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Smog in Harbin, China, in a 2012 photo (Flickr/Fredrik Rubensson)

Sally Ho

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August 25, 2020

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Editor's note: *This story originally appeared in Green Queen and is republished here as part of Covering Climate Now, a global journalism collaboration strengthening coverage of the climate story.*

Meet Howey Ou, the 17-year-old girl who is the only teenage climate striker in China (there are other activists, but Ou is the only public striker). Every Friday, Howey takes to the streets to publicly demand the Chinese government to take climate action and lower emissions in order to avert a climate catastrophe. Since she began her activism a year and a half ago, Ou has been told she will no longer be able to continue her studies at her high school in Guilin. Despite run-ins with the authorities and ongoing challenges, Ou is pushing ahead as China's lone climate striker with unwavering commitment. We recently sat down (virtually) with Ou, who candidly shared with us what she's been getting up to, her mission and what's in store for the future.

1. It all started when Ou learned about veganism.

When Ou was little, she felt like she always cared for the environment but knew little more than to turn off the lights when leaving the room and to save as much water and energy as possible. "I had little idea about what climate change was and really only heard of it when the Paris Agreement was signed in 2015," Ou told Green Queen. "But later on when I reached the eighth grade, I started to learn about veganism and how it was more planet-friendly."



2. She knew she had to do something after learning about multiple environmental issues.

It ultimately took Ou one full year to switch to a vegetarian diet (and she's since convinced her parents to go vegetarian too!), and it was around then when she noticed the problem of plastic ocean pollution as well as how the climate crisis will affect human civilization. "I realized so many things we were doing our daily lives were harming the planet. It was all these different issues that made me realize I had to do something."

3. Ou is the only one in China fighting to limit global heating.

The 17-year-old teenager from Guilin is China's only climate striker. Every single Friday, she takes to the streets to advocate for climate action. Every weekend, Ou hosts an offline climate documentary screening and meet-up.

4. She is barred from school because of her activism.

"My school decided to stop me from striking after I began gaining international coverage and garnered support for my actions," Ou told Green Queen. "The public security bureau would call my school and my parents, and ask them to urge me to go back to school. So they felt a lot of pressure and told me if I didn't end my climate activism, I wouldn't be allowed back."

5. But she doesn't miss it.

Despite not being able to return to school, Ou is steadfast in her mission to continue striking. "No, I don't miss school because what I'm doing right now is necessary," she said. "China doesn't need one more climate scientist – there are so many and all of them say the science is clear. What China does need is one more climate activist to push for change, for action from the government and from the public."

6. Ou has faced interrogation from the authorities for her climate activism.

After protesting at the government building in Guilin, Ou found herself under interrogation from security guards for hours. Having experienced this, the teenager is now taking practical steps to protect herself, from learning cybersecurity and encryption for her electronic devices to contacting lawyers in case of serious situations.

7. She believes that suppression is unavoidable.

While learning to encrypt her devices and using a VPN (virtual private network) to communicate with journalists are some practical steps that Ou has been taking, she sees the interrogation and other suppression tactics employed against her as a part of the process when it comes to her activism. "I've been learning and reading more about the theory behind nonviolent civil disobedience and I can see that I must face suppression from the authorities and focus on the demands to get my message across," explained Ou. "Over time, people will realize that this treatment is unfair."

8. Ou believes the Chinese government is afraid of rising awareness.

"They want to control people. They don't like things that they can't fully control and this kind of civil disobedience makes people aware about the government's climate inaction," Ou told *Green Queen*. "They don't want more people putting pressure on them to take climate action because their current priority is only on economic growth and development."

9. She sees some hope in growing climate consciousness.

She laments that over her 18 months of climate striking, there has been a shallow base of support in China. However, things are beginning to change, she says. "There wasn't much support here in Guilin, but recently, when I was out on the streets, I got some encouragement from other locals and students. I was surprised." She has also received a greater show of support for her work from abroad, and she has since kept in touch with others via encrypted messaging apps.

10. Greta Thunberg is one of her heroes.

When asked about who has inspired her activism, Ou was quick to spotlight Greta Thunberg, the famous Swedish teenage activist who spearheaded the Fridays for Future climate strikes. She also noted that Al Gore has been a great motivator and role model.

11. Ou believes that nonviolent civil disobedience is powerful.

"The way I want to convince governments to stabilize the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees celsius is through nonviolent civil disobedience," shares the teenage climate striker. "There have been many examples of movements following nonviolent principles showing success before, so I believe this is the way to turn the situation around."

12. She keeps in touch with Zhao Jiaxin, the other climate activist in China.

Zhao Jiaxin is an environmental activist in China who has worked extensively with local climate NGOs and Greenpeace, and has set up a student-led organization to raise awareness on the climate emergency in his final year of university. Ou is connected with Zhao, and they continue to fight to protect the planet.

13. Ou doesn't live at home anymore.

At the young age of 17, Ou has already left home and is currently living in an international youth hostel. "It's temporary, but I have to do this to have more freedom to do my climate activism," Ou tells Green Queen. "I'm able to focus on advocating for change, I can be more efficient and productive and connect with more people in the eco movement."

14. She is fearless.

"I'm not scared at all about what I'm doing now," Ou says in a bold tone. "Although sometimes, I feel like there isn't much hope and I am pessimistic about the lack of change. But I know that this is the right thing to do and if I can inspire others to care about the planet, then I feel like I am making a difference and [can] make change happen."

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15. Ou wants the Chinese government to listen to the science.

If there was only one thing she wishes the authorities would take heed to, it would be climate science. "They need to understand what the scientists are saying. There are massive transitions in society needed to tackle the climate crisis."

16. Everyone needs to reflect on their relationship with nature, she believes.

Ou knows that not everyone can take to the streets, but she thinks that everyone can still contribute in their own ways and begin to make a difference for the planet. "Take the time to sit down, close your eyes, and rethink your connection to nature. Reflect about how nature supports us, gives us all our resources and nourishes us. That's what should motivate us to protect it."

17. She wants all the climate strikers to support each other.

The young climate striker knows best when it comes to the challenging – and often lonely – road when it comes to demanding change through protest. But she believes that no matter how difficult the uphill battle is, the young strikers of the world can persevere with each other's help. "All of us will face challenges, but if we band together and share our experiences to support each other, we'll be strong enough to keep doing what we're doing," she tells Green Queen.

18. Ou won't stop until her climate demands are met.

We asked her about her personal goals or plans for the future, but Ou doesn't have any – yet, at least. "I'm not stopping. I will strike every single Friday and host climate documentary screenings until China aligns with the Paris Agreement," she said. "I think that's probably going to be a long time. Maybe one day, I want to make a trip around China and meet everyone who is fighting for the planet."

[Sally Ho is Green Queen's resident writer and lead reporter.]

This story appears in the **Covering Climate Now** feature series. View the full series .