

# Speech: Shaping the future

Distinguished guests – good evening. It is a real pleasure to welcome you all, to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the global Chevening scholarship programme.

This is my second visit to China since becoming Minister for Asia and the Pacific just over a year ago.

In that time I have been fortunate enough to visit nearly all the countries in the region, and I always make of point of meeting Chevening alumni scholars wherever I can.

Hearing about their positive experiences; the contacts they have made; and above all seeing the affection they have for the UK has left me in no doubt that this is an immensely valuable programme, for all our countries.

Minister Field with Chevening Alumni

I am proud that this year we are celebrating the 35th anniversary of the launch of the programme.

In that time we have funded over 50,000 scholars to study at top universities across the UK. More than 4,000 of those from China.

Our Alumni network now stretches not just to China, or Asia, but across the world. Its influential membership is made up of Presidents and Prime Ministers, tech pioneers and business leaders, academics and activists.

Many of you in the room are already part of that influential network, and I hope that many more of you will join it when applications for places on the 2019 scholarship scheme open on 6 August.

The China Chevening scholarship programme is not only designed to develop the potential of talented individuals. It is also designed to strengthen the close personal ties between our countries, for many years to come.

Of course our relationship is already strong, and when our Prime Minister met President Xi and Premier Li in China in January, they committed to deepening our partnership even further.

The UK and China are deepening those partnerships across a range of industries, and right across government – with visits to China not only from the Prime Minister, but also the Chancellor and the Trade Secretary.

Together we are determined to make the most of this Golden Era, to deliver benefits to both our countries.

During my visit I have seen first and how our diplomats, our businesses and our people across the region, are working together to make that happen.

Since the first UK Consul General arrived more than 140 years ago, the UK has played a significant part in helping Chongqing realise its ambitions.

Today I met with Vice Mayor Wu Cunrong to discuss more ways in which the UK can support Chongqing's future.

Trade and investment is a big part of that future, and we have already seen an increase of more than 2.1% in trade last year alone.

So I am delighted that last month the UK signed an agreement with the Chongqing Commerce Commission focused on increasing our business links.

British companies are already well established in Chongqing, across a range of sectors, from manufacturing to real estate.

And in the technology sector we are supporting Chongqing's Big Data Intelligence Strategy, to encourage more high-tech companies to set up here.

Ultimately of course, it is the relationships between people that guarantee any successful relationship.

I know that you have a special word for it 'Guanxi' [Gwan-shee].

And there is a growing number of people from this region of China who want to make connections in the UK.

In 2017, more than 36,000 people from south west China applied for visas. They join a growing number of Chinese people visiting the UK for study, business and pleasure.

The Chevening programme is just part of the work we are doing to strengthen the ties between the UK and China.

I am pleased to see representatives sponsored by the Newton Fund here. This programme brings together the best researchers and innovators from UK and China to tackle global challenges, and has supported over 800 joint projects since 2014.

To those scholars who are already part of the alumni network, I hope that you will nurture the connections you made during your time in the UK.

To those of you who would like to join the prestigious Chevening network when applications open next month – if you would like to find out more about Chevening or any other of our programmes, please speak to our team at the Consulate General.

I hope that you will play your part in shaping the future of the China UK Global Partnership in this very special Golden Era.