

Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou Katoa

Honoured Guests, Society Members, Friends

I am delighted to be able to address you today on the topic of

HOW OUR PAST POINTS THE WAY FORWARD

During my four years of presidency so far, I have focused on ensuring we are a strong organisation to survive the future by remaining relevant to the present needs of the relationship between China and New Zealand and having – a clear role, clear goals, great people fully involved and a sound structure.

Being asked to reflect on how our past points the way forward has forced me to do a stock take on where have we come from, have we been true to our beginnings and is our future likely to be relevant to our past.

Sixty is not very old – especially when you have reached an age older than that! It is extremely old to one of our grandchildren however! Ancient in fact!

In terms of China's history it is but a blink of an eye. In terms of NZ's history it is significant. In terms of the history of the Peoples Republic of China it is momentous. When in 2009 I attended as your representative the PRC's 60 year celebrations in Tiananmen Square, I felt very honoured to represent an organisation whose links with the PRC nudged 60 years at that time and predated our counterpart, The Chinese Peoples Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and its predecessor.

And here we are today. 2012 – 60 years ago, the result of nudging from people like Rewi Alley and others that the support for the peoples of China needed to survive the founding of new China, and here in Auckland a small committee of committed people formed our Society.

Alistair Shaw in his thesis based on the history of our Society said that when our Society was formed, "NZ was under pressure from the United States and particularly UK authorities not to have formal links with China, and during 1950 to 1953 period when Chinese 'volunteers' and NZ troops in Korea as part of the United Nations contingent, faced off against one another – it was in this context that NZCFS was founded and attempted to build people-to-people links between the two countries."

The aims and objects of our organisation adopted at its second meeting held on 2 April 1952 were:

- For the promotion of peace and friendship with the people of China
- The development of cultural relations between the people of New Zealand and the people of China
- The recognition of New Zealand Government of the China Peoples Government as has already been done by the British Government
- The development of trade between NZ & China for mutual benefit
- The China Friendship Association is non-party and open to all who subscribe to the above aims

Our activities in the early years were akin to what an average branch of ours today would achieve in its usual annual programme – films and speakers on China, material distributed on Chinese issues and hosting visiting groups from China. Auckland acted as both a branch and the national body while branches were started in other main centres. In 1958 a separate national committee was formed based in Wellington and activities continued to slowly grow.

1959 saw many discussions at national level on whether our aims and activities should emphasise political action. In 1962 a leaflet was published urging recognition by our Government of the People's Republic of China and 1963 saw many such leaflets published and reprinted. In 1971 on 25 October, the United Nations voted to restore the legal status of the PRC in the United Nations. It is noteworthy that China's permanent representative to the UN at that time was Huang Hua, a former Foreign Minister who also signed the joint communique in New York on 22 December 1972 with his NZ counterpart to affect formal diplomatic relations with our country.

Why I see this as noteworthy is because in 1997 on the centenary of Rewi Alley's birthday China sent Huang Hua as its representative to the celebrations and to open the Springfield memorial to Rewi Alley. I was chair of the Christchurch Gansu Sister City Committee at the time with Bill Willmott as the celebrations subcommittee chair and we hosted Huang Hua at Judy and my home in Christchurch – a great privilege to meet a great man in China New Zealand relations.

So this first twenty year period in our Society's history saw dedicated NZers who believed in supporting China start from small beginnings, forming branches, holding film shows (sometimes not being able to show some films because they were censored), educating New Zealanders on New China and advocating our Country to recognise it.

The second twenty year period of the 1970s and 1980s saw, as Alistair Shaw describes it "When recognition occurred, essentially coinciding with the election of the Kirk Labour Government in 1972, not only was the long held goal of the NZCFS achieved, there was also a blossoming of engagement with China as it became much easier for ordinary New Zealanders to do so. Society tours flourished and were soon complemented by commercial tours as well".

Alistair also notes that "immigration changes in the late 1980's saw significant numbers of Chinese New Zealanders who had been born or raised in the PRC for the first time". This was the time he commented "saw opportunities for NZ prominent people to be introduced to the possibilities the PRC offered. Sister City relationships were formed and interest in China became genuinely bi-partisan across National and Labour lines"

Many of us remember events in this second twenty year period. For me it meant a change from engaging in business in South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong during the 1970's to my first contact with a PRC trading company in Hong Kong in 1979 and in 1981 hosting my first Chinese delegation which happened to be an agricultural delegation specialising in sheep production. 1983 I hosted the then Chinese Premier Zhao Zi Yang in Christchurch making the first major presentation on behalf of the NZ dairy industry to a senior Chinese leader. An outcome was the 1984 Livingstone agricultural agreement on bull semen export to China – resulting from my refusal to accept that my gift of bull semen to the Premier would not precipitate such an agreement. Of course he demanded an agreement so he could keep his "seeds of friendship" gift.

1984 saw my involvement in the first major NZ government trade mission to China led by Trade Minister Mike Moore. This was followed by participation in two NZ China Trade Association trade missions during that year and the next year plus I led my own two person agricultural mission to Gansu Province. From there I became involved in the Society and on the Christchurch Gansu Sister City Committee.

The third final twenty year period of the 1990s and until now is what we are most familiar with. Alistair says "In the 1990s..... the interest in a cultural China, including Chinese language, continued to grow and the Society saw many Chinese New Zealanders drawn into the Society's activities." And he also says "The Society was seen as important too, as the unbroken links that it had maintained with the PRC since the early years were valued in Beijing, and could be utilised by the New Zealand state".

So, taking stock here in 2012, our founders, we would guess don't you think, be astounded by what has been achieved in 60 years, and in fact what we do now and achieve in any one year could well exceed what they achieved in many years all because of the sound foundations laid by them. The way forward – what of our future? Let me tell you how I described our Society recently to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade when they asked for a brief summary.

Our Society has a proud history of sixty years in building links between the people of China and New Zealand which has given us strong connections and contacts. Consequently we have an excellent reputation throughout China

for fostering people to people links, whether through friendship associations at all levels, sister cities, with educational institutions, Women Federations and at a personal level.

Our founders sixty years ago were prompted by New Zealanders who had supported the Chinese people during the years before World War 2 to form an association to continue this support after new China was formed.

Amongst those promoters of such a move were Rewi Alley and his then secretary, Shirley Barton.

The aim of our Society is to promote friendship, understanding and goodwill between the peoples of China and NZ by encouraging visits and exchanges of ideas, information and culture between the two countries

The Goals of the Society are to:

- *Increase New Zealanders knowledge and awareness of China*
- *Support selected development and aid projects in China*
- *Actively promote educational tours to China*
- *Support for Chinese Language education in New Zealand*

The Supporting Activities of the Society are:

- *To strengthen membership and branches to create opportunities for all interested New Zealanders to learn about China, its culture, its people and the country*
- *Facilitate and warmly host appropriate visiting Chinese delegations to NZ and arrange delegations to visit China to further the Society's goals*
- *To support the health and welfare of students from China*
- *Develop strategies for relationships with the Society's counterparts (Youxie) at National, Provincial and City levels*
- *Increase the public profile of the Society and extend the use of web based information*

Yes, I do believe our founders would be astounded by what their idea has achieved in 60 years. We have, in my opinion, exceeded in good measure, in implementing their dreams and goals. Look at my annual report that attempts to summarise what 600 members have done in the last 12 months – hundreds of meetings, many visits, delegations, educational tours to China, film shows, web and newsletter articles, Chinese language promotion, teacher placements, projects, friendship one to one and of course Chinese food enjoyment.

Look at what Hamilton Branch achieved last February – the cover of the Weekend Section of the Waikato Times – “Historic Friendship – The NZ China Friendship Society keeps the faith through thick and thin.” Four pages on the branch’s history and four photos – Jenevere Foreman who went on a society tour in 1979, Meryl Lanting speaking of Kathleen Hall whose family still lives in the Waikato and Stan Boyle who discusses his two homes, one in Hamilton and the other in Changsha. Testimonies of long term love and interest in China.

We should be proud of our founders, of those who followed since like these stalwarts of Hamilton and of how we have remained true to the original goals. The way forward I consider is very clear from the path they set out for us.

There is an even bigger need for New Zealand to grow better relations with the people of China as we move closer together economically and in friendship. Look at the article last week in the Listener by Hamish Keith called “Finding our place in the Asian Century”. He says “A famous Canadian singer and an Oscar-winning film director buy large chunks of NZ and we are flattered. They are people like us. A New York billionaire transforms a couple of iconic headlands into world class golf resorts and gives Auckland Art Gallery a collection of modern paintings by European artists who are household names. We are thrilled. A billionaire enterprise in Shanghai buys a bunch of bankrupt dairy farms and we are swept by a wave of outraged xenophobia. Why?”

And later in the article Hamish says "Xenophobia is fuelled by ignorance. Although the Chinese buyer's culture has been around for five millennia, we still know very little about it. We should educate ourselves. And soon. The 21st century is inevitably going to be the Asian century. It is about time we found out where we might fit in. We certainly need to."

Hamish ends his article by saying "We might be disturbed at the stranger knocking at our door but we should embrace the fact that open doors let people in and ideas in and out. Sure, we already make a living shoving chunks of protein to China, but there are also vast cultural opportunities for us there, too. China has an immensely rich past to inspire us and a dynamic future for us to find our place in. Better to reach out for that than just bounce aimlessly around on a fragile raft of prejudice."

Yes there is much to do. There are potential issues and challenges for us as a Society no doubt some will be around closer economic relations and dependency on Chinese trade, investment, English language, tourism and questions like - Should Chinese companies come for the Christchurch rebuild and displace local labour?

How do we keep up to date on the changes occurring at a fast rate in China – human rights, poverty, the legal system, freedoms and economic development. How we present views on all these issues to our communities will reflect on how they seriously they will regard us.

I am of the opinion that the future will be as challenging as the past – powerful countries want their friends to only portray the good side of their country, they want their views on contentious issues promoted and like us we never show visitors to our country the distasteful views.

Our past we can be very proud of – it has and will continue to point the way forward. The need for our Society is greater than ever.

Thank you.