

Your Excellency Niu Dun, Special Envoy of the People's Republic of China
Your Excellency Ambassador Ma Keqing Mr. Washington Sycip

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps Officials of the Philippine Government
Distinguished guests, Friends, ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of His Excellency President Benigno S. Aquino III and the Filipino people, it is my great honor to welcome all of you as we inaugurate the Philippines- China Years of Friendly Exchanges (YFE) for 2012-2013.

In Beijing, thirty-seven years ago, the leaders of the Philippines and China issued a Joint Communiqué that committed our peoples to the active development of mutual understanding and friendship between them.

In the course of over three decades, the geopolitical landscape and the initial logic that gave impetus to our pursuit of official relations have seen a vast seachange. Both Asia and the world today are far different from 1975. China has risen in stature in contemporary global politics, economy and development in manner and pace that no one had foreseen. The Philippines, for its part, has steadily cultivated its democratic values, domestic economy and international relations amidst major upheavals, such that

now, under President Aquino, we are at the cusp of what promises to be one of the country's most remarkable surges in national development.

We cannot be more pleased that over the years, the doors we opened in Beijing in 1975 have opened onto a broad avenue of friendship. We have steadfastly tread this path, adhering to our bilateral commitments. Now, well into the 21st century, we have given rise to one of present day Asia's most open, dynamic and vigorous relationships.

"By their fruits you will know them", it is said, and indeed the dynamicity of Philippine-China relations can be reckoned in many different ways.

Statistics offer one indispensable way: since 1975, we have forged around 100 government-to-government agreements and 30 twinning agreements between our cities and provinces. Our economic engagement has grown by leaps and bounds, such that China is now our third largest trading partner, our fourth largest source of tourists, third largest source of development assistance, and a growing source of investments.

But the second is perhaps more meaningful: within this hall today we reckon our relations in terms of our friendship. For indeed, the friendship between the Philippines and China have lasted over centuries, beyond the earliest written records of merchant relations documented in the Sung dynasty.

Last year, in recognition of this friendship and the growing importance of our engagement, President Aquino chose to undertake his first state visit outside ASEAN, to China. Just recently, our strong bonds of kinship was again strongly manifested, when China became one of the first to offer aid to those afflicted by twin disasters of tropical storm Sendong and the earthquake in Negros Province.

Today's launch of the "Years of Friendly Exchanges" is a most fitting tribute to our long history of amity, and a testament to our two countries' resolve to tread that path of harmonious and just relations. From this time until 2013, our two Governments will be celebrating our friendship by hosting full calendars of cultural performances, visual arts exhibits, film festivals, culinary festivals and other events and exchanges to build mutual trust and appreciation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The interests of both the Philippines and China will continue to be interlinked and our fate closely intertwined. But history and geography can and will only partly determine the path of our relations in the twenty-first century. Ultimately, what we refer to as the relationship between two nations is actually the relationship between its leadership and peoples. It behooves us, therefore, both Filipinos and Chinese, to build bonds of amity on the strongest of foundations - not only of mutual benefit, but also of mutual respect, sovereign equality, dialogue and the rule of law. It behooves us to cultivate a friendship that is virtuous - the most exalted friendship in the Aristotelian conception, which holds all virtue to be summed up in dealing justly.

By these standards, we are confident that today's launch of the "Philippines- China Years of Friendly Exchanges", can only usher in a brighter and more vibrant chapter in the enduring friendship between the Philippines and China.

Thank you and Mabuhay!