Xi sends video message to WorldSkills Competition

Photo taken on Oct. 13, 2017 shows the meeting attended by members of the WorldSkills International in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Members of the WorldSkills International voted Friday that the 46th WorldSkills Competition would be held in the Chinese city of Shanghai. (Xinhua/Su Xiaopo)

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday sent a video message in support for China's bid to host the WorldSkills Competition before the vote in Abu Dhabi.

Xi said that on behalf of the Chinese government and people he firmly supports Shanghai's bid to host the 46th WorldSkills Competition in 2021, and gave his assurance that the city would be ready to host an innovative and influential event.

Members of the WorldSkills International voted Friday that the 46th WorldSkills Competition would be held in the Chinese city of Shanghai.

Xi said in his message before the vote that the competition would promote international exchanges and cooperation in vocational skills, drive the Chinese people especially nearly 200 million young people to take up new skills, and offer a chance for China to contribute to global skills development.

The Chinese government is willing to be involved across the board and will continue to make its contribution to global poverty reduction and sustainable development, Xi said in the message.

The bid team, including Yin Weimin, minister of human resources and social security, and Ying Yong, mayor of Shanghai, gave presentations.

The WorldSkills Competition dates back to 1950, when it was first held in Madrid, Spain. The biennial event seeks to increase the awareness and prestige of vocational and blue-collar professions. China first participated in the event in 2011.

Primary school students' dissertations trigger discussion over education

Curve geometry, questionnaires, references and bibliographies, all things anyone would expect to find in a graduate thesis, but which have begun to appear in primary school homework.

Some assignments by students from Qinghua University Primary School caught the public eye when they were posted on WeChat earlier this week.

Fifth grade students were asked to write about Su Shi, a Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) poet. Their topics included "The Brand Value of Su Shi," "Understanding Su Shi by Big Data Analysis" and "A Comparative Study of Su Shi and Li Bai."

"Xu Zi'ang and I found all of his 3,458 poems, which had about 250,000 characters," said 11-year-old Zhang Qi (not his real name). "We found 9,552 poets who had composed 276,545 poems. On average each poet completed 28 or 29 poems. Therefor Su Shi did the work of 120 poets."

This year is the 980th anniversary of Su Shi's birth, and, according to Tang Weihong, assistant to the school headmaster, the school began asking the students to study the poet in March.

The articles were finished during the eight-day National Day holiday and were soon circulating online, with some marvelling at the capabilities of primary school students.

"As a college student, I almost knelt down reading the articles," read one comment on Sina Weibo. "You are great."

"I hope that my kids will study in a primary school like the Qinghua University Primary School," said another.

But there was not shortage of those who questioned whether the articles were actually written by the students themselves.

"The boy who did the big data analysis didn't say how he obtained the data," said Shen Yan, a professor with the Beijing University national school of development. "He just said he did it with his dad. How much was done by the

student and his classmates?”

In response, the teacher, Tang, replied that Zhang Qi began doing similar research when he was in third grade.

“He observed the growth of turnips and wheat before writing a report about the comparison and did more than ten other analytical reports in the following years,” he said. “Based on my experience, I believe it was not so difficult for him to write this one.”

The father of a six-grader in the school told Xinhua that students began doing research like this very early. “It is not uncommon,” he said. “Parents help them in the process but they lead the research.”

In fact, many students in the school started doing research in their third year. The topics range from smog in the subway to measuring the playground.

Wu Fei, a professor with the Zhejiang University, said the method made up for a shortcoming. “Chinese education in many schools is exam-oriented, while foreign students began doing research very early,” Wu said.

Wang Kai, vice director of the curriculum center with Beijing research institute of education science, told Xinhua that creative study has always been advocated. Beijing put forward a plan in 2015, stipulating that in primary and middle schools no less than 10 percent of the classes should be used for practical study.

“For a very long time, our children learned more but thought less,” Wang said. “We are trying to change the situation.”

“The idea is good but do we have a better way?” asked Shen Yan.

“They are children after all. We should encourage them to play more rather than forcing them into the world of adults with papers,” she said. “If some students really like the research, it is OK. But it should not be compulsory. We should not pull up seedlings to help them grow.”

Technology helps identify missing characters in ancient military classic

East China’s Shandong Province is using high-tech methods to identify missing characters in “Sun Bin’s Art of War,” an ancient Chinese military masterpiece written more than 2,000 years ago.

Unearthed in 1972 from an ancient tomb in Yinque Hill, Linyi City, the text, recorded on bamboo slips, has many characters missing.

Under a protection and research project launched in 2015, infrared scanning and high-definition digital cameras have been used to find the missing information.

High-definition photos can be enlarged for delicate observation, and some “invisible” characters can appear through infrared scanning, according to Zhang Haibo, a member of the project team with the Shandong Museum.

With the technology, more than 50 missing characters on the bamboo sheets have already been identified, said Zhang.

The project, which involves protection and research on thousands of bamboo books unearthed in Yinque Hill in 1972, is a result of cooperation between the museum and the Chinese Academy of Cultural Heritage.

According to historical records, “Sun Bin’s Art of War” by Sun Bin of the Warring States Period (475 B.C.- 221 B.C.) develops the military principles in “Master Sun’s Art of War,” the world’s oldest military treatise, written by Sun Tzu during the late 6th Century B.C.

China giant panda center welcomes 42 baby pandas in 2017

The China conservation and research center for the giant panda has celebrated the birth of a record 42 panda cubs this year.

The 42 cubs were born to 30 mothers. The 17 born at the Ya’an Bifengxia base in Sichuan made their debut Friday. The others met the public at Shenshuping protection base in Wolong National Nature Reserve.

Keepers at the centers have been on duty around the clock since May to ensure the pandas are happy and healthy.

“The number of cubs born this year shows our preservation and breeding techniques have matured,” said Zhang Hemin, deputy head of the center.

The estrous rate of pandas was 95 percent, while fertility rate and survival rate of cubs reached 87 percent and 95 percent respectively this year, Zhang added.

With the development of breeding technology, the number of giant pandas born in captivity in China has risen from just six in 1983 to 273 this year, accounting for over 60 percent of the world’s captive pandas.

Giant pandas are endangered and live mainly in the mountains of northern Sichuan Province as well as southern Gansu and Shaanxi provinces.

Beijing certifies 14 industry experts for honors

The Beijing Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau has certified 14 experts from various academic and professional fields as “Beijing Scholars.” They are the third group of experts to be honored.

The 14 scholars, including Ge Gennian at the Capital Normal University and Ji Jiafu at Beijing Cancer Hospital, are the representatives in the capital who stand out among their fellows in fields such as medicine, information technology, agriculture, law and economics.

The Beijing Scholar Program, launched in late 2012 by the Beijing municipal government, is the city’s top talent training program aimed at grooming a number of world-class scientists, engineers and masters to stand at the forefront of their fields.

Every two years, the program selects no more than 15 scholars from the sectors of natural sciences, engineering, technology, philosophy, and social sciences. This is a vital move in support of the capital city’s construction as a center of technological innovation with global influences.

In recent years, the bureau has built a support and training platform across different sectors and institutions for Beijing’s scholars by developing personalized training plans and employing academicians from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering as tutors.

Beijing has made fruitful results over the recent five years since the implementation of the program. There have been four scholars selected to become academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, accounting for a quarter of the current number of the academicians from municipal units.

The last five years have also seen the largest number of talent in the city becoming academicians of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering. Nine scholars have won the three national science and technology awards, many scholars have made breakthroughs in scientific research, and many have served in major international and domestic academic institutions.

This year, the city has made a number of amendments to the pilot scheme of the program by promoting incentives and implementing policies more flexibly. For example, the Beijing Scholars will have the cap on their total salaries removed, and may apply to extend their retirement age.