

FORMER PRESIDENT MA YING-JEU'S KEYNOTE SPEECH at SOPA (Society of Publishers in Asia) awards ceremony, at Hong Kong Convention Center on Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Chairman Warhola; Distinguished guests; Members of SOPA; Ladies and gentleman good evening! (各位朋友, 我是馬英九, 大家好)

Before I start my speech, I would like to express my profound regrets that I am unable to deliver my speech in person on this prestigious occasion.

The reason for my absence is quite curious. The new administration in Taiwan, which took office less than a month ago, considers that my trip to Hong Kong might cause some national security problems. Those problems include possible leakage of state secrets and inadequate protection of my personal safety. So my request to visit Hong Kong for only seven hours to give a speech was, unfortunately, rejected by the Presidential Office.

Well, I didn't know that Hong Kong is such a dangerous place. Ladies and gentlemen, you better watch out!

No matter whether these reasons are convincing or not, as a former president of the Republic of China on Taiwan, I always do my duty to my country. So I respect the authority of my successor, President Tsai Ing-wen, to make this decision. For not being able to join you all here tonight, please accept my sincere apologies, although

it's probably not me who should be apologizing to you. So, let me begin my talk right now before I leak any more state secrets.

I'm very happy today to speak to you. Freedom of the press and standards of professional journalism have always indicated the cultural level of modern societies, and also reflect core values that Taiwan and Hong Kong share and uphold. And since its founding, SOPA's contributions in those areas have been widely recognized.

I am also happy to talk to the people of Hong Kong, for three reasons:

First of all, Hong Kong was my birthplace. My family had lived here for a year and 8 months before we moved to Taiwan in 1951. So I'm also considered a "Hong Konger" (哦雅海兄拱仔阿), and have always had a soft spot in my heart for this city. Actually, I was conceived in Taiwan, and born in Hong Kong after my mother came here. So in commercial terms, you could say that I'm the product of Taiwan-Hong Kong cooperation: that is, made in Taiwan, delivered in Hong Kong, and then re-exported to Taiwan.

The second reason is: Hong Kong and the Republic of China have a deep historical relationship. Hong Kong was the birthplace of the Chinese republican revolution, and a pioneer of its modernization. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China, was born in nearby Guangdong Province, and educated in Hong Kong at the Government Central College, now Queen's College. He also graduated from the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, forerunner of The University of Hong

Kong. And it was in Hong Kong that he was baptized and became a Christian, and set up his revolutionary organization. In 1896, Dr. Sun was kidnapped and held in detention for 13 days by the Qing court's Chinese Legation in London, and narrowly escaped being sent back to China and executed. He was rescued by Professor James Cantlie of the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese. So Hong Kong changed our Founding Father's fate, and our Founding Father changed contemporary China's fate. I am a big fan of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, which naturally gives me a special respect for Hong Kong.

The third reason is that the relationship between Hong Kong and Taiwan has continued to deepen. Both have been through turbulent times, defending the Diaoyutai Islands together, and standing in solidarity during the 1989 Democracy Movement in Tiananmen Square. I also remember that back in the 1970s, when Taiwan was still under Martial Law, freedom of the press was restricted. So we would go to bookstalls to sneak a peek at banned books smuggled in from Hong Kong. People in Hong Kong didn't even know that they were once our window on the outside world, helping young people in Taiwan to break political taboos.

It is especially important that both Hong Kong and Taiwan still use orthodox Chinese characters. One point four (1.4) billion people are now using Chinese, but less than 40 million use orthodox characters, with Taiwan and Hong Kong accounting for over 30 million. Orthodox characters are an umbilical cord that connects us to traditional Chinese culture, and a bridge to understanding other Chinese communities. Taiwan should applaud Hong Kong's culture and publishing industries for their efforts on behalf of orthodox characters in recent years.

Over the past few years, Taiwan has also attracted many people from Hong Kong, and vice-versa. Many Taiwanese choose Hong Kong for their first overseas travel destination, and come to know Hong Kong's streets and alleys as well as they know their own. Before there were direct flights across the Taiwan Strait, the vast majority of Taiwan travelers transited through Hong Kong. So for many years, Hong Kong served as a gateway to the Chinese mainland.

On the other hand, more and more Hong Kongers appreciate Taiwan's lifestyle. So over the past eight years, the number of people travelling from Hong Kong to Taiwan has more than tripled, from half a million to 1.5 million. Some of them even want to immigrate to Taiwan. I also hear that Taiwan's Eslite Bookstore (誠品書店) has been a big hit in Hong Kong, and now has three branches. That is because Eslite doesn't just sell books. They are giving people a taste of the Taiwan lifestyle.

Last month, the Swiss-based International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne issued its 2016 World Competitiveness Scoreboard, and Hong Kong was ranked number one. Congratulations! Let's give Hong Kong a round of applause! (7:03)

The topic I want to talk about today is cross-strait relations in the aftermath of the Ma-Xi meeting in Singapore in November last year. Cross-strait relations have improved more in the past eight years than during any period since 1949. And the foundation of that change is the 1992 Consensus, which is "one China, respective interpretations." But where did that foundation come from?

Taiwan lifted Martial Law and restrictions on family visits across the Taiwan Strait in 1987, and cross-strait relations began to thaw. In 1991, the Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF, 海基會) was established in Taiwan, and the mainland set up its counterpart, the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS, 海協會). That marked the beginning of institutionalized exchanges. In October of 1992, right here in Hong Kong, those two agencies held working-level talks. The mainland side wanted to negotiate the “one China” principle, but talks between the two sides were inconclusive. So they all went home. However, after the meeting Taiwan’s SEF persevered, and sent a new suggestion. Its proposal stated that, “Both sides of the Taiwan Strait insist on ‘one China’ principle. However, the two sides have different opinions as to the meaning of 'one China,' and each side may state its interpretation verbally.” On November 16, ARATS sent a formal letter informing the SEF that they “fully respect and accept the SEF’s suggestion.” The two sides had finally reached a consensus, and that is the origin of the 92 Consensus. At that time, Taiwan media came up with the headline “One China, respective interpretations,” which is still in use today. So when the two sides reached the 92 Consensus, Hong Kong also played a role. (9:15)

Based on that foundation, SEF Chairman Koo Chen-fu and ARATS Chairman Wang Daohan signed four agreements in Singapore in April of 1993. So four decades after the two sides of the Taiwan Strait came under separate rule in 1949, government-authorized bodies from both sides signed formal, binding agreements for the first time.

Unfortunately, for the next 15 years cross-strait relations were marked by turmoil, including the Taiwan Strait Missile Crisis in 1996; the shockwaves from President Li Teng-hui's "Two States" remarks (兩國論) in 1999; President Chen Shui-bian's "one country on each side" remarks (一邊一國) in 2001; and four referendums tied to general elections in 2004 and 2008. So for a decade and a half, cross-strait relations were fraught with peril. (10:20)

In 2008 I became president and began to promote cross-strait rapprochement. Under the framework of the ROC Constitution, I sought to maintain the status quo, defined as: "no unification, no independence, and no use of force." I also promoted peaceful development across the Taiwan Strait based on the 92 Consensus, which is "one China, respective interpretations." The "three no's" above is supported by over 80% of the people in Taiwan; it can be called a "Taiwan Consensus," whereas the 92 Consensus is a cross-strait consensus which is part of the status quo. And as a result of those policies, cross-strait relations began to stabilize.

Over the past eight years: Taiwan and mainland China signed 23 agreements; the ministers in charge of cross-strait affairs from both sides met seven times, addressing each other using their official titles; the number of scheduled cross-strait flights each week rose from zero to 890; over 4 million mainland tourists traveled to Taiwan last year, a 14-fold increase; and the number of mainland students in Taiwan surpassed the 42,000 mark, almost a 50-fold increase. Tension in the Taiwan Strait decreased significantly.

Those developments have transformed a flashpoint of conflict into an avenue of peace. It was the 92 Consensus that allowed our minister of health and welfare to formally attend the annual World Health Assembly (WHA) eight times in a row after an absence of 38 years. This was all possible because while we were improving cross-strait relations, we also adopted a new approach to foreign relations called “viable diplomacy,” and stopped contending with mainland China for diplomatic allies in the international arena. That meant Taiwan’s cross strait and international relations were no longer a zero-sum game, and no longer mired in a vicious cycle. Instead, we created a win-win situation, a virtuous cycle, and peace dividends started to roll in. These developments were well received by the United States, Japan, the European Union, and countries throughout the Asia Pacific region. In fact, our relations with these countries have been the best ever as a result. (13:08)

Some of you might recall that back on August 23, 1958, communist forces in Xiamen, Fujian Province, began a massive bombardment of the island of Kinmen. In just 44 days, 470,000 artillery shells rained down on Kinmen, an area of only 150 square kilometers. That’s an average of over 10,000 shells per day. But since 1979, Xiamen hasn’t been firing artillery shells. Instead, they have been sending an average of over 175,000 tourists each year since I took office in 2008. What’s interesting is that when mainland tourists go shopping in Kinmen, their favorite souvenir is a kitchen knife -- kitchen knife made from artillery shell casings fired by communist troops many many years ago!

Because mainland China and Taiwan had built up sufficient mutual trust, and predicated on the principles of equality and dignity, I was able to meet with mainland

Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Singapore on November 7 of last year. That was the first meeting between cross-strait leaders in the 66 years since the two sides came under separate rule in 1949. (14:34)

During that meeting, both sides affirmed that the shared foundation of “consolidating cross-strait peace and maintaining the status quo in the Taiwan Strait” is the 92 Consensus. I also reminded Mr. Xi that the substance of the 92 Consensus is that “Both sides of the Taiwan Strait insist on the ‘one China’ principle. However, the two sides have different opinions as to the meaning of ‘one China’, and each side may state its interpretation verbally.” That is the 92 Consensus: “one China, respective interpretations.” Our side would not interpret that as “two Chinas,” or “one China, one Taiwan,” or “Taiwan independence,” all of which are prohibited under the Constitution of the Republic of China. For us, of course, “one China” means the Republic of China. After the Ma-Xi meeting, Taiwan opinion polls showed that over 60% of Taiwan people support the 92 Consensus as I just explained it, a higher level of support than in the past. The 92 Consensus also reflects the concept of “mutual non-recognition of sovereignty and mutual recognition of governing authority,” as applied by the two sides of the Taiwan Strait. (15:58)

If you ask, “What was the significance of the Ma-Xi meeting?” I would say that the fact that the two leaders met on equal footing, shook hands, and talked amicably about their aspirations for peace has great historical and contemporary significance. It means we have built a great bridge of peace across the Taiwan Strait for succeeding generations of cross-strait leaders to use.

During the preparations for the Ma-Xi Meeting, both sides quickly agreed to hold the meeting in a third jurisdiction, and that during our meeting, neither Mr. Xi or I would mention our country's name or our official titles. We addressed each other as "Mr." The most significant thing was that we both agreed to notify the Americans well in advance. (16:53)

We also agreed to hold a post-meeting dinner banquet. Who paid? Well, we went Dutch, and we both brought beverages. They brought their 30-year-old vintage Guizhou Maotai (貴州茅台). We brought our 25-year-old vintage Kinmen Kaoliang (金門高粱) and Matzu Old Wine (馬祖老酒). After the dinner, we found that more kaoliang was consumed than maotai.

Over the past eight years, I have worked hard to make the ROC a peacemaker and a provider of international humanitarian aid. We have made peace in the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea and the South China Sea. We have provided funds, food, clothing, medicine, rescue and medical teams, pre-fabricated housing units and other relief materials to countries in need, from Japan to the Philippines, from mainland China to west Africa, from Syria to the Caribbean, and from Nepal to Central America. Taiwan is now an asset to the international community--and not a liability.

Taiwan is a society of immigrants, creating a rich and diverse Chinese culture with Taiwanese characteristics. Taiwan's free and democratic way of life, and our successful political and economic transformations, have become deeply embedded in the public's collective memory and core values for three generations. Those

characteristics and values have thus become a wellspring of Taiwan society, nurturing our creativity and genuine human warmth. This is what the mainland needs to understand most.

On the other hand, with its vast territory and hard-working people, the mainland has implemented massive economic reforms over the past 35 years to achieve rapid growth of its overall wealth and strength. Mainland China is very, very different now. So both Taiwan and the mainland need to seek in-depth mutual understanding--and cultural empathy. Over the past eight years, we have welcomed mainland people to visit Taiwan, and encouraged mainland students to study in Taiwan. Mainland students live, study, debate, exercise, and play in a free and democratic environment together with their Taiwan schoolmates. So early in life, they start to develop friendships, creating a solid foundation for a sustainable peace and prosperity across the Taiwan Strait. By doing that, I believe together we will create a very different future for the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

I remember four years ago this past January, on the day of my successful re-election as ROC President, Taiwan and mainland students were together watching the ballot count on television. As reported in the international press, a Taiwan student said to his mainland schoolmate, "Look how efficiently we count the ballots. We vote in the morning, and know the result in the evening!" A mainland student replied, "Oh that's nothing. On the mainland, we also vote in the morning. But we already know the result the day before!" So when it comes to having a sense of humor, mainland students can clearly hold their own with Taiwan students (20:30)

Ladies and gentlemen, cross-strait relations have improved dramatically in the last 8 years, bringing peace and prosperity not only to Taiwan and mainland China, but to the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. And the Taiwan-Hong Kong relationship has improved accordingly, like a ship that rises with the tide. I certainly hope this trend will continue in spite of the recent change of government in Taiwan. I sincerely hope that the new administration will have the required wisdom and courage to maintain the peaceful and prosperous status quo my administration has worked so hard to create in the last 8 years. Taiwan and Hong Kong have long shared the core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law, and especially freedom of expression. In the future, I hope we can work together, hand-in-hand, to safeguard these core values and continue to contribute to cross-strait and regional peace and prosperity.

Let me close by wishing all of you much happiness, and the best of health. I also welcome you, should you have a chance, to visit Taiwan as my guest.

Thank you very much! (多謝大家) 22:10)