

January 26, 2012

Immigration law expert speaks to Rotary Club

By CHERIL VERNON [Palestine Herald-Press](#)

PALESTINE — One of the country's leading immigration attorneys Charles C. Foster of Houston discussed the need for immigration reform during the Rotary Club of Palestine meeting Wednesday at the Ben E. Keith Community Center.

Long recognized as a national expert on U.S. immigration law, Foster has served as senior policy adviser to both Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama during their presidential campaigns and has testified before both the U.S. House and Senate Subcommittees on immigration on a variety of occasions.

"Immigration has been a popular topic for the political season," Foster said, noting the best way to handle the issue is for comprehensive immigration reform that involves some sort of a legal avenue for immigrants.

Foster is co-chairman of Foster Quan, LLP, one of the largest global immigration law firms. He is the founding chairman of the State Bar of Texas Immigration and Nationality Law Section. He also is a past national president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and chairman of the American Bar Association Coordinating Committee on Immigration Law.

Foster, whose wife is Chinese, made international headlines when famed Houston Ballet star Li Cunxin, a Chinese national in the U.S., was forcibly detained inside the Chinese Consulate in 1981 after informing Chinese authorities that he intended to remain in the United States. Li was part of the first U.S. cultural delegation to communist China and was one of the first two cultural exchange students allowed to go to America to study dance under Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong's regime.

Li's immigration attorney was Foster, who refused to abandon his client at the consulate. What followed was a tense 21-hour negotiation, which created a standoff between the Chinese and the U.S. government. During the international event, Foster went to federal court to obtain a restraining order, meeting two federal judges in the early morning hours at the rear entrance of the U.S. District Courthouse in Houston. All the while, he quietly phoned senior U.S. authorities, alerting them to the legal consequences of forcible repatriation to further prevent Li's removal from the United States.

"We knew the decision would cause a firestorm in China," Foster said, noting over the years he has helped many high-skilled and/or talented immigrants ranging from doctors, researchers, dancers and musicians remain in the United States.

Li then danced with the Houston Ballet for 16 years and became known as one of the best dancers in the world. While dancing in London, he fell in love with an Australian born ballerina with a major ballet company in England, Mary McKendry. They married in 1987, and in 1995

moved to Melbourne with their two children where Li became a principal dancer with the Australian Ballet.

That incident is now part of the 2009 film “Mao’s Last Dancer,” based on Li’s autobiography.

Foster reminded the Rotary Club audience that America is a “nation of immigrants” and that most are “proud of their immigrant history,” recalling a joke about the American Indians saying that they are a “failure at their own immigration policy.”

Even in Benjamin Franklin’s day, immigration was a hot topic, Foster said, but at the time Franklin was concerned about those of German descent moving into the colonies.

“As it’s always been, we pull the bridge up for the next wave of immigrants,” Foster said.

The late president John F. Kennedy, author of “A Nation of Immigrants,” was motivated to run for office by his family’s Irish immigrant history, Foster said.

When he tells people he works in immigration law, they say “business must be good.”

“They must think I’m standing there holding my business card as they walk by when they cross the border,” Foster said.

In fact, Foster says immigration is quite restrictive now compared to before 1968 when there was no quota for allowing immigrants into the country.

Every president since Gerald Ford has upped the amount spent on the border enforcement, Foster said.

“We now spend billions of dollars instead of millions of dollars,” Foster said.

But immigration — especially over the Mexican border — has changed. Less are coming over illegally, Foster said, due to a variety of factors: Less jobs; cartels forcing immigrants to pay a minimum of \$3,500 to cross the border; lower birth rate comparable to the U.S. (2.1 children versus 6 to 7 children); and lower unemployment rate in Mexico.

A recognized expert in U.S. immigration law, Foster has more than 30 years of experience representing and advising multinational companies.

Foster also serves as Honorary Consul General for the Kingdom of Thailand. Among numerous professional honors, Foster has been recognized as a top-ranked immigration lawyer by Chambers USA, America’s Leading Lawyers; as a “Texas Super Lawyer” by Texas Monthly magazine; and as a “Go-To Immigration Lawyer” by Texas Lawyer.

Foster is the nephew of Doris Paxton of Palestine and cousin to Rotary Club member Martha Paxton.

<http://palestineherald.com/localscene/x647572821/Immigration-law-expert-speaks-to-Rotary-Club>