

### **'21st Century Coca-Cola Cup' National English Speaking Competition – Adrian Mak**

Perhaps I will start off with what this competition which is still relatively unknown in Hong Kong is all about. Founded by China Daily in 1996, the '21st Century Coca-Cola Cup' National English Speaking Competition Finals is described as being “known for its strict procedures and authoritative judging”, and is “regarded as one of the most prestigious events of its kind in China.” Contestants go through rigorous competition. Competitors undergo multiple rounds to qualify to this stage, including nationwide online preliminary contest, campus preliminary contests, telephone interview, regional finals. In 2010 alone, for example, the competition attracted more than 1,000,000 participants and audiences from about 850 universities across China. Facing such daunting competition, so what did I do to gear myself up for this competition? To answer this question, I will first briefly explain the format of the competition.

In each round of the national semi-finals and finals, we were required to give a i) prepared speech for 4 minutes, ii) an impromptu speech and iii) a question-and-answer session. The i) prepared speech were respectively on the themes Man vs Technology, as well as Chinese Youth's position in the globalization world. For the ii) impromptu speech, we were given 15 minutes immediately prior to our stage-time to randomly draw a topic and speak for 3 minutes. The topics ranged from Chinese politics (e.g. Chinese HuKou system), International social issues (e.g. Emma Watson and third wave feminism), to Chinese philosophy (comparing western vs Chinese philosophy) and technological trends (AlphaGo and self-driving cars by Tesla). My topics were on the reason teenagers procrastinate and on the Chinese trend of “naked marriage” (i.e. where teenagers choose to marry without any lavish ceremonies or banquets). For the iii) Q and A session, I was asked on a quote by Douglas Adams on creativity, a question on naked marriage, a question on the moral impacts of current technological development, and on Chinese free trade vs isolationism.

In response to this competition format, I submitted my speeches to at least 2 professors and other tutors, who have provided me with immensely instructive comments over the past month. I have also had practice sessions with an external tutor who perfected my mannerisms and intonation. Furthermore, I spent at least an hour every day for the past month to familiarize myself with the news of mainland China. With this, I proceeded to the Grand Finals after scoring the highest mark for Day 2 in semi-finals. In the finals I managed to capture 一等獎, ranking overall 6th Best Speaker in the Competition.

What I learn most was two-fold. Firstly and substantively, the post-competition evaluations provided from the highly-esteemed judges were intellectually stimulating. For example, one of the judges who was previously a national winner himself mentioned that in order to write his winning speech, he had completely abandoned and re-wrote his speeches for at least 30 times before coming up with a wholly original one. Whilst I had my reservations about extolling such virtues of working hard blindly without working smart, I understood the immense effort with which one can devote to a goal. Apart from forcing me to rethink how deeply I desired what I hoped to achieve, I became lucidly aware of the competition I will be facing from the mainland and international students.

Secondly, I benefitted immensely from the advice from other contestants. Hitherto my preconceived notions were that some of the students might be less willing to share their knowledge with others, in order to preserve their own ranking. However, my roommate who came from a famous university from Shanghai magnanimously provided me with tips on my speeches as I hurried to rehearse it late at night before the competition. He often urged me to tune down in the academic content of my speeches, and to instill more personal experience in

order to provide a unique perspective into a topic. Under his advice, for example, I added a short anecdote about my father in my Finals speech.

Overall, substantive knowledge and life-long friendships were made. I am grateful for the opportunity which the Chui's Excellence scheme had bestowed upon me.

## Photos



Grand Finals Speech



Other Contestants



Grand Finals Impromptu Speech