

Speech of Hon (Mrs) L.D. Dookun-Luchoomun
Vice Prime Minister
Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science
and Technology
Prize Giving Ceremony
China Cultural Centre
May 19, 2024

(Protocol)

- **HE Mr. ZHU Liying, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Mauritius;**
- **The Director, China Cultural Center;**
- **The President of the United Chinese Association;**
- **Members of the Mauritius China Universities Students Association and the Mandarin Teachers Association;**
- **Distinguished Guests;**
- **Parents and Students;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**
- **Good Morning to all of you.**

It is a real pleasure for me to be here in your midst today. On this occasion, we are recognizing and rewarding the dedication of our young learners from both primary and secondary schools who have excelled in the study of Modern Chinese.

Obviously, congratulations are in order—to you, dear students, but also to your parents, teachers and others who, in one way or another, have provided the relevant support, the boost for you to stretch the limits of your capabilities.

You have demonstrated what I have always put forward as vital for success in life – hardwork : *l'effort est directement lié à la réussite académique et*

professionnel, certainement, mais permet aussi de développer sa capacité de faire face aux défis futurs et réussir sa vie.

Car, l'effort est un investissement dans votre avenir.

Bravo donc à vous et à votre entourage qui s'est montré bienveillant et dont le soutien s'est avéré très fructueux pour vous jeunes apprenants.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Mauritius, we love to insist on our ability to learn and speak more than two languages. Our history and the events associated with it have demonstrated the fact that, in addition to such languages as English and French, we have always attached a huge importance to our heritage languages. In fact, in Mauritius we all agree on the necessity of learning of languages, international or heritage.

For the benefits that accrue are obvious.

In the first place, keeping the ethnic diversity of Mauritius in view, these languages – whether Modern Chinese or any of the other Asian Languages taught in schools only strengthen connections to the cultural heritage that has been passed down over the centuries. That is why we often refer to them as Heritage Languages they provide a sense of identity to their users.

But the benefits go much beyond the heritage scope.

For one thing, this multilingualism, the preservation of this diversity and family of languages, contribute enormously to the multicultural understanding we pride ourselves on in Mauritius.

And of course, there is the economic spin-off.

Who can deny that, in an economy that is today global, the knowledge of additional languages carries a lot of advantages: new job opportunities, interaction between countries, businesses and individuals across frontiers.

I would today, Ladies and Gentlemen, wish to refer to Modern Chinese in this 'mouvance', in this sphere of influence.

We all know the economic might of China in the areas of trade, tourism and technology 3 pillars upon which the global economy rests.

It is a global economy in which Mauritius will continue to actively participate. And learning the language thus opens the doors for improved communication and networking.

And why not?

Today, the Chinese language stands out as the most popular language in the world be it by geographical reach or global influence followed by English and Spanish.

I believe that many of you have heard of ***Ethnologue***, which is a comprehensive reference work providing information about the world's languages. In its 26th edition published in 2023, Modern Chinese stands as the second most spoken language in the world with a total of 1.138 billion speakers as against English that comes in the first position with 1.456 billion. These figures comprise both 1st and 2nd Language speakers.

So, dear students, you are in good company here. Your efforts in studying Modern Chinese will be rewarded in more ways than one.

In fact, some of you can contribute to the spread and wider dissemination of the language by taking up the noble task of becoming teachers.

As you probably know, we do not have many teachers of Modern Chinese in Mauritius. Thus we have just 23 Mauritian teachers for a pupil body of 2144 in the primary sub-sector. The numbers are much less at the secondary level.

Now, there is a chicken-and -egg conundrum here.

The fewer the teachers, the greater the student demotivation and thus, the lesser the number of learners and that clips further down the uptake in the teaching profession.

Perhaps you, young prize winners, who have done so well at SC and HSC levels, could help change this scenario!

Fortunately for us, the Government of the People's Republic of China has always responded to our request for Volunteer Chinese Teachers. Indeed, an Agreement was signed in 2007 between our two countries to promote bilateral cooperation in various fields including the Education Sector. Accordingly, since July 2008, various batches of Chinese Volunteers have been deputed to Mauritius to teach Modern Chinese (initially Mandarin) in the primary schools.

True, Excellency, there are always some teething problems when these young teachers enter the classrooms, but, overall, they have all been doing a good job as the latest PSAC pass rate of 72.5 % in the subject shows.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Both Mauritius and China share a common philosophy concerning education and, through it, human resource development. We all know the gigantic steps taken by the People's Republic of China in Education. Figures speak for themselves: the most recent data from 2020 indicate that the adult literacy rate for those aged 15 years and above stands at 97 percent. Equally China has made major investment in improving access to high level pre-primary, primary and secondary school infrastructure. On the other hand, equity remains high on the Republic's education agenda.

This is why I say our two countries share a common stand on education and the ultimate benefits it can bring to the nation.

Here, I must highlight Government's appreciation in general and that of my Ministry in particular for the support provided by Chinese authorities in terms of capacity building programs for serving public officers and for the scholarships provided for higher studies.

Excellency, do transmit our warm thanks to the Government of the People's Republic of China for these welcome offerings and gestures.

You, our young scholars and you, parents, would be pleased to know that the People's Republic of China offers some 30 scholarships annually at post-grad and PhD levels in a diversity of fields like International Business, Engineering, Music and many others. I can only encourage you, prize

winners, to work even harder so as to potentially secure the scholarships so generously offered.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me also place on record my appreciation for the alumni members of the Mauritius China Universities Students' Association as well as the Mandarin Teachers Association that operate under the umbrella of the United Chinese Association. The several activities that you engage in – the Cultural Summer Camps, the link-up with the ancestral land for our Sino-Mauritian youth and other numerous social and cultural manifestations—all of these help bolster the visibility of the Chinese Culture in Mauritius.

Thank you all for helping to weave the language, Modern Chinese, into the tapestry of our Mauritian linguistic heritage.

Rest assured that my Ministry will be very willing to actively partner with you to drive our current and future collaborative ventures forward.

Let me finally reiterate my congratulations to all prize winners.

I wish you all even greater success in your future endeavors.

Thank you for your kind attention.