

WORLD

Youngsters proud to take 'bridge' to China

Finalists display proficiency in speech, demonstrate talent at Chinese language and culture competition

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
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Zakhar Likuev, a 10-year-old from the Hope Chinese Charter School in Oregon, fluently recited the *Three Character Classic*, commonly known as *San Zi Jing*, which highlights Confucian morality and wisdom.

Likuev, who waved a red ribbon and tapped his feet to the beat on Saturday, was among the six K-12 finalists who showcased their proficiency in the Chinese language and culture. They were competing for two seats in the International Chinese Bridge Finals this summer in Beijing.

According to Tang Jun, the education consul at the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco, the six have defeated about 1,000 peers in earlier state-level preliminaries from Oregon, North Carolina, Minnesota, California and beyond, and represent the talent of the highest level in the Chinese language and culture studies in the United States.

Within an approximately 10-minute time frame, three elementary schoolers needed to finish a free topic speech themed "Chinese, Joy and Fun"; a Q&A session with a judges' panel; and a talent show.

The three middle schoolers needed to deliver a speech themed "Fly high with Chinese"; a Q&A session; a talent show; and were quizzed on their knowledge about current Chinese news, history and cultural anecdotes.

"We are especially excited to bring the 16th Chinese Bridge-Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign Secondary School Students and the 3rd Chinese Bridge-Chinese Show for Foreign Primary School Students back to an in-person setting this year," Tang said, adding that the competition was held online during the pandemic.



From left: Sage Houdek from the Yinghua Academy in Minneapolis, who won the championship in the elementary school category, poses with one of her Chinese paintings with calligraphy; Zakhar Likuev from the Hope Chinese Charter School in Oregon, takes a picture with his parents on Saturday after the Chinese Bridge competition; Ivana Moreno from Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, who won the championship in the middle school category, performs Chinese martial arts in the talent show on Saturday. PHOTOS BY CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Sage Houdek, a fifth grader from the Yinghua Academy in Minneapolis, has the Chinese name Yan Lirui, which literally means "agile and wise". The 10-year-old, in red traditional Chinese costume, said she was "very lucky" to be able to attend a Chinese immersion program from an early age.

Although her first day at kindergarten was tough because she couldn't understand even one Chinese word and she cried to her parents, Houdek didn't quit.

Honing skills

The whole family cultivated a Chinese-learning environment, she said, citing the example of how they learned to use chopsticks. "We failed many times, but no one quit, and we finally had mastered the tricks," she said, adding that's why her favorite

Chinese idiom is "One-minute glamour in the spotlight means (there has been) 10 years of tedious rehearsal down the stage".

Learning Chinese has opened the door, Houdek said, "through which I am able to better understand the other parts of the world".

Houdek also immerses herself in Chinese culture by studying holiday rituals, customs, Chinese calligraphy, drawings and dance, as well as playing traditional Chinese folk music on the violin.

"My family now observes the Chinese New Year the Chinese way — we decorate our house with red lanterns, paste the Spring Festival couplets, and make dumplings," she said.

Ivana Moreno, a ninth grader at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, is grateful for having

the opportunity to study China. "I have enriched my understanding not only about China, its culture and language, but also its people," said Moreno, who is called Meng Huixin in Chinese.

Born and raised in a non-Chinese speaking family, Moreno started learning three languages — Chinese, Spanish and English — at age 3.

To continue honing her Chinese skills, Moreno's parents dropped her off every Saturday morning at a Chinese couple's residence for a two-hour session — to learn Chinese brush painting from the husband and Chinese language from the wife.

Moreno attended a Chinese immersion school when she turned 5. Through a project-based curriculum such as constructing energy-saving houses for Chinese people; field

study trips to China's Yunnan province; and random conversations with local citizens, Moreno has "made many friends, and came to realize differences in our cultures".

"People-to-people exchanges of this kind are so sincere, so warm, yet so powerful (and) lifted my understanding of China as a whole," Moreno said.

Moreno said she wants to be a teacher in the future. "I like children and believe it's rewarding to work with young minds," she said.

Zhang Jianmin, China's consul general in San Francisco, congratulated the contestants, particularly Houdek and Moreno, as both finished first in their respective categories.

"China feels proud of its 5,000 years of history and its rich culture," he said. "Both Chinese and American peoples are great, and we

deserve better friendship and mutual understanding."

Li Yue, president of the Chinese Language Teachers Association of California, who has more than 20 years of Chinese-language teaching experience, sat on the judges' panel.

She said the depth and width of "Chinese Bridge" keep expanding over the years, as contestants demonstrate ever-improving linguistic and cultural talents, interests and achievements.

Joint efforts

"This is a nice outcome of joint efforts among educators, parents and our students," said Li. "Performances of contestants, in general, are very impressive."

Thomas Gold, another judge at Saturday's competition, said it is more urgent than ever for more young citizens to study China, its language and culture, as the bilateral relationship is facing severe challenges.

Gold, who was among the first US-government-funded exchange students and studied in Shanghai in the late 1970s, later became a sociology professor at UC Berkeley and worked as the executive director of a program for Chinese language studies there from 2006 to 2016.

"The more challenging the bilateral relationship, the more Americans we need to acquire adequate, pragmatic knowledge of China," Gold said. "Misconceptions and hostilities only recede when conversations begin."

Consul General Zhang said to contestants: "You represent the future. ... It's important to appreciate other cultures even though we see many differences."

The Chinese Bridge Competition, an annual international Chinese language and culture contest, is sponsored by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation and conducted worldwide.



Foreigners conduct a livestreaming sale at the 2023 World E-commerce Conference held in Weifang, Shandong province. A view of the city of Weifang. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



City boosts position as industrial powerhouse

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Weifang, a traditional industrial powerhouse in East China's Shandong province, has made remarkable achievements in industrial transformation and advanced manufacturing.

Manufacturing is Weifang's foundational and advantageous industry, according to the city government. Local officials said that one of the underlying reasons behind Weifang's strong development momentum is its sustained efforts in manufacturing.

Currently, Weifang has 4,142 industrial enterprises above designated size — those earning at least 20 million yuan (\$2.83 million) annually. Last year, these enterprises' revenue totaled 1.1 trillion yuan, ranking second among cities in Shandong province.

Weifang has developed four industries with output value of more than 100 billion yuan including power equipment, the high-end chemical industry, food processing and new-generation information technology.

The power equipment industry's output value accounted for one-third of the national total and 176 companies in the industry have been approved as national high-tech enterprises, according to official statistics.

Of them, Weichai Holding Group, founded in 1946, is a domestically leading industrial equipment producer, with its business involving powertrain systems, commercial vehicles, agricultural equipment and intelligent logistics.

Committed to innovation, the group has set up an array of national laboratories and research institutes including the National Center of Technology Innovation for Fuel Cell. In addition, Weichai has launched multiple intelligent manufacturing projects such as the marine equipment manufacturing center in Qingdao and a large digital industrial base in Weifang which mainly produces high-end engines.

The intelligent base, with a combined investment of 10 billion yuan, is

considered a key project for Shandong province to replace old development drivers with new ones, local officials said.

Focusing on Weichai, the city government founded the Weifang Power Equipment International Cooperation Park in 2019 in a bid to improve the industry chain and attract more investment.

Companies in the park can receive customized services and benefit from a slew of supportive measures such as reduced rents, according to the operating department of the park.

As of January, the park was home to 35 enterprises including some from Germany, the ROK and Japan.

Weifang is also making efforts to cultivate emerging industries, with the aim of fostering the high-quality development of manufacturing industries and building a modern industrial system.

Established in 2001, the Weifang-headquartered company Goertek is one of the largest manufacturers of mid- and high-end virtual reality headsets in the world. Its other products include somatosensory controllers, smart watches and high-sensitivity speakers.

According to a ranking released by the Hurun Research Institute last year, Goertek ranked fourth among the top 200 Chinese enterprises with the greatest development potential in the metaverse.

Its new production base for VR intelligent hardware in Weifang Comprehensive Bonded Zone has started operations, and it is expected to generate an output value of 20 billion yuan every year.

Thanks to the VR giant, Weifang has attracted a batch of innovation-driven companies focusing on the metaverse, involving hardware production, software development and content creation, local officials said.

At the end of 2022, Weifang released a five-year (2022-26) action plan aiming to build itself into a hub of metaverse technological innovation and industry.

Weifang's metaverse industry is expected to be worth 350 billion yuan by 2026, according to the plan.

Expo highlights Weifang's e-commerce strengths

By LI YOU

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The inaugural Weifang International E-commerce Expo was held in Shandong province's Weifang city from Friday to Sunday to highlight the city's economic development achievements over the years and stimulate the growth of the local e-commerce industry.

Feng Bo, director of the Weifang bureau of commerce, said that in April 2020, Weifang was approved by the State Council to build the China (Weifang) Cross-border E-commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone.

The city has taken the chance to set up an e-commerce development and service center and issued policies for facilitating high-quality development of cross-border e-commerce, Feng said.

The expo's exhibition area spanned 20,000 square meters and comprised nine sectors: e-commerce platforms and service providers, Weifang's key industries, a domestic high-quality product exhibition area, an imported product exhibition area, a real estate project exhibition area, as well as exhibitions showcasing the achievements of the China (Weifang) Cross-border E-commerce Comprehensive Pilot Zone, the Weifang Comprehensive Bonded

Zone, the Weifang Cross-border E-commerce Research Institute, and the Shandong Signature Industry Exhibition Area.

In addition to the exhibition, several supplementary activities took place during the event, including the 2023 World E-commerce Conference. These activities provided distinct services, such as brand showcasing, product promotion, information release, and on-site contract signing for outstanding products.

The 2023 World E-commerce Conference took place on Friday. The heads of major e-commerce enterprises and institutions from over 10 countries and regions, such as Russia, France, Japan and the Republic of Korea participated.

The conference aimed to promote global exchanges and share experiences in e-commerce industry development; discuss trends in e-commerce development; and facilitate business opportunities.

The event also announced the "Top 10 E-Commerce Live Streaming Bases" and "Top 10 New Foreign Trade Formats" in Weifang. It provided a platform for a cross-border e-commerce-themed competition among business insiders in Shandong province.

The event also hosted the launch ceremony of a Weifang sellers' support program initiated by the

e-commerce pioneer eBay and the standard formulation of burdock products.

On the same day, a cross-border e-commerce matchmaking event was held, which invited representatives from Weifang's key industrial clusters such as wood products, textiles, auto parts, gardening machinery, light industry craft, jewelry, musical instruments, building materials and other sectors. They were engaged in face-to-face negotiations with industry players.

Apart from the main events, a range of specialized promotion activities were held during the expo to promote commercialization.

On Saturday and Sunday, the organizers invited major business players and platforms to conduct on-site investigations of the city's counties, business clusters, and development zones, in an effort to bring more business opportunities to local enterprises.

The expo was hosted by the Shandong Department of Commerce and Weifang city government, and organized by the E-commerce Specialized Committee of China Association of Trade in Services and the Weifang Cross-border E-commerce Research Institute.

Su Jun, head of the E-commerce

Specialized Committee of China Association of Trade in Services, said that the organizers made efforts to internationalize the event and improve its efficiency in order to achieve the goals of boosting the economy, driving consumption and promoting the development of the Weifang e-commerce industry.

The committee has invited institutions and enterprises from more than 10 countries and regions, including the United States, Russia, France, the ROK, Malaysia, Ireland, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Bangladesh to enlarge this event's influence.

Besides eBay, this event has brought together well-known domestic and foreign e-vendors including JD.com, Amazon, AliExpress, mengxiang.com, Made-in-China.com, Lazada, Pinduoduo, Qoo10, and OZON, as well as more than 100 manufacturers and buyers from Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Hangzhou, Yiwu, Ningbo, Qingdao and other cities in China, Su said.

In the past three years, the foreign trade volume of cross-border e-commerce increased from 140 million yuan (\$19.8 million) in 2020 to 39 billion yuan in 2022. Currently, there are around 15,300 e-commerce enterprises and around 170,000 online stores in the city.