

Foreword



I cannot remember when I first met Jasper Tsang Yok-sing. That's because we go back a long way. I met him as a reporter when he was a rising star in politics. Throughout the years we have bumped into each other often at cocktail receptions and at large dinners. He has also come to my TV show several times. But it was only recently that the two of us shared our first private meal together

when he graciously agreed to come again to my TV show. We had breakfast at the TV station after the recording. He paid and even gave me a ride back to Central.

The thing that strikes me about talking with Jasper Tsang is that we almost always talk in English even though I am totally fluent in Cantonese. I sometimes switch to Cantonese but both of us subconsciously switch back to English. It seems like he is far more comfortable using English with people who speak fluent English but are also fluent in Cantonese. Most other politicians whom I know prefer speaking to me in Cantonese. Jasper Tsang cares deeply about English. The way he speaks it, with perfect grammar, pronunciation and mannerism, tells me he committed himself long ago to making English part of his life.

I know he is troubled by the falling standards of English in Hong Kong. I share his concern. Our schools, aside from international schools, are just not producing students with the same English mastery that Jasper Tsang has. Reasons for this are many, but this is not the place to detail them. I will say, however, that I fear the cultural setting conducive to raising English standards is slipping away.

As Jasper Tsang knows well, to master a language, you have to expose yourself to the culture of that language. You have to speak, read, write, and even think in that language on a regular basis. You have to love the language, embrace its culture, and enjoy its literary works. I grew up reading and re-reading *Wuthering Heights*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Contrary to what many in Hong Kong believe, learning English is really not all that difficult if you put your mind to it.

If you want to do that, Jasper Tsang's book detailing how he made English an integral part of his life is a good place to start. It is a delight to read. It is a book rich with insights about English-learning, politics, and education by one of Hong Kong's most interesting personalities. I am sure you will learn a lot from it. I can tell you it will definitely be a part of my book collection.

Michael Chugani