

LIFE



Left: Patissier Zhou Chuanmei (right) makes tangyuan, a type of stuffed dumpling ball made of glutinous rice flour for Lantern Festival, with one of her apprentices at an exhibition for intangible cultural projects held at the Confucius Museum in Qufu, Shandong province, on Wednesday. **Right:** Huang Sihan (right) and her teacher show their paper-cutting skills at the exhibition. QIU JIER / FOR CHINA DAILY



Frenchman enjoys a celebration of life in Wuhan

WUHAN — Spending his week-long Spring Festival holiday visiting relatives, setting off firecrackers, eating local specialties and lazing in the warm sunshine, Balthazar Boyer was able to feel a festive ambience in Wuhan.

"It was a very pleasant week off. This Spring Festival was completely different to the last one," says Boyer, 39.

Unlike last year, when he and his family spent the holiday anxiously in quarantine at home, they were delighted to celebrate together with family and friends this year, embracing normality in the megacity that was once hard-hit by COVID-19.

Boyer, the general manager of a French company's China office, has lived in Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei province, for nearly 20 years. He settled in the city after acquiring his master's degree in law from Wuhan University and marrying a local woman.

Two weeks after Boyer and his wife returned to Wuhan from a family visit in France in January last year, the city announced suspension of public transport as well as outbound flights and trains to fight the epidemic.

Though the French government organized several evacuations for its nationals in Wuhan, Boyer and his wife chose to stay.

"Why would we leave? Wuhan is our home," says Boyer, adding that he was confident in the Chinese government's response.

That year, the family spent the Lunar New Year holiday at home, watching the news every day to keep themselves updated.

"Balthazar's birthday coincided with last year's Spring Festival holiday, but we were in no mood for a celebration," says Boyer's wife, Hu Fan.

The couple's anxieties and concerns gradually eased as they learned that medicines nationwide were rushing to assist Wuhan, temporary hospitals were being built and infections were dropping. Their worries were also eased as their community organized group purchases to provide substantial daily necessities.

"I received so many kinds of foods besides what was needed for our daily meals — I could even try to cook different cuisines," says Hu.

As Wuhan gradually regained its vitality, their lives also returned to normal. When Boyer resumed his business, he required all his employees to maintain social distancing and wear masks at work.

"I can feel that Wuhan is recovering in all respects," says Boyer. Though shadowed by the pandemic in 2020, his optoelectronics business in Wuhan was just as profitable as it was in 2019.

Boyer and Hu were fully prepared to celebrate Spring Festival this year, which fell on Feb 12.

"We thoroughly cleaned our house ahead of the festival, hoping to sweep away all the bad luck of last year and welcome the good luck in the Year of the Ox," says Hu.

On the first day of the Lunar New Year, the family visited Hu's parents in the suburbs of Wuhan, where they enjoyed a meal together.

"Our baby received gifts of money from relatives, and we were really happy because it was the first time he has been immersed in the traditional ambience of the Chinese New Year since he was born," says Hu. The family also welcomed friends into their home.

Boyer returned to his office on Feb 18, the first working day after the festival.

"There are so many things to do and prepare. I think my career will go well this year," he says.

To curb the spread of COVID-19, many in China chose to follow the government's recommendation and stay put for the festival, including Boyer and Hu.

Looking ahead in the Year of the Ox, Boyer expects to travel to other Chinese cities — and abroad, if the pandemic eases.

"I would like to go back to France to see my parents, whom I haven't seen for more than a year," he says.

XINHUA

Confucius Museum keeps tradition alive

Modern approach to cultural heritage proves popular, **Zhao Ruixue** reports.

The art and significance of Chinese intangible culture are taking on new forms to enhance modern life and are consequently gaining new fans.

Huang Sihan is 15 years old but her nimble fingers can create an artwork that is both intricate and entertaining. In just half an hour, she cut out a butterfly-shaped ring from a piece of red paper at an exhibition of intangible cultural heritage. The exhibition was part of activities held by the Confucius Museum from Wednesday to Sunday to celebrate Lantern Festival, which falls on Friday. It provides a platform where people can try several ancient arts, such as paper cutting.

The girl put the ring on her finger and the wings of the butterfly she cut flapped gracefully as she moved her finger.

"Girls like rings, so I got the idea of making a butterfly ring," she says.

Huang has been learning paper cutting for three years. The grade two student at a junior middle school in Qufu, Shandong province, now practices paper-cutting every Wednesday afternoon at school.

"Students like paper-cutting," says Chang Fengying, who teaches paper-cutting at the school. "They imagine shapes and cut them out from paper. Some make very good works that can be used during Spring Festival instead of buying items from shops."

The museum in Qufu, the hometown of Confucius, holds exhibitions to bring ancient culture closer to young people, says Lin Lin, a staff member there.

Making radish lamps by putting a candle into the plant is a sure way to attract lots of children. However, some doubted whether the radish that contains the candle is real and some asked why not use lanterns instead of the radish lamps.

Their questions were answered by patient explanations of the lamp makers.



Top: A visitor shows her son the structure of a wooden architecture model at the exhibition of intangible cultural projects at the Confucius Museum on Wednesday. **QIU JIER / FOR CHINA DAILY** **Above:** An artist carves a bull pattern on a radish lamp for Lantern Festival. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

"These were popular and were made with flour dough and radishes, a popular agricultural product in Qufu," says radish lamp specialist Qiu Qingfeng.

To prove his point he quickly carved two radishes with holes for the light

and lids and carved Chinese characters on them.

In recent years, the Chinese government has made great efforts in preserving and developing traditional art forms. The central and local govern-

ment authorities are listing intangible cultural heritage and providing support to artists.

Zhou Chuanmei, 64, is glad that the pastry, made by patissiers at the Confucian Mansion, was listed as an intangible cultural project by the Qufu city government last year.

The line of culinary expertise can be traced back. The teacher of Zhou's father made pastry for Confucius' descendants. Zhou learned the techniques of making pastry from her father and has been making it for over 30 years.

"Confucius Mansion pastry must be made with fresh materials such as seasonal fruits," says Zhou, adding that no additives are used.

"We use honey to keep the pastry for a longer time," she says.

Zhou made tangyuan, a stuffed dumpling ball made of glutinous rice flour, for Lantern Festival, with one of her apprentices at the Confucius Museum on Wednesday. Their tasty product sold out quickly.

To enrich residents' life at home during Spring Festival, Qufu authorities opened a cloud platform to livestream the procedures of making Confucius Mansion pastry. More than 17,000 residents joined the livestreaming.

In recent years, Zhou has been making more pastry with vegetables and fruits.

"Tradition should be preserved. It's also necessary to embrace some new elements to keep the handicraft alive," says Zhou.

To help visitors understand the customs related to Spring Festival, the museum also holds exhibitions during the same period to showcase antiques passed down by Confucius' descendants, such as lanterns.

Qiu Jier contributed to this story.

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Improving lives at local level is crucial for progress

In his younger days, Guo Lianbing would wander around his village picking fights with people. He gained a reputation for his roguish ways, as many villagers recall.

Many of them would probably have found it hard to imagine that Guo, now 48, would become an exemplary local official, dedicating himself to improving their lives.

Alexis Hooi
Second Thoughts

"Planting new cash crops like lily bulbs, laying out more pipes for the water supply or linking people to the internet for e-commerce ... We're focused on upgrading. It's a hands-on approach," Guo says.

Guo is the deputy head of Yuangudui, a village in Weiyuan county of Dingxi in Northwest China's Gansu province. Less than

a decade ago, Yuangudui was still known as one of the poorest spots in the country.

But grassroots leaders like Guo, many of them from the younger generation, have fueled the country's success in fighting poverty. Their determination to help impoverished families in their communities and beyond never fails to impress me every time I get the chance to visit poverty-hit areas.

Dong Jianxin, 39, who leads local agricultural and tourism projects, also returned to the village after various job stints. He is now working closely with fellow villagers to farm valuable morel mushrooms, tapping technology like hydroponics and aeroponics he learned from agricultural specialists to scale up production. The crop, which can sell for about 200 yuan (\$31) a kilogram in its raw form and 10 times more after

being dried or processed, has been integral in helping to lift the village out of poverty.

"I want all of us to become prosperous together, only then can progress be made," Dong says.

In Bulenggou, another village of the province lauded as a model of anti-poverty measures, local official Shan Binjie keeps close track of development to help ensure that residents are doing well.

"We have 62 households, 315 people here. We've invested in basic infrastructure, waterworks, roads, housing, education, healthcare and industry," the 30-year-old village Party secretary says.

"In terms of livestock production alone, we have set up two sheep facilities that can hold 6,000 animals. There are similar cattle and poultry projects, with households involved receiving good bonuses," he says.

In Dulongjiang township of

Southwest China's Yunnan province, Chen Lu, 26, is also spending the prime of her youth helping families keep up with the area's development.

Chen, who is deputy head of the Xianjiudang village work team and a member of the political and legal committee of the county Party committee, says with adequate transportation, education and healthcare in place, the ethnic Derung community is expanding the economy beyond black cardamom cash crops to explore the eco-tourism and other sectors.

"Residents can get loans and subsidies. We want them to be part of the growth," she says.

Mu Wenjun, 29, deputy director of Dulongjiang's Kongdang village, returned home after tertiary studies four years ago. Mu helps his fellow Derung villagers to be part of the expanding economic and social programs.

"I decided to come back instead of staying on in the city," Mu says. "It can be tough to get everyone on board, especially the older, elderly residents, such as convincing and training them in new agricultural practices. But the benefits are clear and they realize it's worth it."

Lu Xiaodong, the 33-year-old deputy head of Xia'nan town in Huanjiang Maonan Autonomous county of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, also keeps his finger on the area's development pulse.

More than 70 households will be getting 20,000 yuan each under a major project to grow the local cattle industry alone, he says.

"It's just one of our ways to make sure residents, through local conditions and advantages, share in the progress together."

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