

# GOING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

## First NZ Chinese Speech Competition – A Unique Opportunity for Students Learning Chinese

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There are many ways to reward hard working students and many opportunities for students to show their achievements. Having organized the first NZ Chinese Speech Competition together with Confucius Institute at University of Auckland and New Zealand Chinese Language Association, I cannot think of better way to hit two birds with one stone.

In May 2008, sponsored by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) China, and Asia: NZ as well, the Chinese National Language Adviser from ILANZ organized the first New Zealand Chinese Speech Competition. The purpose of this speech competition is to create a pleasant environment for Chinese language teaching and learning, to encourage more and more students to learn Chinese, to upgrade the understanding of Chinese Culture and language and to select the candidates going to China for the First Chinese Bridge: Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign High School Students.

The proposal of a speech Competition received a huge response from teachers of Chinese nationwide. Over 70 students took part in the regional speech competitions held in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland. Finally, 24 students, (10 from Christchurch, 7 from Wellington and 7 from Auckland) got the opportunity to compete for the three special prizes, three first prizes, eight second prizes and several third prizes. It was no surprise that Timo Feeney-Toebes from Wellington College, who joined the China Camp at Taiyuan, Shanxi for a 4-week immersion experience in 2008, won one of the special prizes together with two other students from Auckland. A grand ceremony was held at the Consulate General's Office in Auckland with the attendance of a lot of VIPs. The students felt it a great honour to receive the prizes and certificates from them. Nothing could be better than celebrating their success in this way.

Under the guidance of Mr Feng Yu from Wellington College, three special prize winners representing New Zealand secondary school students learning Chinese boarded their flight to Beijing on 14 July to take part in the First Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign High School Students in China. They were Timo Feeney-Toebes from Wellington College, Michelle Lee from Auckland International College and Chris Kim from ACG Senior College. They competed with 87 participants from 29 teams from 24 different countries. The New Zealand team came 9<sup>th</sup> and entered the semi-finals. Although they failed to reach the finals, their achievement is good enough to inspire students learning Chinese in their home country and to encourage them to work harder on the subject. Apart from winning the prizes, the unique opportunity will benefit them all their lives, just as Chris says:

I am grateful for this experience. This trip allowed me to meet many friends from all over the world, who now understand each other through the Chinese language, and share the same memories. It also helped me to understand the country China better, and made me realize that my Chinese language learning has a lot of room for improvement. Only after this trip, I realized that it is a great strength to be able to communicate in Chinese.

The 4-week scholarship at a university in China, sponsored by Hanban, will also upgrade their understanding of Chinese language and culture in the future.

Realising the importance of these kinds of opportunities, we have another round of activities in progress now. For 2009, 20 New Zealand students of Years 11 and 12 will have a 4-week immersion experience in Beijing and Shandong again.

For the photos related to the 1<sup>st</sup> NZ Chinese Speech Competition and the First Chinese Bridge—Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign High School Students, please visit the websites below:

- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/29274440@N07>
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/27459219@N07/>

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