



**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY**

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**AT**

**THE CHINA CONFERENCE: SOUTHEAST ASIA 2025  
*INNOVATING FOR TOMORROW: STRENGTHENING  
ASEAN-CHINA ECONOMIC TIES***

**17 FEBRUARY 2025 | MONDAY | 9.00AM  
ST. REGIS HOTEL, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA**

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan salam Sejahtera.

1. Terima kasih kepada pihak penganjur khususnya South China Morning Post. Menteri-menteri dan rakan-rakan kerana menjayakan acara pada hari ini. Ini satu permulaan yang sangat menarik bagi negara Malaysia kerana ia memberikan satu pendekatan baru dan juga pengenalan terhadap kegiatan kita sepanjang tahun tatkala mempengerusikan ASEAN. Saya percaya kerjasama yang bermula dengan Hong Kong dan negara China merupakan suatu permulaan yang sangat bererti kepada negara kita.

**The Honourable Mr. C Y Leung, Vice Chairman Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Former Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region;**

**Ministers;**

**His Excellency Ouyang Yujing, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to Malaysia;**

And of course, the family of South China Morning Post, who has been extremely kind as an important voice for Asia, admirable function, impeccable media credentials, and we must take this opportunity to express our profound thanks and appreciation what we have done.

2. Now, of course, it is a privilege for me to join you today, this China Conference Southeast Asia 2025. This is not just an ordinary conference, because it is a crucial platform for dialogue, cooperation and leadership at the time of significant global uncertainties and transformation.
3. Malaysia, of course, stands at the heart of this transformation, we don't want and i'm sure we are not best mere bystanders in the shifting high types of geopolitics and economics.

4. We are active participants working with our partners, firstly, ASEAN, secondly, in the region and politically so China. To build a future that is **resilient, innovative and just**.
5. ASEAN must move beyond reacting to global shifts. Our success depends on how well we integrate new technologies, startling, unprecedented and challenging. Develop robust economic frameworks and secure a more **equitable and sustainable** future for all. China i think repeatedly, C. Y Leung said too, so Catherine have been ASEAN's most significant economic partner for years, and this relationship will continue to be a cornerstone of our regional stability.
6. However, as global economic dynamics evolve, our engagement must also adapt to new challenges and opportunities. This means that we must move beyond traditional trade and investment figures and focus on a partnership that is transformational and future oriented.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

7. The next phase of ASEAN China Economic Cooperation must be driven by strategic technological collaboration, sustainable growth and human capital development. This has been I think generally the consensus where we discussed with the leadership in Hong Kong and particularly with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang and Chinese leaders. And we are of course fortunate to have that sort of not only enhanced bilateral relations, but they are sort of forging that understanding and comradeship between our colleagues and in ASEAN and the region and particularly as I have alluded to earlier, with the China's leadership.
  
8. We must therefore embrace and support in specific areas, particularly integration of Artificial Intelligence into regional supply chains, ensuring that ASEAN remains at the forefront of digital economy. At the same time, expanding cooperation in renewable energy, green industries and sustainable infrastructure is vital in fostering long term resilience and environmental responsibility.

9. I alluded to earlier about our major focus in ASEAN, which includes ASEAN Energy Green from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Sarawak to Sabah and the Philippines, particularly Southern Philippines.
10. So, you see this collaboration, collaborative efforts, sub regional, regional, ASEAN and beyond in energy transition, new energy, digital transformation, which has been the main focus. But this of course would have to include the **empowerment of ASEAN's workforce**, equipping our people with the necessary skills to navigate and thrive in an evolving digital landscape. Now our ASEAN's connectivity with China must also extend beyond enhancing trade efficiency. You must drive shared prosperity, and again consistent with the vision spounded repeatedly by President Xi Jinping.
11. Now, Malaysia's position is clear. We remain non aligned in the ASEAN major thrust in our foreign policy is the principle of centrality to ensure that we remain fiercely independent

to be able to engage with all countries, traditional partners in the West and the new emerging force, particularly China in the East together with the other countries in Asia.

12. We reject economic coercion and unilateral actions that undermine the regional stability. We support a rule based multilateral system that ensures fairness, transparency and representation for all, particularly the global South. **ASEAN must also expand its global engagement beyond traditional partners.** ASEAN General is a trading group of trading nations. That's precisely the reason why we have now expanded to for example, the Gulf Cooperation Council and we will be hosting the ASEAN GCC conference in May this year. And of course, China would be an important player in this regard.
13. And this of course BRICS and other emerging economies. It is about **ensuring ASEAN strategic relevance in a multi polar world.** Now, by diversifying its partnership, Asia can enhance its economic resilience, step into new investment opportunities and play a more proactive role in shaping global governance frameworks.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

14. ASEAN economic resilience will depend on how effectively we navigate 3 critical challenges. **First, supply chain disruptions and diversification.** ASEAN must become a reliable hub for global trade and investment by reducing vulnerabilities and to external shocks. Strengthening our industrial base through investments in advanced manufacturing, semiconductors and green technologies will be essential.
15. **Second, energy security and sustainability.** I made reference earlier to the ASEAN Energy Grid and renewable energy investments that will be central to ensuring that economic growth is climate conscious and long term oriented. Malaysia's target of 70% renewable energy by 2050 will serve as a benchmark for ASEAN's broader sustainability efforts.
16. **Third, the digital economy and artificial intelligence.** The ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement must serve as a catalyst for regional transformation by prioritising



AI governance, cybersecurity and digital inclusivity. To ensure that all ASEAN member states can fully harness the benefits of technological advancements, we must establish common standards for data protection, facilitate seamless cross-border digital trade and invest in capacity-building initiatives that bridge the digital divide. By fostering a secure, innovative and inclusive digital ecosystem, ASEAN can position itself at the forefront of the global digital economy, driving sustainable growth and shared prosperity in collaboration with our friends in Hong Kong, China, and beyond.

17. **ASEAN's moment is now.** We must act with urgency, unity and ambition to secure a prosperous future for all.
18. This is **not a time for incrementalism or short-term thinking.** It is a time for **bold decisions, transformative partnerships and a shared commitment to long-term prosperity.**

19. We are ready to collaborate with our colleagues in **ASEAN with clarity and conviction**. But leadership is not the responsibility of governments alone. Of course we have here **businesses, academics, media and entrepreneurs, civil societies** must all play a role in shaping a future that is **inclusive, sustainable and resilient**.
20. Now, as we deepen our role in ASEAN and strengthen collaboration with China, I urge all of you to **be part of this vision**. Let us build a future **based on trust, innovation and shared aspirations**.

*Xie xie ge wei.*

Thank you.