



Harvard College Association for U.S.-China Relations

The Art of Representing China: The Development of Chinese Identity through the Individual

2010 HAUSCR Student Exchange Program

INTRODUCTION TO 2010 PROGRAM

The Harvard College Association for U.S.-China Relations (HAUSCR) is pleased to launch the 2010 HAUSCR Student Exchange Program, in conjunction with its second annual symposium series, the week of April 2-9, 2010 at Harvard University. The Student Exchange Program will bring together top students from universities across China and Harvard students in a weeklong series of events and activities to promote mutual understanding between students of both countries. The launch of the Student Exchange Program is scheduled to coincide with the two-day symposium series, featuring guest speakers and performers who will present their unique experiences, perspectives, and talents to the Harvard and greater Boston community through panel discussions, performances, workshops, and interactive activities. The theme of the symposium series and student exchange program, "The Art of Representing China," aims to engage participants in exploring (1) how the Chinese identity is presented and perceived on today's world stage, (2) the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Chinese people, and (3) how shifts in traditional value systems have impacted modern notions of the Chinese identity. The diversity of Chinese identity is a form of "art"—a product that the Chinese people create as a result of their past experiences, their perception of the present world around them, and their vision for the future. In today's rapidly evolving world, China is undergoing changes at all levels of society, giving rise to diverse individual identities that cannot be compressed into the single national identity of the Chinese people as it is represented at the international level. In drawing upon this "art" of representation at the individual level, we hope to foster a deeper understanding of Chinese identity beyond what it has become to the outside world.

STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Twenty to twenty-five student delegates will be selected through a rigorous application and interview process from universities across China to participate in the 2010 HAUSCR Student Exchange Program, with room and board expenses fully covered by HAUSCR and its sponsors. The weeklong program combines the experience of a liberal arts education at Harvard with interactive programs designed not only to enhance the worldview of the student delegates, but also to allow them to share their unique personal experiences with members of the Harvard community. By actively participating in symposium events, the student delegates



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will be exposed to alternate ways of viewing the world, as well as a stronger understanding of American culture. These experiences will in turn help them develop a broader perspective of the world around them. Moreover, by participating in classes and seminars at Harvard, the student delegates will gain insight into the values and limits of an American liberal arts education, in comparison to their own educational experience in China.

At the same time, the Student Exchange Program will provide Harvard students a direct opportunity to interact with university students from China. By facilitating conversation between students of the two countries, the program will also enable Harvard students to examine the social and cultural aspects of China from a more authentic and personal angle.

Lastly, the Student Exchange Program provides a common ground for Harvard students and Chinese delegates to form meaningful relationships with prominent speakers, professors, artists and public officials. Through in-depth discussions with guest speakers and professors, students from both countries will be exposed to new insights and diverse perspectives on the relevant social and cultural issues in the two countries.

In an effort to achieve all of these goals, HAUSCR has planned the following components of the Student Exchange Program.

- Student delegates will attend an opening reception open to the general public. The reception will give delegates the ability to interact with the Harvard community at-large.
- Student delegates will actively participate in symposium events, many of which will give delegates an opportunity to share their opinions and views, as well as showcase aspects unique to their cultural background.
- Student delegates will attend exclusive lunches and dinners with prominent guests, designed to give delegates the unique opportunity to interact with professors and guest speakers in an intimate setting.
- Student delegates will form strong relationships with their hosts, who are selected for their demonstrated interest in cultural exchange. Students are also encouraged to fully explore the day-to-day campus life at Harvard.
- Since it is increasingly common for Chinese university students to study abroad for a post-graduate degree, student delegates will have the opportunity to attend tours and information sessions at various graduate schools at Harvard as part of the student exchange program.

Through organized tours, student delegates will have the chance to visit many historically significant sites and famous sightseeing locations in Boston and Cambridge. These experiences will give delegates a stronger exposure to American history and culture.



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SYMPOSIUM SERIES OVERVIEW

In order to examine Chinese identity through a global and individual representation, the two-day symposium series will feature distinguished speakers and performers as well as outstanding student delegates in an open dialogue about the influences of today's changing society on their own identities. Topics covered in the symposium series will range from issues of ethnic identity to gender politics, from expressions through the arts to representations through goals, and from the implications of a changing society to changing expectations. In hopes of covering the full spectrum of Chinese art forms and various cultural aspects, HAUSCR will present an image of China that is multifaceted, dynamic and individualistic.

In our two-day symposium, we will focus on two approaches in examining Chinese identity: the rich historical diversity and the vibrant modern heterogeneity. By looking at the past, we will explore how Chinese identity has formed over the course of thousands of years. Through the present, we will explore how Chinese identity is presented in today's world--focusing on the conformity and diversity that comes with China as a country and as a people. Ultimately, we aim to break down the barrier between the perception and the reality of Chinese identity--from the cultural perspectives of both sides.

SATURDAY PROGRAM: FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT

Although China is most notably recognized today by its rapid economic growth, its five-thousand-year-old heritage cannot be overlooked in the international arena. To many people, the image of China's past is inevitably confined to stereotypes from textbooks and images in popular media. Despite the influence of Western values in China, certain values have remained constant throughout the course of China's history. Using a variety of programs, the symposium will expose the impact of China's traditional values from the past to present on both a national and individual level.

- **Traditional Value Systems:** The Chinese people have continually struggled with the conception of what it means to be Chinese. The result was a traditional value system that all Chinese people have identified with and were proud of. However, modernization in today's rapidly cosmopolitan society has slowly eroded these core beliefs. Panel discussions will aim to look at the historical and continuing development of China's belief system and raise the question of their relevance in today's world.
- **Individuals through Time:** Despite the collective value systems that Chinese rulers have promoted and adhered to, the Chinese people did not necessarily conform both externally and internally. Through paintings and calligraphy, through novels and poems, individuals throughout history have expressed their own philosophies as influenced by social norms.

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Some have praised these norms while others have scorned them. Some have refused to conform to society while others pretended to.

- **Modern China through a Historical Lens:** China today is heavily influenced both by its traditional value systems and its historic culture of individuality. The personal poetry that prominent figures wrote thousands of years ago, the art that has survived until today, all these are part of Chinese culture that still have an impact in modernity. By looking at these modes of personal expression juxtaposed against traditional values, we gain a greater understanding of Chinese identity today. Surrounded by its rich history, pulled by the forces of modernization, how have the Chinese people retained their historic identity or have they? These are the themes that we will explore in the conclusion of our Saturday symposium.

Discussion panels, workshops, and featured performances will serve as the means to achieve these goals. Chinese delegates, prominent scholars, and the Harvard community will come together to gain a deeper understanding of how modern China is still tied to its historic roots. They will explore China as a country and as a nation of individuals. The discussions will transition to interactive workshops where participants witness the beauty and vigor of traditional Chinese art from the artists themselves. At the same time, art serves as a medium through which values themselves are transformed. From art we then focus on the individual and his story: his tension between traditional Chinese values and modernization and how it has influenced his identity as a Chinese citizen in the international arena.

SUNDAY PROGRAM: FROM A PEOPLE TO AN INDIVIDUAL

Although China has gained unprecedented visibility on the world stage in recent years, the diversity of China and the Chinese people is rarely portrayed in the West, where China is often seen as a relatively homogenous nation. The symposium series on Sunday, "From A People to An Individual," will build on the historical features of the Saturday program to present the diversity of Chinese identity.

During a period of rapid globalization where the exchange of ideas has grown significantly, the identities of the Chinese people have changed in different ways. Therefore, the Sunday program will feature panel discussions, speeches, interactive workshops, movie screenings, and performances focusing on contemporary issues of identity. These topics will include:

- **China's ethnic minority groups:** Most people are familiar with the ethnic Han Chinese that comprise over ninety percent of the Chinese population. However, China officially recognizes fifty-five ethnic minority groups, each representing a variety of religions, histories, and traditions. Panels with experts on diverse Chinese cultures will explore the notion of the modern ethnic Chinese identity.



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- **Gender politics in Chinese society:** We will explore the role that gender plays in today's society by inviting prominent speakers and performers—whose identities have largely been influenced by their own perceptions of gender—along with scholars and experts who have studied gender in its various societal contexts and influences on identity. Panel discussions and keynote addresses will explore ways in which conceptions of gender have evolved in Chinese society, the social and political implications of this transformation, and how gender identity is perceived in modern day China.
- **Chinese food and culture:** Through presentation and cooking workshop given by a guest speaker, food will be portrayed as not only a critical aspect of our everyday lives, but also as a defining attribute of individual identity.

These events will emphasize the role of individual experiences and perspectives in redefining Chinese identity in new and profound ways.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The 2010 HAUSCR Student Exchange Program aims to fulfill HAUSCR's mission of advancing U.S.-China relations by promoting mutual understanding between the students of the two countries and stimulating cross-cultural exchange between the rising college-age leaders of tomorrow and the established experts of today. By immersing the Chinese exchange students in the experience of American higher education, the Student Exchange Program aspires to provide Chinese students with a more comprehensive understanding of American education and culture. At the same time, by inviting Chinese students to interact with distinguished scholars and participate in symposium events, the Student Exchange Program provides delegates the opportunity to broaden their perspective of the world and understand the changing society around them in novel ways. Going forward, it will be increasingly important that the peoples of both nations develop a deeper understanding of each other's values and institutions. By bringing together leading individuals from both countries to engage in open discussion at one of the world's foremost educational institutions, HAUSCR hopes to set a precedent for continued intellectual and cultural exchange, both at Harvard and elsewhere, in the years to come.