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Treat young Chinese well

His word of advice: Try to win over China's next generation

By Jeremy Au Yong

THE key to the relationship between China and the United States may lie right in the Americans' backyard, said Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew on Wednesday.

Speaking during a dialogue at the fifth anniversary dinner of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy on Wednesday night, he said that those concerned about whether China will rise peacefully need to worry, not about the current generation of Chinese leaders, but their children and grandchildren - people like the thousands of Chinese students currently studying in the US.

He said: 'I tell my American friends, I won't worry about them (China) today. You've got tens of thousands of Chinese students. You give them a bad time, they will go home and nurse a grievance. But if you accept them, it's a different world.'

In particular, he said that these young Chinese need to feel connected to the world as stakeholders, for example in negotiations on global warming.

'If I were the US, I would spend time to make sure the mindset of the younger generation is not one of hostility, but one of acceptance that you are a stakeholder.'

As for the current generation, he said he was confident they wanted peace after going through events like the Great Leap Forward and a Cultural Revolution gone mad.

As for how China could convince the world it can rise peacefully, MM Lee suggested starting with a bit of branding. 'I would not use the word 'peaceful rise'. In Chinese it sounds okay, but in English it sounds like you are rising like a mushroom; you scare people. Why not call it a cultural renaissance?'

In the event, the Chinese used the term 'peaceful development'. Mr Lee also took time to reflect on the changes he saw in China after some 32 visits to the country since 1976.

And as the country developed, he noted, its relationship with Singapore also changed. China used to ask him for advice in the past, but not anymore.

'Now we're talking at a different level. The relationship is at a more realistic level. You can't ask me with four million people to give advice to 1.3 billion people.'

Read the full story in Thursday's edition of The Straits Times.

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