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Opening Remarks for the Ostrom Symposium on the Study of
the Commons, Governance, and Collective Decision

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

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COVER SLIDE. INTRODUCTIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you very much, Professor Man.

I am delighted to be back in Beijing and back at the IU China Global Gateway Office, which I had the pleasure of opening in May of 2014. And it is also a great pleasure to be here to celebrate and honor the legacy of the late Elinor Ostrom in the company of so many distinguished Chinese students and scholars who have been profoundly influenced by the theories and methods associated with and developed by “Lin” (as she was and will always be known to many of us), and her husband, Vincent.

Professor Ostrom had a profound impact on development studies through her work on public choice, institutionalism, and the commons. Her work had—and continues to have—a major influence on scholars from around the world, and she was a loyal and caring colleague and mentor to many, many scholars and students. Many of you know the work of the Ostroms through their numerous groundbreaking publications. Others of you were students of Lin or Vincent, and a number of you are graduates of Indiana University. The work in which all of you are engaged in a continuation of the Ostrom’s remarkable legacy, and it is an honor to be with you today.

I am joined on this trip to China, my eighth as president of Indiana University and my 10th overall, by a number of IU colleagues. In addition to being here to help launch this morning's symposium, we will meet with Chinese alumni of IU here in Beijing and Shanghai, and we will meet with the leaders of a number of China's leading universities, including Tsinghua University, to renew and strengthen our partnerships.

SLIDE 1. CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF ELINOR AND VINCENT OSTROM

On this exact day seven years ago, my wife Laurie and I were in Stockholm, Sweden with our friend and colleague, Lin Ostrom, as Lin was about to receive the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.

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A few days later, on December 10th, 2009, we were there as the King of Sweden formally presented Lin with what is officially known as the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. She received the award, of course, "for her analysis of economic governance, especially the commons." She was the first woman and the first political scientist to have received this honor—and she remains the only woman to have received the Nobel Prize in Economics.

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Even before she received the Nobel Prize, Lin was a living legend at Indiana University, and she was well known around the world as a leading social scientist, and as a gifted, incisive, and creative scholar. During her distinguished career, Lin achieved the heights of distinction and brought great honor to Indiana University. We were incredibly fortunate to have had the benefit of Lin's outstanding work as a teacher, researcher, advisor, and administrator at Indiana University for nearly five decades.

With her passing in 2012, we lost an irreplaceable and magnificent treasure.

She and her late husband, Vincent Ostrom, are deeply missed, but we take consolation in knowing that their legacy truly will live on in a number of meaningful ways.

Their legacy endures through the Vincent and Elinor Ostrom Workshop as it continues to bring together scholars who probe the inner workings of human institutions. Many of you who are here today have spent time at the Workshop as visiting scholars or students.

The Ostrom's legacy endures through the hundreds of their former graduate students who are now working around the globe as scholars, researchers, development practitioners, and advisors—including, again, many of you who are working in these capacities here in China.

SLIDE 4. PROFESSOR ELINOR OSTROM: COLLABORATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Lin and Vincent fostered and created a vibrant and innovative intellectual community during their many years at Indiana University.

Although many of you knew Lin—and all of you are very familiar with her life and work—I would like to take a moment to offer a few highlights of her long and illustrious career.

Lin received her Bachelors of Arts degree with Honors in Political Science from the University of California-Los Angeles in 1954. The next year, she took a job in personnel management in Boston then returned to Los Angeles for a similar position. Ultimately, she completed a master's in political science in 1962 and a doctorate degree in 1965, both at UCLA.

Upon graduation, Lin came to Indiana University as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Government. We were most fortunate and grateful that she called IU her

academic home for the remainder of her career. Over the course of a few years, she became a full professor, and the Department of Government became the Department of Political Science.

From 1980 to 1984, she served as chair of the department—the first woman to hold that position—and as acting chair from 1989 to 1990. She would eventually hold the title of Arthur F. Bentley Professor of Political Science in IU's College of Arts and Sciences and she also served as a professor in IU's School of Public and Environmental Affairs. In 2010, she was appointed to the rank of Distinguished Professor at Indiana University.

SLIDE 5. THE OSTROM WORKSHOP

In 1973, Lin co-founded the Workshop on Political Theory and Policy Analysis with her husband, Vincent. The workshop has served as a model for collaborative, interdisciplinary scholarship. It continues to bring scholars together from around the world to answer some of the world's most vexing questions: questions related to water resources, peace-building, environmental pollution, democracy, and governance.

In 2003, both Vincent and Elinor were jointly honored by the Atlas Economic Research Foundation with Lifetime Achievement Awards in honor of their individual and collective contributions to the Workshop. In 2009, after serving for 36 years as co-director of the Workshop, Lin became Senior Research Director. In 2012, we renamed the Workshop in honor of Lin and Vincent.

SLIDE 6. RESEARCH FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING REAL-WORLD PROBLEMS

Professor Ostrom's work, as you know, focused on research that addressed real-world problems. She and her students, for example, studied the social organization of police departments at a time when no one had conducted such studies. Using rigorous

methods, she showed that smaller police units were often better integrated with the communities they served and more responsive to their needs—but that the optimal scale of police services depended on the particular service. The best social organization for each service had to be determined on a case-by-case basis by the people most closely involved. This important work showed how organizational theory can offer insight into public administration of local police services.

She was also, of course, largely responsible for the development of the study of the commons. The field has matured remarkably over the last 25-30 years and Lin was an instrumental, driving force behind its growth. Her landmark book, *Governing the Commons*, dispelled the conventional wisdom that the best arrangement for managing common property was either privatization or government control. Incidentally, Indiana University will celebrate its 200th anniversary in 2020. That year will also be the 30th anniversary of the publication of *Governing the Commons*, and the 20th anniversary of its translation into Chinese and its publication here in China.

In all of her work, Lin used an impressive and rigorous array of social science methodologies—for example, econometrics and game theory. But she always placed an emphasis on field research that sought to take seriously the capacity of people in local communities to solve their own problems with appropriate help.

SLIDE 7. AWARDS AND HONORS

Lin was a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Academy of Political and Social Science. She was a member of the National Academy of Sciences and of the American Philosophical Society. She served as president of the American and the Midwest Political Science Associations, the International Association for the Study of Common Property, and the Public Choice Society.

Of course, Lin also served on a great many advisory boards, served on the editorial boards of nearly two dozen leading journals, and received countless awards—in addition to the Nobel Prize—honoring her scholarship and her service.

In 2010, I had the great pleasure of awarding to Lin and Vincent the Indiana University Medal, the highest award Indiana University has to give. It is awarded at the recommendation of the president and with the approval of the Trustees, and had at that time previously been given only 10 times in the university's history.

SLIDE 8. A PROLIFIC SCHOLAR, A CARING AND LOYAL COLLEAGUE AND MENTOR

As a scholar, Lin was prolific, publishing—as author and editor—at least thirty books on organizational theory, political science, and public administration. A select list of her presentations and published articles and chapters runs over thirty pages long.

In addition to all of this, Lin Ostrom was a person who combined brilliance with collegiality, and exuberance with modesty. She epitomized what it means to be a scholar and a true colleague. She shared her success with others as generously as she shared her ideas.

Lin and Vincent's generosity to Indiana University was extraordinary as well, with gifts, including Lin's Nobel Prize funds, totaling many millions of dollars. They also included a remarkable collection of Native American artifacts which they collected over many decades.

Beyond her passion for the epochal academic study of the intersections between economics and societal institutions, which she and her husband, Vincent, pursued throughout their remarkable careers at Indiana University, Lin's love for her students

and the enduring support she provided to her colleagues will leave a lasting legacy that stretches well beyond IU.

SLIDE 9. THE OSTROMS IN CHINA

And as today's symposium demonstrates very well, the Ostrom's legacy continues to thrive here in China.

The Ostroms first visited China in 1997, and returned again in 2007, 2009, and 2011 to participate in conferences and give lectures across the country.

During Lin's 2011 trip to China, she visited Tsinghua University, Renmin University, Peking University, and the China University of Political Science and Law here in Beijing, as well as at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou. Former Workshop students or visiting scholars have faculty positions at all of these universities.

The members of the Chinese Ostrom Society, which promotes the Ostroms' ideas and methods on resource management and polycentric governance, hosted a dinner for Lin during her 2011 visit. Many members of this society, of course, are here today, and your admirable commitment to continuing Lin's work is testament to the influence she had on colleagues and scholars around the world.

Her work has had a major impact in public policy circles here in China, and has been cited by Chinese scholars writing on topics ranging from forestry management and water resource management to political economy and institutional economics. And of course, as you understand very well, Lin's ideas on governing common pool resources will continue to be crucial for China as the country works to manage its commons in the face of rising expectations and demand.

A number of distinguished attendees at today's symposium are also directly involved in sustaining the Ostrom's legacy through their work of translating the Ostroms' books into Chinese. With us today, in addition to other translators of their work, is Professor Wang Jianxun, an IU alumnus now on the faculty of the China University of Political Science and Law. Professor Wang translated Vincent Ostrom's book, *The Meaning of American Federalism*, into Chinese in 2003. Also with us is Professor Mao Shoulong of Renmin University, who did post-doctoral work at IU at the Ostrom Workshop. Professor Mao and his academic team have translated more than a dozen of the Ostroms' works and facilitated their publication here in China.

SLIDE 10. CONCLUSION

Lin and Vincent Ostrom had a kind of family affection for China because they have such a "big family" in China made up of so many colleagues and former students. I know they would be humbled by this symposium and deeply gratified by your presence here today.

Their remarkable legacy endures through the work of scholars like all of you, who carry on their work by asking constructive questions that challenge conventional wisdom; by gathering empirical data and conducting research that can influence decision-makers in business, government, and civil society; and by inviting us all to consider new perspectives on critical issues.

Thank you very much for being here and best wishes for a very successful symposium.