



NZCFS Annual Prize-Giving for Chinese Language Students Christchurch Branch 2 December 2005

“Say Hello to Me in Chinese!”

Speech by Flora Chan Statham, CLF Founding Trustee

Your Excellency Ambassador Zhang, Madam Wang Xiaofang, President Madgin, Ms Pierson, members of the New Zealand China Friendship Society, our young linguists, distinguished guests.

It is my honour to be able to represent the Chinese Language Foundation tonight and my great pleasure to be part of this happy occasion.

Tonight I am fortunate to be amongst friends who believe in building a better understanding between the two cultures. I am also fortunate to be among the talented linguists who are the future champions of the cause.

I have to tell our young friends here that I am from southern China and we are not known for speaking beautiful Chinese. Likewise, my English is far from perfect.

Despite this, I know that I have, beyond any doubt, benefited greatly from a bilingual education. My being able to speak and write in both English and Chinese has given me opportunities that I would not have had otherwise.

When I was growing up, the world was learning English as their second language. Now though, it seems that the situation has changed.

Official sources from China estimate that over 30 million students around the world are learning Chinese as a second language. Over 2,000 schools in 100 countries teach Chinese as a foreign language.

Hanyu, the Chinese language, has become the third most important language in the United States, the second most important language in Australia and Japan.

Worldwide, in the last four years, the number of people taking the Chinese Proficiency Tests for Chinese language has increased fivefold.

The Chinese government, via the office of HANBAN, is going to set up a hundred Confucius Institutes around the world to promote Chinese culture and language. These are partnerships formed with tertiary institutions and one such institute is being established in Auckland.

The China Bridge project, a major undertaking, brings young people every year from all over the world to China to take part in a competitive but friendly immersion programme.

As China's cultural and economic strength continues to grow, it would surely be an advantage for everyone to learn some Chinese.

In order not to be left behind, we have to start teaching young people to be China literate, and to give them the tools needed to compete in the global economy.

Encouraging and Enabling New Zealanders to Learn Chinese

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This is the vision of the Chinese Language Foundation, which was set up in May 2004. It is a charity which promotes the study of Chinese as the second language of choice for New Zealanders of all ethnic backgrounds. It acts as a portal and a facilitator to encourage, enable and support the study of Chinese.

As you all know, teaching Chinese to non-native speakers involves much more than what goes on in the classroom, and it is not just about professional qualifications for teaching, curriculum development or financial resources, although all these are important ingredients for success.

Above all else we need to create an environment in which the teaching as well as learning of the language will flourish.

We need to lobby at the top, and build strong and influential relations with leaders in government, educational institutions, parents and media. We need to go looking for champions.

Since success breeds further success, we need to benchmark the quality and inventiveness of the teaching. At the same time we need to create critical mass throughout the supply chain, from the pupils to parents to principals and the school boards. We need to encourage conversation and dialogue from local to regional as well as national centres.

Another important task for us at the Foundation is to invigorate the profession and identify and develop talented Chinese language teachers, to showcase them and to make them feel wanted and rewarded.

We will also focus on fundraising to get more resources for the whole spectrum of teaching such as curriculum and professional development, teaching aid, and supplementary cultural programmes and activities.

In Auckland the Foundation has initiated a network of schools teaching Chinese, called the CLF Schools. They meet and workshop and participate in programmes like our upcoming residential summer school, and share information on language conferences, papers, news and e-learning tools at our online email forum.

On the resource front, we have secured support from donors and sponsors and we were awarded an Auckland SKYCITY Community Trust grant in September this year. We are also deeply grateful that the New Zealand China Friendship Society has given us support early on.

The Foundation is a fledgling charity and we have a long journey ahead of us. In 2004, there were nearly 1,000 Year 1 to 8 students learning Chinese and over 1,200 year 9-13 students learning Chinese in New Zealand schools. So the potential to do more is enormous.

There are many sceptics who tell us that New Zealanders are not interested in foreign languages.

We believe the opposite is true. If we foster the opportunities and the environment for learning Chinese as a second international language, we are in fact providing a vehicle for cultural interaction, for communicating ideas as well as values. In other words, we will be fostering friendship among people from different cultural backgrounds

There is a great deal of the can-do spirit here in this country. If New Zealanders get to know that a second language, such as Chinese, is the key to a fascinating world, I am sure they will not be afraid to hold on to and use that key.

Thank you for inviting me, and good luck to our young friends.

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