

# SPEAKING TO SUCCESS

Southeast Asian languages hold bright prospects for learners in China

KUNMING — When Zhang Weiguo learned that he was selected to do a Burmese major at the Yunnan Minzu University in 2009, he was worried that he might not find a job after graduation.

Zhang, from Southwest China's Yunnan province, was offered a national scholarship to study in Myanmar for roughly a year in 2012.

The experience changed him.

"At first I didn't think my major was a big deal, and thought it was a minority language used by a small population. But during my year in Myanmar, I made quite a lot of friends, and got to know the country and its people better," says Zhang.

Even more surprising to him were the multiple job offers he received from a government department, a State-owned bank and a university when he graduated in 2013.

After some thought, he chose to become one of the first Burmese teachers at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.

Almost all of Zhang's 28 classmates were able to find jobs related to their major.

He says thanks to Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, demand for those who can speak Southeast Asian languages has surged in recent years.

According to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the Second LMC Leaders' Meeting held in Cambodia earlier this month, China is now the largest

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Zhao Shulan, research fellow, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences

est trading partner of Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, and the second-largest trading partner of Laos.

Zhao Shulan, a research fellow with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, says: "Building mutual trust and understanding is the key to the LMC. It requires people who know not only the other countries' languages, but their national conditions, cultures and ways of thinking as well."

And Zhao says systematic language training is indispensable and the most efficient way to achieve the goal.

In 2017, the trade volume between China and the five Mekong countries reached \$220 billion, up 16 percent from 2016.

China's total investment

in the five countries is more than \$42 billion, with a growth rate of more than 20 percent in 2017. And more people are running businesses and building careers in other countries in the region.

Yunnan, which borders Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, has established an intercollegiate committee to promote the teaching and learning of Southeast Asian languages in the province. And a dozen language majors have since been set up, covering as many as 15 languages used in Southeast Asia.

Chen Xiaoyun, a faculty member from the Thai studies program at Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, says: "Studying Thai has given me opportunities to explore the country's politics, economics and culture, and a promising career as well."

To further cultural and educational exchanges between China and Southeast Asia, Premier Li says China will offer short-term training and in-service education to 2,000 people in Lancang-Mekong countries and 100 four-year scholarships for undergraduates in 2018.

Zhang has applied for a master's degree in Southeast Asian studies at the university where he teaches Burmese, the same program his students are enrolled in.

"I will get my master's degree this year together with my students, and I would like to continue doctoral studies in the area," says Zhang.

XINHUA

## Training youngsters to glide with winter glee



Children skate at a winter sports promotional event held in Beijing's Guangqumen Middle School on Jan 4. As the city gears up to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, more young people are getting into winter sports. To encourage teens to take up such sports, local primary and middle schools are holding special training classes. LUO XIAOGUANG / XINHUA

## Innovation: Series features kids' tech flair

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Yuma, who started to teach himself programming at age 6, has also uploaded an online course called Anyone Can Code. About 7,000 people have subscribed so far.

American Kevin Rao presented an "intelligent doctor" that can predict lung cancer patients' survival rates and provide medical suggestions.

Rao says he collected the medical data of more than 26,000 patients from the United States' National Cancer

Database and set up a model that uses AI to learn.

The 16-year-old from Richmond, Virginia, says his "intelligent doctor" involves four computer algorithms that are usually applied in big data calculations and analyses, data classification, junk-mail handling, and speech and image recognition.

"The four algorithm methods are like four doctors who excel in their different professional fields holding consultation

for a patient, and — through massive calculation

and case comparison — the system will come up with a conclusion for the disease and a treatment plan that is most suitable for the patient," Rao explains.

His favorite junior high teacher's death inspired the project, he says.

"I hope the 'intelligent doctor' will not only help physicians make more accurate judgments about each individual case but also will boost the

detection and diagnosis rates of cancer patients to benefit mankind."

Two Shanghai doctors came on the show to challenge him with two patients' cases. Rao's diagnoses matched the doctors'.

Yu Lizhong, a contest judge and chancellor of New York University Shanghai, says the young students are empowered with open minds, action and confidence when confronting challenges in such competitions.

"These intangible characteristics will help them to grow up more quickly," he says.

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