The Chinese people's understanding of the new direction of U.S. policy toward China leads them to believe that the party was right all these years in saying that the American Government is controlled by rich capitalists. All you have to do is offer them a chance to make money and anything goes.

27.3 President Clinton Reevaluates Human Rights as Element of China Policy, May 27, 1994

In his first years in the White House President Clinton stressed human rights as an element of American foreign policy. However, when it came to pursuing this policy in the framework of the debate about the renewal of China's Most Favored Nation (MFN) status in the spring of 1994, the Clinton administration changed its tack: It decided to "delink" human rights and, instead, pursue a policy of "engagement" that was designed to perpetuate the expansion of economic ties with China while promising that moral suasion would continue to be employed to address rights violations.

Our relationship with China is important to all Americans. We have significant interests in what happens there and what happens between us.

China has an atomic arsenal and a vote and a veto in the U.N. Security Council. It is a major factor in Asian and global security. We share important interests, such as in a nuclear-free Korean peninsula and in sustaining the global environment.

China is also the world's fastest-growing economy. Over $8 billion of United States exports to China last year supported over 150,000 American jobs.

I have received Secretary Christopher's letter recommending, as required by last year's executive order—reporting to me on the conditions in that executive order. He has reached a conclusion with which I agree, that the Chinese did not achieve overall significant progress in all the areas outlined in the executive order relating to human rights, even though clearly there was progress made in important areas, including the resolution of all emigration cases, the establishment of a memorandum of understanding with regard to how prison labor issues would be resolved, the adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other issues.

Nevertheless, serious human rights abuses continue in China, including the arrest and detention of those who peacefully voice their opinions and the repression of Tibet's religious and cultural traditions.

The question for us now is, given the fact that there has been some progress
The new direction of U.S. policy initiated by the Clinton administration was right all these years in focusing on human rights rather than being guided by rich capitalists. All you need is money and anything goes.

Clinton Reevaluates Human Rights

President Clinton stressed human rights as a key component of his policy. However, when it came to the debate about the renewal of Most Favored Nation (MFN) status in the spring of 1994, the administration decided to “delink” human rights from MFN status. This approach, designed to preserve diplomatic relations with China while promising to address rights abuses, was met with mixed reactions from all Americans. We have significant differences between us.

The Clinton administration also vetoed the U.N. Security Council’s human rights resolution on the grounds of global security. We share important interests with China and in sustaining the global economy. Over $8 billion of United States goods are sold to China, amounting to over 150,000 American jobs.

In the meantime, the administration was recommending, as required by the executive order, that it be linked to the conditions in that executive. In the executive order, clearly there was progress made in the area of human rights. The Voice of America, increased support for nongovernmental organizations working on human rights in China, and the development, with American business leaders, of a voluntary set of principles for business activity in China.

I don’t want to be misunderstood about this. China continues to commit very serious human rights abuses. Even as we engage the Chinese on military, political, and economic issues, we intend to stay engaged with those in China who suffer from human rights abuses.

The United States must remain a champion of their liberties.

I believe the question, therefore, is whether we continue to support human rights in China but how we can best support human rights in China and advance our other very significant issues and interests. I believe we can do it by engaging the Chinese...

The actions I have taken today to advance our security, to advance our prosperity, to advance our ideals, I believe are the important and appropriate ones. In other words, this is in the strategic economic and political interests of both the United States and China, and I am confident that over the long run this decision will prove to be the correct one.