

HE Ms Frances Adamson, Australian Ambassador to China

Address to Jilin University of Finance and Economics

Changchun, 6 September 2013

Vice President Yang Chunmei, Vice President Zhang Yuejie, students of Jilin University of Finance and Economics, good afternoon.

I am delighted to speak today at the Jilin University of Finance and Economics.

I know JUFEE was established in 1948 and is a leading university, with a strong record of international collaboration.

I am particularly pleased to be here today, not least because this university shares close relations with Australia's Charles Sturt University – as you all know.

I have been looking forward to this visit to Jilin – my first as Australian Ambassador to China.

I've had several opportunities to visit your neighbours in Liaoning, and I made my first visit to Heilongjiang earlier this year, and Inner Mongolia last year.

I'm not afraid to admit that travel to Dongbei is best done in warmer months – and I am pleased that the Jilin provincial government, in its wisdom, decided to hold the 9th China-Northeast Asia Expo in early September! That's where I've been today, at the opening ceremony.

Bordering Russia and North Korea, and experiencing a process of economic revitalisation, Dongbei is a unique part of China, and I always appreciate my travel here.

Australia has strong interests in this part of China, including our political and trade and commercial ties, but also of course our longstanding education links.

And there is no better example of our education links than the 15-year relationship between JUFEE and Australia's Charles Sturt University, which has seen over 1,000 students graduate with an Australian business studies degree recognised around the world.

Before I speak about the great value that programs such as yours bring to both our countries, I would like to say a few words about the Australia-China relationship – a

strategic partnership of mutual trust, mutual benefit and cooperation.

The Australia-China Strategic Partnership

Since we established diplomatic relations almost 41 years ago, Australia and China have shared a very good partnership.

This year in April, when then Prime Minister Julia Gillard visited China, very shortly after the National People's Congress, she met President Xi Jinping and also Premier Li Keqiang.

They agreed that the relationship between our two countries was sufficiently important not only for us to become strategic partners, but also for it to be agreed that our leaders, China's Premier and Australia's Prime Minister, would meet at least once a year formally to talk about the opportunities in our relationship, and also to be able to discuss frankly some of the issues on which we don't always necessarily agree.

So we were pleased with the outcome of these high level discussions.

But I'm sure you as students know, just as I as a diplomat know, that if you have an opportunity, it is wasted unless you make the very best use of it.

So I want you to know that we are discussing areas where we can work together to further enhance the bilateral relationship.

One of those areas is enhancing our commercial and trade relationship, and we are doing that through the negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement, which will give greater access to the Chinese market for Australian companies and greater access to the Australian market for Chinese companies.

Negotiating anything can be difficult, but negotiating a Free Trade Agreement takes even longer than an undergraduate degree.

Our negotiators have been working hard since 2005, over 19 rounds. That would be enough time for you to complete an undergraduate degree, take on a masters, and become a post-doctoral candidate.

Some things in international diplomacy take quite a long time.

We also really want to work on our people-to-people relationship.

You are very much a part of that.

We think there are good reasons to be able to speak at quite high levels, not just between governments, but also through a discussion involving scholars, senior business people, young people, journalists, and perhaps involving some others as well.

As is often the case, young people have led the way, and there is a very active Australia-China Youth Dialogue for people just a bit older than you are.

What we want to do is extend the ability to speak frankly to each other and to engage in a deeper dialogue across our relationship.

We also hope that one day it will be possible for young people from China to travel to Australia under what we call a Working and Holiday visa program, and for young people from Australia to come to China and perhaps study Chinese, perhaps take a course here at JUFÉ, and travel around China as well. So our two governments are working on that. There are some practical issues to address involving visas.

We are also looking to strengthen our defence cooperation relationship. It's important when you look at the changes taking place in the world, and the shift of economic and strategic weight to the Asia Pacific region, that our armed forces know each other well and know how to cooperate well.

We are also looking to deepen our engagement on regional and global issues. As you know, right now, President Xi Jinping is in St Petersburg, attending the G20 Summit. Russia is hosting the G20 this year, and next year Australia will host the G20 Summit.

Next year also, China is host of the APEC Forum. Australia and China have been longstanding partners in APEC and we want to become closer partners in the G20 and other international fora where we work together.

The value of our education ties

I'd now like to come back to where I started and the reason you are all here today – the value of our education ties.

Our ties in education, science and research are a key chapter in the Australia-China story.

These ties provide a strong and stable platform for our political and economic relationship.

They have gone from strength to strength since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries almost 41 years ago.

China is Australia's largest source of international students. China is also our largest trading partner.

Last year, close to 120,000 Chinese students studied at Australian educational institutions, which accounted for about 30 per cent of all international students in Australia.

That is of course in addition to courses such as this one offered here at JUFE, a course offered at Liaoning University in collaboration with Victoria University, and a number of other smaller collaborative arrangements.

The importance of our education links to Australia's economy, and the personal and professional benefit that Chinese students receive from engaging in our programs, is profound.

Because of links forged through our university exchanges, Australia and China share a longstanding and highly productive research relationship.

We work together in many areas of importance to both sides, including energy, astronomy, agriculture and food sciences, and nano-technology.

Australia recognises the value of what we call "Asian literacy". By that I mean the ability of our young people to understand Asia, to be knowledgeable about Asia's history and cultures, and to see Asia as a very distinctive group of societies which have some common threads, but also some very distinct differences.

And we want to see more Australian students studying in China. I hope one day you may see Australian students studying on your campus here at JUFE.

Future Unlimited

In 2011, the Australian government introduced what we call "Future Unlimited" – 未来无限 – a strategy designed to ensure that Australian education helps students such as you develop real world skills valued by international employers.

The goal is to ensure graduates of Australian courses have the best possible opportunity to find the career outcomes that they and you seek.

And from what we can see, Future Unlimited is delivering on its aims.

When the Australian government surveyed employers in China about their level of satisfaction with Australian-educated graduates, employers were overwhelmingly positive - over 98 per cent of 72 employers surveyed.

Overall, 93 per cent of Chinese employers we spoke with said they would recommend to other firms recruiting Australian-educated graduates.

This program, run in partnership between Charles Sturt University and Jilin University of Finance and Economics, is a great example of Future Unlimited.

I can say with confidence that the decision you have made to join this program will benefit your future significantly, not least because the skills you are developing here – in the practical fields of finance, economics and accounting – are precisely those skills that China is looking for as its economy diversifies into new sectors.

Through this program then you are not just gaining an Australian degree, but you are developing skills that will equip you for a successful career, whether it is here in Jilin, elsewhere in China, in Australia, or more widely internationally.

So when you find yourself deep in your preparations for your exams, perhaps feeling a little bit like the challenging path before you is rather like climbing the highest peak of the Changbai Mountain range – 长白山 – I would encourage you to keep your final destination clearly in mind.

So with that aim, I say to you that the future starts here, with you.

Closer engagement between young people from both our nations is what drives the relationship forward, with more meaningful exchanges, broader understanding and stronger partnerships.

Following more than 40 years of diplomatic relations between our countries, we have a solid foundation from which to take the bilateral relationship forward.

This is much broader than trade and investment, and it is sustained and enriched through the strong people-to-people ties.

It is truly a great pleasure to see so many young Chinese people here today, studying and engaging with Australia. You are the future of the relationship – and I am firmly convinced that it is in very good hands.

Thank you.