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"Merry Christmas" in China, Everywhere You Go!

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It's beginning to look a lot more like Christmas, everywhere you go" ... in China! While Americans are banning Nativity Scenes in Dallas, North Carolina and Santa Monica, California, China has them everywhere you go! No "Happy Holidays" signs, just "Merry Christmas," is the only "Season's Greetings" seen or heard in China, everywhere you go.

"Oh Come All Ye Faithful" welcomed my arrival at Shanghai Airport. "We Wish You A Merry Christmas" is alive and well, resounding Christmas cheer, everywhere you go! Hotels and public areas have gigantic Christmas trees covered in red and yellow-gold ornaments, like the China National Flag with a big gold star on the top, and countless Nativity Christmas Displays.

I asked my Chinese government friend, a member of CPC, what this means and was surprised by the response, "The Holy Family, a sign good fortune will happen soon." My living and working in China for a decade, studying Chinese history, reading Chinese classics and philosophies has helped me to humbly understand the Chinese mentality and make lifelong friends. Recently, President Xi Jinping advised his foreign affairs team, "We must make friends." He noted that "friendship" was more important than "alliances" to China's future.

This month in China, Christmas lights are brighter along The Bund than Rodeo Drive or Park Avenue. Buildings I visited for meetings have "Merry Christmas" strewn across the reception desks. Christmas music is non-stop, from Taylor Swift's "Last Christmas" to the traditional "I'll Be Home For Christmas," everywhere you go. Leaving one to wonder, are "Angels We Have Heard On High" moving from the USA to the PRC?

Jaded (pun intended) Christmas skeptics might remark, "They just want to sell more stuff. It's about the money attached to Christmas." But from my personal experience, even though Chinese are perhaps the world's most ardent shoppers, "Christmas in China" does not evoke or promote shopping. Actually it's America that better watch out and ponder what "real Christmas" is all about.

During this visit, I was invited to speak at The Great Peoples Hall to high ranking government officials and 700 Chinese Entrepreneurs educated overseas, many in American universities. The U.S.A. diplomatic delegation I was with expressed their surprise by the emphasis on "Christmas in China" as a cultural exchange with joyful moods in contrast to the unfettered commercialism and discord during this sacred holiday in America. "Merry Christmas" motivates the Chinese to broadly smile and engage in warm hospitality. A Christmas believer might reply to Scrooge skeptics by singing Santa's song like this:

"America, you better watch out, you better learn why, you better be good, I'm telling you why-Santa Claus is coming to Shanghai! He's making a list, checking it twice, going to find out whose naughty

or nice; Santa Claus is coming to Guangzhou! He's watching to see if America has lost her Founding Fathers way; he sees America sleeping, he loves Americans awake; he knows America has been bad but can be good, by celebrating the real Christmas, for goodness sake! So, America, you better watch out, you better not doubt, you better keep "Christ" in Christmas or risk He'll move out. America is losing its grace; it's going to another place.

Good-bye Christmas goose. Hello (Ni hao) Christmas duck, Peking of course!

Christmas time is a good time for some introspection. In 1972, America's traditions played a major role in Sino-US relations. In preparation for my remarks at the Beijing Forum discussing "implications of cultural differences," I recalled China's Premier Zhou En Lai arranging for the PRC military band to play "America the Beautiful" when he welcomed President Richard Nixon into the same Great Peoples Hall. This goodwill gesture and Chinese hospitality touched hearts of the American guests while opening hearts of the Chinese hosts. The crescendo lyrics of this beloved patriotic song are worthy of contemplation, "America, America, God shed His grace on thee; and crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea." Perhaps, these wise words inspired China to celebrate Christmas, everywhere you go.

Chinese people believe in honoring cultural and family traditions. They are not throwing the baby Jesus out with the bath water and not removing Christ from Christmas as some in America, perhaps intimidated by ACLU threats, are irreverently allowing. Some would argue it is more prudent to not upset the "Birthday Boy" who is the reason for Christmas, than to fear bully antics of a transitory organization. China is illustrating honor and respect for America's religious beliefs because they believe they are the foundation of our nation and they desire to share some of our culture and grace. Just as China believes that their own cultural traditions are their strength, they also believe America's historical moral foundation is what keeps America strong.

When did the Christmas Story first come to China? Debatably, according to historians, theologians and saint accounts it was in 70 AD by Apostle Thomas (The Doubting Saint). Is modern China becoming more appreciative than America in celebrating the true meaning of Christmas? What is the cultural atmosphere dynamic that is making the "true Christmas" exit America's consciousness while simultaneously entering China's? It seems from the many Chinese friends we have come to know that the Chinese people deeply desire and are searching for the true Christmas Spirit, to love and to be loved, to care and to share, including The Nativity Story and Nativity Scenes. The recent announcement of unprecedented 10 year visas encourages people to travel between China and USA often. Chinese travelers express their keen desire to learn the real reason for the season of Christmas. Through ATI, AmericanTours International, Chinese travelers experience the "real America;" Americans experience the "real China," and all experience the "real Christmas Spirit," peace and goodwill.

While checking into my Air China flight back to Los Angeles on Saturday I had to smile, the Christmas Carol playing was "The First Noel." On Sunday, we welcomed 40 Chinese visitors to our home for a "Christmas Party" and we brought them "Merry Christmas" all the way from Beijing, non-stop!