

Remarks Before
The Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China
By
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Speaking as a Member of the Delegation of
The U.S. President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities

Monday, June 11, 2007
Beijing, China

First, let me thank the Ministry of Culture and all of our gracious hosts and guides for the magnificent experiences that you have given us of this great culture so much older than our own.

I have been asked to speak about the relationship between our values and our culture in America. The central and enduring core value of the American people is personal liberty, which was defined by the Founding Fathers as freedom of speech and assembly, and freedom from arbitrary punitive authority guaranteed by due process and a uniform rule of law. To protect this freedom, a central government was created with limited powers, divided into three separate branches respectful of preexisting authorities at the state and local levels, and accountable to the people through periodic elections with real choices.

Over the course of American history, the scope of personal liberty expanded (often slowly and painfully) to include populations—particularly African Americans and women, who were excluded from the 18th-century vision of our founders. In the 218 years since the Constitution and Bill of Rights made us a nation, the United States of America has combined remarkably stable governing institutions with a great capacity for continuous innovation. Our progress results not only from our freedoms, but also from our openness to the energizing force of new ideas and of new immigrants from abroad. The United States now has substantial numbers of citizens from almost all parts of the world—including a growing and particularly successful population of Chinese origin.

A major force behind the progress Americans have made has been our commitment to generating, to sharing, and to creatively using, knowledge.

John Adams, the second president of the United States, foresaw the future of American culture in a letter to his wife in the midst of our war for independence. "I must study Politicks and War [so] that my sons will have liberty to study Mathematics and Philosophy . . . in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine."

John Adams signed in 1800 the bill creating in the new capital of Washington, D.C., America's first federal cultural institution, the Library of Congress. Two years later, the United States Congress created the first joint committee of its two chambers to supervise its new library, and subsequently bought from Thomas Jefferson his private collection of books, which was not only the largest in America but also included works in sixteen languages.

This library has grown steadily since then into the largest and most linguistically inclusive collection of knowledge in the history of the world, and it embodies in many ways the special characteristics and basic values of our country.

The United States is the only world civilization whose institutions have been shaped entirely in the age of print. The dependence of local lawmakers on libraries was longstanding, and it preexisted the creation of our national government.

Representatives from all of our states gathered in Philadelphia in 1774 for the meeting of the Continental Congress in Carpenters' Hall, where the Library Company of Philadelphia had its quarters.

John Adams, writing in his diary on September 5, 1774, noted: "At Ten, The Delegates all met at the City Tavern, and walked to the

Carpenters Hall, where they took a View of the Room, and of the Chamber where is an excellent Library.”

The link between libraries and legislation was formalized nearly a century ago by the creation of the Congressional Research Service within the Library of Congress. The research and analytical arm of the United States Congress, the Congressional Research Service provides research that is confidential, nonpartisan, objective, and timely.

The very first article of our Constitution mandates a government role in the promotion of the useful arts and sciences in order to protect the right of private individuals to derive profit from their creations for a period of time. By placing the Copyright Office in the Library of Congress, the Congress has assured that the rich but otherwise perishable record of American intellectual and cultural creativity would be preserved for future generations.

Books, old and new, continue to be important resources to preserve and celebrate in the digital age. Our first lady, Laura Bush, has been both a librarian and a teacher. The Library of Congress has worked with her for six years to sponsor an annual National Book Festival, which now attracts 100,000 people to the National Mall in September, the beginning of each school year.

By making freely accessible to the people all of its unsurpassed collections of music, movies, maps, and manuscripts as well as print publications, our national library advances the basic American dream. The dream is that if more people have more access to more knowledge and the freedom to use it in more ways, then whatever the problems of today may be, tomorrow can always be better than yesterday.

Our digital American Memory project has made 11 million primary documents of American history and culture available to anyone anywhere with access to the Internet. Since a virtual online library reaches by definition across all borders, it opens up great possibilities for bringing scattered peoples and different cultures together. And this thought has led me to suggest during this visit a specific new proposal for Chinese-American collaboration: building a “Chinese Memory” component into the World Digital Library that the

Library of Congress is launching this year with the support of UNESCO.

China’s “memory” reaches further back than America’s. The Library of Congress has considerable experience in promoting digital learning. We have the largest Chinese collection outside of the Chinese-speaking world, excellent exchanges with China, and we can offer our Chinese friends an honored place on a world-spanning Web site that last year fielded more than 5 billion electronic transactions.

I was encouraged by talks with Shanghai Library administrators, and I hope to discuss with the staff of the Chinese National Library in Beijing this afternoon the possibility of working together. The two national libraries can work to bring together scattered treasures of Chinese culture as a key part of our broader effort with many partners to use new technology to deliver old treasures to new audiences. Young people in particular are acquiring global appetites, at times without any real understanding of the cultures with which they must interact. In this—as in other ways—I hope that our delegation can work with our gracious hosts to develop broader cultural links between our two peoples.

As the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities prepares to leave here today, let me quote a verse that enlightened European Jesuits of the High Renaissance left behind in Beijing after the near-successful attempt to build a strong cultural bridge between China and the West.

“Move on, voyager,
Congratulate the dead
Console the living,
Pray for everyone,
Wonder and be silent.”

As we voyagers leave, let us again thank you for so generously sharing with us the wonders of Chinese culture. Your beautiful monuments, museums, and cultural presentations have taken us away from the noisy, often quarrelsome outside world into the silent interior world of memory, reason, and imagination. These were the three categories into which Thomas Jefferson organized his library—and through which we might hope to build an ever-more harmonious relationship between our two nations.

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