

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE RECEPTION FOR CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC PERSONALITIES/EMINENT PERSONS CO-HOSTED BY EMBASSY OF INDIA AND CHINESE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION FOR FRIENDSHIP WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES

GUANGZHOU, CHINA : 25.05.2016

1.It is an honour for me to address this gathering of distinguished cultural and leading academic personalities of China.

2.I particularly appreciate the presence of H.E. Mr Li Yuanchao, Vice President of the People's Republic of China.His presence here today testifies to the high importance that China also attaches to the enduring academic and cultural exchanges between our two ancient civilizations.

Friends,

3.Many of you are old friends of India; you have made important contributions to the strengthening of the mutual understanding and friendship between our two countries. Through your inspiring work and achievements, you have shown the way for the future of this important relationship.

4.I thank the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries for inviting me here today. At the very outset, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the valuable contribution of this Association in fostering regular exchanges between our two peoples for over six decades.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5.My own association with China goes back several decades. I am among those who firmly believe that ours is a defining partnership of the 21st century.As mentioned by Prof Tan Yunshan, a great friend and scholar of India,"*Sino-Indian relations are the most important of the most important.*"

6.I also believe that the thriving academic and cultural exchanges that had defined our ancient contacts will continue to be a foundational component of our partnership.

7.As we are aware, our first contacts were probably consolidated and recorded by the brilliant exchanges between the scholar-monks of our countries, including Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma, Xuan Zang and Fa Xian. Pioneering scholars like Dr. Prafulla Chandra Bagchi, Prof P.V. Bapat, Prof. Ji Xian Lin and Prof. Wu Xiaoling have presented evidence of our rich and diverse cultural contacts. It is important to clarify that these ancient exchanges were not merely centered on Buddhism or promoted solely by monks.Indeed Buddhism was the vehicle for exchange of knowledge and culture during the Golden Age of the Guptas in India and at the time of the Tang dynasty in China, but recent research has unveiled contacts over a longer historical time-frame

encompassing many more areas. We see that envoys were exchanged with the Tang dynasty, between the Song Emperors and the Chalukya and Pallava Kings of southern India, and even between the Ming Emperor Yong Le with the Muslim Sultan Ghiyas-uddin of Bengal in the first quarter of the 15th century. Exchange of knowledge encompassed medicine, science and law, besides sacred texts. Chinese coins found in Tamil Nadu span a thousand year period from the Sui to the Song Dynasties; the remains of temples in Quanzhou testify to these age-old contacts.

8. More recently, the leaders of our national movements gave each other inspiration and support. Few in China are aware that in the mid-nineteenth century, intellectuals of Bengal including Keshub Chandra Sen and Romesh Chandra Dutt had been staunch and vocal critics of Britain's opium trade with China. Many Indians do not know that during the First World War, Sun Yat Sen had assisted Indian revolutionary, Rash Behari Bose to escape arrest by the British.

9. In other fields of culture as well – such as dance, art and music, our traditions have mingled. Dun Huang and Ajanta are examples. Modern Chinese artists like Xu Bei Hong and Zhang Da Qian drew inspiration from their visits to India in the 1930s. Tagore, himself, was inspired by his experiences in China - which are reflected in his works. Indian films were popular in China in the 1950s. Songs from the film, "Awaraz" were also popular in China, and today, Chinese films are as popular with the Indian public as they are in China.

10. Thus the rich culture at the heart of our two civilizations is also at the core of our people-to-people friendship. Why do I say so? Studies have shown that while knowledge flowed freely between us, it was simultaneously enriched by both our peoples. Our cultural interaction was so harmonious it created syncretic cultures in South East Asia and Central Asia which were neither wholly Indian nor Chinese but a colourful confluence of both.

11. Indeed, the nature of the cultural contacts between our countries should be seen as a model for civilisational contacts and peaceful exchanges in the 21st Century.

Excellencies,

12. As India pursues its primary goal of building a modern India, , focused on peace, prosperity and sustainable development we seek to engage with China in a spirit of equality and friendship. We seek to develop a matrix of cross-cutting contacts to enhance our mutual understanding and enrich our bilateral discourse. Far too often, we rely on borrowed prisms and secondary sources to understand each other. We seek to overcome this by increasing direct exchanges and enabling people on both sides to invest in each other's progress.

13. I have had the privilege of being associated for many decades in different capacities with the development and growth of India-China ties.

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen,

14. The possibilities for closer cooperation are limitless. Realising the full potential of our relationship is a shared responsibility. Our Governments have a primary role, but the efforts of civil society, academia, think tanks, cultural icons and artists are equally important. They are the

story-tellers and interpreters of our great relationship- the living soul - that sustains, enriches and strengthens it. To the distinguished leaders in the fields of art and culture who are here today, I would like to say-it is you who can transform our ties, it is you who can make it possible to minimize disharmony , it is you who will increase the synergy between India and China. May your tribe flourish and grow.

15. To sum up, I would like to quote Prof Ji Xianlin - on whom I had the pleasure of personally conferring one of India's highest civilian awards, the Padma Bhushan: "*China and India have stood simultaneously on the Asian continent. Their neighbourliness is created by heaven and constructed by earth*".

With these words,

I thank you.