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THE

HUMAN COMMONWEALTH PORTRAITS



THE HUMAN COMMONWEALTH PORTRAITS × OVAL

Youth in Motion

Eight young leaders on work, exchange and the worlds they want to build.

ASIA-PACIFIC YOUTH CULTURE FOUNDATION

IN COLLABORATION WITH OVAL CHINA · OVAL KOREA · OVAL JAPAN

THE HUMAN COMMONWEALTH PORTRAITS

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PUBLICATION FILE

THE HUMAN COMMONWEALTH PORTRAITS

A portrait magazine documenting a new generation of young people across Asia through leadership, work, exchange and public life.

MASTHEAD

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Profiles are edited from participant submissions. Environmental portraits use AI-assisted image editing.

Across borders, the work begins with attention.

What can one young person do today?
The answer is no longer symbolic.
It is structural.



01

NAME	Chen Shijie
AGE	22
STUDY	Tianjin University · Sapienza University of Rome

“Living young, wild and free.”

PORTRAIT / TIANJIN · ROME

Chen Shijie

Engineer, exchange student, and Vice President of OVAL China

Engineering gave her a language for systems. Rome gave her a wider map of the people who live inside them.

Across disciplines

At Tianjin University, Chen studies Smart Grid Information Engineering, building a technical foundation in electrical systems while deliberately looking beyond the boundaries of her major. University became a place to test several versions of herself at once: engineer, organiser, translator and traveller. Rather than treating those roles as distractions, she sees them as different ways of understanding how systems work - and whom they are meant to serve.

A semester in Rome

An exchange at Sapienza University of Rome placed her inside a new academic and cultural rhythm. She studied with classmates from different countries, learned to navigate daily life far from home and volunteered with the Erasmus Student Network. Supporting Cocktail Nights and other social events showed her that international exchange is built through ordinary gestures: welcoming a newcomer, beginning a conversation and making an unfamiliar city feel temporarily like home.

Work behind the arena

Her engineering life is most visible in the work audiences rarely see. With the Santroll Peiyang Robot Team, she joined the mechanical group responsible for the sentry robot and radar station, assembling, debugging and maintaining equipment while the machines took the arena. The team won first prize in the RMUC 2024 Eastern Division and later second prize at the national finals in Shenzhen - an achievement grounded in patient preparation behind the spectacle.

Youth across borders

As Vice President of OVAL China, Chen helps students from China, Japan and Korea work across different habits and expectations. In 2026 she joined the International Business Contest in Tokyo. Earlier, a United Nations training programme and ZERI traineeship had asked her to move among translation, research, course design, reports, graphics and proposals on sustainability. Together, these experiences made her technical education feel less like a single career track and more like a platform for international action.

ENGINEERING EXCHANGE SUSTAINABILITY



02

NAME Huang Zilu

AGE 19

STUDY The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen

"Treat others the way you want to be treated."

PORTRAIT / SHENZHEN · CAMBRIDGE · TOKYO

Huang Zilu

Global business student and cross-cultural competitor

A first journey abroad at sixteen became an invitation to see business, service and responsibility through a wider lens.

First flight outward

At sixteen, Huang travelled alone to a Cambridge summer school. The practical challenges - finding his way, speaking up and building friendships without familiar support - mattered as much as the classroom. The experience widened his sense of what education could be and turned cross-cultural curiosity into a lasting habit. He returned to China wanting to examine business and society from more than one national perspective.

Learning through service

Volunteer teaching in an under-resourced district of Zhejiang made uneven development immediate rather than theoretical. He began asking what responsibility his generation carries when opportunity is distributed so differently. The question also recalled an earlier family book donation to a suburban primary school. Years later, one child who had studied there became his high-school classmate and was admitted to Peking University - a reminder that the influence of a small act may emerge long after it is made.

Competing in Tokyo

At the 2026 OVAL International Business Contest, Huang joined teammates from Japan and Korea and competed among more than one hundred young participants. The week demanded more than a polished proposal: the team had to reconcile different assumptions about markets, public responsibility and the social problems worth solving. For him, international business became less about speaking fluent English than learning how to build a shared frame of reference.

The team before the score

Football, basketball and table tennis have been a parallel education. Sport taught him to read the room, accept an unglamorous role and keep working when a team is out of rhythm. He carried those habits into the IVEY High School Case Competition, where he became a 2024 finalist, and into university life at CUHK-Shenzhen. After graduation, he hopes to study marketing in Hong Kong or Singapore and eventually take on work that connects Asian markets and communities.



03

NAME Ruijie Wang

AGE 21

STUDY Beijing Foreign Studies University · Hanyang University

“Language is not only about expression, but about understanding one another.”

PORTRAIT / BEIJING · SEOUL

Ruijie Wang

Language learner, cultural communicator, and CFO of OVAL

For Ruijie, Korean was never the destination. It became a bridge into societies, stories and the relationships that shape Asia.

Language meets life

At Beijing Foreign Studies University, Korean began as an academic subject and gradually became a way of entering another society. An exchange at Hanyang University completed that shift. Through classes, daily conversations and travel across Seoul, Busan, Gyeongju and Gangneung, vocabulary acquired places, gestures and memories. The experience taught Ruijie that fluency is not simply accurate expression; it is the patience to notice what another person means within a different cultural context.

Giving stories a wider voice

In an international communication project on Northeast China’s ice-and-snow culture, she led a team exploring how a local Chinese story could travel without losing its texture. Translation alone was not enough. The team had to decide which images, explanations and points of entry would make sense to audiences without the same background. The project won third prize, but its deeper lesson was editorial: communication succeeds when it creates recognition, not when it merely transfers information.

From participation to leadership

Ruijie moved from class responsibilities to student organisations, eventually serving as Head of External Relations at Asia College. Event planning and coordination turned leadership from an abstract quality into a sequence of practical duties: answering messages, negotiating expectations and keeping people aligned when plans change. At OVAL, first in the Program Department and now as CFO, she applies those lessons while working with university students across China, Japan and Korea.

Toward area studies

Her interests now extend beyond language toward society, culture and international relations. The Social Work Award she received at BFSU reflects a path built through participation rather than a single dramatic achievement. She wants to continue toward area studies, using language as a foundation and direct experience as a corrective - observing both the connections that bind Asian societies together and the differences that resist easy generalisation.

LANGUAGE AREA STUDIES COMMUNICATION



04

NAME Taewoo Kim

AGE 25

STUDY Yonsei University · University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

"When asked for 100, give 102. The more you give, the more comes back to you."

PORTRAIT / SEOUL · LOS ANGELES · BARCELONA

Taewoo Kim

Data strategist, venture builder, and OVAL IBC finalist

Taewoo likes the problem hiding inside a trusted number—and the extra two percent that turns analysis into action.

Who should pay?

At OVAL IBC 2026, Taewoo's team had one week to produce a business plan, prototype and English-language pitch for a travel-companion service for older adults. One question kept returning: who should pay? Charging isolated seniors seemed to undermine the idea. The team reframed local governments as the customer because communities also benefit when older residents reconnect. A worst-case sensitivity analysis - his habitual extra two percent - helped the proposal hold together. They placed third among sixteen finalist teams.

The report was answering twice

During a data internship at Eventim USA in Los Angeles, a weekly sales report repeatedly came out slightly wrong. The obvious suspect was faulty code. Taewoo returned to the raw tables and discovered that revenue was being counted on two calendars: the day a ticket was ordered and the day it entered the accounts. Nothing was technically broken; the report was answering two questions at once. It remains his favourite kind of problem - an assumption hidden inside a number everyone already trusts.

Another way into the room

He wanted to attend Mobile World Congress Barcelona but could not afford to go as a visitor, so he applied to work there. When the SK Telecom booth suddenly needed interpreters, he volunteered and spent the day learning the technology of fifteen AI start-ups. Over the week, he interpreted more than ten meetings with international buyers. The difficult part was not English but changing the explanation for engineers, investors and passers-by. His work earned an invitation to return the following year.

Better models need a path

As a Korea-U.S. Advanced Technology Youth Exchange Scholar, Taewoo studied why organisations ignore AI models that have already proved accurate. The answer often lay between the analyst who trusts the result and the manager who must approve it. Better technology, he concluded, still needs an organisational path. That insight links his mathematics training, venture management and service in the Republic of Korea Air Force, where reliability was built through repeated checks and quiet responsibility rather than dramatic moments.



05

NAME Xiao Yao

AGE 19

STUDY Guangdong University of Finance & Economics

“Bridging cultures through communication, and turning knowledge into real-world impact.”

PORTRAIT / GUANGZHOU · TOKYO

Xiao Yao

Taxation student, broadcaster, and youth communicator

She moves between the microphone, the policy question and the international team—always asking how knowledge becomes useful to someone else.

Two roles, one week

At OVAL IBC 2026, Xiao entered the same week as both a competitor and a member of the event staff. She had to contribute to a business plan while keeping operational responsibilities moving around it. At moments, the double role felt unsustainable. Yet the pressure became an education in priorities, communication and recovery. Finishing second mattered, but the more durable lesson was that growth rarely arrives through a flawless performance; it comes through reflection, adjustment and the willingness to acknowledge where one is not yet strong.

Language as a living tool

Volunteering at the 139th Canton Fair placed her in a fully English-speaking environment with international guests moving quickly through one of China’s largest trade events. Classroom fluency was only the beginning. She had to listen for intention, respond without a script and build trust across unfamiliar accents and expectations. The experience sparked a deeper curiosity about how markets connect - and showed her that language becomes meaningful when it helps another person feel understood.

A sweet relay

As station director of the university radio service, Xiao oversaw programmes, events, scripts and public hosting. One assignment brought those skills into contact with a local economic problem: Nansha farmers were facing an oversupply of black sugarcane. She reported on her university’s purchase and distribution campaign, a 'sweet relay' linking local government, the campus and agricultural producers. The story changed her understanding of media from performance into public connection and showed how youth voices can support regional communities.

Complexity over one right answer

A tax risk-control competition unsettled her habit of searching for one correct solution. Real cases contained competing responsibilities and imperfect information. A research project on the low-altitude economy reinforced the point: emerging industries rarely arrive with ready-made textbook answers. As a taxation student, Xiao now tries to slow down, examine several sides of a decision and connect professional knowledge with the way policy and business activity shape ordinary lives.

TAXATION MEDIA PUBLIC ISSUES



06

NAME Yuanhao (Julian) Zhou

AGE 25

STUDY The University of Sydney · Shanghai Jiao Tong University

"Connecting the world through youth leadership and creating meaningful change through action."

PORTRAIT / SYDNEY · SHANGHAI

Yuanhao (Julian) Zhou

Public health advocate, association founder, and President of OVAL China

Julian's leadership is built around welcome: helping a newcomer find a place, then building the institution that makes belonging repeatable.

From student to city ambassador

Julian's leadership story begins with arrival. As an international student in Sydney, he understood how disorienting a new city can feel when even simple systems are unfamiliar. Later, as a City of Sydney International Student Leadership Ambassador and a Study NSW Welcome Desk team leader, he helped new students find information, community and confidence. The work was practical - reception, guidance and volunteer coordination - but its purpose was larger: turning a temporary welcome into a genuine sense of belonging.

A platform for ESG action

At the University of Sydney, he founded the Global ESG Leadership Association to bring together students interested in sustainability and responsible leadership. Rather than keeping ESG as a business-school vocabulary, he wanted a platform where students from different disciplines could move from discussion to projects. As a peer mentor and later lead mentor in the Faculty of Medicine and Health, he applied the same principle at a smaller scale: institutions become humane when someone takes responsibility for the person arriving next.

Strengthening regional ties

As President of OVAL China, after previously managing fundraising, Julian works across universities, student associations, businesses and social organisations. The task is not simply to schedule an exchange; it is to align partners with different priorities and create conditions in which young people from China, Japan and Korea can make something together. His roles in Chinese student organisations, community events and Australia-China initiatives have made partnership-building a central part of his practice.

Public health meets community

Julian first trained in commerce, studying industrial relations, human resources and marketing. He is now pursuing a Master of Public Health, drawn to health communication, equity and culturally diverse communities. The shift is less a departure than an expansion. Business taught him how organisations mobilise resources; public health asks where those resources should go and who remains excluded. He hopes to connect both fields in work that improves access to information and converts youth leadership into sustainable social action.

PUBLIC HEALTH ESG COMMUNITY



07

NAME Xiao Yipin

AGE 20

STUDY The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen

"There is only one true heroism in the world: to see the world as it is and to love it."

PORTRAIT / SHENZHEN · TOKYO

Xiao Yipin

Finance student, hard-tech investor, and youth mentor

From a regional ageing challenge to the coffee shop downstairs, Yipin treats business as fieldwork: observe closely, model honestly, act concretely.

Finding common ground

At the OVAL International Business Competition, Xiao worked with teammates whose starting points were sharply different. Japanese members brought experience from a mature elder-care system; Korean members leaned toward technology-led solutions; he focused on the large gap in China's home and community care. Their debates stretched late into the night. He began to see that the assignment was not to choose one national answer, but to find the greatest common divisor of an ageing future shared across Asia.

Designing Mosaic

The team developed Mosaic, a lightweight mutual-support platform organised around micro-communities of six to ten older adults. Xiao led the unit economics and multi-year forecast, estimating contribution margins above thirty percent per node and a path to break-even at 234 nodes. The model was grounded in a bottom-up market estimate, more than ten competitor comparisons and a three-stage implementation plan. Turning a broad anxiety into a testable blueprint convinced him that business can respond seriously to social problems.

Hard-tech from the inside

As an investment intern at Haimuxing Laser Technology, Xiao was thrown into the front line of hard-tech analysis. He reviewed more than one hundred industry reports, examined over twenty companies and produced more than ten investment recommendations across fields including photovoltaics, 3D printing and robotics. He also shortened the department's monthly data-refresh cycle from fifteen days to seven without data errors. The experience replaced the abstraction of finance with factories, technologies and decisions carrying real operational consequences.

Leadership at ground level

His preferred case studies are often close at hand. For a campus coffee shop, he designed two hundred questionnaires, tracked one hundred and twenty daily customers and built financial statements with a forecasting error below five percent. During the 15th National Games, he volunteered for fifteen consecutive days from early morning to late evening and was named a Shenzhen Outstanding Volunteer. As a peer mentor, he now turns those habits outward, sharing resources and the detours he wishes someone had explained to him.

FINANCE HARD TECH MENTORSHIP



08

NAME Azeem Khan

AGE 19

STUDY Yokohama National University · Socrates Program

"Rise with intention, and let every step leave the world a little better than you found it."

PORTRAIT / YOKOHAMA · TOKYO · ODISHA

Azeem Khan

Urban sciences student, social innovator, and IBC 2026 champion

From a year of cultural immersion in Japan to community work in rural India, Azeem treats innovation as a practice of listening before building.

Winning through a shared problem

At the 2026 OVAL International Business Competition in Tokyo, Azeem entered as a first-year student alongside older and more experienced competitors. His three-country team spent long days researching, debating and refining an idea around a real human need. Winning first place brought relief and pride, but the deeper result was confidence in collaborative youth leadership: when people with different perspectives build a common problem definition, their age matters less than the seriousness of their work.

Technology that begins with listening

As an Equitech Futures Institute Scholar, Azeem first researched youth mental wellness and helped create ReflectAI, a Socratic tool designed to guide reflection without pretending to replace human care. His attention later shifted to older adults living alone in Japan. After visiting care facilities and speaking with families, his team designed HumanKey, a decision-support tool for understanding official documents, recognising scams and preserving autonomy. The project reached the semi-finals of Oxford's Kevin Xu Innovation Challenge.

A year that changed the lens

A sustainability competition scholarship took him from India to Aichi for a year with AFS Intercultural Programs. He joined tea ceremony and calligraphy clubs, taught English and learned to navigate a different language and education system. Returning to India, he became an AFS facilitator, leading orientations in Japanese and English for students preparing to cross the same cultural threshold. The experience taught him that intercultural understanding begins when a person learns to see through someone else's assumptions.

Leadership from the ground up

In Odisha, Azeem served as a project consultant and on-ground operations lead in underserved tribal communities. He worked with local councils, school committees, families and community elders to improve access to education and sports infrastructure. The work involved trust, paperwork, difficult travel and systems that communities could sustain after the project ended. Later, organising the Tokyo AI Film Festival and global youth conferences strengthened the same lesson: execution matters, but durable change begins by listening to the people who will live with the result.

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Profiles were edited from participant submissions for length and clarity. Portraits were standardised from participant-supplied photographs using AI-assisted image editing.