

YOUTH



Sun Chenlu shares online how she overcomes the challenges of adapting to life in a wheelchair and posts on social media her photos taken during trips with her parents. The 30-year-old is now an influencer, with about 90,000 followers on Xiaohongshu, a social media and lifestyle platform. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Sun Chenlu likes to give make-up and style tips on Chinese social media. The desire to look attractive is universal, especially among young people.

Sun, 30, is in a wheelchair since a car accident made her paraplegic four years ago. Now, she's an influencer, with about 90,000 followers on Xiaohongshu, or Little Red Book, a social media and lifestyle platform.

She also has two part-time jobs — selling fresh fruit on WeChat and writing marketing articles online for a study-abroad consultancy.

"I'm like a 'new me' that has crawled back to the human world from hell. If life is like a flight, I've gone off course but didn't crash. I'm doing my best to return to my track and have a new start," Sun writes on social media.

"Many people told me that I'm like a light coming into their life. At the same time, it's because of their encouragement that I can come out of the haze and lead a new life."

She lives in her hometown, Guiyang, Guizhou province, where she's taken care of by her parents. Before the accident, she worked in a study-abroad consultancy in Beijing and planned to pursue a doctorate in Canada, and had traveled to about 20 countries.

She studied for her bachelor's degree at Shanghai University of International Business and Economics and completed her postgraduate studies at University of Bristol in the United Kingdom.

Her life changed completely in January 2017. She was then in Beijing, going by taxi to the airport for a trip to Singapore for the upcoming Lunar New Year, when the accident happened on a highway.

She spent a great deal of time in intensive care and had five operations. A spinal cord injury paralyzed her from the waist down. It was a blow for her, and she felt really depressed until she gradually recovered due to her strong spirit and her parents' support.

"Now I focus more on the things that I'm capable of doing in a wheelchair and what I like to do, such as writing and painting. When you can't change the reality, you have to change yourself," she says.

She's writing a book about her life story, thanks to an invitation by a publisher.

Sharing online

In May 2018, she uploaded her first post to Xiaohongshu, sharing her story. Her life then was all about rehabilitation exercises and she just

wanted to communicate with others.

It took her four hours to write the article — she used a voice-to-text function on her smartphone and revised the words with her fingers that don't have much strength. She was touched by the comments from other users of the online platform and was encouraged when some other people in wheelchairs also shared their experiences.

A turning point came in September 2020 when Xiaohongshu invited her to share her story in a speech. She was surprised at the invitation, because she had just over 3,000 followers then.

"I didn't update my personal post regularly, which only had a few short videos about my rehabilitation exercises and daily life in a wheelchair," she says.

Some influencers, who share their personal favorites and lifestyles on the platform, also joined the activity to deliver speeches. Inspired after chatting with them, Sun started to map out a plan to regularly share her daily life, including makeup tips and her trips with parents.

She spent time exercising, wearing makeup, for example, holding an eyebrow pencil with her weak fingers.

Now, she writes a script before filming a short video and edits it on her smartphone, updating two or three short videos every week. She carefully prepares her outfits: clothes, makeup and ornaments.

Once when the family visited Luoyang, Henan province, she brought three sets of *hanfu* (traditional Chinese apparel) and wore makeup for a video shoot.

"My motivation to make short videos comes from my fans, who wait to watch my new work," she says.

Most of her followers are young women. Some send her gifts via express delivery and write her postcards. They consider her as an "agony aunt" and share their own

Triumph of the spirit

A car accident changed Sun Chenlu's life but it couldn't stop her from becoming an influencer or winning medals, **Xu Lin** reports.

"I'm like a 'new me' that has crawled back to the human world from hell. If life is like a flight, I've gone off course but didn't crash. I'm doing my best to return to my track and have a new start."

Sun Chenlu, a Guiyang native from Guizhou province, who won two gold medals in table tennis at the 11th National Games for Persons with Disabilities



troubles with her, such as suffering from depression or illness.

She replies to some messages and shares books about regulating emotions.

Sun travels with her parents — she covers the expenses with the money she earns from her part-time jobs. Her online photos are taken by her father.

At home, her 58-year-old mother, Wang Xiu, is in charge of adjusting the position of four lights and a smartphone for the best shots of her.

For most older Chinese like Wang, short videos are still a novelty. She has to learn the filming process from scratch.

It also took time for Wang to be fully supportive of her daughter.

After the accident, when Sun was in the hospital for recovery, she wanted to put on a lipstick when her condition became better. But the mother didn't understand her. Wang's thought then was: "The most urgent thing was to recuperate. She was not having any social gatherings. Why did she even bother to apply a lipstick?"

However, as Wang saw her daughter in better spirit after making short videos, she gradually changed her mind.

"Shooting the short videos is not just for her love of beauty. It's also a kind of promotion of positive energy. Many netizens love her work and leave comments to encourage her," Wang says.

Adaptive sports

Sun has also explored her potential in sports. In October, she participated in the 11th National Games for Persons with Disabilities in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, winning two gold medals in table tennis — doubles and team, respectively.

She started to play table tennis about two years ago, practicing one to two hours every day. As her fingers have little gripping power, she has to learn the sport from scratch, with a bat

tied to her hand. It took her about half a year to master the technique of serving. It's difficult to keep her body balance when she raises her arm to serve, because she can't move waist downward.

She keeps the daily habit of playing table tennis, hoping that she can join the 2022 Asian Para Games in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Also, she has learned how to swim while wearing buoys. She went surfing in Sanya, Hainan province, and had a breathtaking paragliding flight in Luoyang.

It's all because of the help of volunteers from "Krankin' thru China", a campaign to help physically challenged people engage in adaptive sports so that they can reintegrate into society. It was founded in 2013 by Joshua Dominick, a US citizen who lives in Beijing, together with his friends.

A professional coach and Sun had the paragliding flight together, and she enjoyed a bird's-eye view of the fields.

"It was so exciting, like being in a roadster in the sky, with wind blowing by my ears. I suddenly felt that my life could have possibilities. It was really good to be alive," she says.

The authorities recently unveiled a guidance to promote the construction of a certification system for a barrier-free environment in sectors such as roads, public transport and public service facilities. Although the barrier-free environment in China is developing, especially in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, Sun says she finds the need for improvement in smaller cities.

She says it's not that easy for people in wheelchairs to go out. For example, in some places, it's difficult to find a barrier-free lavatory that functions properly.

Once she found one that was stacked with cleaning equipment. Only four- or five-star hotels in China have barrier-free guest rooms and she calls them in advance to make a reservation.

More importantly, she has to ensure whether a hotel has a barrier-free ramp at the main entrance and an elevator in the hall before booking.

"It's important for people in wheelchairs to go out. I used to be embarrassed by others' staring at my wheelchair. It's time for me to change my mentality. Also, the books that I read and the road that I travel have brought me self-confidence."

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Diplomats and guests get Peking Opera experience

By CHEN NAN
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Thirty diplomats from various countries, including Azerbaijan, Brazil, Pakistan, Spain and Indonesia, along with their spouses, were invited to experience Peking Opera at Tianleyuan Theater in Beijing on Monday.

The diplomats were introduced to the ancient art form and got to try on Peking Opera costumes and makeup, as well as watch performances.

The event, titled *2021 New Year's Experience Journey to Peking Opera for Diplomatic Missions in China*, is part of the Taihu World Cultural Forum, a nonofficial platform created by China for international cultural exchanges.

"Peking Opera embodies the essence of Chinese traditional culture," Zheng Chuanxin, secretary-general of the forum, says in a video greeting to the diplomats.

"It's full of Chinese philosophy, aesthetics and traditional values, like loyalty, bravery and honesty. It's a great way to get to know Chinese culture by experiencing the ancient art form."



Diplomats and their spouses experience the charm of Peking Opera at Tianleyuan Theater in Beijing on Monday. The event is part of the Taihu World Cultural Forum. PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

The forum, launched in 2008, was named after Taihu Lake in the Yangtze River Delta. Since its inception, the forum has successfully held six conferences in Suzhou in Jiangsu province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Shanghai, Macao, Beijing and Bengbu in Anhui province, respectively.

The forum has attracted hundreds

of politicians, scholars, entrepreneurs and cultural notables from more than 80 countries and regions to share ideas and deepen mutual understanding among cultures.

The gray-brick Tianleyuan Theater is located in the capital's Qianmen area, a popular tourist spot. The theater has a history spanning more than 200 years and reopened

in March 2019, after six years of renovation.

Peking Opera master Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) performed there for four years, from the tender age of 17. Cheng Yanqiu (1904-58) also premiered four of his classic Peking Opera shows, including *The Legend of Hongfu* and *A Red Mole*, at the theater from 1923 to 1927.

Both Mei and Cheng were known for their *dan* roles, that is, men who played female characters in Peking Opera pieces, because, at the time, women were forbidden to appear onstage.

The theater also produced one of the country's first female Peking Opera troupes, Chongyashu, in 1916. The 5,000-square-meter theater



also hosts exhibitions of historical photos. Visitors can try their hand at stage costumes and makeup with the help of professional performers.

The theater is now run by former TV host Ma Yingying and her company. Ma fell in love with Peking Opera after hosting a TV program about it. She has tried to give it a modern appeal by combining the ancient art form with contemporary elements, hoping to popularize it, especially among the younger generation.

Yegana Zeynalli, spouse of the ambassador of the Republic of the Azerbaijan to China, was one of the participants in the event on Monday. "China has an ancient history and rich culture, in which Peking Opera holds a special place. It is recognized as a pearl of Chinese culture," she says.

"Peking Opera is a window that allows us to look into Chinese history, music and culture, as well as offering a great opportunity to understand the life philosophy of the Chinese people."

She notes that Azerbaijan was a guest of honor at this year's Taihu World Cultural Forum, which was held in October in Bengbu.