



**Clockwise from bottom left:** Chen Wen-cheng from Beijing Sport University with his wife from Henan; Students from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao at a Renmin University of China graduation party; students wrap dumplings at a New Year party; a Taiwan volunteer teaches at a school in Sichuan; Yin Min-chi (front) and a classmate from Tsinghua University dance onstage at a students' festival.

# FORGING BONDS ACROSS THE STRAITS

For Taiwan students, life on the mainland not only offers them opportunities, but also helps them develop a deeper sense of identity. **Xing Wen** reports.



**Students** from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao at Renmin University of China at the Great Wall in Beijing in a cultural experience event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ready to share its own development opportunities with compatriots from Taiwan, the Chinese mainland has been attracting young people from Taiwan to come to study, work or launch a start-up in cities far away from their hometowns.

Yang Chia-yun, a postgraduate at Renmin University of China, says studying in the university was a dream she has had since she joined a two-week summer school program there in 2014.

"I was impressed by my peers at RUC, especially their perseverance and diligence in their studies," recalls Yang, who at that time was a German language major at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. "Now my experience at RUC can also serve as a lead-up to my future career in Beijing," says the 25-year-old who is determined to gain the competitive edge over the huge pool of talent in the Chinese capital.

Yang's schoolmate Chiu Tzu-fang, a junior majoring in finance, shares her determination.

Chiu helped organize activities for the International Development and Exchange Association and the Model United Nations Association during her first year at RUC.

In the following year, she took three internships one after another, in a management consulting firm, a State-owned investment corporation and a securities institute.

That, from Chiu's perspective, has enriched her university life and helped her become acquainted with the world of work in advance before entering the job market.

"I've met so many studious contemporaries here, which spurs me on all the time," says the 21-year-old. "Contrary to what I had thought about a State-owned company before

the second internship, the staff members there were passionate and patient, and far from spiritless."

Tsai Tsung-yu, 23, a senior in the Department of Chemical Engineering of Tsinghua University, launched his new materials company with a mainland classmate last year.

His startup was also a registered project with Tsinghua x-lab, a university-based education platform that offers students a wide range of resources and support for fueling creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship, where he received useful information about financial management, raising capital and intellectual property.

"In the context of the mainland's industrial upgrading, innovative startups will take advantage of the large emerging market, adventurous investors, relatively low labor costs, and favorable policies issued by the government," Tsai says, listing the positive stimuli for his company which is based in North China's Hebei province.

Tsai says: "Where can people from Taiwan find another land of opportunity like the Chinese mainland, which shares the same language and a similar culture with us?"

Although he enjoys the fruits of China's development, he has also found that there are drawbacks to being a Taiwan entrepreneur.

"As I was born and grew up in Taiwan, I have weaker connections to the society and people here compared to local residents," says Tsai, adding that normally they choose to run a business with local partners.

Although the registration for their business proved to be time-consuming, Tsai teamed up with a couple local friends, and managed to finally obtain the licence.

"I am piggybacking on the economic strides of the mainland's opening up, and of course the government has given us Taiwan students preferential treatment," says Tsai, "but I would really like to be on a similar footing as my mainland counterparts."

### Helpful new measures

Yang also found her identity as a Taiwan student brought her some inconvenience when she was job hunting during the nationwide campus recruitment season last autumn.

"Most of the HR personnel I talked to seemed confused about how to recruit staff from Taiwan, or flinched at the complexities of the procedures needed to hire me," says Yang, who later signed with a Sino-foreign joint venture familiar with how to hire

employees outside the Chinese mainland.

Yang now hopes to be treated equally as Chinese mainland residents following the introduction of 31 new measures issued by the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council on Feb 28, aimed at promoting cross-Straits economic and cultural exchanges and cooperation.

The measures cover a wide range of fields, including taxation, entrepreneurship, employment, education and healthcare.

Chen Wen-cheng, 29, a doctorate candidate at Beijing Sport University, says the measures will allow him to apply for projects in the national key research and development plan.

And some of his friends studying at Beijing University of Chinese Medicine are

allowed to take qualification exams to permit them to practice their profession in the mainland now.

Although he was brought up in Changhua, Taiwan, for the first 22 years of his life, Chen decided to stay in Beijing for the past few years, not only because he married a woman from Central China's Henan province last year, but also because he has witnessed a surge in demand by local consumers for sport products since he first arrived in 2011.

"I aspire to apply my knowledge and experience of advanced sports management I acquired in Taiwan to the large niche market here," says Chen.

He aims to organize various sports contests across the Straits, in an effort to narrow the gap between young people from both sides, in every sense.

Chen felt increasingly responsible for developing mutual understanding between the two sides after he was voted as the leader of the youth department in the Cross-Straits Exchange Association, an NGO registered in Taiwan.

The youth department involves more than 3,000 students from 25 or so universities in Beijing, according to Chen.

The association regularly offers Taiwan students opportunities to visit the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council where they speak about the problems they face, so that the government can find solutions to the problems.

### School support network

The government is working to address a broad range of situations Taiwan students are often confronted with, while in the meantime, the Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan affairs offices in universities take care of their specific everyday needs.

Xiao Dan, who has worked with the Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan affairs office in RUC for four years, says the office offers strong support to Taiwan students from their initial orientation period through to their graduation.

"We have organized activities like leadership training, reading salons and social events for them," says Xiao. "And in recent years, we have started custom-made maths courses to help students catch up, since the maths course at Taiwan high schools are often easier than those found in the mainland."

The burgeoning economy, beneficial policies and the hospitality of helpful teachers and peers in the mainland have been attracting Taiwan students for years, while their growing understanding of

what it means to live in such a diverse society has reawakened their sense of cultural identity.

Yin Min-chi, 19, a sophomore at the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University, has already volunteered at a school in Northwest China, investigated a poverty alleviation program in a remote village in East China's Fujian province, and filmed a documentary about a retired miner at an abandoned mine in the Mentougou district of Beijing.

She now has a better grasp of mainland society thanks to her experiences and observations.

"Now I think the policies the government has developed to tackle social problems do make good sense," Yin says.

She says some of her friends in Taiwan doubted whether it was a wise choice to study journalism in the mainland, but she looks at it from a different perspective.

"I'm inspired by my classmates who aim to speak up for vulnerable groups," says Yin. "They are motivated by the desire to contribute to society instead of self-interest."

She says her teachers encouraged them to set aside any suppositions they may have had before digging deep into the subject matter.

"Similarly, only when students in Taiwan put aside stereotypes of the mainland, and then come here to live, to observe, and experience it for a long period of time, can they actually understand the mainland's development and the barriers needed to be overcome," Yin says.

"That's the ideal cross-Straits communication between young people in my mind."

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