

African representatives experience traditional Chinese arts and crafts at various workshops, including Peking Opera and bamboo weaving, Photos PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Boosting cooperation

Young Africans attend Chinese cultural workshops as part of exchange program, Xing Wen reports.

frican youths sit at a long table lining up bamboo strips and weaving them together tightly, row by row, until the hull of a small boat begins to take shape. They are attending a workshop where they learn the traditional Chinese craft of bamboo-weaving. The workshop is one of many

options available to representatives from 48 African countries attending the Seventh China-Africa Youth Festival that kicked off on April 18.

The attendees can choose to participate in workshops on traditional Chinese crafts and arts such as playing the *guqin* (a stringed instrument), learning Peking Opera or creating ceramic decorations.

The one-week event, jointly hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China Soong Ching Ling Foundation, and the Shandong government, took the African youth representatives to tourism destinations, rural-vitalization projects and high-tech enterprises in Beijing and Shandong province.

It is the first time Thandi Chabeli, 30, a coordinator for a womanand-youth-empowerment organization in Lesotho, has traveled to China. Her organization encourages women to pursue higher education and provides support to those facing abusive situations, as well as offering free vocational training for women seeking financial independence.

Chabeli says vocational training in her country often teaches women traditional crafts such as grassweaving. "If I learn bambooweaving, maybe I could teach something different."

She says she hopes to establish connections with women and youth empowerment organizations in China for her work in Lesotho.

Since 2018, the China-Africa Youth Festival has hosted over 300 young people from Africa, becoming an important event for cooperation between Chinese and African vouth.

Thandiswa Joan Losi, a 36-yearold entrepreneur from South Afri-



The recent China-Africa Youth Festival takes young Africans to museums, historical sites, villages and tourism attractions in Beijing and Shandong province

ca, has participated in the China-Africa Youth Festival twice, in 2019 and this year.

"I'm also happy to see how China nicely embraces tourism and foreigners," she says.

She says the event can be inspiring. For example, in 2019, the youth festival took them to visit some enterprises, including a solar-system manufacturing company.

"That's what I thought we need to look into in South Africa as we face an energy crisis. We really need solar energy systems or alternatives to electricity," she says.

Losi runs her own business in designing water sanitation products, hoping to improve basic infrastructure in rural areas in her country.

"We visited a 'vitalized village' in Shandong where I saw infrastructure projects that have been done in rural areas in China," she says, adding that she will look to incorporate some ideas in villages in her country, as well as doing business with Chinese people.

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I believe what you will see is a vibrant China ... a China that is injecting strong certainty and new vitality into the world with its new

development." Li Bin, president of China

Soong Ching Ling Foundation

Online

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Francis George Woodcock from the Seychelles, 27, is familiar with China, as he finished his undergraduate program from Dalian University of Technology in Liaoning province where he learned Chinese and economics.

Once a foreign student in China, he stresses the importance of international cultural exchanges.

"Before building a relationship with someone, it's important to understand their culture so that you can have a good start."

He says cultural activities at the youth festival should be held annually with different attendees each time, providing opportunities for a larger group of African people to come and get to know more about China.

Recalling his early days in China, he says he was quite shy and didn't know how to communicate with Chinese people.

Fortunately, his university arranged language partners for international students. He gradually integrated into the new environment and made Chinese friends. As he knew how to play the guitar, he also found common interest with his peers through music. After his graduation from the university last year, he got a job as a market analyst in the Seychelles Trading Company, which is now seeking to import high-quality merchandise from China.

After the youth festival, he will fly to Guangzhou, Guangdong province, where he can help his colleagues better communicate with Chinese suppliers at the 133rd Canton Fair.

At the festival's opening ceremony, Li Bin, president of the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation, expressed the hope that all participants would feel the "friendly enthusiasm of Chinese people toward Africa, see the spirit and style of Chinese youth, experience China's rapid development, and understand the specific practices of China's modernization path and the unremitting efforts of the Chinese people to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".

'I believe what you will see is a vibrant China in the spring, a real, three-dimensional, and comprehensive China, a China that is injecting strong certainty and new vitality into the world with its new development," Li said.

Senegal's Ambassador to China Ibrahima Sory Sylla said the African countries and China have a combined population of 2.7 billion, of which 1.3 billion are under the age of 19. African countries and China should take responsibility for youth education, implement public policies, improve the quality of education, develop vocational skills, empower women and youth, and increase their chances of obtaining decent employment, thereby enhancing social productivity.

He said both China and Africa aim to promote the realization of the China-Africa community with a shared future by building a world of peace, justice, solidarity, and inclusive development. The China-Africa partnership is a unique model of cooperation based on mutual respect, win-win cooperation and a focus on African needs.

"We should steadfastly continue such cooperation to provide more opportunities for the youth of both sides, as the youth represent the future of our cooperation and actions," he said.

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn

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