

The First Shaoxing International Friendship City Conference

Delegate Report

The conference was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Shaoxing City, Zhejiang Province of the People's Republic of China, from May 24th to May 25th 2016. The Conference was hosted by: The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, Zhejiang Provincial People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the Shaoxing Municipal People's Government.

Cities from 17 Countries were represented: Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Fiji, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and the United States of America.

The City of Whitehorse has been a Friendship City with the City of Shaoxing since 2005.

Shaoxing City is on the southern shore of Hangzhou Bay in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River delta about 200km south of Shanghai (less than one hour by bullet train). Downtown Shaoxing is about 30 minutes from Hangzhou International Airport. Hong Kong is about a 2 hour flight from Hangzhou.

Shaoxing is promoted as the "Venice of the Orient" due to the many canals and waterways. It is also known for its rice wine, calligraphy, operas, prominent historical figures and rich cultural heritage.

The population is over 4.9 million living in an area of over 8000 square kilometres. Economically, the City is driven by manufacturing of textiles, machinery, electronics, bio pharmaceuticals and foodstuffs. In 2015 the City achieved a GDP per capita of 16,000 USD; one of the highest in China.

The aim of this Conference was to open up more new avenues of exchange and cooperation between Shaoxing and its friendship cities, promoting developments in the field of trade, economy, science, technology, tourism and culture.

The official opening of the Conference began on the first evening with a greeting of Heads of the Delegation followed by a group photo. This was followed by a visit to the Yue Zhou Hall where a “Products Exhibition from the Friendship Cities” had been set up. Stallholders were able to spruik their particular City’s products/benefits. Although we did not have an “official” stall, I managed to arrange a table to display our Box Hill marketing material and was able to speak to the delegation (via an interpreter) of the benefits of doing business in Box Hill. Thank you to our Investment & Economic Development Unit for providing the marketing material. The evening ended with a Reception Dinner and a boat tour of the “Shaoxing Moat.”

The next morning began with an Opening Ceremony involving many Opening Addresses:

1. Peng Jiaxue, Party Secretary of CPC Shaoxing Municipal Committee.
2. Xie Yuan, Vice Chairman of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.
3. Chen Aizhen, Vice Chairwoman of Zhejiang Provincial People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.
4. Ma Hongtao, Deputy Director – General, Department of Commerce of Zhejiang Province.
5. Tanaka Mikio, Mayor of Nanto, Japan.
6. Joane Naivalurua, Fijian Ambassador to China.

This was followed by speeches from Friendship City Mayors.

1. Pava Zsolt, Mayor of Pecs, Hungary
2. Jarkko Wuorinen, Chairman of the Board, South Savo Regional Council, Finland.
3. David James Trewavas, Mayor of Taupo, New Zealand.
4. Richard Matthew Stewart, Mayor of Coquitlam, Canada.
5. Matsunaga Hiroshi, Vice Mayor of Nishinomiya, Japan.
6. Park Jay-Hyun, Vice Mayor of Changwon, Korea.

Four Countries signed a Friendship City Agreement letter viz. New Zealand, Serbia, Canada & South Korea.

Three Cities signed collaboration projects: Taupo NZ for their “Thousand Tourist Program”, and South Korea & Fiji for water treatment projects.

The afternoon included break out sessions of two sub forums:

1. Culture, Education and Tourism
2. Economic and Trade Cooperation

These sub forums consisted of presentations by department officials in the main. They were highly scripted with no opportunities for questions or discussion.

Delegates were then directed to waiting buses for a tour of the Shaoxing Rice Wine Museum followed by a dinner.

CONCLUSIONS AND ACTIONS

The objective was to make contact with as many appropriate officials from the City of Shaoxing as was possible.

Contact with Shaoxing University, following up from the visit there by our Whitehorse Orchestra in 2015 was important. A delegation from the Shaoxing University was in Melbourne on Friday, 3rd June to mainly make contact with Deakin University, Burwood campus.

There was an opportunity to introduce the delegation to the Box Hill Community Art Centre for discussions around the Artist in Residence program and a local primary school that had expressed interest in a sister school arrangement. Shaoxing University have an affiliation with a primary school in Shaoxing. There will be follow up discussions with art, cultural and sporting opportunities.

During the Conference, contact was made with the Shaoxing Municipal Commerce Bureau and their Investment & Promotions Bureau. They are keen to do business with Friendship Cities. A connection will be made with our Whitehorse Business Group (WBG) and our Asian Business Association of Whitehorse (ABAW). A local businessman who contacted our Whitehorse Business Group just last week, expressed interested in setting up a China Office and has been given the Shaoxing details.

There are many opportunities for our Whitehorse community to benefit from our Friendship City relationship with the City of Shaoxing. If we want to take advantage of these opportunities there is a need to pursue this community to community link. The future will determine if our local community organisations see value and benefit in embracing these opportunities.

I thank the City of Whitehorse for the opportunity to facilitate the building of bridges with the City of Shaoxing for the ultimate benefit of the citizens of our community.

Cr Bill Bennett

4th June 2016

CONTACT LIST

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