

Confucius Institute Conference, December 11-13, 2009, Beijing

Presentation President's Forum Chair Johan de Graeve : "How can the Chinese and the Host universities contribute to the trade and economic exchanges?"

Your Excellencies, Mrs. Xu Lin, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

These have been inspiring days indeed and with the hope of capturing the spirit of the moment, I will now try to summarize that part of the discussion which revolved around the topic of how the Chinese and Host universities may contribute to trade and economic development through the Confucius Institutes. Before I begin, I would like to add that, thanks to the confidence that Prof. Chen Yulu, Vice-President of the People's University, has put in me, I will be speaking today on behalf of the discussion group convened by him as well as my own group.

At the starting point of our discussion was the realization that this is the first time in the history of the Confucius Institutes that such a topic is on the agenda, and I believe that this fact results from the Confucius Institute Headquarters' finely tuned perception of our evolving environment. Indeed, our question "Can the Chinese and Host universities contribute to trade and economic development through the Confucius Institutes ?" was answered unanimously and enthusiastically with "yes!" We are all convinced that on the one hand, culture and language, and on the other hand, trade and economic exchange, are two sides of the same coin.

International trade needs understanding of the economic partner's culture and language to be successful. As one of our panelists pointed out so fittingly: you can easily buy anything if you have enough money, but selling something without any knowledge of your counterpart, is quite a challenge. In return for the gained insight, trade enables cultural activities of all kind to take place by giving them financial support.

For the Confucius Institutes this means concretely that by organizing Chinese language courses and cross-cultural communication sessions, the Confucius Institutes can help to create insightful entrepreneurs. And on the flip side, this may lead to more self-sufficiency for them, by generating money to teach the people.

Some very interesting ideas that resulted from our lively discussion yesterday morning were:

- To organize a symposium on the relationship between ancient Chinese philosophy and modern trade
- To hold a separate conference exclusively for the business-oriented Confucius Institutes
- To set up technology-oriented Confucius Institutes, since economic development is driven by technological development. Learning Chinese to better understand Chinese technology!

Ladies and gentlemen,

One coin, two sides: trade and culture. As the coin passes from hand to hand, so shall knowledge and understanding be passed on from person to person with the final purpose of achieving real peace.

Let's be open innovators!

Xiexie dajia!