

Chinese New Year Celebration
27 January 2001
Grand Ballroom, Sheraton Hotel

- Salutations -

Guang shi fut chey! A very happy New Year!

Of course, we are already three days into the Chinese New Year. Over the past few days we have witnessed colourful displays of New Year festivities. Tonight we are all being treated to a culinary and cultural feast characteristically of our splendid host the Chinese Club of Queensland. It is an absolute delight to share in these wonderful celebrations.

The Spring festival is a time for celebration, renewal, thanksgiving and reunion with family and friends. We are most fortunate to partake in it. I suspect many of the resolutions we made on 1st January have already quietly slipped our minds. Now we have a second chance! But most of all, we in Australia are privileged to share in the unique Chinese cultural experience both at this time, and more broadly throughout our lives.

When last I addressed the Chinese Club of Queensland, for the coincidental 706th anniversary of Marco Polo's return from China, and the 45th anniversary of your own fine organisation, I spoke of your club's, and the Chinese people's, enriching influence on Queensland culture. Now, as then, Queenslanders delight in cultural aspects including traditional cuisine, visual arts, and relevantly today, festivals.

I also spoke, three years ago, of the Australian Chinese community's important contribution to this nation's industry and commerce for example, through the Australian Chinese Chambers of Commerce, in developing substantial trade links with Asian nations. Again, today, we continue to benefit from Australian Chinese organisations which facilitate Australian entry into Chinese markets.

I am pleased to note, however, that not all things remain unchanged since my last address. I had sensed, at that earlier time, concern in some Australian quarters about Australia's cultural constitution the existence of our many cultures, and the extent to which they might blend together. I am pleased and relieved to note such concerns have largely faded into the background as Australians embrace their truly multicultural identity. The nation is fortunate that we have all tolerantly persisted together! Australia would be a much lesser place without its Australian Chinese community, so instrumental in Australia's moving forward as a united nation into the new millennium.

Of course new millennia seem less significant to the ancient East. This is, for you, "just another year". But you might be relieved to see the old one pass. It seems that the past year – the year of the Double Dragon, brought as much turmoil and disruption as was predicted – globally, and locally! Queenslanders especially will no doubt look forward to the less turbulent Year of the Metal Snake!

It is a little unusual perhaps, to Western ears, that a snake might be celebrated for a full 12 months. Those brought up in the Christian faith know to avoid snakes lurking near apple trees, while Australians tend to avoid their native snakes altogether! But the snake of this Chinese New Year is different. Your President informs me that this snake brings greater calm in our somewhat dragon-weary lives. This new year will be a time for contemplation, for reassessing our situation and redefining our goals. And we can use this time to work towards greater success and prosperity in the next year – the year of the Horse! May this be your experience!

It has been a great pleasure to address you again this evening, and to share this very special Spring Festival with you. Once again, *Guang shi fut chey!* And *Sun ling fy lok!* May you prosper in this new year!