



## *China in My Perception*

### **Remarks Delivered by Huang Mengfu**

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere thanks for Professor Kirby's invitation, and to the President of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, Mr. Orlins, who is an alumnus of Harvard, and whose daughter is now attending Harvard as well.

I studied Russian instead of English when I was at school, so if I were to deliver this speech in English, I suppose it would be much more difficult for you listen than for me to speak. Therefore, I have invited Mr. Dai Huiping to interpret my speech from Chinese into English; Mr. Dai is the vice president of the Graduate Institute of Interpretation and Translation of Shanghai International Studies University.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy and honored to deliver a speech here, since Harvard is one of the most famous universities in the world and always stands at the forefront of human exploration for the future. It cultivates many outstanding talents, including the forty-fourth President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, to whom I would like to take this opportunity to express my warmest congratulations.

I feel very happy to give a speech here for another reason, which is that my grandfather Mr. Huang Peiyan used to visit Harvard, and my father Mr. Huang Jingwu studied here seventy-nine years ago and received his master's degree in economics here.

I have met many prominent Americans during this visit, and often they expressed to me how they understood China. One of them told me a vivid aphorism: if an American visits China for a week, he could come back and write a book; if he visits China for three months, he could only write an article; but if the visit lasts for one year, when he comes back, he could only scratch his head and say that China is too complicated to write a single word about. This is why I am willing to come to America to communicate face-to-face with you in today's highly advanced



information age. I would like to introduce you to the China of my perception in a frank and sincere manner.

Without doubt, China's achievements during the reform and opening-up period have been worthy of acknowledgement and appreciation. For the past thirty years, China's GDP has experienced an annual growth of 9.8 percent. People's living standards have enjoyed general increase; the human rights situation has also improved rapidly. Thirty years ago, China's urban residents relied on bicycles as the major form of transportation, but now cars are used by many families. Thirty years ago, telephones were deemed as unattainable luxury goods by Chinese people, but now there is an average of nearly one telephone to every two people in China.

Accomplishments in the area of human rights development in China are reflected in our country's achievements in the elimination of poverty and the improvement of basic living conditions for people in poverty-stricken areas. Thirty years ago, there were 250 million Chinese people living in poverty, meaning that one-third of the population did not have adequate food and clothing. By 2007, this number had been reduced to 15 million, or about 1.1 percent of the population, indicating that Chinese society has in general solved the problem of adequate food and clothing, which is a step towards achieving moderate prosperity. For the Chinese people, who faced poverty for so long, these improvements are of obvious significance.

In the 1960s, when I was in college, I used to go and work in the countryside outside Beijing, and lived in a peasant's home. At that time, his house was utterly destitute; his family treated us with the only flour left in their home while eating cornmeal and potherb themselves. Now, however, they don't worry about food and clothing anymore. They live in big brick house, watch a big color television, use cell phones and drive their own car. They live a very happy and affluent life, for which I am very happy for them.

Among those who have been to Beijing, most have noticed that taxis always seem to serve as places of discussion on politics and society. People in taxis can comment on political affairs freely, some even criticize sharply, but nobody thinks that this is inappropriate and no one would take these words too seriously. An article written by American columnist Nicholas D. Kristof and published in the New York Times on August 24 of this year noted that, according to the author's own experience, he could freely express his opinions, including politically sensitive comments, on the Chinese Internet.

This year, the Chinese people experienced two significant events—the 5/12 Wenchuan earthquake and the Beijing Summer Olympic Games. After the devastation of the earthquake, China's main leaders hurried to the stricken area from the capital, arranging for man-power and materials to save as many lives as possible. Various other people from the general society also jumped in to help; the lines to donate money and blood were endlessly long and a lot of volunteers actively rescued people at the front.



The Beijing Olympic Games turned out to be an incomparable success, and the warm smiles of thousands of volunteers became Beijing's calling-card. The attention given to the Paralympic Games greatly increased awareness among the Chinese people of the need to protect the rights of the disabled. These two events reflect on the overall development of the Chinese people during the past thirty years of reform and opening and embody the progress the Chinese people have made in the area of human rights. While the Chinese people are certainly marching toward a better life, but we also clearly notice that China is still a developing country that faces significant challenges.

The first challenge is how to break the constraint of population. In the past, we believed that strength lay in numbers, but now the large population has created a bottleneck in development. China has 1.3 billion people. No matter how small an economic, societal or political issue is, when multiplied by 1.3 billion, it becomes a large-scale problem. Take the issue of employment, for example. In order to control the deteriorating employment situation, China must create 20 million new jobs every year, which is equivalent to the population of a medium-sized European country. And no matter how substantial a country's financial and material achievements are, when divided by 1.3 billion people, the per capita figure would become very small. China's GDP ranks fourth in the world, but once divided by 1.3 billion, the GDP per capita ranks lower than 100<sup>th</sup>.

The second challenge is how to further narrow the urban-rural gaps and eliminate regional disparities. Due to historical reasons, there are large developmental differences between the urban and rural areas. Some are similar to the North-South differences in the world. In some less-developed areas infrastructure is weak and social services such as education, health care and culture are underdeveloped. In these areas, people's average income is only one third that of city dwellers. The economy of Eastern China is more prosperous than that of Western China. The average income in Eastern China is 2.5 times greater than for those in Western China. In the foreseeable future, a major task of China's economic and social development will be to reduce urban-rural economic differences and regional disparities.

The third challenge is how to establish nation-wide social security, health care and education systems. At present, half of the people in China basically have no social security, pension, unemployment insurance or basic medical and health care services. The average number of years of education is only eight, far below the American average of 13.4 years. We face numerous other difficulties as well. However, the Chinese people maintain the goal of realizing increased development for the people, and devote themselves to establish a society characterized by democracy, fairness and justice, sincerity and humanity, vigor and stability and the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature.

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Ladies and gentlemen, a lot of friends present are interested in China's political system and democratic construction. So next, I would like to introduce their situations.

In China, people are familiar with the "cave dialogue" between Chairman Mao Zedong and my grandfather Mr. Huang Peiyan. In 1945, in a cave near the Northwest city of Yan'an, the two of them conducted a dialogue which became significant in Chinese history. In Mr. Huang Peiyan's opinion, Chinese dynasties had all experienced a cycle from rise to prosperity to decline and finally extinction. He asked Chairman Mao how the Communist Party could step out of this cycle of destiny. Chairman Mao replied that he had found a way to resolve this problem, that is, to take the road of democracy. Indeed, democracy has become the ultimate goal our country has strived to attain. Since the founding of new China, and especially since the era of reform and opening-up, China's democratic construction has made continuous progress, reform of the political system has been steadily carried out and the principle of "managing state affairs according to law" has been further implemented as well. We have paved a path toward socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.

The realization of democracy requires certain economic, cultural and social conditions, which also determines that different countries should achieve democracy through different paths and by using different means. When it comes to political party systems, the United States utilizes a multi-party system, while China implements "multi-party participation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party." In the regards to checks and balances of power, the United States practices the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers, while China implements the National People's Congress system, which is characterized by a combination of legislative and executive powers, emphasizing the checks between "human rights, duties and ownership of property" and "authorities of decision-making, execution and supervision." In terms of electoral system, leaders of the United States are elected indirectly on the basis of national universal suffrage, while Chinese leaders are elected indirectly by National People's Congress.

We believe that the core meaning of democracy is that the people are masters of the country, which concretely manifests itself in a series of systems and mechanisms that guarantee people's democratic rights. As long as they can ensure that people are the masters of the country, any party, forms of checks and balances of powers or electoral system is a democratic system. The key lies in whether people are real masters of the country, and to what extent they master the country, and whether actions taken by the government truly reflect people's will and represent the fundamental interests of the people. These should be the basic criteria by which to appraise a country's democracy and its level of development.

Ladies and gentlemen, I also have two other titles: one is Vice Chairman of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference; the other is Chairman of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce. I would like to share my experiences and understanding of the facts of democratic development in China.



As we all know, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the ruling party, while another eight parties also participate in the management of state affairs. The CCP often discusses significant political, economic and social issues with the participating parties and social groups. Before each major policy comes into being, the CCP leaders always consult and coordinate the interests of all parties, and then make decisions on the basis of agreement. After the decision has been made, the CCP leaders will take a further step to consult all parties' opinions, in order to improve the decision during its implementation. During political consultations, everyone may express their views freely and actively, and reasonable suggestions will be adopted. Such political consultation has formed into a formal and legal system. Last year, CCP Central Committee General Secretary Mr. Hu Jintao and Chinese Premier Mr. Wen Jiabao attended eighteen consultative meetings, communicating directly with the participating parties.

The All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce is one of the thirty-three constituents of the People's Political Consultative Conference. As Chairman of this association, I participate in consultative meetings and the highest level of political decision-making on behalf of 5 million private enterprises and 30 million individually-owned businesses, and report their appeals to decision-makers. Not long ago, before the decision of strengthening rural development was made, Chairman Hu Jintao presided over a consultative forum, listening to suggestions put forward by participating parties and various groups. During the forum, I proposed that the greatest difficulty in new rural construction was that some people had not gotten rid of poverty, thus we should intensify our efforts to help them as soon as possible. My suggestion was adopted and the government greatly increased funding for poverty relief.

I also proposed that the key to new rural construction was helping grain farmers to become more prosperous, therefore we should increase grain prices. This proposal was also adopted. Beginning next year, the minimum protection price of grain will have an average increase of about 13 percent. In the first half of this year, Premier Wen requested opinions on economic trends and macro regulation. I proposed that the implementation of tight monetary policy would impact small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) first, since banks would stop lending money to SMEs first when capital became limited. This suggestion was adopted as well so that when it issues indicators of bank credit, the government established a dedicated line of credit for SMEs.

After many years of exploration and experimentation, China has finally found a path and political and social system suitable to its own development. An opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Center indicates that 86 percent of China's population is satisfied with the country's development, ranking first among all countries in the world. This result substantially shows that Chinese people are confident and fully acknowledge the country's political system.

So, does this mean that Chinese people have become too conservative and complacent to listen to others' advice? Of course not. In fact, we not only constantly assess and improve ourselves, but also draw experiences and lessons from other countries.



“All roads lead to Rome.” In our opinion, we should respect the diversity of development models, and should not measure a political and value system according to the standards of another. We also know that the attention paid by American people to China’s human rights development is not out of malice, but out of their real intention to improve the human rights situation, for which we would like to express our appreciation. We would also like to say that we admire the achievement American people have accomplished in the field of human rights, and we respect the model of democracy that the American people have chosen. Therefore, we hope that you can understand that the Chinese people have the ability to seek democratic freedom.

Take the party system for example. China practiced multipartism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, following the downfall of the Qing government. At that time, there were more than 300 political parties in the country. The result of multipartism was general chaos—hostilities among warlords resulted in little benefit for the people. The Chinese people drew a lesson from this history: that democracy in China must have Chinese characteristics and must primarily guarantee the country’s stability and development. Some countries in the world put elections above all else. Actually, election is not the only form of democracy. Furthermore, the Western mode of election is not without defects. In almost every election, only half of the eligible voters take part in the vote, which means that the result only partially reflects public opinion, though enormous money and social costs have been spent in conducting the election.

In the 1990s, under the influence of Western countries, a wave of imitating Western-style democracy came into vogue in some developing countries. A Central African country, which used to be fairly stable, sank into chaos after implementing a Western-style democracy. Tribal conflicts, which had already existed in this country, were intensified by elections, rendering the entire country to separation and finally triggering a shocking genocide.

In fact, just as other things that have their own laws of development, a country’s human rights development also has its own path and rhythm. Take America’s efforts to gain equal rights for black people for example: from the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, to Martin Luther King’s famous speech *I Have a Dream* in 1963, and finally to the election of the first black president this year, human rights development in the United States has also undergone a long process, but other countries should not interfere with or criticize it.

Dear friends, the current degree of China’s democracy, freedom and opening-up were unimaginable thirty years ago. A basic fact nowadays is that China is moving toward an even higher level of democracy. But we do not want to take this as an excuse to slow down the process of human rights development. As President Truman said in the broadcast on the day when Japan surrendered in World War II, “spiritual freedom, personal freedom and human dignity are the strongest, most resilient and lasting powers in the world.” No individual could reduce people’s confidence, determination and strength to promote human rights development. Over the next two years, the Chinese government will be drawing up the *National Action Plan on Human Rights*, which will lay the groundwork for future human rights development in China.



Ladies and gentlemen, China and the United States are geographically far away from each other, with the vast Pacific Ocean between them. In my opinion, the Sino-US relationship is like the water of the Pacific Ocean: though it occasionally raises terrifying waves, on the whole it is calm. No matter how far apart we are and how many different opinions we have, I strongly believe that just as President Nixon had said during his visit to China that “we both are great peoples in the world, neither of us intent to encroach the other’s territory, rule the other side or the entire world.” I am deeply convinced that both of us have adopted a positive attitude in the pursuit of human rights development, and we both have the responsibility to collectively promote human rights development in a more positive and collaborative manner.

Through this visit and direct communication, the delegates from the China Foundation for Human Rights Development have learnt much from America, and we have also introduced the current situation in China to our American friends. In fact, “seeing is believing,” so here I would like to invite all of you who are present to come and visit China sometime in the future.

As a member of the industry and business sector, I believe that I have the responsibility to say a few words here regarding the current situation of the world economy. At this time, no one can predict how serious and long-lasting the crisis will be, but one thing is definite: the world economy will surely recover sooner or later. “Winter has come, can spring be far behind?” Therefore, the key is what attitude we adopt to face this crisis.

I think, at this moment, we should not forget two terms: spirit and responsibility. First and foremost, we should not let spirit collapse. The courage that people from both countries showed after 9/11 and the 5/12 Wenchuan earthquake, and the altruistic dedication to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, should all be employed to collectively face and resolve this crisis. The crisis would be over faster and the impact would be smaller if everyone established confidence and assumed responsibility. But if people are reluctant to spend money, banks refuse to lend money, and enterprises are resistant to borrowing money, the world economy will be difficult to go back to its normal track. As a result, more people will lose jobs and some of them will even lose basic human rights. Therefore, at this moment, confidence is even more significant than gold, and implementation of a plan is much more important than the plan itself.

The Chinese government has adopted a responsible attitude and, on the basis of careful analysis of current domestic and international economic situations, has made timely adjustments to policies in order to ensure relatively stable and rapid economic growth. These policy adjustments include the implementation of this proactive fiscal policy, and a loosened monetary policy, which includes a package of tax cuts and a 4 trillion renminbi investment plan to stimulate the economic growth. China will also adopt other measures in response to the changing situation and to cooperate with the world on an effective response to the financial crisis. The Chinese government and people believe that China can have a positive influence on the world’s finances and “real economy” by maintaining China’s economic stability and growth.



During this visit, I found that most Americans believe that the most important bilateral relationship in the world is the Sino-U.S. relationship, and that collaboration between China and the United States is of essential importance to deal with the economic crisis. So here I would like to call for a closer cooperation between our two countries in order to bring happiness and prosperity to both peoples and to the world. Let us take actions immediately, just as Chairman Mao Zedong has said: “Ten thousand years is too long; seize the day.”

As the rainbow appears after the storm, let us believe that tomorrow will be better.

Thank you very much.