

Chinese Language School Serves As A Goodwill Ambassador

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The normalization of the relationships between China and the United States 30 years ago was a moment deeply imbedded in the mind of the baby-boomer generation in China. We responded enthusiastically to the change from hostility to friendship between our two nations and strived to be part of that change.

Hua Xia Chinese School is part of the effort of those of us who eventually called America home.

The school was created 15 years ago to answer a call of the Houston Chinese community with a steady influx of Chinese immigrants since the late 1980s. At that time there was no Chinese school in Houston that taught Chinese with the pronunciation system and simplified characters used in mainland China. In order that our children could speak, read, and write in our mother's tongue, a group of Chinese volunteers opened Hua Xia as a weekend Chinese school.

I remember the joy of seeing the first batch of 40 students enrolled and first group of teachers hired as we held the historic opening ceremony

on Jan. 15, 1994. Chinese Consulate General in Houston donated all the textbooks.

The popularity of the Chinese language soared in America as the relationships between China and the U.S. deepened. Hua Xia's classes began to draw other ethnic groups, prompting us to open six branches across the Greater Houston area. Enrollment rose to 1,900 students last fall.

Hua Xia also has expanded its mission to not only serve the local community but also contribute to Houston's cultural diversity and the friendship between the American and Chinese peoples. Activities Hua Xia organizes, from cultural performances to summer trips to China for youth, have brought the two peoples closer.

Many of Hua Xia's graduates continued their Chinese language study in college or use their skills in their careers. They will play a significant role in carrying on the friendship between the peoples of China and the U.S.

A normal and close relationship between our two countries can not be attained without the everyday effort of ordinary citizens like us. As an organization rooted in the community, Hua Xia is committed to its continued services and being a goodwill ambassador to both of our nations.



Students of Hua Xia Chinese School gave dance performances in celebration of the Chinese National Holiday in 2004

One World, One Dream - A Chinese American's Political Adventure

By Ling Luo, President of US China Relations Foundation

As the United States and China celebrate the 30th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations, I sit back and realize the last ten years of my life closely mirrors that of the past 30 years between the United States and China.

Ten years ago I immigrated to the USA from China—seeking a different life and future, searching for new friends and frontiers. After a year in the USA I met my American husband, Roger Snyder, in Los Angeles, California. Two different cultures, two different sets of values, the same dream: a long term relationship where both benefit from the relationship individually as well as become a strong force in the world when united. Two years after marrying we moved to Houston, Texas where my political life and activism took root.

Chinese people have contributed greatly to this country over the past 150 years from building rail roads to developing the new cutting edge technologies of today. But they had been silent in the US politics, few even voted. My simple idea was just to have their voices heard by those who walk the halls of power.

I set my goal to share my belief with Chinese community that we can realize the full potential of the gift we had by being a citizen of the United States of America by get them involved in the American political mainstream as well as the cultural mainstream through participating in campaign activities such as phone banking, block walking, fundraising, voter registration, etc.

The challenge to organize a volunteer team that had shown little interest in American politics

Center Serves Immigrants, Promotes Cultural Understanding

By Ke Chen, President of the Chinese Civic Center

The dynamic growth in Houston's Chinese community has been a fruit of China's open-door policy launched 30 years ago.

Chinese students who sought academic advancement in America and later remained in the country to become U.S. citizens or permanent residents comprise a sizable segment of the local Chinese-American population.

With that came a growing need for a multitude of services for the Chinese community and a bridge linking that community with the mainstream society and other ethnic groups. Such a need precipitated the establishment of the Chinese Civic Center, a nonprofit organization, in 1995.

For 18 years, the Center has worked to carry out its mission to build a stronger community through leadership, volunteering, collaborative efforts, multi-cultural education and services to youth, seniors and families. Serving an average of 5,000 people a week, the center is often the first stop for Chinese immigrants as they begin their new lives in Houston.

In 2005, the center acquired a new home in the heart of new China Town in southwest Houston. The larger facility and proximity to the Chinese community enabled the center to expand its

services and reach more people.

The new center features an expanded library with 45,000 audio and video items to promote the Chinese language and culture. The center's training programs in English, computers and other vital skills have empowered immigrants as they integrate into the American society. The center's many art and cultural classes and events have also helped Houstonians to better understand and appreciate China.

The center's strong presence is seen and felt in many of the Houston festivals and charitable activities. The center has organized numerous disaster-relief efforts, including those for the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attack, Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in southwest China last year. In addition, the center has sought to promote business exchange between China and the U.S.

All these efforts have helped Chinese immigrants become an integral part of the American fabric and contributed to Americans' understanding of the Chinese community in Houston and China as a nation.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations, we aspire to continue our effort to bring our two nations and peoples closer.

or voting for that matter was big. I encountered numerous difficulties in this congressional campaign, but all resolved with my husband's support behind me as my strategist and baby sitter. With two little kids at age 2 and 4 in 2006, I struggled between being a traditional Chinese wife for my own family or an American activist for more families. Thankfully, my husband has consistently put my dream first that I should play a bigger role to bring Chinese community into American political process.

With his supports, we had helped our candidate won his seat in the Congress and continued as a team to serve the Chinese community. During the presidential election, we built a group of Asian Americans to campaign a candidate. We built the first and only Chinese version presidential campaign website and became one of the largest fundraisers in the country. We organized for the opening of the campaign office in Chinatown which was a first that a presidential campaign office selected Chinatown. An estimated 2000 people attended the outdoor rally on that wonderful day. My political motto "Be seen, Be heard" had borne fruit.

As I look back over these past 3 years of my

political involvement and activity, I am happy with the results of my work. I also believed that mutual communication and understanding is the foundation of a good relationship between people as well as the two great nations. By bringing American friends to the Chinese community to participate in our cultural events such

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as Chinese New Year's Performance, Moon Cake Day Festival and Spring Festival Fairs, the people from both China and US has deepened their understanding to each other.

My husband and I have been practicing the common sense of "One world, one dream". We respect each other's difference, also seeking the common ground in our understanding of issues. Together, we stand, and together, we achieved the same dream: A mixed family, the fruit of US-China relations with two beautiful kids - one girl and one boy!



On September 21, 2003, at the Chinese Culture Festival in Washington D.C., 70-meters-long dragon bestowed by the Oversea Chinese Affairs Office of Guangdong, "soared" in the Washington Chinatown with 34 people playing, and pushed the festival atmosphere to climax.

China As A Global Classroom For Art Institute Students

By Gary Eaton, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
The Art Institute of Houston

When the United States and the People's Republic of China established embassies in Beijing and Washington, D.C. in March 1979, many of the faculty members at my college were then undergraduates, and the regular cultural and educational exchange in which students at the Art Institute of Houston participate today would have been unthinkable.

The geographic distance, the gulf between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions, the mutual distrust between Communism and Capitalism, and world political events conspired 30 years ago to make China impossibly foreign. The country was physically, intellectually and emotionally inaccessible to the same American faculty who today takes students to work and study in China and often describes the experience as transformative.

But just as the courtesy and friendship expressed between table tennis players Glenn Cowan and Zhuang Zedong in their chance encounter on the Chinese team's bus in 1971 that led to the so-called "ping pong diplomacy" of Chairman Mao and Richard Nixon, courtesy, increasing understanding and respect among ordinary peoples of the two countries can build the foundation for sustained relationships which benefit both cultures.

In 2002 the Art Institute of Houston began working with Easton Resource Development, an educational consulting firm, to plan faculty and student trips to China. Nancy Li, Eaton's Executive Vice President, helped develop

itineraries which transcend tourism and allow students to study and work with Chinese instructors and students. Ms Li also introduced us to the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association.

As our relationship and experience deepened, we began offering those trips as academic credit-earning classes. Students in culinary arts and interior design engage in research and writing before the trip, have classes, focused activities and writing assignments while abroad, and take a course related to the trip in the post-trip academic term. They complete an essay reflecting on their personal and professional development in China, how the experience fulfilled or altered their expectations, or raised new questions. The depth and breadth of student responses has affirmed the incredible value of this program.

In 2006, the institute worked with other schools to create a Study Abroad Consortium that coordinates trips and expand international study opportunities for students at 28 of the Art Institute's schools nationwide. New trips to China for students studying fashion and retail management and digital photography are being developed.

Several common themes emerge in students' writings, the first of which is gratitude for what they typically experience as a gracious and formal version of the Chinese politesse, an experience I personally shared during my three trips. My Chinese hosts have displayed unfailingly gracious hospitality and have gone to extraordinary lengths to show me what they considered to be the best aspects of their culture. This generosity of spirit often expresses itself

as a form of stewardship in which care and understanding is tacitly expressed for every detail of a guest's experience in the new culture.

Secondly, American students comment on the discipline they observe in their Chinese counterparts. A tangible emblem of the focused discipline and respect for education was an exhibition of knife skills and carving techniques given to our students by a group of Chinese students at Shannxi Culinary College in Xi'an. At their instructor's cue, a group of 10 students executed incredibly precise and difficult knife



work in absolute unison. The cadence was created by the singular sound of 10 cleavers meeting 10 chopping blocks at exactly the same instant again and again as each student transformed vegetables into precise carvings and geometric shapes.

As we mark the 30th anniversary of the two countries' diplomatic relations, the strong educational value of our friendship and exchange is clear in what one of our students wrote: *China was fascinating. My mind and heart will forever remain full of all the wonderful memories from this adventure. Above all the trip was a terrific opportunity for me to reinforce the idea that I am going down the correct path. I learned many things that gave me a new-found respect and understanding of my profession and how people in another culture practice it. The chefs that I saw were exceptional in their abilities. They could take the smallest piece of squid and cut the finest grooves or chop and mince at almost inhuman speeds. They are bold and daring, they combine things that I never thought would work but somehow ended up being very pleasant to the palate. I came away with an incredible respect for the people we met and a renewed gratefulness for all of the opportunities we have here at home.*

Most of our students see the ability to travel to China, with its incredibly rich and ancient culture so distinct from the Western tradition, as the opportunity of a lifetime. I have traveled with students who had never been out of their home state and whose first trip in an airplane was the long flight to Beijing. These trips gave American visitors a unique opportunity to understand their own identity in new ways. Uncovering the "foreignness" of a culture with norms, value systems and senses of history so different from one's own while finding common ground in working openly and respectfully with Chinese people is incredibly broadening for our students.