



President's Report 2004 / 2006

Sometime last year, we were approached by our counterpart in Beijing, the China's People Association for friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), to explore the possibility of conducting short courses in Singapore for the benefits of the Secretary-Generals of their local chapters from various parts of China. As we know China is a big country, CPAFFC has under their administrations no less than 360 local Friendship Associations in all the provinces, autonomous regions for minority tribes, and major municipalities each with more than one million population.

After some preliminary discussions with them when I was visiting Beijing in September and again in October last year, it dawns on me that CPAFFC is planning to mount a major exercise to forge closer ties with the "ASEAN Ten" and Singapore is to be invited to play a facilitative role, i.e., to conduct courses with emphasis on "anything and everything" about ASEAN for all the local Sec-Gens under CPAFFC's umbrella. We are presently discussing this program with NTU and hope to arrive at some decision soon.

It is no surprise to us that they have chosen to solicit assistance from Singapore since it is a well-known fact that Singapore is not only a pioneer but also a strong advocate and activist of ASEAN grouping and solidarity since Day One.

I was given to understand that with the unanimous blessings from all the ten ASEAN Ambassadors-accredited to Beijing, including our own H.E. B G Chin Siat Yoon, CPAFFC has since caused the formation of the China-ASEAN Association, an official organization to be tasked to conduct multi-lateral as well as bilateral dialogues with China's neighbours in Southeast Asia.

For your information, the first China ASEAN Ten plus One meeting had just took place in Beijing on the 17 May 2006, exactly one month ago. I was invited to represent Singapore, together with Dr K.K. Phua, Messers T F Chung and Alan Chan. It was a very good meeting that provided a rare occasion for ASEAN brethrens to converge and share with each other experiences in the execution of our common agenda - Friendship with China. The result of the meeting was the signing of a "Declaration on China-ASEAN People to People Friendship and Cooperation" by all the ten ASEAN heads of delegation on the one part, and H.E. Madam Gu Xiulian, President of China ASEAN Association, representing China on the other part. The fact that Madam Gu is also Deputy President of the Chinese People's Congress, signifies clearly that China attaches great importance to her relationship with this particular region. It is indeed an extremely shrewd strategic move in geo-politics.

The reason that I have taken many minutes to report to you on this matter, it is because this development has created a totally new dimension to the current scenario. Instead of conducting a simple one to one dialogue on fixed agenda, we are now being elevated to a higher platform where consensus will have to be sought or built, because of the multiplicity of players (eleven in numbers) will be performing together on the same stage. To my mind, it may be more complicated, but it will also be more interesting and even beneficial. If the new modus operandis can achieve the

expressed objective of the signed "Declaration", i.e. "To improve the overall well being of the Ten plus One region through cooperation and joint undertakings in the field of economics, social and culture, by working towards the creation of a Zone of Friendship, Solidarity and Peace". Other decisions taken during the 10+1 meeting in Beijing were:

- a) Annual 10+1 Gathering alternating between China and an ASEAN country (by alphabetical order).
- b) China to organize a China-ASEAN Friendship Tour with a 15 car motorcade, starting from Beijing and driving through Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, Myanma, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore as the terminal point. The event is to take place in the last quarter of 2006.

Let us, together, look forward to the unfolding of this new chapter and give it our best wishes and supports.

During the year ended February 2006, we received 32 groups of visitors in total numbering more than 170 persons. They came from 7 provinces (provincial level) Beijing, Shanghai and 9 other cities, namely: Guangxi (3) Yunnan (3), Jilin (2) Shandong (1) Shanxi (1) Gansu (1) Hainan (1) Beijing (5) Shanghai (2) Weihai (5) and one each from Huangshan, Shangyu, Liaoyang, Zao-an, Yangzhou, Harbin, Dalian, Binzhou, mostly lead by their mayors.

2005 saw the 15th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relation between Singapore and China. We received in October an invitation from CPAFFC to send a delegation of 4/5 to Beijing for one week to take part in their celebration activities. Besides myself, our group included M/ssr T F Chung, Alan Chan, Oh Bin Cheng and William Cheng (Oh and Cheng joined the group in Beijing because they were then touring other parts of China.)

A surprise program our host lined up for us was a side trip to Guizhou where our Association donated some money back in 2004. There we witnessed how our donation was put to good use. The principal of Shanglang Primary School, Mr Liu Cao Jung went around publicizing the fact of the Singapore donation of RMB100, 000, and succeeded in raising a much larger sum of RMB600, 000 from two foundations, one of them was the famous Sung Qing Ling Foundation. Now this "pig sty" school has 3 modern concrete blocks (3 storeys each) to house its classrooms, offices and dormitory (8 rooms, 64 beds.) A plaque bearing our Association's name was affixed on the wall adjacent to the entrance of the dormitory.

During our visit a further sum of RMB 100,000 was donated to pave a mud track linking the school to the main road. This was again funded by the generous contributions from our members, to whom I say thank you very much.

In my capacity as Advisor to the Municipal Government of Weihai city, I was invited there earlier (15/9/05) to attend a series of celebration activities to commemorate the city being conferred the "Habitat Scroll of Honor" under the United Nation Human Settlement Program. My first visit to Weihai was in 1993, it was then a modest little town with 1 1/2 million people. Over slightly more than one decade, it has transformed itself into a well planned, green and modern metropolis, endowed with 1st class environment to deserve the 'Habitat Honor" from the United nations. As their advisor, I share their pride and said to them: A job well done. I must also thank our Mr Chwee Meng Chong for taking time off to keep me company during the trip.

Back home in Singapore, as expected, our Association was involved in a number of trade promotion symposiums. For one of them, from Weihai, we assumed the role of main organizer and managed to have the attendance of more than 160 people. The show was considered a success. On other cases, our role as co-sponsors was minimal; we were not involved in the Guangxi Trade Show because of its tremendous size and extensive involvements. The Guangxi contingent consisted as many as six hundred people from their own Region. But we were invited to take part in some of their activities.

Last year was the 600th anniversary of Admiral Zhenghe's first oversea expedition to the South Seas during the early part of the Ming Dynasty.

To commemorate this, hosts of events were staged both in China and in Southeast Asia countries where it was thought Admiral Zheng left behind some legacies (not adverse kinds). Through the assistance of our Mr Oh Bin Cheng, our Association was involved in co-sponsoring a students-exchange event with 600 students from China taking part in Singapore's program.

As regard to our six grand tours of China. I can only report: mission half accomplished. M/ssrs Alan Chan, Goh Boon Kok, Oh Bin Cheng and Ong Chu Meng did embark on their respective tour, but were only able to cover 14 out of the original 22 destinations due to unforeseen circumstances or time constrains. Dr K.K. Phua and Mr T F Chung have yet to be able to take time off to complete our program. I can only wish that they can complete the entire mission before the year ends. The six tour leaders, kindly take note.

The 13th "Spring in the City" Show which we co-sponsored duly took place in January this year. The opening ceremony was jointly officiated by Mr Chan Soo Sen, Minister of State for Trade, and H. E. Mr Zhang Yun, PRC Ambassador.

Our Lunar Chinese New Year celebration dinner was successfully held on 12/2/06. We had more than 30 Guests from PRC Embassy, including H.E. Mr Zhang and his wife. More than 110 people attended the function. There was some interesting entertainment. H. E. Zhang Yun also made his contribution with some Beijing operatic arias.

In my report to you last year, I once again raised the 7 point plan which I first introduced in my 2002 report. Point 7 was on the process of renewal. During the past year, I have indicated on many occasions that time has come for me to kick start the renewal process by stepping down and pass on the presidency of the Association to a successor. Today, I am very pleased to announce that Dr K K Phua has been so good in agreeing to succeed me as your next president. K.K is so well known to all of us here and to others that I am sure you will agree that his credentials need not my endorsement, nor any others for that matter.

For an organization like ours, it is desirable that a transition of this nature should be smooth, and changes minimal. Hence, I suggest that today's election of new management committee and office bearers, the entire team of incumbent committee, minus myself, for obvious reason, be preserved intact and be re-elected in totality. This will contribute greatly to continuity. Any necessary changes due to retirement or other reasons can be brought about in the future. Under my proposal, it only entails the following minimal changes in designations:

- a) Mr Alan Chan to succeed Dr KK Phua as Vice President
- b) Mr Ong Chu Meng to succeed Alan as Hon. Treasurer

- c) Ms Koh Sok Kheng to succeed Ong as Asst. Hon. Treasurer
- d) The New President to Co-opt one member to fill the one vacancy on the new committee.

I hope I would have your support, even if it were for the last time, when we get on to item 4 of today's agenda.

In conclusion, I must confess that I have thoroughly enjoyed my entire tenure as president of our Association over the past 13 years. I feel a very much enriched person especially in the aspect of human relationship. I gained in knowledge about China, through our friendship exchange activities. More importantly my entire outlook in life, though I do not anticipate many more years to enjoy, has been broaden by such an extent that now I consider myself to be a happy man. All that being said allow me to insist on saying a Big Thank You to all present here, because without your supports, past and present, not all these achievements would have been possible. Including, SIA YONG, a Happy man. Thank You.

Mr Sia Yong