

attempt to understand their desires and needs and not simply scold China for failing to meet international standards.

Facing Up to Friendship ☆ Geremie R. Barmé

On April 9, 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a speech to an audience at Peking University, China's preeminent university. Given the tensions over Tibet and the Olympic torch relay, as a practiced diplomat Rudd could have taken the easy path by speaking in platitudes about the strength of the bilateral relationship and any number of mutually acceptable and anodyne topics.

Instead, with finesse and skill, he chose to address the students on broad basis for a truly sustainable relationship with the economically booming yet politically autocratic state that is China. In doing so, he rewrote the rules of engagement in a way that can only benefit Australia and its relationship with this important country.

First Rudd acknowledged where he was: at a university that, more than any other educational institution in China, has helped shape that country's modern history, one known for its contributions to Chinese intellectual debate, political activism, and cultural experimentation. He mentioned some of China's twentieth-century intellectual heroes whose careers were entwined with Peking University. Some were involved in reshaping Chinese into a modern language capable of carrying urgently needed political, cultural, and historical debate. One was a leading democratic thinker.

He also made three references to Lu Xun (1881–1936), China's literary hero, unyielding critic of authoritarianism, and principled dissenter, noting that Lu Xun personally designed Peking University's crest. It would not have been lost on his audience that the prime minister's choice of intellectual exemplars acknowledged China's dominant Communist ideology while pointing to the traditions of free speech and debate that have made Peking University so important. Next year is one of many anniversaries, one of the most significant being of the ninetieth commemoration of the May Fourth movement. May 4, 1919, is remembered as an occasion when patriotic student and mass ire led to a boycott of Japanese goods. It was also the iconic moment in an era of cultural renewal and intellectual foment. It also marks a watershed in the rise of left-wing radicalism, something that would later bring devastation on the nation. But May Fourth also ushered in an era of mass political participation and youthful awakening in China. For the students of Peking University, the significance of Kevin Rudd's opening remarks would not have been lost; in a sense the Australian prime minister gave one of the first commemorative speeches at the university marking the ninetieth anniversary of May Fourth.

Rudd's strategy was thus first to honor the place where he was speaking and its connection to significant, complex historical and cultural figures. He went on to speak more personally of his own educational and political trajectory and about Australia's national interest. Appealing to his youthful audience to consider what positive role they could play in China's rise as a world power, he evoked the concept of harmony (*hexie*), embraced by the present Chinese leadership, before making a canny digression. This was to note that 2008 is the 110th anniversary of the Hundred Days Reform movement, during which an enlightened emperor struggled to enact a process of political reform and modernization similar to the Meiji Restoration in Japan that had taken place not long before. Rudd didn't need to say that this movement failed and its leaders were beheaded; his audience would know that. Instead he noted that one of the leading lights of the reforms, the thinker Kang Youwei, who survived by fleeing into exile, went on to write about "the Great Harmony" (*datong*), "a utopian world free of political boundaries." Thus, in a manner both subtle and eminently clear to a Chinese intellectual audience, he linked the officially approved concept of harmony to the broader course of political reform, change, and openness.

Rudd then spoke about China joining the rest of humanity as "a responsible global stakeholder"—a lead-in to addressing the pressing issue of Tibet. By framing his comments in such a manner, he established his right—and by extension the right of others—to disagree with both Chinese official and mainstream opinion on matters of international concern. There is a venerable Chinese expression for this position: "A true friend," Rudd went on, "is one who can be a *zhengyou*, that is a partner who sees beyond immediate benefit to the broader and firm basis for continuing, profound and sincere friendship."

The subsequent Chinese media discussion of Rudd's use of the powerful and meaning-laden term *zhengyou*—the true friend who dares to disagree—has been considerable. That is because the more common word "friendship" (*youyi*) has been a cornerstone of China's post-1949 diplomacy. Mao Zedong once observed, "The first and foremost question of the revolution is: who is our friend and who is our foe."

To be a friend of China, the Chinese people, the party-state, or, in the reform period, even a mainland business partner, the foreigner is often expected to stomach unpalatable situations and keep silent in the face of egregious behavior. A friend of China might enjoy the privilege of offering the occasional word of caution in private; in the public arena he or she is expected to have the good sense and courtesy to be "objective," that is, to toe the line, whatever that happens to be. The concept of "friendship" thus degenerates into little more than an effective tool for emotional blackmail and enforced complicity.

Rudd's tactic was to deftly sidestep the viselike embrace of that model of friendship by substituting another. "A strong relationship, and a true friendship," he told the students, "are built on the ability to engage in a direct, frank and ongoing dialogue about our fundamental interests and future vision."

The distinction was not lost on the Chinese. The official news agency Xinhua reported, "Eyes lit up when [Rudd] used this expression . . . it means friendship based on speaking the truth, speaking responsibly. It is evident that to be a *zhengyou*, the first thing one needs is the magnanimity of pluralism."¹ Of course, in the land of linguistic slippage it is easy to see that while for some *zhengyou* means speaking out of turn, for others it may simply become another way for allowing pesky foreigners to let off steam. After all, erudite historical references can easily be dismissed as "Sino-wank." They send a message of sincere engagement and competence to Chinese audiences and may too readily be taken to mean "We all talk the same language, I can disagree with you, but now let's get back to business." However, I believe that Kevin Rudd signaled something more, something that in another context I have called "a robust engagement with contemporary China and the broader Chinese world in all of its complexity, whether it be local, regional or global."²

Of course, there are dangers, not mentioned in the Chinese media. Perhaps the most famous *zhengyou* relationship of modern times was that between Mao Zedong and Liang Shuming, a Confucian thinker and agrarian reformer. Mao declared that although their politics were different, Liang was a true *zhengyou*. Liang advised Mao on rural policy from the 1940s into the early 1950s. But, in 1953, Liang dared to venture that class struggle was having a calamitous effect on rural life. He asked Mao whether he had the "magnanimity" to accept his views. The chairman shot back, "No, I don't have that magnanimity!" Shortly thereafter, Liang was denounced and silenced.

On the other hand, there are examples from Chinese history where a *zhengyou* has played a key role in bringing about good governance and prosperity.

The most famous *zhengyou* was Wei Zheng, a friend and critic of the emperor Taizong of the seventh-century Tang dynasty. Wei told the ruler that "if you listen to wise counsel all is brightness; if, however, you give in to bias darkness falls." When Wei died, some years later, the emperor bitterly mourned his death. He offered this tribute: "One looks at a reflection in a mirror to see if one's dress is in order. One studies history to understand the changing fortunes of time. And one seeks wise counsel to avoid mistakes. Wei Zheng has died, and I have lost my mirror. To have a *zhengyou* is to be fortunate indeed." The metaphor is used by China's leaders and the media even today. One can only hope that when they look in the mirror, they do not do so with eyes wide shut.

By introducing the term *zhengyou* with all of its liberating connotations into our dealings with China, Kevin Rudd has achieved something of considerable significance.

1. It is also noteworthy that in official accounts of the speech no mention was made of Hu Shi, the literary reformer, historian, and advocate of liberal democracy whom Rudd had listed among the leading lights of Peking University.

2. See my March 2005 essay "On New Sinology" online at <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/pah/chinaheritageproject/newsinology>.

Preserving the Premier's Calligraphy at Beichuan Middle School ☆ Richard C. Kraus

The Beichuan Middle School lost a thousand students in May's devastating Sichuan earthquake. When Premier Wen Jiabao visited the school's temporary quarters, he wrote four characters on a blackboard to inspire the students: "distress rejuvenates a nation" (*duo nan xing bang*). After his departure, teachers and students could not bear to erase his chalk inscription, which was covered in plastic until the Sichuan Cultural Relics Bureau could devise a method for permanently preserving Wen's handwriting.

Although Premier Wen's chalk on a blackboard may seem difficult to preserve, China has a deeply established tradition of copying calligraphy. Many of the great works of past masters are known only by copies, often stone carvings, which astonishingly capture the most delicate brushstrokes in a medium that lasts for centuries. And newer technologies can be used to preserve Wen's temporary inscription for future generations.

The more interesting problem is political. The propagation of calligraphy by powerful men (never women) bolsters personality cults, as I show in my book *Brushes with Power*. Calligraphy is said to reveal the inner character of a person—one can detect the virtue of a writer by the beauty of his brushstrokes. Underlings have flattered their bosses for centuries by praising their calligraphy, leading to a secondary tradition of ghost calligraphers to create suitable inscriptions for those men of power who lacked a good classical education. For the powerful, spreading calligraphy around is a way to leave visible markers of their sphere of influence. Book titles, building signs, and newspaper mastheads have all featured inscriptions where politicians use the brush to display their patronage and extend their protection.

This ancient power-calligraphy bond was initially shaken in the twentieth century as modernists questioned the traditions of literati culture. But the practice instead grew to new extremes because Mao Zedong was both a serious calligrapher and the center of an unprecedented personality cult. Mao, whose distinctive writing style lives on today not only in artifacts from his day but also in a computer font inspired by it, wrote characters for causes and institutions he supported. Even those he did not often forged his calligraphy to strengthen their claims to legitimacy. Mao's characters graced the Bank of China, the *People's Daily*, and Red Guard armbands. Ardent revolutionary orchardists grew apples bearing the Chairman's calligraphy by ripening the fruit with stencils and sunlight.

The equation of good calligraphy and high moral leadership can be broken. Lin Biao, Mao's one-time ally, produced inscriptions for the *Little Red Book* of