sentiment is at the back of it. The people of China will appreciate it in years to come." And so you will realize that traditions and the history of our diplomatic relations which indicated the mutual goodwill and friendship in the past will continue to so remain in the future.

The course of civilization seems always to take a westward direction. Starting from western Asia, it crossed over to Europe, and after attaining a high plane in the history of Greece and Rome, it has reached its loftiest conception and most brilliant of achievements in the Anglo-Saxon race of to-day. Separated as we are from the western part of Asia by the lofty and unscalable heights of the Himalaya mountains, the elements of our civilization have nevertheless in the past penetrated into Persia and other Asiatic countries. That our civilization on its material and scientific side is inferior to that of the west, we candidly admit, but we believe that there are many points both in our philosophy and learning, which by the way form more a part of our daily life than perhaps your philosophy and teachings do in yours) worth the study and consideration of the west. An American writer has summarized the achievements of our civilization in the following words: "A people whose national existence has survived the mutations of a definitely known historic period of thirty-seven centuries and of an additional legendary period dating back to no man knows how far into the hands of a heroic antiquity; who are frugal, patient, industrious and respectful to parents, as we are not; whose astronomers made accurate recorded observations 200 years before Abraham left Ur; who used firearms at the beginning of the Christian era; who first grew tea, manufactured gunpowder, made pottery, glue and gelatine——who invented printing by movable types 500 years before that art was known in Europe; who discovered the principles of the mariner's compass without which oceans could not be crossed, who made mountain roads which when new probably equalled in engineering and construction anything of the kind ever built by Romans; and who invented the arch to which our modern architecture is so greatly indebted." The contribution, therefore, made by my people to the advancement of the civilization of the
world is not a small one. The west owes some of its wonderful achievements of the past few centuries to the earlier civilization of the east. What we required decades and centuries to invent and utilize, you have with your vigor and energy vastly improved and developed in the course of a few years, speaking comparatively. This nation in particular has been fortunate in starting out on its national career with the experiences of the old world to serve as a guide, with the advantages of accumulated learning and knowledge to lead and to inspire, and with a wealth of natural resources and a richness of soil that insured the transformation into gold of everything to which you turn your hands. You constitute the highest type and best embodiment of western civilization; infinite credit is due to you in the development of this great republic. But do you not realize, as I feel assured you do, the responsibility that rests on your shoulders of handing across the Pacific the torch of civilization, which has been handed to you by Europe across the Atlantic? Are you not eager to complete the circuit of the progress of civilization, the circuit, which beginning from western Asia on its westward march has after the lapse of centuries reached the American continent? And in so doing, it seems to me, both the east and the west will be benefited. America is preeminently the representative of the western civilization as China is of the Eastern. In the words of an eloquent author, Europe and America looking across the ocean to the far east should be anxious, "not indeed to imitate the forms, but to appropriate the inspiration of that ancient world which created manners, laws, religion, art, whose history is the record not merely of the body, but of the soul of mankind, and whose spirit, already escaping from the forms in which it had found a partial embodiment, is hovering even now at your gates in quest of a new and more perfect incarnation." And are our people really awakened to the necessity of sitting at the feet of western nations and drinking in their learning and their philosophy? Ask the three hundred young men of my country now attending the schools and colleges of this country; ask the five hundred more scattered all over Europe in the military and other educational institutions; ask the thousands and hundreds of thousands of young men and young women who have entered the new schools at home. There are two hundred newspapers published in different cities of China today against the half a dozen of fifteen years ago. Commission after commission has encircled the globe in the eager pursuit after knowledge and the study of your laws and institutions. On the other hand, there has been a sympathetic and scholarly research into our literature and history, our customs and habits, and our institutions and characteristics by men and women of your nationality. Residents in many cases in the Chinese Empire for a long period of years masters often of our language and literature, scholars and gentlemen by birth and education, your writers have rendered into the English language many specimens of our choicest literature and have described, narrated and expounded with a fair and impartial spirit and an unusual insight men and things Chinese. This mutual interchange of ideas and ideals and the adoption of the one of what is best and highest in the other will result in the birth of a new civilization, the civilization of the Pacific Ocean, the new light of the far east, that will eclipse the glory and brilliancy of the old civilizations. Another chapter will be added to the history of civilization, a chapter in which the east and west, laying aside all feelings of antagonism and prejudice will vie with each other not in the achievements of might, but in the victories of peace, aggressive only in the dissemination of truth and light and relentless only in the establishment of justice and right.

Strange as it may seem to you, there are many points of similarity in the character of our people and yours. We are democratic. Practically speaking, we have no aristocracy of blood or birth but only that of genius and education. Every Chinese, however humble his origin may be, can by dint of study and ability, rise himself to the highest main post of honor and trust within the gift of the Emperor. We have a strong sense of humor and so have you. In this country, as in mine, honesty and
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integrity are virtues occupying important places in our moral code and especially with
our merchants their word is as good as their bond. In typical Chinese life you will
find a simplicity and happiness very much similar to the rural life of this country.
We are intensely domestic and it is asserted that wherever we go and whatever coun-
try we settle in, we are found to make good husbands. In our love of argument and
reasoning, in our mental acumen, in our taste for the picturesque and the beautiful,
do you not recognize that we are alike in essentials and unlike only in small details?
As this nation is noted for being of a practical bent of mind, we are my people
sometimes dubbed the Anglo-Saxons of the far east.

But the twentieth century is preeminently the century of international commerce.
With our modern means of communication and transportation, and with our progress
in geographical and political knowledge, there is not a spot on the surface of the
earth too far for the trader to reach and not a want that the merchant cannot supply.
There is a tremendous struggle, although it is a peaceful one, for fresh markets, and
merchants of different nationalities compete with one another for the patronage of
buyers with a keenness usually associated with acts of belligerency. That the
Chinese Empire will soon constitute one of the biggest buyers in the world is uni-
versally admitted. Our imports are increasing by leaps and bounds and the ultimate
magnitude of our foreign trade can best be appreciated when I say that at present
it is only a dollar per capita. In a decade, when our natural resources in the
shape of coal, gold and silver are developed on a large scale, when with the
completion of our trunk lines of railway, domestic trade is fully established, and
when the dissemination of modern knowledge and creation of modern wants the standard
of living is raised higher, the imports will reach figures that will surpass the
prognostication of the most optimistic statistician. In the development and after,
a large share of the trade will come to this country. If you are wise, as I believe
you are, if you adhere to the principles of international intercourse as enunciated
by President Tyler in his letter to Emperor Taokuang if you seize the opportunities
enjoyed by you on account of your geographical position, your traditional friend-
ship, your vigorous and inspiring civilization, and of the fact that our young
men are thirsting for your knowledge and philosophy, your commercial supremacy
in the far east is assured. And with this additional bond in the shape of a
community of commercial interests between my country and yours, the friendship
between us will be adamantine in firmness and strength.

In conclusion, I wish you gentlemen, every success on the ocean of life on
which you are about to embark. May you influence your fellow countrymen with
the same lofty ideals by which your professors have influenced you. This is the
grandest country in the world for a young man to make his life a success and I
hope your names and your actions will be written large in the history of your nation.