Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Shaping China for the 21st Century in Shanghai, China

June 30, 1998

The President. Let me begin by thanking all of you for agreeing to participate in this roundtable discussion. I want to say that the purpose of this discussion is to help me and my wife and the American people, through us, understand the changes that are going on in modern China, the challenges that are out there, and what all of you are doing in your various lives to deal with these changes.

For us, this is a very exciting opportunity to come here, to see what is going on, and also to try to come to grips with the areas where China and the United States can cooperate, the areas where we still have differences, and how we might not only manage those differences but even work together there to try to come to some common agreement.

Everyone understands that there is a new China emerging in the world that is more prosperous, more open, and more dynamic. I have been to a small village near Xi'an where people now elect their local officials. I have already had the opportunity to meet with some small-business people and others who are agents of change in the modern China. But this is really the first opportunity I have had to meet with such a diverse group of Chinese citizens who are active in so many different areas.

So I hope that you will help us to understand what is going on and to speak with us frankly and openly, and understand that what we want is to build the right sort of partnership and friendship with the Chinese people over the long run into the 21st century.

If I could begin, I think I would like to ask Professor Zhu, how has China changed in the last couple of years, and what is the role of the legal profession in this change?

[*Zhu Lanye, vice dean of the International Department, East China University of Politics and Law, stated that in the school she graduated from, the student population had doubled to 4,000 students, with over 400 graduate students, and that the number of law schools in China had increased from 2 to 14, reflecting China's need for more lawyers due to a major increase in civil cases.*]

The President. Mr. Wang has been a consumer advocate, and we have read about you in the American press. I wonder if you could follow up on what Professor Zhu said in terms of the work you do. Do you believe that the quality of products, consumer products is getting better?—first question. And tell us what the relationship is between what you do and the legal profession. Can people have adequate access to legal remedies if they are sold inferior products?

[*Consumer advocate, author, and newspaper columnist Wang Hai stated that China had promulgated consumer protection laws in 1984, but prior to that had placed emphasis on the collective interest as opposed to consumer interests. Mr. Wang said his company consulted with consumers and companies whose rights had been violated. He indicated that he was viewed as immoral and asked if consumer advocates in the United States were also viewed this way.*]

The President. No. Interestingly enough, many of our governments in what you would call the province level, our State governments and some of our larger city governments, actually have their own consumer advocates, people who are employees of the government whose job it is to work to find out things that are being done, in effect, that work a fraud, that are unfair or illegal to consumers when they buy homes, when they buy cars, when they buy other products. So, in our country, people who find those kinds of problems very often are themselves employees of the government and generally are quite highly regarded.

Now, of course, if they find a very big company doing something that's going to be very expensive to fix, they're sometimes criticized by the company. But by and large, consumer advocates enjoy a very favorable position in American society. It has not always been so, but I would say that for the last 20 to 25 years they do.

I would like to ask our novelist, Ms. Wang, to talk a little bit about how the atmosphere for writers, for artists, movie makers, other creative people has changed in China in the last few years. How would you describe those changes?

[*Novelist Wang Xiaoying stated that great changes had taken place in China in her area of interest. She indicated that she had signed contracts with three publishing houses and said her problem was not whether she could publish but whether she could produce enough good novels. Ms. Wang then asked the President if literature had an impact on his life.*]

The President. Oh, yes, very much, and I think not only for enjoyment but also for enlightenment. We have many books of literature, all kinds of prose and poetry published in America every year and heavily taught in our schools and, at least in our case, widely discussed in our home with our daughter. She is now reading books in the university that, if we haven't read them, she wants to know why, and she expects us to try to understand those things.

So I would say that for millions and millions of Americans, literature is a very important force in their lives. And every week in our newspapers, there is a publication of the best-selling books and the books that are in hardcover, the books that are in paperback. So it's quite a large part of American life, I think.

I would like to ask Madame Xie if you could tell us a little bit about, from your perspective, how China has been changing, and in particular, whether there is any difference in university life and the emphasis that the young people are placing on different areas of study.

[*Xie Xide, former president of Fudan University, stated that the Chinese policy of reform had brought great benefits. She indicated that Fudan University sent 1,400 teachers to study abroad or to serve as visiting scholars and that 80 percent came back to play important roles at the university. She added that increasingly the best students went into law, business administration, or economics.*]

The President. If I could just follow up on that and perhaps anyone, professors, who would like to comment on this—when I was talking with President Jiang he said, "I am trained as an engineer, and Premier Zhu Rongji is trained as an engineer." They were both mayor of Shanghai. The present mayor of Shanghai, we were walking down and he said, "I am an engineer." And he said, "We were all trained in an era when we had to build China. We had to build things. We had to know how to do things that people did with their hands. And now that we have a more complex society, and people's rights have to be protected, for example, in what they buy, and we have to work out the complex relationships between people in a market economy, we need more lawyers." I think China only has like 115,000 lawyers, something like that. And, so, I wonder if maybe the changes are not a necessary evolution of the change in society.

Participant. Well, there are a lot of students who are very interested in law subjects. Well, in China we do not have sufficient lawyers, and in your country you have plenty. And so many American friends told me that "we can export some of them to you." [*Laughter*]

The President. I tell President Jiang we have too many lawyers and too few engineers. So maybe instead of changing all the courses in the universities, we should just trade each other. We'll give you lawyers; you could give us engineers. [*Laughter*]

[*A participant noted that while many students applied to study law, only a quarter of the applicants qualified and were accepted. Hillary Clinton then introduced Wu Qidi, president of Tongji University, who stated that the current focus in higher education was economic development but that her university was moving to more diverse academic pursuits, gearing the students toward participating in the global economy. She stated that as more Chinese teachers worked and studied abroad, they became more aware of the need for change in the university educational system. She then said that China needed science and technology to support sustainable economic development and asked if the President thought that greater openness in the future between the two countries would go beyond exchanges of faculty and students.*]

The President. Yes, I do, and I believe it is very important. We are trying to do two things in the United States. One is to make sure more of our young people, wherever they live, even if they live in very poor communities, are exposed at an early age to science and technology. We are trying to connect all of our schools to the Internet by the year 2000, because our goal is to take the very remote schools, the schools in the poorest urban neighborhood, and make sure they can have a connection and access to information that anybody anywhere in the world has. I think that is important.

Then we also want to have more cooperation internationally. Perhaps the most successful part of the U.S.-China partnership in the last few years has been our cooperation in science and technology, although because there has been no great conflict, it's very often not in the news. But Chinese and American scientists, for example, discovered that children born with spina bifida, which is a very painful childhood birth problem, largely come from mothers that didn't have enough folic acid. So it changed the whole way the world viewed this terrible problem. Chinese and American scientists have learned more about how to predict earthquakes and other natural disasters. So I think we have to do more of that.

And then the third area is the one you mentioned of technology transfer. We are now implementing our peaceful uses of nuclear energy agreement. I personally believe that in the energy area it's the most important thing.

I asked President Jiang if we could have a major focus of our science and technology partnership in the future be on the relationship of energy use to the environment, because America is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, warming the climate. China will soon be larger than America. So we have this huge challenge, how to allow China to continue to grow—how can Shanghai build more beautiful buildings like this and have people have good places to live and all of that—and still not destroy the environment of the world.

The scientists know that this can be done. Most political leaders and business leaders don't believe it. Most political and business leaders think this is a problem my grandchildren will deal with: "I have to create wealth now; I have to create opportunity." Scientists know we can grow the economy and improve the environment. So I think this will be the biggest challenge for us.

Now, in terms of the technology transfer, one last thing. We are working very hard to deal with the so-called national security implications of technology transfer. Sometimes they are quite real. So we are working through that. But I think in the energy and environment area we will have no problems. And there will be more of this.

I think I would like to, if I might, just go on to Professor Zuo, because I know you've done a lot of work on migrant research. And one of the most interesting things to us here is how China is managing the growth of its large cities. And in America we have a similar phenomenon, mostly because of immigration coming from beyond our borders. But we still allow about a million people a year, just under a million people a year, to come legally to the United States from other countries. And most of them come to large cities. And so some of our cities are growing, as Shanghai is growing. And perhaps you could tell us about the challenges that that presents and what you are doing in your research.

[*Zuo Xuejin, vice president of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, stated that since the mid-eighties, the population flow within China had been tremendous, with people from rural areas seeking greater opportunities in urban areas. He said that while this migration had caused concern to urban Chinese because they feared limited job opportunities for themselves, the migration had been controlled and services increased for migrants. He then discussed his experiences in the United States and the influence of American culture in China, giving specific examples which ranged from fast-food restaurants to jeans and movies, and concluded that there was much to be shared by China and the United States.*]

The President. If I could just make two brief points. First of all, as to the last point you made about films and travel, even though we have more and more access to each other, to our information and to our ideas over the Internet—and some day I suppose people will—every time someone like Ms. Wang writes a new book, someone will be in a matter of days able to pull it up on the Internet and read it all over the world in their own language. I still think that it's actually important to have these people-to-people exchanges and to have more American students, for example, coming to China and more Chinese going to America. I think that's very important.

I feel the same way about the movies. I actually have seen some Chinese movies I thought were extraordinarily powerful movies. And I think we should have more of that and we should be—we should encourage our artists to come here. And of course, there's so many Chinese-American artists that would give anything to perform in China and would feel very honored about that. So I hope that we will be

open and that the governments will encourage more of that.

The only other point I wanted to make is just—about your research and how you deal with these millions of people that are coming here to find work. This is a global issue. There are many cities that have nowhere near the opportunities that Shanghai does in other parts of the world, that are still growing by leaps and bounds all the time, because even though there are huge numbers of poor people in these cities, there is still a chance that the city life will be better than it is in the rural areas in other countries.

So if you look at the whole world—if you look at Africa, if you look at the Middle East and Central Asia, if you look at all these places, you have cities growing by leaps and bounds in countries that have been poor. And as I said, in our country, it's a place where we try to manage all the new immigrant populations, and we have all the same challenges you do, plus, often, language differences. So I would just say that this is an area where, again, we may be able to cooperate and where we need to help, even beyond our borders, deal with these vast migration flows. They will be one of the central, defining trends, in my view, of the next 30 to 40 years. And so I thank you for that.

Yes, Professor.

[*Noting that the President would be young when he left office, a participant asked if he planned to return to his law practice and, if so, remain in Washington or move back to Arkansas.*]

The President. I was hoping you would offer me a position here. [*Laughter*]

Participant. No, you don't speak Chinese. [*Laughter*]

The President. I'm not too old to learn. [*Laughter*] Actually, I am the third youngest President ever, and I think the second youngest to be elected. President Theodore Roosevelt and President John Kennedy were both a little younger than me when they took office. So I'll be about 54 when I leave office, and I don't intend to retire. But I haven't decided what to do yet or where to do it—except I will always have a home in my home State, in Arkansas, and I intend to build a library there to house my Presidential papers and to tell the story of the time in which I served as President. But beyond that, I have not made any final plans. So maybe I will apply for a visiting professorship. [*Laughter*]

Participant. We welcome you to our university as a visiting professor. You are more than welcome. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Clinton. I know that we want to hear from all the panelists, and I'd like to hear from the young man, Mr. Zeng, who has been so successful in the——

The President. He's not here, is he?

Mrs. Clinton. He's not here? There he is, back there.

The President. You may talk if you like.

Mrs. Clinton. Yes, about the Internet, because you were talking about the Internet and the explosion of the Internet. And what I'm interested in is, are there any restrictions on access to the Internet in China?

The President. Please come up here and use Ms. Wang's microphone.

Edward Zeng. Right now it's just purely in the application form, you can get it right away.

Mrs. Clinton. Right away. So there's no restrictions, universally available to anyone who has the funds to have access to it.

Mr. Zeng. Yes, and also the growing rate is very fast. We are talking about more than 1 million right now.

Mrs. Clinton. More than 1 million——

Mr. Zeng. Internet users.

Mrs. Clinton. Internet users. In the entire country?

Mr. Zeng. Yes.

Mrs. Clinton. And so what is the rate of increase, do you think, in terms of projection?

Mr. Zeng. By the year 2000, maybe around 5 million. So we're talking about 30 percent growth rate.

[*Mrs. Clinton asked how the information explosion was affecting the vast majority of the people of China. Edward Zeng, chief executive officer of Unicom-Sparkice Information Network, answered that there were ongoing efforts to provide a virtual office for small and medium-sized business and that he operated a cyber cafe that was experiencing a 30 percent monthly growth rate.*]

The President. Let me ask you one question about your Internet figures. This library has an Internet room upstairs. I just visited it. Is it really possible to know how many Internet users there are? I mean, how do you know?

[*Mr. Zeng explained that each user had to submit an application and that each had an IP address which would allow an accurate count of users. He then asked if there was an opportunity for exchange between Chinese and American small and medium businesses.*]

Mrs. Clinton. That's something that we'll look into and see if we can get you some information about that.

The President. There is probably more growth among new companies this area than any other area in the American economy. It's exploding. So it may be that someone is following this conversation right now, and you'll get a call within 30 minutes, for all I know. [*Laughter*] But we will see what we can do.

[*Mrs. Clinton asked Bishop Jin Luxian of the Shanghai Catholic diocese how he would describe the recent changes in China. Bishop Jin responded that he was responsible for 78 churches with 160,000 followers and that he had priests from all over the world. He stated that some of the initiatives underway were training abroad for students, a large religious publishing house, translations of Christian texts, and computer training for students. He said that there were no restrictions on religious beliefs in China, and that he had sought a dialog with the Chinese Government rather than a contentious relationship.*]

The President. Thank you, sir.

I would like to ask Mr. Wu now to talk a little bit. I know that you're a professor of American studies, and perhaps you have some observations about how the relations between our two countries have changed in the last few years and what advice you could give us going forward here.

[*Wu Xinbo, a professor at the Center for American Studies of Fudan University, stated that many Chinese worried that the United States was trying to contain a growing China. He cited the areas of disagreement between the two countries, including Taiwan, but said there had been a major shift in the U.S. China policy since 1996. He said he believed that economic cooperation would grow in the future and cited President Clinton's open exchange on human rights with President Jiang at the recent news conference as a sign of a maturing relationship.*]

The President. Well, first let me thank you for what you said. I do believe that my coming here and the work we've done in the last 2 years, President Jiang's trip to the United States, has helped to resolve some of the misunderstandings. I had a chance to reiterate our Taiwan policy, which is that we don't support independence for Taiwan, or two Chinas, or one Taiwan/one China. And we don't believe that Taiwan should be a member in any organization for which statehood is a requirement. So I think we have consistent policy.

Our only policy has been that we think it has to be done peacefully. That is what our law says, and we have encouraged the cross-strait dialog. And I think eventually it will bear fruit if everyone is patient and works hard.

I also agree that the human rights dialog I had with President Jiang was a good thing. I hope it will lead to more open discussion here. And I would be encouraged if that happened.

Let me, if I could, I'd like to ask you a more personal question. I read in your—I got a little biography of all of you before I came here, and I would like to ask—I noticed that you were born in a small rural community, like me. All my mother's people came from a community, actually, that never had more than 150 people, although I was born in the largest city in my little area, which had at the time 6,000 people.

One of the struggles we work at all the time in the States is trying to make sure that our children, no matter where they're born—if they're born in some remote rural area or some very poor area in the inner city—that they still have a chance, if they have ability, as you obviously did, to live the future of their imaginations and their dreams.

Do you believe that you have a system now in China which would give every boy and girl growing up in a small rural village like you the chance that you had to become what you have become?

[*Mr. Wu stated that his experience was very typical, noting that despite his poor circumstances he was able to get an education and that the Government had made a great effort to popularize 9 years of compulsory education.*]

The President. Dr. Wu and Madame Xie and anyone else, what percentage of the students in your university come from poorer families where the parents of the students had no education to speak of?

[*A participant said that about 15 percent of the students had poor family backgrounds, noting that many foundations' mission was to help poor children return to school. The participant stated that while many students in remote areas found it difficult to participate in national exams, they received equal treatment when they reached the university. The participant also noted that while girls in the past had not received much family support, they were currently half of the university population. Another participant added that girls pursued law degrees more than math and science degrees and that they were under-represented at the graduate student levels. The participant noted that financing for education was the major problem and that local governments often opted instead for investment in areas which would show economic returns to the community.*]

The President. I think what will happen in China—I believe this will happen because of the technological revolution—I think in your economic growth you will almost leap over a whole generation of economic experiences that older European countries and perhaps the United States experienced, where you will essentially be creating an industrialized and a post-industrial society at the same time. And therefore, more quickly, you will have to educate more people at higher levels than we did.

Because what happened in the 20th century in America is, first, everyone had about—you know, first, education was the province of the elite. And then everyone got about 4 years of education, and then 6, and then we went finally to high school education. And then when I became President, about half of our young people are going on to university. Now people are actually coming back to university in huge numbers. The average age of our university student is going higher because we have more people not only coming right out of our high schools but also coming back from society, because everyone recognizes now that we have to universalize very high levels of education because of the way the society works.

So I think that this will happen in China more quickly just because of this moment in history, and I think it will be a very good thing.

I wanted to—I know we're about to run out of time, but I wanted to ask a couple of more questions. Go ahead, Professor Xie, do you want to make a point? Because my question is unrelated to this, so go ahead.

Participant. [*Inaudible*]—continue this discussion, but we know you have a very busy schedule. And we're very glad to be here to discuss our life here with you and we thank you for listening.

The President. Thank you. I want to ask two quick questions, one of Ms. Wang.

[*A participant asked Mrs. Clinton what impact the media attention had on her personal life. Mrs. Clinton said that people read meaning into everything she did as First Lady, even when no meaning was intended. She related the situation to a larger set of expectations and stereotypes imposed by society and faced by all women, regardless of geography or culture.*]

Participant. Thank you very much.

The President. Go ahead, Mr. Wang.

[*Mr. Wang stated that in China there were potential conflicts of interest within the consumer protection process, in that store managers could also hold positions and exert influence in consumer rights groups, and asked about the situation in the United States.*]

The President. Well, in the United States a consumer in the position that you just mentioned—let's say someone bought something in a department store and it was defective; I would say there might be four things that could happen. And I don't want to complicate the answer, but I have to give you a complete answer.

First of all, in America we have pretty clear laws on this, and so the best companies would just take the merchandise back and give the person his money back or give the person a new product, because they wouldn't want to get a reputation of being unfair to consumers or a reputation of selling bad products. So the first thing the person would do is to take it back, because of the laws.

Now, secondly, the person might go to the consumer advocate in the government. That's the one I talked to you about. Suppose this happened in New York City. Well, New York City has a Consumer Affairs Bureau. Now, maybe some times it's more active for the consumers than others, depending on whether the mayor believes in this cause or not.

So if there's no opportunity there, then the person would have either an independent consumer group—there are some—or you could go into court and pursue your remedy there.

So I don't think there's a problem of having the consumer groups themselves too tied to the manufacturers. And if there's a pattern or practice of selling bad products, then it's almost certain that there would be a remedy found in our courts.

[*Mr. Wang stated that in China, even when a case went to court and an award was made, getting the court decision enforced was difficult. He asked if that was possible in the United States.*]

Mrs. Clinton. It is. And sometimes even after people get a judgment, they have to continue to work very hard through the legal system to enforce their judgment. So it's a continuing problem.

The President. You mentioned—you said, well, sometimes if there's a good store with a good brand name, that you won't have these problems, but if people are selling off-brands or off the street, or whatever, they might. You have real problems in America sometimes in enforcing these orders if it's difficult to find the company that sold the product or difficult to find their bank account.

[*Mrs. Clinton asked if there were any additional points the participants would like to make to present to the American people a broader, more accurate perception of China. A participant stated that her 5-year-old's childhood would be much better than her own, but that changes in China would take time to evolve. She said that the United States should be more understanding of the evolution of human rights and democracy in China and stressed that understanding could be enhanced by publication of Chinese literature in the United States. Bishop Jin then said that the Shanghai Catholic diocese had set up primary schools in the provinces to address the education needs of poor children and was interested in projects at the university level as well.*]

The President. Thank you very much. If I could close, I would just like to make a couple of points. First of all, thank you all very much for being here. For me and for Hillary and I think for the Members of Congress and the Secretary of State and the members of our delegation, this has been an enriching experience. And I have a much, I think, better feel for what is going on in modern China.

Secondly, if I might just close with a few words about our perspective on this whole issue of the relationship between social progress and individual rights or human rights.

I think there are basically three different categories of issues here, and I'd leave these thoughts with you. When it comes to just creating more opportunity for people to have a better life and refraining from oppressing people in horrible ways, I think it's obvious that China since the end of the Cultural Revolution has made enormous progress, almost unprecedented for any society in human history.

And then there's the second category of problems, which is just the basic legal problems or personal problems that people find in a complex society, whether it's consumer protection problems or—Hillary yesterday was talking to some people who were involved in legal work in Beijing, and there was a woman who got a divorce from a husband who had been abusing her. But their apartment house came to him because of his work, so where does she live now with their child? Those kinds of problems. I agree with what Madame Xie said. We have to—these rule-of-law issues, we need to just keep working through these and work together on them.

But in the third area I think there is still some considerable difference, and that is, to what extent does a different political opinion or a different religious conviction enrich a society and make it stronger, and to what extent does it promote instability and weaken the enormous work that has to be done?

And I think that we just have to kind of be honest here. China has had many challenges. It's a much bigger country than the United States. It's coming very far very fast. And I think there is a tendency among the Chinese, in government and perhaps in the society, to see these kinds of political or religious dissents as—at least to be very supersensitive to the prospect of instability, because China has suffered in the past from instability.

In the United States, because of our history, there is always a tendency to believe that anybody's political opinion and religious expression deserves great protection and great respect and, no matter how different it is from ours, that allowing the widest possible room for expression

of political and religious feelings makes a country stronger, a society stronger over the long run. That has been our experience.

So I think we have to understand our two perspectives and honestly confront these things as they present difficulties in our relationship and look at them as opportunities to try to build a common future, because I do think that, as I said in Beijing in the press conference I had with President Jiang and at the university, the forces of history are driving us toward a common future. We have to build a common future. And so it's important that we be able to discuss these things in an open way.

I think all of you did a terrific job today expressing your point of view and also giving my fellow Americans and I a window on modern China. And we thank you very much.

Mrs. Clinton. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:41 a.m. at the Shanghai Library. In his remarks, he referred to President Jiang Zemin of China and Mayor Xu Kuangdi of Shanghai. The Chinese participants spoke in Chinese, and their remarks were translated by interpreters, except for Edward Zeng, who spoke in English.

Remarks in a Call-In Program on Shanghai Radio 990
June 30, 1998

President Clinton. First of all, I want to thank the mayor for welcoming me to Shanghai, and say I very much enjoyed my first morning here. We did go to the library, my wife and I did, and we met with a number of citizens from in and around Shanghai who are involved in one way or another in China's remarkable transformation. And they helped us a lot to understand what is going on in China.

I also want to say a word of appreciation to President Jiang for the very good meeting we had in Beijing and for making it possible for me to reach out to the people of China through televising our press conference together. And then, of course, I went to Beijing University yesterday, "Beida," and spoke with the students there and answered questions. And that was also televised.

And then to be here in Shanghai, one of the very most exciting places in the entire world, to have the chance to begin my visit here with this radio program is very exciting. So I don't want to take any more time. I just want to hear from the questioners and have a conversation, so that when it's over, perhaps both the American people and the people of China will understand each other better.

Program Host Zuo Anlong. Mr. President, you already can see our TV screen—right in front of you there are so many people waiting in line to talk to you. We're really happy about this. How about we just start right here, okay?

President Clinton. Let's do it.

Asian Financial Crisis

[*The first caller asked about the Asian financial crisis and increasing cooperation between China and the United States.*]

President Clinton. First of all, Mr. Fong, that is a very good question, and it has occupied a major amount of my time since last year, when we saw the difficulties developing in Indonesia, in the Philippines, in Thailand, in Korea, and of course, in Japan.

I would like to begin by saying I believe that China has done a very good job in holding its currency stable, in trying to be a force of stability during the Southeast Asian crisis. Secondly, we are working together, the U.S. and China, and we are working through the IMF to try to help all these countries stabilize their economies and then restore growth.

But I think the last point I'd like to make is that we cannot see growth restored in Asia unless it is restored in Japan. Now, in Japan the people are about to have an election for the upper house of the Diet, so this is not an easy time for them. But the Government is going to disclose in the next couple of days what it intends to do in the area of financial reform.

If it is a good proposal and the confidence of the investors of the world is raised, then I believe you will see the situation begin to