

ON FRIENDSHIP

Remarks at the 2011 PRC Friendship Awards Ceremony Great Hall of the People

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Esteemed Vice Premier Zhang, Friends, and Colleagues.

I am filled with gratitude for the honor that you have bestowed upon us today. And I feel doubly honored to have been invited to speak on behalf of the recipients to this extraordinarily distinguished audience.

In the time since I learned that I would be one of the recipients of the Friendship Award, I have been reflecting on its very special qualities, and what they reveal about the China I have come to know and love.

Many countries recognize foreigners for the work they have done with their country. For example, France has the Legion of Honor. Germany has the Order of Merit. England bestows an honorary knighthood.

These are all deeply meaningful acts of appreciation by the governments of those countries. And yet I cannot help feeling that China is giving us something even more meaningful.

To me, terms like honor, merit, and even knighthood reflect a kind of arm's-length assessment of an individual's actions, in the way that we teachers give grades to students on their examinations. China has chosen a different vocabulary to appreciate our work here. Instead of the vocabulary of arm's length assessment, China has chosen the vocabulary of connection and relationship. We are receiving friendship awards.

During my time in China, I have been amazed by how easily my Chinese hosts have befriended this foreigner. Old or young, teacher or student, shopkeeper or security guard, they have welcomed me into their community with open arms.

I am not unusual in this sensation. For the past three years, I have lived and worked in Shenzhen, helping the Peking University School of Transnational Law to train lawyers who will serve as human bridges across cultures. Most of our courses are taught by professors from abroad, mostly from American law schools. Our visitors always ask if they can return, citing the deep connection and relationship they feel with our students, our Chinese professional staff, and the larger community we inhabit.

Perhaps that is why I find it so natural that China uses the language of friendship to appreciate work done by a foreigner. And perhaps that is why I feel that, in my own case, the Friendship Award is more a recognition of our school than it is of me as an individual.

This morning, I naturally ask myself what more I can do to strengthen this connection, this relationship, this friendship that has become so important to my own life.

If I think about how other people have been great friends to me, five things come to mind: how they have been committed to helping me find contentment in both the short run and the long run, how they have responded when I asked for assistance, how they have shown me that they really want me to ask for that assistance, how they have used their own experiences to help me learn, and how they have been willing to let me return the favor and help them, so that the support has been mutual.

My hope is that I will be able, in these ways, to be a good friend to China in the future. I hope that China will always feel free to ask my assistance, and that I will be able to help well. I hope that China will be able to draw benefit from my own particular experiences – as an American who loves America and her people and who understands their sometimes mysterious ways, as a lawyer who believes that law can strengthen the development of all societies, and as a teacher whose greatest joy comes when a student's creative insight enables me to see the world in an exciting new way. Finally, I hope that my connection with and relationship to China will continue to deepen all the days of my life.

Shanah Tovah.