

Transcript of Inaugural Speech by Republic of China President Lee Teng-Hui

May 20, 1996

Your Majesty, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, My Fellow Countrymen, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Today we are assembled here to jubilantly and solemnly celebrate the inauguration of the President and the Vice President before all our compatriots. This gathering marks not only the commencement of the ninth-term Presidency and Vice Presidency, but also a fresh beginning for the future of the country and the people.

Today, the 21.3 million people in this country formally march into the new era of "popular sovereignty."

Today, the Chinese people enter a new frontier full of hope.

Today, we in Taiwan firmly tell the world, with great pride and self-confidence:

We now stand on the apex of democratic reform and will remain there resolutely.

We have proved eloquently that the Chinese are capable of practicing democracy.

We have effectively expanded the influence of the international democratic camp and made significant contributions to the cause of freedom and democracy.

Therefore, this gathering of today does not celebrate the victory of any candidate, or any political party for that matter. It honors a triumph of democracy for the 21.3 million people. It salutes the confirmation of freedom and dignity—the most fundamental human values—in the Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu area.

My fellow countrymen: The doors have opened to full democracy, with all its vigor in full swing. Today, most deserving of a salute are the people of the Republic of China:

A salute to them for being so resolute and decisive when it comes to the future of the country.

A salute to them for being so firm and determined when it comes to the defense of democracy.

A salute to them for being so calm and invincible when it comes to facing up to threats.

From now on, the people as a whole, rather than any individual or any political party, will be invested with the ruling power of the nation. This is free will in full play, the fullest realization of "popular sovereignty," the real "compliance with the will of Heaven and response to human wishes," the getting rid of the old and ringing in the new. All the glory belongs to the people.

My fellow countrymen: At this very fresh start of history, we pledge ourselves to launch the new era with a new determination and new deeds. This is our common homeland, and this is the

fundamental support we draw upon in our struggle for survival. Fifty years of a common destiny forged in fortune and misfortune have united us all into a closely bound and interdependent community. The first-ever popular presidential election has reconfirmed our collective consciousness that we in Taiwan have to work together as one man.

How to make this land of ours more beautiful and how to make its inhabitants feel safer and live a happier and more harmonious life is the common responsibility of the 21.3 million people!

"Whatever the people desire is always in my heart." I am fully aware of the needs of the people and I pledge myself to do my best to deserve their trust. But no individual or political party can single-handedly decide a policy of far-reaching importance to the country. The government will soon invite opinion leaders and other representatives from various quarters to exchange views on major topics of future national development. The consensus that emerges from such meetings will launch the country into a new era.

The election is over, but the promises made during the campaign will be kept and fulfilled as soon as possible. Building a modern country entails the services of all available talents. I am convinced that only when upright, insightful, capable and experienced people, regardless of their political affiliation or social group, participate in the leadership of the government will political stability and national growth be ensured.

The times are changing, so is the social climate. Keeping in the old grooves while refraining from any innovation is doomed to failure. Political maneuvering has no place in political interaction, nor can self-interest have any role in deciding upon a political position. No quarrels can be started under the pretense of representing the will of the voters. A boycott certainly is not the equivalent of checks and balances. The ideal of democracy we are pursuing means not just effective checks and balances; it demands hand-in-hand cooperation for the welfare of the people among the political parties.

Four years will soon pass. We have no time for wavering or waiting. For the purpose of laying a solid and secure foundation for the country and bequeathing a happy and comfortable life to the future generations, let us get off to a very good start today—May 20, 1996.

Firstly, we have to broaden and deepen the democratic exercise. Horizontally, we will share our democratic experience with all Chinese and international friends.

Vertically, we will proceed to phase 2 constitutional reform, promote clean elections, ensure clean and efficient government, enhance law and order, restructure the political landscape, and strengthen the multiparty political system, so as to guarantee stability and development for democracy. Economic growth and political democracy are equally important. Without continued success in economic development, we risk losing everything. We have to make sure that the plan for turning Taiwan into a hub for business operations in the Asia-Pacific region will proceed on schedule so that this country may from a position of strength play a role to be reckoned with in the international community and in the process of national unification. In the meanwhile we have to plan ahead for national development well into the next century, nurture a liberalized and internationalized economic regime in as short as possible a period of time, foster a low-tax, obstacle-free businesses climate, renovate the land system, improve the small and medium business, and greatly enhance national competitiveness. Only when thus prepared will we be able to compete in a new Asia-Pacific age of mutual benefit and co-prosperity, thus becoming an indispensable partner for prosperity and development internationally.

At the same time we do not intend to neglect development in non-economic sectors. Our top priorities will be the judicial system, education, culture, and social restructuring, which will have to move ahead in tandem.

Judicial reform should be based above all on the rule of law. All judicial judgments have to be fair and make sure that all are equal before the law. The rule of law being the foundation of democracy, the cause of democracy will be compromised to a serious extent if court rulings are not trusted by the people. The reform will also guarantee full respect for any fundamental human rights including those of prisoners and parties to a law suit. Rectitude and efficiency in the court and prosecutorial system will have to be drastically improved.

Reform in education aims to put into practice a concept of education that imparts happiness, contentment, pluralism and mutual respect. Such education is designed to develop potentialities, respect individualism, promote humanism, and encourage creativeness. All unreasonable restrictions will be removed to allow the emergence of the life education system. Ample room will be reserved for individual originality and personal traits to ensure the continued pursuit of self-growth and self-realization. The new generation will be assisted to know their homeland, love their country and foster a broad international view. Fortified in this manner they can better meet international challenges and map out a bright future for their country in an increasingly competitive global village.

My fellow countrymen: After 5,000 years the Chinese are still going strong solely because they derive sustenance from an excellent culture. Under the strong impact of Western civilization since the mid-19th century, Chinese culture has gone through tribulations and shocks giving rise to a sharp decline in national confidence. Bearing this in mind. I have never stopped thinking about cultural regeneration. I am hoping that the people of Taiwan will nurture a new life culture as well as a broad and long-sighted view of life. The new Chinese culture, with moorings in the immense Chinese heritage, will draw upon Western cultural essence to facilitate adapting to the new climate of the next century.

This is the essence of the concept of "manage the great Taiwan, nurture a new Chinese culture." All the major cultures originated in a very restricted area. The 5,000-year Chinese culture also rose from a small region called Chung Yuan. Uniquely situated at the confluence of mainland and maritime cultures, Taiwan has been able in recent decades to preserve traditional culture on the one hand and to come into wide contact with Western democracy and science and modern business culture on the other. Equipped with a much higher level of education and development than in other parts of China, Taiwan is set to gradually exercise its leadership role in cultural development and take upon itself the responsibility for nurturing a new Chinese culture.

Managing the great Taiwan can nurture not just a new culture, but also a new society. With political democracy, Taiwan's society has become robustly pluralistic. The vigor thus released will provide nourishment for new social life and bring about further progress.

We will regenerate family ethics and build up a strong sense of community beginning at the grass roots. This will enable us to have a harmonious and communicative society where all members can have the joy of family life. People will also be encouraged to live a simple life and treasure all available resources.

The land should be used based upon optimum planning, and nature conservation should be promoted to make it possible for future generations to savor the beauty of the landscape. In the same spirit, we will take better care of the disadvantaged groups in the interests of social harmony

and human dignity. We also want to have in place a social security system, fair to all and sure to endure, that provides for freedom from want. But this system can only be installed gradually, depending upon the availability of funding support.

At the very time when we are engaged in the task of developing the Republic of China on Taiwan, the overseas Chinese are never out of mind. We do our very best continuing to assist them in developing their careers. The welfare of the Chinese in Hong Kong and Macao has always been of great concern to us. We are ready to lend them a helping hand to help maintain democracy, freedom and prosperity in this area.

Today the existence and development of the Republic of China on Taiwan has won international recognition and respect. In the new international order of today, such basic tenets as democracy, human rights, peace and renunciation of force are universally adhered to; they are in full accord with the ideals upon which our country was founded. We will continue to promote pragmatic diplomacy in compliance with the principles of goodwill and reciprocity. By so doing we will secure for our 21.3 million people enough room for existence and development as well as the respect and treatment they deserve in the international arena.

My fellow countrymen: China has suffered a lot in the 20th century. In the initial stages, it was buffeted with a series of invasions, and over the last 50 years an ideological gap has been responsible for the Chinese-fighting-Chinese tragedy, resulting in confrontation and enmity among the Chinese. I have been of the view that on the threshold of the 21st century the two sides of the Taiwan Straits should work for ending this historical tragedy and ushering in a new epoch when Chinese should help each other.

It is this consideration that over the past years has been guiding our initiative in promoting a win-win strategy for expanding cross-straits relations leading to eventual national unification, but we are doing this on the premise that the Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu area is well protected and the welfare of its people safeguarded. Unfortunately, the cross-straits relationship has experienced bumps from time to time because the Chinese Communists have refused to admit the very fact that the Republic of China does exist in the area. Beginning last year, the Chinese Communists, because of their opposition to democracy, launched against myself a smear campaign using false charges to damage my credibility, but I simply ignore their irrational behavior and remain patient. An eye for an eye is no solution to an historical question of 50 years.

In an attempt to influence the outcome of the first popular presidential election in March, the Chinese Communists conducted a series of military exercises against Taiwan, but unrivaled restraint prevailed in this country. We know that it is imperative that peace and stability be maintained in the Asia-Pacific region. More important, we would not like to see the sudden disappearance of the economic growth in mainland China that has been made possible with great difficulty by its openness policy over the years. Patience on the part of the 21.3 million people is not tantamount to cowardice. Because we believe quiet tolerance is the only way to dispel enmity bred by confrontation. We will never negotiate under threat of attack, but we do not fear to negotiate. Our position is that dialogue will lead to the resolution of any issues between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits.

The Republic of China has always been a sovereign state. Disputes across the Straits center around system and lifestyle; they have nothing to do with ethnic or cultural identity. Here in this country it is totally unnecessary or impossible to adopt the so-called course of "Taiwan independence." For over 40 years, the two sides of the Straits have been two separate jurisdictions

due to various historical factors, but it is also true that both sides pursue eventual national unification.

Only when both sides face up to the facts and engage in dialogue with profound sincerity and patience will they be able to find the solution to the unification question and work for the common welfare of the Chinese people.

Today, I will seriously call upon the two sides of the straits to deal straightforwardly with the momentous question of how to terminate the state of hostility between them, which will then make a crucial contribution to the historic task of unification. In the future, at the call of my country and with the support of its people, I would like to embark upon a journey of peace to mainland China taking with me the consensus and will of the 21.3 million people. I am also ready to meet with the top leadership of the Chinese Communists for a direct exchange of views in order to open up a new era of communication and cooperation between the two sides and ensure peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.

My fellow countrymen: We in Taiwan have realized the Chinese dream. The Chinese of the 20th century have been striving for the realization of a happy, wealthy China and of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's "popular sovereignty" ideal. For 50 years, we have created in the Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu area an eye-catching "economic miracle" and achieved a world-acclaimed democratic reform. The Chinese who were regarded as dictatorial, feudalistic, penurious, and backward by Western countries one century ago have by now created in the Taiwan area a new land of democracy, wealth and progress, proudly enjoying enthusiastic recognition from the world. This stand for not just a proud achievement of our 21.3 million people; it marks a crucial departure for the Chinese people to rise again to a new height of glory. We believe that whatever is achieved by the Chinese in Taiwan can also be achieved by the Chinese in mainland China. We are willing to provide our developmental experience as an aid in mapping out the direction of development in mainland China. The fruits of our hard work can be used to assist in enhancing the welfare of millions of our compatriots on the mainland. The Chinese on the two sides can thus join forces for the benefit of the prosperity and development of the Chinese nation as a whole.

My fellow countrymen: I wish to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for the trust you have reposed in me. Today, I have accepted with humility and solemnity the office of the ninth-term President of the Republic of China at the swearing-in ceremony this morning. I fully understand the meaning of this office as well as the duties of this office. I pledge myself to the complete performance of my duties to the best of my power. I would never fail you!

Meanwhile, I sincerely call upon all my fellow citizens to give me wholehearted, unselfish and patient support so that we may stride forward hand in hand into the 21st century. I am convinced that during the next century the Chinese people will be able to achieve the historic enterprise of peaceful unification and do their very part for the peace and development of the world.

May I wish the Republic of China continued prosperity and all the distinguished guests health and happiness.

Thank you!