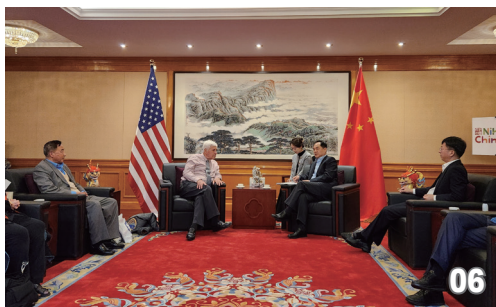


Voice of Friendship stems from  
*Shi Jing (Book of Songs).*

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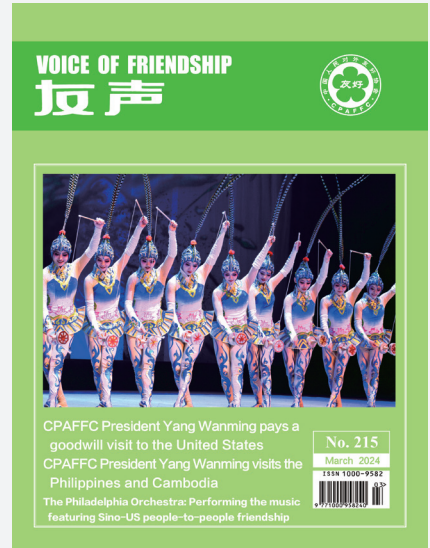
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**Front Cover: On March 9, the China Acrobatic Troupe, organized by the CPAFFC, kicked off its visit to Nagoya, Japan.**

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Editor-in-Chief: Gao Weimin

Address: 1 Taijichang St, Beijing,  
100740, China

Fax: (010) 81441265

E-mail: [yousheng\\_ys@sina.com](mailto:yousheng_ys@sina.com)

<http://www.cpaffc.org.cn>

<http://www.qikan.com>

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# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming pays a goodwill visit to the United States

## Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation on a 12-day visit to the United States, which began in Washington D.C. on January 27, and included the states of Texas, Nevada, California and Washington. It was aimed at promoting the implementation of the important consensus reached at the San Francisco summit meeting between the two heads of state at the people-to-people and local levels, deepen the friendship between the Chinese and American peoples, and promote cooperation between the friendship cities of the two sides.

In Washington D.C., Yang attended a seminar in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of China-US diplomatic relations. He met with Bob Holden, president of the US-China Heartland Association and former governor of Missouri; Justin Smith, founder and CEO of Semafor; Clarence Anthony, CEO of the National League of Cities; John Thornton, co-chair of the Asia Society; and Thomas Shannon, co-



**CPAFFC President Yang Wanming attends a seminar in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of China-US diplomatic relations.**

chair of the board of trustees of the Inter-American Dialogue. At the dinner held for him by the Albright Stonebridge Group, Yang had in-depth exchanges with senior executives of 22 American multinational companies, including Carla Hills, former US Trade Representative, and Robert Goldstein, CEO of Las Vegas Sands, on issues of

common concern.

On the morning of January 29, the CPAFFC, the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and the China-United States Exchange Foundation jointly held a seminar in commemoration of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of China-US diplomatic relations, with the

theme of “Building the Healthy, Stable and Sustainable China-US Relations”. Yang addressed the opening ceremony of the seminar, so did Chen Dongxiao, president of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, and Rick Waters, managing director of the Eurasia Group’s China practice and former assistant secretary of state and head of the Office of China Coordination. Xu Xueyuan, minister of the Chinese Embassy in the US, attended the seminar, which was presided over by Zhou Jiancheng, president of the China-United States Exchange Foundation.

In his speech, Yang recalled the day, 45 years before, on which US President Jimmy Carter held a grand welcome ceremony for and had formal talks with Deng Xiaoping, vice-premier of the State Council of China, at the White House. He also recalled the meeting between the top leaders of the two countries in San Francisco in November 2023, where they exchanged candid and in-depth views on the strategic, overarching and directional issues concerning bilateral relations and world peace and development, charting the course and drawing the blueprint for the sound, stable and sustainable development of China-US relations.

Yang introduced the CPAFFC’s efforts in promoting people-to-people and local exchanges and cooperation between China and the US, and shared the stories of Kuliang, the Flying Tigers and China-US friendship cities. He said, “The Kuliang story tells us that mutual respect is the basic premise to promote the healthy development of China-US relations. As long as the Chinese and American peoples adhere to mutual respect

and friendly coexistence, we can establish sincere friendship and pass it on from generation to generation. The Flying Tigers story shows that peaceful coexistence is the fundamental cornerstone for the steady development of bilateral relations. Our two peoples have forged a profound friendship with our lives and blood during World War II, and maintaining world peace and stability today is even more inseparable from the joint efforts of China and the United States. The story of the friendship cities tells us that win-win cooperation is the only way forward to promote the sustainable development of bilateral relations. China-US relations have never been a one-way street in which one gains while the other loses. Our two countries have every reason to achieve mutual benefits and achieve win-win results.”

More than a dozen Chinese and American experts and scholars from the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, Tsinghua University, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Johns Hopkins University, Georgetown University and other institutions discussed the past and prospects of China-US political and diplomatic relations, and the opportunities and challenges in cooperation on climate change and sustainable development. They also analyzed the problems and prospects in people-to-people exchanges. They all expressed the belief that cooperation between China and the US, the world’s two largest economies, will not only bring huge benefits to the two countries, but also inject new impetus into global development. A dozen and more student representatives

from Johns Hopkins University and Georgetown University sat in on the seminar.

Yang thanked the people from all walks of life for their long-term positive role in people-to-people friendship and local cooperation between the two countries, saying that the CPAFFC will continue to work with them to build more bridges of friendship and make new contributions to the healthy, stable and sustainable development of China-US relations. Participants from the US said that both the American and Chinese people love peace and yearn for a better life, and a sound and stable US-China relationship serves the common interests of both peoples. They are willing to continue efforts with the CPAFFC to deepen the friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation.

At the dinner attended by representatives of the US business circle, Yang introduced China’s economic situation and latest policy measures to expand opening up and attract foreign investment. He thanked the representatives of the US companies present for their long-standing support for friendly exchanges at the people-to-people and local levels and expressed the hope that they will play a greater role in stabilizing and developing China-US relations. The US participants said that they will remain committed to maintaining and developing the mutually beneficial and win-win economic and trade relations between the two countries, continue to deepen and expand their business in China, and support and promote the friendly exchanges between the two peoples. ■

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Houston, Texas

## Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

From January 30 to February 1, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Houston, Texas.

During the visit, Yang was invited to deliver a speech titled “Building More Bridges of Friendship Between the Chinese and American People” at the Asia Society Texas Center (ASTC), and held a fireside dialogue with its

former president Charles Foster. Bonna Kol, president of the ASTC, and about 100 guests from the local government, businesses, academia, the media, and some overseas Chinese attended the event.

Yang also held talks with Stephen Lakis, president of the State Legislative Leaders Foundation; Peter Svarzbein, chairman of the Sister Cities International; Neil Bush, founder and chair of George H. W. Bush Foundation

for US-China Relations; and David J. Firestein, its president and CEO. Positive results were achieved.

In his speech at the ASTC, Yang said that in November last year, President Xi Jinping attended a joint welcome banquet hosted by the Asia Society and other friendship groups of the United States, and delivered an important speech to the American people telling the touching story of friendly exchanges between the two



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming has a fireside dialogue with Charles Foster, former president of the ASTC .

peoples.

“President Xi mentioned the word ‘people’ more than 60 times. He pointed out that the foundation of China-US relations has been laid by the people, the door has been opened by the people, the story has been written by the people, and the future will be created by the people. His words resonated strongly with the people of both countries,” said Yang.

Looking back at history, Yang said, it is the people who paved the way for the normalization of China-US relations. At present, it is the people who are driving bilateral exchanges and cooperation. Looking to the future, it is the people who will write new chapters of our bilateral relations.

Yang shared many touching stories of friendly exchanges between the Chinese and American people. He called on all sectors of US society to work with China to implement the important consensus reached by the heads of state of the two countries in San Francisco. He advocated for jointly building a bridge of friendship, youth exchanges and local cooperation in order to make positive contributions to enhancing people-to-people friendship, promoting cooperation on people’s livelihoods and improving mutual understanding among the Chinese and American people. This will facilitate the sound, stable and sustainable development of bilateral relations.

During the fireside dialogue, Yang answered questions from his host and the audience. He introduced the significance and achievements of the summit meeting in San Francisco last



**Yang meets with an American friend.**

November, the recent positive progress in the implementation of the “San Francisco Vision” made by the Chinese and US governments and the people of the two countries, as well as measures taken by the Chinese government to promote mutual visits between the Chinese and American people.

Yang also encouraged people from all walks of life in the US to respond to President Xi Jinping’s call of inviting 50,000 American young people to China for exchange and study in the next five years, and actively organize and participate in China-US youth exchange activities through friendship cities and local exchange channels.

When meeting with leaders of US friendship organizations, Yang highly appreciated their long-term contributions to enhancing people-

to-people and local exchanges and cooperation. He expressed the hope that the two sides would further strengthen cooperation and enhance mutual trust and friendship between the two peoples by holding activities attended by congresses, friendship cities, think tanks and youth.

Yang also met briefly with Andy Icken, Houston’s chief development officer, and Christopher Olson, director of Trade and International Affairs. He expressed the hope that Houston will continue to actively explore cooperation with China in areas such as energy, medical care and friendship cities. Icken said that Houston values its long-term friendly relations with China and will resume as soon as possible exchanges and cooperation with its friendship cities in China, which were interrupted by the epidemic. ■

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Nevada, and continues to write the Flying Tigers story

## Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

From February 1 to 3, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit the US state of Nevada.

Yang visited the Jack Lund Schofield Middle School, the first Flying Tigers Friendship School in the US, where he reunited with Harry Moyer, a 103-year-old Flying Tigers veteran, Jeffrey Greene, chairman of the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation (SAAHF), and descendants of the Flying Tigers from all over the US. He also talked with teachers and students of the school.

Yang thanked the Flying Tigers veterans for their long-standing and important contributions to promoting the friendship between the Chinese and American people. He said that their visit to China at the invitation of the CPAFFC last year has left behind many moving and inspiring moments, allowing the people of the two countries to relive the friendship forged together with blood and life during the Second World War.

He said, "In today's world rife with challenges, it is all the more

necessary for the two countries and peoples to work together. The CPAFFC is ready to work with the SAAHF, the Flying Tigers veterans and their descendants, to carry on the spirit of the Flying Tigers among the Chinese and American people, as President Xi Jinping expressed in his letter of reply to you last year."

Moyer and Greene were excited to recall President Xi's words with the Flying Tigers veterans and some other friends before the joint welcome banquet of US friendship groups last year. They said that they would commit themselves to the cause of promoting US-China friendship and continually strive to foster friendships that will be passed on from generation to generation.

During the meeting with teachers and students of the Jack Lund Schofield Middle School, Yang said that over 80 years ago, the older generation of the Flying Tigers fought side by side with the Chinese people for peace and justice, and finally defeated the fascists. They were heroes of people all over the world.

"The future of China-US relations lies in the hands of you young

generation. The healthy and stable development of bilateral relations requires the participation and support of the Flying Tigers in the new era," Yang pointed out.

Yang said that to help people better understand China, starting from this year, the CPAFFC will invite teachers and students of the school to visit China every year. Visitors will engage in exchanges with teachers and students from the Flying Tigers Friendship School in China, so as to jointly carry forward the spirit of the Flying Tigers and make contributions to the great cause of China-US friendship.

During his stay in Nevada, Yang also met separately with the CEO of the US Sands Group and the CEO of MGM Group, and discussed issues on strengthening people-to-people friendly exchanges and cooperation between the two countries. They all expressed their willingness to continue expanding investment in the Chinese mainland, and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions.

Zhang Jianmin, Chinese consul general in San Francisco, and Shen Xin, secretary-general of the CPAFFC, participated in relevant activities. ■

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit California

## Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

From February 3 to 5, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit San Francisco and Sacramento, California.

Yang met with Eleni Kounalakis, lieutenant governor of California; Jerry Brown, former governor of California and chair of the California-China Climate Institute; chair of the California Air Resources Board; chair of the California Energy Commission; and secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. He

attended and delivered a speech at the meeting on the implementation of the China-US Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate Crisis; and held talks with David Haubert, honorary chairman of the Sino-American Friendship City Association, and Larry Jobe, president of the Flying Tiger Historical Organization.

Zhang Jianmin, Chinese consul general in San Francisco, and Shen Xin, director-general of the CPAFFC, attended relevant activities.

At the meeting with Kounalakis, Yang said that when President Xi

Jinping met with California Governor Gavin Newsom last year, he stressed that the vitality of China-US relations lies in the localities. Yang said, "The CPAFFC will continue to support the China-US Bay Area Dialogue, climate change cooperation and youth exchanges between California and Chinese localities, so as to inject new impetus into the sound, stable and sustainable development of China-US relations."

Kounalakis said that California cherishes the friendly and cooperative relations with Chinese localities.



President Yang Wanming has a meeting with representatives on the US side.



It will implement the outcomes of Governor Newsom’s visit to China, further strengthen cooperation with the Chinese side, and jointly host the China-US Bay Area Dialogue and other activities. It warmly welcomes more Chinese people to travel and study in California.

Yang and Brown had in-depth exchanges and reached consensus on further strengthening cooperation between the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area of China and the San Francisco Bay Area of the US, and on addressing the challenge of climate change at the local level.

At the meeting on the implementation of the China-US Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate

Crisis, Yang recognized in his speech that climate change is a common challenge facing all humanity. He said, “In November last year, China and the US jointly issued the Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate Crisis, which specifically proposes to support local cooperation in coping with climate change.” He hoped that experts from think tanks will exchange ideas, share experience and build consensus, so as to contribute wisdom to the local cooperation of the two countries in combating climate change.

Experts from more than 10 think tanks had in-depth discussions on strengthening local cooperation in coping with climate change, saying that they will jointly build a “Golden Gate

Bridge” for more local exchanges and cooperation between the US and China and with other countries so as to better cope with climate change.

Yang also had friendly exchanges respectively with Haubert, officials of the municipal governments and city councils of four cities in northern California, and with Larry Jobe, on strengthening China-US local cooperation and people-to-people exchanges.

The US side said that they will actively promote cooperation between US-China friendship cities, focus on promoting youth exchanges, carry forward the spirit of US-China cooperation during World War II, and enhance mutual understanding and friendship between the two countries. ■



President Yang Wanming (5th right) takes a photo with American friends in California.

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming visits Washington state and finishes his trip to the US

## Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

From February 5 to 6, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Washington state.

In Seattle he met with Howard Shultz, founder and honorary chairman of Starbucks and co-founder of the Schultz Family Foundation. In Olympia, the state capital, Yang had a meeting with Steve Hobbs, secretary of Washington state, and some state senators. He was also invited to visit the Lincoln Middle School in Tacoma.

When meeting with Schultz, Yang said that he highly appreciated Schultz's long-term attention to and support for the development of China-US relations, and that he would like to invite him to attend the China-US youth exchange activities organized by the CPAFFC and share with young leaders of both sides his successful experience in entrepreneurship and views on bilateral relations. Schultz responded that face-to-face exchanges between the peoples of the two countries are crucial for the stable development of US-China

relations. He and his foundation will actively support various programs that help promote understanding between the American and Chinese people, and he looks forward to attending activities organized by the CPAFFC.

At the meeting with Hobbs and state senators, Yang introduced the exchanges and cooperation between China and the US at the provincial and state levels conducted by the CPAFFC. He hoped that the Washington state government and congress will actively participate in such activities as the China-US Subnational Legislatures Cooperation Forum, the China-US Sister Cities Conference and the China-US Local Dialogue on Climate Change, all organized by the CPAFFC.

Hobbs and the state senators said that Washington state and China have long maintained close ties in various fields and they look forward to further expanding exchanges and deepening cooperation in the future. Many state senators expressed their willingness to send delegations to China this year, and Yang assured them of warm welcome.

At the Lincoln Middle School, the teachers and students delightedly recalled President Xi Jinping's two visits to their school and once again sang affectionately the song *In the Fields of Hope* in Chinese. Yang said that in November last year President Xi announced in San Francisco that 50,000 young American students would be invited to visit China for study exchange over the next five years. To implement this initiative, the CPAFFC will cooperate with relevant organizations and invite 100 students and teachers from the Lincoln Middle School to visit China this year. The principal expressed his gratitude and happily accepted the invitation.

On February 7, the delegation finished the trip to the US, during which they visited eight cities in five states, attended nearly 40 events, and met with more than 200 people from all walks of life, achieving the purpose of enhancing mutual understanding and friendship and promoting exchanges and cooperation between the two countries. ■

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming visits Vietnam

## Department of East Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO), Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Vietnam from December 11 to 14, 2023.

On the afternoon of the 13th, the CPAFFC and the VUFO co-hosted a meeting in Hanoi with representatives of Chinese and Vietnamese youth, and people who have contributed to bilateral friendship.

General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan, who were on a state visit to Vietnam, attended the meeting, along with General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Nguyen Phu Trong and his wife. They also took a group photo with the representatives.

The top leaders of the two parties and two countries delivered important speeches at the meeting.

CPAFFC President Yang Wanming and representatives from both countries also made speeches.

More than 400 participants attended the event, including officials from relevant ministries and local governments of China and Vietnam.

During his visit, Yang Wanming held a meeting with Phan Anh Son, president of the VUFO, exchanging in-depth views on implementing the spirit of the important speeches made by the top leaders, and further promoting friendly people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

Yang said that we have witnessed a milestone moment in the history of relations between our two parties and two countries when General Secretary Xi Jinping and General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong jointly announced a new positioning and opened a new stage for China-Vietnam relations. The important speeches made by the top leaders have pointed out a new direction and provided fundamental guidelines for further promoting people-to-people and cultural

exchanges between the two countries, especially friendly exchanges between the youth, and opened up broader prospects for cooperation.

Yang pledged that the CPAFFC will work with Vietnamese friends from all walks of life to implement the spirit of the speeches; give full play to the basic role of people-to-people diplomacy; constantly consolidate and deepen the public support for China-Vietnam friendship; build more platforms for the youth of both countries to strengthen exchanges and cooperation; and encourage them to carry forward China-Vietnam friendship, participate in the development of the Asia-Pacific region, become pioneers in human progress, and make unremitting efforts to build a China-Vietnam community with a shared future, which is of great strategic significance.

Phan Anh Son pointed out that the year 2023 was of special significance to Vietnam-China relations. With frequent high-level interactions, the upgrading of bilateral relations opened

a new chapter in the relations between the two parties, countries and peoples. With the world undergoing rapid and complex changes, friendly people-to-people exchanges are indispensable and significant for enhancing friendship and understanding between the two parties, countries and peoples.

“The VUFO will work with the CPAFFC to earnestly implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of our two parties and countries, enhance mutual understanding and friendship between our two peoples, especially the youth, and make new contributions to inheriting and consolidating our traditional friendship,” said Phan Anh Son.

The two sides also had in-depth talks and reached consensus on strengthening exchanges on governance, deepening cooperation between friendship cities and localities, and jointly holding bilateral and multilateral activities such as the Meeting of Representatives of China-Vietnam Friendship, the China-Vietnam People’s Forum, the Gala for Residents Near the Border, the China-ASEAN Young Leaders Exchange Festival, and the Conference on China-ASEAN People-to-People Friendship Organizations.

Yang and his delegation also laid wreaths at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum to pay respects to the late leader, and visited the Hanoi Light Rail Line 2 built by Chinese enterprises.

## **Speech by CPAFFC President Yang Wanming at the meeting with representatives of Chinese and Vietnamese youth and people who have contributed to bilateral friendship**

Your Excellency General Secretary and President Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan,  
Your Excellency General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Madame Ngo Thi Man,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the historic occasion of the state visit of General Secretary Xi Jinping and his wife to Vietnam, the CPAFFC and the VUFO co-organized the meeting with representatives of Chinese and Vietnamese youth and people who have contributed to the bilateral friendship. The presence of the top leaders of our two parties and two countries and the important speeches they are going to deliver demonstrate the great importance of and their high attention to the cause of China-Vietnam traditional friendship. We are very encouraged and excited.

Yesterday, General Secretary Xi and General Secretary Nguyen jointly announced a new positioning of relations between our two parties and countries. On the basis of deepening the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between China and Vietnam, the two sides will jointly

build a China-Vietnam community with a shared future, which is of strategic significance. A series of important consensus have been reached on promoting and expanding bilateral cooperation in various fields, such as people-to-people exchanges. The new positioning points out a new direction and provides fundamental guidelines for further promoting people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries, especially friendly exchanges between the youth.

In recent years, under the strategic guidance and personal care of the top leaders of our two parties and countries, the CPAFFC has given full play to its role as a main channel of people-to-people diplomacy. Together with friendship organizations such as the VUFO and friendly personages, we have actively implemented the important instructions of the leaders of the two countries and the spirit of the Memorandum of Friendship and Cooperation and other bilateral documents.

Brand events such as the Meeting of Representatives of China-Vietnam Friendship, the China-Vietnam People’s Forum, and the Gala for

Residents Near the Border have been organized and are playing a positive role in enriching channels of people-to-people exchanges, promoting practical cooperation at the local level, and enhancing mutual friendship.

General Secretary Xi points out that young people are the most active and dynamic social force. As China-Vietnam relations enter a new stage, a more beautiful chapter needs to be written by the younger generation.

The CPAFFC will work with Vietnamese friends from all walks of life to study and understand the spirit of the important speeches made by the top leaders of our two parties and countries, implement the important consensus that has been reached, continue to play the basic role of people-to-people diplomacy, build more platforms for the youth of both countries to strengthen

exchanges and cooperation, and continue to make unremitting efforts to consolidate and deepen the traditional friendship between China and Vietnam.

The CPAFFC will continue to host bilateral activities such as the Meeting of Representatives of China-Vietnam Friendship, the China-Vietnam People's Forum, and the Gala for Residents Near the Border, and make unremitting efforts at the people-to-people level to build a strategically significant China-Vietnam community with a shared future.

The CPAFFC will take the 2024 China-ASEAN Year of People-to-People Exchanges as an opportunity to join Vietnamese youth in multilateral activities such as the China-ASEAN Young Leaders Exchange Festival and the Conference on China-ASEAN People-to-People Friendship

Organizations, and make unremitting efforts to build a China-ASEAN community with a shared future, a peaceful, safe and secure, prosperous, beautiful and amicable home for China and ASEAN countries.

The CPAFFC will tell the international community the story of Marxist political parties, tell the story of successfully embarking on the socialist path suited to our respective national conditions, and make unremitting efforts to promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and a better world.

Once again, our sincere thanks to General Secretary and President Xi Jinping and Madame Peng Liyuan, General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong and Madame Ngo Thi Man, for joining us today.

Thank you all! ■



**President Yang Wanming (middle left) has a meeting with Vietnamese friends.**

# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming visits the Philippines and Cambodia

## Department of East Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Association for Philippines-China Understanding (APCU) and the Cambodia-China Friendship Association (CCFA), Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit the Philippines and Cambodia from December 15 to 19, 2023.

During his visit to the Philippines, Yang Wanming called on Gloria Arroyo, former president of the Philippines and honorary chairman of the APCU. Yang also met with Atty. Raul L. Lambino, chairman of the APCU, and held talks with Philippine youth representatives.

Yang visited Cagayan province and met its governor Manuel N. Mamba. He had talks with Mrs. Mamba, leading officials of the provincial government, municipal leaders, parliamentarians, university presidents, grassroots civil servants

and representatives of the Chinese community.

Cagayan province held a grand welcome ceremony for the delegation, at which local youth performed lively folk dances.

Huang Xilian, Chinese ambassador to the Philippines, attended relevant activities.

Yang pointed out that China and the Philippines are close neighbors that face each other across the sea. The two countries have a history of friendly exchanges that spans thousands of years.

President Xi Jinping and President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos reached an important consensus during the latter's visit to China in January 2023, charting the way forward for the development of bilateral relations.

"Our two sides should implement the important consensus reached by the heads of our two countries; strengthen communication, enhance mutual trust

and properly handle differences on the basis of consolidating traditional friendship; and strive to maintain and promote the sound and stable development of China-Philippines relations in the long run," said Yang.

In the context of globalization, Yang noted, local cooperation can play a positive role as a stabilizer, booster and pilot in the development of state-to-state relations.

Yang pledged that the CPAFFC will give full play to its role as a bridge and support Cagayan and other Philippine provinces and cities in strengthening cooperation with Chinese provinces and cities, forging friendship-city relations, and contributing to the local socioeconomic development and the improvement of people's well-being in both countries.

"The foundation of China-Philippines relations lies in the people and the future lies in the youth," said Yang. "The CPAFFC will work with

friends from all walks of life in the Philippines, make use of mechanisms such as the 2024 China-ASEAN Year of People-to-people Exchanges and the China-ASEAN Young Leaders Exchange Festival, and create more opportunities for exchanges between the two peoples, especially young people, so as to enhance mutual understanding and consolidate popular support for our comprehensive strategic cooperative relations,” said Yang.

Former President Arroyo thanked

the CPAFFC for awarding her the title “Friendship Ambassador” in April 2023, saying that regardless of whether she is president or not, she always attaches great importance to cooperation with China in her work and will continue to devote herself to the cause of Philippines-China friendship in the future.

Governor Mamba and his wife thanked the CPAFFC for inviting them to visit China in May 2023. They said that it was their first visit to China,

and it was the start of their journey of learning from China’s development achievements in recent years, which as they said have attracted worldwide attention. Noting that China has become the world’s second largest economy and the most promising hyper-scale market, Governor Mamba said that Cagayan province is willing to increase cooperation with China in agriculture, tourism, infrastructure and other fields, and hopes to build friendly cooperative relations with more Chinese provinces



**President Yang Wanming takes a photo with friends from all walks of life in the Philippines.**

and cities.

Chairman Lambino said that the maritime disputes between the two countries do not define Philippines-China relations, and the two neighbors enjoy a long history and solid foundation of friendship. The most important task of the APCU is to tell the story of the Philippines-China friendship to all sectors of Philippine society, especially the young generation, so that more people in the Philippines can understand China and support the friendly cooperation between the two countries.

During his visit to Cambodia, Yang met with Ouch Borith, senior minister of Cambodia, and Ek Sam Ol, chairman of the CCFA.

Chang Jian, charge d'affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Cambodia, attended relevant activities.

Yang noted that China and Cambodia are close neighbors linked by mountains and rivers and brothers linked by blood.

Under the joint efforts of Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai, and other Chinese leaders of the older generation, and Cambodian King Father Norodom Sihanouk, an "ironclad" friendship has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the two peoples, Yang said.

"Since the beginning of the year 2023, President Xi Jinping has met twice with King Norodom Sihamoni and Prime Minister Hun Manet

respectively, and maintained strategic communication with Samdech Hun Sen. Important consensus has been reached on building a high-quality, high-level and high-standard China-Cambodia community with a shared future for the new era, which draws a blueprint for the development of China-Cambodia comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership," said Yang.

Yang said that the year 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative and the concept of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness" in neighborhood diplomacy. Over the past decade, China has strengthened its strategic alignment and carried out practical cooperation with Cambodia and other neighboring countries, which has greatly promoted the economic and social development of the two countries and injected strong impetus into the peace and stability of Asia.

The year 2024 is both the China-ASEAN Year of People-to-people Exchanges and the China-Cambodia Year of People-to-people Exchanges. Yang said that he hoped that the two sides will take the opportunity to further strengthen people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. He pledged that CPAFFC will, as ever, seek to strengthen exchanges and cooperation with Cambodia's people-to-people friendship groups and forge the already strong China-Cambodia bonds of friendship ever stronger.

Senior Minister Ouch Borith said that Cambodia has always taken developing relations with China as its top diplomatic priority, and firmly supports and actively participates in the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping.

"The Cambodian side is willing to work with the Chinese side to continue to implement the important consensus reached by the heads of our two countries, constantly substantiate the Cambodia-China 'diamond hexagon' cooperation framework, strengthen practical cooperation in energy, agriculture, infrastructure, digital technology and other fields, and speed up the modernization processes of the two countries," said Ouch Borith.

CCFA Chairman Ek Sam Ol said that China and Cambodia share a close friendship and cultural affinity. Over the past 65 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the two countries have witnessed deepening political mutual trust, a closer bond of shared interests, booming people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and the fruits of cooperation have benefited people in both countries.

He pledged that the CCFA will continue to join hands with the CPAFFC to strengthen cooperation in youth exchanges and human resources development, further enhance mutual understanding and trust between the two peoples, and constantly cultivate social forces that carry forward the cause of Cambodia-China friendship. ■



# CPAFFC President Yang Wanming gives an interview on Sino-Arab states and Sino-Islamic states people-to-people friendship

## Department of Asian & African Affairs

From November 21 to 29, 2023, CPAFFC President Yang Wanming visited Egypt and Iran at the invitation of the Egypt-China Friendship Association (ECFA) and the Iran-China Friendship Association (ICFA). Recently, Yang gave an interview to relevant media outlets on China's friendship with Egypt and Iran as well as other Arab and Islamic states.

### **I. As your first foreign visit after taking the post of the CPAFFC president, why did you choose Egypt and Iran as your destinations?**

Egypt and Iran are important Arab and Islamic countries. Both countries enjoy a time-honored friendship with China and have made significant contributions to the progress of human civilization together with China. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, their traditional

friendship with China has been constantly consolidated and developed, and cooperation in various fields has been stably advanced. Also, they established comprehensive strategic partnerships with China and joined the BRICS in August 2023 under the strategic leadership of President Xi Jinping and their respective state leaders.

The foundation of state-to-state relations lies in the people. As a national organization engaged in people-to-people diplomacy, we accepted the invitations of the ECFA and the ICFA to visit Egypt and Iran in order to fully implement the important consensus reached by President Xi and the state leaders of Egypt and Iran at non-governmental levels. In this way, we can deepen people-to-people friendship and sub-national collaboration with the two countries,

facilitate mutual understanding and friendship among the peoples, and fortify public support for the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Egypt and between China and Iran.

### **II. Could you please tell us the role of the inviting parties, namely, the ECFA and the ICFA, in Sino-Egypt and Sino-Iran people-to-people friendship?**

The year of 2023 marks the 65th anniversary of the founding of the ECFA. Over the years, it has made remarkable contributions to promoting mutual visits, people-to-people exchanges and cooperation, and friendly feelings between the peoples of the two countries. Through close cooperation in the fields of culture, tourism, and among the youth, the ECFA and the CPAFFC have

developed flagship activities including the China-Arab Friendship Conference, the China-Arab Friendship Youth Ambassadors Program, and the Dragon Boat Carnival, which embody the people-to-people friendship between the two countries.

The CPAFFC and the ICFA have hosted annual meetings in turn since 2010. During the COVID-19 pandemic, artists from China and Iran played the dulcimer, an instrument that originated in Persia, online together, at the invitation of the two associations. Their performance was to encourage the joint efforts of the two peoples to combat the pandemic. During the 2022 Spring Festival, the ICFA arranged a light show on the iconic Azadi Tower in Teheran to celebrate the Chinese New Year and to wish the Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics a success. The CPAFFC produced a video to express good wishes from Chinese university students to Iranian friends during the Navruz Spring Festival.

During the visit this time, we attended activities in celebration of the 65th anniversary of the founding of the ECFA and the 14th annual meeting of the China-Iran Friendship Association and the Iran-China Friendship Association. We have reached consensus with the ECFA and the ICFA to strengthen cooperation in the fields of culture, education, tourism, and

among friendship cities and the youth to facilitate mutual understanding and friendly feelings among the peoples of the three countries.

**III. Besides exchanges with the friendship associations in Egypt and Iran, what other activities have you been engaged in? What kind of impressions do you have?**

During this visit, we attended the Dialogue Among Historic and Cultural Cities of China and Egypt co-hosted by the CPAFFC, the Shaanxi provincial people's government, and the Cairo provincial government. We met with officials of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Local Development, and Civil Aviation of Egypt; officials of the Ministries of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Iran; and officials of the Iran-China Parliamentary Friendship Group. We also had in-depth discussions with government officials of Luxor and Cairo provinces of Egypt, and with government officials of Teheran city, Esfahan province and Esfahan city of Iran, on further advancing collaboration among friendship cities under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

We deeply feel the friendship of people from all walks of life in the two countries, their appreciation of China's economic and social achievements, approval of our philosophy of

development, and recognition of the country's international influence. People in the two countries said that China's accomplishments have set an encouraging example for other developing countries, including Egypt and Iran, and that the inspiring prospects of the Chinese road to modernization will bring new opportunities and inspiration to people in other countries in their efforts to realize modernization.

Officials from governments and parliaments as well as people from other social sectors expressed on many occasions their admiration for China's upright position on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They said that they expect and will support more efforts from China to continue to exert its influence as a major country and safeguard international fairness and justice.

**IV. You mentioned just now the Dialogue among Historic and Cultural Cities of China and Egypt, and collaboration Among friendship cities under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Could you give us more details?**

The dialogue among historic and cultural cities of China and other countries is a flagship activity to promote cultural exchanges. It is hosted by the CPAFFC and friendship cities in China and their counterparts

in the rest of the world. The Dialogue among Historic and Cultural Cities of China and Egypt was co-hosted by the CPAFFC and the friendship cities as well as provinces of the two countries. It aims to carry forward our traditional bilateral friendship, jointly implement the Global Civilization Initiative, advance mutually-beneficial cooperation through mutual learning, and pursue common development through friendly exchanges. In the dialogue, different parties spoke highly of the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping and agreed that China and Egypt, as countries with ancient civilizations, should draw wisdom from their time-honored civilizations and make contributions to tackling the common challenges faced by humanity. A consensus was also reached on strengthening sub-national exchanges, deepening mutually-beneficial cooperation, and promoting mutual learning among civilizations.

Sub-national cooperation serves as an important driving force and a pillar for Belt and Road cooperation. In October 2023, the CPAFFC and the Beijing municipal government co-hosted the Thematic Forum on Sub-national Cooperation of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. This visit was a pragmatic implementation of the fruits of the thematic forum. During our stay

in Egypt and Iran, we had in-depth discussions with their local officials on strengthening collaboration in commerce, science and technology, environmental protection, culture, education, tourism, and visited relevant places, laying a foundation for further exchanges among friendship cities along the Belt and Road.

People-to-people friendship, which derives from close exchanges, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations. Mutual interests between the states are also important. The CPAFFC will make better arrangements to advance cultural exchanges and cooperation among friendship cities. Closer connectivity between the people will help integrate our interests and promote state-to-state relations. In this way, we will better serve the overall development and diplomacy of our country, and contribute to its high-quality local development and opening up.

#### **V. How about the CPAFFC's blueprint for people-to-people friendship between China and Arab as well as Islamic states?**

Arab and Islamic countries are good friends and brothers to China. The year 2024 marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum. We will put the fruits of the First China-Arab States Summit into

effect. First, we will host institutional activities in Arab states, including the Sixth China-Arab States Friendship Conference and the Fourth China-Arab States City Forum. Second, we will strengthen people-to-people exchanges, with the CIFA and the ICFA co-hosting their 15th annual meeting, and advance non-governmental exchanges and cooperation in culture, education, tourism and among friendship cities. Third, we will carry out dialogues among civilizations and invite friendship associations and cities in Arab and Islamic states to attend activities hosted by the CPAFFC, including the Dialogue of Friendship Associations of Countries with Ancient Civilizations, and dialogues among historic and cultural cities of China and other countries. Through these efforts, we will jointly implement the Global Civilization Initiative and spread the common values of humanity.

We welcome more and more people from all walks of life caring about and supporting the cause of people-to-people friendship between China and Arab states and between China and Islamic states. Through concerted efforts, we will promote mutual understanding and friendship between China and countries in different regions, and build a closer community with a shared future for humanity. ■

# 2023 Forum on Lancang-Mekong Local Government Cooperation and Dialogue Between Historic and Cultural Cities of Lancang-Mekong Countries held in Yingtan, Jiangxi province

## Department of East Asian Affairs

On December 19, the 2023 Forum on Lancang-Mekong Local Government Cooperation and Dialogue Between Historic and Cultural Cities of Lancang-Mekong Countries was successfully held in Yingtan, Jiangxi province. It was co-hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the People's Government of Jiangxi province.

Xia Wenyong, vice-governor of Jiangxi province; Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC; Tin Maung Swe, Myanmar ambassador to China; and Yun Linne, vice-governor of Siem Reap province of Cambodia, addressed the opening ceremony of the forum. Liang Jianjun, deputy director-general

of the Department of Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, delivered a video speech.

About 100 people attended the forum, including government officials from China's Jiangxi, Henan, Guizhou and Qinghai provinces, and Shenzhen and Chengdu cities; and local government and diplomatic representatives from Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

Zhang Zijian, mayor of Yingtan, presided over the opening ceremony.

Xia Wenyong said that in recent years, Jiangxi has actively integrated into a new type of sub-regional cooperation mechanism, promoted practical cooperation with countries

in the Lancang-Mekong region, and achieved mutual benefits and win-win results.

In 2022, Xia said, the value of Jiangxi's imports and exports to the Lancang-Mekong countries totaled 7.795 billion US dollars, an increase of 32.3%. It is hoped that through this event, Jiangxi will carry out pragmatic cooperation with the Lancang-Mekong countries in a wider range, at a higher level and in a wider scope, continuously enhance the friendship between the peoples of the Lancang-Mekong countries, tighten the bond of the Lancang-Mekong community with a shared future, and make the relations stronger and closer.

Yuan Mindao noted that the

six Lancang-Mekong countries share geographical proximity and cultural affinity. The year 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, the vision of building a community with a shared future for mankind, and the vision of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in neighborhood diplomacy put forward by President Xi Jinping.

“The Belt and Road Initiative originated in China, began in neighboring countries, and first benefited the Lancang-Mekong countries,” Yuan said. “After seven years of sustainable and high-level development, Lancang-Mekong cooperation has become a ‘golden model’ of regional cooperation with great vitality and development potential. It has set a good example for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and for jointly building a community with a shared future for mankind.”

“Local and people-to-people exchanges and cooperation are an important part of Lancang-Mekong cooperation. The CPAFFC stands ready to work with all sides to continuously promote the in-depth development of Lancang-Mekong local cooperation and cultural exchanges, and create a better future for the people of all countries in the region,” said Yuan.

Ambassador Tin Maung Swe said that the foundation for state-to-state relations lies in mutual

understanding and trust between peoples. Local governments of the six Lancang-Mekong countries are directly responsible to the people. Enhancing close exchanges and cooperation among all parties, expanding people-to-people exchanges and building strong ties are of great significance to the in-depth development of Lancang-Mekong cooperation.

“Myanmar attaches great importance to Lancang-Mekong local cooperation and cultural exchanges, and has established many pairs of friendship cities with China and other Mekong countries. I hope that today’s event will serve as an opportunity for local governments to share their development experiences, enhance mutual understanding, strengthen exchanges and cooperation, and bring more benefits to the people of the Lancang-Mekong countries,” said Tin Maung Swe.

Vice-governor Yun Linne said that the year 2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative, the 65th anniversary of Cambodia-China diplomatic ties and the 10th anniversary of the friendship-relations established between Siem Reap and Jiangxi.

In recent years, Yun said, Cambodia, especially Siem Reap province, has been committed to comprehensive reform, strengthened infrastructure construction, promoted digital transformation and achieved rapid development under the framework

of the Belt and Road Initiative.

“We look forward to taking this event as an opportunity to share experiences and measures in economic development and social governance with local governments of the Lancang-Mekong countries, and jointly build a better home that is more prosperous, inclusive and vibrant,” said Yun.

Based on their local development experiences and characteristics, 12 local government representatives from the six Lancang-Mekong countries held in-depth exchanges on the theme of “Strengthening Local Exchanges and Jointly Promoting High-quality Belt and Road Cooperation”. The discussions were centered on three topics: “Deepening Local Cooperation for Common Development and Prosperity”, “Cultural Inheritance and Innovation for Enhancement of Mutual Learning”, and “Development of Tourism Resources for Common Prosperity”. Broad consensus on future cooperation has been reached.

It was agreed that the Forum on Lancang-Mekong Local Government Cooperation and the Dialogue Between Historic and Cultural Cities of Lancang-Mekong Countries should function as a platform for expanding people-to-people exchanges, deepening pragmatic cooperation in various fields, and bringing the local cooperation of the Lancang-Mekong countries to a higher-level and higher-quality stage of development. ■

# The Night of Friendship and Exchanges, and the launch ceremony for the Week of Friendship and Exchanges Between Chinese and French Youth held in Beijing

## Department of European & Asian Affairs

On February 23, Sino-French Friendship: The Night of Friendship and Exchanges Between Chinese and French Youth and the launch ceremony for the Week of Friendship and Exchanges Between Chinese and French Youth was held in Beijing. Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), attended and addressed the ceremony. Around 200 young people from the two countries attended the event.

Yang said that this year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France. In his video speech delivered at the reception celebrating the anniversary, President Xi Jinping pointed out, "Over the past 60 years,

Sino-French relations have always been at the forefront of China's relations with Western countries, bringing benefits to the two peoples and contributing to global peace, stability and development." Xi also noted, "In the face of the new era of changes and volatility, the two countries should hold firm to the original aspiration that guided the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations, actively embrace the future, and bravely make greater progress."

President Xi has attached great importance to exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign youth. He once emphasized, "Young people all over the world should carry forward the common values of all humanity featuring peace, development, fairness, justice,

democracy, and freedom, implement the Global Development Initiative with concrete efforts, facilitate the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and work together to write a new chapter of unity and cooperation among the youth all over the world in the new era." The original purpose and significance of the event are best expressed in President Xi's remarks.

Yang said that just as a tall tree grows from a small seedling, the towering tree of Sino-French friendship requires good care and watering, which is the responsibility of the insightful young generations of both countries. He expressed the hope that through the event, the youth of both countries will embark on a journey of mutual understanding and

sing the song of friendship despite the barriers of different languages, customs, backgrounds and cultures. He believes that through exchanges and collaboration, young people of the two countries can continuously strengthen their skills, develop their abilities, and cement their friendship. In doing so, they can write wonderful chapters together in the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and let the flower of youth bloom brilliantly in the garden of Sino-French friendship.

Yang expressed the following three expectations of the youth in China and France. First, they should firmly safeguard the bilateral friendship through seeking common ground while shelving differences. Guided by the common characteristics and values of the two peoples, they should display the time-honored cultures of the two countries through exchanges; tap the wisdom of the youth of the two countries in keeping up with the times; cultivate friendship through mutual learning; and continuously explore new sources of bilateral friendship in the next six decades. Second, they should actively carry forward the “China-France spirit” with concrete actions. They should carry forward traditions, make sincere communication, expand consensus, and take actions to achieve more, so that they will present to the world a positive image and inject fresh meanings into the “China-France spirit” in the new era. Third, they should carry forward the common values and contribute to the building



**Sino-French Friendship: The Night of Friendship and Exchanges Between Chinese and French Youth held in Beijing.**

of a community with a shared future for mankind. They should uphold peace, development, unity and progress through practical actions, display their unique youthful vitality and sense of mission, and constantly contribute their wisdom and strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

The Week of Friendship and Exchanges Between Chinese and French Youth, with the theme of “Unity and Mutual Assistance for a Shared Future”, was hosted by the CPAFFC and strongly supported by the Secours Populaire Français (SPF) and the Europe-China Friendship Association. The event also received support from the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, National

Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, Beijing Foreign Studies University, among others.

During the Week of Friendship and Exchanges, the youth of China and France put on a variety of performances and held a number of folk cultural activities, such as instrumental performances, medleys, opera performances, dances, recitations, and mini temple fairs. Through the performances and activities, they showcased the 60 years of friendly exchanges between the two countries, from “rendezvous”, “accompanying each other” to “walking in the same direction”, and demonstrated their confidence in continuing traditional friendship and opening up a brighter future in the new era. ■

# Fourth China-Russia Youth Friendship Road successfully held in Sochi

## Department of European & Asian Affairs

On March 3, the Fourth China-Russia Youth Friendship Road, jointly hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), the China-Russia Friendship Association (CRFA) and the Russia-China Friendship Association (RCFA), was successfully held in Sochi, Russia. Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC; Sergey Gavrilov, chairman of the Committee on Property, Land and Property Relations of the Russian State Duma; Sergey Uyanaev, vice-president of the RCFA; a Chinese youth delegation; Chinese students in Russia; and youth representatives from both countries; attended the event. Altogether, over 500 people participated.

Yuan Mindao said in his speech that the two heads of state have high hopes for China-Russia youth exchanges. The foundation of China-Russia relations lies in the people and the future lies in the youth. On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Russia

diplomatic relations, Yuan said, the China-Russia Youth Friendship Road kicked off for the first time in Sochi, the city of Winter Olympics in Russia. A group of energetic Chinese and Russian youth took over the baton from the Third China-Russia Youth Friendship Road, symbolizing the mutual understanding, affinity, solidarity and progress of young people on the new journey. Yuan hoped that the youth of both countries will uphold equity and justice and be guardians of world peace; advocate openness and inclusiveness and promote exchanges and mutual learning among civilizations; and embrace the world and be builders of a community with a shared future for mankind.

Chairman Gavrilov recalled the history of Russia-China traditional friendship in his speech, saying that in recent years, bilateral relations have maintained a high level of development and become an important force for safeguarding regional and world security and stability. "Russia

and China have enjoyed vigorous exchanges and cooperation in various fields. The youth of both countries have held high the banner of people-to-people friendship, and constantly enhanced mutual understanding through exchanges in culture, education, sports, economy and global governance. Their efforts have benefitted the two peoples and contributed to the joint building of a community with a shared future for mankind," said Gavrilov.

Other guest speakers said that on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of China-Russia diplomatic ties, it is of special significance to hold the Fourth China-Russia Youth Friendship Road and make it a useful platform for deepening the friendship and trust between the young generations of the two countries.

Recalling the touching stories of China-Russia traditional friendship, the youth of both countries believe that, having stood the test of war and time, the bilateral friendship is even more



precious and worth cherishing. They will follow the development trend of the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in the new era, shoulder their responsibilities and actively integrate their personal dreams into the cause of promoting the common development and prosperity of China and Russia.

Afterwards, members of the Chinese youth delegation presented a wonderful artistic performance. The event ended with the beautiful melody of *Night in the Outskirts of Moscow* sung by all the young people. They then exchanged gifts, celebrated birthdays, and thus formed profound friendships.

The China-Russia Youth Friendship Road was initiated by the CPAFFC in 2019, aiming to implement the important consensus reached between the two heads of state on strengthening friendly exchanges among the youth of both countries. The previous three sessions were successfully held in China. ■



Fourth China-Russia Youth Friendship Road successfully held in Sochi.

# CPAFFC Vice-President Yuan Mindao leads a delegation to visit Italy and San Marino

## Department of European & Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Italy-China Link Association (ICLA) and the San Marino-China Friendship Association (SMCFA), Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to pay a friendly visit to Italy and San Marino from January 21 to 26, 2024.

During the visit to Italy, the delegation attended the Italy-China Friendship & Cooperation Day organized by the ICLA. More than 50 people attended the event, including Maria Moreni, president of the ICLA; Claudia Carzeri, regional councilor of Regione Lombardia and head of China affairs of Brescia province; the mayors of Ponte di Legno, Vione, Veriglio and Valdobbiadene; as well as prominent figures in the fields of economy, culture and sports.

Yuan Mindao pointed out in his speech that people-to-people friendship is an important cornerstone for the development of bilateral relations, and local cooperation is a vital force to

deepen the friendship between the two countries.

"Italy is highly compatible with China's new development concept in scientific and technological innovation and green development, and the cooperation between local governments of our two countries enjoys broad prospects," said Yuan. The Italian delegates said that China is playing an increasingly important role in the international arena and is also the most dynamic and huge market in the world. Italy is willing to seize the opportunity to achieve common development with China.

On January 24, the Italy China Council Foundation (ICCF) and the Union Entrepreneurs Italy China (UNIIC) jointly held a dinner to welcome the Chinese Spring Festival, and 300 representatives from all walks of life attended. Yuan delivered a speech at the event, saying that China and Italy are outstanding representatives of Eastern and Western civilizations, and that the two countries

enjoy a long history of friendly exchanges. "The CPAFFC is ready to serve as a bridge for exchanges and cooperation between the two countries, constantly bring the Chinese and the Italian people closer, and promote the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries to a new level," said Yuan.

Mario Boselli, chairman of the ICCF, said that the international environment is complex and changeable, but the willingness of the Italian and the Chinese people to strengthen dialogue and cooperation has never changed, and that the Italian side is willing to work with the Chinese side to tackle common challenges in a rational and pragmatic manner.

During the visit, the delegation met with Jia Guide, Chinese ambassador to Italy, and held talks with the leaders of several friendly organizations, including the ICLA, the Italy OBOR Institute, the Italy China Cultural Exchange Promotion Association, and the Open Gate China

Association. The delegation called on Svetlana Celli, president of the Assembly of Roma, Carlo Bottani, governor of Mantova province, and Veronica Nicotra, secretary-general of the National Association of Italian Municipalities, and conducted in-depth discussions on strengthening people-to-people and cultural exchanges and local cooperation between the two countries.

During the visit to San Marino, Yuan attended a reception celebrating the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the SMCFA on January 23 and delivered a speech

at the event. Yuan paid tribute to Gian Franco Terenzi, founder of the SMCFA and former captain regent of San Marino, for his outstanding contributions to the promotion of friendship between the two countries in his life, saying that with the joint efforts of both sides, the friendship has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people.

Yuan pledged that the CPAFFC will join hands with the SMCFA to pass on China-San Marino friendship from generation to generation. Barbara Terenzi, daughter of Gian Franco

Terenzi and president of the SMCFA, recalled the friendly exchanges between the two sides, saying that she will carry on her father's long-cherished wish and make unremitting efforts to deepen the friendship between the two peoples.

The delegation also met with Andrea Belluzzi, Minister of Education and Culture of San Marino, and Dario Galassi, non-resident ambassador of San Marino to China, visited the Confucius Institute of San Marino, and presented exhibits to the San Marino Museum of Chinese Art. ■



Chinese visitors and foreign friends pose for a group photo.

# Bridging cultures for a brighter tomorrow: Educators and students from Kuiwen District, Weifang, visit Japan on a cultural exchange

**Zhang Yanbin & Yan Nuo**

Just as nature's beauty sparks intellect, so do cultural exchanges promote mutual understanding and trust. On January 25, 2024, Weifang Kuiwen Teenage Cultural Exchange Group, comprised of representatives from Weifang China-Singapore Bilingual School and Kuiwen District Experimental Primary School, embarked on a four-day cultural exchange journey to Japan for the purpose of bolstering cultural understanding and strengthening city-to-city friendship.

Upon their arrival, the group first visited the beautiful winter campus of the University of Tokyo, delving into its rich history and cultural heritage of over 100 years, guided by Chinese students studying there. The sharing of respective learning experience inspired the visiting students' passion for future study at the university, and further academic planning and expectations.

Japan has pioneered a real-time

earthquake warning system. At the Fire Museum and Earthquake Experience Museum, students learned more about natural disasters and acquired hands-on essential survival skills. This scenario-based and immersive approach not only left a profound impression on the participants, but also provided them with valuable experience in the event of an emergency.

At Mount Fuji, a UNESCO World Heritage site and an iconic landmark of Japan, students enjoyed breathtaking views and a tea ceremony, whipping matcha and savoring local delicacies, which enriched their understanding of Japan's rich cultural tapestry.

Japan's animation industry is well known worldwide, with many of its cartoons beloved by young people. The visit to the Suginami Animation Museum at Tokyo Polytechnic University on the second day provided the students with a unique insight into the origin of the animation industry

and relevant production skills, and engaged them directly in the creative process under expert guidance. Students transformed their sketches into vivid and interesting animations, experiencing the thrill and achievement of bringing their ideas to life.

The National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, also known as Miraikan, also captivated the group with its visionary exhibits across three thematic zones: exploration, innovation, and environmental connection, showcasing the forefront of scientific advancements. Interesting experience and interactive displays immersed the students in the marvels of high-end technology, illustrating technology's impact on the world, and inspiring the visitors' imagination and creative spirit.

Tokyo Disneyland, a fairyland of excitement, offered the students a delightful escape into a world of enchantment, marking the third day

with joyous adventures that sparked their youthful exuberance. The visit was characterized by the spirit of teamwork, as students devised strategies and united to overcome challenges. The experience has left the visitors with exciting and happy memories.

Their next visit was to the Misumi Elementary School in Yachimata, Chiba, which is a large public school. After a warm welcome, students from both sides, nearly 100 in number, formed mixed teams and engaged in a basketball shooting contest that ended in excellent results through teamwork and collaboration. The contest set a positive tone for further exchanges, highlighting the importance of cultural and educational interactions.

Afterwards, students from the Misumi Elementary School shared the art of origami cranes with their Chinese counterparts, who in turn introduced the craft of kite making. All the students fully immersed in this reciprocal learning process, pushing the visit to a happy climax marked by the beautiful artworks symbolizing friendship.

Peng Shuxuan, a student from Weifang China-Singapore Bilingual School, reflected on the profound connections and cultural insights gained through the “Walking into Yachimata” Cultural Exchange Initiative, expressing a desire for lasting friendships and deeper cultural understanding.

A corner dedicated to Chinese



**Educators and students from Kuiwen District, Weifang, visit Japan on a cultural exchange.**

traditional arts was also set up during the exchange, including calligraphy works, paintings, paper-cuts, and Weifang kites, drawing admiration from the Japanese participants and local educators like Tomoyasu Asao, the education director of the Yachimata Education Committee. The exchange program also included the inauguration of the “Corner of Chinese Culture—Nishan Library” at the Misumi Elementary School, which is the Third Nishan Library established in Weifang’s friendship cities.

By the end of the visit, Education Director Tomoyasu Asao conveyed his hope for continued exchanges and best wishes to the Chinese New Year in a video clip. Likewise, the government of Yachimata expressed in emails

the expectation to strengthen further exchanges and collaboration under the framework of the Agreement of Friendly Relations Between Weifang and Yachimata.

China and Japan are close neighbors with longstanding friendship. This trip has provided profound insights into the differences between and fusion of the two cultures, fostering trust and friendship among the teenagers of both countries and establishing a platform for robust city-level friendships and broader people-to-people exchanges. Through their journey, the students not only traversed Japanese landscapes but also confidently spread the Chinese culture and the essence of friendship, heralding further people-to-people cultural dialogue between the two countries. ■

# Fiery-red pomegranates bridge the communication between China and Kyrgyzstan

**Ma Qian**

Famed in ancient China for its exotic origin, the pomegranate has long been revered as a precious and auspicious fruit. Its cheerful color and multiple seeds have bestowed on the fruit symbolic association with a happy life and many children. Pomegranates were introduced to China along the Silk Road from the Persian region in the Western Han Dynasty (206BC – AD25). During this period, Kuang Heng (dates of birth and death unknown), a prime minister of the time who is better known today for “boring a hole in the wall to make use of the neighbor’s light to study” when he was a boy, brought pomegranate seeds to his hometown, today’s Zaozhuang in Shandong province, from the Royal Palace when he retired. Over the past 2,000 years and more, Zaozhuang has become a major pomegranate growing center in China. It boasts more than 6 million trees over a continuous area of

80 square kilometers, the largest of its kind in the country. These trees also represent the richest variety and the fruit is processed via the most complete production chain. With the largest distribution centre for pomegranate fruit, seedlings and bonsai across the nation, Zaozhuang is hailed as China’s hometown of pomegranates and the capital of ecological pomegranates.

As one of the origins of pomegranates, Kyrgyzstan has rich pomegranate resources. It was also one of the earliest countries to support and participate in the Belt and Road Initiative. China and Kyrgyzstan are linked by mountains and rivers. The ancient Silk Road and the spread of pomegranates have witnessed friendly exchanges between the two peoples for thousands of years. In recent years, under the framework of China-Kyrgyzstan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the New Era,

the economic relations and friendship between the two countries have become increasingly close.

The year 2023 marked the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative and the successful holding of the first China-Central Asia Summit. In May, President Xi Jinping and the heads of five Central Asian countries jointly planted six pomegranate trees, making pomegranates once again a symbol of friendship between China and Central Asian countries. On September 24, President Xi visited Zaozhuang and gave instructions on developing a stronger pomegranate industry and promoting higher agricultural efficiency to increase the income of farmers. He pointed out that the pomegranate industry enjoys great potential due to people’s rising living standards and growing market demand for high-quality local products. He proposed that Zaozhuang should

strengthen its brand building, improve its product quality, and extend the industrial chain to enhance market competitiveness and comprehensive benefits so that more people can share the fruits of development. He also wished people in Zaozhuang a more prosperous life as symbolized by the red color of pomegranates.

In order to implement the achievements of the China-Central Asia Summit and President Xi's instructions during his visit to Zaozhuang, and to participate in high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, Zaozhuang held the Pomegranate Industry Development Conference on September 26. The conference aimed to further enhance the opening up of the city by functioning as a platform for domestic and foreign pomegranate producing regions to engage in economic, trade and cultural cooperation, with pomegranates as the medium. A delegation from the government of Karakol, Kyrgyzstan, was invited to attend the conference, at which Mayor Chingiz Bapaev delivered a speech. He said, "Pomegranates are an important resource of both Karakol and Zaozhuang. The two cities have great potential for cooperation in pomegranate planting, processing, marketing, seedling cultivation and people-to-people exchanges. Let's continue to strengthen our friendship and cooperation in trade and economy for common development and

prosperity." During Bapaev's visit in China, the two cities signed the Agreement on the Establishment of Friendship and Cooperation at the 2023 World Cities Forum & Regional Leaders' Summit hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the Shandong Provincial Government. Mayor Bapaev and Deputy Mayor of Zaozhuang Zuo Wen represented their respective cities to speak on the theme of "Creating a Green Vision Together for a Better Home" at the World Cities Forum Round-Table Dialogue. Zaozhuang then arranged an intensive schedule for Mayor Bapaev and his delegation, based on Kyrgyzstan's huge market potential for new energy and energy storage. They communicated with many new energy enterprises such as Shandong Goldencell Electronics Technology, Quanwei Technology, Jinpeng Technology, NIU Technologies and Breton Technology, with the route covering all administrative areas of Zaozhuang. The two sides reached a series of cooperation intentions on photovoltaic solar panels, intelligent container energy storage, new energy vehicle investment and trade. Mayor Bapaev expressed his belief that the passionate red pomegranates represent friendship between Karakol and Zaozhuang, and function as a bridge for all-round cooperation between the two cities.

At present, Zaozhuang is leveraging its great development potential to build itself into a leading producer of new energy batteries in China. Meanwhile, the new energy industry in Central Asia has huge market potential, and Kyrgyzstan enjoys a strategic location and positive market influence in the region. Against this background, both sides are confident that cooperation between Zaozhuang and Karakol will definitely make progress. Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Edil Baisalov led a high-level delegation on a visit to Shandong on September 27 and 28, with cultural tourism and the pomegranate industry in Zaozhuang on his agenda. A new chapter of friendship and exchange between Zaozhuang and Kyrgyzstan has opened, focusing on cooperation in pomegranate processing, new energy vehicles, photovoltaic and energy storage equipment.

The plentiful and beautiful pomegranate fruits, first introduced into China more than 2,000 years ago, have brought wealth and happiness to the people of Zaozhuang. The fiery-red pomegranate also reflects the Chinese nation's wisdom and open mind to embrace both material and cultural diversity. As a bridge linking Zaozhuang and Central Asian countries, the fruit also symbolizes the Chinese people's aspiration for peace, friendship and harmony. ■

# The Philadelphia Orchestra: Performing the music featuring Sino-US people-to-people friendship

**He Yan**

“Drink to me, do not stop. / Here’s a song for you to hear. Hope you’ll lend me your precious ear.” Accompanied by drumbeats and the strong melody played by a symphony orchestra, seven foreign vocalists sang *Drink to Me*, a well-known poem by the Tang dynasty poet Li Bai, in Chinese. The expressive bel canto immediately transported the audience back to more than a thousand years ago, drinking with the poet and listening to his words from the bottom of his heart.

On the night of November 10, 2023, the National Center for the Performing Arts of China was filled with the soul-stirring music. It was part of the concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s 1973 China Tour. The first half of the concert concluded with excerpts from the innovative *Echoes of Ancient Tang Poems* by iSING Suzhou.

In the second half of the concert, the orchestra played *Beethoven*:

*Symphony No. 5 in C Minor*, which was conducted by Li Xincao from China National Symphony Orchestra. The concert started from the tranquil and lingering melody of *The Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring* under the gentle baton of Tristan Rais-Sherman, assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Both works mentioned above were also played by the artists of China and the United States during the Philadelphia Orchestra’s first tour of China in 1973. The melodies, which spanned the 50 years between the two performances, were not only a bridge between the past and the present, but also a refrain for the friendship between the two countries.

## **The icebreaking 1973 music tour in China**

The Philadelphia Orchestra, with a history more than a century, enjoys a long-standing friendship with China.

As early as 1940, when China was resisting Japanese aggression, Eugene Ormand, the then music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, hosted charity concerts in Philadelphia and other US cities and donated all the money raised to the Chinese base hospitals and schools.

In 1971, shortly after the secret visit to Beijing by Dr. Henry Kissinger, the then National Security Advisor to the US president, Ormand wrote a letter to President Nixon, suggesting that he lead the Philadelphia Orchestra to China. In the summer of 1972, after President Nixon’s visit to China in February, Kissinger wrote to Ormand to say that he had already submitted his request to visit China to the Chinese side. He added, “You will serve as a perfect cultural envoy in this special period in which we are committed to advancing bilateral relations.”

Kissinger recalled later, “It was not a common music performance.



Both sides agreed that it showcased a major breakthrough in bilateral relations with one of the most excellent orchestras in the world performing in China.”

In 1972, Nicholas Platt accompanied the then US president Richard Nixon during his visit to China and witnessed the normalization of bilateral relations. In August 1973, Platt, head of the political section of the US liaison office in Beijing, was put in charge of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s coming visit to China. According to Platt, “The two sides kept arguing on details of the visit. We couldn’t tell whether it was discussing a performance or drawing up a treaty.”

Although the Chinese side insisted on playing *Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 “Pastoral”*, Ormand disliked the work. On September 11, 1973, more than 130 orchestra members and working staff arrived in Shanghai on a Pan AM Boeing 707. With a long journey from Philadelphia to Honolulu, Tokyo, and finally to Shanghai, the whole team were exhausted but excited. Platt picked Ormand up at the airport in Shanghai, finding him not very tall and with fluffy hair.

On their flight to Beijing, Platt sat beside Ormand and cautiously conveyed the request from the Chinese side. “To tell you the truth, I hate *Beethoven: Symphony No. 6* and I didn’t even bring the score,” Ormand said. Platt explained to him that the Chinese side had a preference for the piece.

Ormand sighed, “If this is what

they want, then let it be. We need to do in Rome as the Romans do. I will set my principles aside.” He had only one request, that was, to get the score the next afternoon. Platt recalled, “I know a little bit about the revolutionary history of China. So I know the real reasons why the Chinese side insisted on playing this piece of music, but I didn’t mention that and only made up the expedient explanations above. That was the first ice I broke in our ‘icebreaking’ trip to China.”

On the late night of September 12, their chartered plane landed at Beijing Capital International Airport. They gave four performances at the Palace of Ethnic Cultures in Beijing from September 14 to 16. During one intermission, Platt was informed that there was something wrong with Ormand. He rushed to the fitting room, finding Ormand upset and sweaty while his wife was waving her handkerchief to cool him down. “The audience didn’t like our performance at all,” he complained. “They were so quiet. I’ve never met calm reactions to our performance before.”

Platt continued, “The audience in Beijing at that time were more cautious about the then political atmosphere than reserved. They were not sure of what kind of reaction to Western music they should make. It was not until the third concert on September 16 that the worry of the audience was removed because the performance received enthusiastic applause from the high-level Chinese officials present at the concert.

On the afternoon of September 16, members of the orchestra came

by bus to the China Central Orchestra (the predecessor of the China National Symphony Orchestra) located in Hepingli, Beijing. In the rehearsal hall, Li Delun, a master Chinese conductor, was conducting *The Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring* for the first time after it was adapted into a piece of string ensemble music by Wu Zuqiang. Ormand was deeply moved by the sentimental melody and requested its score.

Then it was *Beethoven's Symphony No.5*. After the first movement, Li Delun said to Ormand, “How about you conducting the second movement? It’s very easy for you.” Ormand was excited to hear that. He repeated the words “Easy! Easy!” while standing up, taking off his suit and loosening his tie. Then he stood on the podium and lifted his baton. After only several bars, the musicians adapted to the beat and cooperated well with each other. They were refreshed and gave a rhythmic performance with full confidence. After the performance, Ormand felt exalted and applauded, “These young people were quick to adapt to changes.”

During panel discussions, the American musicians were surprised to notice that their Chinese counterparts were using instruments with dents or broken parts, which were glued back into place, and shabby handwritten pieces of score, also glued together. Therefore, they gave many Western instruments, scores of European and American composers, and a set of records made by the orchestra as gifts. In return, the Chinese side presented

them with some traditional Chinese instruments including *pipa*, Chinese drum and *huqin*, among others. Among all the gifts, a gong with a diameter of 1.1 meters, handmade by artisans in Shandong province, was the most attractive.

The American musicians were amazed at the sound of the gong. They had never heard such beautiful sound before. It was such a precious gift for them. They replaced their original machine-made gong with the new one upon returning to the US, which was first used in their performance of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

On the morning of September 19, the orchestra flew to Shanghai and gave two concerts on the 20th and 21st respectively. Platt said, "The performances in Shanghai caused a sensation. The audiences in Shanghai were far more enthusiastic than those in Beijing. During the two concerts, the musicians played to packed halls and received a warm response from the audience to the rousing finale of *The Stars and Stripes Forever*. We attended more banquets in Shanghai, toured the Huangpu River and enjoyed traditional Chinese music played by Chinese musicians."

On the afternoon of September 22, thousands of people followed the fleet of the leaving musicians. "The farewell was heartbreaking," said Platt. Many members of the orchestra felt sad to say goodbye to China, and some elderly ones even couldn't help shedding tears. Ormand was reluctant to enter the cabin. After entering, he came out to wave goodbye again to people seeing

them off just before they took off.

#### Music can cross national borders

"The Philadelphia Orchestra's visit to China had far-reaching implications," Platt concluded. "The visit opened up cultural exchanges between the two countries, and facilitated commercial and diplomatic exchanges, among others. It was the beginning of everything that followed."

When the orchestra left Beijing, Li Delun sent the score of *The Moon Reflected on the Er-quan Spring* to Ormand, who was so delighted that he planned to include it into the program of the following seasons. It's a pity that the piece wasn't played by the orchestra until eight years after Ormand's death. In May 1993, the orchestra paid its second visit to China led by director-elect Wolfgang Sawallisch and played this work for the first time.

One year earlier, Platt finished his 34-year career as a diplomat and served as president of the Asia Society for as long as 12 years. In 2011, he began to serve as senior counselor for the Philadelphia Orchestra. He is currently the honorary president of the Asia Society.

In April 2011, the orchestra was burdened with serious deficits and filed for bankruptcy. Five months later, the National Center for the Performing Arts of China reached out a helping hand by signing an agreement of strategic cooperation with the orchestra. Under the arrangement of the Chinese side, the orchestra made concert tours in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Tianjin. The two sides also agreed on

a five-year cooperation program from May 2012, which included a three-week performing tour in China every year and a resident musicians initiative. The orchestra gradually navigated its way out of difficulties. Charles Dutoit, the then chief conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, said with emotion, "China never disappoints us."

Though over 80 years old, Platt comes to China with the orchestra every year. He said, "When I presided over an event hosted by the Asia Society in 2004, Tan Dun, a Chinese composer and conductor, told me that the concert held on September 16, 1973 was relayed via radio. As a farmer working in a village, he was delighted to listen to the relayed concert and his life began to change after that. He and his fellow Chinese musicians have been dedicated to promoting integration of Chinese and Western music. He has been busy shuttling between Shanghai and New York."

In 2001, Tan won an Oscar for Best Original Score for the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. He recalled, "It was on September 16, 1973 that I encountered *Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 'Pastoral'* and the heartwarming orchestra named Philadelphia Orchestra. I was then a well-known instrument player for weddings and funerals in Hunan, where I also played the *erhu* and other instruments for works of Peking opera."

"I was so attracted by the symphony that it lit my dream. I decided to leave my old career, get closer to Beethoven and learn how to

compose. In 1977, I was admitted into the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the beginning of my pursuit of music. Twenty years later, in 1993, I got my PhD degree from Columbia University and my first offer from the Philadelphia Orchestra to serve as a conductor. It seems that everything was arranged by fate.”

“I prepared to conduct *On Taoism*, a work composed by myself, and works of Beethoven for my debut at the Philadelphia Orchestra. In rehearsal, I was too excited to begin conducting. During conversation with the orchestra, I told them the complete story of listening to the orchestra playing the work of Beethoven 20 years ago in the paddy field. They told me that the 20 years of my personal experience meant I’d crossed 200 years between the world of Beethoven and rural instruments in Hunan, and over 2,000 years from the culture of the State of Chu to Western culture.”

“The words enlightened me immediately and brought magic to the baton in my hand. I have since developed a sincere friendship with the Philadelphia Orchestra and was so fortunate to be the first regular conductor from the East for the orchestra.”

In 2013, Tan planned to come back to his hometown Hunan to compose music on the theme of *nvshu*, a kind of folk culture in Hunan. On hearing that, the Philadelphia Orchestra expressed full support for him and became the first contracting party for the related music. The trust of the orchestra touched Tan deeply.

*Nvshu* was a symphony for micro films created by Tan Dun after five years of efforts. As the only existing female writing system in the world, *nvshu* was created and used by females in Yongjiang, Hunan. The culture of *nvshu* features elegant characters and beautiful melodies passed on orally from mothers to daughters. It created a unique spiritual kingdom for women in their oppressed life in the old days. Inspired by *nvshu*, Tan attempted to express the unique charm of the characters through music, and to showcase the agrarian civilization and the simple local customs.

During a cultural trip to Hunan and Hubei provinces in May 2014, the Philadelphia Orchestra played *Nvshu: The Secret Songs of Women* onstage in Changsha and also in a paddy field. One year earlier, in September 2013, Platt and Tan made a special trip to Changsha. Platt said, “I attended many concerts played by our orchestra and its Chinese counterparts. The Chinese musicians were excellent. I admire Tan very much.”

At the end of 2018, Tan was creating another work commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra. In the previous five years, he had paid many visits to the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang to seek inspiration. The murals in Cave No. 257 impressed him the most. They told the story of a deer of nine colors, who saved a drowning man but was heartlessly betrayed by him.

Tan said, “I grew up near the Liuyang River. When I was a kid, I was enchanted by the stories told by my

grandparents. *The Deer of Nine Colors* was one of them. It has taught me to be a kind, noble and compassionate person.”

On the night of May 18, 2019, *The Deer of Nine Colors* premiered at the brilliantly-illuminated National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, music director and chief conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Chinese soprano Lei Jia, with her melodious and lyrical voice, performed the roles of the deer, the drowning man, the king, and the narrator, transitioning smoothly and incorporating various singing techniques such as bel canto, ethnic, opera and rap. Her charming and broad-ranging voice fit perfectly with the orchestra. She said, “This work is just like a romantic painting, meaningful and impressive.”

The year 2019 coincided with the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US. The trade conflict between the two countries was turning white hot. Against that backdrop, the musicians from both countries connected the two peoples with music. Tan said, “This vocal concerto reflected the sincere aspiration for world peace from me and the Philadelphia Orchestra as well.”

### Culture as a bridge

“Rub-a-dub! Rub-a-dub!” Under the baton of Yannick, the prelude of *Ode to Humanism* began. The double bass players used the technique of plucking the strings to imitate the continuous effect of timpani. “There is

a theory with a time-honored history. The 5,000 years of civilization served as its broad riverbed..." Members of the Philadelphia Chorus presented the music theme in deep, full, grand and long-lingering voices.

Then, the oboes seemed to be telling stories and the cellos deeply murmuring. The first movement, *Benevolence*, gave the audience a feeling of warmth and broadness, just like the earth under our feet. The second movement, *Righteousness*, began with a wonderful solo cello. It was soon interrupted by inharmonious notes, simulating a fierce battle between justice and evil. The third movement, *Rites*, created the images of grand ceremonies of the Zhou Dynasty (1046BC – 256 BC) by clamping the boards and plucking the strings of the instruments. The fourth movement, *Wisdom*, a fabulous chorus like echoing sounds of wind chimes, interpreted the meaning of "wisdom flowing like plentiful water." The fifth movement, *Good Faith*, was performed in a not-very-broad vocal range, featuring harmony and symmetry. The coda brought the performance to a grand climax.

*Ode to Humanism* is a grand symphony on the theme of Confucianism. It was composed by Wang Ning, a composer in Shenzhen, through eight years of hard work. On the night of September 22, 2014, the symphony was staged at the UNESCO headquarters in New York for the first time. More than 400 guests present at the 69th UN assembly enjoyed the concert, which was broadcast live via

UN TV.

Platt said after attending the concert, "This symphony represents the growing soft power of the Chinese culture. It constitutes a milestone in the history of US-China cultural exchanges. We've made history with concerted efforts." It was Platt who arranged the performance and who proposed the resident welfare exchanges program by the Philadelphia Orchestra in Shenzhen.

The year 2014 marked the 35th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US. In April that year, Platt visited Shenzhen with Craig Hamilton, vice-president of the orchestra. Platt said, "Cultural exchanges require mutual efforts. We're looking forward to the Philadelphia Orchestra's tour performance in Shenzhen in May and its joint performance with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra. After that, the two orchestras will jointly perform *Ode to Humanism* in the US, making it a new program in bilateral cultural exchanges."

*Ode to Humanism* made its debut in the 9th China (Shenzhen) International Cultural Industries Fair in May 2013. Four months later, on September 21, the symphony, as the highlight of the commemorating activities on the 32nd International Day of Peace, was performed at the headquarters of UNESCO in Paris. It was recommended by UNESCO as an excellent work worth being performed across the world. After that, the symphony was performed in Macedonia, Bulgaria, and China's

Taiwan province and Macao Special Administrative Region, winning widespread praise.

On the afternoon of May 30, 2014, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra made their first rehearsal in the Shenzhen Concert Hall, involving more than 100 musicians. After the rehearsal, Platt suggested a full display of the lyrics of the symphony in the future performances in the US. In his opinion, the lyrics, expressing the essence of traditional Chinese culture, could help the audience appreciate the beauty of traditional Chinese culture while enjoying the music. *Ode to Humanism* was widely recognized as a philosophical as well as musical work. The values of benevolence, righteousness, rites, wisdom and good faith conveyed by the symphony constitute standards of conduct for the Chinese people, expressing the Chinese nation's life philosophy and attitude towards life, which are gaining more and more recognition in other parts of the world.

"In recent years, I've led the orchestra to perform in Chinese communities and communicate with ordinary people. In my opinion, the exchanges among people matter a lot," said Platt. "The core competitive strength of the Philadelphia Orchestra lies in the musical works it chooses and its performing skills. *Ode to Humanism*, with its international implications, will push forward cultural exchanges between the US and China."

In 2019, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of

diplomatic relations between the two countries, nearly 100 musicians from the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra jointly performed *Symphony No.10 Peking Fantasy* in the US.

On the night of January 29, 2019, the first Chinese Spring Festival Concert in Philadelphia was held at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. Tadao Watanabe of the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted the highlight of the second part of the concert, *Symphony No.10 Peking Fantasy*. The trumpet blew singing melodies of Peking opera, followed by the portrayal of different characters. The rhythm changed from slow and soft to fast and intense. In the coda, the brass voices burst out in unison, arousing loud and long applause.

Platt attended the performance and said that the growing enthusiasm for cultural exchanges between the two countries could facilitate mutual understanding between the two peoples against the background of the strained bilateral relations.

The story of *Symphony No.10 Peking Fantasy* began in 2017. That year, the Philadelphia Orchestra renewed its cooperation for the next five years with the Shanghai Oriental Art Center, the Shanghai Media Group, and the China National Center for the Performing Arts.

In September 2017, a 3D version of the Peking opera film *Farewell My Concubine*, was released in New York. Allison Vulgamore, president and CEO of the Philadelphia Orchestra, was deeply moved. She accepted the

proposal of Teng Junjie, director of the film, to work with the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra to commission Peng-Peng Gong, a young Chinese composer, to compose a symphony named *Peking Fantasy*.

The work was inspired by Peking opera, the quintessence of Chinese culture, and incorporated classic melodies from *Drunken Concubine*, *Farewell My Concubine*, and *Cao Cao and Yang Xiu*. It translated the spirit, emotions and characteristics of Peking opera into vivid symphonic notes, making it transcend national borders and the hurdles of hearts.

On the night of April 28, 2018, *Symphony No.10 Peking Fantasy* was successfully premiered during the Shanghai Spring International Music Festival, with Zhang Liang as the conductor. The live performance was broadcast globally through the online live-streaming platform of the Vienna State Opera House.

Before the rehearsal, Gong briefed the musicians on the work. For example, there was a trombone solo which imitated laughs of a clown in Peking opera. The intriguing details sparked the interest of the musicians, who praised the melodies as “extremely beautiful.”

Tadao Watanabe, conductor of *Peking Fantasy*, said, “When I graduated from the Julia Conservatory of Music, Gong had just entered the school. I had heard of his talent for piano for a long time, but didn’t know his great talent for composition. *Peking Fantasy* has a distinct Chinese rhythm, showcasing the composer’s

interpretation of the culture of Peking opera. I could also tell from the composition that the composer is deeply influenced by Mahler and Bartok. This is indeed a perfect combination of Eastern and Western music.” Upon learning that this is Peng-Peng Gong’s 10th symphony, Watanabe joked, “Do you plan to write 100 symphonies?” Gong smiled and replied, “As long as I can live that long.”

### Tang poetry meets bel canto

On the night of November 10, 2023, at the concert commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Philadelphia Orchestra’s 1973 China Tour, Esther Maureen Kelly, an American soprano singer, sang *Docking by the Bridge at Night*. “From Hanshan Temple outside Gusu City, / Sounds of its midnight chimes reach the boat.” She sang the lyrics unaccompanied in Suzhou *pingtan*, storytelling and ballad singing, in Suzhou dialect. The audience were amazed at her soft and melodious singing and her sophisticated singing technique.

On November 16, the Philadelphia Orchestra visited Suzhou for the first time. Under the blue sky and white clouds, the Suzhou Museum, designed by American Chinese architect I.M. Pei, looked pure and elegant. The Magnolia Hall in the Humble Administrator’s Garden appeared classical and peaceful, with two tall and upright magnolias in front of the hall. It was at these signature venues that the American musicians and the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra woodwinds quintet gave two chamber music performances.

“What a beautiful jasmine flower!  
What a beautiful jasmine flower!  
Sweet and charming on the branch.  
So fragrant, so white, so adorable.  
Shall I pluck you off, and give you  
to someone?” When the Jiangsu folk  
song *Jasmine Flower* was played, the  
audience couldn’t help singing with it.  
Each of the musicians was presented  
with a jasmine bracelet.

That was not the first cooperation  
between the Philadelphia Orchestra  
and Suzhou. On the night of January  
6, 2023, a spring concert, *Echoes of  
Ancient Tang Poems*, jointly performed  
by iSING! Suzhou and the Philadelphia  
Orchestra, was staged at the Kimmel  
Center for the Performing Arts. They  
held another concert at the Lincoln  
Center the next night.

Directed by Lio Kuokman, the  
singers from iSING! Suzhou walked  
elegantly onto the stage accompanied  
by music, and sang “See you not! The  
Yellow River tumbling from the sky, /  
Rushing to the ocean by and by!” and  
“Eyes raised, I see the moon so bright;  
/ Head bent, in homesickness I’m  
drowned” among other charming Tang  
poems. During the one and a half hours’  
concert, 15 singers from 10 countries  
sang 15 Tang poems in Chinese. Two  
of the singers were winners of Grammy  
Awards.

The program of iSING! Suzhou  
dated back to 23 years ago. Hao Jiang  
Tian performed in the Verdi opera  
*Don Carlo* in Italy as a basso. As the  
only Asian in the cast, he made up his

mind to promote Chinese culture and  
facilitate the understanding of China by  
more foreign friends.

In 2014, Tian came to the  
Suzhou Industrial Park to organize  
the first iSING! Suzhou International  
Young Artists Festival. Up to now,  
eight sessions of that event have  
been held. The singers are rigorously  
selected. With free tuition, the  
successful candidates are paid for each  
performance. Over the past 10 years,  
more than 380 singers from over 30  
countries have been selected to take  
vocal lessons to improve their Chinese  
and singing skills, out of tens of  
thousands of applicants.

In 2020, the first iSING! Suzhou  
composition competition was held,  
inviting young composers from all  
over the world to set Tang poems  
to music. Hundreds of composers  
submitted their compositions to the  
organizing committee. Sixteen works  
by 14 composers won relevant prizes.  
In November that year, the symphony  
concert *Echoes of Ancient Tang Poems*  
was premiered in Suzhou.

Three years later, on the night  
of November 10, 2023, excerpts  
of that concert were put on stage,  
which included these four famous  
Tang poems: *Up on the Crane Tower*;  
*Docking by the Bridge at Night*, *Song  
of Goose* and *Drink to Me*. This part  
of the concert was under the baton  
of Tristan Rais-Sherman, a young  
assistant conductor of the Philadelphia  
Orchestra.

It was Sherman’s first visit to  
China. He even got a Chinese name  
Que Siteng, which has a similar  
pronunciation to his first name. He  
said, “I have been learning Chinese for  
two months specially for this China  
tour. I fell in love with Li Bai’s *Drink  
to Me*. I feel that the time-honored  
history and culture of China are worth  
my lifelong learning and studying.” In  
Suzhou, Sherman learned to say hello  
in the local dialect.

Davyd Booth is a violinist in the  
Philadelphia Orchestra. The silver-  
haired 73-year-old has participated  
in all the 13 visits to China by the  
Philadelphia Orchestra since 1973.  
“Before this visit, I had been told that  
Suzhou is a very beautiful city. Now  
I can say, ‘Yes, that’s true!’ I even  
feel this place is very suitable for my  
retirement life. Maybe I will think  
about settling here after retirement.”

Recalling his previous  
performances in China, Booth said,  
“Music is like great artwork. It affects  
your heart. I have pieces that I have  
played hundreds of times, and I never  
get tired.” He was so excited when he  
mentioned the gong presented by the  
China Central Orchestra in 1973. “It  
is a special gift for us. It is still in use  
and accompanies us in every concert or  
rehearsal. Every time the percussionist  
plays it, it reminds us of China.  
Actually I can see it every week,” said  
Booth. He added, “I have seen the rapid  
development of China over the past five  
decades. In 1973, there was no Chinese

musician in our orchestra, but now there are many. With closer bilateral cultural exchanges, Chinese elements have been perfectly incorporated in American culture.”

“I hadn’t expected to receive the letter of reply from President Xi Jinping that soon,” said Matías Tarnopolsky, president and CEO of the Philadelphia Orchestra. “Music is a very equalizing force that brings people with different cultural backgrounds together for dialogues. I feel no stranger to China during my visits. The two peoples can make in-depth communications across borders with the help of music. We are greatly encouraged by President Xi’s letter of reply and will carry forward

the cause of bilateral friendship in the next five decades.”

From November 7 to 19, the Philadelphia Orchestra designated a team of 24 people to visit China and performed in Beijing, Tianjin, Suzhou and Shanghai. Before their departure for China, Platt, as the honorary president of the Asia Society, awarded the orchestra “Game Changer Award”, together with Huang Ping, Chinese Consul General in New York. He said, “The Philadelphia Orchestra, as the first American orchestra to visit China, has left a deep impression in the hearts of the Chinese people. The two peoples across the Atlantic Ocean share the common love for music. Owing to that,

the exchanges between the Philadelphia Orchestra and its counterparts in China are flourishing. They are indeed “game changers.”

Half a century has flown by like a fleeting flash. The story between the Philadelphia Orchestra and China is composed of strings of notes, contributing to the beautiful music of friendship between China and the US. Flowing notes linger in people’s hearts, and the Eastern and Western civilizations blend here across time and space. The Chinese and foreign singers stand shoulder to shoulder, reciting lines of verse on friendship: “To have in this world a good friend like you, / Is like having someone always by my side.” ■



The Philadelphia Orchestra performs at the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing.

# In memory of New Zealand Professor Bill Willmott

**Nie Guangtao**

Bill Willmott, former president of the New Zealand-China Friendship Society (NZCFS) and tenured professor at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, passed away, at the age of 89.

I was shocked at the news, because it was hard to believe that he had died so suddenly, knowing he had always been in good health. The passing of such a great friend, who, born in Chengdu, China, had long dedicated himself to the cause of friendship between New Zealand and China, left me deep in thought and filled with memories of him.

Bill served as president of the NZCFS for 10 years and visited China more than 20 times. During his tenure, the friendly relations between New Zealand and China made great progress and achieved fruitful results. In recognition of his contribution, in 2001, he was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit for “promoting the relationship between New Zealand and China” by the British Queen as head of the Commonwealth. In 2002, the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries

(CPAFFC) conferred him the title of “Friendship Ambassador”; and in 2015, the International Committee for the Promotion of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives (Gung Ho, or ICCIC) awarded him the “Gung Ho International Medal”.

It was more than 20 years ago when I first met Bill in Shandan, Gansu province, in 1997. He was leading a New Zealand delegation to retrace Rewi Alley’s footsteps in China. The trip was to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Rewi’s birth, taken by the Christchurch Branch of the NZCFS and Rewi’s relatives. Christchurch was Rewi Alley’s hometown. Wang Shuanglin, a member of the CPAFFC, accompanied the delegation.

Through the visit, members of the delegation learned about Rewi’s contributions to the Chinese revolution. These include initiating the Gung Ho Movement in China to support the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, and establishing the Shandan Bailie School under extremely difficult conditions to cultivate talent for New China with unwavering determination and perseverance.

Wherever they went, the delegation received a warm welcome and generous hospitality from the local people, which made them feel the deep affection that the Chinese people hold for Rewi. This experience enhanced their understanding of the significance and value of his work in China. I once had the pleasure of meeting Buck Alley, Rewi’s nephew, and his wife at the Shandan Bailie School. I also met Philippa Alley, Rewi’s niece. They knew long ago that I had lived with Rewi since childhood, but had never met me before. This time, Bill created an opportunity for us to meet. We were all very excited, especially in the Rewi Alley Memorial Hall at the Bailie School, where we looked at the pictures of me riding on Rewi’s shoulders, the heated brick bed that we had slept on, and the table where we had had meals together. I told them about my life with Rewi in Shuangshipu, Fengxian county, Shaanxi province, and in Shandan county, Gansu province, when I was a child, which aroused their great interest. Because I was a witness to and participant in that period of Rewi’s life, it made them feel even more



connected to his experiences. Through the contacts with the old alumni and teachers and students of the Bailie School, the friendly feelings between the people of New Zealand and China have been deepened, and the intention to further expand cooperation has been strengthened. Under the initiative and arrangement of Bill, the NZCFS sent volunteer teachers to the Shandan Bailie School, made donations, provided teaching equipment, offered fund to students from financially challenged families, and assisted the school in sending a number of students to study in New Zealand.

With his actions, Bill inherited and carried forward Rewi's spirit of internationalism, and was warmly welcomed and praised by teachers and students of the school. The foundation he laid for friendly cooperation is now normalized and institutionalized. On the website of the NZCFS, a column has been opened to introduce the Shandan Bailie School and the recruitment of volunteers to teach there.

The year 2002 marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Shandan Bailie School. In December, Bill led a group of NZCFS members to the school to extend their congratulations. As an old alumnus of the school, I had the honor to meet him again in Shandan, where we celebrated the school's anniversary together. We felt very close at the meeting and Bill was happy to pose for a photo with the

people who had spent their childhood with Rewi. Besides my younger brother Nie Guangpei and Zhang Weishan, I also introduced to him my two younger sisters who came with me to Shandan to commemorate Rewi and George Hogg while visiting the school. We took a group photo that captured Bill's bright smile.

In March 2006, a CPAFFC delegation visited New Zealand, headed by Yao Mingyu, director general of the CPAFFC's Department of American & Oceanian Affairs and a former secretary of Rewi; Lu Wanru, director general of the CPAFFC's Research Center for Rewi Alley and a former secretary of Rewi; and Shu Zhang, former cultural counselor of the Chinese Embassy in New Zealand. The delegation attended the unveiling ceremony of the memorial statue of Rewi Alley in Auckland. My brother and I were invited by the CPAFFC to attend the event, after which we planned to visit Rewi's hometown. Learning of our visit to Christchurch, Bill made detailed arrangements for us. He and his friends from the Christchurch Branch of the NZCFS met us at the airport and accommodated us in their homes.

Bill took Lu Wanru, director general of the CPAFFC's Research Center for Rewi Alley, to his own home. Ken Bain, treasurer of the Christchurch Branch of the NZCFS, took my brother and me to his home. His wife, Helen Bain, who worked

for the city library, met us at the gate of her yard. Our accommodation and breakfast and dinner were arranged by the hostess herself. At noon, during the visit, we had lunch outside and each paid for our own meal.

In Christchurch, Bill accompanied us the whole time. We visited Springfield, Rewi's birthplace. We were greeted cordially by a local administrator, who saw Rewi as the pride of the people in Springfield. In the reception hall were exhibited large photographs of Rewi with children. The administrator also showed us around to see a few trees planted by the then Vice-Premier Huang Hua when he visited Springfield a few years previously. This background was introduced on the plates placed under the trees. He told us that they would take good care of the trees because they are a symbol of the friendly relations between New Zealand and China.

In Springfield, we first visited the Rewi Alley Memorial Park, which had a small pavilion with many photos of the protagonist on display. Inside the pavilion, there was a bronze plaque engraved with Rewi's biography. Outside, stood a marble relief, featuring Rewi and children walking together in joy. A clear stream flowed past the statue.

Bill was very excited and took photos with everyone. He even joked with me, "Which kid do you think is you?" He then showed us to the Rewi Alley Memorial Room, a house just

across the road from the park. Inside, there were more photos of Rewi and his biographical information. Next to the Memorial Room is the Amberley Elementary School, which Rewi attended. The headmaster of the school gave us an introduction to the school's history. Along the walls of the corridor there were photos of past headmasters. She gestured toward the first one, a man distinguished by his moustache, and told us that he was Rewi's father. When she learned that we were Rewi's relatives from China, she appeared notably delighted and offered to take a photo with us.

Bill also arranged for us to visit the high school where Rewi studied and the Christchurch Museum. The

headmaster of the school shared with us Rewi's academic performance. He pointed to a big photo and told us that Rewi was a member of the school's football team. As we were departing, the headmaster kindly invited a few students to join us for a commemorative photo beneath the school's flagpole.

In the museum, in a glass display case, we saw a jade seal engraved with Rewi Alley's name given to him by Comrade Deng Xiaoping.

After visiting Christchurch, Bill accompanied us to Wellington, where we attended the annual meeting of the NZCFS.

Lu Wanru was invited to introduce Rewi's significant contributions throughout his 60 years of living and

working in China. Lu extolled him as a bridge builder in fostering connections between the peoples of New Zealand and China. Her speech was warmly received by the participants.

At the meeting, I met Rewi's nephews Rod Alley and David Somerset. In 1988, David came to China to attend a ceremony dedicated to scattering Rewi's ashes. That was the first time we met. Meeting again in his hometown, we both felt very close to each other.

Bill also introduced us to Wu Bingnan, a local Chinese. It was this Mr. Wu who led his whole family, holding banners, to warmly welcome Rewi's return to his hometown. He took out the photos of the event and



**Bill Willmott accompanied the author to visit the Rewi Alley Memorial Park in Springfield, in March 2006.**

introduced them one by one. He then personally drove us to Palmerston North to see Rewi's nephew Maurice Alley and his family.

The Chinese Embassy in New Zealand attached great importance to the visit, regarding it as a concrete embodiment of carrying forward the friendly relations between the two peoples and conducting two-way exchanges. Zhang Yuanyuan, the then Chinese ambassador to New Zealand, kindly received us.

In May 2008, a severe earthquake struck Wenchuan in Sichuan province. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people rallied to combat the aftermath of the disaster and carry out relief efforts. The earthquake touched the hearts of the people of New Zealand, who actively participated in the relief efforts. In early August that year, Bill sent me an email saying that the NZCFS would send an observation group to China. It was composed of David Bromwich, vice-president of the NZCFS and Sally Russell, president of the Hawke's Bay Branch of the NZCFS. Bill also informed me of the group's schedule. I arrived in Xi'an on August 10, 2008, and went to Fengxiang and Fengxian counties, together with Xiao Wu from the International Department of Shaanxi Provincial Women's Federation. Upon evaluation, it was determined that Fengxian, located south of the Qinling Mountains, suffered more severe damage than Fengxiang. After discussions with the

leaders of both counties, it was agreed that funds would be allocated for the reconstruction of the Honghuapu Central Health Center in Fengxian. In April 2010, I visited Fengxian county again and found that a brand new three-story building had been built, equipped with modern facilities such as an X-ray machine and electrocardiogram tester. It also housed departments such as internal medicine, surgery, and an inpatient department, all of which were already operational. Some women traveled to the center on tractors or by electric bicycles, bringing their children for vaccinations. Hanging at the door of the hospital is a bronze plaque, which reads: New Zealand has aided the construction of the Honghuapu Central Health Centre.

In September 2012, after its visit to the Silk Road, the NZCFS delegation made a special trip to the cave dwelling in Baijiaping of Fengxian county, where Rewi once lived, and to Honghuapu to see the Central Health Centre they had helped build. The delegation was warmly welcomed by the county leaders and the local people. Zheng Weiguo, secretary of the CPC County Committee, personally received the delegation and extolled the friendship between the peoples of New Zealand and China. He said that they will continue to make efforts to build Fengxian better. Following the visit, under the initiative of David, the Fengxian Elementary School entered into a mutual exchange agreement with the Amberley Elementary School,

which was the first direct international exchange in Fengxian's history.

In May 2015, I learned that Bill and his delegation visited Chengdu, Sichuan province, and then returned to Beijing. This time, he came with his wife, Diane, who is a horticulturist with extensive knowledge of flowers. In Beijing, I was invited to join them at the memorial hall of the former residence of Soong Ching Ling. Together we toured the greenhouse, the garden, the buildings, the original resident's office, her bedroom and other places. We also watched the pictures and materials of friendship and cooperation between Madame Soong and Rewi. They talked with great interest about what they had seen and praised her as a great woman.

Michael Crook, chairman of the Gung Ho-ICCIC, accompanied his mother, Isabel Crook, to welcome Bill and his delegation. On behalf of the Gung Ho-ICCIC, Michael presented Bill with the Gung Ho International Medal and certificate, in recognition of his contribution to the work of the Gung Ho-ICCIC for decades and his achievements in the cause of friendship with China.

On the evening of May 11, the CPAFFC hosted a banquet for Bill and his delegation at Jinglun Hotel to celebrate the success of their visit to China. He Liliang, wife of the then Vice-Premier Huang Hua; Lu Wanru, a former secretary of Rewi; Ma Baoru, former deputy director general of the Baoding Tourism Bureau; Shu Zhang,

former counselor of the Chinese Embassy in New Zealand; and other old friends joined the happy gathering, an event full of laughter.

A very considerate person, Bill had prepared small gifts for all his old friends. He gave me four photos of the snow-capped mountains in New Zealand, each the size of an A4 paper. He also invited me to visit New Zealand again when I have a chance. What I never expected was that this meeting would turn out to be the final farewell.

Born in Chengdu, China, Bill met Rewi when he was six years old, and once sat on Rewi Alley's lap to play.

He moved to New Zealand when he grew up. In 1957, he joined the NZCFS and dedicated himself to the cause of friendship between New Zealand and China for decades.

It is particularly worth mentioning that Bill and his wife Diane assisted the preparation for the establishment of the Consulate-General in Christchurch. Their contribution was dearly remembered by Tan Xiutian, the first Chinese consul general in Christchurch, and her husband, Zhang Jichun. Both were shocked and saddened by the passing of Bill.

“Willmott was an old friend of the Chinese people. During the

establishment of our Consulate-General in Christchurch, he and his wife Diane always gave us timely and warm help when we needed it most. We deeply miss him. He will live forever in our hearts. We will always remember him, an old friend who devoted his life to friendship between China and New Zealand,” said Tan.

We should indeed cherish the memory of old friends like Bill who were committed to the friendship between China and New Zealand, and also make more new friends. We should bear in mind the cause of friendship they initiated and carry it forward from generation to generation. ■



The author accompanied Bill Willmott and his wife to visit the Former Residence of Soong Ching Ling in Beijing, in May 2015.