

My Chinese Dream come true in Hungary

By XING YI
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Zsuzsanna Karsai is the first European to be recruited by the Confucius Institute among graduates of the master's program on teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages, and she's now teaching Chinese in Budapest.

"It's not an easy test," Karsai says about the exam she took in Beijing in June. "You have to give a demonstration class, explaining some grammar points and Chinese culture."

For the past two years, Karsai has studied at Fudan University in Shanghai with Chinese students, learning to teach Chinese to foreign speakers.

"It's difficult for a foreigner to study a major in Chinese. But the teachers have taught us very well, and I really love it there," says Karsai, who is among 15 international students in her class.

The bond between Karsai and Chinese started when she was still a little girl and received a gift from her mother.

It was a ruler with a picture of the Monkey King, a protagonist in the Chinese classical novel *The Journey to the West*, and some Chinese characters.

"I asked myself: 'Is that another language? How mysterious!'" Karsai recalls of her first encounter with Chinese.

She later became a fan of Chinese martial arts through Jackie Chan's kung fu movies. But whenever she told her parents that she wanted to learn Chinese, they just smiled.

In her hometown of Oroshaza, a small city in southeastern Hungary, there were neither Chinese teachers nor anyone who knew the Chinese language in the 1990s.

"But I never gave up on that dream. Sometimes I spoke to the Monkey King, saying I wished I could learn Chinese and visit China one day," says Karsai, who realized her dream in 2005 when she went to study at the Chinese department of Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest.

During her first year in university, Karsai was given a Chinese name — Ruyi — which means "as one's wish".

Many people feel that learning Chinese characters is difficult, but Karsai found them beautiful.

She spent hours practicing writing them on paper and never tired of doing so.

She also participates in Chinese Bridge, a Chinese-proficiency competition for foreign college students all over the world. She won third place in Hungary in 2008.

The same year, she went to Shandong Normal University as an exchange student on a government scholarship.

Before she graduated from university, Karsai found a job teaching Chinese to students from first to eighth grades at the Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual School in Budapest in 2011.

Karsai also worked with Chinese teachers on writing Hungarian-Chinese bilingual textbooks.

Working as a teacher made Karsai realize she needed more training in teaching Chinese so she came to China again in 2014.

"From a girl with a ruler to a Chinese teacher, I have realized my dream. I think there will be more people wanting to learn Chinese in Hungary, and I will help them to realize their dream," Karsai wrote in her graduation reflection at Fudan University.



Zsuzsanna Karsai teaches Chinese in Budapest.

Britain still appeals to students, despite Brexit

A devalued pound and job opportunities are cited as reasons for the UK's popularity, Zhao Xinying reports.

The vote to leave the European Union has not damaged the United Kingdom's appeal among Chinese as a popular destination for overseas study.

While some reports have predicted a drop in the number of EU nationals seeking places on some of the most popular courses at Britain's leading universities, applications from Chinese students look set to increase.

According to the British Council, the number of visas issued to students from the Chinese mainland has grown during the past decade. In the first nine months of 2016, almost 73,000 students from China obtained a visa from Britain, a 9 percent increase year-on-year.

"As the upsurge of studying overseas continues among Chinese nationals, Britain will remain one of the top destinations," says He Chugang, general manager of the South China region at Amber Education, an overseas-study consultancy.

"We expect that the number of Chinese applying to study in the UK will keep on growing in the future."

A survey of 1,000 international students published in the UK's Independent newspaper in the wake of last June's Brexit vote showed almost 30 percent would not consider applying to British universities as they believed that the country was



A Chinese college student checks details about studying in the United Kingdom at the China Education Expo in Beijing in October. CFP

73,000

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"less welcoming" as a result of the decision.

Those surveyed said they were seeking education elsewhere, such as Canada, Germany, Australia or the United States.

But Amber Education's He says applications for studies at UK universities "remains strong" with no evidence that the Brexit decision

has had an impact on where students in China want to locate.

Gu Zeqing, a 23-year-old translation studies student from Nantong, Jiangsu province, says he chose Britain partly because of the Brexit result.

"I'm not affected by the Brexit at all," said Gu, who has applied to do a master's program in the UK.

"On the contrary, it even has one benefit for Chinese students as the devalued pound means lower tuition fees."

Lin Ying, general manager of the Britain section at JLL Overseas Education, an overseas-study consultancy in Beijing, says another possible benefit of the Brexit is that a decline in the number of EU applicants to

British universities potentially means more places for students from further afield. In the longer term, it could also improve their job prospects, he says.

He says students from the EU who previously enjoyed preferential employment policies in the UK are now "standing on the same starting line" as international students.

"This means that if Chinese students decide to hunt for jobs in Britain after graduation, they will have more opportunities to compete for the posts previously designed for or occupied by graduates from the EU," he said.

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International Education Column

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