

A single thread connects me to a vast world.

Lizu Jiang was born in China's Guizhou Province, and currently works as a radio personality and TV reporter in Seoul. Despite her carefree smile, Jiang endured a difficult, impoverished childhood and a long uphill battle toward getting a university education. Her success was achieved by the help of relatives, teachers and corporate support.

Toyota Study Assistance Program



Her parents' divorce threw Lizu Jiang (second from the left) into a difficult life of poverty from the time she was very young. But she never gave up on her passion for learning, and was able to continue her studies thanks to support from various people in her life. Today she lives and works out of Korea, making use of her excellent Chinese and Korean language skills. Here she is pictured in her home province of Guizhou.



I had a happy childhood.

Then we were suddenly plunged into poverty.

Korean and Chinese flow effortlessly through the speakers in a Seoul recording studio. The voice belongs to Lizu Jiang, who grew up in Guizhou Province, China but does most of her work out of Seoul these days. You'd think from her carefree smile that she's led an easy life, when in fact her life has demanded tremendous courage. What drove her to pursue her studies amid the countless hardships of extreme poverty?

Guizhou is located in the southwestern part of China, and the region is home to many Miao people—passionate about their singing and dancing traditions. Jiang is one of them. When she was very young, she lived with her father (a teacher), her mother and her older sister. "We weren't rich," Jiang told us with a smile, "but when the family was all together, we were happy." Remembering those times suddenly darkened her expression, it seemed, and tears came to her eyes.

When Jiang was five years old, her parents divorced. Her mother was forced to care for her sickly older sister, while Jiang went to live with her father. "My father quickly got remarried," she explained, "but lost his job soon after. After that, I was on my own, shuttled back and forth

among various relatives. I once sold my hair to make enough money for the bus ticket to go see my mother, who lived in a faraway town."

She realized that she was now unable to depend on her family as much as she used to. She'd wake up early every morning to draw water from the well and tend to her family's pigs and chickens. Even under those conditions, however, Jiang never gave up on her studies. Perhaps she was inspired by the fact that her father was a teacher. Her grades were always at the top of her class. Convinced that her education would come in handy someday for something, she kept at it. One night when she was studying, a relative yelled at her for running up the electricity bill. "When I grow up, I'll make enough money to pay it back!" she fired back. That was the end of that.

Girls in rural minority communities often marry young and devote themselves to raising children. But the more Jiang learned, the more she was drawn to the outside world. She felt sure she could escape poverty if only she kept studying. "Everyone around me was telling me to hurry up and get married," she said, "but all I wanted to do was stick with my education."

There was always support from family members and teachers.

So many people helped me get where I am today.

One of the people who continued to support Jiang was her high school teacher, Mr. Luō. Once he loaned her enough money to pay for four months' worth of school lunches. "Jiang had a strong drive to learn," he told us. "Plus, helping each other out is just what we do around here when people are struggling. There are a lot of natural disasters in this area." It was Luō who suggested to Jiang that she apply for the Toyota Study Assistance Program.

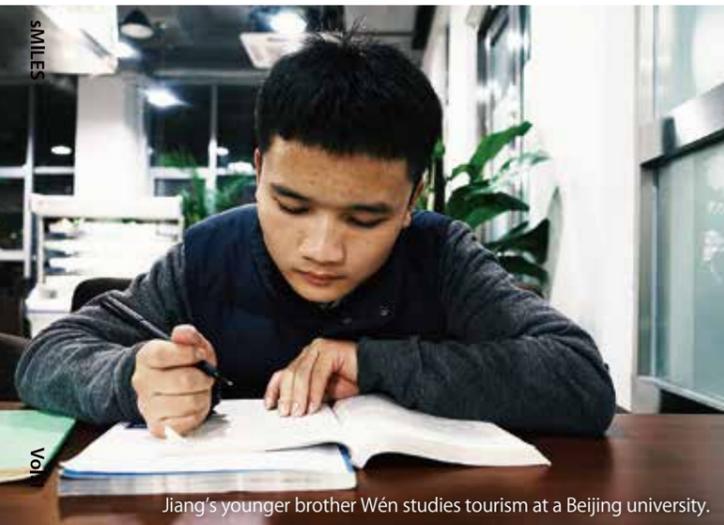
- ① Jiang records a narration segment in a broadcasting studio in Seoul. She currently works as a host and reporter for TV and radio programs, making use of her Chinese and Korean language skills.
- ② Jiang as a child. "My family broke up, but my relatives were good to me. I was definitely lonely, though," she recalls.
- ③ Jiang visiting her relatives at home. "My relatives never had a house this nice when I lived with them," she says with a smile.
- ④ Everyone in the family came out to offer Jiang a warm greeting after her long absence, despite the winter cold. When Jiang was in junior high school, her aunt would always offer her a warm welcome, telling Jiang that while she couldn't offer her luxury, she would make sure she always had a full belly.
- ⑤ Living in Seoul, far from where she grew up, Jiang constantly thinks about her family and where she came from. "I want to pay back all of the people who helped get me where I am today," she says.



Jiang's mentor, Mr. Luō

Toyota Study Assistance Program

In addition to tuition support, the Toyota Study Assistance Program offers leadership training, visits to Japan, and other opportunities. Scholarships do not need to be repaid. The program has sponsored some 2,600 students since it began 10 years ago.



Jiang's younger brother Wén studies tourism at a Beijing university.



Jiang brings some souvenirs back to her relatives.



Jiang's dream is to serve as a link between China, Korea, and Japan.

A single thread pulls me forward and connects me to a vast world.

Subsequently, Jiang was chosen as a recipient of the Toyota Study Assistance Program, and enrolled in Guizhou University. While there, she took her first trip abroad—turning a long-held dream into a reality. She visited Korea as part of an exchange program and Japan through the Toyota Study Assistance Program. The trip made her even more interested in the outside world. “Since I was a little girl,” she told us, “I always had this feeling that my life was being guided by a single thread.” As she reeled in the thread, she found opportunity in her hands. Studying abroad and participating in the Toyota program were along that path. The thread is one that connects her to a vast world.

Jiang now sends money to her younger brother Wén, who is currently studying tourism at a university in Beijing. “Education allows you to rewrite your destiny,” he told her, speaking of how important his studies were to him. “I want to go back to my hometown someday and help bring prosperity to the region.” Inspired by his sister, Wén is starting to take an interest in Japan as well—and is currently looking into his options for participating in a student exchange program.

When we traveled with Jiang back to the home of her relatives, she brought with her a bag brimming with gifts—

clothes, cigarettes, makeup. On the surface, they were nothing more than trinkets. But Jiang's bag was overflowing with kindness. “Having family and relatives to bring gifts and pocket money to or support financially puts pressure on me, but it's also a great motivator,” Jiang admitted. “They supported me so much. Now it's my turn. I want to pay them back for everything they did for me.” Today, Jiang's dream is to serve as a link between China, Korea and Japan. She also wants to start studying Japanese. She is again feeling the powerful tug of the thread that connects her to this vast world—and she has no intention of letting go.



Jiang's childhood home.

Fragrant is the rose bearer's hand

Support, generosity, wisdom.

Passing on what we have received.

Toyota Study Assistance Program: Japan Trip

Two Chinese university students talk about their visit to Japan through the FY2016 Toyota Study Assistance Program



Qiji Han is from Qinghai Province and is currently studying at Qinghai University for Nationalities. When she was in elementary and junior high school, her family had so little money that she was the only student who could not

afford to buy textbooks. Han's homeroom teacher in high school actually had to support her, since her family didn't think a higher education was necessary. “I started looking for a scholarship,” Han told us. “For me, it wasn't just money—it was freedom. Today, I'm active with the volunteer club at my university. In the future, I want to find a steady job, support my parents, and if I have anything left over, support other poor students like me.” Han says that when she has kids someday, she wants them to hold tight to their values and pursue their dreams.



Tiyo Zhou is from Fujian Province and is currently studying at Nanchang University. When he was a boy, his father got cancer working as a migrant laborer away from home. The family sold everything they had to pay for treatment, but he passed away

despite being well cared-for, leaving the family with nothing but debts. Zhou learned about scholarships through the internet when he was in high school. Now he's busy holding down a job while attending to his studies, but still finds time on the weekends to care for the elderly at a local nursing home. He told us about the Chinese proverb, “Fragrant is the rose bearer's hand.” It means that a person's soul is indelibly marked by a life of service, even if they lose money or honor. To Zhou, the words are a powerful distillation of the way he lives his life, knowing that in supporting others, you ultimately support yourself.



Students who visit Japan through the Toyota Study Assistance Program participate in sightseeing trips, classroom activities, visits to Toyota plants and more. Many say that the experience broadens their horizons and makes them want to come back to Japan someday. Here, they visit the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology in Nagoya.