

# **International Conference of the Confucius Institute**

Beijing, China  
December 10, 2008

“Nothing is more effective than music in changing people’s customs and habits.”

These words by Confucius have helped to guide our thinking at Valparaiso University as we designed our inaugural year of the Confucius Institute.

Valparaiso University is located in Indiana, along Lake Michigan, and is considered part of suburban Chicago. We are a comprehensive Lutheran university of 4,000 students, with nationally ranked colleges of Engineering and Business, schools of Nursing and Law, and strong programs in our College of Arts and Sciences. We also offer an internationally renowned honors college experience, called Christ College. About one-third of our students are in graduate and professional programs, and 8% of our students are international. Fifty-seven nations send students to Valparaiso University and we maintain study centers in Hangzhou, China; Cambridge, England; Reutlingen, Germany; and Puebla, Mexico. Valparaiso University is nationally recognized for its success at internationalization, having won the prestigious Paul Simon Award for internationalization this year. The award judges described Valparaiso University as “international to the core.”

It was our strong desire that a Confucius Institute be established at our University, building upon nearly two decades of active engagement in China, and fostering even greater interest in Chinese language and culture, not only among our students and faculty, but also among the business community and the children and parents in our community. We focused our first year of development on three strategies:

- Music and cultural arts exchange;
- Chinese language and culture programs for Northwest Indiana, including K-12 schools;
- Economic development opportunities between Zhejiang Province and Northwest Indiana.

We have chosen the arts—more specifically music—as the best way to pique increased interest in Chinese language and culture. From this initial interest, we then work to foster business relationships between our two nations. Alongside business development, we engage our local community in both formal and informal Chinese language instruction, offered at reduced cost to schoolchildren and community members. I am pleased to report that this strategy is working well at Valparaiso University, and recommend that my colleagues internationally consider this approach as you continue to evolve your Confucius Institutes.

“Poetry can arouse interest for learning, and rituals help to cultivate sense of righteousness. However, it is music that brings everything together and makes a full person.” If these words, written by Confucius more than 2,000, hold true, then our

approach may well provide a holistic educational experience for our students. Here is just one example of how we approach our goal.

This fall, and in partnership with four other Confucius Institutes at universities in Indiana and Minnesota, Valparaiso University produced the “Great Lakes Music Festival.” With the support of the Confucius Institute, we brought the 26-member Jiangsu Silk and Bamboo Performing Troupe of musicians, dancers, Peking Opera singers, and puppeteers to present a musical and cultural program on campus, at local high schools, and at universities and communities in the states surrounding the Great Lakes. More than 10,000 people had the opportunity to see and hear these talented artists over the span of two weeks in September.

But perhaps the most innovative and engaging event was a large-scale musical event, involving the musicians from the Jiangsu troupe, and more than 200 student musicians from Valparaiso University, and high school orchestras from three states. Each and every student musician had the chance to try or learn to play at least one traditional Chinese instruments. Twenty of them learned to play the famous Chinese song *Jasmine Flower (Moli Hua)* on the Erhu during the classes and performed it at the gala concert. The concert culminated in the performance of both Chinese and American works by a joint symphony of several hundred musicians from our two nations, on both Western and Eastern instruments. About 250 Chinese and American musicians played side by side well known Chinese and American musical pieces such as *Confucian Ceremonial Music Kangding Love Song, Good News from Beijing, American Fiddlists*. This musical fusion of cultures will never be forgotten by the students and teachers who participated, and this has led to a tremendous growth in interest in Chinese language and culture in our region. We expect to send Valparaiso University’s symphony to China this summer and look forward to an expanded Great Lakes Music Festival in fall 2009.

Jiangsu musicians performed for local business leaders at a breakfast forum to discuss economic development strategies and Chinese business etiquette. We announced a business education and development tour to China for the following month; the tour filled quickly and business and education leaders spent 10 days visiting businesses and forging relationships in Shanghai and Hangzhou. We will welcome a delegation of Chinese business leaders to Northwest Indiana this spring for further development.

In closing, it is our belief at the Confucius Institute at Valparaiso University that music and the arts are our most valuable tool in growing mutual understanding and respect among the nations and for fostering a deep appreciation of Chinese culture and language. Our approach is rooted in Confucian philosophy, in the belief that “Harmony is the most valuable of all things.” We look forward to future opportunities to advance this philosophy through our work in the Confucius Institute and to collaboration with our colleagues in China and around the world. Thank you.