

Speech by Mr Jonathan K.S. Choi, Chairman of Sun Wah Education Foundation

Summit on Education Reform in the APEC Region

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**Developing a Model for Non-Government Basic Education in China**

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for the Sun Wah Education Foundation to have been able to sponsor such a prestigious and meaningful conference. It is an even greater honor for me to be here today as part of such a knowledgeable and visionary group of policy makers and experts from so many economies around the Pacific Ocean. I say this because although I have a long-standing interest in education and have tried to support education in various forms, I am nevertheless an outsider to education and thus by no measure I am an expert on educational issues. This conference thus provides me with a rare opportunity to interact with the “insiders,” to learn from the experts and policy makers, and to get my “outsider” view of education checked out. Even more importantly I want to take this opportunity to share with you a significant educational project I plan to launch, and get your advice and support. So I thank you for this.

We are in advanced discussions with Michigan State University’s College of Education about establishing a US China Center for Research on Educational Excellence. The Center’s mission will be to research and develop effective models for teaching and school governance in general and will aim to integrate the strengths of both Eastern and Western educational practices through scientific research carried out in excellent primary and secondary schools in China and the United States.

My decision to donate 5 million US dollars to such a Center was not an easy one to make. It was taken as a result of things learned from a combination of my many years of involvement in education as an intimate “outsider” and my business experiences. In the 25 years since 1979 when I first donated to a school in Zhongshan, China, my ancestral home, I have provided financial support in various forms to schools and universities in China. I am now serving as an advisor and director on the board of many schools and institutions. Although I have no doubt that my charitable activities have helped these schools in some way, today I found that what I have been doing is maintenance activity rather than regenerative activity.

Let me put this into context: there is a great Chinese tradition that many teachers and headmasters contribute their time and heart selflessly. Often working for nothing but philanthropic reasons, some of these dedicated people have been known to cycle for hours to reach remote village schools just to practice their noble profession. I am touched by this spirit, and it has encouraged me to make donations to these schools. However, these schools have to be sustainable and well run in order to do justice to these good teachers and headmasters.

However, I have come to realise, to paraphrase an ancient Chinese saying, that I have been trying to give people fish, instead of trying to find a way to teach them how to fish. In other words, those donations did not generate a model or series of practices that are sustainable and scalable. The donations went into buildings, and short-term projects that are limited to one institution. But China is a vast country. The impact of individual effort is very limited. Thus I have been reflecting on what I have done and working on ways to find something that can last longer and reach more people, or to use more businesslike terms, something with sustainability and scalability.

So how can we reach more people with our limited resources? Or as we might say in business, how can we get the best bang for our buck? In business, when we find a successful model, we try to replicate it. In order to replicate a model, we must first understand what makes the model effective. We must understand the management, customer attraction, financial flow and growth, and possible constraints. In education, we already have many good models; there are successful programs, as well as effective schools. They exist in China and elsewhere. I am pretty sure that every nation has good schools. I am also pretty sure that every nation has bad schools, and that in general there are more bad schools than good schools. Why can't we study the good schools and turn them into replicable models to improve the bad schools? If education is a science, it should provide us with the tools and knowledge to go about creating good schools. Personally, I believe that education is both a science and art, and while we can leave the art part to take care of itself, we need to capitalize on the science part where we can make a difference. Thus I feel strongly that the time is ripe for a systematic approach to speeding up the country's educational reform. This will help to resolve the problems facing education, which include governance, administration, teaching quality, curriculum content and the application of technology.

So I decided to make this investment. I hope this Center will identify, study, and thus come to understand effective educational practices in China and the United States through empirical and theoretical research into the whole school ecology. This ecology, which will be looked at in schools that have been commonly regarded as successful and are widely recognized as standards of excellence, will include governance, administration, teachers and teaching, curriculum and learning resources, students and learning, assessment and parental and community involvement.

The Center will also develop and describe a model of education that is sustainable and scalable through the use of modern information and communication technologies.

Prior to disseminating the model into diverse settings in China, the Center will conduct experiments in a small number of schools in China to assess the effectiveness of the model and to further refine it.

In order to share the results with the broader education community, our Center will also disseminate our findings through publications, the designing and circulation of multimedia products, summer institutes and workshops.

Each year the Center is expected to produce reports of its research activities and findings. Based on the research findings, a set of dissemination materials, including multi-media professional development materials for administrators, teachers and other personnel; computer software for school management, student assessment and student learning; and a handbook of guidelines for effective educational practices, will be developed to be used in pilot schemes in specifically identified schools.

By January 2006, we hope our model will be adopted by schools in China on a large scale while further research and refinement, and the ongoing evaluation of models and tools will continue.

As our Premier Mr Wen Jiabao put it, “Different nations may speak different languages, but people’s hearts and feelings are interlinked. Different cultures may present manifold features, yet they often share the same rational core elements that

can always be passed on by people.” Eastern learning is spreading to the West and Western learning is spreading to the East. Our project will help to promote closer cultural exchanges and deeper understanding between China and the US and will also pick up the successful core elements in our educational systems, representing the best of both worlds.

I firmly cleave to the Chinese belief that education and science and technology are the driving forces for the future development of the country. For the Chinese, moral and civic education is also highly important as part of a student’s comprehensive development through education. Whether or not an educational system is successful cannot be simply measured by how much money we invest. However, as long as we are getting closer and closer to the target of nurturing well-rounded students, I am confident that we will be on the right track to success.

A large population and underdevelopment are the two facts China has to face. I hope our model will act as a catalyst to speed up the process of educating more of our people in the best way as soon as possible.

Educational reform is a long-term and on-going endeavor. Let us set ourselves, as individuals or groups, or as society as a whole, to sharing our experience and putting our hearts together in furthering education for the well-being of the generations to come.

Thank you very much.