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A member of the University of International Business and Economics' summer social practice group shows people how to solve lantern puzzles in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. YUAN YIYU / FOR CHINA DAILY



A Sri Lankan girl smiles as a volunteer from the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing gives her flowers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Volunteers lend a helping hand

Chinese college students increasingly spend their vacations assisting people in developing countries

By XIN WEN
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Zhao Yuti was regretful that he did not spend more time in Cambodia during the past summer vacation to establish a better connection with the children he met.

The 21-year-old junior student from the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing went to Siem Reap on Aug 19, to teach English voluntarily for one week in a school.

The experience was an unforgettable one for Zhao as he immersed himself in a new country.

What touched Zhao most was the children's thirst for knowledge of the outside world as well as their curiosity.

"I felt I was needed and would like to let them know more," he said.

The summer vacations provide opportunities for Chinese college students to travel or do internships. Volunteer work has become more popular among students, especially in low-income countries.

Zhao enjoyed his time there and the chance to meet new friends and experience a different culture.

One young girl, who had an angelic smile, stayed in his memory. He called her "the temple girl", and every day when she came to class, Zhao said that he was won over by her beautiful smile.

"My heart melted and I felt happy



Zou Huiying, a member of the University of International Business and Economics' Georgia social practice group writes Chinese characters on a Georgian's arm in Tbilisi. YUAN YIYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

seeing her smile," he said.

Duan Yichen has the same feeling. The 20-year-old sophomore student, also from the University of International Business and Economics with a major in translation, completed a two-week voluntary stint in Galle, Sri Lanka, in August.

Duan was touched by the sincerity and friendliness of the Sri Lankans. The Shandong-born student said she was used to living in big cities that can be impersonal. "But when I arrived at Galle, I was totally myself and managed to strike up conversations very easily."

Duan loved to talk with children but some were shy, at least initially. "I tried to play games with a 3-year-old Sri Lankan girl, but she was very

shy," she said. However, after two days the young girl was joining in the games and expressing herself.

"Even if what we do is small, I still hope our efforts help the children," she said.

Such voluntary work has become a popular choice for university students.

According to AIESEC, a student-launched global organization focused on overseas volunteer services and internships, more than 2,800 Chinese volunteers have gone to different countries in the past three years through its organization.

"It became increasingly obvious that Chinese university students prefer to do voluntary services in developing countries," said Lian Kaibin,



Duan Yichen plays with a Sri Lankan girl at a kindergarten in Galle, Sri Lanka, during her two-week stint. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

an AIESEC branch manager.

World Without Borders, a volunteer travel platform launched by college students in Beijing in 2014, has sent more than 5,000 volunteers to different countries. In the last two years, the number of volunteers overseas doubled, according to the platform.

About 80 percent of the volunteers chose to go to low-income countries, said Wang Jiaqi, cofounder and CEO of World Without Borders.

Zhang Wenyuan, director of the student activities office at Tsinghua University, said more students at the Beijing university are signing up for such projects.

Tsinghua set up a mechanism for students to record their activities

and overseas experiences.

"It's a good way for students to connect with the international communities and improve their communication and learning abilities," he said.

Countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative have also become a popular choice among students, according to Zhang. This year, 93 teams involving 1,322 Tsinghua students went overseas for social activities, to countries as varied as Israel, Kenya and Kazakhstan.

Yang Yi, a teacher at a Beijing university youth league committee, said the overseas voluntary service is a valuable experience for university students.

"Most of the university students are not even familiar with China's rural areas," he said. "The overseas voluntary service will help them to broaden their vision and enrich their experiences."

However, Yang also said safety issues need to be paid attention to when students go overseas.

"We will normally advise students to consider factors, such as living conditions and organization qualifications before they go abroad," Yang said.

Zhao came back to school in early September and resumed his studies.

"I can feel my heart has become stronger and broader after coming back from Cambodia," he said.

"I hope to seek more opportunities while I am still young and have adventures in more different countries."