

Memoir and the anecdotes of the first TCCC AGM



1. Saturday, May 26, 2012 was not a bright and pleasant day! The sky was grey and dark, and heavy rain kept on pouring. I got all wet when I went from my Caine Road home to Causeway Bay for lunch. My heart was rather down because I was thinking I would have to brave the rain to go to the first Annual General Meeting of the Teochew Culture Club later that afternoon. I am a founding member of that club, and for the time being I also act as the club's "Treasurer".

2. I left my home at 1545 hour, taking a bus to Admiralty, then by MTR direct to Yau Tong, in a restaurant owned by the father of a member, where the AGM would be held. It was the first time I traveled direct from my home to Yau Tong, a suburb not familiar to myself. I intended to arrive at the appointed restaurant well ahead of time. Luckily I did not have to wait long time for my bus, and I had a smooth MTR ride from the Admiralty to Yau Tong, with a quick transfer in North Point for the Yau Tong way. I arrived at the Yau Tong MTR station at about 1615 hour. I thought it was too early to go into the restaurant. I took a few minutes to wondering around the shopping centre where the restaurant is. It is only a very small centre, perhaps there are only 50 shops. I walked into the restaurant at about 1630, half an hour ahead of the scheduled time when the councilors would meet.

3. Alas, two members were already at the long table busily rehearsing their speeches. Clement, the Secretary



of the club, had his opening speech purposely broken down in small fragments in Chinese characters, and trying out his Chiu Chow phonetics with Grace (she was elected a new councilor at this AGM). I listened to their exercise, and from time to time chipped in one or two suggestions.





4. By about 1645 hour, our Chairlady, Ms Sandy joined us. She had her speech, now nicely translated from English to written Chinese. (I later found out that the original English script was penned by Clement, and it was translated into Chinese with the help of Grace). I peered at Sandy's script, I noticed certain marks were on her papers, properly she wanted to emphasize at some points. Sandy was busily rehearsing her speech with Grace.

5. By 1658, another fellow councilor, Bing Hai (Leo Wong), walked in with his backpack and a bottle of wine. I said to him: "Bing Hai, I have been waiting for you!" He hurried to defend that it was not yet 1700 hour when we should meet. I quickly pacified him that he was ahead of our agreed time, and I had no complaint to make against him! Bing Hai was to act as my speech translator, from my oral Chiu Chow to Cantonese. We practiced once my speech which was written in English. It was too big a task for me to translate my own English text into the Chinese characters. So, what we did was I "mentally translated" my own English text into the oral Chiu Chow simultaneously when I was speaking. This was the first time I delivered a speech in Chiu Chow dialect in an official occasion like this. During my lifelong career, English is almost always used in my official speech. I was amazed at my own "performance", this time.



6. Meantime more members arrived for the meeting, to attend the AGM. Restaurant staff were busily arranging the tables and chairs and serving us with hot tea. With the help of Bing Hai, two of us went around collecting from members the dinner fees. We also received, at the spot, 3 new members joining our club, and we collected a fee of HK\$ 50 from each of them.

7. By 1805 or thereabout, we were ready to have our first ever Annual General Meeting of the Club. Clement, the Secretary, called to order to start the meeting proper. He was speaking in Chiu Chow, and the speech was translated simultaneously into Cantonese by Stephanie (she was elected a new councilor later at this meeting). Whilst Clement was still in his opening remarks, a female member walked in.



Clement graciously invited the member to come forward to the head table to sign the “Attendance list”, and he announced that the number of members present was increased from 24 to 25. The legal quorum to conduct this meeting was one quarter of our total membership, i.e. 17. He then resumed his speech. He revealed that this meeting would be conducted in dual languages, Chiu Chow and Cantonese, to the delight and enthusiastic applause of the members.

8. Chairlady Sandy gave her speech, again in Chiu Chow, with Grace as her interpreter (into Cantonese). Sandy made a point to introduce her interpreter, an unusual gesture, but a pleasant surprise. Then she told the history of the formation of the Club. She also gave a quick review of the activities the Club had held to date. There were a few hiccups during the translation. But these unfortunate mishaps were drowned by the applauses of the audience.

9. Then it was my turn, as the Club’s Treasurer, to give a brief report on our first financial statements. Bing Hai was sitting on my left side, because he is a councilor too. So, we decided to remain seated while we were speaking (contrary to the Chairlady and her interpreter. They choose to standing). My report was short, with moments when I had difficult in uttering the correct Chiu Chow phonetics, even though I had previously rehearsed hundreds of time. Then, two questions were raised from the floor. One related to the collection of members fees, and one member inquired if the club should have opened a bank savings account. Satisfactory replies were given by Secretary Clement.



10. The last item for this AGM was to elect four new councilors, making an 8 members’ council. The election was by written ballot papers. Recording and counting of the ballots took sometimes. Finally we had four new councilors: Stephanie, Grace, Fred and Chun Fat. Members were eager to offer to the new councilors our hearty congratulations!



11. It was a big relief to me seeing that our first AGM was successfully held, and it was all over now. We had more chit chats whilst

waiting for the arrival of our three invited guests, and several members who were still on their way. The first guest to arrive was Mr Lam Chiu Ying, the former Director of the HK Observatory; he retired from the government service 3 years ago. Next was Mr Wu Yim Song, the Youth Director of the Chiu Chow Chamber of Commerce. Finally the long waited Dr Ko Wing Man, who was the former Director of Professional Services and Human Resources of the Hospital Authority (during the SARS catastrophe time Dr Ko was the Acting Chief Executive of the Authority), arrived at the scene. We continued to standing and talking around for a few more minutes. It was now about 1915 hour.

12. To make the numbers right, here are a few statistics. At the dinner, 38 members, 6 accompanying friends / relatives, and 3 invited honour guests. Total 47. I am surprised that there were 38 members present, out of our total membership of 67 (an attendance rate of 56 %.) I think it was a record figure. I understand, however, this large turnout was due to the personal effort and the friendly “persuasion” of the Chairlady and the Secretary. I was particularly pleased to seeing my “drinking partner”, Simon whom I have not met for quite sometime. Simon was talking with WC, another old classmate. WC has been my “chaperon”, and I am reminisce of the times when we were having our class in the Chiu Chow Chamber’s boardroom, WC would escort and walk me to my Caine Road flat after class. It was a 2-miles uphill walking lasting for a good 30 minutes! I missed WC’s presence last time we had our bible group in TST. I was also pleased to see Junior Sandy who went to Melbourne for a short course and returned. Three of my female classmates, who started together with me to learning Teochew dialect in the same class, joined us for the AGM meeting. Hello Irene, Rebecca and Denise, I am overjoyed to see you!

13. Before the dinner started, Chairlady Sandy announced that she wanted to give a special thanks to the Chef of the restaurant. She said this Chef is unfamiliar with the Chiu Chow cuisine, but for our feast, he has tried very hard to entertain us with a few classic Chiu Chow dishes. Certain classmates of ours have had tried out the same dishes beforehand. Loud applause was given to him, and all our 3 honour guests, with much appreciation and gratitude eagerly shook the Chef’s hands. Thanks, Mr Chef.

14. May I have my own appreciation to our three invited guests :

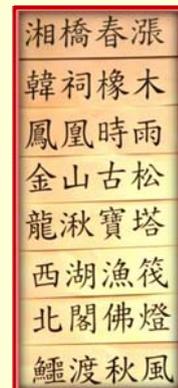
(a) Mr Lam gave his speech entirely in Chiu Chow. I like what he said about his encounter in Paris. He said Chiu Chow dialect is used widely even in Paris. He could use Chiu Chow dialect to find his way around in Paris.

(b) Dr Ko told us about his childhood, his parents are native Chiu Chow. Sandy reminded Dr Ko a speech that Dr Ko delivered in Chiu Chow dialect years ago, at a Chiu Chow Chamber's function. Dr Ko's sound recording, with the script of that speech, was included in our Level One textbook. Dr Ko is a Orthopedics Specialist, and he runs his own medical clinic.

(c) Mr Wu told us that he was born in HK, as a second generation Chiu Chow. He did not speak Chiu Chow dialect when he was little. He said, with a sense of regret, he apologized to us for his inability to use Chiu Chow in his speech to us. He further stated that in his own committees, of the Chiu Chow Chamber, they do not use "all Chiu Chow" dialect.

The 3 guests all praised us for our insistence in conducting our proceedings in Chiu Chow dialect. I believe we had greatly impressed our guests. Well, they should have been with us, when we conducted our AGM in simultaneous "dual languages". Cheers to the TCCC! I am proud of my Club!

15. In between our dinner, my classmates prepared certain games for us to play. Each table was given a number of "big Chinese characters" banners, each banner bearing the name of a "Chiu Chow 8 scenery", the famous scenic spots in Chiu Chow. I saw Dr Ko hurriedly scribbling certain Chinese characters on a piece of paper. He was writing down, from his memory, the correct names of all the 8 Scenery! Before Stephanie could finish introducing to us the first scenery, Dr Ko volunteered to give us the background and the proper explanation of all the 8 scenery. Mr C Y Lam, sitting at my right, kept on whispering to me that Dr Ko has a good memory, because the doctor had good training in memorizing those long and difficult medical terms. Lam said Dr Ko is very familiar with Chiu



Chow customs, and culture. Stephanie later related to us, with a sense of great relief, that Dr Ko had saved her out of her difficult job to explain to us the story of the 8 scenery!

16. I was grateful, too, that our Chairlady gave me a chance to say a few words, before the conclusion of the dinner. Again, I took the opportunity to tell my audience the reason why I wanted to learn Chiu Chow dialect. I said the only reason I want to learn, my mother tongue, is for the “remembrance of my passed parents”. I think I had the sympathy and perhaps the approval of my audience. When I returned to my seat, Mr C Y Lam patted on my shoulder, and said that he thought my reason is valid and good enough!

17. Finally, just before the desert was served, the Chairlady gave the usual “thank you” note. She thanked just almost everyone. Apparently she forgot to thank herself, and that was understandable, an usual display of our Chinese humility. But, surely she has done a great lot for the club and for the successful conduct of this AGM meeting and the dinner. She certainly deserved a big thank you. Stephanie rushed in, loudly announced a few sweet compliments to Sandy. I watched Stephanie gave Sandy a bear hug, and that was all needed. A spontaneous loud applause erupted, for our great Chairlady! Cheers, Chairlady Sandy. A moving moment! I was touched.

18. It was an evening to remember!

Dr P Lam, May 28, 2012

An Sequel

19. After the first draft, also while waiting for comments to come in, certain things flashed into my mind. I feel a sense of lost, should I be deprived of this sequel:

i. Teacher Xu – Sorry I have forgotten all about Teacher Xu, simply because he was absent from the AGM meeting and the dinner, for

some personal reasons. But I wish to pay tribute to my Chiu Chow dialect teacher for the past 2.5 years. He was able to persuade the Baptist U for him to conduct a structured Chiu Chow dialect class. The first of such course in Hong Kong, put under the auspice of an university. I was among the lucky first batch of students studied under Teacher Xu. His is a great teacher, and I love to be in his class. His wisdom and contribution to the Club were also too valuable and too numerous to be listed down. I could not think of a better tribute to our dear Teacher Xu other than by quoting from the PolyU's own course pamphlet which the University is advertising for the current four Chiu Chow dialect classes, to be conducted or under the supervision of Teacher Xu:

“許先生對潮汕文化有深厚的認識，擁有十多年潮汕文化研究及潮語教學經驗，是本港唯一主講定期及獲認可潮語課程之導師。”

ii. One of the highlight of the evening was a presentation made by one of our member, Philip Li. He has just returned from a 3-days study tour to the Shantou University. He had attended 5 lectures on the Chiu Chow culture, including one session on the renowned Chiu Chow cuisine. His talk was lively and interesting. I admire Philip for the opportunity he has had. I feel a little envy because the privilege he has enjoyed. We are hoping that Philip would have time to entertain us with a written write-up about his study tour and the lectures he attended etc. I want to add on two more observations about Philip.

(a) Philip was the only member who put on a full suit and a tie. I joked with him that he was the “best dress person” in the meeting. He modestly brushed me aside by saying: “Oh, no. I have an

inappropriate dress put on”.

(b) Philip used Teochew dialect when he was delivering to us his speech. His talk of about 10 minutes was exclusively in Teochew. But I had certain difficult in following Philip’s Teochew, because he has a very heavy “Chiu Yeung accent”. Fortunately, Chun Fat, another newly elected councilor, came to our rescue. Chun Fat ably translated Philip’s talk into our understandable Cantonese. Much to our big relieve, as otherwise we might have missed the finer points!

iii. I have just read a copy of an email from Bing Hai to Stephanie. He wanted to thank Stephanie for the effort and the time she has contributed to the club. He said he is “purposely missed out” 3,000 words plus another 30,000 thousand words to thank Stephanie. I suggest to Bing Hai, with a sense of regret, I would have wished Bing Hai to actually write down the 33,000 thankful words to Stephanie. I am convinced, however, that in this case, words are not sufficient to express our thanks. Thank you, Stephanie.

iv. I note Stephanie has already expressed a thanks to Clement in her “job accomplished note” via email to us. May I add on my own observation and my gratitude. Clement, is a practicing certified public accountant, and he has his own auditing firm in Central. He had undertaken the drafting and the completion of our Club’s constitution. He also handled and completed the government registration for our Club, waiving the usual required expensive professional fees. The organization and most of the paper works, for this AGM, were also done by Clement. I salute Clement.

Dr P Lam, May 31, 2012