

Xi's sultanate visit sparks local people's enthusiasm

Interest in Chinese language and culture is increasing among the SE Asian country's residents

By XU WEI

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Huang Wei said she is confident that the visit by President Xi Jinping to Brunei will have generated more interest from the local people in Chinese culture and her Chinese lessons.

The Chinese president's first visit to the Southeast Asian country between Nov 18 and 20 provided a thrill for the 28-year-old Chinese volunteer, who is serving as a Chinese language teacher at the University of Technology Brunei (UTB).

"I have already felt the enthusiasm for the Chinese language here.

I have students who are professors, technicians, and even staff workers," she said.

Huang, a primary school teacher from Shenzhen, in South China's Guangdong province, is one of three Chinese volunteers who are working at UTB in a one-year program.

She is part of the third group of Chinese volunteers to Brunei. China sent the first group, comprising 23 members, to Brunei in 2012 to conduct voluntary services in areas including Chinese language teaching, endemic prevention and anatomic medicine.

The three Chinese volunteers at UTB had to beat off competition from over 200 others in a contest



Huang Wei, a Chinese language teacher at the University of Technology Brunei, expects more people to learn the language after President Xi Jinping's recent visit to the sultanate. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY ASIA WEEKLY

organized by the Shenzhen Volunteer Association.

Huang said her students are motivated to learn Chinese for pragmatic reasons. A teacher decided to learn Chinese because one of her children is now studying in China. Another member of staff, who is Chinese Bruneian, could only speak the Hakka language and wanted to learn Mandarin to better understand his ancestry. Huang said she hopes to open a course on Chinese language for students at the university next semester.

Even though she has received support from the university faculty, Huang said she had to start from scratch because she did not have

fixed teaching materials and had to prepare all the lessons by herself.

"I hope it will become their long-term interest to learn the Chinese language, and through the language they can better know the Chinese culture," she said.

Huang said she has been impressed so far by the level of friendliness of the Bruneian people. "If you ask a stranger for directions, they will even lead you there," she said.

Zhou Haiyu, another Chinese volunteer at the university, said the Bruneian people struck her as polite and friendly.

Zhou, who was involved in activities to promote the university among

Brunei's high school students, said the students were refined and courteous as she handed them circulars. "They were always wearing a smile talking to you. They are so gracious and gentle," she said.

Zhou said she is hoping to improve the local residents' level of recognition of Chinese culture.

She is also actively sharing her experiences in the Southeast Asian country and the local culture with her friends in China, many of whom she said had very limited knowledge of Brunei.

"I believe the visit by President Xi (provides) a historic opportunity for people of the two countries to better know each other," she said.

Yeebee taps Southeast Asia potential

Chinese B2B platform for service providers targets expansion in markets such as Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia

By XU WEI

A Chinese platform for small and medium-sized service providers is looking to further expansion in Brunei and other Southeast Asian markets after having extended its reach to India and Singapore, according to its CEO.

Zhang Tao, the CEO of Yeebee.com.cn, a B2B (business to business) service provider in trade in services, said the company is targeting more service expansion in Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia to tap the potential of their service sectors.

"We are trying to link up more small service providers from China with those in Southeast Asia," he said.

Zhang, who was in Brunei to promote his company's services, said more than 20 companies in Brunei had signed up for them.

"In the future, we foresee more demand for high-end consumption here, especially in education, tour-

ism, medical care and financial services," he said.

Even though the Southeast Asian country has provided its residents with free healthcare and education, there could be demand for high-end services in China, he said.

In Brunei, Zhang said his company is relying on the help of local chambers of commerce to promote its service, adding that its platform can enable more cooperation between small and medium-sized service providers in China and those in Brunei.

In India, the company has already attracted about 2,400 companies to join its platform, while in Singapore, about 1,900 companies have also registered for its services. The company said it had a total of 800,000 registered service providers in China.

Zhang said President Xi Jinping's announcement that China will import services worth \$10 trillion in the next 15 years, at the first China International Import Expo in Shanghai, has bolstered confidence for the



Zhang Tao, CEO of Yeebee.

company to further extend its service overseas.

"The market in countries like Brunei is unique because large companies would not bother to expand their services here because of the high cost of promotion and the relatively small market," he said. Brunei

had a population of about 420,000 people in 2017, according to local media.

Yeebee is trying to serve as a liaison between service providers in China and those in Southeast Asian countries to facilitate the import and export of services, he said. The Chinese service providers can strike deals with their foreign counterparts through the company's mobile applications or via WeChat, he said.

Zhang noted that currently it is mostly large construction companies from China that are undertaking projects in Brunei, and the construction boom could end in the next two to three years after the projects are completed.

"What comes next must be Chinese service providers catering to the rising demand in services," he said.

Quite different from e-commerce giants like Alibaba or JD.com, the lack of online payment services in Southeast Asian countries would not provide a hurdle for Yeebee as the

company relied mostly on membership fees for profits, he said.

"What we do is to link up the service providers. We are not monitoring the deals," he said. He added that unlike other e-commerce models, trade in services would rely on offline channels for completing deals.

"It is not like buying a key ring from online platforms, in which the deal is completed upon receiving the product. In trade in services, buyers and providers must build trust first, and it takes time for the services to be completed," he said.

Zhang said the company is not taking any charges from service providers overseas in a bid to expand its reach.

He conceded this could still be the time for businesses in Southeast Asia to develop a habit of relying on online channels to conduct business.

"That is why we are following the steps of Alibaba, which we believe are trying to shape the user habits here," he said.