# "Aggregating Talent, Knowledge, and Wisdom"

**Conference on
International Exchange of Professionals**

**Shenzhen, China**

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**November 4, 2011**

Good morning.

I am honored to have been invited to share keynote remarks at this exciting conference. Today marks an important and serious effort to reflect upon the goal of sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development. In particular, it calls for us to reflect upon how talent, knowledge, and wisdom can best be aggregated from around the world in service to that important goal.

I believe that it is appropriate for this conference to be held here in Shenzhen. For the past 30 years, Shenzhen has been an international symbol of Progress and Change. This city is charged with the special mission of creating China's future. And for that reason, it has a significant responsibility to help create the world's future.

When we look at Shenzhen's accomplishments so far, there is much to be proud of. This city has become an innovation hub for technologies such as lighting and batteries. And it has been deeply and publicly committed to a process of thoughtful growth and development; I myself have been deeply impressed by the way in which the city consulted widely and integrated cutting-edge principles of bioclimatic design and sustainable urbanism into the development of Pingshan Central District.

For me personally it has been a privilege these past three years to participate in one piece of Shenzhen's efforts. Peking University's branch

campus in University Town has been established with the values of internationalism and interdisciplinary cooperation at its core. Our School of Transnational Law was created to define a new approach to legal education. We built upon a fusion of the best features of twentieth century American and Chinese legal education. And then we innovated to respond to the special new requirements of the twenty-first century global legal profession. Participating in this process has been one of the most intellectually stimulating experiences of my life.

In my remarks this morning I would like to explore with you the special challenges of aggregating "talent, knowledge, and wisdom" from around the world. I will first explain why I think of them as three very different tasks that pose three very different sets of challenges. I will then offer a few ideas about steps we might all take to surmount those challenges together.

When it comes to aggregating talent, knowledge, and wisdom from around the world, I think that the simplest element is knowledge. A substantial percentage of what human beings have come to know has been recorded – as text, or as images – in ways that are now easy to share. Whether the knowledge concerns the structure of the atom, the benefits of crop rotation, or the history of income inequality, information technology and telecommunications technology have dramatically reduced the barriers to acquiring and aggregating knowledge.

To be sure, some barriers remain. On our campus, we have invested less in printed books and journals, and more in digital subscriptions. But our students and faculty will tell you that, despite our subscriptions, they do not in fact have world class access to all the materials covered by those subscriptions. Sometimes it takes a very long time for knowledge to appear on their screens. Sometimes they worry that the knowledge might never appear at all.

The problem is partly one of bandwidth. Demand for broadband access has increased so fast that circuits are overloaded. Any community that wants to be on the cutting edge has to commit itself to continuously investing in its network, so that every citizen has world-class access to the world's storehouse of knowledge.

Of course, it also bears mention that the digital era has created a very different challenge for the project of knowledge aggregation. I am speaking now of the problem of false knowledge, misinformation, factual assertions that are in fact the opposite of reality. It is not hard to find web sites asserting with 100% confidence that the singer Elvis Presley is still alive and did not die in 1976, that global warming and evolution are complete hoaxes, and that Barack Obama's birth certificate is forged. And it is equally easy to find so-called photographs of the corpse of Osama Bin Laden.

When we speak of aggregating the world's knowledge, we mean aggregating real knowledge, not aggregating lies that masquerade as knowledge. Is there a way to create some kind of screen that would block out the false and only admit the truth? The legacy of human history says there is not; indeed, such efforts have generally proven more likely to interfere with the project of human advancement than to promote it. Instead, the solution must lie in educating the consumers of information to be critical. We must teach our children not to believe every image they see or every assertion that they read. We need to nurture in all our citizens a sense of healthy skepticism: not so believing that it is easily fooled, but not so doubtful that it fails to give proper weight to real evidence.