

# Area students learn Chinese language

## Shanghai native teaches about country's culture

BY MICHAEL WILKEY  
SUN STAFF WRITER

**HARRISBURG** — At least 50 students at Harrisburg Elementary, Middle and High Schools are getting a chance this year to learn Chinese.

And their teacher said Tuesday the students are very excited about the class.

Lillie Zheng said the students, in grades 5 through 12, are learning not just about the language but Chinese culture as well.

Zheng, who arrived in Harrisburg on Aug. 12, said the classes are mainly used to teach students the language of well over 1 billion people.

But culture is also key, Zheng said. "Every Friday we have Culture Day. There are 14 different cultures in China," Zheng said.

The students have a chance to see Chinese movies, learn Chinese songs and celebrate holidays, Zheng said.

As much as the students are learning, Zheng said she is learning a lot about the United States and the people in Harrisburg.

"I am learning a lot here," said Zheng, who is from Shanghai. "There are a lot of very kind, warm-hearted people in Harrisburg."

The administrators and teachers at Harrisburg have also been supportive, Zheng said.

"Mr. (Steve) Rorex, (high school principal) has helped me a lot," Zheng said. "Miss Lydia Wallace (high school English and Latin teacher), she is my mentor. Ms. (Karl) Saracini (Middle School principal) has been very helpful."

Saracini said Zheng has learned a lot about American culture.

"I took her to a volleyball game at Brookland and she said, 'We have volleyball in China,'" Saracini said. "We

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Lillie Zheng, who teaches Chinese at Harrisburg, is part of a 2-year program sponsored by the Confucius Institute, the University of Central Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Education to teach Chinese at schools in Arkansas.

Zheng is one of seven teachers who teach at Conway, Cross County, Greenwood, Harrisburg, Hot Springs, Waldron and Wynne.

also went to Burger King in Jonesboro, and I ordered a chicken sandwich. She was surprised because she asked me how they get the chicken leg on the bun because they eat chicken that way there."

Saracini said Zheng also talks about life in her native city of Shanghai.

"She is into the culture here. She told us that an apartment building in Shanghai can fit all of Harrisburg," Zheng said. "She said the Chinese food you get here is not the Chinese food she talks about in her country."

Zheng also had the chance Tuesday to experience another rite of passage in America — passing her driver's test — and will have a chance Thursday to see another tradition in the United States — the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.

Saracini, who herself will be traveling to China next week as part of a trip sponsored by the Confucius Institute, said the children at Harrisburg benefit from the Zheng's teaching.

"They learn culture and the language at a young age. ... In the class, the children get to choose their Chinese name, which is a symbol," Saracini said. "The kids think it is the greatest."

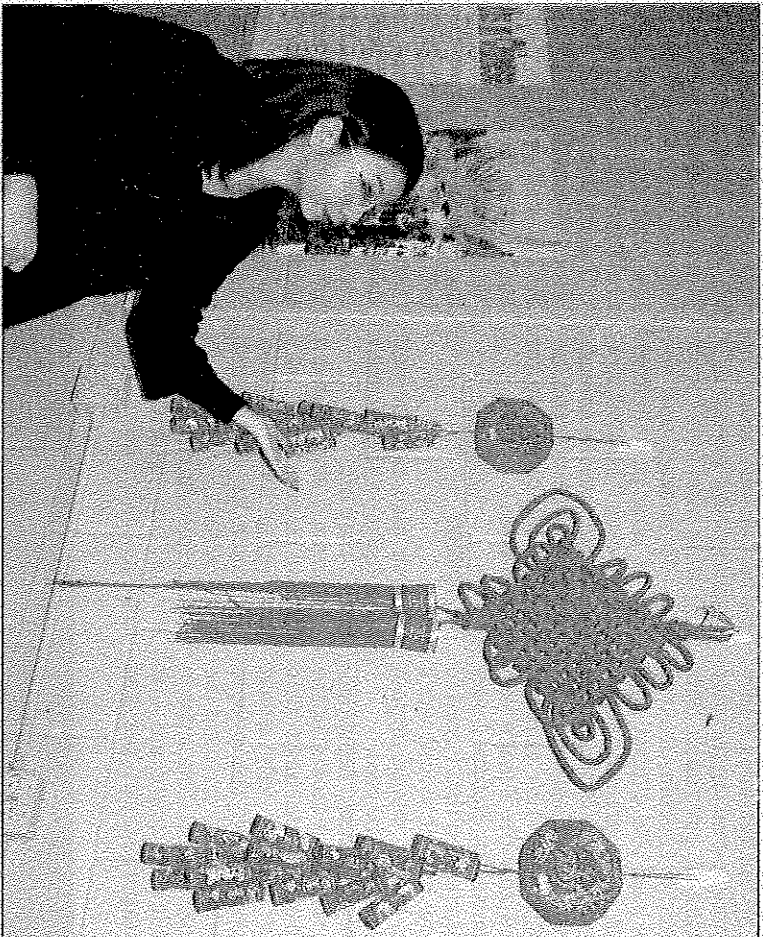
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A R K A S S A S



Harrisburg Chinese teacher Lillie Zheng shows Chinese culture at her classroom Tuesday. Zheng teaches students in grades 5 through 12 the Chinese language and culture.

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