



Let us exchange our insights and spark a light with light

Dinner Speech of the President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

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– Check against delivery –

„Lasst uns unsere Verdienste zusammenwerfen und Licht am Lichte anzünden!“

“Let us exchange our insights and spark a light with light.”

President Jianguo Hou, distinguished Colleagues from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Max Planck Society,

These were the words of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, one of the greatest scientists in German history. It is an interesting quote, but even more interesting is the context in which Leibniz wrote this down.

Believe it or not: He referred to his desire to promote scientific and cultural exchange between Europe and China. This was in 1692 – 331 years ago. Leibniz was a great admirer of Chinese science, Chinese writing, Chinese medicine. He was convinced: Europe and China can learn a lot from each other.

And Leibniz wasn't the only one to feel that way, even back then. The dynasty of the Wittelsbacher, the former kings of Bavaria, also admired the Chinese culture. They collected Chinese books and established close relationships for exchange in various fields, especially in maths, astronomy and the arts. Today the Bavarian State Library holds an extensive Chinese collection that comprises around 233 000 printed volumes and 3 500 handwritten manuscripts.

The historic connection between China and Bavaria is rather special within Europe – because of its continuity. Seeing these historical lines, the continued cultural appreciation, is something I find inspiring. It's like a signal in the noise of our modern times.



We are honored to have you with us tonight, enjoying a cold beer together, sharing good food. I remember the wonderful food I enjoyed in Beijing and Shanghai and the great hospitality when visiting Tsinghua University and Cold Spring Harbor Asia.

In addition to our company, however, our meeting aims at continuing our historical interactions, and taking the next step. A step into more science. And I think this is more important than ever. Why?

This is not only because our countries are both leading science nations. It is also because I think there is some eternal truth in the scientific approach. Beyond any breakthroughs and innovations, it is the nature of science, the discourse at its heart, seeking the truth, that has an intrinsic value for all human societies. And it is this that we should teach the next generation.

In this rapidly changing, multilateral world, the voice of science should be loud and clear. It is up to us scientists to help people to distinguish facts from fiction. And this can be fostered by international exchange between scientists from different countries who together seek the truth. We do so using the language of science, which is also universal – something that unites all of us.

So let's spark a light with light and let's raise our glasses, to science - our joint language, our joint journey, and our joint responsibility.

Thank you for being our guests tonight. Cheers!