

Qooco Asia Spelling Cup China final in Beijing

The 5th Qooco Asia Spelling Cup China final will be held in Beijing on Sept. 24, 2017. The winners will attend Qooco Asia Spelling Cup in Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia on Nov. 12 to compete for the highest honor, together with students from other Asian countries.

Qooco's CEO David Topolewski gives an exclusive interview with China.org.cn in Beijing on Sept. 20, 2017. [Photo by Guo Xiaohong]

Around 90 Chinese students, who have stood out in the pre-final competitions in six Chinese provinces including Guangdong, Zhejiang, Liaoning and Shanxi, will take part in the final round of the competition this weekend.

The Asian Spelling Cup was jointly launched by the Yale University, Singapore government, China's Ministry of Education and Qooco, an online and mobile learning solution provider. Since its launch, the annual contest has become the largest spelling bee in Asia. Participants are primary and middle school students aged below 15.

"Lots of people in Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea and China spend a lot of time and effort learning English, but with very little results," said Qooco CEO David Topolewski to China.org.cn. Mute English is very common in these regions.

The spelling bee is one way to encourage kids to use and communicate with ease and fun instead of just memorizing words, said Topolewski.

"We want to apply our approach and technology to make language learning a delightful, highly-interactive engagement, which will let learners be motivated and move on," said Topolewski who used to work in finance and the IT industry before joining Qooco. According to him, his current role is a combination of education, entertainment, technology and international culture.

He predicted that mobile language learning will become increasingly popular due to its inexpensive, convenient service.

Many English teachers from English-speaking countries tend to teach in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai, which causes an uneven education access. Yet, online learning platforms can help solve this imbalance.

Topolewski hopes the Asian spelling cup can bring people a culture of learning and interest in language while building up friendships among competitors from different Asian countries.

"It's all about developing skills and having fun," he said.

Piano school folds, CEO disappears

Thousands of Xingkong customers suffer losses as 60 centers are closed

Thousands of parents suffered losses as Xingkong, a well-known piano training institute, closed all its 60 centers across China on Sept 2. Its CEO, Zhou Kaicheng, disappeared on Wednesday.

In late August, a mother in Beijing surnamed Xie paid 40,000 yuan (\$6,000) for a two-year course of piano lessons and rental of a piano for her daughter. However, the piano failed to materialize and the 6-year-old didn't get any lessons.

"Xingkong's centers in Beijing are all located in high-end shopping malls such as Wanda and CapitaLand Mall. I did not hesitate for a second to choose a nationwide training company in such credible malls," Xie said.

Like Xie, thousands of parents have approached the police or courts for help. Some of them paid 12,000 yuan for a year of lessons, and some paid around 50,000 yuan to buy or rent a piano and receive free lessons.

Established in 2012, Xingkong was a rising star among educational startups. In December 2015, its gross earnings were 50 million yuan, according to its financial report. However, rapid expansion and investments in other industries resulted in financial pressure.

"Because we expanded our business blindly, we have fallen into a financial crisis and have to close our centers," the company said in a statement on Wednesday.

In addition to parents, teachers employed by Xingkong said they have been affected by the company's difficulties.

"We are victims, just like the parents. Our wages have been delayed for months," one teacher told Beijing News.

In an email sent to the public before he disappeared, Zhou, the CEO, said, "It is hard to give up my career, and I feel really sorry for what staff members and parents have experienced. But I can do nothing but leave. Maybe in the future, I will stage a comeback and compensate you all."

Xie was not impressed.

"Zhou took a gamble with our money to fulfill his ambitions. Even if he has some kind of remorse, he is to blame for lacking social responsibility."

In its statement, Xingkong said it is sparing no effort to raise money to compensate parents and teachers – "as long as there is a gleam of hope".

[China building world's first deep sea mining vessel](#)

The world's first deep sea mining vessel is being built by a Chinese shipping firm, and is expected to be put into use in 2018.

The vessel is being made by Fujian Mawei Shipbuilding (FMS) affiliated with Fujian Shipbuilding Industry Group, and is designed to work at a depth of 2,500 meters.

"It is unique in the world," said Zhao Jinjie, chairman of the group.

The vessel measures 227 meters in length and 75 meters in height, and will integrate advanced technologies, including deep sea mining robots, a deep sea lift system, a water-storage system and a cargo-loading system.

It will provide living and working space for 200 people and can store up to 39,000 tonnes of ore.

The main body of the ship is basically completed and supporting equipment has arrived.

In 2014, FMS received an order and cooperated with a design enterprise from Singapore to build the vessel for a United Arab Emirates company.

The vessel costs about 500 million U.S. dollars and will be delivered to a Canadian mining company to explore deep sea metal ore in the West Pacific.

China is working on core techniques to detect at deep sea, and plans to master key skills in the commercial collection of natural gas hydrate in sea areas by 2020.

[11 foreign military bands to join Nanchang Int'l Military Tattoo](#)

From Sept.24-29, Nanchang, the capital city of China's eastern Jiangxi Province, will host its 5th International Military Tattoo.



The Vancouver Police Pipe Band from Canada

Eleven foreign military bands from the U.S., Russia, New Zealand, Australia, Italy, Canada, Sweden, Egypt, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Mexico will participate in the music festival, the city's fifth since 2006.

Since 2006, Nanchang has hosted successfully four international military musical festivals.

The year 2017 marks the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, which coincides with the 90th anniversary of the Aug. 1 Nanchang Uprising, an armed resistance led by the Communist Party of China on Aug. 1, 1927 in Nanchang in order to fight back against the anti-communist purges by the Nationalist Party of China. Aug. 1, 1927 marked the birth of a new armed force independently led by the CPC.

The 5th Nanchang International Military Tattoo is a part of the activities to honor the history and celebrate this anniversary.

The festival is consisted of the opening ceremony and parade performances, a military music evening party, a special concert, military music carnival culture performances, the closing ceremony, and a military music party. Organizers estimate that the six-day event will attract more than 200,000 attendees.

Beijing mulls banning fireworks in city proper

The Beijing municipal legislature is discussing amending its fireworks management regulations to ban fireworks all year long in light of the city's heavy air pollution and casualties caused by fireworks during festivals.

A draft amendment on Beijing municipal fireworks safety and management regulations on Thursday was rendered to the standing committee of the Beijing municipal people's congress for deliberation.

According to the draft, setting off fireworks will be banned within the Fifth Ring Road of Beijing.

This means residents in the city proper will not be allowed to use fireworks on the Lunar New Year, China's most important festival of family reunion. Chinese people often celebrate the holiday by setting off fireworks.

According to an official with the legal affairs office of the Beijing municipal government, dozens of people were injured or killed in firework-triggered accidents during the Chinese Lunar New Year between 2015 and 2017.

The number of heavy air pollution days during the seven-day festival reached two to four days each year during the past five years, said the official.

The office solicited public opinion about the draft amendment, with 83.1 percent of participants supporting the ban.

Lawmakers also advised reducing the number of sales booths and cutting off channels for illegal sales of fireworks.

Currently, use of fireworks within Beijing's Fifth Ring Road is allowed only on Chinese Lunar New Year and Lantern Festival.