

***Invitation from China Cultural Centre to Ceremony of Donation of Terra Cotta
Warriors followed by Chinese Concert
22 July 2023 at 7.00pm
Exhibition Hall Chinese Garden of Serenity St Lucia***

Your Excellency Ambassador for the People's Republic of China, Yu Dunhai
Madame Yuan, Director of the China Cultural Centre
Esteemed guests
Dear friends

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Madame Yuan, Director of the China Cultural Centre in Malta, for her gracious invitation to this event, in celebration of the 20th Anniversary since the setting up of the China Cultural Centre in Malta.

It is always an honour for me to join in celebrating the longstanding bilateral relations between Malta and China and the friendship between our two peoples, which developed since the start of our diplomatic relations in 1972.

It is with great pleasure that I note that the friendship between our two peoples never stopped growing over these last 51 years.

On occasions such as today, I always feel that it is appropriate to acknowledge the wisdom, and pay respect to two great Statesmen, who were catalyst in bringing two countries from two so different hemispheres, closer.

Dom Mintoff, Malta's prominent Prime Minister, was the very first European Statesman in 1972, to acknowledge China's incredible potential, and reached out to Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party at the time, who acknowledged Malta's strategic and important role in the Mediterranean and European region.

It was thanks to their wisdom that our diplomatic, economic, social and cultural relations developed and continued to strengthen from then on.

I do believe that culture has played an important and significant part in the development of our bilateral friendship between our peoples.

I still remember when during the 1970's, when the late Ms Agatha Barbara, was Minister for Education and Culture, and later the first female President of Malta, through our bilateral relations, worked hard to give visibility to Chinese culture and welcomed many a cultural group from the People's Republic of China.

I clearly remember the amazing dancers and gymnasts gracing the stages set up even in Malta's village squares, whereby the people of Malta used to enjoy the magnificent talents and skills, of these brilliant Chinese performers.

Today we are marking another significant milestone, as we commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the China Cultural Centre in Malta. This is not just a milestone for Malta, but it is also a watershed moment

on a European level, as this China Cultural Centre was the first of its kind in Europe.

We must acknowledge that throughout these two decades, the China Cultural Centre has been another beacon of cultural exchange, fostering understanding, and forging lasting bonds between our nations.

The cultural bridge we have built has not only enriched our lives but also opened new avenues for friendship and cooperation.

When we embrace diversity and promote cultural exchange between our countries, we reaffirm our commitment to celebrate the richness of both our societies.

Today, the China Cultural Centre is once again fostering this cultural exchange through the donation of replicas of the "Chinese Terra Cotta Statues" found in the mausoleum of Emperor Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China.

The beautiful terracotta statues of soldiers, horses, chariots, and other military personnel are unique, indicating a remarkable level of craftsmanship, and attention to detail that is reminiscent of Chinese art.

The statues offer a glimpse into the artistic, and technological achievements of ancient China. Their location today, is celebrated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The site serves as a testament to the grandeur and power of the ancient Chinese civilization and remains, a symbol of China's rich cultural heritage.

I wish to take this moment to acknowledge a particular valuable contribution of the Chinese Cultural Centre in Malta.

I am pleased to highlight the collaborative efforts between the China Cultural Centre and the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society, a foundation which I set up in 2014, and still Chair today.

One of our bilateral endeavours was the Kite Festival, which created an amazing opportunity, whereby Chinese Kite Masters have, before the unfortunate COVID pandemic visited Malta, to share their expertise in building kites with school children. This presented a unique opportunity for children living on the Maltese Islands, to learn about the history of the kite and its importance in ancient China. The Kite Festival served as an interesting way for children to learn about the beauty of our diverse cultures.

Witnessing children participating during the Kite Festival, in the spirit of respect and unity was a source of immense joy to me.

During the pandemic we also tried to re-invent the connection due to the unfortunate constraints that the pandemic imposed on our world.

We created an online space for conversation between Maltese Children who were learning Chinese together with Chinese Children living in Malta, to exchange information, and share their knowledge, of their respective countries.

It was a memorable occasion, where the Children not only enjoyed the conversation, but were also so inspirational for us adults that participated in this dialogue.

I will never forget one particular remark, when Children at the end of the conversation, were asked if they find anything which is similar between the two countries.

A young boy promptly said that although China is a large country with the largest economy, and Malta is a small country with a small economy, we are two unique countries. The boy continued by saying that Malta and China are unique and are similar because, we both speak our own language, and that we do not borrow any other country's language.

It was a moment where all present, both children and adults, felt more connected. At the beginning of the next 20 years for the China Cultural Centre,

we must ensure that we invest more in our children to sustain and maintain the friendship between our peoples.

Let us cherish and invest more in sustaining these values of togetherness and sharing, as they are the essence of sustainable peace and harmony within our communities and among nations.

As we strengthen our friendships and connections, I firmly believe that the boundless possibilities of collaboration between Malta and China will guide us towards a brighter future for our present and future generations.

I urge us all to continue building open channels of communication and understanding, empowering our youth to actively participate in creating inclusive societies.

By adopting forward-looking and innovative approaches, we can ensure that our cooperation extends to economic, social, and cultural realms.

The Chinese Cultural Centre in Valletta will remain an invaluable platform to enhance our mutual understanding and friendship between our peoples.

As we navigate our responsibilities, let us prioritize equitable lives for all, considering the most marginalized and vulnerable in our decision-making processes.

Here, I encourage civil society to be the guiding conscience for leaders and policymakers, fostering respect for human dignity and the wellbeing of every individual. Through collective efforts, we can achieve sustainable peace and holistic wellbeing for our nations.

Once again, I extend my deepest appreciation to Madame Yuan and the China Cultural Centre for their continuous efforts in strengthening the cultural ties between Malta and China.

Let us embrace this celebration as testament to the enduring spirit of friendship that unites us.

Together, we can create a brighter and more harmonious world for us all, and especially for our children.

I would like to end my opening speech by quoting a Chinese Proverb which says:

A bosom friend afar brings distant lands near.

This is so true and our friendship between our distant lands/countries, was brought about by two bosom friends, Dom Mintoff and Mao Zedong.

Let's continue to work to sustain their important legacy.

Thank you and I wish you all an enjoyable evening.