

Agencies help students adapt to UK life

Support overcomes daily difficulties and puts parents' minds at ease

By ZHAO XINYING
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Christine Chiang still remembers the day she arrived at Newcastle upon Tyne airport in northern England one year ago.

The 19-year-old brought nine pieces of luggage with her.

"I would have had huge problems getting the bags to my college dormitory if there hadn't been a pickup service provided by an agency for students studying overseas.

"Although Newcastle airport is connected to the local subway system, I couldn't possibly have made it to the dormitory with nine large bags," said Chang, who comes from Taiwan. "A service agency like this is really helpful."

With Chinese students increasingly studying abroad,

parents are no longer so worried about the application process. Instead, more of them are concerned about their children's lives and studies overseas.

Against this backdrop, agencies that provide services and support for such students are attracting parents' attention.

Apart from pickup services, the agencies also help students who have just arrived in a foreign country to handle a series of everyday tasks.

Wang Yu, 24, from Beijing who is studying for a master's degree at Bristol University in southwest England, said she received a large pack of necessities from her agency soon after arriving in the UK last year, including pots, pans pillows and quilts.

"My service agency did a good job because it saved me a



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A group of Chinese students enjoy a wine-tasting course as part of learning about British culture and way of life.

lot of time and energy in buying these items myself. Many of my classmates, who are also international students, envied me," Wang said.

Jennifer Leong, co-founder of BeGo, a UK company that provides such services and support, said international students can easily become mired in different kinds of problems

when they first start living and studying abroad, especially without having their families or friends on hand.

Parents will naturally worry if their children abroad are swindled, become ill or get injured, are involved in traffic accidents or fail in their studies, Leong added.

"In this sense, agencies like

CHANGE

For international students who are planning to or have already arrived in the United Kingdom to study, BeGo, an education agency, provides the following services:

- Provides safety, healthcare, property and school insurance.
- Issues SIM cards to students before their departure.
- Professional drivers pick up students at the airport all day.
- Students will be given bedroom, kitchen and living essentials at their residence.
- Connects students with host families and gives them a proper UK cultural experience, including hiking with local Britons and offering cooking classes and relationship courses.
- The firm can also help students who are interested in horseback riding, wine tasting, sailing and learning British etiquette. It can help students join networking events with well-known local companies and institutes.
- The company also gives career training, guidance and personal coaching.

ours are experienced in handling such matters and we can help students to overcome their difficulties by using our local resources, which will ease their, and their parents', concern," she said.

The most appealing aspect of the service for students and parents is the guidance provided on students' studies and

career paths, and on experiencing British culture.

Chiang said she really appreciated living with a British family last year, which was arranged by her service agency.

"It was the first time I had lived with a British family, which helped me to adapt quickly to local life and culture," Chiang said.

US expat translates love of Mandarin into teaching post

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan
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If you speak to Benjamin K. Hammer on the phone, you would think you were talking to a person who had lived in a Chinese-language environment since childhood, as he uses Mandarin's four tones correctly.

But Hammer started learning Mandarin when he was a high school senior in San Jose, California. Since there were no Chinese-related courses at his high school in the 1990s, Hammer studied Mandarin at a community school's night classes.

"In the United States, people are curious about Oriental culture and history, such as the culture embodied in religions, kung fu and traditional Chinese medicine," Hammer said.

Hammer is one of the US citizens who show great interest in Chinese culture. In addition to Mandarin, he learned kung fu from a Chinese teacher when he was a student at American University in Washington. He got his Chinese name, Meng Weilong, from his kung fu teacher.

"I use the same family name with my kung fu teacher, as there is a saying in China that the teacher is like your father," Hammer said.

At American University, Hammer majored in international relations, and selected Chinese as his foreign language without any hesitation. Since then, Hammer spent more time and effort on learning Chinese than he did on his major.

"Chinese and English belong to different language families. Learning Chinese is a great challenge, but I do like the language.

"It's rare that a Western foreigner can speak very good Chinese. I believe Chinese, rather than Spanish, can make me stand out among my peers," he said.

Hammer received his master's degree in Chinese classical philology at Shandong University and spent four years getting his doctorate in the same major from Peking University.

Now the 37-year-old works as a teacher at the Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies of Shandong University in Jinan. He is also the assistant editor of the English version of the Journal of Chinese Humanities, an English-language offshoot of the well-known culture and sociology journal Wen Shi Zhe, created in 1951.

Hammer spends hours each day enriching his knowledge. His desk is covered with piles of books and paper. Two bookshelves besides his desk are stuffed with dictionaries and Chinese classical works such as *The Four Books*. The wall to the left of his desk is covered by a picture that shows the history of China.

"Being a teacher, you have to know your major very well, and then you have to have the ability to educate students," Hammer said. In his classes, Hammer discusses with students in Mandarin the translation of Chinese classical works into English.



Benjamin K. Hammer, a teacher at Shandong University



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Students from Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia take part in a sports event featuring traditional bamboo dancing at Guizhou University in Guizhou province on Sept 2.

Stronger ties with ASEAN a boon to Guizhou University

By ZHAO KAI in Guiyang,
LUO WANGSHU
and ZHOU WA in Beijing

Meas Bona started to teach himself Chinese in Cambodia when he was a boy. At that time, Chinese kung fu movies motivated him. "I really like Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee," he said, mimicking his idols' gestures in the movies.

At the age of 25, Bona has finally fulfilled his dream of coming to China as one of more than 400 international students at Guizhou University.

"More than half of the international students in our university come from Southeast Asian countries," said Zhang Chengxia, vice-dean of the College of International Education at Guizhou

University, adding that most of the international students received scholarships from the Chinese government.

Since 2008, when the first China-ASEAN Education Cooperation Week was held in Guizhou province, Guizhou University has started to provide financial aid to students in ASEAN countries. Before 2008, the number of international students from ASEAN countries was only about 50.

"The class of 2008, the first group to benefit from the education cooperation, has graduated. The majority of the students have returned to their homeland and received decent job offers," Zhang said. "They have become ambassadors of Chinese culture."

At the seventh China-

ASEAN Education Cooperation Week held in the first week of September, education officials from China and ASEAN countries called for more cooperation in higher education, encouraging more Chinese universities to reach out, conduct international cooperation programs and open overseas campuses in ASEAN countries.

Guizhou University is benefiting from the annual program, forging international cooperation with overseas universities. The number of international students from ASEAN countries has increased annually by 17 percent.

Zheng Qiang, president of the university, said the university focuses on teaching local development, aiming to build a foundation to train

international students from ASEAN countries.

He believed that the advantage of Guizhou University is the proximity of its location to, and ties with, ASEAN countries.

ASEAN countries are the main foreign trade partners of Guizhou province thanks to the China-ASEAN free trade zone.

Zheng said that as the bilateral economic cooperation between China and ASEAN countries has improved, the trust between China and ASEAN countries regarding young people should also be improved.

It should not be limited to talks between government officials and school leaders, but it should involve a mutual trust among schools, Zheng said.

Singapore school shaping China's decision-makers

By ZHAO XINYING
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More Chinese students are obtaining master's degrees at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University, and the institution is working to further strengthen its links with China.

About 190 Chinese master's graduates received their diplomas from NTU this month at a convocation ceremony in Beijing.

It was the ninth time the university had held convocations for its Chinese graduates — the first was in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, in 2006.

A total of 360 Chinese students graduated from NTU's seven master's programs and one fellowship program this year, and the subjects studied included managerial economics, public administration, financial engineering, education and technopreneurship.

Among them was Liu Xiya, a deputy at the National People's Congress and principal of Chongqing's Xiejiaowan Primary School.

She has already implemented curriculum reforms at the school, and said her studies at NTU broadened her horizon and introduced her to new ideas.

"Only a fifth of my courses at NTU were about specific teaching methods, and the rest were about education

philosophies and practices in other countries," said Liu, who earned a master's in education. "I learned a lot and benefited a lot."

Song Zhaohu, who earned a Master of Science in managerial economics, said the NTU courses provided a good mix of eastern and western cultures and had enhanced his strategic thinking.

Song, a program manager at an aerospace science and technology corporation, said:

"Our company requires an internationalized management team that is familiar with the aerospace industry as it is experiencing a strategic transformation.

"The theoretical knowledge and practical skills I gained from NTU are really helpful in my work."

The graduates included 50 Chinese officials who studied managerial economics and public administration.

NTU President Bertil

Andersson said the university's China-based graduates are growing into an important and influential group of decision-makers with established ties to Singapore.

"Since 1992, NTU has provided training to more than 16,000 senior Chinese officials in different areas, such as public administration, economic management, urban planning and the management of higher education institutions," he added.

Fudan's iLab program pays off

By WANG HONGYI
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Fudan University's School of Management and the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation recently agreed to continue a project that helps Chinese MBA students gain more real-world business experience.

The project is based on the school's MBA iLab program, which helps Fudan students apply their theories in management to real business and social environments.

Twenty-five MBA students participated in the project. With their knowledge in business and management, they provided ideas for five Finnish enterprises entering China's market looking for business partners.

"Participating in this project is a big challenge full of rewarding experiences. This project helps us know how to complete a real project as a team and how to play the right role to contribute to the team," said Wu Zhengqi, an MBA student.

Wu and his iLab team helped BioGTS, a solid waste treatment company, explore the Chinese market by setting up a comprehensive view of the Chinese market. It advised BioGTS about how it should proceed and gain access to the demanding Chinese market.

The team checked existing waste treatment companies in China that the Finnish company could cooperate with and analyzed different waste treatment technologies in the country.

"We also analyzed potential clients according to their different business models and evaluated each market. The team provided BioGTS with some potential clients during the project. One of the potential clients has now become a partner for BioGTS," Wu said.

"This project is quite technical compared with other projects, so we need to read more professional materials and conduct more background research. Thanks to this experience, we have had a very deep understanding of this unique business," Wu added.

"With the help of the faculty mentor, our team worked with the marketing methodologies trying to deliver concrete results to our clients," said MBA student Chen Qingying, who led a separate team.

Chen's team helped Lumene Oy, a skin care company, look for opportunities to expand its operations in China.

"Through this project, we have applied methodologies gained in our marketing courses to real business opportunities. And I think we gained a better understanding of the Chinese cosmetic and skin care industry," Chen said.

"This is a win-win cooperation. The project will not only help Finnish enterprises better understand the characteristics of the market in China, but also help our school cultivate future business leaders," said Lu Xiongwen, dean of Fudan University's management school.