

DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATIONS

Speeches by
Zhao Qizheng



New Classic Press



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常州大学图书馆
藏书章

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Preface

He has been a physicist and has earned awards for his technical innovations. He was for a number of years vice mayor of Shanghai and head of the New Pudong Area, leading a taskforce to spearhead the construction of this part of the metropolis of Shanghai, where now skyscrapers dominate the views along the famous Huangpu River. He is now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. He is a professor at the School of Journalism at Renmin University in Beijing. But perhaps Zhao Qizheng is best known for his role as minister of the State Council Information Office (SCIO), a post he held from 1998 to 2006.

In this capacity he took on the task of explaining China to the outside world, frequently meeting with international visitors, speaking at forums, answering questions from the world media, delivering speeches to audiences in international organizations like UNESCO and other world arenas such as the Parliament of Korea, and organizing large-scale cultural events best represented by the China Week in France and the Chinese Cultural Promotion Festival in the United States, among many others. For the same purpose, he knocked on the doors of many statesmen and CEOs of transnational corporations, chatted with world leaders of all persuasions, scholars of varied academic disciplines and religious leaders of different cultural backgrounds across the world. As minister of the SCIO, he left many legacies, perhaps the most significant of which was the establishment of the spokesman system

across the nation at all levels, which, in retrospect, was nothing short of an institutional revolution.

Many of those who have had contact with him praise him for being a passionate patriot, for his tireless efforts and never-ending attempts at explaining what China is really like and what Chinese civilization embodies. Indeed he outranks many people of similar positions in the number of foreigners he has met and talked to, from heads of state to professors, from chiefs of international media to young students, from business board chairpersons to office clerks. He has gone on more speaking tours and had more interviews than most others in similar positions.

Others say he stands out for his wisdom and wide-ranging knowledge. Yes, to be sure, he is one of the very few well-trained scientists who have crossed a huge gap to take international relations as their career. His mind works fast, and he moves from one topic to another in his talks, often before the audience has fully digested the previous one. An atheist all his life, he has had one of the most widely-publicized, most in-depth and most harmonious dialogues with a leading figure in the Evangelical church in the United States.

Still others, statesmen or ordinary citizens, remember him as a genuinely warm and friendly man. He was said to be the only official of his level to send a “get well” card to Dr. Henry Kissinger when the latter was sick. When Yaohan, a giant supermarket chain with its base in Japan, fell in 1997 amidst the Asian financial crisis, Mr. Zhao was among the first to encourage its chief, Mr. Kazuo Wada, who was experiencing one of the most difficult times in his life. Not that Mr. Zhao could in any way help Mr. Wada revive his business, but he was there when friends, domestic or overseas, were needed. In 2008, his 92-year-old mother was confined to bed after breaking her hip, but Mr. Zhao was to speak at a cultural event in the United States. Being a

filial son, he wanted to stay at her bedside, and yet he did not want to disappoint his hosts in the US. In the end, he attended the event only after his mother said, “You don’t have to stay with me. It is important that you attend the event in the United States.” Once, we were in New York on my only international trip together with him, when we had to stop for lunch before we went to the airport. As we sat down, his first question was “Has lunch been arranged for the driver?” referring to the locally hired car driver, whose name was perhaps even unknown to his entourage. To help young journalists finish their jobs for the day, he did not hesitate to skip a nap or dinner. Many of his fellow workers and subordinates were inspired by him, and he brought them joy and a sense of worth.

This is not the first book in English he has published, but it certainly is the most richly compiled work combining a selection of his speeches and dialogues, touching on diversified topics and introducing his views on China and the world at large. What makes this book especially worth reading is that Mr. Zhao speaks not only from his mind, but from his heart. His genuine beliefs in his country and his culture, his conviction of the importance of international peace and dialogue, his passion for his people, and his tirelessness in pursuing true global understanding all come out loud and clear from these lines. Readers will not only come to see a lively and active Chinese official at work, but also gain a rare insight into the thinking of the generation of Chinese people he represents, which pushes a dynamic China forward in the 21st century.

Huang Youyi

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Preface

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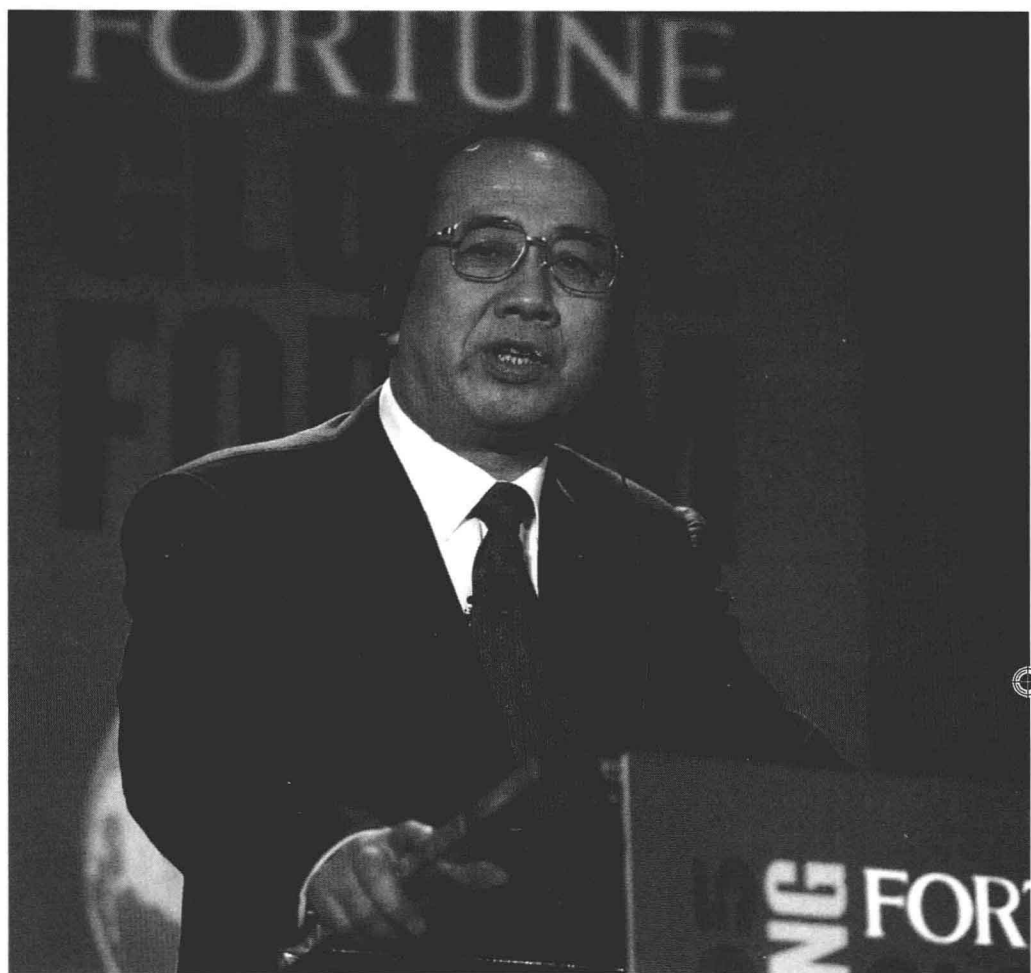
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Huang Youyi



Speeches

The Chinese People Embark upon the 21st Century

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, France,
September 2, 1999

I am very glad to have this opportunity to discuss the topic of the Chinese people with all of you.

It is not easy to understand a person; it is even more difficult to understand the people of a country. General Charles de Gaulle, who is highly esteemed in China, once said, "We may go to the moon, but that's not very far. The greatest distance we have to cover still lies within us." I hope that the people of different countries can conquer the geographical and cultural distances, and become closer.

The first person to make Europeans aware of the existence of China was the Italian merchant Marco Polo. His travel journal, which described the country of the ancient East as prosperous, strong and beautiful, inspired the curiosity of countless Europeans. In the 18th and 19th centuries, France developed *Chinoiserie*, or "China Fever." In fact, the renowned 19th century French writer Théophile Gautier wrote a poem called *Chinoiserie*. The essence of the poem is as follows:

"My beloved girl is in China, she lives at home and cares for her old parents;

From a tower of porcelain she leans her brow,
By the Yellow River, where haunt the cormorants.

She has upward-slanting eyes, a foot to hold,
In your hand – that small; the color shed
By lamps is less clear than her coppery gold;
And like a poet, to the evening star,
She sings the willow and the flowering peach.”

This poem presents an endearing portrait of China. However, “bound feet” is not poetry. Perhaps Gautier didn’t know that at the time Chinese women’s feet were intentionally bound to be small and that it was immensely painful for them.

There are 56 ethnic groups in China, with the Han being the majority – making up 92 percent of the population – and the smallest minorities consisting of just 2,000 or so people. Today, when I talk about the Chinese people, of course, I am speaking of the Chinese people as a whole and not of each ethnic group individually, as that would take a whole other speech.

I plan to talk about the changes that the Chinese people have undergone during this century in order to explain the Chinese people as they head into the 21st century. The monumental change experienced by China and the Chinese people during the 20th century have been unlike any other experienced by China in the 3,500 years since China began keeping records. It is equally unlikely that a change comparable to this will take place in any other century to come. Not only are these changes tremendous, they are of the utmost importance as well. Today I would like to talk about the changes in the mentality of the Chinese people.

The rapid change of people’s social status, lifestyle and mentality are a result of the two revolutions China experienced in this century. The first revolution was in 1911 and led by Mr. Sun Yat-sen. Mr. Sun overthrew the Qing Dynasty, which had been ruling China for nearly 300 years, and ended feudalism. Later, as a result of warlord battles and foreign invasions – particularly Japan’s invasion from 1931 to 1945 – the semi-colonial and semi-feudal nature of Chinese society intensified. The second revolution was the democratic one led by Mao Zedong, which led China into the new democratic and socialist society that has been in place ever since.

The reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping began in 1978. Deng himself said that the reforms were revolutionary. He proclaimed that the main responsibility of the Chinese government was to develop the country's economy. China's history during this century has made the Chinese people realize that the two slogans, "adhering to self-reliance and working hard to build China" and "reforming and opening up" are not contradictory. China thus entered a period of high-speed economic development. China's GDP has on average increased by 9.7 percent in the past 20 years. As everyone knows, Deng Xiaoping and many other influential Chinese leaders once studied in France and were influenced by French culture. This is something I should mention here.

The Chinese people entered the year of 1900 humiliated and backwards. One Dutch dictionary from the beginning of the 20th century, the *Standard Dutch Dictionary*, defined Chinese people as people who are stupid and mentally backward. Before 1950, Chinese people were also labeled as the "sick men of East Asia."

During the 19th century, the terrible habit of binding girls' feet was very common in China, among both the rich and the poor. Perhaps the Chinese people of that time can be represented by women with small bound feet, because they entered the 1900 with deformed feet.

But the Chinese people will enter the year of 2000 with healthy and firm strides. The idea that Chinese people could win gold medals in international athletic events was inconceivable 50 years ago. Some say that Chinese women have surpassed Chinese men. This is perhaps true. After all, it is our women who dominate events like volleyball, soccer, gymnastics and swimming.

Now I would like to discuss some of the changes that have taken place in Chinese families and women. Then I will move on to discuss changes of a few important Chinese concepts.

In the traditional Chinese family, brothers could live under the same roof even after they married, but girls had to leave the family upon marriage. Typically, the richer the family, the more members there were in