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THE SPEECHES
2006 + 2009

By Barack Obama

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Barack Obama Shanghai Speech

**Museum of Science and Technology, Shanghai, China
November 16, 2009**

Good afternoon. It is a great honor for me to be here in Shanghai, and to have this opportunity to speak with all of you. I'd like to thank Fudan University's President Yang for his hospitality and his gracious welcome. I'd also like to thank our outstanding Ambassador, Jon Huntsman, who exemplifies the deep ties and respect between our nations. I don't know what he said, but I hope it was good. (Laughter.)

What I'd like to do is to make some opening comments, and then what I'm really looking forward to doing is taking questions, not only from students who are in the audience, but also we've received questions online, which will be asked by some of the students who are here in the audience, as well as by Ambassador Huntsman. And I am very sorry that my Chinese is not as good as your English, but I am looking forward to this chance to have a dialogue.

This is my first time traveling to China, and I'm excited to see this majestic country. Here, in Shanghai, we see the growth that has caught the attention of the world—the soaring skyscrapers, the bustling streets and entrepreneurial activity. And just as I'm impressed by these signs of China's journey to the 21st century, I'm eager to see those ancient places that speak to us from China's distant past. Tomorrow and the next day I hope to have a chance when I'm in Beijing to see the majesty of the Forbidden City and the wonder of the Great Wall. Truly, this is a nation that encompasses both a rich history and a belief in the promise of the future.

The same can be said of the relationship between our two countries. Shanghai, of course, is a city that has great meaning in the history of the relationship between the United States and China. It was here, 37 years ago, that the Shanghai Communique opened the door to a new chapter of engagement between our governments and among our people. However, America's ties to this city—and to this country—stretch back further, to the earliest days of America's independence.

In 1784, our founding father, George Washington, commissioned the *Empress of China*, a ship that set sail for these shores so that it could pursue trade with the Qing Dynasty. Washington wanted to see the ship carry the flag around the globe, and to forge new ties with nations like China. This is a common American impulse—the desire to reach for new horizons, and to forge new partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Over the two centuries that have followed, the currents of history have steered the relationship between our countries in many directions. And even in the midst of tumultuous winds, our people had opportunities to forge deep and even dramatic ties. For instance, Americans will never forget the hospitality shown to our pilots who were shot down over your soil during World War II, and cared for by Chinese civilians who risked all that they had by doing so. And Chinese veterans of that war still warmly greet those American veterans who return to the sites where they fought to help liberate China from occupation.

A different kind of connection was made nearly 40 years ago when the frost between our countries began to thaw through the simple game of table tennis. The very unlikely nature of this engagement contributed to its success—because for all our differences, both our common humanity and our shared curiosity were revealed. As one American player described his visit to China—“[The] people are just like us...The country is very similar to America, but still very different.”

Of course this small opening was followed by the achievement of the *Shanghai Communique*, and the eventual establishment of formal

relations between the United States and China in 1979. And in three decades, just look at how far we have come.

In 1979, trade between the United States and China stood at roughly \$5 billion—today it tops over \$400 billion each year. The commerce affects our people's lives in so many ways. America imports from China many of the computer parts we use, the clothes we wear; and we export to China machinery that helps power your industry. This trade could create even more jobs on both sides of the Pacific, while allowing our people to enjoy a better quality of life. And as demand becomes more balanced, it can lead to even broader prosperity.

In 1979, the political cooperation between the United States and China was rooted largely in our shared rivalry with the Soviet Union. Today, we have a positive, constructive and comprehensive relationship that opens the door to partnership on the key global issues of our time—economic recovery and the development of clean energy; stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and the scourge of climate change; the promotion of peace and security in Asia and around the globe. All of these issues will be on the agenda tomorrow when I meet with President Hu.

And in 1979, the connections among our people were limited. Today, we see the curiosity of those ping-pong players manifested in the ties that are being forged across many sectors. The second highest number of foreign students in the United States come from China, and we've seen a 50 percent increase in the study of Chinese among our own students. There are nearly 200 "friendship cities" drawing our communities together. American and Chinese scientists cooperate on new research and discovery. And of course, Yao Ming is just one signal of our shared love of basketball—I'm only sorry that I won't be able to see a Shanghai Sharks game while I'm visiting.

It is no coincidence that the relationship between our countries has accompanied a period of positive change. China has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty—an accomplishment unparalleled in human history—while playing a larger role in global events. And the

United States has seen our economy grow along with the standard of living enjoyed by our people, while bringing the Cold War to a successful conclusion.

There is a Chinese proverb: "Consider the past, and you shall know the future." Surely, we have known setbacks and challenges over the last 30 years. Our relationship has not been without disagreement and difficulty. But the notion that we must be adversaries is not predestined—not when we consider the past. Indeed, because of our cooperation, both the United States and China are more prosperous and more secure. We have seen what is possible when we build upon our mutual interests, and engage on the basis of mutual respect.

And yet the success of that engagement depends upon understanding—on sustaining an open dialogue, and learning about one another and from one another. For just as that American table tennis player pointed out—we share much in common as human beings, but our countries are different in certain ways.

I believe that each country must chart its own course. China is an ancient nation, with a deeply rooted culture. The United States, by comparison, is a young nation, whose culture is determined by the many different immigrants who have come to our shores, and by the founding documents that guide our democracy.

Those documents put forward a simple vision of human affairs, and they enshrine several core principles—that all men and women are created equal, and possess certain fundamental rights; that government should reflect the will of the people and respond to their wishes; that commerce should be open, information freely accessible; and that laws, and not simply men, should guarantee the administration of justice.

Of course, the story of our nation is not without its difficult chapters. In many ways—over many years—we have struggled to advance the promise of these principles to all of our people, and to forge a more perfect union. We fought a very painful civil war, and freed a portion of our population from slavery. It took time for women to be extended the

right to vote, workers to win the right to organize, and for immigrants from different corners of the globe to be fully embraced. Even after they were freed, African Americans persevered through conditions that were separate and not equal, before winning full and equal rights.

None of this was easy. But we made progress because of our belief in those core principles, which have served as our compass through the darkest of storms. That is why Lincoln could stand up in the midst of civil war and declare it a struggle to see whether any nation, conceived in liberty, and “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” could long endure. That is why Dr. Martin Luther King could stand on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and ask that our nation live out the true meaning of its creed. That’s why immigrants from China to Kenya could find a home on our shores; why opportunity is available to all who would work for it; and why someone like me, who less than 50 years ago would have had trouble voting in some parts of America, is now able to serve as its President.

And that is why America will always speak out for these core principles around the world. We do not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation, but we also don’t believe that the principles that we stand for are unique to our nation. These freedoms of expression and worship—of access to information and political participation—we believe are universal rights. They should be available to all people, including ethnic and religious minorities—whether they are in the United States, China, or any nation. Indeed, it is that respect for universal rights that guides America’s openness to other countries; our respect for different cultures; our commitment to international law; and our faith in the future.

These are all things that you should know about America. I also know that we have much to learn about China. Looking around at this magnificent city—and looking around this room—I do believe that our nations hold something important in common, and that is a belief in the future. Neither the United States nor China is content to rest on our

achievements. For while China is an ancient nation, you are also clearly looking ahead with confidence, ambition, and a commitment to see that tomorrow's generation can do better than today's.

In addition to your growing economy, we admire China's extraordinary commitment to science and research—a commitment borne out in everything from the infrastructure you build to the technology you use. China is now the world's largest Internet user—which is why we were so pleased to include the Internet as a part of today's event. This country now has the world's largest mobile phone network, and it is investing in the new forms of energy that can both sustain growth and combat climate change—and I'm looking forward to deepening the partnership between the United States and China in this critical area tomorrow. But above all, I see China's future in you—young people whose talent and dedication and dreams will do so much to help shape the 21st century.

I've said many times that I believe that our world is now fundamentally interconnected. The jobs we do, the prosperity we build, the environment we protect, the security that we seek—all of these things are shared. And given that interconnection, power in the 21st century is no longer a zero-sum game; one country's success need not come at the expense of another. And that is why the United States insists we do not seek to contain China's rise. On the contrary, we welcome China as a strong and prosperous and successful member of the community of nations—a China that draws on the rights, strengths, and creativity of individual Chinese like you.

To return to the proverb—consider the past. We know that more is to be gained when great powers cooperate than when they collide. That is a lesson that human beings have learned time and again, and that is the example of the history between our nations. And I believe strongly that cooperation must go beyond our government. It must be rooted in our people—in the studies we share, the business that we do, the knowledge that we gain, and even in the sports that we play. And these

bridges must be built by young men and women just like you and your counterparts in America.

That's why I'm pleased to announce that the United States will dramatically expand the number of our students who study in China to 100,000. And these exchanges mark a clear commitment to build ties among our people, as surely as you will help determine the destiny of the 21st century. And I'm absolutely confident that America has no better ambassadors to offer than our young people. For they, just like you, are filled with talent and energy and optimism about the history that is yet to be written.

So let this be the next step in the steady pursuit of cooperation that will serve our nations, and the world. And if there's one thing that we can take from today's dialogue, I hope that it is a commitment to continue this dialogue going forward.

So thank you very much. And I look forward now to taking some questions from all of you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

So—I just want to make sure this works. This is a tradition, by the way, that is very common in the United States at these town hall meetings. And what we're going to do is I will just—if you are interested in asking a question, you can raise your hands. I will call on you. And then I will alternate between a question from the audience and an Internet question from one of the students who prepared the questions, as well as I think Ambassador Huntsman may have a question that we were able to obtain from the website of our embassy.

So let me begin, though, by seeing—and then what I'll do is I'll call on a boy and then a girl and then—so we'll go back and forth, so that you know it's fair. All right? So I'll start with this young lady right in the front. Why don't we wait for this microphone so everyone can hear you. And what's your name?

Q: My name is (inaudible) and I am a student from Fudan University. Shanghai and Chicago have been sister cities since 1985, and these two cities have conduct a wide range of economic, political,

and cultural exchanges. So what measures will you take to deepen this close relationship between cities of the United States and China? And Shanghai will hold the World Exposition next year. Will you bring your family to visit the Expo? Thank you.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, thank you very much for the question. I was just having lunch before I came here with the Mayor of Shanghai, and he told me that he has had an excellent relationship with the city of Chicago—my home town—that he's visited there twice. And I think it's wonderful to have these exchanges between cities.

One of the things that I discussed with the Mayor is how both cities can learn from each other on strategies around clean energy, because one of the issues that ties China and America together is how, with an expanding population and a concern for climate change, that we're able to reduce our carbon footprint. And obviously in the United States and many developed countries, per capita, per individual, they are already using much more energy than each individual here in China. But as China grows and expands, it's going to be using more energy as well. So both countries have a great interest in finding new strategies.

We talked about mass transit and the excellent rail lines that are being developed in Shanghai. I think we can learn in Chicago and the United States some of the fine work that's being done on high-speed rail.

In the United States, I think we are learning how to develop buildings that use much less energy, that are much more energy-efficient. And I know that with Shanghai, as I traveled and I saw all the cranes and all the new buildings that are going up, it's very important for us to start incorporating these new technologies so that each building is energy-efficient when it comes to lighting, when it comes to heating. And so it's a terrific opportunity I think for us to learn from each other.

I know this is going to be a major focus of the Shanghai World Expo, is the issue of clean energy, as I learned from the Mayor. And so I would love to attend. I'm not sure yet what my schedule is going to be, but I'm very pleased that we're going to have an excellent U.S. pavilion

at the Expo, and I understand that we expect as many as 70 million visitors here. So it's going to be very crowded and it's going to be very exciting.

Chicago has had two world expos in its history, and both of those expos ended up being tremendous boosts for the city. So I'm sure the same thing will happen here in Shanghai.

Q: First shall I say it in Chinese, and then the English, okay?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Yes.

Q: I want to pose a question from the Internet. I want to thank you, Mr. President, for visiting China in your first year in office, and exchange views with us in China. I want to know what are you bringing to China in your visit to China this time, and what will you bring back to the United States? (Applause.)

PRESIDENT OBAMA: The main purpose of my trip is to deepen my understanding of China and its vision for the future. I have had several meetings now with President Hu. We participated together in the G20 that was dealing with the economic financial crisis. We have had consultations about a wide range of issues. But I think it's very important for the United States to continually deepen its understanding of China, just as it's important for China to continually deepen its understanding of the United States.

In terms of what I'd like to get out of this meeting, or this visit, in addition to having the wonderful opportunity to see the Forbidden City and the Great Wall, and to meet with all of you—these are all highlights—but in addition to that, the discussions that I intend to have with President Hu speak to the point that Ambassador Huntsman made earlier, which is there are very few global challenges that can be solved unless the United States and China agree.

So let me give you a specific example, and that is the issue we were just discussing of climate change. The United States and China are the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases, of carbon that is causing the planet to warm. Now, the United States, as a highly

developed country, as I said before, per capita, consumes much more energy and emits much more greenhouse gases for each individual than does China. On the other hand, China is growing at a much faster pace and it has a much larger population. So unless both of our countries are willing to take critical steps in dealing with this issue, we will not be able to resolve it.

There's going to be a Copenhagen conference in December in which world leaders are trying to find a recipe so that we can all make commitments that are differentiated so each country would not have the same obligations—obviously China, which has much more poverty, should not have to do exactly the same thing as the United States—but all of us should have these certain obligations in terms of what our plan will be to reduce these greenhouse gases.

So that's an example of what I hope to get out of this meeting—a meeting of the minds between myself and President Hu about how together the United States and China can show leadership. Because I will tell you, other countries around the world will be waiting for us. They will watch to see what we do. And if they say, ah, you know, the United States and China, they're not serious about this, then they won't be serious either. That is the burden of leadership that both of our countries now carry. And my hope is, is that the more discussion and dialogue that we have, the more we are able to show this leadership to the world on these many critical issues. Okay? (Applause.)

All right, it's a—I think it must be a boy's turn now. Right? So I'll call on this young man right here.

Q: (As translated.) Mr. President, good afternoon. I'm from Tongji University. I want to cite a saying from Confucius: "It is always good to have a friend coming from afar." In Confucius books, there is a great saying which says that harmony is good, but also we uphold differences. China advocates a harmonious world. We know that the United States develops a culture that features diversity. I want to know, what will your government do to build a diversified world with different cultures? What

would you do to respect the different cultures and histories of other countries? And what kinds of cooperation we can conduct in the future?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: This is an excellent point. The United States, one of our strengths is that we are a very diverse culture. We have people coming from all around the world. And so there's no one definition of what an American looks like. In my own family, I have a father who was from Kenya; I have a mother who was from Kansas, in the Midwest of the United States; my sister is half-Indonesian; she's married to a Chinese person from Canada. So when you see family gatherings in the Obama household, it looks like the United Nations. (Laughter.)

And that is a great strength of the United States, because it means that we learn from different cultures and different foods and different ideas, and that has made us a much more dynamic society.

Now, what is also true is that each country in this interconnected world has its own culture and its own history and its own traditions. And I think it's very important for the United States not to assume that what is good for us is automatically good for somebody else. And we have to have some modesty about our attitudes towards other countries.

I have to say, though, as I said in my opening remarks, that we do believe that there are certain fundamental principles that are common to all people, regardless of culture. So, for example, in the United Nations we are very active in trying to make sure that children all around the world are treated with certain basic rights—that if children are being exploited, if there's forced labor for children, that despite the fact that that may have taken place in the past in many different countries, including the United States, that all countries of the world now should have developed to the point where we are treating children better than we did in the past. That's a universal value.

I believe, for example, the same thing holds true when it comes to the treatment of women. I had a very interesting discussion with the Mayor of Shanghai during lunch right before I came, and he informed me that in many professions now here in China, there are actually more