



## **PRC Embassy Reception to Mark CLF's First Anniversary 17 May 2005**

### ***Respondent's Speech by Derek Firth, CLF Chairman***

Your Excellencies (Ambassador Chen and Mrs Chen), the Hon Trevor Mallard, the Hon Margaret Shields, Member of Parliament Patsy Wong, Secretary for Education Howard Fancy, and the numerous other very special guests here this evening.

It is my great pleasure, not only on behalf of the Chinese Language Foundation, but also on behalf of all of your guests, to thank Ambassador Chen and Mrs Chen and the senior officials of the Chinese Embassy for hosting this magnificent dinner function and to thank Minister Trevor Mallard and our Vice President Ian McKinnon for speaking.

It is the view of our Foundation that Chinese language education is a significant key to New Zealand's relationship, not only with China as a country, but with the wider Chinese speaking world.

Understanding the language will foster both cultural understanding and trade and economic links.

We believe this will give future generations of New Zealanders a competitive edge.

We are fortunate to have secured as our joint Patrons, Ambassador Chen being the Chinese Ambassador to New Zealand and his Excellency Tony Browne, the New Zealand Ambassador to China. We are also fortunate to have secured as our two Vice Patrons, Ian McKinnon one of our pre-eminent educators, having had a distinguished career as the Principal of Scotts College in Wellington; and as if that was not enough, he has now entered public life as a Wellington City Councillor, and John Graham, another of New Zealand's pre-eminent educators being a former Headmaster of Auckland Boys' Grammar and the immediate past Chancellor of the University of Auckland.

We are not alone in our endeavour to foster the learning of Chinese in New Zealand schools, but we do believe that there is a role for a neutral single-purpose Trust to act as a champion, facilitator and enabler of this endeavour.

To this end, it is essential that we attract the interest and support of both the New Zealand Ministry of Education and the Chinese Government.

Without that recognition and support we will be unable to serve any useful purpose.

We believe that we will be able to provide leadership in some areas and, at the very least, be a relevant consultative organisation in matters of curriculum and the recruitment of teachers. We believe we will be able to assist with the vision of professional development opportunities and support networks for teachers of the Chinese language.

We have already developed a network of six pilot primary schools in the Auckland area and we are hopeful this will be expanded as soon as possible in the Wellington Region.

The other Trustees and Board of Management persons here tonight are (identify one at a time) Anne Blackburn, Maylene Lai and Flora Chan Statham. Please feel free to direct any questions or comments to them and to me as the evening progresses.

Ian McKinnon, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to be one of our Vice Patrons and for speaking this evening.

Mr Mallard, your portfolio is, by definition, one of the most difficult. This is because everyone in New Zealand is an expert in the field of education. Despite that, you and your senior Ministry officials have brought to the education of New Zealanders an important sense of national pride and identity. Ironically, the enhancement of our own sense of identity is but a short step from appreciating the importance of bridging the language and other cultural gaps with other

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nations. China has come upon us rather quickly. Its economic and cultural strengths are certainly not going to diminish, but continue to grow. Thank you for recognising this and for extending your sincere support.

I am sure that our speakers will wish to join you and me in singling out our gracious hosts for particular focus. This is the second occasion on which you have kindly met us in Wellington; in addition, you have met us in Auckland. This dinner tonight provides a very important opportunity to underline the importance of our objectives. Ambassador, we thank you.

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