

# YOUTH



A girl tries her hand at writing Chinese calligraphic characters on an electronic screen during the national science and technology week in Beijing last May. CHEN XIAOGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Keeping in touch with writing tradition

A renowned senior calligrapher hails practicing Chinese characters on apps

TAIPEI — “Every day when I go out, I carry an iPad and a digital pencil with me,” says Chang Ping-huang, a calligrapher from Taiwan, when introducing his new toolkit for practicing Chinese calligraphy. Chang is best known in Taiwan as the host of a TV program that aired back in the 1980s when, each day he would teach the audience to write one Chinese character with ink and brush. The show aired for two decades, and he taught viewers nearly 7,000 characters. With the advent of the digital era,

the calligrapher and educator is marrying modern technology with the ancient writing art. Chang, who has been a professor of Chinese language at Tamkang University for many years, says he now finds that students tend to spend much more time on computers and cellphones than writing on paper, and even less time on calligraphy. “It was quite a blow to me,” says Chang. “So I started to think about how to use technology to kindle interest in calligraphy among young people.”

So Chang learned to use a computer and worked with the department of information engineering at Tamkang University. Six years after they began working on the initiative in 2001, they came up with a system they call “e-pen”. However, this system was not perfect. With a computer and a touchpad, the movement of the strokes could be captured, but the eyes had to focus on the screen instead of the hands. It did not feel like writing calligraphy. Then, thanks to the tablet computer, an updated “e-pen” was born. Now, equipped with pressure sen-

sors, the tablet detects the tiniest details of each stroke of the stylus and visualizes it on the screen in real time. What’s even better is that people can now look at the screen and their hands at the same time.

The new “e-pen” app was launched in September and soon topped Taiwan’s weekly download rankings. Simultaneously, it has also become popular on the mainland.

The e-pen app is for anyone with an interest in learning Chinese characters, says Chang, adding that it is growing in popularity in the United States, Japan, Canada and South Korea.

When practicing Chinese calligraphy, traditionally, people had to take time to prepare the ink, brush and paper.

So Chang says that with this convenient digital toolkit, people who used to have little interest or were not that willing to learn will be able to take the first step into the world of calligraphy.

“We did not digitalize Chinese calligraphy to make the brush and ink obsolete,” says Chang, pointing to scrolls of calligraphy works hanging on the walls in his studio in Taipei.

For Chang’s calligraphy class, he combines traditional teaching methods with modern technology, and the students’ spirits are much higher.

Chang decided to be an educator for Chinese calligraphy very early on.

When he was a child, Chang had very poor handwriting, and it was only the encouragement from his teacher that set him on the path of calligraphy.

Since then, he has been a keen promoter of this art, teaching on TV and by correspondence and taking part in various activities to pass the tradition forward.

He also says that he is impressed by the efforts to promote Chinese calligraphy on the mainland, where many students get to learn about calligraphy in classrooms.

To keep the tradition alive, Chang hopes more young people across the Taiwan Straits will learn more about calligraphy with the help of new technology, and maybe even fall in love with it.

XINHUA

## Body donation more acceptable among youth

LANZHOU — With the New Year approaching, many young people are buying gifts, but Geng Yingying is thinking about a serious subject — death. A healthy 21-year-old student at Northwest Normal University in Gansu province, Geng signed documents to donate her body for medical research and education because she wants to leave a legacy to the world after her death. She first learned about body donation through a volunteer activity in 2016. Not long after that, one of her friends died in an accident.

“I realized life is vulnerable and I wanted to make it more meaningful,” she says.

Geng is among a growing number of young Chinese who have registered as voluntary body donors in recent years.

The number of registered volunteers for body and organ donations was 2,610 in Gansu by Nov 20, compared with just 80 in 2014, according to the statistics released by the local Red Cross Society.

The Beijing arm of the Red Cross reported that, by 2017 over 21,100 people applied to donate their cadavers since the city started a body donation registry in 1999. Over 2,600 donations have been used for medical research and education in that time.

Zhan Haibing, a postgraduate student in the School of Public Health at Lanzhou University, refers to cadavers as “silent teachers”: “They have played an irreplaceable role in medical education and research. They give medical students a real understanding of the human body.”

China’s body donation program started in the early 1980s. The Chinese have traditionally held that a person’s body should remain intact because they believe there is an afterlife, and they see a traditional burial as an obligation of filial piety toward their elders.

Voluntary body donation in China needs consent from an executor who must be a direct relative of the donor.

Geng’s decision to donate her body was strongly opposed by her parents, but she convinced them to support her. Her brother even signed as her executor.

As the laws and the overall environment for donation continue to improve, and people’s attitudes to funeral customs gradually change, body donations have become more acceptable.

Liang Jiali, another college student who registered to donate her body to science, says her parents opposed her decision at first.

“I patiently explained to them my reasons and shared the stories of other donors. They finally understood me. And my mother even decided to become a body donor too,” says Liang.

Meanwhile, members of the public are also showing more respect and understanding to donors. Last year, the Gansu Red Cross Society set up a memorial park for donors in Lanzhou.

In the park stands a monument on which all the donors’ names are engraved. Now, people visit the park on special occasions to pay tribute to these donors.

Meanwhile, many Chinese universities are advocating “life education” and asking students to join in volunteer activities in hospitals, funeral parlors, nursing homes and Red Cross societies to better understand the meaning of life.

Geng has also signed documents to donate her corneas. Her story has inspired many others to make the same choice.

“I know it requires courage,” she says. “But if you can understand the real meaning of life, which is about giving back, you’ll find it’s not that difficult to make the decision.”

XINHUA

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