

Chinese Consul General cites Alfred University's reputation for innovation, creativity

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From left, Madame Qiyue Zhang, Prof. Xulong Lai and Provost W. Richard Stephens

Madame Qiyue Zhang, the Consul General of China in New York, praised Alfred University for its “innovation and creativity” that led to the University and its Confucius Institute hosting the first-ever national conference on K-12 Chinese language immersion programs.

Madame Zhang, who in 1971 became one of the first citizens of the People’s Republic of China, knows of what she speaks. Without knowing or speaking a word of English, she said she arrived in New York City in 1971 and was placed with an American family. That “immersion” allowed her to not just learn the language but to “learn about the people and how to deal with them,” as well as the culture.

It was an experience that has been invaluable to her throughout her career, which now has brought her back to New York City. As Consul General, she oversees Chinese relations in 10 Northeastern States, including New York, New Jersey, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

“The purpose of education is to prepare students to understand the world,” said Madame Zhang, noting students of today are living in an increasingly “globalized world.” She noted as graduates go out in the business world, one of every five people they interact with will be from China, and of those, three of the five will speak Chinese, which is increasingly becoming the language of international business.

Attendees at the Alfred University conference were both those who are directing the kindergarten-12th grade Chinese immersion programs, and those whose schools are partners in the K-12 programs. Alfred University’s Confucius Institute has offered Chinese language immersion programs to several schools, both public and private, throughout Western and Central New York.

Madame Zhang also noted there are about 300,000 Chinese students studying in the United States at present, and more than a third of them are attending schools within her area. Each year, about three million Chinese tourists visit the United States, and last year, they contributed \$33 billion to the U.S. economy. The near-by Corning Museum of Glass is one of the tour groups’ “favorite destinations,” she added.

All these interactions are signs of a stronger partnership between the U.S. and the People’s Republic of China, one China is “working harder to make even stronger,” Madame Zhang said.

Prof. Xulong Lai, vice president of the China University of Geoscience, which is Alfred University's sponsoring school for the Confucius Institute, said he was "so happy" to be returning to Alfred University and "very pleased to have the chance to welcome the experts, scholars and teachers" who were sharing their experiences with the language immersion program.

"It is remarkable what the Confucius Institute at Alfred University has achieved in 10 years," Prof. Lai said, extending his thanks to "everyone at the CIAU," and in particular, Dr. Wilfred Huang, who is the founding director of the institute at Alfred University, now considered one of the top five Confucius Institutes in the world.

Prof. Lai said his goal is to have even more students and faculty members from his university come to Alfred University.

Alfred University Provost W. Richard Stephens echoed the notion the world is changing, recalling 30 years ago, he bicycled from Beijing to Shanghai. "Every time I stopped, a crowd gathered," he said, because the Chinese people were unaccustomed to seeing Americans. Four weeks ago, he visited China and "nobody noticed me. There were no crowds" because American visitors are now commonplace.

"I reflected on how much China has changed, and how much the U.S. has changed," said Stephens, and he cannot help but wonder what changes will come in the next 30 years as young people now in college in both countries have a 50-50 chance of living to see the next century. "I hope the education we provide, together, will be meaningful and relevant to them when they take their leadership turn."

"I applaud the vision," he said, that led to the creation of the Confucius Institute at Alfred University 10 years ago, and the impact the institute has today on the University and the communities it serves.