

Talk by Simon Draper – 2 July 2018 12pm Asia NZ Foundation/DN Shanghai Association/Otago Chamber of Commerce Event

Simon Draper, the Director of the Asia NZ Foundation, gave a very stimulating talk examining how unaware young New Zealanders are of Asia's importance to New Zealand's future. Asia NZ Foundation conducted a survey of young kiwis. The research shows that young New Zealanders have very low knowledge of Asia, even though they recognise the region's importance to NZ's future. They were invited to answer 6 questions about Asia and a high percentage of them only get 1 out of 6 correct.

Simon Draper himself has an extensive background with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) for over 20 years prior to becoming a Director of Asia NZ Foundation. While at MFAT, he also managed NZ's engagement and policy with the United Nations in New York. A highlight for him in this role was steering NZ's successful campaign for United Nations security Council seat.

In light of Simon's extensive understanding of NZ's position in the world, Simon gave interesting insights as to how NZ needs to develop its relationship with its Asian neighbours. An international rule base system has always been important for NZ and therefore we have been a strong advocate of that.

He also emphasised how undervalued the Asian business economy is to us. He gave the example of a Wellington peanut butter company called Fix and Fogg who had to be persuaded to go with Asia NZ to Vietnam. Like many NZ businesses, Fix and Fogg believes that its main export market will be in, say, Australia, UK, US or European countries. When they went to Vietnam with Asia NZ Foundation, they were surprised to find peanut butter was widely consumed in Vietnam due to its colonial past and it has a lucrative and established market. As a result, Fix and Fogg has now established successfully an export channel to Vietnam.

Simon emphasised that Asia NZ's business internships giving young New Zealanders the opportunity to learn about the business environment in Asia are often hugely undersubscribed, when their internships from Asia to NZ are often oversubscribed.

The other issue which is a hot topic currently is languages. While there is an understanding that Chinese will be an important language in business in future, NZ does not have any official language policy for language education. It is up to individuals to acquire language skills. The system does not support New Zealanders themselves learning a foreign language as a second language. Simon gave the example of his own children learning Mandarin for a couple of years, but eventually got disillusioned, as the only other students in their class are native speakers against whom they found hard to compete. In countries such as Australia where there is a formal policy to encourage language learning in school curriculum, students are streamed so that those who are learning Mandarin purely as a second language will be put in a class together separate from the native speakers.

Simon also talked about different business concepts. For example, traceability in Asia means something very different from NZ. In Asia traceability could just mean organic and may have very little connection with knowing the origins of the food involved. Understanding these differences is vital to doing good business in Asia.

All in all, associations such as Asia NZ Foundation and our Association can only facilitate and promote connections. There is a real need in NZ for a cultural shift, for NZ to see itself as part of Asia. In that respect, when we see cultural icons and business leaders being clearly Asian, that cultural shift will start to happen. In the meantime it is up to us, especially those of us who are Asian New Zealanders to put down further points of connection to create pathways. Those pathways will enable all New Zealanders to understand that there is plenty to gain for New Zealand as being part of Asia.

Teresa Chan- Chair, Dunedin Shanghai Association
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