

Dialogue with Chinese Women
Beijing, China
6/27/98

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton

**A Dialogue with Chinese Women:
Progress and Challenges in a Transforming Society**

Held at the Beijing International Club Hotel

Beijing, China

Saturday, June 27, 1998

For the public campaign stressing that it is as good to have a girl as a boy and the importance of valuing our daughters which is something that the President and I are very, very supportive of since, of course, we have a daughter and think that daughters are as important as sons and that girls are as important as boys.

So today I want to listen, ask questions, and learn from the distinguished women on this panel. I have reviewed their resumes; I have studied information about the work they are doing, both in urban and rural areas on behalf of women, and, as I said when I was here in Beijing three years ago, I believe that women throughout the world in every country -- urban and rural -- have very much in common in terms of the issues and the problems that we face. And that we learn much from each other, and we can strengthen each other as we all work to achieve opportunities and rights and responsibilities for women and girls. So I am delighted to be here and thank all of you for coming, and I particularly thank the panelists for taking time out of their busy schedules to be here with me to explain what they are doing and to discuss with me how we can all make more progress on behalf of women here in China and women in my own country and women throughout the world. So with that, I would love to start the discussion and hear from these very impressive women as to what they are doing and the issues on their minds.

Chinese Dialogue from panelist:

Well I want to thank the panelists, I think we should all give them a round of applause. I have been in discussions like this all over the world because when I travel alone or when I travel with my husband, I always seek out women to discuss with me what is happening in their societies, because I do believe that so much of the challenges and opportunities that women face today are similar. They may be different in degree or intensity but every problem that I have heard about today, from the panelists, I've heard about in every country including my own to some degree or another. And because I have been in so many of these discussions, I have learned so much from women like those whom we have heard from today, but I don't think I have ever been a more lively, energetic, informed, exciting discussion as the one I've heard from today with these women. I think that says a great deal about the work that each of you is doing, but also how you represent millions of other women who are worried about poverty, who are worried about education, who are worried about health care, who are worried about the status of women and who are looking for solutions. And the solutions that we have talked about today,

and that you are putting into action are ones that will make a difference in the lives of millions and millions of women and will make a difference in your entire society.

I was very pleased yesterday when my husband and I visited a small village outside of Xian to meet both men and women who talked to us about the changes in their lives in the last years, talking about the opportunities that they face and they were taking advantage of. And I was very struck by what I heard in that rural village was very similar to what I use to hear, with my husband, in our rural state of Arkansas, in the United States. And that many of the solutions that we are talking about here are ones that we have also worked on in the United States -- expanding legal rights for women, changing the judicial system to be more sensitive and aware of women's needs, expanding education to girls and women, persuading families, particularly families of minority cultures to educate their daughters, working very hard to increase the number of women who go, not only to primary education, but like the example the professor gave, of women who go on to university because their families sell donkeys or borrow or do whatever is necessary to educate their daughters.

I have also been very struck by how health care is a basic human right and educating women about their bodies, about the health care system, about their opportunities to seek and obtain health care, about reproductive health care is a basic human right for every women in the world. And more work needs to be done about that. I was also very impressed to hear the work you are doing both to create economic opportunity through micro credit and to assist women who need retraining because of the economic changes that are going on in your country. Micro credit has been proven in so many different countries in both rural and urban areas to give women economic opportunity and access to credit that they would not otherwise have.

You know in my own country we are using micro credit to help poor women, particularly women who are coming off welfare because we have changed our welfare system, to start small businesses for themselves. So this is not only a very good strategy for rural China, but also urban China and rural and urban America, and many other countries in every continent that I have visited.

So what I have heard today, the voices that I have heard, are very exciting to me, because I remember so well when I was here in Beijing at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, in 1995, there were so many different women from over 180 countries, but we agreed on a platform for action. China signed it, the United States signed and we are seeing results from following that platform for action. What you have told me today are all specific steps and strategies designed to increase the opportunities, the rights and responsibilities for women. I think it is clear as we look at the 21st Century that no society will be successful that does not empower women, that does not educate girls as well as boys, that does not keep girls healthy, that does not provide economic opportunity for women, that does not enforce the laws for the political and civil and legal rights of all people, but particularly for women, and each of you has described very

eloquently what is happening that will achieve that kind of opportunity for women in the next century.

Our moderator said that there is the old Chinese saying that women hold up half the sky. I have always like that saying. But of course women cannot hold up their half of the sky if they are not educated, if they are not healthy, if they don't have their rights, if they cannot enforce their own personal goals and aspirations, if they are not respected by the men in their lives and by their larger society. I particularly liked the saying that you are using as part of your campaign, "Self respect, self confidence, self reliance and self improvement," now those are goals for women everywhere in the world. But you have very clearly illustrated this morning how much progress is being made in helping women lift up their own voices. Because of course, each of us here on this panel are very lucky because our families respected us, our parents wanted us educated, we have remained healthy so that we could peruse our own dreams of being a professor or starting a publication or translating many books and running projects, but I think that makes it even more important that women like us use our voices to speak up on behalf of the millions of women throughout the world whose voices are silenced. They are not listened, to they are not respected, they are not encouraged, they are not given their rights, and they cannot hold up their half of their sky. So what I want to thank you for is very clearly explaining this morning all of the work that you are doing to create change in the lives of individual women which are sometimes the hardest changes to make. Sometimes the most difficult challenge is to persuade an individual women to have hope, to feel that she is worthy, to go to school, to protect her daughter, and yet you are also through these efforts that you have described, I think, changing the lives and attitudes of women and men. And that will change the society in which you live. Now I don't think any of us who have worked on these issues as long as each of us has is in any way unaware of how hard the challenge is.

There is a great deal of work. Because for every women who does not have her legal rights, there is not a legal center. For every women who needs the information in your publication and in your books, they do not always get it. For every women who should go to Beijing University because she is intelligent and motivated she may not have a family to sell a donkey to send her. So there is much work to be done and I think that there is a lot we have in common that we can work on together that will up-hold the value of each girl and will create an environment in which even more girls and women can participate in panels such as you with your education, your eloquence, your passion, your advocacy and that will do a great deal to create the conditions, not only in China, but throughout the world that will enable us to proudly enable us to proudly hold up our half of the sky in the next century, so thank you very much for what you said, but thank you more for what you are doing on behalf of girls and women.

Thank you.