



CHINA • YUNNAN



FOCUS

“Miracle principal” helps 1,600 disadvantaged girls go to college



Zhang Guimei(left) hugs her student. (Yunnan Daily)

Editor's note

She is small and in her early sixties. In 2008, she founded the first senior high school in China for girls from disadvantaged families. Eleven years on, the school has sent more than 1,600 girls from mountainous areas to college. People think that her story is a miracle, and her students consider her as their own mother. She is Zhang Guimei, principal of the Girls' Senior High School in Huaping, Yunnan.

At 5:30 A.M. every morning, Zhang Guimei stands on the third floor of the school. With a loudspeaker in her hand, she shouts, “Hurry up, girls! The morning reading is about to start!” Fifteen minutes later, the girls are reading aloud in the classroom.

This has been happening every day, since Zhang Guimei founded the school in 2008. At that time, the school had only 17 teachers and less than 100 students.

In Huaping, a mountainous county of Lijiang, in the northwest of Yunnan province, some people are still living in poverty. Local education lags behind compared to other places, and some girls have limited access to schooling. In 1996, Zhang Guimei was transferred from Dali to Huaping for teaching. She discovered that far more girls than boys dropped out

of high school.

In 2002, she began to raise funds to build a free senior high school for girls from poor families in mountainous areas. She solicited help from the government and companies. For more than five years she experienced setbacks ordinary people wouldn't be able to tolerate.

In September 2008, the Girls' High School opened. All of the first students were from poor families in mountainous areas. The school did not have a campus. It didn't even have a dormitory building or a canteen. Within six months, nine of the 17 teachers had applied for a transfer. However, Zhang and other teachers were determined that they were going to change the destiny of the girls that had enrolled. Three years later, the first 96 students of the school sat the national

college entrance exams and earned high enough marks to be eligible for entry into higher learning institutions.

In Zhang's school, almost all the students come from remote places, so the school has never held a parent meeting in the past eleven years. Instead, Zhang has often paid home visits, to learn more about the students' families and to keep their parents updated on their performance at school.

Once, Zhang was caught in heavy rain, on her way to a student's home. She fell, but she still went on, to visit the student's parents. Three days later, her chest still hurt. She went to hospital for an examination, only to discover her seventh and eighth ribs on the right side were broken.

The Girls' High School has become an example for local education, inspired by Zhang's devotion

and perseverance. After graduating from the school, almost all of the students have gone on to receive further education. In 2019, 118 students graduated from the school. 109 of them went to undergraduate college and the remaining nine went to junior college.



Further reading

China's poverty alleviation practices have proven that women often play an important role in eradicating poverty. They are not only major family members but are also the key to preventing poverty spreading from generation to generation. Therefore, girls in poor families must have equal access to education.

CHINA STORIES



The Belt and Road Initiative represents a joint undertaking by China and its Asian neighbors. China gives top priority to neighboring countries in its foreign policy and pursues amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in building relations with them. China is ready to

provide more public goods to its Asian neighbors through connectivity, and welcomes them to board China's train of development.

— Excerpt from President Xi Jinping's speech at the Dialogue on Strengthening Connectivity Partnership

Connectivity with China will help Thailand develop further

In 1996, when I first came to China, the sincere, friendly and hospitable Chinese people made a deep impression on me. Now I travel to China almost every year.

Over the past 70 years, China has constantly improved its infrastructure, its education and its technology. It is now leading the world in 5G technology, artificial intelligence and big data. China has blazed a path of development in keeping with its national conditions. The Chinese government's practical and efficient governance is an example for other countries.

I come from a rural area of Thailand, so I pay close attention to China's battle against poverty. China has helped hundreds of millions

of people shake off poverty, which is a remarkable achievement. We emphasize exchange, cooperation and mutual learning with Chinese communities.

In late 2017, the first high-speed rail line in Thailand—the Bangkok-Nakhon Ratchasima high-speed rail line—started construction, with Chinese technology. I believe that connectivity with countries in the region including China will help Thailand to develop further.

(Admiral Suraki Tanatong, director of the Thai-Chinese Strategic Research Centre of National Research Council of Thailand. This is an abridged version of the original article.)

CULTURE

The Poya Folk Song Book: 81 symbols, 81 love songs



Performance of Poya Folk Song Book chorus. (Zhou Can)

Poya is a small village, tucked away in the mountains of Bo'ai Township, Funing County, Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan Province. To this day, the 55 households of the Zhuang ethnic group in the village retain the tradition of singing folk songs.

The Poya Folk Song Book is a piece of white home-made cloth, one foot wide and two feet long. 81 symbols are painted in red cactus juice, representing the moon, the stars, trees, grass, people, horses, bird cages and other things. They represent 81 love songs which relate how a young

man and his lover met and got to know each other, fell in love and remained a devoted couple until the end of their lives. In 2011, the Poya Folk Song Book of the Zhuang ethnic group in Funing was inscribed on the Chinese national intangible cultural heritage list. (Xinhua)

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Doctor on the move: Bringing light to fellow countrymen with cataracts

Yu Chaoqing is deputy head of the People's Hospital of Weixi Lisu Autonomous County in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. He is an ophthalmologist, and serves as director of the hospital's otolaryngology department, but he is often on the move.

“When I graduated from college, I chose to return to my hometown, because I wanted to serve my fellow countrymen with what I had learned,” Yu said. In 2002, he graduated from Kunming Medical College and became a doctor. However, instead of staying at the hospital, he often visits the farmers in the villages.

In 2007, when he was visiting Yongchun Township with a delegation of the Yunnan Disabled Persons' Federation, he noticed a high incidence of cataracts among the local farmers. It was then that Yu planned to carry out a cataract survey.

From the second half of 2008 onwards, Yu would spend his weekends carrying out screenings for villagers in the surrounding townships. “I conducted more than 70 operations that year. I was tired, but what I did was meaningful,” Yu said with a broad smile.

Today Yu works with a team. “Now we have a team



Yu Chaoqing makes examination for a patient. (Li Hengqiang)

of seven ophthalmologists. We take turns to conduct screenings for villagers. With more and better equipment, we have improved our efficiency. Medical workers from

Kunming and Shanghai come here every year, to help us improve our skills, which has in turn helped poverty alleviation in rural areas,” Yu said happily. (Xiong Yan)



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