

# Scholars' Choice

## Exploring uncharted waters

*Ms Cai Kewei goes against the norm to choose a career in the maritime industry*

by Dawn Wong

MISS CAI Kewei's friends were quick to voice their concerns when they heard of her intention to pursue maritime studies.

The 23-year-old recalls: "My friends said not to risk it because it's new, and that I should take up more established courses like accounting, business or engineering instead. I felt the maritime industry is quite important to Singapore's economy and we have established companies here."

With this confidence, Miss Cai opted for a Bachelor of Science in Maritime Studies at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), where she is currently in her fourth and final year of studies.

Her parents – a taxi driver and part-time office cleaner – did not interfere in the decision of their daughter, the older of two children.

In fact, they were happy that she bagged a scholarship in her third year of studies from MaritimeOne, an initiative spearheaded by the Singapore Maritime Foundation and its partners.

Miss Cai's scholarship was sponsored by Torm, an international shipping company from Denmark with operations in Singapore. She is required to work in the local maritime industry for three years upon graduation.

As part of her 10-week industrial attachment, Ms Cai spent seven weeks at Torm's headquarters in Copenhagen and the remaining period at the company's Singapore office.

She was offered the stint in Denmark office to acquire a better understanding of the company and the overall maritime industry, says Ms Cai.

There, she did a rotation of seven departments that included those dealing with the technical side, chartering and operations. Besides given tasks to complete, Ms Cai also had a mentor who shared with her his daily routine and duties.

She particularly enjoyed her frontline role in the chartering department, which involved selling cargo space in ships.

"For chartering, it's about dealing with customers and negotiations. Also, sometimes the market is up and sometimes it's down. So you need to know how to play your cards well. Things are never the same," she says.

She picked up important practical tips during her stint and is thankful for the opportunity.

"The Torm culture encourages you to learn and ask questions. The Danish were very helpful to me and answered my questions," she says.

She described the internship as "enriching", and is drawn to the nonroutine, interesting nature of maritime work.

It was, in fact, the nature of the job that first sparked her interest five years ago, when she was still a second-year student at St. Andrew's Junior College.

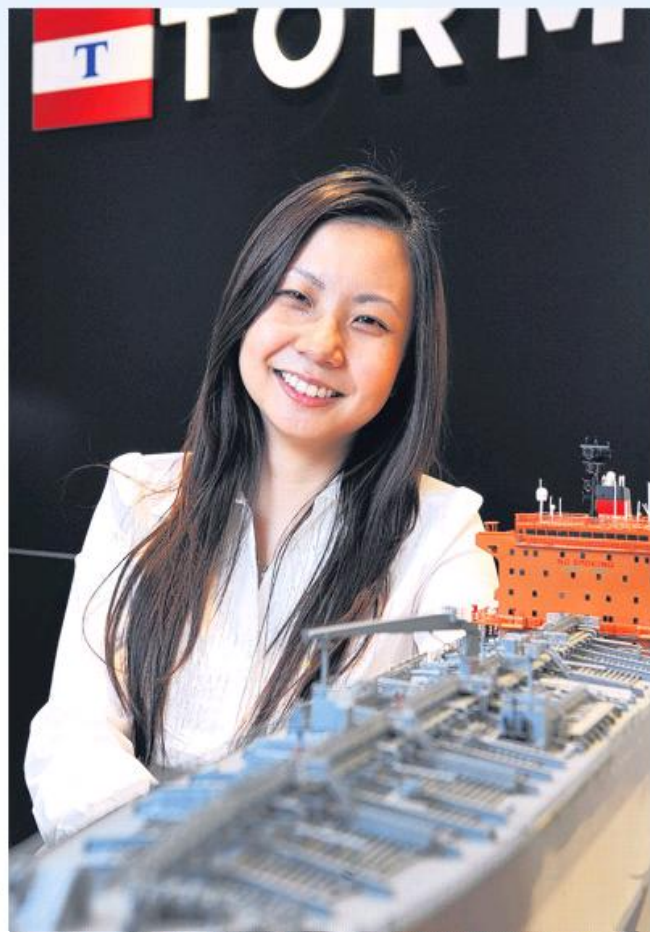
NTU officials had gone to her junior college to give a talk on the university's courses and Miss Cai learnt about maritime studies. She also went to the university's open house to find out more.

She says: "The course at NTU covers a very wide scope because the maritime industry is a very diverse one. NTU tries to cover as much as possible to give an introduction to each area."

Her favourite subjects included shipping economics, ship chartering, maritime law and insurance, which have improved her understanding of the intricacies of the complex and diverse maritime sector, she says.

In 2007, as part of her studies, Ms Cai travelled to Norway with more than 40 course mates, for a five-month study stint at the Norwegian School of Management.

She says: "I spent a memorable time with my course mates. There was a lot of bonding because almost the whole batch went over. I still remember when it first snowed, we were very excited and ended up making snow angels and snowmen!"



**Ms Cai feels that the maritime industry plays an important role in Singapore's economy.**

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