

Dr Ronald Wong DCL

25th May 2009

The Honourable Ms Regina Ip
Legislative Councillor
Hong Kong Legislative Council
Hong Kong

Dear Madam

Your writing in the 25th May 2009 issue of the SCMP, entitled: ‘**English Asset**’, has touched me enormously. By a co-incidence, another writing by a politician named Tien Bei Chen (spelling my own making) appearing, as a private placement, in the same date issue of the Apply Daily Chinese Newspaper (and others, possibly) has also touched me rather painfully. Mr. Tien’s Article is of such a travesty, by sheer co-incidence, compared to your well-seasoned Article, that few could be too unsure if he was not trying to score a political point to pave his way.

Politics apart, Mr. Tien’s Article does highlight a fact that our Hong Kong education system is in utter shambles, as I seriously question if the present head in Government taking charge of our Hong Kong education affairs is the right person to take lead to remedy the shambles children in Hong Kong are being innocently thrown into and are suffering. Mystified as it does seem, one cannot help but feel if the Education Minister is not passing the buck in introducing ‘**the fine tuning scheme**’. Until the education objectives are remedied in that a professional educator (and, not someone who came through by seniority) can be appointed to take charge of our education system, children, who have to rely on free education meted out to them and who can ill-afford to go to private school, would suffer. It is in this respect that I say that Mr. Tien’s writing in the Apple Daily has touched me painfully. For, those fortunate children, whose parents can well afford to send their own children to private schools and later abroad for higher education at any cost, will return well prepared to take on gainful positions in the society, which demand proficiency in the English language as a pre-requisite. Those children, who have come from less fortunate environment, would lose out to those others, whose parents can well afford. This is grossly unfair.

Those less fortunate children, who are so deprived of equal opportunity, constitute a majority, while only a minority of those others could compete to uphold the good name of Hong Kong with a status as a premier international business and financial centre. Logically, the minority cannot sustain without the concurrent support of the majority to maintain the status Hong Kong deserves; and, if this state of affairs continues, other competing cities in the Mainland such as Shanghai, would soon overtake Hong Kong.

During the era of our first Chief Executive, Mr. C. H. Tung, we all saw our education system take a dramatic change, implementing the usage of Putonghua as the main means of communication in practically all subjects at schools, thus effectively downgrading the importance and, consequently, the quality, of the English language into oblivion. As a consequence, few can write a simple letter or a business paper without being flooded with grammatical mistakes; and, few can speak simple sentences that business visitors can understand. I wonder who should be accountable for squandering such a historical legacy as being a premier international business and financial centre unnecessarily? Yet, by way of contrast, in less than two decades since China opened its door to foreign investment, the Central Government has encouraged more and more young men and women to further their education overseas, towing the same line as we did in the early sixties when more and more of us left Hong Kong to further our education overseas.

Just as you have said, like it or not, English is a world language. As *the Economist* reports, English is gaining ground in Europe, as practically the majority of young people in European countries are more likely to speak English in their working lives.

Our present Chief Executive, Mr. Donald Tsang, must do his utmost to avert a great injustice being forced upon our less fortunate but innocent children, who deserve the right kind of education system and teaching being meted out to them. I am sure tax payers can well afford and would not mind seeing a larger portion of their tax contributions being earmarked for their benefits.

I must take my stand on the importance of Putonghua. I give support to the need that everyone of us born in Hong Kong must now or soon speak and write Putonghua as proficiently as any one in the Mainland, and children must be taught to speak and write Putonghua with the same competence as the children in the Mainland. How this can be achievable, I leave that to those who know best.

Finally, I must congratulate you for your finding time to produce such a fine piece of English writing as the **English Asset** in the SCMP. Good English writing is becoming less frequent these days. I am sure many who have read your sweet fragrant article would wish that you would uphold that historical legacy and speak out appropriately in the Legislative Council.

Yours truly