Chengdu looks to Nashville for a 'Music City' assist

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By Paul Welitzkin in New York |   
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The Chinese city of Chengdu is looking to America's "Music City" to build an entertainment and music district to expand its tourism economy.  
Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, is eager to develop an area in the city that will be called the Chengdu Musical Fun district, said Charles Li, a native of Chengdu who lives in Nashville and is a consultant to the music industry.  
"The government (municipal and provincial) is playing an important role in the Chengdu Musical Fun area. They want to develop a music industry that includes music education, publishing, performance and licensing similar to Nashville's Music Row," Li said in an interview.  
Home to radio stations and recording studios, Music Row is considered the heart of Nashville's famous country music industry. In December, Chengdu hosted several music industry executives from Nashville, including Jeff Syracuse of BMI, a performing rights organization that collects fees on behalf of songwriters, composers and music publishers.  
"They want to learn how the music industry works and how they can encourage the development of music-related businesses," said Syracuse who is also a member of the Nashville Metropolitan Council, which is the legislative authority for the city and Davidson County, Tennessee. "We discussed the creative aspects of the music business and they asked how BMI functions to collect royalties."  
Syracuse said because Chengdu is already a leading destination for international high-tech companies like Intel, the city is using and encouraging streaming services. "Chengdu has all the elements to help create a music ecosystem," he said.  
Li said that even though Nashville is known for country and Western music, the city has developed a scene that features other types of music. "We have all kinds of music now - blues, pop and jazz. Chengdu also wants to develop many musical styles," he said.  
At the heart of the Chengdu Musical Fund district will be one of the campuses of the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, said Li. Founded in 1939, the conservatory has its own symphony orchestra, a Chinese traditional orchestra, several college choirs and pre-college ensembles.  
Chengdu has a rich history dating back more than 2,000 years. It also has a strong tourist economy due in part to the famous Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding, a conservation center where visitors can view endangered giant pandas in a natural habitat.  
"Chengdu now wants to use music to promote tourism," Li said. Music is already a big part of the area economy as the city ranks among the top three nationwide for revenue from music shows.  
Not only have Chengdu and Nashville exchanged visiting delegations, the two cities are also considering the international Sister Cities program. "It would be wonderful to see us become true sister cities to solidify the relationship between Chengdu and Nashville," said Syracuse.

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