

Teaching Chinese

New Millennium and Beyond

Chinese Language Conference July 2001 - Melbourne

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Through the generous assistance from NZALT, Asia 2000 Funding, I was able to attend this year's 7th National Chinese Language Teachers' Conference in Melbourne. The conference venue was at the prestigious Camberwell Grammar School in its new, spacious and comfortable auditorium. We were extremely spoiled by such grand and beautiful surroundings.

The 112 delegates were from six Australian States, plus five delegates from New Zealand: Mary Gray, President of the New Zealand Chinese Language Association from Wellington, Fan Chuntian and Yang Jinlan from Auckland, Jin Qiangfu and myself from Christchurch.

It was wonderful to mix and mingle with new acquaintances, to share and compare our experiences in teaching Chinese in both countries. Equally it was great to learn some new teaching methodologies through personal presentations or by using technology. Above all it was overwhelming to view mountains of resources produced by teachers of Chinese from all over Australia. Mary and I spent most of our free times looking through resources; we were like two little children (both grandmothers) with new toys!

Credit must be given to Stephen Lee, the Conference co-ordinator and his hard working and friendly team. The Pre-conference tour of Sovereign Hill, Ballarat, (which is the equivalent to our Shanty Town on the West Coast, but on a greater scale) was much appreciated by all those who went. The visits to the Chinese village and temple, gold mines and gold museum were certainly educational. After dinner, we saw the Sound and Light show "Blood on the Southern Cross", which enhanced what we had learned during the day. The show took us back to Sovereign Hill in the 1850s.

The conference was very well organised. We were informed by Academic speakers, and enriched by professional presenters, and high quality resources. We came back to New Zealand with new ideas and a new challenge for implementing technology in our classrooms. The China Book Display was one of the best I have seen on Chinese Section. As usual, Jillian Taylor's knowledge on Chinese CD ROMS was invaluable for all those present. During the conference, we were entertained by PEGS Chinese

Orchestra, Children's Choir and Dance groups. These musicians came out during the school holidays, and on a weekend to perform for us. We were touched by their enthusiasm and dedication!

Teaching Chinese in Australia in the New Millennium

The Opening speech was addressed by Professor Colin MacKerras, the author of "The Dragon Tongue" series. He pointed out some disappointing statistics regarding the teaching and learning of Chinese language at Tertiary levels. He emphasised that we need to tell the public that the Chinese language is not more difficult to learn than any other language. It is simply different. We need to stress positive images such as: Chinese language has no gender, no plural, no articles, and that its grammatical rules are simple to learn, i.e. verbs have no conjugations, etc. His overall conclusion for Australia: "We've done well, we could have done better. The Beijing Olympic Games will certainly help!"

Most of the delegates were able to attend only 3 of the 8 workshops. Proficient presenters including non-native teachers delivered their programs mostly in Chinese with confidence and fluency, which I found really amazing. I was impressed with the teachers' proficiency not only in Chinese but also in English. Most teachers in Australia are constantly upgrading their skills to keep up with 21st century progress. Some of the native Chinese teachers or background Chinese teachers whom I spoke to excel themselves by committing to higher education either through MA Education or Ph.D. Psychology.

Chineselinx and Careerlinx

Both Ramona Chua and John Crone are technology experts. This hands-on workshop reflects Victoria being the Information Centre when it comes to links between various educational sectors and information technology. The Chinese Language Website www.users.bigpond.com/chineselinx in Melbourne is something we in New Zealand should learn from. It is informative and user-friendly. John Crone (its Web designer) not only has the technical knowledge but is also fluent in Chinese. He is a real asset to Victoria Language Teachers. Check the above Website for Chineselinx, Careerslinx and Businesslinx. Internet-links with the business world demonstrate that teachers of Chinese in Victoria are at the forefront with progress.

Here are only a few of the benefits of Chineselinx, Students are able:

- to publish and exchange work, chat or correspond with pen pals in China.
- to browse through papers and magazines from China.
- to access information about career opportunities in China.

What's "Cool" in Chinese Multimedia

This section was presented by dynamic Jeffrey Goonan. Fluent in Chinese, and a very confident teacher, he includes multimedia in his teaching programs, which is a very impressive skill. Most of us watched him with admiration.

Songs in the Primary Classroom

Chui Ying Ewe received a Primary teacher's award. She is an enthusiastic, positive and well-organised teacher. All those participating in this workshop left with some new ideas and resources to be used in our classrooms. There has been a significant increase in the teaching of Chinese at Victoria schools. That is due to teaching Chinese at the younger levels, at Primary schools. Perhaps it is time for New Zealand to adopt the same system.

In order to achieve the above, we need also to understand that the Australian Education Ministry assist their teachers, and there is A LANGUAGE POLICY in Australia, which we desperately need in New Zealand! In Victoria for example there is LOTE Project and Resource grants - each year schools are invited to apply for a golden opportunity for teachers to produce excellent resources to share with their colleagues. Obviously all the assistance from the Ministry has paid it off!

There also exists a Standing Committee on Educational Cooperation, which is a very strong and committed group of people. Teachers have developed an Action Plan: to support the teaching and learning of Chinese in Victorian schools, including professional development, school links with China, teacher and student exchange programmes, resource development for Primary and High School levels, awards and scholarships for both teachers and students. A very impressive package!

Even though Chinese language was first introduced in Queensland, Victoria has more schools teaching Chinese. Victoria is also considered to be the Chinese resource centre. This is because the Victoria Department of Education "Employment and Training" supports LOTE (Languages Other Than English)

Compared to New Zealand, non-native teachers of Chinese in Australia have more opportunities to get involved in exchange programmes or scholarship programmes with China. Some teachers spent six months to two years in China immersed in the language and culture in order to improve their Chinese.

Some positive aspects in New Zealand

In Australia there are six States but eight systems of education: these include independent schools, public schools and Catholic schools. Most independent schools implement the International Baccalaureat. In New Zealand we have one Curriculum Document to work from for Chinese, which we should be proud of.

Regarding the various dialects in Chinese, simplified characters versus traditional characters; Australia has varied rules between states, which is a real headache in itself! We on the other hand in New Zealand stress Modern Standard Chinese and simplified characters. Our rules are easy to follow and causing fewer disharmonies between teachers.

I would like to express my sincere thanks again to both NZALT and Asia 2000 for providing me with funding. The conference was stimulating, informative, and educational. My request to NZALT and Asia 2000 is to invite John Crone (Web-site designer, Schoollinx, and Careerlinx) and Jeff Goonan (Multimedia in Classrooms) to our next Language Teachers' Conference in Napier. I am certain teachers would benefit from their presentations. Their knowledge would inspire and motivate us to use technology in our classrooms and beyond.