

Parents feel loss as more children go abroad

'Empty nest' families discover ways to bring more happiness into life

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

When retiree Ren Chunqing's daughter went to Japan to study two years ago, they communicated via video and telephone almost every day.

"I missed her very much in the first month, worrying that she couldn't adapt to the new environment, couldn't entirely understand Japanese and that the teaching method was different in foreign universities," said 51-year-old Ren, who is from Shanxi province.

Her daughter Guo Jiao left in October 2012 to study for a three-and-a-half year biology PhD at the University of Tokyo.

Ren said she only felt relieved about a month after her daughter left, when Guo reported her studies and life in Japan were going smoothly.

"My daughter is very independent and can look after herself very well — my worry was really unnecessary," Ren said.

Ren said she also felt "very alone and frustrated in the beginning".

She visited her daughter last year and stayed for about a month, but did not like Japan.

"There was the language barrier and I couldn't talk to anyone except my daughter. So most of time I stayed in her apartment, which was very boring. I had no sense of security," said Ren, whose husband, 54, is an ENT doctor.

Since her return from Japan, Ren has kept busy — finding new interests and renewed purpose in her life.

She often sings and dances with a group and studies photography at a local community college for seniors. She also travels occasionally and spends more

time with her husband.

"I am busier than before. My life has become colorful," Ren said with a smile.

Ren is just one of the increasing number of "empty nest" Chinese families, in which the parents can face difficulties after their only child leaves to study overseas.

The number of Chinese students overseas reached 413,900 in 2013, an increase of 3.58 percent from the previous year, figures from the Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange under the Ministry of Education showed.

The Education International Cooperation Group forecast the number of overseas students would reach 500,000 this year, which would be the seventh consecutive year of growth.

Sun Hongmo, the director of the China Center for International Educational Exchange, said the number of students who head overseas for studies at a younger age has also increased.

Last year, about 45 percent of Chinese students overseas were enrolled in master's and PhD programs in the United States, and about 40 percent were US undergraduates under the age of 18, Sun said.

Hao Meng, a consultant from the Education International Cooperation Group, said the number of students studying at elementary schools and high schools is increasing.

Because of this trend, many expect an increase in empty nest families in China as more young students head abroad.

Need to adjust

Counselors and educators suggest that many parents can



People whose children have left them to work and study in other regions or abroad get together to enjoy a dinner party organized by a community in Wuxi, Jiangsu province. More young Chinese are studying overseas each year.

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feel lost and suffer psychological and emotional stress after their children go abroad.

They need to adjust to a new way of life — sometimes shifting their attention from child to spouse.

"It is inevitable that the parents feel lonely and frustrated after their children leave home, but they should learn how to make psychological adjustments, look for new interests and find happiness in daily life," said Jia Rongtao, a family education counselor and chairman of the Rongtao education group.

Jia said such parents can participate in recreational activities such as painting, calligraphy, playing the piano and singing, to enrich their lives and overcome loneliness.

"Society also needs to be more concerned about empty nest families. Communities can organize various activities and give psychological guidance and support when parents encounter emotional problems."

Zhang Jing, 27, has been studying in Hong Kong part time for a master's degree. She also works at a local research institution. This is the fourth year she has been away from her hometown in Taiyuan, the capital of Shanxi province.

Zhang phones her parents every day and asks for advice when she faces difficulties.

"I think Hong Kong is a city full of opportunities and I will continue to work in the region," Zhang said.

"I want to stay together with

my parents and have them live in Hong Kong as they become older, but I need to consider economic factors. I sometimes blame myself for not being able to be with them."

Zhang's mother, surnamed Liu, 54, works as a pharmacist in a hospital in Taiyuan. She told China Daily she was "very proud" when her daughter went to Hong Kong to study, but the longer her daughter stayed there, the more lonely she felt. Liu's husband, 53, is a businessman.

"I feel very rejuvenated when she comes back for vacation. I am willing to cook different kinds of food for her but, when she returns to Hong Kong, I have no interest in cooking and eat randomly. Life seems to be lacking something for me."

Liu goes to Hong Kong almost twice a year to see her daughter. She insists that she will support her daughter's choice "to develop her career and life in Hong Kong, and hope she can work happily and realize her dream".

Respect and support

Xu Yan, a professor from the school of psychology at Beijing Normal University, told China Daily that parents should care for their children "moderately" and not interfere with their personal lives.

"Their excessive concerns and worries might affect their children, overburden their children and even make them feel disgusted. This can affect the healthy development of the children," Xu said.

413,900

Chinese students

studied overseas in 2013, an increase of 3.58 percent from the previous year.

Xu said parents should not let children with low self-control go abroad because they may go astray and lose themselves when faced with temptations in foreign places.

"Furthermore, the parents should shift their attention to themselves and their spouse. Before their children go abroad, the whole attention of a family is often focused on the children. But the parents need to make a change, spend more time interacting with their spouse and care more about each other, to fill the vacuum of feelings when their children leave home."

Xu suggested that such parents respect and support their children's choice, giving suggestions and ideas if necessary, to let the children grow independently.

But there are also parents who are not affected by their children's absence.

A businesswoman surnamed Tao in Langfang, Hebei province, sent her 22-year-old daughter and 19-year-old son to Canada last year. She does not worry about them at all.

"It is a good opportunity for them to practice their different abilities. Studying abroad is their choice. I don't force them to do anything," said Tao, whose husband is a businessman.

She said her daughter often misses home and returns home at holidays.

"Their living environment in Canada is also safe. My life is almost as normal as before and I am busy with my work."

autospecial

African business drives truck maker into developed countries

By WANG QIAN
wangqian2@chinadaily.com.cn

China National Heavy-Duty Truck Group Co signed a \$100-million deal for a new assembly plant to produce trucks in Lagos, Nigeria.

The nation's leading heavy-duty truck maker hopes the project will give its business in Africa a further boost.

The new knocked-down assembly line is a joint investment established by the Shandong-based company, also known as Sinotruk, and Africa's industrial giant Dangote Group.

When completed, the plant is expected to produce 10,000 heavy-duty trucks a year.

The deal is part of a raft of agreements due to be signed off between China and Africa during Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Ethiopia, Nigeria, Angola and Kenya from May 4 to 11. It is Li's first visit to Africa since taking office in 2013.

Li and Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, president of Nigeria, attended the deal signing ceremony in the Abuja Presidential Palace on Wednesday morning.

"The African market is one of the most significant parts of our 'go-global' strategy. We have long been committed to developing close business ties with our partners in the continent and contributing more to the economic growth of African countries," Ma Chunji, chairman of Sinotruk, told China Daily.

Backed by the China-Africa Development Fund, the new assembly plant will add a sharp competitive edge to Sinotruk by saving transport costs and also create more jobs for local workers and transfer skills to them, said Ma.



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MA CHUNJI
CHAIRMAN OF SINOTRUK

Established in 1956, Sinotruk was a pioneer in the development of heavy-duty truck manufacturing in China. The nation's first wholly self-manufactured heavy truck rolled off its assembly line in 1960.

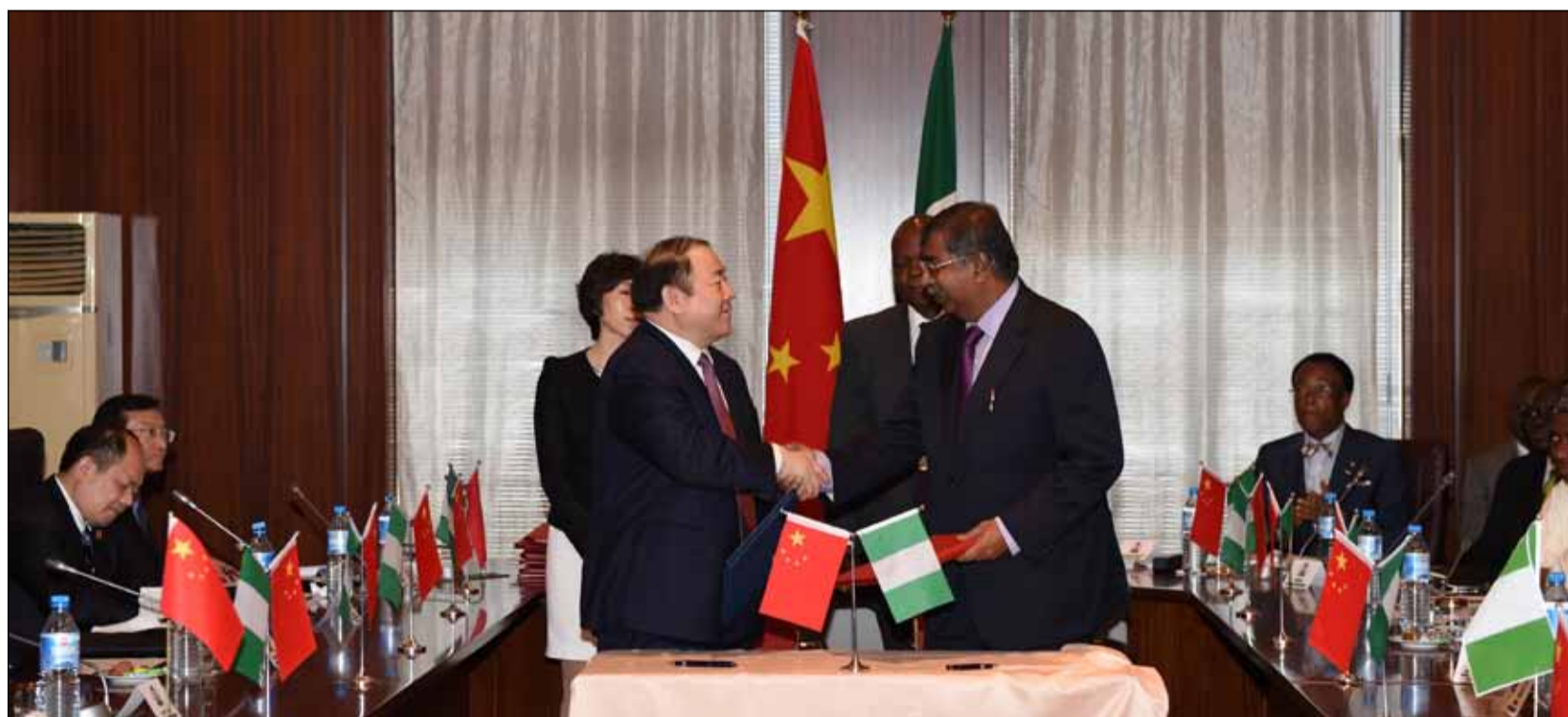
The company's product portfolio includes heavy, middle and light-duty trucks, passenger cars, special purpose vehicles and construction machinery.

The product lineup for heavy-duty trucks alone has grown from one series and 78 models in 2001 to nine series and more than 3,000 models today.

Ma said the company has held the biggest share of the domestic heavy-duty trucks market for years.

The company exports products to more than 96 countries and regions and has six overseas branches, more than 400 service centers and 300 parts dealers across the world.

It secured export orders



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Representatives of China National Heavy-Duty Truck Group Co and Africa's Dangote Group signed a \$100-million deal on Wednesday for an assembly plant that is designed to produce 10,000 heavy-duty trucks a year in Lagos, Nigeria.

for more than 24,500 vehicles last year, making it the largest exporter of heavy trucks in the country for nine years in a row, according to the company.

"Acknowledged to be one of the fastest-growing regions in the world, Africa has long been the most important of our overseas markets," said Ma, noting that 40 of its 96 exporting markets are in Africa.

More than 32,000 vehicles were sold in African countries and regions since 2011.

Of these, more than 10,000 were in Nigeria, which has the largest economy and population in Africa.

The vehicles were well received by local customers and used in a wide range of sectors, including transportation, infrastructure construction, environmental protection, as

well as defense equipment, Ma said.

Liu Wei, vice-general manager of Sinotruk, attributed the company's strong performance in Africa to its humanized and high-quality products, sound after-sales services and marketing strategies.

"Africa's regulations, climate and driving habits are different from those in China, so it is important for vehicle makers to make products that suit local conditions," Liu said.

"Our return on investment from Sinotruk vehicles has been excellent. The vehicles have performed exceedingly well on all parameters," said Edmund Okwu, general manager of Richbon Ltd Co, a Sinotruk dealer in Nigeria.

"Their products are made for African roads. They have an

advantage over other companies because of lower prices, high performance, fuel efficiency and simpler maintenance procedures," he said.

Sinotruk has established a range of long-term business partners in Africa, one of which is the Nigerian-based Dangote Group, Africa's leading manufacturer and supplier of cement, steel and petroleum.

Aliko Dangote, founder and president of the group, is the richest man in Africa, according to the most recent annual ranking of the world's richest in Forbes magazine.

Since partnering with Dangote group, Sinotruk has delivered more than 6,000 vehicles to the client.

Last July, the two companies signed a contract for the deliv-

ery of 1,700 heavy trucks and 1,700 semi-trailers, which are expected to be used to expand Dangote's extensive nationwide distribution network.

Sinotruk is expecting its performance in Africa to provide momentum for expansion into other developed markets like Europe and the US.

To achieve this aim, the company has built technical partnerships with major international brands including Steyr in Austria and Mann in Germany.

In 2009, Europe's leading heavy commercial vehicle maker MAN SE, owner of the Mann brand, bought a 25 percent share in Sinotruk Hong Kong and signed an agreement to transfer some advanced technologies to the Chinese truck maker.

By teaming up with MAN, Sinotruk has improved its own research and development capabilities, which helped the company penetrate key global markets.

The jointly developed product, the Sitruk series of heavy-duty truck, was launched last March and has become one of the company's best sellers.

"The new model is expected to rival foreign high-end brands in the domestic market and help Sinotruk extend its sales network to developed countries," said Zhang Xiaodong, general manager of the company's sales department.

The company's exports are expected to account for 20 percent of its total revenue in a few years, making it a top player in the sector worldwide, Zhang projected.