



Belarus-born piano teacher Katia Jurova talks with Vietnamese student Nguyen Trong Tinh (second from left), a Chinese student and a fellow faculty member at Lingnan Normal University in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province. ZOU ZHONGPIN / CHINA DAILY

University draws foreigners for academics and lifestyle

Teachers and students enjoy pace of the city, Emma Gonzalez reports.

Belarus-born piano teacher Katia Jurova moved to China almost by chance. But nearly five years after she first set foot in Zhanjiang, Jurova said she feels the city in southern China has offered her everything she needs to grow professionally and emotionally.

"I really did not plan to come here. It just simply happened," said Jurova, who is now in her earlier thirties.

Her first contact with the country started when she was still a child. Her father, an employee of the Belarus Space Agency, worked closely with Chinese institutions for more than 20 years.

"While growing up, my dad made frequent work trips to China. We always talked about the things he saw and experienced during his business travels," Jurova said.

But it was not until she was working in Turkey that she met a music producer who

suggested that her music career could take a positive turn if she moved to China.

"I was told that China was the place to go for musicians as the country was offering a lot of opportunities for piano players," she said.

Jurova started browsing the Internet looking for jobs and found a piano teacher placement at Lingnan Normal University in Zhanjiang. Although she was also approached by other Chinese universities, she opted for Lingnan because she had always wanted to live by the sea.

"I was looking for a good place where I could work. And I think I found it," she said.

It is easy to see that music is her passion and that her job at Lingnan University enables her to continue with her dedicated piano practice routine and to share her love for music with the university students.

She also unexpectedly felt in love with a local businessman whom she married. The couple has a 1-year-old boy.

Jurova said she does not see her future anywhere else because she now belongs to this city.

"I have a Chinese husband now, so I am not planning to go back to my country. I also never considered moving to another place within China because I personally do not like jumping from one city to another," she said.

In her opinion, the relatively small city of Zhanjiang is more suitable for her than a larger metropolis in China, where she would waste valuable time commuting.

"It is not a huge city so I have time to focus on the things that matter to me, like spending time practicing piano and enjoying time with my family," she said.

She is also pleased with the rapid changes that are taking place in the city. She admits that when she first arrived in Zhanjiang, she thought she would struggle to adjust to her new environment.

She remembers the central area being old with some of the buildings in very poor condition. But she is impressed by how fast things have improved in the city.

"A large number of hotels are being built and the streets are much cleaner. I can see there is an interest to develop green areas in the city. Zhanjiang overall looks more beautiful now," Jurova said. "I think it is going to be very interesting to see what the city will look like in 10 years."

Like Jurova, 24-year-old Vietnamese student Nguyen Trong Tinh first arrived in Zhanjiang five years ago.

He came to Lingnan Normal University as an exchange student for part of an academic cooperation

program with his university in Vietnam. Now that Tinh has graduated with a degree in Chinese language, he aspires to become a Chinese-language teacher in his home country.

However, before Tinh returns home for good, he will relocate to Beijing to start a master's degree program.

He said he will be sad to leave Zhanjiang as the university has provided him with an excellent education and many friends that he will miss.

"I think Lingnan University is a very good place to study Chinese because it has a very good language department. I also like that the university has many squares and green areas where you can socialize with other students," Tinh said in flawless Mandarin.

Tinh said because there are not many international students in Zhanjiang, he had the opportunity of making many Chinese friends and improving his Mandarin-language skills.

Xiao Jianchun, deputy director of the office of international exchange and cooperation, Lingnan Normal University, said the center expects to receive 113 international students this year, mainly from Thailand, South Korea and Japan.

"Foreign students that study here choose Lingnan University because of the academic syllabus. But also because of the good weather and its air quality," Xiao said.

The official said the university expects to see more foreign students and teachers joining the school in the coming years.

Contact the writers through emmagonzalez@chinadaily.com.cn

Zhanjiang seeks UNESCO status for unique history

By XU JINGXI

in Zhanjiang, Guangdong
xujingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

Zhanjiang, where the ancient Maritime Silk Road began more than 2,000 years ago, is seeking to join in China's effort to gain UNESCO World Heritage status for the ancient route and develop soft power from its historical legacy in its bid to become the central city in the Beibu Gulf rim.

According to document dating from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), the then emperor opened a Maritime Silk Road starting from Sandun Port in today's Xuwen county, Zhanjiang, in 111 BC.

Ships delivered silk, gold and native products from China to Southeast Asian countries, India and the "Western Regions", an area west of Yumenguan Pass in northwestern Gansu province that includes what is now the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and parts of Central Asia. The vessels then returned home carrying rhinoceros horns, pearls, ivory and jade.

The construction was recorded in the document, which is the earliest known record of the ancient Maritime Silk Road. It is considered strong proof that Xuwen county was the start of the route during the Han Dynasty, said Nie Bing, head of the Culture, Radio, TV, Press and Publication Bureau of Zhanjiang.

However, Zhanjiang was not on the standby list of nine Chinese cities in a joint effort to seek UNESCO World Heritage status for the ancient Maritime Silk Road announced by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 2012.

To make up for that missed opportunity, the city government launched a campaign last year to be added to the list.

The city's cultural heritage authority researched relic sites and decided on two for which to seek UNESCO World Heritage status as part of the ancient Maritime Silk Road.

They are the Erqiao village and nearby Han Dynasty tombs site in Xuwen, and the relic site of the porcelain kilns on Leizhou peninsula, whose products were exported during the period between the Song and Yuan dynasties (960-1368).

The Zhanjiang government has handed application materials to the provincial government of Guangdong.

Guangzhou, the provincial capital, was the only city in Guangdong included in the country's standby list in 2012. In addition to Zhanjiang, the cities of Jiangmen, Shantou and Yangjiang have applied to be added to the list. The Guangdong government



If we make it, Zhanjiang will have an overall upgraded character and consolidate its role as a strategic fulcrum in the country's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road."

Nie Bing, head of the Culture, Radio, TV, Press and Publication Bureau of Zhanjiang

will hand Zhanjiang's application materials to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage by Sept 1.

"It is not just a cultural action as it seems to seek UNESCO World Heritage status for the relic sites of the ancient Maritime Silk Road in Zhanjiang," Nie said.

"If we make it, Zhanjiang will have an overall upgraded character and consolidate its role as a strategic fulcrum in the country's 21st Century Maritime Silk Road."

It will also be encouraging to the city's development of its modern port economy if its status as the port of departure for the ancient Maritime Silk Road is widely recognized, Nie added.

Focus on soft power

In the meantime, Zhanjiang seeks to strengthen its soft power as it aspires to the status of the central city in the Beibu Gulf rim.

"Apart from politics and economy, a central city of an area should also have a cultural influence that can radiate to other cities in the area," Nie said.

Zhanjiang has many distinctive folk customs and

arts, especially on the Leizhou peninsula, and boasts six State-level intangible cultural heritage items, including the dragon dance from Donghai Island and the Leizhou stone dogs.

"It is these folk customs and arts that make Zhanjiang special and attracts visitors from home and abroad. We will keep on cultivating inheritors of Zhanjiang's intangible cultural heritage and focus on harnessing their potential to foster the tourism industry and the cultural creative industry," Nie said.

To give a larger, more modern stage for the display of its culture, Zhanjiang started the construction of a 230,000-square-meter cultural space — which includes an opera house, museum, library, art gallery and art center — earlier this year and plans to complete the project within three years.

"These splendid architectural works are also expected to be the first-choice stage for the high-end, international cultural and art events coming to cities in the Beibu Gulf rim in the future, showcasing Zhanjiang's status as the rim's cultural center," Nie said.



The Naozhou lighthouse, recognized as a cultural relic site under State-level protection, is a popular tourist attraction in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Zhanjiang Huguangyan National Geopark, one of the most popular tourist attractions in Zhanjiang, has the world's largest Maar volcanic lake, which was formed 140,000 to 160,000 years ago. ZHANG XIAO / CHINA DAILY