Confucian way to spread Chinese culture

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NEW YORK — Twenty-five-year-old Steven Coons, a sophomore in foreign language studies at the University of Memphis, became a double major by adding Asian studies and international trade.

His reason was simple: the program is closely affiliated with the Confucius Institute (CI) at the university.

"I get to learn stuff from teachers from China who now the culture and language well," he said.

"And this program offers most everything — the language experience, culture exposure, and the business aspect. I think it is phenomenal," Coons, who loves Chinese language, kungfu movies and food, seemed to have a clear plan after graduation.

"The Chinese economy is growing at a phenomenal rate and there's a lot of room for expansion," he said.

"This major, which has both language and business, will make me a lot more marketable for future job opportunities in China," Asian studies and international trade was set up in 2007 in the CI at the University

the increasing demand for Chinese language learning and to enhance cultural diversity abroad.

While CIUM offers students opportunities to get a real taste of the Chinese language and culture, not many CIs in the US are as successful. Many are still striving to expand and be more involved with Chinese programs in the universities with which they are affiliated.

Institutes are created and funded in partnerships with institutions in various countries. Initially, Hanban provides $100,000 for the first year and some teaching staff from China while the partner institution provides space and facilities.

Most partners in the US are institutions of higher learning, but there are CIs at school districts and local community organizations. Many are focused on organizing cultural events such as music festivals.

More than 280 CIs operate in more than 80 countries worldwide, with nearly 80 in the United States, where the first was established at the University of Maryland in 2004.

Joseph Nye, a scholar from Harvard University who coined the phrase "soft power" (the ability to affect others to

The CI at the University
Children practice zaiji at the Confucius Institute at the University of Maryland, which offers students a real taste of Chinese culture.