



Talking about China on this historical date

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Twenty years ago today, a tragedy occurred at Beijing's Tiananmen Square: The student-led pro-democracy demonstration was brutally crushed by the soldiers. I, like many expatriate Chinese, thought China was finished.

Guess what? China was not finished. To the contrary, she changed dramatically for the better, lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and becoming the world's third largest economy today. In fact, the changes in China over the past two decades are so remarkable that some have started doubting the assumption that the combination of capitalism and democracy is the only way to prosperity, because the combination of capitalism and autocracy has clearly worked in China, in a way totally unprecedented in human history! For example, in Chicago we debated about a third runway at O'Hare for more than a decade; all the while China built a dozen new airports like O'Hare! The same applies to nuclear power: There are at least two dozens nuclear power stations in China (working, under construction and planned), while we have been stuck with nice-but-not-in-my-backyard. Most notably, today's China appears to be rushing towards capitalism while we are running away from it: China produces many basic consumer goods for the betterment of people worldwide, while we want more and more socialism domestically and have exported democracy by war.

I was born in China in 1959 and grew up in the horrible days of the Cultural Revolution. I was a hopeless teenager when good fortune came in 1977: China re-opened its universities after closing them for 11 years and I made it into one of the top universities. Moreover, as China continued to open up, I saw the beacon in the US - I was determined to come and I did in 1985, after spending three years in Japan. After getting my Ph.D. in 1988, I worked hard to make it in corporate America, without success. Finally in 2005 I founded my own company and am now well on the way to realize my American dream: to be financially independent. I love America!

I also love China! So as a Chinese-American [and a true American], I passionately promote everything between the two countries, especially trading. Unfortunately, the U.S. media coverage of China has been disproportionately negative over the past two decades. Of course, human rights are important. But that is not the only thing! What about democracy? It too is important. But democracy takes time and it must come from within - Can you spell Iraq? Look at China today: The majority is very happy, enjoying the ever-rising standards of living. No, it has no U.S.-style democratic elections yet. Yes, some people do get wrongfully punished for exercising their right of freedom of speech. But everything is relative - China has made tremendous progress along these lines over the past two decades! While we all must strive for freedom and justice, we must not expect perfection to our standards right away and all the time. Don't we have a lot of imperfection in our society as well? Isn't it true that 1% of our population is now in prison?

To me, the two biggest challenges China faces today are the economy and corruption in politics, just like us! Two other big challenges are environmental pollution and political system reforms. China is dealing with them already and we should, non-judgmentally, let them work these complex things out by themselves over time. External pressure helps, but it must be measured. Very importantly, don't listen to the single-issue folks suspiciously influenced by the extremists like actor Richard Gere (for being overly obsessed with Tibet) and CNN's Lou Dobbs (for constantly labeling China as the communist China). Let's focus on the positives, understanding each other more and promoting peace throughout the world.

Time to know more about China? Visit her - she is one of the most exciting countries to visit today! See China with your own eyes: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Let me predict the conclusion of your visit: WOW, China is amazing, but there is no place like home.