

Local business people urged to learn Chinese

By Verne Burnett Thursday, June 26 2014

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DR Beverley-Anne Carter, Director of the Centre of Language Learning at the St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI), last Wednesday said that the United Kingdom loses 7.3 billion pounds a year or 0.5 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) because that country's business sector confines its exports to countries where English is spoken.

Carter, who is also one of the directors of the Confucius Institute, also located on the UWI St Augustine campus, said simplified Chinese, the language spoken in China, is the sixth most widely-used language in e-GDP.

She explained that the term e-GDP covers both online and offline spending, stating that the "e" refers to the fact that people may be attracted to a product and even influenced to buy it by online advertising and may even research products online but they might do the actual spending offline in brick and mortar stores.

She said that in 2007, 48.4 percent of such online/offline trade was in English but by 2013 this had fallen to 36.3 percent. She said, "The fastest growing languages in terms of economic power are Russian, Arabic and simplified Chinese. She added that, "If we as a country understand that we have to engage in economic diversification, if we have to export, we cannot continue to pat ourselves on the back and say that we are English speakers, we have to tap in to those languages."

She said language learning is a subject with real life applicability. Carter made the comments at a seminar to celebrate 40 years of diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and China. The seminar was held on June 18, 2014, at the Conference Centre of the University Inn on the UWI St Augustine campus.

She said the Centre of Language Learning started teaching Chinese with five students but last year it had 72 people learning Chinese. Also speaking at the function was the other director of the Confucius Institute, Professor HU Youzhen, described on the programme as the China-side Director, from the College of Humanities and Development at the China Agricultural University.

She said there are more than 400 Confucius Institutes all over the world and disclosed that the one at UWI was established last year as a joint venture between UWI and the China Agricultural University. She spoke about key concepts in Chinese culture, telling participants about the value of harmony in various important relationships.

The Confucius Institute was set up on June 1, 2013 with the signing in Parliament of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the second of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean. The other one was established at the UWI Mona Campus in Jamaica in July 2010.

The occasion of the signing of the MOU was marked by a tour of the St Augustine campus by a six-member delegation from the headquarters of the Confucius Institute in Hanban, China. The aim of the institute is to strengthen educational cooperation between China and Trinidad and Tobago, support and promote the development of Chinese Language education and increase mutual understanding between people in China and Trinidad and Tobago. The Confucius Institute teaches Chinese and provides Chinese Language teaching resources; trains Chinese language instructors; provides information and consultative services concerning

China's education and culture; conducts language and cultural exchange activities and serves as the centre for the Chinese Proficiency Test, and conducts tests for the Certification of Chinese Language Instructors.

The Chinese Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, Huang Xingyuan, also delivered an address in which he said one of the goals set for China's future development was to raise the per capita income of its population to "almost the level of Trinidad and Tobago in the next six years."

He said China is the biggest developing country in the world, adding that it has a population of more than 1.3 billion people but that over 200 million of them live below the poverty line as determined by the United Nations.