

LIFE

Creating synergy

French cultural festival in China resumes with an eclectic repertoire of events in 14 cities, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

Festival Croisements returns this year with an eclectic repertoire of events from the fields of music, drama, visual arts, cinema, dance, books and fashion.

Organized by the French embassy in China and Institut Français, the festival, after a year of suspension due to the COVID-19 outbreak, began on April 21. It runs through July 31, with some 78 events being hosted in 14 cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Wuhan in Hubei province.

The festival aims to promote cultural exchanges between France and China.

Laurent Bili, French ambassador to China, says each year the festival provides Chinese and French artists new opportunities to collaborate and highlight their work.

This year's festival also proves the vitality of creativity and an urge for bilateral cultural exchanges, Bili adds.

As 2021 marks the centenary of the death of French composer Camille Saint-Saens, the Chinese musical group DNA Trio, comprising pianist Zhang Jialin, violinist Zhang Jingye and cellist Song Zhao, together with composer Zhou Jing, will present a tribute concert at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing on June 24.



Top: Laurent Bili, French ambassador to China.
Above: The exhibition *Trees* is one of the highlighted events of this year's Festival Croisements.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The works of Saint-Saens, along with those of French composers Cesar Franck and Hector Berlioz, will also be available online, with a concert performed by Orchestre National de France at the Paris Philharmonic concert hall, which will be streamed on Chinese platforms Bilibili and Sina Weibo to accommodate a wider audience amid COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Works created jointly by Chinese and French artists will be highlighted at this year's festival.

Qfun Theater, a troupe dedicated to children's drama education in China since 2013, has worked alongside Hybridites France-Chine, an organization founded in France that promotes France-China artistic exchanges, in adapting *Flowers in the Mirror* by Chinese novelist Li Ruzhen (1763-1830) into a stage play. Performed entirely by children, the play uses puppetry and masquerading to realize surreal scenes and plots of the classic fantasy.

Other coproductions at this year's festival include *Cosmogonies and Metamorphoses*, a play combining traditional Chinese shadow puppetry and contemporary French visual arts, and a dance choreographed by Chinese dancer Xiao Ke and French choreographer Jerome Bel.

Festival Croisements 2021 will introduce the fifth edition of *La Fete des Bulles* in response to a growing



The ongoing Festival Croisements presents a wide range of activities, including dance, concerts and book events. SU WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

interest in comic books in China. Related events will begin in Beijing on May 29 and end in Shanghai on June 6, presenting comics and graphic novels from China and France, with illustrators signing their books and sharing experiences in creating them, as well as holding a workshop on comic translation.

The representative for the book event is illustrator Li Kunwu.

"It's common knowledge that many Chinese adults consider comics as an equivalent of children's books and find it difficult to take comics seriously. If bookshops have a special section for graphic novels, more people will know that they are in fact books that provide a visual experience, almost like watching films," Li says.

Fashion is a field that is being presented for the first time at Festival Croisements. A serial project, entitled *Fashion Rendezvous*, will be launched to promote emerging young designers who integrate art and sustainability into their designs. The Franco-Chinese Fashion Night will take place at the Sea World Culture and Art Center in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on May 9, presenting the fashion brands Sankuanz and Andrea Crews.

Representatives for this year's festival are Shangguan Zhe, the founder of Sankuanz, Chinese actress Tong Liya and actor Jin Dong.

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Li Kunwu, illustrator

Remote Guizhou villages to get new library

GUIYANG — While natural beauty adorns Xiayangdong and Shangyangdong villages in Southwest China's Guizhou province, the area has a scarcity of books.

But that is set to change as Chen Xi has decided to build a two-story library to ensure the villages embrace the light of knowledge.

Born in Beijing, Chen attended college in the United States and worked there for some time.

A visit to the villages in 2019 left her fascinated with the landscape, hospitality of the people and the rich ethnic culture. At the same time, she was appalled by the lack of books.

"I learned that locals lacked books and children did not have enough reading materials to improve their knowledge," Chen says.

This prompted her to help build a library and she swung into action. The main structure, covering 130 square meters, has been completed. The library will sit in the cross-section of the two villages, close to a local primary school.

"Our next focus is on interior decoration, desks and chairs. We



Left: Xiayangdong and Shangyangdong villages are home to ethnic Dong and Miao people in the mountainous area of Guizhou province.
Right: A farm house is renovated into a library for children in the villages. PHOTOS BY LUO YU / XINHUA



plan to purchase 600 books," Chen adds.

She expects the construction to be completed by late May. The library will help children to gain knowledge of the outside world through reading and also help them spread their stories and culture among more people, Chen says.

Another village named Cengeng is located near Xiayangdong and Shangyangdong. Together the three

villages form a residential community with 1,397 families, most of whom are from the Dong and Miao ethnic groups.

The area has maintained the country's traditional farming culture, with villagers raising more than 1,000 cattle.

The ethnic culture of the region is quite diverse, with locals staging song and dance performances in fancy clothing during holidays.

Wooden buildings built by villagers also form a part of the region's traditional craft.

Chen says she believes in maintaining cultural diversity, but nowadays many ethnic cultures and traditions are disappearing from modern society.

"For example, the Dong people's singing and dancing traditions and their wooden buildings are facing challenges of inheritance," she says.

After visiting the mountainous area, Chen found that many remote villages did not have books, and it was hard for rural children to form a reading habit in such a state. Even though some village schools had some books, they didn't draw the children's attention.

Yang Zhengxi, a 49-year-old resident of Xiayangdong, says his village has poor education.

"For instance, many parents in

the village only received education up to primary or middle schools. They usually ignore the importance of education and barely buy books for their children. The kids run around or fiddle with mobile phones after school."

Chen says a library can help children inculcate the habit of reading, broaden their horizons and enhance their abilities to talk about their culture, which is why she planned to build the library there.

After initial evaluation, Chen found that the project would cost approximately 65,000 yuan (\$10,000). Starting in December, Chen purchased, processed and sold purple rice grown in the vicinity. Within three months, she not only had helped the villagers earn money but also raised funds for building the library.

In March, workers broke ground on the library, which is being transformed from a rural house Chen has rented. Currently, she is in talks with an architect about the interior design, while making plans to hire volunteers to manage the library.

"I will try my best to run it well and give a special gift to the villagers and the children," she says.

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