

VISITING PROGRAM FOR YOUNG SINOLOGISTS

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Program Review

When Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, visited Kazakhstan and Indonesia in September and October 2013 and announced the initiative to jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, those who are not familiar with China's rapid development could have had some doubts. Today, however, the One Belt, One Road initiative encompasses more than 65 countries all over the world with an anticipated cumulative investment of several billion US dollars, primarily in infrastructure, transport, finance, science, education, and culture. Chinese officials also believe that cultural and academic exchange could be a direct bridge to enhance the knowledge exchange, understanding and cooperation between various nations, and, more broadly, that it could also be a driving force for global human progress in the future. With all this in mind, the Chinese Ministry of Culture launched the Visiting Program for Young Sinologists in 2014.

This annual event has aimed to strengthen cultural and knowledge exchanges and set up a platform where young Sinologists worldwide can communicate and learn more about Chinese culture, history, philosophy, linguistics, art, literature, learn about modern Chinese society, but also about China's contemporary politics, economics, and international relations.

This year, the Visiting Program for Young Sinologists began in four separate groups in Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and Zhengzhou in August, September, and October. The VPYS in Shanghai was hosted by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, organized by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) and co-organized by the SASS Institute of China Studies.

The program in Shanghai brought together thirty young Sinologists (aged 25 to 40) from 29 countries between September 3rd and September 26th. Distinguished Shanghai professors, such as Ge Jianxiong, Wang Zhan, Lu Ming, Shen Guoming, Yang Jieman and others gave lectures on Chinese culture, economy, urbanization and sustainability, the rule of law, diplomacy, and so forth. Since the main topic was undoubtedly the One Belt, One Road, it was not surprising that two out of six working groups were discussed, about The One Belt, One Road, because most of the Sinologists research some particular aspect of that enormous Chinese economic initiative.

The entire program was delivered in Chinese, but the Chinese language was not obligatory because the organizers provided interpreters who accompanied the students at official events. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Sinologists speak Chinese fluently since most of them have finished or are in the process of finishing their postgraduate studies in the People's Republic of China.

It is also important to emphasize that Chinese scholars speak English although they prefer speaking in Chinese. While I do not speak Chinese myself, I support this because it serves to show the extent of China's soft power.

During the program, young Sinologists worked together, in groups and separately with their tutors. Every student had a tutor who was a renowned professor in the field, depending on the student's research topic. Almost all of the tutors were full professors, institute directors, heads of SASS departments, members of high-level boards, etc.

On the final day of the program, the students presented their research proposals and they are now required to submit a full paper by December, to be published in a collection of papers of the VPYS 2017 after peer review.

In addition to the academic part of the program, the VPYS also included educational visits to various public institutions and companies in Shanghai such as: Shanghai Tunnel Engineering – a civil engineering company widely known as one of the best in building subway tunnels; the Lujiazui Financial Zone and the Shanghai Stock Exchange, the Museum and Site of the CPC Founding Congress, Intermediate People's Court in Shanghai, Huayang Neighborhood – a community for elderly residents of Shanghai; Chongming Island – widely known for its ecological balance; and Shanghai Electric Group – one of the largest mechanical and electrical equipment manufacturers in China, with a registered capital of 9.1 billion RMB. The high level of development and the tremendous success of Shanghai and China in all areas are something that the people of Shanghai can truly be proud of.

The organizers from SASS also arranged a visit to Anhui and a field trip to Jingdezhen in order to give young Sinologists an opportunity to see life in Chinese provinces, which differs significantly from life in highly urbanized and modern areas such as Shanghai. In this way, the participants of the program could also see in what way the Chinese have been able to preserve and protect their culture and tradition for thousands of years.

Such a comprehensive and varied program enabled young Sinologists from the 2017 Shanghai group to enhance and exchange their knowledge with top Shanghai academics, to get acquainted with some of the most important public institutions and public or private companies, but also to meet the common people living in Chinese provinces and experience their everyday lives. All of this is something that the Chinese people can take great pride in.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to professor Houngh Renwei, Board Chair and SASS High-End Think Tank; professor Yao Qinhua, Director of SASS Institute of China Studies; professor Li Yihai, Secretary General of Think Tank Foundation; professor Wu Xueming, Director of

Office for International Cooperation; Ms. Lavinia Fan from SASS Institute of China Studies; and to supervisors Zhu Shuosheng and Ms. Jia Zhang for organizing the program so successfully and providing great company during the program, but most of all for creating a unified platform for innovative methods for knowledge exchange and offering deep analytical insights into contemporary issues in China. I would also like to thank all the young Sinologists who took part in the VPYS 2017 and to encourage young experts on Chinese issues to take part in this outstanding program next year.

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