

Embracing the World: WUCI Hosts Academic Conference

On Wednesday, September 4, the Confucius Institute at Webster University (WUCI) hosted an academic conference in the East Academic Building entitled “Embracing the World: China’s Transformation in the New Era, 1979-2019.” Scholars and experts from Webster University as well as universities from both the United States and China came together for a day of multidisciplinary academic exchange on issues pertaining to China. On the same day, the Confucius Institute held an art exhibition in the Edward Jones commons featuring the works of noted Chinese artist Dengbai Yuejin. In the opening ceremony, Webster University Provost Julian Schuster delivered welcome remarks and accepted a gift painting from the artist on behalf of Webster University. Webster University Vice Provost Nancy Hellerud introduced the guest speaker.

The academic conference, as its name suggests, examined contemporary China and its relation to the world. Panelists provided perspectives from their own research in domains ranging from international relations, Chinese popular culture, literature of the Chinese diaspora, to Christianity in China. The last panel of the day was a round table discussion entitled “US-China Academic Exchange—Challenges and Opportunities,” chaired by Nancy Hellerud. Panelists came together to discuss how they work to facilitate academic exchange and formulate partnerships with universities abroad. Grant Chapman, Associate Provost at Kansas State University, emphasized that the best partnership often stems from individual faculty members or departments, while others elaborated on the role of central strategic decision making at the level of university leadership. When asked to identify challenges to this process, panelists talked most extensively about the current political climate. Joseph Lee, Director of



Dr. Zhao Ma leads the first panel discussion



From left to right: Vice provost Nancy Hellerud, artist Dengbai Yuejin, Provost Julian Schuster

the Confucius Institute at Pace University, noted that many challenges deal with perceptions, suggesting that Chinese parents may be more concerned than before about sending their children to the U.S. Joel Glassman, Director Emeritus of International Studies and Programs at UMSL, made clear his position that even though there are real issues that need to be addressed at a political level of the U.S.-China relations, these issues can and should be overcome.



When asked about the future of US-China exchanges, the panel was optimistic. Hannah Verity, Director of Global Program Development at Webster University, summarized this feeling by noting that her work brings opportunities to students, in line with Webster's mission as a global institution, to understand other cultures.

The art exhibition, entitled "Wandering in Nature," featured the traditional Chinese style ink paintings of the acclaimed artist Dengbai Yuejin, who with this exhibition made his American debut. After an opening ceremony, Dr. Tongyun Yin, Curator of Asian Art at the Lizzadro Museum of Art in Illinois gave an art appreciation talk.

The WUCI would like to thank the many people who came together to make this day a fruitful exchange of academic and cultural views.



Conference panelists pose for a group photo