

Speech by Mr Matthias Yao Chih (姚智)  
Mayor of South East District, Singapore  
Deputy Speaker of Parliament  
Adviser to Singapore Maritime Officers' Union

Mr Wang Shaoyun (王绍云), Vice-President, Qingdao Port Corporation,

Mr Thomas Tay (郑维华),  
General Secretary, Singapore Maritime Officers' Union

Mdm Liu Ying-Hua (刘映华),  
President, Qingdao Harbour Vocational Technical College,

Ms Wang He (王禾), General Secretary of the China Coordination Council  
for Overseas Seaman Employment (COSE),

Mr Ma Ji, Chairman of the China Seamens' Union (CSU) - Shandong,

Distinguished Guests,

Graduating Cadets,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening!

I am honoured to be invited here to this beautiful city of Qingdao to officiate at the graduation ceremony of the pioneering group of 80 cadets who have completed the inaugural Wavelink CadetsPlus programme.

Qingdao and Singapore have much in common. We are both important port cities, serving a wide region around us. We have well-developed maritime industries. We welcome many tourists each year to enjoy our sights and cultures. Businessmen from the two sides have established fruitful partnerships and investments with each other. This Wavelink CadetsPlus programme further strengthens the friendship and relationship between our two cities.

The outlook in the maritime sector is bright, and that augurs well for Qingdao and Singapore. Global sea-borne trade continues to rise every year. New build vessels are put into commission with steady regularity. There is much growth and optimism for the foreseeable future.

With this growth comes a strong demand for seafarers all over the world. If present trends continue, it is estimated that by 2015 there may be a global shortfall of 27,000 officers.

This gap presents an opportunity for the young men and women who wish to build a career in the maritime sector. Asia, in particular, will benefit from this opportunity. Already, 40% of the seafarers in the world fleet come from Asia. And among Asian countries, China has the most number of seafarers serving overseas.

From its 76 Maritime Colleges and Institutes, China produces more than 10,000 graduates in maritime studies every year. Currently, there are about 42,000 officers and 79,000 ratings from China serving on board foreign flagged ships. A number of them are employed by Singapore registered companies.

The Singapore Maritime Officers' Union has, among its members, 1,200 officers from China. In their interaction with ship-owners, managers, and the union members, the union leaders realised that the transition by the cadets from graduation to serving on foreign registered ships could be further smoothed by a preparatory course that would equip the cadets with the knowledge required in international shipping. Such a programme would benefit the cadets and the ship operators as the familiarisation period, both land-based and onboard ships, will be much shortened.

Thus, in a collaboration among the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union, Wavelink Academy and shipping affiliates, and with the strong support of the Singapore Maritime Training Fund, the Wavelink CadetsPlus programme was formed. The programme offers courses in "Maritime English", "Shipboard Organisation, Behaviour and Management", and "Maritime Occupational Safety, Health & Environmental Protection". These are useful and practical courses that will help to prepare the cadets for work in an international environment.

The Wavelink CadetsPlus programme has made an excellent start. Tonight, we witness the graduation of 80 cadets in the first batch of students. They are now fully ready for work onboard the international shipping lines. Please join me in congratulating all of them, and wishing them every success, as they embark on their maritime career.

This was made possible because there is enormous support from many important organizations here in China, including the government, training institutions, ship management and trade union.

Many friends from other cities in China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and elsewhere have also come to join us this evening to celebrate this happy occasion. Your concern and assistance give SMOU and Wavelink greater encouragement to strive for excellence for the benefit of the cadets and the industry.

I would also like to congratulate the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union and Wavelink for this significant initiative. The union has a long history of safeguarding the welfare of its members. Its approach is forward looking. The union does its work not by making unreasonable demands on the employers, but by exploring ways that can lead to genuine, long-term job security and advancement for its members. It does so by matching the needs of the union members and employers to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. This Wavelink CadetsPlus programme is one such example.

As the maritime sector expands, the international shipping companies will recruit many more cadets from China. I am sure the Wavelink CadetsPlus programme will be a valuable contribution to the process for many years to come. But it will not be able to achieve its objective without the support of the many people and organisations that have given the programme continuing encouragement.

I therefore take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to Mr Wang Shaoyun, Vice-President of Qingdao Port Corporation for your strong endorsement, to all the shipowners, managers and manning agencies for your recognition of this programme, and to everyone present for your support and guidance.

Thank you.