

# Taihe Civilizations Forum Keynote

## SPEECH TRANSCRIPT

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Virtual

### REMARKS FROM NATIONAL COMMITTEE PRESIDENT STEPHEN A. ORLINS

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I had the good fortune to spend the end of summer with my children and grandchildren on a beach on the Atlantic Ocean. As I walked on the water's edge and looked over the horizon, my granddaughter asked me, "What's on the other side?" I told her Europe was over there. She asked if we can swim there. I said that would be difficult. It provoked my daughter to ask what happens when you can't do something that you hoped you could do. She asked about our Sunday night dinners that would have been enabled by a Chinese-built high-speed railway between Baltimore, where she lives, and New York, where I live. "With the trip shortened from 3 hours to 45 minutes, you would have been able to have dinner with us every Sunday night and return home, right?" she asked.

She then asked, "Dad, do you remember the day when you had breakfast in Taipei, flew to Shanghai, had lunch in Shanghai, and then flew nonstop to New York and had dinner with grandma all on the same day? The ease of travel and the atmosphere at the time led you to believe that cross-Strait relations had fundamentally changed and a peaceful future was virtually assured. Her questions multiplied. Do you remember when Chinese and American scientists successfully fought Ebola, and you believed that America and China could together conquer new frontiers in medicine? What happened with Covid? Do you remember when you spoke at the opening of the world's largest automotive plate glass factory in the shadow of your brother's home in Dayton, Ohio? You believed Chinese investment in America would pull the Chinese and American peoples together just as American investment had pulled the two peoples together. What happened? Do you remember when President Xi and Obama stood together as they signed the Paris Accords, and you believed that these two great countries would lead the world in combatting climate change?" "Lao Ye," they asked, "what happens when you don't realize your dreams?"

The weight of the questions and the failures they implied threatened to crush me. How had so much gone so wrong these past years? How had a once productive relationship been led to the brink of disaster? I could only respond, "You don't give up because you know you are right, and ultimately, the people on both sides of the Pacific will make sure these dreams become a reality." I told them Lao Ye might be early to this belief, but he is not wrong.

It's undeniable that the United States and China are in fierce competition. Both countries are convinced the other seeks to stymie progress and meddle in internal affairs. In the United States, policymakers see China not as a cooperation partner but rather as the only adversary with the ability and will to challenge the United States' position in the world. Meanwhile, in China, media openly discusses "the rise of the East and the fall of the West" while declaring that the 21st century will be "China's century." These views are fueling mutual antagonism between the two countries.

Despite years of turbulence, we are now starting to see a stabilization of U.S.-China relations. After months of silence, our senior leaders are talking to one another again. The visits by Secretaries Blinken, Raimondo, Yellen, and Special Envoy Kerry signal a new era of communication. While discussions at times were tense, we should continue high-level engagement to manage differences and reduce misunderstandings and miscalculations. Ultimately, our countries' two presidents must engage in regular dialogue. I believe that President Biden should travel to China and speak directly to the Chinese people. President Xi should make the same trip to the United States and speak directly to the American people. This will build mutual trust and provide an anchor to the relationship.

Re-opening the lines of communication is an important first step. Next, our countries must prioritize people-to-people interactions. Since 2020, opportunities for cross-cultural interactions have vanished as travel between our two countries has dropped precipitously. The number of American students studying in China is less than 500, and the number of Chinese students studying in America has plummeted. Chinese academics in the U.S. fear for their safety, and U.S. academics worry about traveling to China. Public opinion of the other country has soured.

These trends must be reversed. Our countries have done it before. The ping-pong diplomacy of 1971 ushered in a new era of bilateral ties. I believe we can do this again. First, we must increase the number of flights between the United States and China. Flights have increased from 24 to 48. This is a start, but it is nowhere near the more than 350 flights that flew before COVID-19. Alongside flight increases, our countries must clear the backlog of visas that prevent citizens from freely traveling. Reopening the consulates in Houston and Chengdu will benefit the peoples in both the southwestern United States and China. Both countries must stop denying entry to citizens of the other country with a proper visa.

Our countries must also begin to have difficult discussions about core interests like economics and national security. The last few years have seen the expansion of national security to cover everything from agriculture to healthcare. Policymakers in both countries have legitimate national security concerns that motivate them to enact market access, data transfer, and technology transfer barriers. But what if these policies cause more harm than good?

For complex issues like this, I think we should listen to the experts. A recent National Committee Track II dialogue consensus agreement written by leading Chinese and American academics and former officials had this to say: "Our countries' continued pursuit of decoupling risks reducing business, academic, and personal interactions between the United States and China— the very bedrock of bilateral ties. Decoupling will also lead to reduced global growth due to overcapacity and overinvestment, with the majority of the cost paid by consumers in both countries."

What can be done? First, we must establish a common definition of national security, especially as it relates to export, investment, and data transfer controls. Policymakers can look to free trade ports and free trade zone policies in the Mainland as models for cross-border data transfer. Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Hainan have already formulated cross-border data transfer programs. China and the United States should build on this foundation and expand to cross-border e-commerce, cross-border payment, supply chain management, and service outsourcing. Commercial enterprises have already figured this out; it's time for our countries to catch up.

Building trust is a slow process. While suspicion remains high on both sides, our two countries should establish a pilot cooperative program to work on mutually agreeable privacy and data security standards. Environmental and medical research are safe data exploration fields with great room for cooperation. Based on the experience gained from the pilots, cooperation could gradually be expanded.

Goodwill gestures from both countries would also help speed up this process. The United States and China should reverse all tariffs to 2017 levels. Numerous studies have shown that these tariffs harm working-class Americans and Chinese. As a gesture of goodwill, Beijing should work more closely with the U.S. to stop the export of precursors to fentanyl.

Working together in years past, the United States and China reduced piracy off the Gulf of Aden, defeated Ebola in West Africa, enforced UN sanctions on North Korea and Iran, signed the Paris Accords, and cooperated to prevent past pandemics. Our world still faces significant challenges. Just because we are encountering difficulties does not mean we should give up and abandon the dreams that my grandchildren believe. When it comes to the future of US-China relations, I firmly believe that “The prospects are bright, though the road has twists and turns.” 前途是光明的，道路是曲折的。 I hope our two countries can again join together to ensure peace and prosperity for people on both sides of the Pacific. Thank you.