

Epilogue:

Peaceful Rise, Multiculturalism, and TCSL

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It is a great pleasure for me to congratulate the China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, or NOTCFL, on its timely actions in calling together this conference, whose function is to investigate the demands and challenges, and develop solutions for the teaching of Chinese in an ever-changing multicultural world. I believe that this conference is historically significant. Its existence alone substantiates the fact that the teaching of the Chinese language is not now merely a national Chinese issue, but has become an international concern. More importantly, as a third of its time will be devoted to exploring the future developments in “Teaching Chinese as a Second Language,” or TCSL, I predict that China’s policies for “Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language,” or TCFL, may progress from a demand for quantity and quality to a betterment of its fundamental concepts and ideology.

Meeting these winds of change head-on, I would like to address aspects concerning the inevitable evolution of TCSL in the modern, changing world. It is now a crucial, exciting time of change; I foresee several issues worthy of illumination and discussion. First and foremost, I am strongly convinced that promoting Chinese language education is, for China, an indispensable means for diplomatic relationship-building. Moreover, I feel it is the most impactful means by which China can assure and communicate to the rest of the world its intent for a peaceful rise in the world community. Second, TCSL is inherently beneficial to all nations of the world in various ways. Not only does it have intrinsic educational value in that it increases the knowledge base of students and widens their potentiality, TCSL may also play a pragmatic role in counterbalancing the potentially negative trends that are inevitably associated with cultural and economic globalization, and that threaten the well-being of society. Then, to further elaborate on the benefits that TCSL brings, I turn to the specific example of Canadian multiculturalism and policies of Second Language Education. I will close with some suggestions to the NOTCFL for initiatives that may aid in the continuing growth and adaptation of TCSL.

The dual factors of continuing economic globalization and the rapid and sustainable growth of China’s economy have spawned an intense worldwide interest in learning

Chinese languages. Hence, a vast assembly of over 300 policy-makers, educators, scholars, and experts from all over the world has been called together to speculate on the possible issues affecting the development of the Chinese language in the new millennium. Indeed, it is undeniable now that the teaching of Chinese is no longer an educational issue only for China and her people. It has inevitably become an international concern. As the introduction to the World Chinese Conference cites, "There are 25 million Chinese-language learners; more than 2,300 universities, and an increasing number of primary and middle schools in 85 countries around the world offer Chinese language courses."

Today, technology pervades every facet of society from lifestyle to industry and government. Over the last 20 years, technological advances have fostered intricate connections and close dependencies that are now taken for granted between nations and people throughout the world. Like it or not, we are all linked to each other for economic survival and social stability. In such a world, openness, trust, and mutual understanding between nations is of vital importance. However, the ability of a nation to function effectively within the global community depends on its citizens' language skills. Therefore, the onus lies on the government's encouragement of learning other nation's languages, and spreading knowledge of its own. Communication is the key, therefore the promotion of teaching and learning Chinese as a second language is central to China's commitment to advancing international understanding and trust. It is the responsibility of China, as it is of all nations on the globe, to enhance international cooperation for the benefit of all. In this way, it becomes evident that championing Chinese language education is China's vital contribution to international stability and sustainable economic growth. Indeed, it is the pivotal means through which China can concretely and effectively demonstrate its commitment to rise peacefully into prominence onto the world stage. There is no better way to cultivate enduring, mutually trustful, and cooperative international relationships than to make such a gesture of good neighbourly faith.

Perhaps Chinese citizens are wondering, "What is the benefit of promoting Chinese language education in other countries?" Similarly, these other nations may be asking, "What is the benefit of promoting Chinese language education in our own system?" Both questions can be answered in the same way. Learning Chinese can increase a student's career mobility, and enhance his understanding and appreciation of Chinese culture. Moreover, knowledge of languages is a necessity for both professional and private citizens who wish to succeed and fulfill their potential in modern life. It is, in any case, China's duty to provide help, support, and resources to Chinese language-learners in any country adapting Chinese language courses into its school curriculum.

Pragmatic benefits aside, the promotion of Chinese language education may have a weightier role to play in light of a fast-changing global environment subject to turbulent geopolitical and social change. The world we encounter today is similar to the vision of English writer George Orwell in his novel 1984, though not in his portrayal of a frightening, universal super-state. However, his other predictions on human living standards have

proven to be accurate by the intriguing advances of communications technology in the last two decades. Of these advances, television and the Internet have had the greatest impact upon every aspect of society. The concept of the global village—in terms of education, culture, economy, and way of life—has become more tangible than ever. The benefits of this smaller world are many, but they also come with a hidden cache of insidious and divisive trends. Technological advances relentlessly accelerate the processes of modernization, industrialization, and globalization everywhere. However, globalization leads too readily to extreme cultural and economic homogenization, and thus, loss of identity and individuality. Then, there is modernization, which too easily becomes a kind of Westernization predominated by purely capitalistic ideals. Societies that embrace industrialization to excess often fall prey to the pitfalls of utilitarianism. Second language education, and specifically Teaching Chinese as a Second Language, is perhaps an excellent counterbalance to these negative universal tendencies. Indeed, such programs are a culturally empowering embodiment of multiculturalism which in turn, embodies the very spirit of the democratic ideal.

The benefits of the promotion of Chinese language education in other countries is best demonstrated by the Canadian government's policies of multiculturalism and Second Language Education; specifically, by its implementation of TCSL, Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

Canada is a country of immigrants. Its federal policy actively promotes immigration. Every year about 200,000 people, that is about 17% of its total population of 29 million people, arrive in Canada with their own distinct languages and cultures. In order to preserve these diverse heritages, and in doing so, create a cultural mosaic and a more harmonious society, the Canadian federal policies of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism acknowledge the value of languages other than English and French, and emphasize aims such as combating racism, cross-cultural awareness, respect and appreciation.

To this end, numerous multilingual and multicultural newspapers, and television and radio stations have been federally licensed, and regulations and practices of Second Language Education and of International Language Education have been implemented at the provincial level. Thus, English and French are taught as official first languages, and all others are taught as second languages. The term "second language" is used because no language can be considered "foreign" in a country that has official policies of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism. Anyone is entitled to learn any language as his second language. Statistics show that there are currently 7 second languages, including Mandarin Chinese, offered as classes in the public school setting, and more than 45 languages are offered in heritage or international language programs outside the public school setting.

In British Columbia, for example, the provincial language education policy requires all students to take a second language in grades 5 through 8. Curricula for second language courses offered in grades 9 through 12 are ministry-authorized. Since 1996, formal curricula and academic credits for Mandarin, Japanese, German, Punjabi, and Spanish

have been developed. Varying formats have been implemented for province-wide examinations of second languages. At present, in the Greater Vancouver area, for example, every year there are roughly 4000 university and college students and 2,500 primary and secondary school students taking Chinese credit courses, 1,200 students taking the Provincial Mandarin Challenge Examination, 1500 students taking the Provincial Mandarin Examination, and more than 20,000 students enrolled in a Chinese language program outside the public school system.

The Canadian Second Language Education policies are strongly based on the conviction that the integration of such a program into basic education will provide students with more effective communication skills and pave the way for greater educational and career opportunities. It will help to develop deeper appreciation and respect for the identity, rights, and values of others, and engender confidence and self-esteem. Second Language Education provides students with the ability and opportunity to explore interdisciplinary areas of study (such as history, geography, music, art, literature, business, and political affairs); and thus, it serves to extend their capacities for creative and critical thought, and to deepen their insights into life.

Under the policies of Multiculturalism and Second Language Education, Canada has gradually become a strong and prosperous modern country, one that is respected as an unremitting guardian of international peace. Canadian society is uniquely harmonious with its diversity of cultures. Vancouver, BC has been chosen many times as the best city in the world to live in. In short, there can be no question as to the positive impact of Second Language Education to the growth and development of youth in BC and across Canada.

In closing, to help delineate the new role and advance the function of the China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in a multicultural world, I offer six suggestions:

An adjustment in mentality from TCFL to TCSL which will translate in practice to changes in policies, measures, theories, methods, and textbooks.

Creation of a Universal Chinese Language Website with electronic textbooks and teaching resources free for use or download by any person or institute for Chinese language teachers and learners worldwide.

Establishment of a Chinese Language Education Satellite Channel providing instructional TCSL programs in all levels and in various formats.

The immediate implementation of a Universal Chinese Language Proficiency Index in order to provide a standardized examination tool integrating various kinds of examinations for common reference.

The establishment of an International TCSL Database, in nature and function similar to

that of the Canadian National TCSL Database (<http://www.canadiantcslassociation.ca>), in order to provide accurate information and reference to the world.

The establishment of a World TCSL Association, comprised of representatives of TCSL Associations from every country in the world, in order to better integrate all international TCSL affairs under one umbrella.

Finally, I again congratulate China's timely insight in calling this conference and wish good prospects to come for TCSL.