

Establishing friendships, connecting hearts

2017 Wuhan International Friendship City Cultural Summer Camp concludes

By Echo Xiong

The 2017 Wuhan International Friendship City Cultural Summer Camp will come to an end on July 2. It has brought together 29 high school students from 15 international sister cities and friendly exchange cities of Wuhan on a cultural journey in Wuhan since June 19. They learned about Chinese art forms, visited local landmarks, participated in homestay programs, and made friends with one another.

Wuhan has witnessed their friendship. The group of young people was connected together on this journey through their mutual interest in Chinese culture. "I'll come back again." "I won't forget this trip," they said. When they get older, this connection with Wuhan, China, will grow into something bigger, and more beautiful.

Experiencing the new and traditional during homestay

One of the highlights of the summer camp was that the students were able to feel a part of the life of the locals when they participated in a two-day homestay program. From June 24 to 25, they were paired with a student from WEDZ No. 1 High School. They went shopping, visited historical sites, and spent time at home together.

Cyritelle Martin came from Essonne, France. During her homestay, she has made friends with Fu Boya, a Chinese teenage girl. "The host family was extremely nice to me," she said.

Unlike most of her fellow campers, Cyritelle lived in Wuhan for three years several years ago. At the time, her father was working at the PSA in Wuhan, so the entire family moved here and has built a connection with the city since then. After returning home, Cyritelle continued to learn Chinese in France, and her Chinese teacher also happened to be from Wuhan. Knowing the opportunity to visit the city again, Cyritelle could not say "no."

She said that she has noticed the many changes that have taken place. "There's a metro line to the neighborhood we used to live in, and more people are riding bikes." To let her experience these changes, the host family invited her to visit the Hanyang Riverside Park, ride an ofo bike (one with a bike sharing system) to the metro station, and take the metro home.

Lauren Hutfield from Swansea, U.K. shared similar feelings. As she was staying with a local family, she went shopping in local department stores where she tried on traditional Chinese dresses such as the *qipao*. "I couldn't believe that they actually bought me a traditional Chinese dress as a gift." The host family also cooked local food for her, and her favorite was the sweet and sour mandarin fish. Being able to learn more about the culture and lifestyle, she said, "I hope next time I can bring my friends here with me."



The young campers visiting local sites and having Kung Fu classes Photos by Li Yonggang & Zou Yan



Interest in Chinese art and culture draws them to Wuhan

Over the two weeks, the young campers had Chinese calligraphy, brush painting, traditional martial arts, seal cutting, and traditional music classes at Jiangnan University.

Zsombor Kempl from Győr, Hungary has always been interested in Chinese art. "As a matter of fact, my passion for it has lasted for over six years now. My Chinese friend in Hungary brought me pieces of paper, ink, and brushes so I could practice." Kempl said that his favorite calligraphy styles are *kaishu* (the regular script) and *caoshu* (the running style), especially the latter allowing people to show more emotions.

Meanwhile, Lucile Grouard, another student from

Essonne, France showcased her talent in the calligraphy classes. She has been studying Chinese for several years, and her writing was already at a good level. While most others were learning how to write the simplest characters, she was able to write complete words like "France" and "China" in Chinese.

Another favorite class for the students was traditional Chinese martial arts where the students learned to complete a set of martial art moves. They first greeted each other with a formal Kung Fu gesture of respect, and then learned to punch, defend, and jump in mid air. During the breaks, Johannes Plöger from Duisburg, Germany continued practicing the

moves with his group. He said, "I'm very interested in martial arts. When I go back home, I can show my friends some moves." Silva Costa Sarah Raquel from São Luís, Brazil said, "I want to be a policewoman in the future, so I like the martial arts classes the best."

Ahurira Martha from Jinja, Uganda was very focused in the Chinese brush painting classes. She followed every step as the Chinese teacher instructed them on how to create a painting of lychees in a basket. "I like Chinese painting. I find it very interesting, and I will try to learn more about it when I go back home," she said. "I will buy a brush and show my friends how to do Chinese painting as well."

Learning Chinese, bridging cultures

Quite a few of the students have studied Chinese before coming to Wuhan, and the others became equally interested in learning the language after they had several Chinese classes.

Heather Newbound from Christchurch, New Zealand has been learning Chinese for more than two years now. "I'm interested in the language because I think it's going to be very useful." She said it would be great if she could pursue her future career using both languages and traveling between the two countries.

Ton Wanlipaka and Reenna Sawatdee came from Bangkok, Thailand. They said, "We've learned Chinese at school. As a matter of fact, we had to compete with many others in some English and Chinese tests in order to come here." Ton added, "I'll go to Jinan University in China and study Chinese for four years. I plan to continue my language study because I want to be a Chinese teacher in Thailand after I graduate."

Natalia Nazdracheva from Saratov, Russia said that Chinese *pinyin* and communication was her favorite class. "I know how to count and how to introduce myself in Chinese now." She said that she had received some invitations to work in China, as she wrote an essay on how to enhance communication between the two countries. "It'll be a great experience for me to further our friendship if I can work here in the future, and I hope to join more links between us."

Unforgettable visits to local sites

Though the young campers had a busy schedule at school, they were able to visit several natural, historical, and cultural sites in Wuhan, including the Yellow Crane Tower, Zhongshan Avenue, the East Lake Greenway, Taihualin, the Hubei Provincial Museum, and Wuhan University.

Poshli Ketshepitswe Kamohelo from Bloemfontein, South Africa especially enjoyed his visit to the Yellow Crane Tower. "The view was magnificent because you can see the Yangtze River."

Zsombor Kempl (Győr, Hungary) said he loved the traditional architectural styles of the buildings in Wuhan. "Wuhan University is so beautiful with so many trees and traditional Chinese buildings. It would be very nice to study in a place like that."

"Wuhan has so many rivers and lakes, and I think it's a very green city," said Nivea Cristina Amaral, another student from São Luís, Brazil. "When I go back home, I'll tell my friends about that."

Mathebula Lethokuhle from Bloemfontein, South Africa was one of the teachers. He said he got to see more of the city via the metro line because he stayed in a hotel some distance from the school and he had to take the metro every day.

Joni Määttä from Kemi, Finland enjoyed his time at a local coffee shop. He said, "One of the things I like the most about this journey is that I've made friends with people from so many different countries. The coffee shop I went to turned out to be Mr. Mai's Coffee House where a lot of people there, Chinese or not, were speaking English. People from different countries can communicate and make friends together. It was an unforgettable experience."