

Megemlékezések

Pordány Sarolta:

In memoriam Chia Mun Onn



Reflecting on his activities conducted in aid of development of adult education and Hungarian civil organisations (In memoriam speech presented at the 2007 international conference of The Association for Development of Adult Education)

Upon the sudden death of Chia Mun Onn I have to formulate some thoughts, which I have not had the time to think through and accept for myself, because we are organising, managing, getting things ready, but we are not counting on death and the inevitability of it suddenly occurring. During the preparations for this conference it became evident, in particular first in electronic form, in e-mailing: “the address given is registering a continuous fault, the letter is undelivered”. This was followed by letters from friends and colleagues: “we are informing you that Chia Mun Onn has passed away on 22nd October 2007 at 10.35 am”. Everybody knows, who uses the modern information transmission systems of today, if an address is not operational, if the addressee does not open and answer his letters, then the contact is terminated. This was an unknown situation for Chia Mun Onn. He always answered the letters, because he valued friendships and human contact above everything else.

The evaluation of Chia Mun Onn’s international adult education work will be conducted by those organisations, which he was a member of during the past decades. But his participation in Hungarian adult education has to be acknowledged by our organisation, The Association for Development of Adult Education, because his co-operation was strongest with our organisation.



We first met in Finland in 1989 at the marvellous world conference organised by the Finnish colleagues: "Meeting in Finland", which meeting had influences lasting up to this day. This was the time of the changing system in Hungary and the expert audience of the world was welcoming us kindly. It was an unforgettable experience, because everybody wanted to speak to us and help us. From among the many superficial conference friendships, which later prove to be just that, Chia Mun Onn's became long lasting. He visited Hungary twice arriving from Singapore. He organised our participation in the conference of the Singapore Association for Continuing Education, and we could marvel at his country. He sent articles, letters and advice, and all this without expecting anything in return, purely just being helpful.

One of the most useful and fruitful exchanges of correspondence with him – among many others yet to be utilised in practical terms – we conducted in January 2005 in connection with the adult education challenges regarding the Southeast Asian tsunami. As a result of this we organised a domestic round table discussion during which we discussed the responsibilities of adult education and educators. As a result of this group thinking we named one of the topics on our web site: "Knowledge added together".

I quote from one of his letters: "My feelings of sympathy towards the victims is equally great as my pain, that I feel, because despite our greatly sounding speeches about the effectiveness of adult education, it is obvious, that we are unable to prepare particularly the poor and illiterate people to protect themselves and be able to act during natural or manmade catastrophes."

The portion of his letter demonstrates his way of thinking, it shows that Chia Mun Onn could rise above everybody and everything and he could think about global problems globally. This made him particularly suitable – besides his openness – to conduct international organisational tasks. The photo displayed now shows him at the conference in Africa organised by DVV International in 2005, where he presented a paper about his specialist subject: adult educational co-operation in Southeast Asian countries.

His death and its circumstances were worthy of his whole professional carrier. He was untiringly working on developing international adult educational networks, he was preparing to visit us, so he could teach and learn – as he said on one occasion.

He was fighting for his life, as his immediate colleague and friend Thomas Kuan, the president of Singapore Association for Continuing Education wrote. He fought hard for three days with death. He wanted to live and help despite his bad health and mobility difficulties.

His preparations for "the trip" were also symbolic and moving. The travelling in practical terms meant the flight to Hungary, but rereading our correspondence I should have noticed the insignificant half sentences, the double meaning hidden among compulsory friendly international phrases. These expressions were the messages of a friend and colleague preparing for the final great journey.