

**Mutual Appreciation and Peaceful Coexistence
in Order to Reach Harmony**

Speechmaker: Ye Xiaowen
President: President DeGioia
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Honorable Dr. DeGioia, Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning!

I'm Ye Xiaowen. My English name is George. I'm the Minister of the State Administration for Religious Affairs of China.

First of all, I'd like to thank Dr. DeGioia for his gracious invitation and thank all of you for your warm welcome. It is a great honor for me to meet and speak to you. I also feel very much at home here as George comes to his hometown -- Georgetown.

On this beautiful campus by the Potomac River, Georgetown University is better known for its glorious history of about 219 year. I know this university was set up under the initiative of a Jesuit, Father John Carroll in 1789. Believe it or not, many Chinese people have heard about the Jesuits. That is mainly because of Matteo Ricci. Ricci was a successful missionary who came to China at the end of 16th century. I'm sure that Chinese people who have heard of Matteo Ricci far outnumber those who have heard of me.

By now, I believe you must have realized that my English is really very poor. I don't know how much I've made myself understood. Like many people in Beijing, I only started to learn to English after Beijing began to prepare for the 2008 Olympic Games. Now, to give you and myself an easier time, I'd like to switch to Chinese. My interpreter, Lucy, a teacher from Beijing Foreign Studies University -- she's also my English teacher -- will help with the translation.

I hope that when some of you come to Beijing for the Olympics this August, I would be able to speak better English. And maybe if I work hard enough, I could be your tour guide. I guess some of you are also interested in learning about Chinese culture and even speaking some Chinese.

Now I'd like to invite you to listen to some Chinese.

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As one of the four ancient civilizations, the Chinese civilization has never been interrupted and it will not end. Where does the mystery lie? Matteo Ricci, who came to China over four hundred years ago, had the correct answer.

Their answers were quite similar. The answer they gave is that China has never been ethnocentric and has never only appreciated its own culture and civilization while ignoring other cultures or civilizations. China does not have the either/or mentality. China advocates the idea that each culture and civilization has its own beauty, which should be appreciated and hopefully well recognized. It is important to learn to respect and value the beauty of different cultures and civilizations. It is important to learn to coexist with different cultures and civilizations and achieve harmony through mutual appreciation.

(Now, I'd like to illustrate this point by considering four aspects.)

I. Mutual Appreciation and Peaceful Coexistence Is a Way of Reaching Harmony

Georgetown University was established by Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who was also a Jesuit and later became a famous missionary, was devoted to his Christian faith and certainly considered Christianity to be the most truthful religion in the world. Nevertheless, he did not regard other religions, or civilizations, as ugly because of his Christian faith. He came to China during the 16th century with an attitude of mutual appreciation, humbleness and gentleness. He wore Chinese clothes, befriended Chinese people, learned Chinese characters, and respected Chinese cultures and rites. He endeavored to seek common ground between Chinese culture and Christian civilization and he tried to integrate Christian doctrines into Chinese culture. The humble Chinese people were impressed by Matteo Ricci's humbleness. They respected him and received the Christianity proclaimed by him with openness even though this religion was then foreign to them. Matteo Ricci arrived in Canton in south China in 1584 and continued his journey northward until he came to Beijing in 1601. Many Chinese were converted because of his attitude of mutual appreciation. Among them, the most famous person, and also the most influential one, was Xu Guangqi, a very learned scholar and official. At the same time, Matteo Ricci introduced western astronomy, geography, mathematics and other sciences to China and he also translated and introduced to Europe the Confucian Canon, the Four Books, which are considered to be "the Chinese Bible." Through Matteo Ricci, Chinese and Western civilizations, the two different kinds of great civilizations which developed totally independently had their first true encounter. As a result, western science and philosophy brought a new horizon to the Chinese people and, Chinese philosophical thinking, represented by Confucianism, also exerted some influence on the European Enlightenment in the 18th century.

Nevertheless, later, the humble and successful Matteo Ricci stepped off the stage of history. Instead, those who were ego-centric, who were against the idea of co-existence, and who became dizzy with their own success, entered the stage with the establishment of Western industrial civilization. With the expansion of western culture as a privileged culture, those with attitudes of self-centeredness and Western superiority engendered many tragedies, destroying or even exterminating other civilizations. Having studied the history of Chinese religion, the former president of Peking University, Mr. Jian Menglin, who earned his doctorate from Columbia University, stated in the 1930s: “If Buddha came to China on the back of the White Elephant, Jesus Christ flew to China with cannonballs.” In the same way, Africa was plundered, and Asia was exploited. The World Wars, starting from the Balkan Peninsula resulted in the slaughter of untold numbers of human beings. As we enter the 21st century, there still remain conflicts and antagonism among different nations, peoples and religions. Such conflicts and antagonism have sadly intensified, not diminished, and world has been shocked by the clamor of wars and the scourge of terrorism again and again.

Today, the whole world has to denounce and eradicate terrorism, the common enemy of human beings. When the terrorists hijacked aircraft, religion was also hijacked by them. For us, the civilizations of Christianity and Islam are both respectable.

There has been much debate since Prof. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University came up with the “Clash of Civilisations” theory in 1993. Some people use “9/11” as an example of clash of civilizations. However, many believe that the tragedy was a result of conflict of interests. We should advocate “civilized dialogues” and “civilized harmony”. Even Prof. Huntington himself admitted in his 1996 book The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order that a multi-culture world is inevitable, and it’s impossible to build a “global empire”. In a world with multi-civilisations, a more constructive approach is to accept and appreciate diversity and seek commonality instead of insisting on universalism. If two parties are self-centered and each regards its own value as the absolute and universal value, when conflict and oppositions arise, each wants the other to give in, each wants to replace the other, each sticks to its own interests, and eventually each will go to an extreme. This either/or mentality – the mentality against co-existence—can easily lead to the extreme of murdering each other. Applying the law of the jungle to real life will cause debilitating cycles of endless revenge.

Standing at the podium of Georgetown University, the prestigious institution established by the Jesuits, it is easy for us to recall the Jesuit Matteo Ricci. His experience has inspired us to believe that if we do not allow the co-existence of different civilizations, there will be no peace in the world, because the strong will try to devour the weak. If we appreciate different cultures and encourage peaceful co-existence of different civilizations, then we will be able to learn from others’ strong points and offset our own weakness, and eventually, to build a harmonious world.

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Crossing the threshold of the 21st century, we should especially recall the teachings of the Bible, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peacefully with all” (Romans 12:17-18).

Let us clear the haze of extremism and terrorism with the light of mutual appreciation of different civilizations.

II. Mutual Appreciation and Peaceful Coexistence Requires Seeking Common Ground while Keeping Differences

There are certainly many differences between China and the United States. For instance, Americans put their family names after their given names but we Chinese place our given names after our family names. The phone number to report a fire in the States is 911, but it is 119 in China. Many Americans like to drink iced water, but many Chinese prefer hot tea. American culture is largely shaped and influenced by Christianity, while Chinese culture has been deeply influenced by Confucian tradition and Buddhist and Daoist thought. Non-religious-based moral and ethical teachings have soaked into the common people’s daily political and social life in China. Americans may not recognize many Chinese people as religious believers, but they have a similar pious faith, a deep sense of awe, and a finely developed conscience. Many Chinese people believe that “gods are near you, three-feet about your head,” and therefore, they believe that they should worship heaven and pay tribute to their ancestors sincerely, because it is important “to make sacrifice to gods as if gods were there.”

The beauty of the world lies in its colorfulness. A small-minded soul sees differences as antagonisms and a different person as a potential foe; a large-minded spirit sees difference as diversity and seeks unity and harmony.

Because of the lack of communication and understanding, plus the repeated propaganda of some prejudiced western media, quite a number of kindhearted Americans sincerely think that “religious persecution” prevails in China. They even believe that China forbid the printing and publishing of the Bible. What, then, are the facts? In the past two decades, China has printed over 50 million copies of the Bible; among them, over 9 million copies were printed for overseas churches. Thus, the Bible has become one more “Made in China product” The Chinese government has applied a tax exemption to the printing and sale of the Bible. The cost of a Bible is only one fifth of price of other similar-sized books. The China Christian Council held the Exhibition of Bible Ministries in China in Hong Kong in 2004; in Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New York City in 2006 and in Cologne and Bavaria in Germany in 2007.

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Former U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, once told me a story. While Deng Xiaoping, China's former leader was visiting the United States Almost two decades ago, he was asked whether there was religious freedom in China. His answer was, "Yes"; when asked whether China could print the Bible, his answer was, "Yes"; when asked whether there would remain missionaries in China, his answer was, "No". Deng's answers were based upon two basic principles: first, to safeguard religious freedom in China and second, to adhere to the principle of running the Chinese Church by Chinese Christians. These two principles are like two sides of one coin and they have been written into the Constitution of China. The spirit of these two principles ensures the healthy and smooth growth of Chinese Christianity and also enable peaceful co-existence and friendly exchange between China, where the Christian population makes up only 1% of the total Chinese population, and the rest of the world, where the Christian population makes up about 1/3 of the total population. The process of recognition, understanding, and exchange of different cultures involves practicing the principle of seeking common ground while maintaining the differences. The principle does not try to import the models of Western churches into China; it does not try to evangelize China with an "either/or" mentality. To do otherwise would incite new cultural tension, anxiety, and antagonism.

After all, is there religious freedom in China? As the Minister of the State Administration for Religious Affairs of China, I would like to tell you that our respect for religious freedom is sincere and consistent. Our respect for religious freedom is to show our respect to the objective reality, to the course of civilization, to the intrinsic law of social development, and to the basic rights of human being. To respect the religious freedom of Chinese citizens is to unite more people for the development of our nation and the establishment of a harmonious world. Our respect for religious freedom is ensured by our laws and our Constitution; our respect for religious freedom is deeply rooted in a rich Chinese traditional culture of harmony. China today has inherited one of the world's most tolerant cultures, and there is no cultural element that generates religious antagonism or religious persecution. In Chinese history, almost no great conflicts took place due to different religious beliefs, or between religious believers and non-believers, or among the believers of different religions. Rather, there was tolerance and mutual understanding among different religious or denominational groups.

Of course, no culture or civilization is perfect. China has had its own painful experiences, such as the Cultural Revolution, during which human rights were trampled, and religions blasphemed. We've learned from these painful experiences and gained a better understanding of what is good and beautiful. A nation will cherish some principles even more after learning from its past mistakes. Today, we appreciate more and work harder to protect our citizens' rights for freedom of belief. In his report to the 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress, our president, Mr. Hu Jintao further urged us to "exert the positive role of religious workers and believers for the promotion of social development."

III. “Mutual Appreciation” Requires the Appreciation of the Beauty of Others

It is only in the spirit of mutual appreciation that one will see the beauty of others and learn to appreciate it, and learn to respect and tolerate other’s beauty even if it is different from one’s own, and eventually, to achieve harmony in peaceful coexistence.

China and the United States are thousands of miles away. With the help of a certain kind of telescope, we are able to observe and understand each other. With our telescope, Chinese people can see American people clearly, and consider their country to be a vast and beautiful country. (The word in the Chinese language for “United States” is meiguó, which literally means, beautiful country.) Nevertheless, some Americans, with their telescope, see China small and ugly. They even consider China to be weak and, even – pardon my pun – as a piece of fragile china. Why did this happen? I think because they looked through the telescope from the wrong end!

Matteo Ricci not only looked through the telescope from the right end, but he also came to China to meet with Chinese people and the experience Chinese culture in person. He clearly observed that China was also a beautiful country.

Where does the beauty of China lie? In his book The Problem of China, written in the 1930s, Bertrand Russell, the famous British Philosopher, stated, “.....something of the ethical qualities in which Chinese is supreme, and which the modern world most desperately needs. Among those qualities I place first the pacific temper,.....” Russell believed that if the whole world would adopt this quality, there would be ever more peace and happiness on earth. Similar ideas to Russell’s are also reflected in German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s Novissima Sinica, French writer Voltaire’s Essai sur les mœurs, and contemporary British scholar Toynbee’s Historical Studies.

Chinese civilization seeks to progress to the realm of “the Great Harmony,” which is “the harmony between heaven and people, among all things, and among all people.”

Ancient Chinese sages and philosophers highly regarded the concept of harmony, “HE” in the Chinese language. Confucians argued that, ever since ancient times, harmony was treated as a kind of beauty that needed to be applied to the ritual of propriety. “People treat each other according to the rituals in a harmonious world.” Buddhists asserted that external peace and harmony lay in internal tranquility and stability. “A harmonious world starts at the heart.” Taoists believed that the harmonious world had to communicate with Tao—the Way, because Tao generated and includes all things. Tao is with nature and is peaceful and selfless. Tao is non-action and meekness without any clash. “A harmonious world is connected by Tao -- the Way”.

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Chinese emperors adored HE – harmony. In the Forbidden City, important halls were named the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Central Harmony and Hall of Preserving Harmony.

Common Chinese people have favored the concept of HE – harmony. The inscription of the plaques placed in the homes of common Chinese families often advocate the idea of harmony, such as “Harmony and Kindness” “Prosperity Begins with Harmony,” and “Harmony Adds Glitter to My Humble House.”

Gentleness and politeness, concord and amity, peace and calm all point to the concept of harmony. The 17th Chinese Communist Party Congress declared that China will seek a path of scientific development which is people-oriented, comprehensive, balanced and sustainable; China will endeavor to promote unity and harmony of its social members and different undertakings; China will engage in peaceful development. Such development is based upon China’s self-development through safeguarding world peace, and, at the same time, safeguarding world peace will also facilitate China’s development. Chinese people uniformly support a national policy based on the ideal of harmony, HE.

China is making great efforts to build a harmonious society and we sincerely recommend and ardently look forward to “building a harmonious world.” This is a logical extension of the old saying that “internal harmony is for external peace, and will create external harmony.” It is a long-time wish of an ancient people with a rich and profound cultural heritage.

Of course, Christian civilization also affirms the ideal of harmony. The Bible asks Christians to “love your enemies” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 5:44, Lk.10:27). “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you;...”(Matt. 7:12). “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt.5: 9). We believe, therefore, that Americans are able to understand the Chinese ideal of harmony “HE” and to appreciate the beauty of China. We also hope that the United States, with Judeo-Christian civilization as its core value, will recognize and respect the beauty of others, aid others in becoming more beautiful, and appreciate the beauty of others, learn to coexist with other’s beauty so as to contribute to the building of a harmonious world.

IV. Mutual Appreciation Begins with Dialogue

Seeking common ground while maintaining differences, and recognizing and respecting the beauty of other cultures are the basic foundations for the realization of mutual appreciation and peaceful coexistence of different cultures. Sincere dialogue and true communication are the paths leading to mutual appreciation.

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Two years ago, I met former President Jimmy Carter in Atlanta. I presented my book, Turning Antagonism into Dialogue, to him. In return, he gave me his book, Living Faith. Our different concerns, and yet our similar pursuit, are clearly reflected in the complementary titles of our books.

We should respect people living with faith, even though we may have different beliefs. As a matter of fact, believing in either theism or atheism, or believing in this god or that god, is not too important. What matters is that people should have a kind and open heart and a free and inclusive spirit. Such a mind and spirit comes from dialogue. I will leave for New York City tomorrow to attend the book release of the English edition of Riverside Talks: A friendly Dialogue between an Atheist and a Christian. This book documents the sincere dialogues between Luis Palau, a well-known American evangelist, and Zhao Qizheng, former minister of the State Council Information Office of China. This is an outstanding book recording the equal exchange of views of a theist and an atheist, as well as an in-depth dialogue between Eastern and Western cultures.

Atheists and theists have their own beliefs. Dialogue is a way to help us go beyond the differences in our beliefs, which can be “the supreme gods” that separate us. The spirit of dialogue embodies the spirit of seeking truth, goodness and beauty. In this way, we are able to pursue truth, obtain goodness, attain beauty, and achieve harmony.

The Americans and Chinese have their own cultures and civilizations. Dialogue is necessary for the exchange and acceptance of different cultures. Many Americans believe, “In God We Trust” God divided human beings into men and women, not for them to argue endlessly, but for them to love one another. The world is divided into the East and the West, not for the sake of confronting each other, but for the solidarity and unity of each.

This year is an election year in the United States. I believe that, during the heated election, there will be much sincere dialogue between the two competing parties. As President Bush indicated in his State of the Union Address. “Republicans and Democrats can compete for votes and cooperate for results at the same time.”

As global warming has caused changes in our environment and threatened human survival, dialogue will help us work together to safeguard our common home, the global village.

When the clash of civilizations and rampant terrorism take place, people become confused and helpless. Dialogue will help us gain hope and find effective ways of building a peaceful world.

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When the largest developed country and the largest developing country engage in sincere, sustainable, and comprehensive dialogue, I believe that the whole world will acclaim, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1).

Though I could still go on and on – there is still more that I want to say, I should stop here and leave some time for questions. Americans have hoped that China would revalue its currency, and their hope has come true: the Chinese currency is appreciating in value. It was a bit less expensive for me to buy a ticket to the States with Chinese RMB this time. If the price of airline tickets continue to go down because of the appreciation of the Chinese currency, my colleagues and I will come again soon.

Thank you very much!

Permission to reprint the remarks of Minister Ye Xiaowen has been granted to this Journal by the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China