

PROFILE

Pursue Excellence and Fortune will Follow —An Interview with an ECNU Dream Chaser

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In September 2021, Niu Zijie, an English major who spent both his undergraduate and postgraduate years at ECNU, is embarking on his journey as an English teacher in Shanghai High School. It's a great honor to become an "Engineer of Human Souls" in a renowned high school that attracts the most talented students in Shanghai every year. But what makes Niu Zijie stand out from the other candidates despite the fierce competition for jobs? *ECNU Circle* intends to discover his recipe for success.

In particular, Niu Zijie's active involvement in student affairs won't go unnoticed. During the past seven years he played key roles in the team of English pronunciation peer tutoring group and the Students' Union and the Postgraduate Association. Besides, he took an active part in the revision of a phonetic textbook and the academic research on pronunciation teaching to unify the theory and practice. Apart from those engagements, he also served as a teacher for students minoring in English at ECNU for two consecutive years by giving lectures on pronunciation.

Fortune favors the prepared mind, so the saying goes. His persistent efforts and prominent performance earned him not only the school scholarship but also a series of honorary titles including Excellent League Member, Excellent Student Cadre, Outstanding Volunteer and Outstanding Graduates.

ECNU Circle: Your undergraduate major is English and postgraduate major is Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Could you tell us about your motivation for these choices?

Niu Zijie: My choice of major is guided by my childhood dream of becoming an English teacher. I found myself at a turning point after completing the College Entrance Examination, where I had to make a hard choice among different universities and majors. Compared with Shanghai International Studies University, ECNU attracted me more because it is a comprehensive university with a wide range of academic disciplines. That's why I chose ECNU over other institutions for my post-secondary education.

After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree, I was lucky enough to further my study in ECNU as an English postgraduate. There were three available research fields: Literature, Translation and Linguistics. Since I wasn't interested in the first two options, the field of linguistics thus became my primary field of choice. Meanwhile, years of cooperation with my supervisor Prof. Liu Sen, an expert in English Phonetics, also strengthened my determination to pursue linguistics as my major.



E: As the chief leader of the English pronunciation peer tutoring team, you are mainly responsible for the team recruitment and pronunciation correction for freshmen. Please elaborate on your roles in the work.

N: One part of my duty is to design the recruitment model for the peer tutoring team. Our team members are expected to cover a wide range of responsibilities, from daily operation routines to coordinating public relations and hosting the annual English Speech Contest and Pronunciation & Intonation Contest.

It is obvious that both English pronunciation skills and social communication skills are indispensable to a qualified candidate. Therefore, in addition to the assessment of candidates' basic pronunciation skills and knowledge, our recruitment model also includes some psychological tests to measure the interviewee's stress tolerance and involves some real-life situations to evaluate their social skills such as communication, coordination, innovation, flexibility and so on. For example, one popular method we use is the leaderless group discussion, which works as a prediction of successful leadership and helps us select the right candidate for team leader.

Another part of my duty is to help freshmen correct their pronunciation, a task undertaken by each teaching assistant in our team. It is estimated that more than half of English majors at ECNU tend to work as an English teacher after graduation. Since pronunciation is an essential work-place skill for a would-be English teacher, it is necessary for English majors to standardize their pronunciation and meet the specific requirements of their career.

In fact, apart from the weekly English phonetics lecture given by Prof. Liu Sen, a 90-minute peer tutorial is available to the first-year English major every week in which we tailor our teaching style to meet the need of the individual learner. Apart from reviewing the phonetics symbols, we also assign them some supplementary exercises such as

tongue twisters and news broadcast to improve their language fluency and accuracy.

E: During your seven years of college life, you have been engaged in the Pronunciation & Intonation Contest six times in different roles. How did you handle the change in roles from contestant to judge?

N: I first took part in the Pronunciation & Intonation Contest as a freshman. It was not so grand as it is now. At that time, the contest was more like a final presentation by English majors for the one-year phonetic course. Since there were many talented students in my class, I only signed up for the word reading and chorus rather than the more challenging items such as tongue twisters and news broadcast.

It was the role switching from a contestant to an organizer in the following year that gave me a full picture of the contest. As the event planner, I had to take every factor into consideration from scheduling the time to renting the venue. Besides, external coordination between different departments was also required to ensure that the contest would be held on schedule. Fortunately, all my efforts paid off as everything went well as planned.

The successful organization of the Pronunciation & Intonation Contest is attributed to the working experience I accumulated during my work in the Students' Union of ECNU. At that time, I organized many large-scale events including the Campus Top Ten Singers Competition, the Freshman Talent Show, the Graduation Night, and some sports leagues such as the Freshman Cup Football Match and Sunshine Sports League. Those working experiences contributed to my later job in the Pronunciation & Intonation Contest. The former served as a guide for the latter, while the latter worked as a polish for the former.

E: During your postgraduate years, you worked as an English teacher in our school to give lectures on the minor course English Phonetics and Skills of Reading Aloud. Please elaborate more on how

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you successfully transform from the role of a student to that of a teacher?

N: I taught English Phonetics and Skills of Reading Aloud for two consecutive years, in 2018 and 2019 respectively. In addition to giving weekly lectures to students, I also assigned after-class oral practice to them. The evaluation of their oral exercises was not so easy as those for reading and listening assignments, so I set up a public E-mail for them to submit their audio homework.

To make the lecture sound juicier, I gave students three English poems in the first year, from which they could pick up one and recite it with background music or in other artistic forms. What impressed me most was that a student majoring in Broadcasting & Hosting chose the poem *She Walks in Beauty* and preceded his recitation with a monologue in Shanghai dialect. This innovative approach impressed the whole class. Later, considering the great progress students made in their oral English, I assigned them more demanding tasks. For example, students were required to imitate BBC or VOA hostess to broadcast the English news in one minute. To my surprise, they did it very well.

The role change from a student to a teacher was quite smooth, thanks to my three-year experience of being a pronunciation teaching assistant, as it helped me gain a full picture of students' common problems in pronunciation. However, I was still very nervous faced with a bigger class. Compared with the precious class with only 10 students, a 40-student class sounded a bit challenging to me.

To ensure that every student in my class could benefit from the lecture, I tried multi-level method to teach them in accordance with their aptitude. Students with relatively weak pronunciation were required to master the pronunciation of phonetic symbols, words and sentences; while those with better pronunciation were assigned with more advanced tasks such as tongue twister, dubbing and video imitation. To my pleasure, this teaching method worked very well and got positive feedback from students.

E: You have successfully combined your teaching practices with research by publishing academic papers and revising phonetic textbooks. Please illustrate a little on your research experience and its influence.

N: I think I was lucky to be at the right time, in the right place and with the right person. Firstly it happened to be my mentor, Prof. Liu Sen, whose phonetic textbook was under revision at

that time, giving me an opportunity to participate in the compilation work.

Secondly, as a graduate student, doing research and writing thesis were my daily routine. Finally, I had a wonderful cooperation with my mentor and junior fellow students in the whole process of thesis writing, without whom my research work wouldn't have been completed.

Admittedly, my research was not entirely smooth all the way through because I was not proficient in data analysis. Thanks to Dr. Hao Yuanyue, who gave me professional guidance on the application of quantitative methods and models, and Prof. Chen Fang, an expert in linguistic statistics, who provided me with many practical suggestions, finally I blazed a way through all kinds of obstacles. In a word, the publication of my thesis was the fruit of the joint efforts.

In retrospect, my research journey benefited me in the following two aspects. On the one hand, I got a deeper insight into my major in the process of research because it was impossible for me to gain access to the application of various statistical methods merely through the textbook knowledge. On the other hand, my research work helped improve my job prospects. I remembered that in my job interview at Shanghai High School, the headmaster who attached great importance to research capacity, asked me many questions about my research experience. I guess my research background certainly helped me stand out in the interview.

Mirror Club

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PERFORM A PLAY WE DESIRE—this quote is the original intention and central tenet¹ of Mirror Club—a club for enthusiasts of drama founded in 2001. The members of Mirror Club strive to co-produce fantastic plays. In addition to regular meetings of club members, basic acting and directing courses are held every year. In the acting classes, participants' basic performing ability will be improved through various training forms such as games and improvisation. The lessons on directing are more relevant to instructors' teaching styles. For example, the participants have been encouraged to form groups to rehearse some drama episodes this year, through which their directing skills are gained in practice imperceptibly.

Mirror Club members perform their plays on and off campus, bringing different stories to life through drama, such as *The Red Bean*, *Sunrise*, *The Blue Bird* and so on. Among the performances, the most impressive one was the graduation play, *The Blue Bird*, performed on the new stage in Shanghai's Pudong District in early July. The troupe was established in December 2020. The performers were mainly senior students who were about to graduate as well as a few freshmen and juniors. Moreover,

the director had graduated for years. Although this performance faced enormous obstacles, especially limited funds and the impact of the pandemic, which were rarely encountered in previous plays, the troupe made great efforts to overcome difficulties and the hard work paid off. Ultimately, on the night of the formal performance, there were nearly 500 people, and the live atmosphere was very positive. After the performance, some of the audience left messages, hoping that this play could be performed again. Others also mentioned that their favorite fairy tale in childhood was *The Blue Bird*, and this play moved them deeply. Mirror Club members have also learned and benefited a lot from the performances. ECNU Circle journalists are fortunate enough to interview several members who will share their valuable experiences with us.

Jenny (Chairwoman of the Club)
Cedar (Former Chairwoman of the Club)

ECNU Circle: Among the drama performances held by the club, which one impresses you most?



Various Life Dramas, Boundless Learning Opportunities

文 / 朱新亿 申琛 美编 / 李超然

Jenny: One of the most impressive plays is *The Blue Bird* performed off campus. We all felt that although 500 seats had been reserved, there might not be so many people present. But to our pleasant surprise, we never had such a large audience, and the atmosphere was just amazing! It is a fairy-tale play, and that's why it attracted many children. They were often not being very serious when entering the theater, which caused us to worry about the performance. But thanks to Director Wang Xinzhou's guidance before the opening, the kids were attentive during the play. I think both the viewing experiences and the stage effects were impressive to us.

Before this play, I thought that the most important thing for the club was to offer students who were interested in drama an opportunity to perform on stage. Whether there was any audience wouldn't be the most crucial factor. But not until this play did I realize the power of the audience. The audience is really an indispensable part of a play. I remembered that there was a dog, one of the characters, which risked its life to protect the little owner. At that time, the audience gave the dog a very big hand. We were all deeply touched. It was the third time that the student who was temporarily

in charge of photography had watched the play, but she almost cried when she heard the audience clapping for the dog.

Cedar: The short story *The Red Bean*, by Mr. Zong Pu, was brought to the stage and performed both in the community and at the school. This was the first time that Mirror Club had performed on the informal off-campus stage, in front of the elderly and primary and secondary school students. The ideas of "Dramas into Campus" and "Dramas into Community" originated from the desire for spreading the brilliant drama culture to the areas lacking resources. Namely, in addition to the college students and white-collar workers, any other people could have the chance to know, understand and love dramas. Encouraged by this, we have more confidence in the following activities and the promising future of the club.

E: *After you have joined the club, are there any big changes in your life?*

J: The rehearsals have become part of my weekly routine. For example, when I first joined the club in my freshman year, I participated in one of the special performances for short plays for new hands, which required several days





Explorations and Achievements in College English Education Reform at ECNU

文 / 夏佳怡 岳冰洁 美编 / 高焱

East China Normal University (ECNU) is one of the pioneers in the reform of college English education in China. Back in 2012, the College English Department initiated its first round of reform for a new recognition and orientation of the courses: a goal-directed, standard-driven, multiple-designing, and competence-focused guideline for the reform. Over the past nine years, there have been several adjustments and improvements for the perfection of the reform, with the goal of improving students' comprehensive English competence and humanistic qualities.

In addition to a large-scale curriculum reform, many extracurricular activities have flourished during the time. While some of them have literally become cultural pillars on campus, such as *ECNU Circle*, Voice of ECNU, and English-Chinese Corner, there are also workshops and panels tailored¹ to other sectors for English study, including reading, writing, debating, academic presentation, cross-cultural communication, etc. A host of students have been encouraged to participate in municipal or national competitions and harvested national rewards through these workshops and panels.

ECNU Circle journalists interviewed Professor Zhao Chaoyong, Professor Li Zheng, and Professor Li Hui to see how they embark on a higher platform of English study, by helping students gain awards in various English competitions during the past few years.

English Speech and Debate Workshop

Directed by Professor Zhao Chaoyong, “English Speech and Debate Workshop” evolved from the previous “English Speech Workshop” established in 2013. The workshop aims to provide outstanding students with a high-quality training platform, which enables them to improve and demonstrate their oral English proficiency and debating skills.

So far, more than 130 members have been recruited into the “English Speech and Debate Workshop”, with 36 students winning the opportunity to participate in various speech contests and debate competitions. Each contestant², who can finally

take part in the debates, must endure several rounds of campus-level competitions. In preparation for the fierce competition, Professor Zhao will have formulated an intensive training plan for the contestants, with mock debates every Wednesday as the major component, to help students with all-round improvements: the language proficiency, the knowledge reserve, the prompt and proper responses under different circumstances, and most importantly, a positive attitude to face the exhausting preparations and the pressure of competitions.

In recent years, “English Speech and Debate Workshop” has harvested many distinguished awards, which has also helped to ignite ECNUers’ enthusiasm for English study. In December 2019, Wang Yan, a second-year law student, won the national championship of the “FLTRP ETIC Cup” English Public Speaking Contest, and her victory set a ground-breaking record for ECNU. In 2020, Luo Ying won the Grand Prize for “FLTRP ETIC Cup” Shanghai final, and the Second Prize for national final. In addition, Hu Kang won the First Prize for “FLTRP ETIC Cup” national online competition. As a result of these students’ excellent performance, Professor Zhao has been awarded the “Excellent Instructor” Prize several times for his guidance and instruction.

The First Nanjing Online Tournament, held between May 15th and May 16th, was also a debate competition hosted by FLTRP. ECNU contestants excelled other competitors and won excellent awards. Xie Fei and Xian Yu won the First Prize and Best Debaters Awards in the open group; Wang Yiming and Yao Jiayi won the Second Prize in the open group; Zhu Xinyi and Qi Qianqian won the Second Prize in the novices group³.

The competition system for the Nanjing Tournament emulated the British Parliamentary Debate, and the topics of debate were often related to policies and social issues, such as fighting the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, the topic this year was quite unique and philosophical: ‘*This House prefers a world where people do not have the ability to feel nostalgia*⁴’. As nostalgia is almost a human instinct, such a topic naturally set contestants into deep thinking and fierce argumentation. There were some students who considered the physiological mechanism of people. Some of them started from the perspective of human sociality, while others illustrated the inheritance of civilization and culture.

For our contestants, the most nerve-racking problem was their unfamiliarity with the topics, which was a challenge to their knowledge obtainment. Brainstorming exercises were the main methods used to tackle problems. Firstly, each member aired their own opinion. After summarizing all the opinions, Professor Zhao led them to select a strategy that was most suitable for the whole team; simulated responses from the opponents; and figured out ways to crash the opposing views.

Professor Zhao said he was often impressed by the dedication of the students. This debate competition lasted for two days, including five rounds of points race and three rounds of elimination race. However, the more debates our students entered, the more excited and vigorous they became. The rewards they obtained also marked a fantastic beginning for the ECNUers’ debating experience.

Two latest good news from Professor Zhao: Dai Xiaoyan, an undergraduate student from the School of Psychology and Cognitive Science, won the First Prize in “SFLEP Cup” English Speech Contest for Telling Party History Stories, Shanghai competition in July; she also won the Grand Prize for the 21st National English Speech Competition for College Students in August.

Let us look forward to more achievements from the English Speech and Debate Workshop, with best wishes to Professor Zhao Chaoyong and his students.



participated in the competition are mainly from the eastern part of China so far, we hope to expand our influence to other regions of China by the internet and English APPs. We hope the competition can give us a clearer idea about the future of college English teaching, and guarantee consistent improvements in our teaching qualities.”

National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest

The SFLEP Cup National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest was first held in 2016 by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press. The contest aims to promote college students' abilities for international communication and cooperation, with the dream of building a community of shared future for the mankind.

This annual competition was a test of participants' comprehensive ability, which contains six sections including case analysis, answering judges' questions, interpreting popular foreign quotes, cultural knowledge quiz, situational commentary, and Q&A, as well as Chinese storytelling. Judges should base their grades mainly on three aspects—content, efficiency and presentation.

On April 24 to 25, 2021, the final contest was successfully held in Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press. ECNU and Fudan University entered this stage on behalf of the Shanghai Division, competing with 18 teams from other provinces. Three ECNUers, Shen Liao and Yang Yang from the Department of Applied Psychology, and Wang Yaqi from the Translation Department won the First Prize. Shen Liao also won the Best Cultural Speculation⁵ Award. Prof. Li Hui was awarded the “Excellent Instructor” Prize.

Professor Li Hui has been teaching college English classes for many years. He has opened a course named Intercultural Communication (ICC), which aims to illustrate the key definitions and components of ICC, promote contemporary Chinese core values to establish our own culture identity, and enhance students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills under different cultural circumstances. Professor Li always likes discovering talented students from his class. Under his guidance, many of them have won prizes in the National College Students' Intercultural Competence Contest in recent years.

The three professors' practices and methods set an inspiring example for college English teaching—by combining teaching with practice and competitions. Thanks to ECNU's College English Reform, these practices and methods are constantly improving and meeting the necessary requirements of college English reform. This type of learning not only keeps English languages courses up to date, but also gives students deeper insights into the value of their course requirements and progress.

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| 1. be tailored to 量身定做 | 3. the novices group 新手组 | 5. speculation n. 思索 |
| 2. contestant n. 竞争者 | 4. nostalgia n. 怀旧 | |

(审稿 / 汪燕)





SPECIAL OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE IN CONNECTICUT A M I D C O V I D - 1 9

文 / 岳冰洁 潘窈窈 美编 / 李超然

Wang Qing, an associate professor of the School of Psychology and Cognitive Science at East China Normal University (ECNU), left for the University of Connecticut (UCONN)¹ in the United States for an exchange programme from January to September in 2020. She taught three courses at UCONN: Educational Psychology for two parallel undergraduate classes, and Theory of Cognition, Learning and Instruction for Master's and PhD students. During the programme, Prof. Wang also participated in psychological counseling² for overseas students and a research collaboration

project with other professors. She was supposed to come back to Shanghai at the end of June, but her flight was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and flight restrictions. After June, Prof. Wang moved to Boston where she taught the course in Positive Psychology to ECNU students online for four weeks.

Now we are honored to interview Professor Wang and share her special and intensive experience when she was abroad in the United States.

ECNU Circle: How serious was the COVID-19 situation there?

Professor Wang: When I went to America, it was just

the beginning of the outbreak. From January to March, not enough attention was paid to it. However, the situation had gradually grown more serious since April. Fortunately, the university started to take a series of effective measures to control the situation, such as moving our courses online accordingly.

E: How was the online course program there?

P: Because of the change in the teaching form, I had to learn the online teaching and grading system there, which was an intensive learning experience for me. Luckily, the online teaching and grading system used at

relatively small, but America is vast, where you can't go anywhere without a car. I went to Bristol more than ten years ago, which is one of the best memories of my life. I didn't go to every city of the US, but I did visit every city of the UK. I immersed⁵ myself as much as possible in the rich British culture, such as the history, architecture, and literature. But there was natural greenery everywhere in both two countries, which was very impressive to me. It seemed that I stepped into a forest whenever I walked onto a street. There I could be myself without worrying that someone would disturb me.

E: *How do you think this exchange experience can influence your future academic research and teaching at ECNU?*

P: This experience has brought lots of benefits to me. Firstly, I established research collaboration with professors there. We are still working on some cross-cultural research projects, and I asked one of my graduate students to participate in a project which could be part of her thesis.

Secondly, I've gained extensive teaching experience through this programme, and consequently become more confident in using English language for teaching, initiating seminars and holding discussions with students. During the seminars in the US, my role was

to facilitate or coach them on high-quality discussions, which were very different from the ones I ran weekly in China where I let students present the literature and the progress of their work, then made comments, asked questions, and tracked their progress, which involved lots of guidance and correction. The overseas experience has inspired me to create a more favorable learning atmosphere for students to discuss,



debate and figure out how to solve research questions by themselves, even though we have already formed a very student-centric and autonomous learning atmosphere in my research team at ECNU.

E: *Unfortunately, the global pandemic isn't over. What suggestions would you like to give to students planning for studying abroad?*

P: As a psychologist, I

would like to point out that you shouldn't be too anxious towards the virus, because the COVID-19 vaccines are available now. Remember to take all the necessary protective measures and regulate your emotions. The second suggestion is attempting to get familiar with the programs and course schedules, and make preparations for them in advance. The third thing is to be confident when you communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds, and just be yourself. Appreciate cultural differences and embrace them. There might be some moments when you sense discrimination and unfairness abroad, but just try to be strong and assertive⁶, and speak out for our country. Compared to a century ago, we should have more confidence as Chinese people. Finally, try to make new friends by participating in local leisure activities, such as university clubs. Be curious and open-minded and then I am sure you will have a wonderful overseas learning experience.

the University of Connecticut (UCONN): 康涅狄格大学

psychological counseling: 心理咨询

collaborate: v. 合作

abide: v. 遵照

immerse: v. 沉浸

assertive: adj. 坚定而自信的

(审稿 / 赵国霞)