



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at a state banquet for Chinese President Xi Jinping and
Mrs Peng Liyuan
at Schloss Bellevue
on 5 July 2017**

欢迎来到德国! Welcome to Germany – and welcome to Schloss Bellevue. This evening, I can assure you that you are guests of friends of China – many of whom know your country well and who have visited it on many occasions.

You have come to a city whose citizens are currently greatly looking forward to a Chinese attraction, indeed to one of your country's most important emblems. Two giant pandas – Meng Meng and Jiao Qing – are set to find a new home at the historic Berlin Zoological Garden.

I consider this to be a truly wonderful gesture by the Chinese Government, and also an expression of the close and friendly ties between our countries. Never in the 45 years of our relations have the dialogue and cooperation between our two countries been as close as they are today.

A very up to date or, I could also say, political, example of this is our close cooperation in the presidency of the G20 – China held the presidency last year and it is Germany's turn this year. What is more, Germany is able to build on foundations already laid by China in many areas, such as the sustainable growth agenda and climate protection – we talked about both of these areas in detail this morning. And in these areas in particular, we are hopeful that clear signals will be sent by a successful summit in Hamburg and are sure that Germany's presidency will enjoy China's support.

There is no doubt that our countries have a special responsibility with regard to climate issues – this rings even truer in view of the announcement by the US to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, which was, to my mind, probably the biggest success story of international cooperation in recent years, if not decades. I am

delighted to be able to say that, particularly after our talks this morning, China and Germany stand firmly by their promises made in the context of the Agreement that you, Mr President, said was "hard fought and necessary". And it goes without saying that we are aware of the fact that the fight against environmental pollution has become a key societal issue in China's metropolises, too. You illustrated this for us with a number of examples this morning.

Cooperation on international, global issues presents many opportunities for continuing to develop Chinese-European relations and bringing the same to bear in the service of a peaceful, cooperative world order. As major trading nations – China has been our biggest trading partner since 2016 – China and Germany are particularly dependent on such an international order.

And in your speeches in Davos and Geneva at the beginning of the year, you, Mr President, clearly expressed your commitment to multilateralism and to open and fair trade and just globalisation. We are also united by this firm belief. We have achieved much together. And I would be delighted if German business were able to continue its positive work in China under fair conditions. Our efforts to be a force for good should also inform our perception of the new paths between China and Europe, new paths that could emerge as a result of the Belt and Road Initiative, which you yourself are driving forward with great energy.

The Silk Road was always more than a trade route. It was a network that also helped to bring ideas, even religions, to other regions of the world. Thanks to this exchange, China became a centre of Buddhism, and even of the Nestorian Church, during the Tang dynasty, for example. Islam also spread along the Silk Road, reaching, as we know, as far as China. The then capital Chang'an was a cosmopolitan hub for people from all over Asia and China. It was especially open to foreign influences and was thus a model for many Asian countries at that time.

Credibility and acceptance are indispensable for anyone who intends to take global responsibility. The world expects major countries in particular to conduct themselves in compliance with international law and the rules of peaceful international interaction. This can only be done together and on the basis of common rules – and never unilaterally. And major countries in particular have an especially great responsibility to ensure that these common rules are complied with. It should therefore be our common objective to oppose any attempts to weaken international law and international organisations as has been attempted by a number of actors. This is neither in China's nor is it in Germany's interests.

The democratic and liberal societies of Europe have developed in both an economically dynamic and a peaceful way over the past

seventy years. However, we have also seen that such successes are never guaranteed for all time. We cannot deny that we in Europe are having to grapple with substantial crises and strong forces of disintegration in society. While we do not underestimate the threats that this poses, I am sure that the ability to take a critical look at ourselves, the willingness for peaceful change and continued development among the people of Europe and an appreciation of what is essential will enable us to overcome these crises. Europe is aware of the responsibility that it bears in a world full of unresolved, old conflicts and new uncertainties.

The Chinese philosopher Mencius gave expression to the essence of good governance over 2000 years ago when he wrote that "the people are most valuable [...] and the ruler is least valuable".

I am not sure whether this clear sighted observation was to the liking of the Chinese rulers of the time. But I am sure that it would have met with shaking heads and indignation among the political rulers in Europe at the time. And yet this wise warning has endured the passage of centuries and has gained in depth and significance also here in Europe. For our purposes, this ancient Chinese wisdom means nothing less than that governments must serve the people and not themselves. Law and justice and human rights place this ancient insight on firm, reliable and, hopefully, permanent foundations.

While the Chinese-German partnership has become so wide-ranging and continues to develop so dynamically, we also know that China and Germany each have their own history and culture that have shaped us over the course of centuries. Of course, this occasionally informs our view of the world of today and can also lead to differences of opinion on individual issues. However, it is also important that we discuss these differences, wherever they occur, in a spirit of trust and always strive to find common solutions. We want to preserve and strengthen what unites us – this is not only our wish, but also my most personal wish. I would be delighted if, during my term as Federal President, we were both able to play our part in fostering friendship and cooperation between China and Germany.

Please join me now in a toast to the health of President Xi Jinping and his wife, as well as to the future of the Chinese people and to the Chinese-German friendship.