Of the Six Arts of Confucianism, “arithmetic” is an extremely important topic. It embodies an exceedingly rich branch of knowledge. The ancient Chinese often kept records by tying knots. Since then, the evolution of this process resulted in the development of a more sophisticated method of record-keeping using what is known as an abacus. The abacus is widely used throughout Asia to perform functions such as calculating day-to-day necessities. It is even capable of performing advanced logic and reasoning, which is an indispensable aspect of Chinese culture.

"Zhu suan" is the Mandarin term for "using the abacus." Most people can start learning it by practicing to manipulate the beads. With consistent practice and effort, they will attain the ability to perform mental abacus, which is essentially mental arithmetic with an imagined abacus.

The Confucius Institute at San Diego State University has always been an innovator; seeking to spread new trains of thought built along the “New Silk Road” of culture. The Six Arts of Confucianism uses mental abacus as one of its themes in order to carry forward Chinese culture. Li Mianjun is a cultural ambassador of the Six Arts, who devotes his time to spreading the art of this particular practice.
Li Mianjun was born in Linyi City in the Shandong Province. His father was a math teacher and from childhood, Li has loved mathematics. Up until early 1990, he poured his heart into studying mental abacus; studying day and night without stopping. Because of his hard work, Li had won the abacus championships seven years in a row.

From 1995, Li Mianjun decided to dedicate his efforts into teaching abacus. He endured many hardships as he pioneered this work, starting from scratch to carve out a place for himself and his passion. In 1998, he established Shenmo Education, and little by little spread mental abacus across China, primarily teaching young primary and secondary school students. After many years of observing others’ methods and verifying and improving on their work, he started his program with just four students. Over ten years of hard work and perseverance, the program grew to have over 6,000 branch schools and has trained over 11,000,000 people. In 2010, he led his team to begin building the “New Silk Road” overseas. This “New Silk Road” originates in Shandong, and radiates to the five continents. After years of development, Li Mianjun’s footprints are found everywhere from North America, Europe, Australia, and Southeast Asia. Currently, several countries have set up mental abacus courses thanks to Li’s influence.

Li Mianjun's dream is to spread the Confucian art of arithmetic to every part of the world, a slow and difficult path. In becoming the ambassador and promoter of the Six Arts of Confucianism and its culture, he walks all over China, dedicated to carrying on Confucianism's
launched a two week long experimental mental abacus course in San Diego at Barnard Asian Pacific Language Academy, Pacific Beach Middle School, and Mission Bay High School, where around 500 students participated. The two week experimental course greatly testifies to the mysterious magic of mental abacus. Whether it was a first grader, fifth grader or even a junior or senior high schooler, they all expressed extreme interest in this interesting concept. Elementary schoolers from first to third grade treated the abacus like a fascinating toy, playing and learning at the same time. After one class, they had already mastered how to use the abacus for single digit addition and subtraction. Fourth and fifth graders mastered single digit mental abacus. After the experimental class ended, the children were reluctant to part from it, entirely wanting to continue studying mental abacus. Most students made

art of arithmetic.

The Confucius Institute at San Diego State University witnessed Mr. Li’s determination, and invited him to the university to give curious students not just a mere lecture but a demonstration of the power of mental abacus. This opened the door for his role as the cultural ambassador of the Six Arts. Then, Confucius Institute scheduled him to talk and give demonstrations at different elementary schools and cultural events. He inspired many young hearts at the Balboa Park Moon Festival Celebration in San Diego. When the performance was over many children flooded down the aisles to understand the mysterious abacus and even try it.

After many such experiences, Confucius Institute sent Li Mianjun to officially lecture at Confucius Classroom schools. From February 1st to the 11th, he
hand-made thank you cards, and family heads also brought gifts for Li Mianjun to express their gratitude. In the middle school and high school experimental classes, the students' responses were much more enthusiastic. Students not only jumped up to speak and interact, but also right after the class many students came up and expressed that they wanted to register for mental abacus. In the high school class, the school specially selected students with outstanding math scores to participate. The students not only displayed extreme interest and focus on learning, but also the school's principal and math teachers also came personally to observe the teaching process, deeply expressing their interest. Li Mianjun's teaching method was akin to magic, letting each student master 10's place multiplication and speed calculation in the short span of one class period.

Also, in the span of this experimental course, his mental abacus promotion overseas made significant breakthroughs. With the San Diego Confucius Institute's arrangements, the Confucius Classroom at Barnard Asian Pacific Language Academy officially signed an agreement with him in regards to the framework for strategic cooperation, paving the way for a mental abacus course to open at the Barnard Elementary Confucius Classroom. This is Confucius Institute's first mental abacus curriculum established in the U.S. San Diego Unified School District. The district now has over 200 schools also leaning towards the opening of mental abacus education. Li Mianjun's goal of overseas mental abacus promotion has already obtained periodic victories. Nonetheless, he will continue to lead his team in spreading cultural knowledge by teaching arithmetic, one of the Six Arts of Confucianism. May his journey through the New Silk Road carry on to its end!