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## Witnessing the Blossoms of Sino-U.S. Friendship and Saying "YES" to the Future

On November 9, the closing party of the Chinese-American Youth Cultural Exchange Camp was filled with music, dance, and the vibrant spirit of friendship. Over eight days, 15 students and faculty members from Utah Valley University joined their peers at Zhejiang Institute of Economics and Trade (ZJIET) in an immersive exchange program themed Experiencing Intangible Cultural Heritage and Perceiving E-commerce Innovation. Through in-class learning, cultural activities, company visits, and after-class practice, the youth from both countries gained firsthand experience of China's thriving digital trade, the rich legacy of Song Dynasty culture, the splendor of natural landscapes, and the grandeur of ancient and modern architecture. In the process, they forged deep friendships.



### ► A cultural journey through time

To offer the American visitors a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, the Institute organized an event on the Song Dynasty intangible cultural heritage. Dressed in traditional attire, ZJIET teachers and students demonstrated to their American counterparts Song-style tea whisking, Chinese calligraphy, traditional fan-making, and Chinese Kung Fu. The students learned to paint on tea foam, craft fans from bamboo strips, write Chinese characters with calligraphy brushes, and experience the essence of Chinese martial arts in

every practiced move. These activities not only imbued the visiting students with the expansive and profound Chinese culture, but also allowed them to be personally connected, through practice, with the glamor of ancient Chinese art.

### ► An e-commerce journey across mountains and oceans

On the Digital Craftsmanship Academy campus, the American visitors completed a course on e-commerce live streaming through integrating theory and practice under the teaching of Chinese instructors. Fascinated by China's e-commerce industry and AI technology, they gained a direct cognition and understanding of modern e-commerce operations and technological support in China. In the practice session, the Chinese and American youth learned the entire process of livestream sales and the essential skills involved, in particular, the applications of cross-border e-commerce. This structured learning module provided the American students with a systematic learning of China's thriving e-commerce industry. More importantly, they were exposed to the distinctive appeal of Hangzhou as the nation's e-commerce hub.



In the off-campus research and study segment, the visiting group toured Huawei's Global Training Center where they witnessed cutting-edge technology and innovative practices in China's intelligent manufacturing. From the immersive experience, they observed and felt how high-tech is driving new quality productive forces and socio-economic

progress. The delegation was amazed at China's achievements in smart manufacturing and expressed high expectations for the development potential and international collaboration possibilities in this field.



### ► An unforgettable city exploration

While in Zhejiang Province, the American teachers and students explored the breathtaking West Lake and visited historical and cultural landmarks including Southern Song Dynasty Deshou Palace Ruins Museum, the China Umbrella Museum, the Fan Museum, and the Knife, Scissors & Sword Museum. These visits provided a window into Hangzhou's brilliant culture and deepened the young visitors' understanding of the city's history. At the Yiwu International Trade Market, aka, the World's Supermarket, the students learned about the dynamism of China's merchandise trade. At Lu Xun's former residence in Shaoxing, they came to know the literary giant's role as a founder and pioneer of modern Chinese literature and gained an insight into the historical backdrop of his time. A ride on the city's iconic black-awning boat immersed them in the charm of Jiangnan's ancient waterways, leaving them with a lasting impression of China's historical towns.

### ► A journey of souls through sincere dialogue

At the Chinese-American youth symposium, the students and faculty from both countries engaged in open discussions on cultural differences, education systems, and future career planning. These exchanges fostered

mutual understanding and respect, enriching their cross-cultural perspectives. Their learning and exploring together sparked many cultural and intellectual ideas, with a tree of friendship planted on ZJIET's campus.



The interaction at the closing ceremony filled the camp with heartfelt sincerity. Rachel Bi, Director of the Finance Department and FinTech Center of Utah Valley University's Woodbury School of Business, expressed her sentiments: In this wonderful golden season of fall, we share laughter and joy. Though we come from different countries, speak different languages, and have different living habits, we have built the best experience of this journey with what is the truest to our hearts.

### Setting the Sail of Scientific Innovation Competitions and Building a Bridge of Sino-U.S. Friendship—Chinese and American youth co-create a new chapter in DI

In late November, the ginkgo trees were turning golden, standing as welcoming ambassadors spreading the vibrant color and warmth of Shanghai. In line with President Xi Jinping's initiative to "invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years", the Shanghai Huangpu District Education Bureau has been actively promoting educational exchanges between China and the U.S. As one of the organizers, the Bureau innovatively launched an international invitational tournament by building on the 2024-2025 Destination Imagination (DI) Shanghai Youth Innovative Thinking

Competition. In collaboration with the DI Shanghai Committee and the DI China Regional Committee, the Huangpu District Youth Science and Technology Activity Center invited five teams from three U.S. states consisting of nearly 50 American teachers and students. Beyond the competition, the Bureau also organized a series of diverse visits and cultural exchange activities to foster cross-cultural exchange and collaborative innovation between Chinese and American students and teachers, thereby opening a new chapter in China-U.S. youth collaboration.



On November 30, the 2024-2025 DI Shanghai Youth Innovative Thinking Competition and Shanghai International Invitational Tournament officially kicked off, with the five DI teams from the U.S. competing alongside Shanghai youth. The American teams chose to tackle the Improvisational Challenge, a demanding test of spontaneity. Harris Ian, a high school freshman from Michigan, said, "Although we only had three weeks to prepare, we fully dedicated ourselves to the challenge. Team creativity is probably our biggest strength." He added, "I hope to take part in more exchanges between China and the United States in the future." A team of sixth graders from Texas also joined in the heat. According to Emily Duke, head of the Texas DI program, the team had won first place at the Global Finals a year before and had been making steady progress ever since. On the competition ground, they were amazed at the

creative device designs of the Chinese teams. "Shanghai's international atmosphere and the creativity of the Shanghai kids dazzled us," Duke said. "I believe the friendships we've built here will continue to grow."



The interaction between Chinese and American teachers and students went beyond the competition. From December 2 to 5, schools in Huangpu District warmly welcomed these guests from afar. The school visits left a deep impression on them. One remarked, "I like China very much. I'm happy to be in Shanghai for the first time for the competition. I'm so excited to interact with teachers and students in Huangpu District." "Your schools are beautiful and the campuses are full of energy," said another. Still another inserted, "It's amazing that the students here are full of talents." "Traditional Chinese culture is so fascinating. I got to experience shadow puppetry, sachets, lacquer fans, folk music, and drama—I can't wait to tell my family about it." Another commented: "The drones, robots, flight simulators, and AI everywhere—these tech projects are so cool!"

For their first stop on school visits, the U.S. delegation arrived at Xiangming High School where they were inspired by the creative ideas shared by their DI peers and impressed by the school's strong focus on innovation in education. In the VEX robotics lab, the students and teachers from both countries discussed in detail about robotics technology. Under the guidance of the student and teacher volunteers

from the host school, the visitors had a hands-on experience with traditional Chinese paper-cutting for window panes. The interaction between hosts and guests not only sparked creative thinking, but also deepened their appreciation for the depths and unique glamor of Chinese culture. The event was marked by a lively and engaging atmosphere. As Principal Hu Hong put it, "This is more than just a celebration of creativity—it's a meeting of hearts and a fusion of cultures."



Between school visits, the American students and teachers delved into the culture of Shanghai and experienced its urban charm. Stepping into the East Hall of Shanghai Museum, they felt as if they had embarked on a journey through history. As they explored the exhibition halls, they appreciated one by one the displayed treasures of Chinese history and culture, marveling at the exquisite craftsmanship of ancient Chinese artisans. This experience provided them with a direct and up-close observation of Oriental aesthetics while allowing them to enjoy a cultural feast that blended tradition with modern technology.

At the International Table Tennis Federation Museum, the diverse collection of table tennis memorabilia and the engaging narration of historic matches deepened the group's understanding of the sport. In the interactive experience area, they all eagerly approached the table tennis tables. Between serving and returning shots, the Chinese and American students and teachers deepened their friendship and mutual understanding.



Touring Shanghai's iconic cultural streets and visiting the time-honored City God Temple of Shanghai and the exquisite, classical Yu Garden, they experienced the seamless fusion of tradition and modernity in Shanghai-style culture. The moment they arrived at the Bund, the stunning view across the Huangpu River unfolded before their eyes. Many expressed their gratitude: "I'm truly happy to be experiencing in person such an appealing Chinese culture"; "this journey is an unforgettable one in our life." They said expectantly, "We will come to Shanghai again next time. It's such a beautiful city!"

### Crossing over the Ocean for a Youth Encounter—the "Double North" College Youth Exchange Program

To further deepen the pragmatic cooperation between China and the U.S. in education, Hebei Normal University (HEBNU, located in Hebei Province which literally means north of the Yellow River) invited a 24-strong delegation from Northwest Missouri State University (NWMSU, a friendly partner institution of HEBNU) to visit China in December and participate in the Double North College Youth Exchange Program Between HEBNU and NWMSU. The program was focused on three themes: culture, sports, and academic exchange. It was designed to help teachers and students of NWMSU "make Chinese friends, experience Chinese culture, and share Chinese stories". Through various cultural activities, the program was to show

the young students and teachers China's cultural achievements in different historical periods, experience the urban landscapes of different cities across China, and savor the diverse flavors of Chinese regional cuisine. In collaborative discussions, they would exchange ideas with Chinese students and learn from each other, fostering face-to-face and heart-to-heart communication. Moreover, with their exposure to a panoramic view of a real, multi-dimensional China, these young people were to become envoys of Sino-U.S. youth exchanges through mutual recognition, understanding, and bonding.



### ► Exploring culture: tracing history and culture on foot

Stepping into the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, the group embarked on a journey through time, starting a dialogue with Chinese culture across centuries. At the Great Wall, they marveled at this world wonder, appreciating its architectural ingenuity and profound historical significance. Strolling through the bustling alleys of Nanluoguxiang, they traced the cultural essence of Beijing's traditional hutongs. By engaging in the intricate art of paper cutting and inner painting, they immersed themselves in the beauty of intangible cultural heritage and discovered the charm of traditional Chinese craftsmanship. Through making dumplings and savoring longevity noodles, they explored the richness of Chinese culinary traditions and

birthday rituals. With a diverse array of cultural activities and hands-on experiences, the participants were not just observers, but active participants and storytellers of Chinese culture.

During this program, six professors, including Timothy Jason Wall, Dean of the School of Education at NWMSU, delivered six academic lectures based on their respective research fields. Seventeen American college students participated in faculty-student exchange activities aligned with their academic disciplines, and more than 200 faculty members and students from HEBNU took part in the academic exchange sessions in which both sides had in-depth discussions on topics such as academic training inside and outside the classroom as well as the educational models of Chinese and American universities.

### ► Enjoying sports: Strengthening cooperation and friendship through games

The Chinese and American students and teachers competed in the same court, enjoying the spirit of teamwork and collaboration. The dragon and lion dance revealed the rich history of traditional Chinese sports. In the martial arts session, they unleashed their youthful energy and passion, and learned about the inheritance and development of traditional martial arts. In friendly table tennis matches, they made friends and continued the legacy of the Sino-U.S. ping pong friendship. In the tug-of-war game, they collaborated closely and deepened the bond between the two universities.



### ► Eulogizing youth: bridging hearts through art

On December 4, 2024, the School of Music hosted Double North Rendezvous: Ode to Youth-An Art Exchange Soirée between HEBNU and NWMSU. Professor Hepworth presented with NWMSU students Gabriel and Zane a captivating show featuring a soprano solo, bassoon, and marimba. Their performance was followed by 13 items by the faculty and students of HEBNU, including the percussion piece *Battle Drums*, the Uyghur folk dance *Yaliguna*, and the *guzheng* performance *Flourishing Age*, creating an extraordinary artistic feast. The soirée reached its climax with a grand choral performance of *See You Again*, with the Chinese and American students and faculty transcending language barriers and national borders through the bond of music, their hearts moving even closer to one another.

### ► Exploring technology: deciphering the future development landscape

From December 6 to 7, the delegation visited the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, gaining insights into the allure of China's intelligent manufacturing through the "Eye of Shenzhen". They explored Baidu, a leading Chinese technology company, experiencing image and text recognition powered by big data models. They also took a test ride in an autonomous vehicle and made queries about the future prospects of AI-driven transportation. At the Peking University HSBC Business School, they learned about this leader in business education and the transformation of business models driven by technological innovation. Their journey continued at Huaqiangbei, Shenzhen, a new global hotspot for Gen Z's trendy consumers. By getting up-close to China's evolving technological landscape, the delegation further increased consensus on international cooperation through interpreting future development trends.



The Double North Youth Exchange Program between HEBNU and NWMSU took to delegation to three cities – Beijing, Shijiazhuang, and Shenzhen – over a span of eight days. The program helped sow the seeds of friendship between Chinese and American youth. Samantha, an undergraduate student from Northwest Missouri State University, shared her excitement: "This has been a magical journey. I don't even want to leave China – this place is so cool!" Amaira echoed her sentiments: "China's cities are so beautiful and the people are incredibly friendly. This has been such a wonderful experience. I will definitely come back again."

### U.S. Students' Porcelain Exploration Tour in China

On December 23, CHINA · china – A Journey to Explore Chinese Porcelain Art, a winter camp for American youth hosted by Nanchang University, came to a successful conclusion. In the course of ten days, 14 students and faculty members from Washington State University delved into the rich world of Chinese ceramics, immersing themselves in traditional handicrafts and experiencing firsthand the profound heritage and innovative evolution of Chinese culture. Through the journey, they gained a deep appreciation for China's modern, open, inclusive, and dynamic society, making this Porcelain Exploration Tour an unforgettable experience.

### ► Ancient charm, modern brilliance-a cultural journey with myriad events

The program comprised of a series of meticulously-curated thematic lectures on China's fine cultural and artistic heritage. *Brilliant Lacquer and Painted Elegance - A Celebration of Fan Art* introduced the American students to the historical legacy and exquisite craftsmanship of Chinese fan art. *Tradition and Future of Jiangxi Ceramics - How Traditional Craftsmanship Embraces Digital Innovation* was a briefing on the modernization of Jiangxi's ceramic culture. *Chinese Language and Characters* opened the door to Chinese language learning and sparked the students' interest in learning Mandarin. Beyond lectures, the program offered immersive cultural experiences such as lacquered fan-making, tie-dyeing, traditional porcelain crafting, and Chinese calligraphy. From molding clay and shaping ceramics to meticulously creating lacquered and silk fans, dyeing handkerchiefs, and practicing Chinese calligraphy with brush and ink, the American students gained a deep appreciation for the unique charm of Chinese cultural arts.



### ► Urban memories - a North-South journey of discovery

In Beijing, the American students and faculty explored iconic landmarks such as the Great Wall, Tiananmen Square, and the Temple of Heaven, gaining a profound appreciation for China's rich history and vast cultural heritage. In Nanchang in South China, they were captivated

by the grandeur of the Tengwang Pavilion, the extensive collections of Jiangxi Provincial Museum, and the unique charm of Wanshou Palace Historical and Cultural District, gaining a deeper understanding of the distinct allure of Jiangxi culture. In addition, the delegation visited Jingdezhen where they explored the Ancient Kiln Site at the China Ceramics Museum and Taoxichuan (Pottery Creek), getting a full picture of the timeless beauty and modern development of China's ceramic culture. This Porcelain Exploration Tour provided the American visitors an opportunity to experience the vibrancy of Chinese society while offering a comprehensive insight into China's cities.

### ► Advancing hand in hand - an unforgettable journey of friendship

Under the theme of "Together·Better", the program featured a variety of interactive activities, including a campus treasure hunt, a Sino-American youth culture and art salon, and a grand student gathering. Students from both countries explored the campus and cities together and engaged in in-depth discussions on artistic heritage and innovation, cultural differences, education systems, languages, technology, personal growth, and career planning. These exchanges ignited intellectual sparks and planted the seeds of friendship deep in the heart of each and every student involved.



Nanchang University and Washington State University established a partnership in 2020 and have since carried out substantive cooperation in academic exchanges, student exchange

programs, and joint training initiatives. The successful completion of this winter camp further strengthened the ties between the two universities. Looking ahead, both universities will continue to deepen their collaboration and actively explore new pathways, models, and fields to increase the width and depth of youth exchanges between China and the U.S.

### A Melodic Dialogue Across the Yangtze —China-U.S. Youth Musical and Cultural Exchange Held in Wuhan

In the winter of 2024, a grand cultural feast transcending national borders unfolded in Wuhan. Using music as a medium, the Tell School of Music at Millersville University and the Wuhan Conservatory of Music joined hands in producing a beautiful symphony of cultural exchange across space and time.



### ► Trip to Yichang - a stunning cultural experience at the Three Gorges Dam

On December 15, the American visitors journeyed to Yichang to explore the world-renowned Three Gorges Dam. As they gazed out of the windows of the high-speed train, they felt the pulse of China's dynamic growth through fleeting images of its prosperous countryside. On arrival, they were immediately struck by the site's grandeur—the towering structure over vast spans of water, a powerful testament to the harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

They took a cruise boat along the Yangtze River

to enjoy the magnificent scenery of the Three Gorges. Verdant mountains rose on both sides of the winding river, with great human ingenuity blending perfectly into nature's artistry. The tour offered an opportunity to appreciate China's natural beauty and, more than that, to have a deeper insight into its ancient philosophy of "oneness with the universe".



### ► Intellectual encounter in open-house teaching: musical resonance without borders

On December 16-17, the Wuhan Conservatory of Music hosted two open-house teaching sessions led by Professor Brandon Martinez, a vocal specialist, and Professor Pan Xun, a pianist, as part of its World Conservatory Exchange and Performance Season: Melody of the Yangtze. The masterful performances were more than a feast for the ears—the professors shared perspectives on music education and demonstrated their skills.

Martinez captivated the house with his soulful, expressive voice, providing everyone with a magic, immersive experience in a sea of melodies. Pan, with his exquisite piano skills, brought each note to life and took the listeners on a journey through diverse styles and genres. The lessons served a purpose greater than imparting professional knowledge. More importantly, music was used as a common language to build bridges between the Chinese and American faculty and students, inspiring in them infinite love and pursuit of musical art.



### ► A night in the Chime Bell Concert Hall - music across borders

On the evening of December 16, the faculty and students of both schools staged a joint performance in the brightly-lit Chime Bell Concert Hall. They told stories of different cultures through music, unlocking its unique power as a universal language. From classical to contemporary, from East to West, each piece was an intercultural dialogue and every performance a meeting of the hearts.



After the concert, the performers embraced one another on stage as photos were taken. In that instant, music became their shared language, transcending national boundaries and uniting their hearts. The event not only deepened their friendship, but also laid the foundation for future exchanges and collaborations between the two institutions.

### ► An artistic initiation - introducing the aesthetics of Chinese ink painting

On December 20, the American visitors entered the School of Chinese Painting at the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts (HIFA). Under the guidance of professional instructors, they had a hands-on

experience of Chinese calligraphy, sensing the delicate interplay between aromatic ink and rice paper. Although their first encounter, everyone was fully immersed in its timeless charm, with their brushstrokes revealing their love and admiration for Chinese culture. During this cultural journey at HIFA, the American students and teachers alike not only were exposed to the unique elegance of Chinese painting, but also deepened their understanding and respect for traditional Chinese culture through close-up experience. As an artistic feast, but also as a spiritual journey, this exchange also fostered even closer cultural connections between China and the United States.



### ► Charting a new chapter in cultural exchange with music as a bridge

Looking back on this series of activities—from the historical reflections at Yellow Crane Tower to the musical resonance at the Chime Bell Concert Hall, to the awe-inspiring journey to the Three Gorges Dam and the artistic exploration at HIFA—each step embodied the yearning and passion of both Chinese and American teachers and students for cultural exchange. Music, as a universal language of the human race, became the most moving melody of this exchange. It not only transcended national borders, but also bridged the divides of souls and cultures.

Looking ahead, let us continue to deepen cultural exchange between China and the world with music as a bridge. Guided by the power of music, people from different cultural backgrounds can jointly explore the diversity

and commonality of human civilization. Hand in hand, we will paint a new and vibrant chapter in the story of cultural exchange.

### China-U.S. Youth Friendship Blossoms in Harbin, the City of Ice

On December 25, the American Youth Explore the Ice City program kicked off at Harbin Engineering University (HEU). As the university's first initiative under the Young Envoy Scholarship program, it not only provided young Americans with a valuable opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of Chinese culture, but also sowed the seeds of friendship between Chinese and American teachers and students.



During their stay in Harbin, the American students visited the bustling Central Street, joining tourists from around the world in enjoying its signature ice and snow culture. From crystal-clear ice sculptures to lively winter sports, the experience was thoroughly enchanting. The more they learned about the city full of appeals, the fonder they grew of it.

They also visited some of the locals in a home setting and were treated with warm hospitality and to the daily life typical of modern Chinese families. The up-close observation of and close interactions with the hosts afforded them a direct understanding of Chinese society and its culture and enabled them to feel the profound friendship between Chinese and American peoples.



The American students played a basketball game with their Chinese peers. The perspiration sprinkled on the court helped the growth of their friendship. They also tried out table tennis and badminton, enjoying the joy of sports in a well-equipped gymnasium. On New Year's Day, they attended a concert and felt the unique charm of Harbin as a capital of music.

At the closing ceremony, the visiting students reflected on their unforgettable time at HEU and expressed their love for Chinese culture and their gratitude to the people in Harbin. Each participant penned a letter of heartfelt thanks, expressing their appreciation and reluctance to leave China, the hosting university and their Chinese friends.

### Youth Unite with Future in Sight: A Friendship Relay by China-U.S. Teens in Greeting the New Year



The onset of winter did not stop young Americans' footsteps in their China exploration. On December 25, 2024, 100 students from California, Maryland, and Arizona embarked on a journey to China. They joined their Chinese peers at Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School (SFLS) for New Year celebrations. Sharing their

personal growth stories and looking into 2025, the students warmed up the atmosphere with lively exchanges.

On December 29, the young Americans arrived at the school, ready for a unique cultural adventure. They went straight to the sewing room, art building, life skills workshop, and table tennis hall where they took lessons in the school's curriculum - weaving, paper cutting, Chinese calligraphy, making dumplings, and practicing table tennis.

### ► Unveiling the art of Chinese knot weaving

In the sewing room, under an instructor's guidance, they learned with their nimble fingers and experienced the intricacies of traditional weaving techniques, appreciating the unique glamor of the traditional handicraft.

Through what appeared to be a simple exercise of making a Chinese lucky knot, a time-honored New Year custom to invoke good fortune, they not only derived great fun from craft making, but also learned about traditional Chinese customs and people's beautiful expectations for the coming year. "I never had such an experience before. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn about traditional Chinese culture. I love it!" said one American student.

The festivities of traditional Chinese New Year wouldn't be complete without creating paper-cut floral patterns to decorating window panels, writing the “福” (Fu, meaning good fortune) character, and making sumptuous dumplings. The vibrant colors of the window decorations added to the festive atmosphere while the use of brush, ink, paper and inkstone allowed the students to appreciate the power of Chinese calligraphy. The Chinese and American students paired up to make dumplings, experiencing Chinese cuisine through dough rolling and pinching.

### ► An immersion into the traditional Chinese art of paper cutting

The craft of paper cutting left American students in awe. "This paper-cutting class was incredibly interesting. I learned that most of these paper-cut artworks are made for the incoming Chinese New Year. Since 2025 is the Year of the Snake in China, our paper-cut designs include the beautiful character ‘福’ (blessing) and the number "2025" with distinct snake features. I'm going to take mine home and hang it up," said Kevin Watson from Arizona.



Having studied Chinese for five years, Kevin had just won the second prize in the 17<sup>th</sup> Chinese Bridge-Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students in October 2024. He had longed for this visit to China. Kevin submitted his application the moment he learned about the exchange program at Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School, filled with expectations to visit the mysterious nation that he adored. At the school, Kevin cherished every engagement with the Chinese teachers or students, always trying to converse with them in Chinese.

As part of the "one-on-one buddies" arrangement for the American students, Song Zeyi, an eighth grader from SFLS, shared her heartfelt experience, "When we discussed a certain topic and shared knowledge of our countries' histories, arts, cuisines, and lifestyles, I feel as if in the midst of a vibrant global cultural feast. The sense of excitement and discovery is indescribable. I hope to have more opportunities to participate in such international exchange programs to

become a bridge for cultural dialogue. I want to help the world understand China better and, in turn, help China connect with the world!"

"The promise of the China-U.S. relationship lies in the people, its foundation in our societies, its future in the youth, and its vitality in exchanges at subnational levels.' I'd heard this remark many times, but it wasn't until I had firsthand experience that I truly understood its meaning. I hope that more young American friends will come to China in the future and experience for themselves a real, dynamic, warm, and inclusive China," said Zhang Xilin, an eighth-grade student at SFLS.

On the evening of December 29, a song-and-dance evening gala-The Charm of Chinese Dance and Impression of the Chinese Nation choreographed and performed by teachers and students of SFLS, brought together a thousand Chinese and American youths in a joyful welcome of the arrival of 2025.



As one of the students invited under the initiative to bring 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study in five years, Kevin Watson from Arizona spoke at the gala on behalf of the study tour delegation.

Higley High School in Arizona has been a sister school of SFLS for many years. During a visit to Higley High School in 2018, the SFLS delegation had presented a bamboo flute as a token of cultural exchange and friendship. At the gala, a student from Higley High School

played "Auld Lang Syne" with the same bamboo flute, inspiring the thousand-strong audience of Chinese and American students and teachers to join in singing the classic song in chorus in Chinese. This moment left the most unforgettable note in the American youth's study tour in China.

### Shared Musical Art Knows No Boundaries —China-U.S. New Year youth concerts in Shijiazhuang

The beauty of harmony lies in the integration of differences. To promote the international dissemination of traditional Chinese culture and art, facilitate cultural exchanges and mutual understanding, and enhance civilizational dialogue, Shijiazhuang University held a series of YES program for cultural exchanges and study, entitled A Study Tour for Cultural Exchange, Artistic Sharing and Boundless Joy in Hebei from December 26 to 31, 2024.



### ► Traditional Chinese music strikes a chord

With the lifting of the curtain came the gentle melody of the Jiangnan folk song *Purple Bamboo Tune*, performed by a group of American youths with traditional Chinese instruments including *erhu*, *zhongruan*, *guzheng*, and *yangqin*. The melodious and rhythmic tune echoed throughout the auditorium, soothing the hearts of the audience like a murmuring stream. On December 28 and 29, Shijiazhuang University invited over

60 members of the Great Wall Youth Orchestra from San Francisco to visit Shijiazhuang City and Xiong'an New Area in Hebei Province. During the trip, they immersed themselves in traditional Chinese culture, including Chinese opera, calligraphy, and Tai Chi. Together with their Chinese counterparts, they held two New Year concerts featuring a dazzling array of folk music performances and dances.

Founded in 1995, the Great Wall Youth Orchestra is dedicated to preserving and promoting traditional Chinese music and its instruments. It collaborates with multiple schools in the U.S. to provide music education for children of new immigrants. The concert had music as a bridge and art as a medium to connect hearts. A total of 13 musical pieces, including *Blooming Flowers and Full Moon*, *Purple Bamboo Tune*, and *Koum Tara*, were performed, creating a grand artistic experience where East met West and the past met the present.



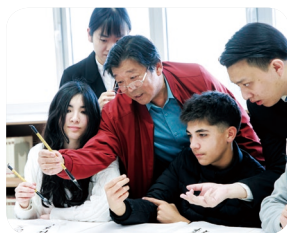
### ► Cultural experience builds a bridge for heart-to-heart connection

With the sound arrangements made by the university, the American student delegation participated in a variety of cultural exchange activities, effectively took in the charm of Chinese cities, and had an immersive experience of China's culture and customs. In Beijing, they visited the grand and solemn Tiananmen Square and marveled at the majestic ancient Great Wall. In Xiong'an New Area, they visited the Xiong'an Impression Exhibition Hall and felt the mind-blowing charm of this city of the future. In Zhengding County, they embarked

on a night tour of the ancient town and visited the Yuan Opera Museum where Peng Huiheng—a member of Hebei's Provincial Institute of Literature and History, recipient of the 13th Chinese Drama Plum Blossom Award, and inheritor of Hebei Bangzi, a provincial drama recognized as an intangible cultural heritage—introduced the young visitors to Yuan opera.

The American youth experienced firsthand the charm of singing, reciting, acting, and martial arts all integrated in traditional Chinese opera. "This is my first time in China, and I love it here! The singing style of Chinese opera is amazing!" enthused Taylor Daniel Thompson, an African American member of Great Wall Youth Orchestra. Having started his training at the orchestra at the age of four, he now specializes in percussion and vocal performance. Though not fluent in Chinese, he can sing the Peking Opera piece *Justice Bao* and the Chinese song *The Moon Represents My Heart*. He has toured extensively in the U.S. with his orchestra as an envoy of Chinese culture in American communities.

At Shijiazhuang University, calligraphy theorist Xu Wanshun, also a fellow of the Provincial Institute of Literature and History, provided an insightful lecture on the origin, artistic features, and cultural values of Chinese calligraphy. With dexterous sweeping brush strokes in ink, he expressed the beautiful wish for mutual learning and shared progress between the two civilizations. At Hebei Museum, the delegation had an up-close look at its centerpieces—a jade burial garment made of jade pieces threaded with gold as well as a Changxin palace lamp. In the water town of Xibaipo, they practiced Tai Chi, donned Han Dynasty dresses, visited a calligraphy academy, and enjoyed a tea ceremony, gaining an insight into the rich and profound Chinese culture. Together, the youths planted a Sino-American friendship tree.



### ► Academic exchange charts a new vision for East-West collaboration

At Shijiazhuang University, academic lectures and a symposium on Sino-American cultural and artistic exchange were held, focusing on topics such as youth development and cultural exchanges between the two countries. At the symposium, a university leader made remarks, extending a heartfelt welcome to the visiting American youth delegation. Professor Victor Stanson Siu, an expert conductor of the Great Wall Youth Orchestra, delivered an engaging lecture titled *From Gold Rush to Music: The Heritage and Cultural Revival of Chinese Americans in the Bay Area*. His presentation captivated the students and faculty as the audience, further enriching the depth and scope of Sino-American cultural exchange.

After the event, Shijiazhuang University presented calligraphy works by Mr. Xu Wanshun to the American delegation. Sean, a member of the visiting orchestra, expressed his gratitude: "I am so thankful for this invaluable journey for cultural exploration. The diverse activities allowed us to gain a deep understanding of China's rich culture and make many wonderful Chinese friends. I hope to return someday!"

True friends remain close regardless of distance; they are neighbors even though living ten thousand miles apart. This brief journey allowed the American youth to experience China's profound cultural heritage and its forward-thinking educational philosophy, laying a sound foundation for furthering Sino-American cultural exchanges and collaboration.

### Iowa Youth Delegation Arrives in China for a New Year Trip

Late at night on December 31, 2025, just before the tolling of the New Year's bell, 27 delegates from Iowa arrived in Changchun, Jilin Province, embarking on an 11-day visit to China.



Greeting the first sunrise of the year, they visited Changchun Urban Planning Exhibition Hall to learn about the city's socio-economic development. They explored the city's rich cultural heritage at the Changchun Film Studio Museum, known as the "cradle of New China's film industry". They savored Chinese dumplings, a symbol of family reunion, and marveled at the spectacular Zigong Ice Lantern Exhibition in World Sculpture Park, experiencing the history, culture, and scenic beauty of Northeast China.

At the Central Library of Jilin University, they had a great experience navigating an array of smart devices to access its extensive collections. They explored various sections in this impressive complex, including the digital resource wing, the open-plan general reading area, and the spacious Four Season Lounge. At the Chinese Classics Inheritance and Innovation Center, they tried the technique of rub printing, a craft designated as an intangible cultural heritage, feeling the charm of traditional Chinese culture.

At the Archaeology and Art Museum, the young Americans were captivated by Song Dynasty exhibits, including feasting utensils, drinking vessels, and clay figurines, brought to life by the engaging explanations of student volunteers.



At the State Key Laboratory of Superhard Materials, the delegation learned about lab-grown gem-quality diamonds, gaining some preliminary ideas about Jilin University's research capabilities.

During the highly popular Hanfu cultural experience event, the American students learned about the history and culture of traditional Chinese attire through a captivating Hanfu (Han-style clothing) fashion show. After gaining basic knowledge, they got dressed in Hanfu and practiced traditional Chinese etiquette, immersing themselves in the timeless elegance of this ancient Chinese culture.



At the First Bethune Clinical Medical College of Jilin University, the students and teachers from Iowa engaged in discussions with representatives from the cardiology, general medicine, nursing, and research departments. They also toured the clinical skills center and public research platform at the First Hospital of Jilin University and research-teaching complex, gaining an insight into the school's teaching and research capabilities.

When visiting the School of Nursing, the Chinese and American students held a discussion

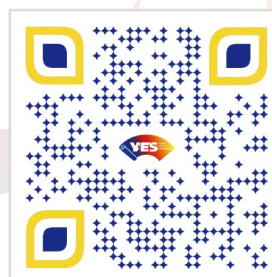
session to share their learning in the field of nursing. The delegation also visited the nursing and rehabilitation therapy experimental teaching centers, experiencing firsthand the educational resources available at the school.



The delegation members expressed their excitement and gratitude for the opportunity to visit China during the New Year at President Xi Jinping's initiative to invite 50,000 young Americans to China for exchange and study programs over five years. They described this trip as a unique and precious experience that allowed them to celebrate the New Year alongside the Chinese people. The students look forward to gaining a deeper understanding of China's diverse regions and fostering meaningful connections with Chinese youth, becoming good partners and friends.

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