

# An Interpretation of the Topic for the Prepared Speech of the 2018 FLTRP Cup English Public Speaking Contest

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The FLTRP (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) Cup English Public Speaking Contest is one of the major nationwide English competitions for Chinese learners as well as a hot spot for extracurricular activities among Chinese colleges. The prepared speech has always been of great significance to all participants in that its survivors will qualify for the next round and gain a chance of making it to the final summit round. This essay intends to interpret the topic of the prepared speech “The Stones, \_\_\_\_\_” by tracing the origin of “stones”, analyzing relevant key words with an intent to advise rhetorical strategies on speech writing based on the principles of three beauties.

*Keywords:* FLTRP (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) Cup, English public speaking, writing, rhetoric

## Introduction

As a national intercollegiate English speaking contest, the annual FLTRP (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) Cup has enjoyed wide popularity and anticipation each year. The release of the topic for prepared speech on March 26 takes the form of a 4-minute video, roaming through 40 years of modern Chinese history since its adoption of the open-door policy in 1978, focusing on the country’s outstanding achievements and changes made in people’s lives. The metaphoric expression put forward in the video, “crossing the river by feeling for the stones” (mō zhe shí tou guò hé 摸着石头过河) is a well-known Chinese allegorical saying that has been branded as a political punch line. It can be understood as making tentative attempts or advancing cautiously. During the early stages of its opening-up days, China was cautiously trying to cross the river of economy by feeling for the stones of economic truths. The video also extends its usage by creating phrases, such as “testing the water”, “the crossed rivers”, and “more rivers to cross”.

This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the great decision of open-door policy and the stones are put in the limelight on the stage of the 2018 FLTRP Cup. The given topic for prepared speech, “The Stones, \_\_\_\_\_”, leaves space for the speaker to fulfill with personal association or imagination. It appeals for innovation and inspiration. In the spirit of crossing the river by feeling for the stones, a look back on the history is necessary before an attempt is made. In the following, this paper intends to trace the origin of the stones, explain the key words in focus, and analyze writing strategies. It hopes to shed light on the writing of the whole speech based on its cultural and rhetorical implications.

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### **The Origin of the Stones**

The year of 1978 marked a brand-new era for China, for it implemented the reform and opening-up policy in the economic sector. However, for a country which had just struggled its way out of the ten-year Cultural Revolution and the three-year famine, the situation then was critical. The feeble economy seemed doomed and to make matters worse, it was cursed with a whirlwind of sinister pomposities. The gloominess hung over the country was broken up by the media. On May 11, 1978, *Guangming Daily* published a special commentator's article, entitled "Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing the Truth", which was immediately reprinted by Xinhua Agency and followed up by *People's Daily* and *PLA (People's Liberation Army) Daily*. A nationwide discussion was ignited on the criterion of truth. Two years later, in December 1980, CHEN Yun (1984) reiterated the importance of seeking truth. "We need to reform with steady steps... (we must) learn from experience, namely crossing the river by feeling for the stones" he elaborated (Volume 3, *Selected Works of Chen Yun*). CHEN spoke on the occasion of the working conference of the CPC (Communist Party of China) central committee and reaped ripples of agreement; his remarks made the Chinese allegorical saying a catch phrase till today.

The implications of the metaphorical phrase are wrapped in three layers: The stones stand for facts or truth, feeling for the stones suggests gaining the knowledge, and crossing the river symbolizes the action of executing. The whole phrase enunciates testing acquired truth through careful action or putting knowledge to practice by cautious attempts. Only in this way can risks be diminished and damages be minimized. The phrase can also entail such influence factors as the changing waters, the hidden hazards below water, and the unknown and unpredictable nature of the river. In order to succeed in reaching the opposite bank, reliable stones are to be found.

Forty years of cautious attempts witnessed marvelous progress the Chinese people have accomplished in pursuing a better life. The law and practice that have brought beneficial results are the reliable stones. On the other hand, failed attempts and setbacks are also stones, which are lessons to be learned. They altogether have led the Chinese people to destination despite slips and falls. The original aspiration stands stronger with knowledge of weights and shapes of the stones, and of depths and flows of the water. The spirit will continue to work its magic in the future. Success tolerates no rash or arrogance; keep feeling for the good stones for sake of risk-free benefits.

### **Discover Your Own Stones**

It is unwise to presume that the prepared speech lacks variety or creativity. Though the speech topic is half set, it still reserves plenty of space for elaboration. "The Stones, \_\_\_\_\_", invites the speaker to fill in the blank with personal ideas. It is always advisable to brainstorm for inspirations yet the following four adjectives taken from the video can serve as guidelines:

#### **Colorful**

Colorful stones tell interesting stories. A winning speech is never dull. An interesting theory, a unique perspective, or an intriguing plot works absolutely better in grasping the audience's attention than straight-face preaching, however your theory is in the right. The audience expects to hear something fascinating; no one sits down to be put to sleep. It is the speaker's responsibility to interest, engage, and enchant. Provide sufficient details so that the audience can form mental pictures. A sense of humor is always welcome to ease the atmosphere especially in the intensity of speech competition.

**Significant**

Significant stones weigh heavily. They should be important events so much so that the impact is consequential whether in a personal dimension or on a demographic group or even on a national scale. It is best to dig into personal history for profound experiences that coincide with significant timelines. Special occasions like graduation count as rites of passage and so does an epiphany or an amazing discovery of personal growth. Put emphasis on how personal discoveries of truth are made. Take great care in dealing with political clichés.

**Valuable**

Valuable stones make precious jewelry. Explore for gems of intelligence. The lessons learned in attaining the stones are pearls of wisdom which may be rare yet truly esteemed. Wisdom often wraps itself up in layers of pretentious snobbishness. Only those who wear down the surface by the power of thinking can have the honor to host wisdom in their intellectual hall. Hence the information and knowledge the speaker selects to share should be all worth the while.

**Magic**

Magic stones work wonders. The stones can be holy, mystical, and even enchanted as long as they are powerful enough to perform miracles. The inexplicability allows most freedom for the speaker to capitalize on. The great charm of speech-making lies in the delicate balance between logical reasoning and magical mystery, which might as well be called the sixth sense in public speaking. Evasive can become persuasive. No audience is immune to the wizard's wave of the wand. Say the right spell and people's eyes will sparkle.

**Polish Your Stones**

Once the stones are designated, the next step is to polish them till they shine. There are two working tools for the speaker to employ in refining the script: the Chinese element and the principle of three beauties.

**The Chinese Element**

With the Belt and Road initiative, China assumes a stronger role in international affairs and impressing its cultural image on the global stage. Telling Chinese stories has become a hot spot and the new rage in English-wise activities. The 2017 FLTRP Cup offered "China a Global View" as the topic for prepared speech, which stressed a strong stand on seeing China against the backdrop of the world. The topic calls for participants to elaborate on Chinese stories with a global mindset or Chinese perspectives on the global state of affairs. This year's topic still underwrites the Chinese culture encompassing its character, convictions, and ideals through historic spying glasses.

Considering the fact that the speech is delivered to an audience supposedly fluent in Chinese culture, the speaker should feel free to tell his or her story of stones with Chinese characteristics. He or she should be well-versed in intercultural communication and can never be confined to the Chinese or English way of thinking, i.e., a fish swimming freely in both waters. However, the speaker is supposed to encode the authentic Chinese culture in a totally different language and make perfect sense. Anything inappropriate in either culture will defame the credibility of the speaker and whatever he or she tries to sell.

**The Principle of Three Beauties**

Public speaking is to perform and persuade. The speaker should seek to achieve linguistic effects for the sake of desirable influence on the audience, in the competition setting, the panel as well. By virtue of telling

Chinese stories in English, the speaker is somehow translating the Chinese culture into English. Given the distinctive features of the Chinese language, the principle of three beauties in poetry translation (XU, 1983) can provide some guidance in refining the writing, i.e., the beauty of phonology, the beauty of formality, and the beauty of style.

Remember the fact that speech is rendered to the ear. Sound is the instantaneous and conspicuous messenger that arouses the audience's feelings. Variation of tones and stresses can be carefully planted for certain musical effects; the same is true of rhymes and phonemes. Do not hesitate to lay down sounds or syllables that may ring up the ear. Designed silence punctuated at particular points can sometimes articulate important ideas.

A message is an easy-to-get-across message if it takes up an attractive form. Successful examples of rhetorical usage live in numerous classic speeches like J. F. Kennedy's skillful use of antithesis and Dr. Martin Luther King's emphatic parallelism and repetition. Poetic verses will surely ring bells of charm among the audience. A skillful combination of phonological phenomena and lexical layout is bound to win the heart of those with an appetite for linguistic delicacies.

The last beauty, style, refers to its moral or spiritual sense through aesthetic images created by the language. It is the soul of words. Chinese ancient poetry highly values imagery, which is a tactic of painting with words in the listener's mind through sketching expressive material existences. Just as in cinematography the camera angles a unique perspective, the speaker shoots a curious story using sounds and meaning. What is chosen to be told tells the story; it will be told in the specific way it is meant to be told. The main idea may be straightforward even tactless while the way to tell can land a touchdown in the game.

The first two beauties serve the last. Altogether, they breathe life and emotions into the stones and the speech will be of flesh and blood, powerful enough to touch other souls.

### Conclusion

Intercultural competence has always been a great concern for Chinese learners of English and enhancing intercultural awareness has been included as a major task in the Teaching Guide for College English (Ministry of Education, 2017). Extracurricular activities play a significant role in stimulating students' interest in expanding their knowledge of foreign cultures, which, through reflecting upon their culture, facilitates in establishing healthy cultural identity and conducting effective intercultural communication. The FLTRP Cup English Speaking Contest provides incentives for motivated learners to shine on this stage with particular emphasis on cultivating in students a strong sense of intercultural communication and a global mindset. This year's contest finals in December anticipate elites from the whole country to tell their outstanding stories of stones, stories of Chinese colors. Those who are capable of charming the audience with the story in their pocket will pocket the audience's hearts and the trophy of the FLTRP Cup.

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