

2002.1.23

**Speech by the Hon Mrs Selina Chow Liang Shuk-Yee, JP
Motion Debate on Promoting the Use of Putonghua, 23 January 2002**

Selina Chow:

Madam President, first of all, let me thank Miss CHOY So-yuk for moving this motion, which has not only given me an opportunity to practise my Putonghua but will also induce some very entertaining moments for this meeting in the next hour or two.

From the saying "fear not heaven or hell but only Cantonese people speaking Mandarin (Putonghua)" we can see that speaking Putonghua can be a real challenge to the people of Hong Kong. Today, I should like to share with Honourable Members the importance of Putonghua to the development of the tourism and retail industries. I hope people engaged in these two industries will expeditiously make an effort to learn and master Putonghua.

According to the statistics on inbound visitors, about half of the tourists visiting Hong Kong are Putonghua-speaking. Take 2001 as an example, Hong Kong has, using Putonghua, served over 6.2 million visitors from the Mainland and Taiwan who brought more than \$27.78 billion earnings for the local tourism industry. And these figures have not yet included the Chinese-speaking visitors from Singapore. It should be noted that 10% or 620000 of those tourists criticized that the people of Hong Kong could not communicate with them. In what situations have these visitors found the people of Hong Kong unable to communicate with them, when they were doing shopping or when they were visiting restaurants? On deeper thought, perhaps Hong Kong has let some 620000 chances to boost tourist consumption slip through our fingers. So, we have seen business opportunities slip through our fingers. Is there anything we can do to grasp such business opportunities firmly? The answer is very obvious.

Actually, we have also been visitors to other places before. When travelling overseas, the trip would of course be less enjoyable if we could not communicate with the locals there. What is more, we might even mistakenly consider that the people there are very unfriendly to us. We cannot rely solely on the attractiveness of the scenic spots to establish our good reputation as a tourist destination, for other kinds of matching "software" are also indispensable and communication ability is one of the very important factors. The focus of the Hong Kong Tourism Board is on how we can let visitors have a more interesting, more enjoyable and more unforgettable stay in Hong Kong. This is because we know that this is the only way to persuade visitors to recommend Hong Kong to their friends and relatives at home, thereby attracting

more tourists and business opportunities to Hong Kong.

In recent years, we often hear people discussing how productivity can be enhanced. At the present time, I believe learning Putonghua is one of the better ways. To participants in the tourism and retail industries, Putonghua should be a compulsory subject they all have to learn. This is because the greater the number of visitors from the Mainland, the greater will be the chance we need to speak Putonghua. If anybody should still refuse to learn Putonghua at this stage, I am afraid they would just be lagging too far behind. Earlier on, when officiating at the Food Expo I came across an exhibition stall operated by Koreans and found to my surprise that the people working at the stall could all speak Putonghua. They told me, "We all learn Putonghua because we want to enter the market in China and do business with Chinese people." Their attitude to work is a worthy lesson for our employers and employees. Some friends engaging in the retail trades told me that their employers did not allow them to take Putonghua courses during working hours, and were concerned that they would switch to other jobs once they could master the language. I am sure the people of Hong Kong are very smart, having regard to the situation they are faced with, they should know what they ought to do in future.

Madam President, I believe there is much room for promoting the use of Putonghua in Hong Kong. In this connection, I suggest that Putonghua be made a compulsory subject for students taking Tourism and Hotel Studies, and that all modes of public transport should have announcements made in Putonghua as well.

Further still, the hotel industry in Hong Kong may set up a staff exchange scheme with mainland hotels, so as to give Hong Kong hotel employees a chance to practise their Putonghua on-site on the one hand, and to enable local hotels to have front-line employees who can speak fluent Putonghua on the other.

Is Putonghua very difficult to learn? I cannot say it is very easy to learn to speak Putonghua. However, I do know that if we do not take hold of the opportunity available to us to make proper preparations, we would regret it very much when faced with new challenges in the future and life could be even harder then.

Madam President, I support the motion. I will also strive to further improve my Putonghua.