

# Top speller wants life of fashion

Fei Lai

**K**atherine Niu is a smart and talented, typically soft-spoken and polite seventh grader whose claim to fame is being China's National Spelling Bee champion.

The 13-year-old student, who was born in the United States, attends Hangzhou International School.

Everyone knows she's a good student but she wowed everyone when she won the national finals of the English-language competition in Shanghai in March.

"I like Shanghai a lot because it is so modern and chic," Niu says. "I especially like Nanjing Road because of its pretty malls and shops. Shanghai is much bigger, populated and busier than Hangzhou."

Studying for the spelling bee takes most of her spare time. When asked how she prepares for the international contest sponsored by Scripps-Howard, a US media group, she says she studies the word lists issued by Scripps. Her parents quizzed her on the words.

But her best preparation has been her years as an avid reader.

"I recognized most of the words during the spelling competition," Niu says. "But when it came down to it, I dug into my own knowledge

of words and deep background in reading to come up with the correct spelling."

While she was a bit surprised to emerge as the champion of China and thrilled to be able to travel to the United States with her parents and compete for the grand prize — US\$30,000 cash and a US\$5,000 scholarship, reference materials and trophy.

The competition was fierce but friendly. Niu's parents said the spelling bee and travel experience gave their daughter an opportunity to build her confidence and character.

At school in Hangzhou, Niu takes part in sports, takes violin classes and has helped paint a mural.

"A top student knows the importance of education, tries to excel in academics and hobbies, nurtures talent and has achievements she is proud of," Niu says.

"My life right now is all right, but I am not completely satisfied," she says. "There is room for improvement. I want to make more friends and prioritize more."

In university, Niu wants to major in art or fashion design and minor in writing or linguistics. She hasn't thought about which universities she might like to attend.

"I want to study art because I have loved art ever since I was a little



kid," she says. "I want to major in fashion design because I would like a career as a fashion designer."

"I want a writing minor because I want to write a book or books someday and a linguistics minor because I want to coach someone who is going to the National Spelling Bee."

She would like to be a fashion designer who writes in her spare time and coaches students for spelling bees.

Her parents have been good role models and sacrificed a lot for her, says Niu, adding that she wants to strive for a better future for her family as well.

**Katherine Niu (center) from Hangzhou International School holds the champion trophy for China's National Spelling Bee with the other two winners.**



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