

YOUTH

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Character forming

Artist creates comics for Paralympians, **Zhao Ruixue** reports in Jinan.



While athletes were racing to realize their dreams during the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympics, Ding Jiao, a physically challenged artist in Jinan, Shandong province, kept a close watch on them, hoping to capture their happiest and most inspiring moments through her comics.

Yet, it was not the first time that the artist focused on the Paralympic athletes.

Ding, who works for Expo Huachuang Animation Media Co, created a series of 96 comics for the Chinese athletes who had participated in the Tokyo Summer Paralympics last year.

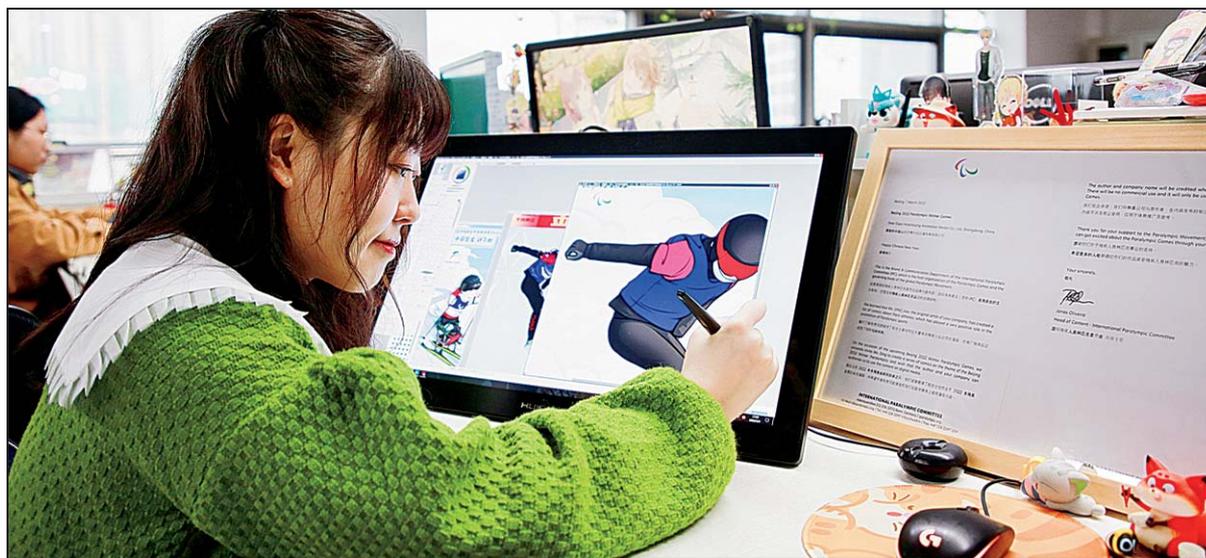
These comics were popular and collected by, and forwarded to, a lot of athletes, with views surpassing 100 million on social media, according to the company.

On March 2, the company received a letter from the International Paralympic Committee, inviting Ding to create a comic series for the Beijing Winter Paralympics.

"We learned that Ding Jiao, the original artist of your company, has created a lot of comics about Paralympic athletes and has played a very positive role in the promotion of Paralympic sports," the letter says. "We hope more people will get excited about the Paralympic Games through your work"

The 31-year-old Ding says: "I'm physically challenged, so I know how hard it is for physically challenged people to fight for their dreams."

Ding recalls when she watched on TV Chinese athletes coming into sight at the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games last year, tears coursed down her face.



Ding Jiao captures the Paralympic spirit through her comics. Her best-known works include Shuey Rhon Rhon (top), the mascot of the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympics, and Liu Zixu (below), China's first gold medalist at the Games. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Every Chinese athlete was smiling. I was deeply moved by their positive attitude and had a strong desire to capture that moment with my pen," Ding says.

She spent around five hours drawing a comic piece, depicting the Chinese athletes at the opening ceremony.

The work was posted by Zhou Jiamin, the flag bearer of Chinese team, to her Sina Weibo account, which encouraged Ding to continue creating more comics for Chinese athletes.

Every time she drew an athlete, she watched the athlete's race repeatedly.



She added a pair of wings to a drawing of Lu Dong, who won the swimming championship for women in the Tokyo Paralympics.

"Lu has no arms, but she is like an angel. She can fly freely," says Ding.

Ding spent around four hours creating one comic work. She finished 96 comics within one month.

"I worked overtime, but it was worth it, especially when I read the messages left by the athletes and their relatives," she says.

Her comics have earned her friendships.

A carrot-shaped hair accessory she often wears is a present from Xue

Juan, a gold medalist at the Tokyo Paralympics.

"It was really a surprise for me," Ding says.

Ding was busy creating comics for athletes at the Beijing Winter Paralympics. Officially invited by the IPC, she hopes to present more works.

"I'd like to create a comic through which viewers can feel the athlete's positive attitude that encourages people to go on and enjoy life," she says.

Ding had paraplegia due to a disease in her spine when she was 2 years old.

With the help of her parents, she

did rehabilitation exercises at home after surgery when she was 3.

"I was able to stand up and walk on my own when I was 10, although not as well as normal people," says Ding, adding that her parents were always there to encourage and help her.

"It was really hard for me to do the exercises, day after day, at home. That is why I am able to feel how hard it is for physically challenged people to make such achievements in sports," she says.

While staying at home, Ding studied primary school textbooks on her own and got to know the outside world by watching TV. She was inspired by a drawing program on TV.

"Following the TV show, I drew a sunflower which impressed my mother. She said I had special talent in drawing," says Ding.

Ding's parents then bought her various drawing materials and registered her for drawing classes. All these laid a foundation for her to develop her skill.

Ding was able to go to school when she was 16. She was admitted to a vocational school to study comics when she was 22 and started to work at the company after three years of study.

She is now a director in charge of the initial phase of an animation project — to create animated images.

"Green is the color of growing grass. In my view, green represents strength and a positive attitude," she says about a green sweater she is wearing.

"When being positive, every day is beautiful."

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Academic partnership offers students best of both worlds

By **WANG HAIJIN**
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Surrey International Institute at Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, in Dalian, Northeast China, is demonstrating how open cooperation among educational institutions in China and the United Kingdom can play a key role in promoting diplomatic relations between the two countries.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the UK. According to Max Lu, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Surrey, open cooperation between educational institutions including universities is a vital part of open and sustainable diplomatic relations between states.

"Open, high-quality and productive cooperation between universities has historically been — and remains today — an effective catalyst to build and guarantee long-lasting beneficial bilateral relations," Lu said. "Students and researchers who have undertaken opportunities to study and work abroad become the best ambassadors for such collaborations."

"In this respect, SII plays an incredibly important role in the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the UK, by providing high-quality education to future leaders," Lu added.

In 2007, SII was established by the University of Surrey and DUFE to provide China-based students with a peerless opportunity to undertake and graduate with a dual degree that represents the best of both educational systems in China and Britain.

The institute, which will mark its 15th anniversary this year, has become the centerpiece of the University of Surrey's China-based transnational education. The Sino-foreign joint cooperative program is highly regarded by both Chinese and UK quality assurance agencies, Lu said.

"With more than 1,390 students currently spread across a foundation year, and three further years of study, SII offers young minds a formidable opportunity to undertake highly employable degree pathways, with



Clockwise from top: Surrey International Institute at Dongbei University of Finance and Economics plays an important role in promoting relations between China and the UK. Students take part in a sports event at SII. A teacher exchanges ideas with students at SII. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cutting-edge teaching," Lu said.

Quality education

"DUFE and the University of Surrey are widely recognized as highly reputable universities by the public," said Shi Da, dean of SII. "Being one of the largest schools in DUFE and an overseas international institute of the University of Surrey, SII shares the strengths of both universities. Students, here at SII, can enjoy various resources not only in academic areas but also in personal develop-

ment. They learn and grow in a more international way, which makes them more competitive in a fast-changing world."

Run in conjunction with DUFE, SII offers three separate dual degree programs: international business management, international tourism management, and accounting and finance.

According to Gary Rivers, dean of operations at SII, the institute's courses were designed to better serve students' varied demands and give them flexibility to consider their

future paths. A stable team with a good understanding of transnational education management, involving members from both parties, has been established.

"Our curricula designs have been restructured to accommodate full-time internships to maximize opportunities for a smooth transition into local employment or provide needed time for postgraduate entry test preparations," said Rivers. "Similarly, students who transfer to the UoS' UK campus for their third year of studies can transfer back to SII for their final

year and take advantage of these special arrangements or apply and compete to take a one-year job placement in the UK before deciding on the location of their final year of studies."

The UoS' full set of digital tools, as experienced on the UK campus, are available at SII. This includes a high-end virtual learning environment, online library facilities, various communications tools and specialized module packages as needed. Assessment submissions and marking are also done online, Rivers said.

According to Rivers, SII also has

one of the most comprehensive English for Special Purposes programs within the curricula for all business programs comprising 10 modules and covering more than 500 hours of tuition in the first year of study.

"We keep oral English language classes at low teacher to student ratios, around 1:10, and the other English classes around 1:20. Both universities consider this important to support the jump from high school English language learning to being able to fully function in an English-speaking university setting," Rivers said.

Over the past 15 years, SII has been committed to obtaining relevant educational accreditations, such as that of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants for the accounting and finance program, to better support students' career paths.

"Our institute, apart from being subject to both Chinese and British quality audit requirements, has achieved accreditation issued by the China Education Association for International Exchange," Rivers said. "With a diverse population of teachers from many countries and foreign qualifications, students are exposed to different perspectives, accents and advice."

Future development

SII will continue to enhance the quality of the education it provides by introducing more programs and improving research capacity through the partnership, according to Lu.

From 2022, there will be new staffing arrangements, and the launch of a truly exciting collaborative development: a joint research center will be built and shared between SII and the University of Surrey. This initiative will add new research-intensive staff to both sides, focusing on important developments in industry and academia, including, for example, sustainable tourism, digital entrepreneurship, block-chain and fintech.

"These research-led activities will produce high-quality, co-authored publications connecting SII and the UoS, and build the foundation for a new PhD program for a new generation of postgraduate students in both Dalian and Guildford," Lu said.