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A Chinese dancer performs a traditional silk ribbon dance at yesterday's celebration of the new Confucius Institute at UNH.

UNH celebrates new Chinese institute

◆ **Colorful event:** Program marks expanded language, culture courses.

By **CLYNTON NAMUO**
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DURHAM — Chinese officials celebrated the University of New Hampshire's new Confucius Institute with a ceremony Tuesday that inadvertently

highlighted the cultural divide that still exists between East and West.

The institute, sponsored by Chengdu University and the Chinese government, is the first in northern New England and heralded as a major step forward for Chinese language and culture in this area. The institute will allow UNH to vastly

► See **Institute**, Page B2

Institute

Continued From Page B1

expand its Chinese language and culture courses.

"All over the world, interest in China ... is growing dramatically," UNH President Mark Huddleston said, noting that in 1996 there were 1,400 American students studying in China, compared about 13,000 in 2008.

China's influence has expanded with its economy, but its government has helped push its culture and language as well by funding Confucius Institutes worldwide to facilitate further interaction with China.

Huddleston said UNH's institute will help supply teachers to schools looking to teach Chinese as well as support local business people who want to do business with China.

Chinese officials showed Tuesday how much they supported the new institute.

Jiliu Zhou, Chengdu University's president, flew in for

the ceremony at the Memorial Union Building's Strafford Room, which was decked out with lanterns with red bulbs, a good luck color in Chinese culture. Jianjun Cen, an attache from the Chinese consulate in New York City, was also on hand to show his support.

Both offered great thanks to UNH, local officials and the Chinese government.

Despite working at a consulate, Cen's English was minimal and Zhou spoke through a translator who himself wasn't fluent in English.

"May our friendship last forever, thank you," Zhou's translator shouted at the end of his speech.

No one from UNH spoke in Chinese, though Huddleston joked that had he known he could have a translator he may have tried.

Chinese officials celebrated the institute with music and dance. A man played a string

instrument called a Pipa, a young woman did a traditional silk ribbon dance, tossing brightly colored ribbons about as she fluttered around a stage, and a Tai Chi master did a sword demonstration one might expect in a movie.

The best performance may have been from a man who played the erhu, a traditional string instrument, and did a dizzying piece that was met with plenty of applause.

And then came the finale: a man dressed in an all-white suit and fedora, a la Michael Jackson in his "Smooth Criminal" video, with a bright green T-shirt and sneakers, who performed magic while dancing to music by the Black Eyed Peas.

UNH officials have said the Chinese government contributed \$100,000 to \$150,000 to start the Confucius Institute.

◆ For more information, go to <http://unh.edu/confucius/>.