



From the Office of Secretary of State John A. Gale

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Please consider this op-ed by Secretary of State John Gale for your publication. It is the first in a three part series about Sec. Gale's recent trip to China.

China's history and culture deserve our understanding

As Nebraska's chief protocol officer for international relations I have accompanied two Nebraska delegations to China – once in 2010 and then again in June. The trips were organized and hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) Confucius Institute and Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU). The two universities have an official partnership created through the Confucius Institute at UNL and the American Exchange Center at XJTU. Xi'an Jiaotong University is one of the top ten universities in China.

The Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) funds some 450 Confucius Institutes in 120 countries throughout the world, including 100 in the United States. They are a reflection of China's deep commitment to promoting an understanding of its history, culture and language around the globe. The one at UNL was one of the first 20 in the U.S.

During the most recent trip our group visited Beijing, China's national capital of 18 million people; Xi'an, the ancient capital of China and a major western city of 8 million people in Shaanxi Province; and our last stop was Shanghai, a metropolis of 22 million people and a very modern city.

The differences between the cities was explained this way: If you want to see China's history and culture of 4,000 years, go to Xi'an; if you want to see China's history and culture of 400 years, go to Beijing; and if you want to see the dazzling new China of 100 years, go to Shanghai.

Beijing is the nation's capital and has served that role since early 1450 A.D. Major tourist stops are the Forbidden City, built for the emperors from which they ruled for some 450 years; the Temple of Heaven, where the emperors went to pray for good harvests and peace; Tiananmen Square, a huge public square with the mausoleum of Mao Zedong at one end and the Forbidden City at the other; the Summer Palace of the Emperors; an impressive restored section of the Great Wall, with cables cars that take tourists to the top for a spectacular view; and the Bird's Nest and the Water Cube, both architectural wonders of construction which were built for the 2008 Olympics.

From Beijing we traveled to Xi'an, 1,000 miles away. Initially, we were supposed to fly to our destination but were forced to switch to a high speed train when strong storms moved in. Unexpectedly, we went from the world's largest airport to the world's largest passenger railway station. Even at speeds of between 195 to 230 mph we were able to watch the changing scenes of rural life during the five hour journey.

Xi'an has memorable tourist sites as well, such as: The Terra Cotta Warrior and Horse Museum; the Ming Dynasty City Wall; the Drum Tower and the Bell Tower; and the Stone Tablets Museum. For 2,500 years Xi'an served as the country's ancient capital, and was the point of origin of the ancient Silk Road from China to Europe.

Tourism is flourishing in China. We were told that 10,000 Americans come every day in the summer months. A number of Nebraskans have made the trip, whether for business or pleasure. Chinese are visiting other countries in large numbers as well. More Chinese students study abroad than ever before.

Person-to-person relationships help bring mutual respect and understanding between the world's people which fosters international cooperation. Cooperation between the United States and China is vital to global stability. The Confucius Institutes, by promoting cultural, educational and commercial ties, are a worthy effort toward developing ties of friendship and peace.

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