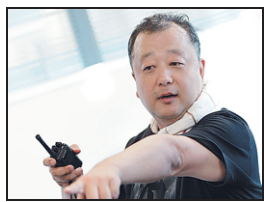


YOUTH

Testing times for overseas students

A recent Chinese TV series highlights the challenges of adapting to new culture, **Zhu Dunhua** reports.



“Many of those watching do not have experience of studying abroad, but some are planning to go overseas or let their children go. That’s why we include all the possible scenarios they may face.”

Yao Xiaofeng, director

Midnight. Freezing. Another country, far from home. The events of that night are seared in Lucy Zhu’s memory. A fully packed suitcase straining to keep its contents from spilling. A long walk to her campus amid a snowstorm in Lansing, Michigan, the United States after a 13-hour-long flight from Beijing.

Large snowflakes flutter onto her clothes as she tries to protect her face and eyes from the wind that cuts like a knife. The bitter cold seems to penetrate her bones. After the airport shuttle bus dropped her at the bus station, she tried to get a cab or a lift, but to no avail. The late hour and the weather seemed to conspire against her. She had no option but to lug her suitcase for more than 40 minutes back to the university dorm as the -19 C temperature seemed to taunt her for returning after Christmas break.

Zhu, who studied in Michigan State University, part of her seven years spent overseas, recalls that night and other challenges she faced. “It was one of the most unforgettable nights in my early years of studying abroad, and there have been more dilemmas, much harsher than physical cold and pain. Besides trying to adapt to a new environment, I also needed to learn how to live independently using a foreign language.”

Zhu’s midnight plight, and the sense of despair, have been experienced in various forms by international students. After all, one of the great lessons learned by these students is how to manage outside of the campus. This challenge is reflected in the TV series *Over the Sea I Come to You*, broadcast on Dragon TV and Zhejiang Satellite TV from June 13 to July 9.

When Zhu, 24, now an employee of an international hotel management company in Shanghai, watched it recently, she was touched by a similar scene. Huang Xiaodong (acted by Zeng Shunxi), a young overseas student, on his first day in a foreign land, drags his luggage in the middle of the night to school after the car he was being driven in breaks down.

But there is one crucial difference; the young man is not alone but with his father. That scene coincides with the Chinese title of this TV series, namely “studying abroad with daddy”. The plot depicts the lives of three young Chinese students and their fathers, or mothers, who accompany them to a developed country. Predicaments then arise. Study problems, issues with the homestay family, exam cheating and a campus shooting. This has ignited responses from viewers, with mixed voices including both positive and faultfinding critical comments.

Increasing numbers of Chinese students are opting to go abroad to further their studies in colleges and universities. According to data from UNESCO, overseas Chinese students now account for 14 percent of the global total. China tops the rankings of international students, according to Xinhua News Agency, reaching 660,000 in 2018. Of these 596,300 are self-funded.

The TV series has attracted a huge number of viewers and “overseas students” is a hot topic for online comment. On Sina Weibo, the comments of the hashtag about the TV series have hit more than 1.1 million.

To Zhang Shuwei, the 20-something producer of the series, “the keyword is more ‘daddy’ than ‘study abroad’”, since the plot also



The TV series, *Over the Sea I Come to You*, has recently been broadcast on two TV channels. Centered around the lives of overseas students and their parents, it has sparked mixed reviews online. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

depicts the lives of the three parents, who accompany their children. Audience response suggests that they would like to learn more about the students and their travails. The show has a rating of 3.5 out of 5 on review site Douban.

Yet on the other hand, the struggles of the overseas students portrayed in the TV series still managed to reveal typical issues faced or experienced by Chinese students who study abroad.

Few Chinese families are wealthy

enough to dispatch a parent to help a student face the challenges of life overseas.

Lucy Zhu, for example, points to her own experiences. “One day, in my senior year, I was driving, but suddenly my car was hit by another car being driven by a US teenager. I had to deal with all the case proceedings and the insurance claim every step of the way,” she recalls.

In more ways than one, being an overseas student means there is a great learning curve. Jane Yang, now a US citizen, from Hebei province, studied as an international student at the University of Minnesota in 1988. “The early years abroad, looking back, made me a more independent, open-minded person,” she says.

It is this aspect that many viewers admit to enjoying, as the TV series highlights the progress of the individual outside of academic spheres.

“Many of those watching do not have experience of studying abroad, but some are planning to go overseas or let their children go,” says Yao Xiaofeng, director of the series. “That’s why we include all the possible scenarios they may face.”

Mini movies motivate young directors

By **XU FAN**
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It was a hot summer in 2010. Shen Ao, then a 23-year-old who had just graduated from the Beijing Film Academy, took a ride on a long-distance bus.

On the journey, which departed the Chinese capital bound for a far-flung fishing village in Xiangshan county, East China’s Zhejiang province, the bus got stuck in traffic jams in Beijing and Tianjin that lasted for a few hours.

To kill the time, he came up with an idea for a short film about a middle-aged businessman’s reunion with a love interest from his youth, but the plot takes a dark turn.

The trip was organized by the Nine Minutes Film Competition, an event which is jointly hosted by the China Film Critics Association and the Beijing Film Academy to

help young filmmakers realize their cinematic dreams.

All the 30-plus passengers — consisting of five film teams — on the bus were nominated participants of the competition.

That journey has become the best summer memory for Shen, who ended up winning the top prize of the competition with his traffic-jam-inspired story, which was honed into the event’s Best Picture winner, titled *Tide and Wave*.

Nine years on and Shen has directed dozens of projects — mostly advertising — but for the Beijing native, the summer of 2010 is still the most free and happiest period he has enjoyed as a filmmaker. It was a time where he could focus on what he was really interested in, rather than the interests of his projects’ financiers.

Recently in Beijing, Shen recalled the journey at the launch ceremony

of the 2019 Nine Minutes Film Competition, which is the eighth edition of the normally annual event that was unfortunately suspended last year due to a shortage of funding.

Qiu Qi, initiator of the event, says that this year’s competition has so far drawn more than 70 film teams, as well as over 500 story ideas.

From early August to late September, 18 teams will be shortlisted, and will each be financed to the tune of 150,000 yuan (\$21,800) to make a 9-minute-long film. The shoot will mostly take place in Dongtai, Jiangsu province in East China, and Chengdu, in Southwest China’s Sichuan province.

A highlight of this year’s competition is that it has also expanded its locations to feature foreign countries. Two of the nominated teams will shoot their short flicks in either Los Angeles in the United States or Yokohama, Japan.

“Making a film can be an enjoyably absorbing experience. We hope the event can help these talented young directors develop their passion and love of cinema,” says Qiu.

Starting his career as a director in 2007, Qiu recalls how upset he was to discover that things could be complicated and tough for a rookie to handle.

He notes that there are gray areas in the film industry that can easily dampen the enthusiasm of young talent, but the aim of the competition is to help the young people who love making films to follow their dreams.

“Nowadays a lot of insiders in the industry are too focused on earning money or winning big budgets, but actually a good story doesn’t mean a film must cost a fortune,” says Qiu.

“Back in the 1980s and 1990s, China produced a flood of



Shen Ao (third from left) shoots on location for his directorial debut *Tide and Wave* in Xiangshan county, Zhejiang province, in 2010. The short film won the Best Picture title in that year’s contest. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

acclaimed directors who made many influential art house films, earning Chinese cinema recognition around the world,” he says, adding that he hopes young filmmakers can revive the tradition.

Over the past eight years, the Nine Minutes Film Competition has financed 121 short films made by 115 young film teams that have won 158 awards domestically and overseas.

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