



信使报

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A Long Journey to Bring CRI Closer to Listeners

It was a cool rainy morning in mid June when we started our trip to Europe. There were three of us: Madam Liu Hui, Director of Overseas Projects, Madam Xu Huazhen, deputy director of the English Service, and yours truly. We were going to visit some local radio stations to arrange further cooperation, specifically, for relays of CRI programs.

Beijing had been scorching hot for several days, and this cool morning seemed to indicate that our trip would be a successful one. And so it turned out! Our first stop was Finland, where a local radio station called Classic Radio has been broadcasting our programs for one year. The station broadcasts ten minutes of China-related news and Chinese folk music at eight every weekday morning. On Saturdays, it broadcasts a one-hour program, "China Hour," which includes news, music and feature stories about China. Listeners can also learn about China's most famous tourist destinations and Chinese languages. The programs are tailor-made for the local people: they are all in Finnish and are produced by Fins. CRI provides materials and interviews.

This is the first time for CRI to cooperate with overseas radio stations in this way. In the past, we would rent air time from local radio stations and send them our own programs. This pilot cooperation with Classic FM was an immediate success. The programs have attracted attention from both the public and also the country's leaders. Many people write or call to say how much they enjoy them. The Chinese culture program in particular has aroused Finnish people's interest in China. Of course, there are

also complaints, mostly about the quality of our programs, such as the selection of news and music. But thanks to these complaints, we have a better picture of what our listeners want to hear.

To celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of the program, a Chinese Cultural Day was organized in mid-June, and the three of us were there.

We could feel the Finnish people's enthusiasm for Chinese culture. Many people drove hundreds of miles to attend the activities, which included lectures on Chinese tea, calligraphy and painting, as well as martial arts and other performances. The questions covered a wide variety of topics, such as the status of Chinese women and are Chinese farms run differently from western farms.

While we are happy that they are so interested in China, we also realize how much work we have yet to do to enhance their understanding of Chinese culture. It is their enthusiasm that encouraged us to expand our programs in the country. In fact, one of the purposes of our trip to Finland was to talk with another radio station about broadcasting our programs. It was Radio Day, which mostly has talk shows. Like Classic FM, the radio will broadcast ten minutes of news and views about China. By doing this, our programs can reach a larger audience.

The next leg of our trip was Paris, where we negotiated similar projects with a business radio station called BFM. The station will

carry 30 minutes of interviews with Chinese experts and business people. The programs will be co-produced by CRI and BFM, but will be hosted by BFM staff. Only two weeks after the launch, the station told us they were very satisfied with the program and their audiences enjoy it.

While cooperation with these stations is a new way of reaching listeners in foreign countries, CRI also keeps abreast of new broadcasting technologies to meet the needs of future audiences. We have been cooperating with a few digital and satellite broadcasting companies across the world, including the London-based World Radio Network. WRN broadcasts two and a half hours of CRI English programs on its satellite broadcasting platform. And thanks to WRN, our programs are relayed by some local AM and FM radio stations in Europe. For example, people in London can hear us on Spectrum Radio on AM558 from 15:00 to 17:00 GMT. And in Europe, Luxemburg-based RTL Radio broadcasts two hours of CRI programs from 20:00 to 22:00 GMT on AM1440. People living around Luxemburg can hear the programs. In addition, many hotels in Europe can get our programs on TV. Our programs are also broadcast by satellite in Africa.

Of course, we can't forget the Internet. Since the beginning of this year, China Radio International has made a major adjustment to its broadcasting strategy by adopting online radio. After more than half a year of effort, nearly all the radio programs produced by CRI can be heard on the Internet. Take the English Service as an example: there are three channels on our website at www.crienglish.com. By clicking on these channels, overseas listeners can even hear our domestic programs, which are mainly music and English teaching programs. On the website, one can also find abundant information and pictures, and even make hotel reservations. Thousands of netizens now visit our website everyday. In fact, our English website has become one of the biggest portals in China. (Liao Jibo)



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Chongyang Festival

The Chongyang Festival falls on the ninth day of the ninth month of the Chinese lunar calendar, so it is also known as the Double Ninth Festival. This year, the festival falls on October 22.

The festival is based on the theory of Yin and Yang, the two opposing principles in nature. Yin is the feminine, negative principle, while Yang is masculine and positive. The ancients believed that all natural phenomena could be explained by this theory. Numbers are related to this theory. Even numbers belong to Yin and odd numbers to Yang. The ninth day of the ninth lunar month is a day when the two Yang numbers meet. So it is called Chongyang. Chong means double in Chinese. Chongyang has been an important festival since ancient times.

The festival is held in the golden season of autumn, at harvest-time. The bright clear weather and the joy of bringing in the harvest make for a festive happy atmosphere. The Double Ninth Festival is usually perfect for outdoor activities. Many people go hiking and climbing, enjoying Mother Nature's final burst of color before she puts on her dull winter cloak. Some will carry a spray of dogwood.

It is hard to say when these customs were created. But there are many stories which are closely related. One story goes like this:

In ancient times, there lived a man named Huan Jing. He was learning the magic arts from Fei Changfang, who had become an immortal after many years of practicing Taoism. One day, the two were climbing a mountain. Fei Changfang suddenly

stopped and looked very upset. He told Huan Jing, "On the ninth day of the ninth month, disaster will come to your hometown. You must go home immediately. Re-



member to make a red bag for each one of your family members and put a spray of dogwood in every one. Then you must all tie your bags to your arms, leave home quickly and climb to the top of a mountain. Most importantly, you must all drink some chrysanthemum wine. Only by doing so can your family avoid this disaster."

On hearing this, Huan Jing rushed home and asked his family to do exactly as his teacher said. The whole family climbed a nearby mountain and did not return until the evening. When they got back home, they found all their animals dead, including chickens, sheep, dogs and even the powerful ox. Later Huan Jing told his teacher, Fei Changfang, about this. Fei said the poultry and livestock died in place of Huan Jing's family, who escaped disaster by following his instructions.

And so it happened that climbing a mountain, carrying a spray of dogwood and drinking chrysanthemum wine became the traditional activities of the Chongyang Festival.

The dogwood is a plant with a strong fragrance, and is often used as a Chinese herbal medicine. People in ancient times believed it could drive away evil spirits and prevent one from getting a chill in late autumn. So its history as a medicine goes back many centuries. But the custom of carrying a spray of dogwood during the Double Ninth Festival is slowly dying out and many people, especially young people in the cities, do not even know what a dogwood spray looks like.

Even though the tradition of carrying a few sprigs of dogwood dies out, that of climbing mountains is reaching new heights.



Early in the Western Han Dynasty, about 2,000 years ago, people used to climb a high platform outside the capital city of Chang'an on the occasion of the Chongyang Festival. For many, it was the last outing of the year before the onset of winter. The custom evolved into its present form, when people go climbing to get some exercise as well as enjoy the autumn scenery.

But what about those people who live in flat regions far from any mountain? The problem is solved by going for a picnic and eating cakes. The Chinese word for cake is "Gao", a homonym of the Chinese word for "high." Mountains are high, so eating cake can, by a stretch of the imagination, take the place of going for a climb.

Since nine is the highest odd digit, people take two of them together to signify longevity. Therefore, the ninth day of the ninth month has become a special day for people to pay their respects to the elderly and a day for the elderly to enjoy themselves. It has also been declared China's day for the elderly. (Dai Yirong)



China Messenger: Useful Information You Want

After a long journey, China Messenger, the latest channel at CRIEnglish.com, finally went live in late June. Broken into six bulging columns filled with information on China's hottest trends, column-specific articles, web forums, and China's most useful information service, China Messenger brings the useful China information you want!

In our Hotels and Leisure column, we bring you the most up-to-date news on China's ever-changing fashion and entertainment scenes. Here you'll also find all the info you need, from hotels to movie theaters, from beauty salons to museums, on how to spend your leisure time in the country.

The Fitness and Adventure column is set to ensure you make the most of your time in China by continually challenging yourself and keeping fit. Besides introducing you to all the sporting options available in the country, from paragliding adventures to white-water rafting, we also provide information about gyms, fitness centers, pools, etc. to keep you looking and feeling good.

Chinese cuisine offers an endless journey of discovery, of tastes, presentation styles, cooking methods, ingredients, for both the novice and the gourmand to enjoy. In our Food and Drink column you'll get a chance to dabble in Chinese culinary arts or find that restaurant or watering hole that satisfies your latest craving.

From Shen Nong, the founding father of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), to the explosion of western drugs onto the Chinese market, we reveal the history and current state of medical care in China. What exactly is TCM? Where can I find a good doctor in China? In the Health and Medicine column you will find the answers to these questions.


Head over to the Transport column for everything from booking a flight to finding a driver, and while there you can also check out the latest develop-

ments in China's car market, already the world's third largest. And if you're looking to buy a car, we'll even tell you what's available in your price range.

Are you looking for a place to live? Whether you're an expat already here looking for better digs, or still planning your move, the Real Estate column is required reading. With its tips, stories, and reviews it's a lifesaver for anyone, from the renter looking

for a studio apartment to the buyer looking for a spacious house in the country.

For more information, please log onto "www.crienglish.com" or "en.chinabroadcast.cn" and click China Messenger! Or if you have any suggestions or ideas on content you can e-mail us at chinamessenger@crifm.com or call us at 86-10-68891579. Your feedback is always warmly welcomed. We hope China Messenger continues bringing you the informative and interesting articles you've come to expect of us.



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Athens: A Historic Turning Point for China

by sportswriter Li Gang



event dominated by European countries. This time China's Meng Guanliang and Yang Wenjun gave a shock to the world to grab the gold medal. Competitions were extremely fierce so that in the end there were three to four kayakers dashing to the line at the same time. The moment that the two knew they are the champions, they just couldn't believe in their ears. I saw Meng Guanliang raised one finger to the officials on board to confirm. Later, he just burst to laugh, facing the sky. That's really a cool moment.

As a sports fan, I am quite enchanted by the sporting activities at the 2004 Athens Olympics. I will always jump to the ground when seeing the 100-meter relay and the heating competitions in the pool. But what I feel most excited and be proud of is whenever there are the Chinese athletes who took on excellent performances and whenever there is the Chinese national flag and anthem arose in the stadium. I'd like to share some personal excitements with all of you at here.

The biggest excitement for me is when those Chinese girls defeated Russia to stand at the top of the volleyball stand. The moment when Zhang Yuehong gave that heavy strike, though it had already been four o'clock in the morning, though I laid in bed, sleepy eyed, I couldn't help standing up and applauding for them. It is their strong determination; it is their unconquerable spirit that enabled them to smile to the last. I still remembered after that strike, Zhang Yuehong just knelt down, punched heavily the ground to unleash her long-suppressed emotions. After experiencing the glorious 1980's period and the ups and downs in the 90's, the Chinese women volleyball team returns to the world's best. More precious the medal is - it is the only gold medal for China to win in team events at Athens.

Another miracle for the Chinese delegation is at the 110 meter hurdles. Before the event, no one would even bet in confidence that Liu Xiang could win. But with the accident drop-out of US star player Allen Johnson, it became more and more a real one. 12.91 seconds, with an equaling world record performance, the Shanghai native tells in person that Chinese can run as fast as anybody else. The 21-year-old young say he still has room to improve and the 2008 Beijing Olympics would be his best career time. Besides Liu Xiang, another sparkle in track and field is from the women's 10,000 meter race. 18-year-old Xing Huina unexpectedly broke an Ethiopian sweep to dash to the line, making her the best-ever Chinese female runner after Wang Junxia, who claimed the 5,000 meter title at Atlanta. These two gold medals are of significant meaning for the relatively weak Chinese track and field sports. Both Liu Xiang and Xing Huina have been listed as candidates for players of the year of the International Association of Athletics Federations.



The Darkest horse added to the medal list is from the tennis court. The Chinese duo of Li Ting and Sun Tiantian have won both their and the country's first-ever gold in tennis. Actually, I didn't favor them since the very first round when they met with the defending champion Venus Williams and Chanda Rubin of the United States. Surprising enough, they played a team match and dominated the whole process. Then they moved on to knock out a few changers to enter the final. In it, they beat Spain's Conchita Martinez and Virginia Ruano Pascual to win the Olympic women's doubles title. This victory is not only a surprise for the two players but also a huge boost to tennis development in China. Besides their unexpected victory, another thing even harder to believe is that Chinese Jia Zhanbo claimed the gold medal in the men's 50-metre rifle three-position target event, after American Matthew Emmons fired at other's target on the very last round.

Another breakthrough that the Chinese athletics made is at the Kayaking. This has long been an



Weight-lifting is no doubt China's traditional advantages. During the Athens Games, there are some old and new Chinese Hercules appeared. Of them, the most impressive one to me is Zhang Guozheng, who won the men's 69 kilograms champion.

This fellow from South China's Fujian province is quite energetic and full of passion. Besides, he has a very beautiful wife. I remembered the moment when he knows he won the gold, he told his wife in deep emotion through the screen "Darling, I miss you so much." Later Zhang Guozheng revealed the reason why he trained and played so hard is to a large extent for his wife.

Another sweeping victory for the Chinese delegation occurred at the diving springboard and platform. Except for the one mistake made by Peng Bo and Wang Kenan at the men's synchronized 3-meter springboard, all others have given an excellent show in Greece. The Chinese beauty diver Guo Jingjing, after the retirement of former world champion Fu Mingxia, has become China's leading women diver and fully displayed her magnificent diving skills and charming personal characters at Athens. The handsome Tian Liang, after losing the ten-meter platform champion, says he will come back at the Beijing Olympics.

But there are also some unexpected failures for the Chinese Olympic delegations at Athens such as in gymnastics. As the champion team of last year's Anaheim World Gymnastics Championships, the Chinese



men's team made a series of big mistakes at nearly all the equipments so that gave the gold medal to the Japanese team. If it is not Teng Haibing who won a gold for China at the pommel horse, the Chinese team would end their Athens trip with nothing. The same setbacks also fell on the Russian team. Neither Alexnder Nemov or Aleksei Bondarenko could bring a hope to Russia though Nemov's performances at the high bars of the individual event could be said as perfect.

Besides gymnastics, Chinese women soccer team is another which fell heavily at Athens. With the retreat of many old nationals such as Sun Wen and Liu Ailing, China's weak base of women footballers began to show sings at Athens. There is no very capable new blood supplemented to the team. While the bad results of losing to Germany 0-8 and drawing with Mexico have disappointed a lot of Chinese nationals.

Anyhow, China vows to take more gold medals during the 2008 Olympics and in general, the Olympic delegation has given much fun and national pride to the Chinese.

Mailbag

First of all please accept congratulations from the bottom of my heart on the best ever Olympics performance by the Chinese athletes in the Athens games. Chinese players have really done a remarkable job for their homeland, as well as they have given Asia something to be proud of. The world has seen that the Asians are the best at their own and really Chinese have represented their country and continent in a great style and honour. This is not only good for this games, but China has made a great start and platform for the Beijing Olympics in 2008, in which the world will see a new and more attractive and impressing face of China. Congratulations on your Olympics successes and very best wishes for the coming Olympics in your own country. (Azam Soomro, Pakistan)

I would first of all congratulate China on its fantastic showings at the Olympic Games in Athens. I guess my biggest surprise is the gold medal accomplishment of China's woman double-tennis team. My congratulations! And on the other end, My biggest disappointment is in the China women soccer team not making the final four in these games. But in the meantime I keep watching the games and wish China much more success at these Olympic games! (Franz Schwartz, USA)

This morning I heard your special segment on Deng Xiaoping after News and Reports and also the tail end of the segment about Deng's hometown. It was very interesting to hear personal stories about this remarkable

man, his admirable character, and the love he had for the people of China. There's no doubt his legacy lives on in the steps China is taking today to open its doors to the outside world and the socialist market economy, all of which he pioneered and have made China a very important nation in the world. The 100th anniversary of his birth is something that has gone virtually unreported here in the West and thanks to CRI many people around the world will be able to hear the story about Deng and his legacy. Congratulations on a job well done in regards not only to your coverage of the 100th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's birth, but also the Olympic coverage which has been very good! Keep up the good work! (Josh Wolfenbarger, USA)

The series of programs on Deng Xiaoping have given me great and unique knowledge and information about the Great Chinese leader in the history of new China. Also it is very much interesting for me to take part in the knowledge contests which are very hard to get from other sources, for example the knowledge and information about Zhejiang province is really a treasure for me. (Mohammad Magsi, Pakistan)

Thank you for sending me The Messenger. For me it is one of the best ways to know China. I have received it for more than three years, and it is really fascinating to discover Chinese culture through The Messenger. I also enjoy the new publications of "Q and A on China". This book contains a lot of answers to know better the country. (Michal Mizera, Poland)

Learn to Speak Chinese

Pengyoumen, it's great to meet you here again!

During the past two months some of you have e-mailed me, asking for audio and visual materials for learning Chinese. I'm very sorry, but I've got no such free materials at hand.

But I could recommend some sources to you, and you can contact them directly. Our Learn Chinese Now is designed to be fun and teach basic everyday Chinese, and, by necessity, half of every lesson is in English. You would be much better off buying a more comprehensive set of learning materials, where all the English is in the book, not on the tape. Now to the weather!

If you want to ask what's the weather like in some place, you can say in Chinese: 最近天气如何? (Zuìjìn tiānqì rúhè?) 最近(zuìjìn) means recently, 天气(tiānqì) is weather, 如何 is an interrogative adverb, meaning "how". The answer could be like this. 最近北京的天气变得越来越热了 (Zuìjìn Běijīng de tiānqì biànde yuèláiyuè rè le), meaning it's been getting hotter and hotter in Beijing recently. 有时还下雨 (Yǒushí hái xià yǔ). Sometimes it rains!

Generally speaking, there is much more rain in the south than in the north of China, so the weather is usually hotter and stuffier. If you plan to travel to cities in southern China, I suggest you don't go in the summer.

What goes down well on very hot days? I often hear people say it's really great to eat ice cream in summer. 夏天吃冰淇淋真爽! (Xiàtiān chī bīngqín zhēn shuǎng!) 爽 in English means "comfortable, great". Yes, that's it! I indulge myself in ice cream and drink iced water. It's also a great idea to go swimming!

I hope the temperature tomorrow will not be that high, so I can go window-shopping with my friends. 可是天气预报说明天要下雨。(Kěshì tiānqì yùbào shuō míngtiān yào xià yǔ.) But the weather report said it would rain tomorrow. Here you can make sentences with "天气预报说..." (The weather report said...). For instance, you can say 天气预报说明天要下雪。(Tiānqì yùbào shuō míngtiān yào xià xuě.) The weather report said it would snow tomorrow.

Guess I'll stay at home!

With that we come to the end of this edition of "Learn Chinese Now". Feel free to share your experience of learning Chinese with me. You are always welcome to e-mail me at zhaopingping@crifm.com. Bye for now and hope to see you here next time.

The Origin of Chinese Characters

First, I must tell you how happy I am to receive a letter from Kenekukwu Dike Ulasi in Nigeria, who is interested in the origins and evolution of Chinese characters. That's great!

Actually, following the development of characters from their pictographic origins is fun, and often helps one remember their modern forms.

OK, to work! Today we'll learn two more characters: 鹿 (lù, deer) and 龙 (lóng, dragon).



鹿 is a pictographic Chinese character. On the oracle bones (甲骨文 jiǎgǔwén, 1) it's so much like a running deer that we must admire our ancestors' wit and artistry. On the bronze inscriptions (金文 jīnwén, 2), it still looks like a deer - look at the impressive antlers - but this time it's not running. Rather, it seems to be walking slowly and looking round on the alert, with eyes open wide and head up.

Moving on to the third picture, it has evolved into lesser script (小篆 xiǎozhuàn), with the antlers simplified into a character similar to 山 (shān, hill), but the hoofs have become much larger. I suppose that's natural, because hoofs are very important when running away from a hungry tiger, but I have no idea why the tail is so much longer! Then the antlers shrink to a dot in the clerical (隶书, lìshū, 4) and later styles.



Next comes to the character 龙 (lóng, dragon).

The Chinese dragon originated in primitive society. This mystical animal of legend has horns, a big long tail and a body covered with scales.

The dragon on the oracle bone and the bronze inscriptions have similar heads and bodies. The main difference is that the latter has pretty frightening teeth!

After the lesser script version (c), the character developed into a rather abstract dragon that's difficult to identify just from the image. The characters in clerical style (d) and regular script (楷书, kǎishū, e) become square and upright. The next two are written in cursive script (草书, cǎoshū, f) and running script (行书, xíngshū, g).

The last one (h) is the simplified modern Chinese character.

That's all for this "Origin of Chinese Characters." If you have any suggestions or comments, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at zhaopingping@crifm.com.

静夜思



床前明月光，疑是地上霜。
举头望明月，低头思故乡。

【Annotation】

静 jìng: quiet
夜 yè: night
床 chuáng: bed
明月 míngyuè: bright moon.
霜 s huāng: frost
举头 jǔtóu: to raise one's head
望 wàng: to look into the distance
疑 yí: to doubt
低头 dītóu: to bow/lower one's head
思 sī: to miss
故乡 gùxiāng: hometown, native place; birthplace

【Poet Li Bai】

Li Bai (701-762) is also called Tai Bai (太白, Tàibǎi) or

Qing Lian Ju Shi (清莲居士, Qīng Lián Jūshì, the Blue Lotus Recluse), as his poetic name. He's one of the most renowned and admired poets in China, and is often considered as Poet Immortal (诗仙, shīxiān).

He lived among the Tang Dynasty which was one of the strongest eras in the Chinese history. At the age of 25 he traveled around China.

Li Bai's poems are varied. He wrote poems about the beautiful landscapes and people in the scenes which touched his heart. He expressed his feelings through the fantastic words in his poems. His poems are easy to understand with rhyming, alliteration and assonance, and beautiful imagery.

【Translation】

A Tranquil Night

Abed, I see a silver light,
I wonder if it's frost aground.
Looking up, I find the moon bright;
Bowling, in homesickness I'm drowned.

(Translated by Xu Yuanchong, from China's Peking University)

【Comment】

In the poem Li Bai expresses his feeling of missing his hometown.

He describes the tranquil and enchanting night in the clear language.





by Fergus Thompson

My Chinese Granny

It is the middle of a hot August night in 1999. I am standing on a dusty street beneath an arched gateway, which forms the entrance to a courtyard. The yard is neatly stacked with firewood, piles of vegetables and farm implements. But most noticeable at this moment is the crowd of happy Chinese people busily greeting each other like long lost relatives. This is hardly surprising: they are long lost relatives.

I am somewhat nervous, for two reasons. Firstly, I have just completed a somewhat hair raising five hour car journey, a large portion of which seemed to have been conducted independently of any recognizable road surface.

And the second excuse for my wobbly knees is that I am about to meet, for the very first time, the matriarch, the grande dame, the 'She Who Must Be Obeyed' of the Chinese family into whose bosom I had fallen not many months before! Let me explain...

Some time before this, in my home town of Dublin, I had met a beautiful, intelligent, funny, sensitive, young girl from the coastal Chinese city of Dalian. This BIFSOG from Dalian wasted little time in reaching into my chest cavity and wringing my heart like a wet dish cloth (but oh, so sensitively!)

When I finally came to my senses three months later I was on a plane to China to MEET THE FAMILY. Oh, yes! The words guaranteed to turn any young (or not so young) suitor's bowels to jelly.

Actually, so far everything had been pretty peachy. Prospective Pa-in-law had sneaked me a cigarette when his wife wasn't looking and I had returned the favour. No problems there then! Prospective Ma-in-law had not spat at me (always a good sign) and plied me with food from morning to night - an even better sign. Prospective elder brothers-in-law (x 3) and I bonded quickly through ingesting vast quantities of Tsingtao beer together. All in all, a pretty successful performance so far I felt.

Now for the final hurdle: off to Dongming, the remote Jilin village where this wonderful family originally hail from, to meet my eighty-nine year old Chinese Granny! "Lao Lao" was waiting to see what sort of creature her beloved granddaughter had picked up on her travels in barbarian lands - and the barbarian was quaking in his sandals.

Which brings us rather neatly back to the dark, dusty street, the sultry August night, and the rowdy relatives in the courtyard.

"What shall I say to her? I ask BIFSOG nervously.

"Say 'Nin de shenti hao ma, Lao Lao?' she replies.

"What does it mean?"

"Oh, something like, 'how's your body?'"

Cool, I think. Just rehearse that line a few times, a bit of the local lingo, gift of the gab, and I'm the golden boy - bound to work! I am ushered through the kitchen into what appears to be living room, dining room, and bedroom, all rolled into one.

And there she is. 89 years old. A diminutive old lady with white hair and nut brown skin sits on the biggest bed I've ever seen. Made of brick and covered with eiderdowns it's the centerpiece of the room (the bed, not Lao Lao). The vastness of the bed, contrasted with the smallness of Lao Lao, reminds me of those imperial paintings where the emperor seems dwarfed by the huge thrones, vases, furniture and columns surrounding him. She wears a Chinese jacket fastened up to the neck and reclines regally on two large cushions. I notice she has tiny feet. The sparkly headband, silver earrings, and crowds of relatives thronging the room like courtiers, add to the image of royalty at rest. Lao Lao is nodding and smiling in a friendly enough manner so I slap on a big smile and give her my spiel.

Well, that seemed to go down alright! Lao Lao bursts into laughter. So do most of the 57 relatives in attendance as they repeat my party piece over and over. Wait a minute though, it wasn't supposed to be funny. Oh, God! I haven't mixed things up and said something like "That's a beautiful body you have there Lao Lao", have I?

No, apparently not. BIFSOG says the general hilarity is simply because no one here is used to seeing a foreigner speak Chinese. Well, basically no one is used to seeing a foreigner full stop. As far as anyone remembers I'm the first to have visited the village.

BIFSOG sits down beside "Lao Lao" and starts what has all the appearances of being a very long chat. She has been away for a long time so there's obviously a bit of catching up to do. And no doubt "Lao Lao" wants the low down on the object she's brought home with her. I decide to take a nocturnal stroll round the village and inform BIFSOG accordingly.

"You won't get lost, will you?"

"Ahem. Where I come from we have a saying: 'Real men don't use road signs.' In short, no, I won't get lost. And if I do, I'll just ask for the Wang's house."

"It's not as simple as that", she says doubtfully. "There are about two hundred houses in the village - and 90% of the owners are named Wang. Anyway, it's more or less a square, just keep turning left and you'll end up back here eventually". "I see", I say craftily, "Two hundred Wangs; don't make a right!"

Of course I said no such thing but I've been honing that one for ages and couldn't resist dropping it in. (The bit about the multiple Wangs is true though!)

I return from my walk in time for dinner. During this fabulous feast I see Lao Lao having a few sharp words with BIFSOG and pointing at me.

"What's up?" I ask.

"Oh, nothing, she's just complaining that I don't put food in your bowl and refill your glass fast enough".

"Indeed", I reply, "and I've also noticed that you've been a bit slow bringing my slippers and pipe in the evening recently."

"xxxx off", retorts BIFSOG succinctly in her all too fluent English. Ah, the generation gap!

I was still curious to know what Lao Lao's impression of me was. BIFSOG said the judgment was "He seems OK" but the fact that I was going to disappear off to some faraway foreign land with her only granddaughter weighed heavily against her.

Well, I did just that. However, three years later, much to Lao Lao's delight, we returned to stay. We may not be in Dongming but we are at least in China and can turn up at family celebrations, Spring Festival and so on. Since then my ratings on Lao Lao's clap-o-meter have been rising steadily.

As I got to know my Chinese granny better I realized that the respect and love her family have for her is not just veneration for age. This indomitable little woman has lived through hardships and privations that I can hardly imagine. The effects are still evident in her thriftiness. Dare to carelessly drop a can or an old newspaper in the bin and she'll quote you the going rate per kilo of waste paper or tin down to the nearest fen! What's more, she'll haggle with the poor recycling man till he gives up and pays her what she wants. Turn on a light before it's pitch black and a voice from the dim corner will remind you that she may not know how electricity works but she knows it's not free! In Lao Lao, the Green movement has an activist it can be proud of! The environment may not be her primary concern but, hey, it doesn't matter if the cat is black or white as long as...!

So how am I doing now in the popularity ratings you ask?

Well, recently she gave BIFSOG a summary: "I wasn't sure at first but I like him much more now. He's good looking enough I suppose, although he has a big nose and funny eyes. Tallish and looks strong so he should be able to work well. Healthy and eats enough so he shouldn't go off dying on you suddenly. Not bad over all. It's just a shame he can't speak human language. Ah, well, you can't have everything I suppose!"

Indeed Lao Lao, you can't. And if everyone understood that as well as you, this would be a much happier world.

"Lao Lao" is older these days and sometimes not too well. But she hasn't lost an ounce of spirit. Recently her heart stopped suddenly. She was revived by her frantic daughter and niece and taken to hospital. On coming round in intensive care she complained bitterly:

"I could see all my old friends and relatives on the other side. They were calling me over. They had arranged a big welcome party for me - and I missed it. All because of you two!"

Although I hope Lao Lao will put off going to "her party" for a long time yet, I also hope she will enjoy it hugely when she finally gets there.

To my Lao Lao, and the millions of Chinese grannies like her, I humbly salute you.

"Lao Lao finally managed to get to her party shortly after this article was written. She left from her home village, surrounded by family and friends as she had always wished. I am sure she is happy, but I miss her very much."

My Splendid Experiences in New Zealand

From March 2003 to April 2004, I stayed in New Zealand as a visiting scholar. It's hard to describe my feelings and experiences over there. If I have to describe the place in one word the first thing that pops into my head is "beautiful".

But clearly, that's not enough: the longer I think about it the more I realize that a single word doesn't really do it justice, and it at least needs to be modified. "Absolutely beautiful" is what I'll leave you with for the time being. And the Kiwi people are very nice as you can always hear a "hello" even you just meet them in the street. The following are a few segments of my unforgettable experiences in New Zealand.

Beautiful Campus in A Beautiful City

It was a rainy morning when I arrived on the campus. I stood in front of the University of Canterbury's Students' Union Building waiting for Head of Department Jim Tully to pick me up.

I was stunned by the beautiful trees growing all over the campus. There was a maple forest before my eyes and



most of the maple leaves were red or yellow. I couldn't help thinking: "This is exactly the place where I'd like to stay."

Jim arrived. Then, much to my surprise, he went to buy some birthday cake for one of the 20 students in Graduate Diploma in Journalism class. Jim remembers everybody's birthday and buys some cake to help add a "sweet" element to the special day. As we got to the classroom, it was almost time for the next class. Jim introduced me to the 20 students and then began the class focusing on objective reporting in journalism. To improve my skills and get to know more about journalism in the west, I joined this class.

I almost got lost when I tried to go back to the bus stop after class as the campus is, especially for someone who has just arrived, a little confusing. It's huge and well forested, with trees and flowers everywhere. Fortunately, there is a map almost in every corner and an arrow to show where you are.

When I left the campus, I ended up in another beautiful place, Hagley Park. The park is located between my apartment and the campus, and I pass through it everyday. It's a huge park, and if you walk around it, it takes more than an hour. Most of the trees in the park are hundreds of years old; but there is at least one tree which is very young, planted by the Mayor of Gansu, Christchurch's sister city.

There were very few people in the park, which is surprising considering its beauty. The botanical garden in the center of the park is surrounded by a stream where people can take small boats to see the surrounding beauty. And, interestingly enough, there's a sailor wearing handsome uniform that moves up and down the stream in a boat. The day before I left Christchurch for Beijing, I went to the park again and began to think there really is a "Heaven on Earth".

The city of Christchurch got its name from a Christian church located in the city center. The church was built in the 18th century and still serves the people everyday and is a place that proudly displays the city's history. Not very far from the church, is the newly-opened art gallery that shows modern aspects of the city. It is made of glass and hosts both modern and classic art exhibitions.

Some of the most common descriptions I heard from Chinese students are "fresh air", "blue sky" and "beautiful gardens". And they are right! Christchurch is a real garden city.

An Unforgettable Dinner

People often asked me what I eat and if I cook. To tell you the truth, most Chinese staying abroad cook for themselves, and I was by no means an exception. It's less expensive and makes it a little easier to keep the tastes of

home alive and well. Here I'd like to tell you about a special dinner I had with my Kiwi classmates.

We went on a reporting trip to the Marlborough Express newspaper in Blenheim, in the northern part of New Zealand's south island. Jim drove us there on June 16th, and the next day we went to work at the Marlborough Express. Our assignments were to write soft stories like profiles for their weekend edition.

I interviewed a few Asian students including some from China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand. They all expressed that it was a good place to study because of its beauty, tranquility. However, while many of them cherished the opportunity of studying abroad, they usually discovered that there was no "taste like home". They were not used to having bread or drinking milk twice a day. Although the schools took measures to hire Asian cooks to serve them Asian food every Tuesday, they still missed eating good hometown food all the time.

After work, we went to the Countdown supermarket to buy some food for our meal. This evening, we would cook dinner in pairs. After we arrived at our Motel, Jim said: "You can start now."

The two Nicolas, Nicola B and Nicola W, started first. They took a big piece of pan cake, and then they put mushrooms, tomatoes, peppers and many other things



on it. They were making pizza! After this, they put it in the oven to bake. And then the other students follow suit. I also tried to make a pizza, my first one!

"To my surprise," I said to Jim, "I didn't realize western food can also help create such a good atmosphere. It reminds me of Chinese Spring Festival when every member of the family joins hands to make dumplings. I feel at home!"

"Yes," Jim replied. "food always helps create a good atmosphere and good feelings."

It's true. Especially when my pizza was ready, I felt very warm to say the least. When I took my pizza out, Jim said it looked very good. In fact, it tasted even better!

It was a great dinner! It was the first time I'd ever eaten with a large group of students outside of China and I feel it was unforgettable.

Celebrating Spring Festival in RNZI

Another unforgettable thing was celebrating Spring Festival at Radio New Zealand International where I worked for almost 3 months. RNZI has only 11 permanent staff, but runs 24 hour programs. It was fun to be there.

I didn't realize what time of year it was until I started to receive a few emails of festival greetings, which meant Spring Festival or Chinese New Year was on the way! The next day at noon, I went out to get some sweets, which they call lollies in New Zealand. I put the candy on the table which stands in the middle of the newsroom.

"Hello everyone, please take some candies to celebrate the Chinese New Year!"

"Wow! Happy New Year, Xuefei!" my Kiwi colleagues cheered. Janine and Penny were both born in the year of monkey. They were very happy to know that this year belonged to them. "What is it like to be a monkey?" Janine couldn't help asking. "Well," I said, "it's just like a monkey, intelligent, clever, smart and hard-working also. By the way, my mother was born in the year of monkey too."

Then, everyone starts to wonder what symbol is his or hers. In the end, we found out that Walter, Koro and Steven and I were all born in the year of horse. Then we drew the conclusion that horses make good journalists and editors because they are enthusiastic, independent

and hard-working. And here the four horses are at different ages with Walter older and Koro younger than me. Then Lynda wondered what her birth symbol was and I guessed that it must be ox. An ox is definitely a good worker. It's true with Lynda, mother of two extremely energetic boys, who was very hard working and efficient, a good journalist. Sara turned out to be a rat, intelligent, sensitive, and easy-going. Then someone found some information about the Chinese zodiac and printed it out in English.

As Linden came over, I told her that she was a tiger. "What is a tiger like?" She asked. "Just like you, in charge, very demanding and also capable." I said. She burst out laughing. Linden is the manager and she is a good team leader because you can often hear laughter coming out of her office. And if you have any worries, she's also an amazing problem solver!

Then the ladies started thinking of their partner's or children's birth symbol. After an enthusiastic discussion about their zodiac signs, people went back to work. As Penny came back to her desk after an interview, she said, "Our life is not the same any more."

I didn't really know what she was getting at. No one pointed out what she meant. But after a while I began to understand that the knowledge they gained caused them to wonder about their family members' signs: what year their parents were born; and what kind of character their children and friends had. It gave people a new way of understanding others.

It doesn't matter where they're from, the zodiac applies as equally to Chinese people as it does to Kiwi's and everyone else around the world. Everyone cares about their fate, their luck, their future and their relatives. It's a thread that links us all together.

Even the next day we continued to talk about it. And we found out that Don's birth symbol was also monkey. Johnny was a rabbit and he would like to come to China some day soon. And a colleague of Steven's found out that he was born in the year of the dog. He said his mother



even gave him a name Damin, which, at least in his opinion, is a dog's name. There weren't any fireworks or big family reunions, but I felt I had a great Spring Festival celebration in RNZI's newsroom.

Farewell to the University of Canterbury

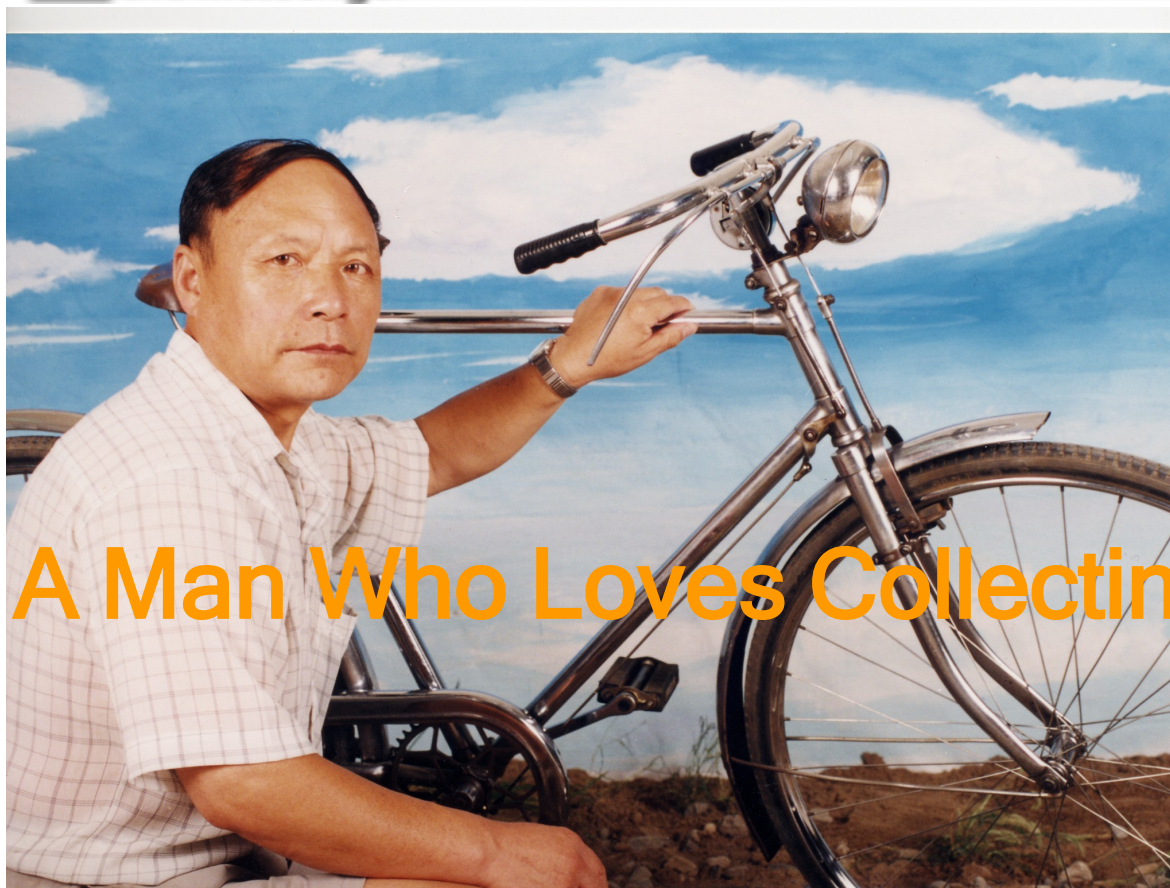
The year passed so quickly that I barely had time to catch my breath, but the time came that I had to say goodbye.

Why? The campus is a sacred place, it's fun, it's hard, it's frustrating and totally unforgettable. In fact, I didn't really feel that the campus has anything to do with academics; rather, it seemed much more like a social place to me, where I, and everyone else for that matter, could socialize freely.

It was fun to practise Teeline or short-hand in English during journalism classes and I also found that I'd developed a serious interest in media law along the way. Interviewing Chinese and other Asian students in Blenheim was a wonderful experience. But what I found even more inspiring was to see students protest an increase of their tuition fees.

As a visiting scholar from China Radio International, I really enjoyed sitting in the classroom, listening to lectures and having heated discussions with classmates. I was deeply impressed with the professors' attitudes and lectures; yet, I could also feel the stress they experienced during recent restructuring. I felt the library was extremely convenient because you only needed one card for everything.

The University of Canterbury has over a hundred years of history, yet it's also a melting pot for people coming from all over the world. It doesn't matter where you're from, anyone from anywhere can become a member of it. Goodbye, Canterbury, I loved you at first sight, and I will love you forever! (Chen Xuefei)



A Man Who Loves Collecting Old Bicycles

Editor's note: Many people have hobbies in their spare time. Some like collecting stamps or old clocks, some are looking for old coins or porcelains to enrich their personal collection. But 69-year-old Wang Mingxi, an old city dweller of Beijing, is fascinated by collecting old bicycles. CRI's reporter Shi Chunyong has just talked with this old man and tells his story.

In the past 50 years, Wang Mingxi has collected from many parts of the world more than 130 famous brand bicycles including some pretty classy brands. But recently he decided to sell the lot because of his old age and the problems of storage. Now he is looking for a loving home for his beloved bicycles.

Wang lives in an ordinary apartment building in the south of Beijing. He has been fascinated with bikes from a very young age. So there was a time, when the thing that made the little Wang Mingxi the happiest boy in town, was the chance to ride someone else's bike!

Naturally, he dreamed of having his own bike, and after a few years working in a factory, the 18-year-old Wang went to a Beijing department store one sunny day in 1954.

"It was my first bike. I spent 480 yuan to buy a brand new Raleigh made in Britain," said Wang Mingxi. "I was so excited when I pushed the bike out of the shop. I rode it to show off to my neighbours and I was so proud when I saw the admiration in their eyes. In the evening I put it in my room, looked at it, and cleaned it, with a soft rag. That night I was so excited I couldn't sleep."

Ever since Wang has had an indissoluble bond with bikes and wanted to collect them, be they new or old. But collecting bicycles is a difficult process. It needs both money and time.

"The most frustrating thing is when you would find a good bike and couldn't afford it. And when you raised enough money, the owner didn't want to sell it. Sometimes I would go and talk to the owner more than 10 times to make him agree to sell his bike to me."

But no matter how bumpy the path, Wang Mingxi's interest in collecting bicycles has never lost its chain. Once he found an old Benjamin bike when he visited an old man's home. And Wang was very much taken by it. The bike was made in Britain in 1917 and China imported only 20 at the time.

"I bought this bike in the early 1980s. The owner

was an old man. And he was also a bike collector and lived in Guangming building, which is quite a way from my home. When I first saw the bike, I was immediately conquered by its beauty and design. I visited the old man several times. But he refused to sell it. But the chance came when the old man passed away and the bike was passed on to his grandson. He didn't like bicycle and sold it to me at the price of 1,000 yuan. You couldn't image how happy I was when I finally got the bike that I had dreamed of night and day."

The Benjamin has become Wang's favourite. Wang says a British bike-collecting fan once offered him a car for his Benjamin bike, but he politely turned the offer down. He says the value of some bikes cannot be measured in money. Their artistic value and craftsmanship are beyond comparison.

Wang Mingxi always refused to sell his bikes, but if someone wants to do a swap, he's willing to negotiate. Once a bike fan offered a Japanese made "Miyata" bike in exchange for one of his Raleighs, and he agreed. Because every component on the Miyata bike bears a trademark, Wang got all pumped up over it.

It's not always easy to find the old bikes you want. Wang says he often goes to second hand shops or pawnshops to see if there is anything he likes. Sometimes he would go to other cities, such as Shanghai, if he knows there are valuable old bikes to be sold.

Wang Mingxi doesn't just collect his bikes to collect dust! He rides 'em too! He sometimes goes on trips over to Tianjin, a city fully 130 kilometers east of Beijing. "Though my two children both have their own cars, I prefer riding bikes if I want to go somewhere," he said, "I can even ride to Tianjin. I can reach 15 kilometres an hour or more. It normally takes me 7 or 8 hours to get over there. Of course, I don't travel alone. I like to ride my bike together with some young people. It's great fun to talk with them while riding."

After several decades of being the nut behind the handlebars, Wang Mingxi has collected over a hundred old bikes. Most of them were made in Britain, Japan and the Netherlands. The oldest bike he has is over 80 years old.

The bikes that Wang collected have their own unique features. They're made not only with different materials and styles, their drive systems are also different. "The bikes that I collected are from different countries and their drive systems are different too," said Wang. "There are three different kinds of bicycle drive system in my collection. One is gear driven, one is driven by belt transmission

and one is driven by axle. It is very rare to find a bicycle driven by axle nowadays, because our country didn't produce it."

Though Wang Mingxi has so many valuable old bikes, to keep and maintain them is a big problem.

Luckily one of Wang's friends offered him a big underground warehouse for him to store these bicycles. But maintaining these bikes is still a big problem. It takes a lot of the old man's time and energy. "To keep my bikes in good condition, I often go out to find spare parts that fit them. All my bikes are stored in an underground warehouse, where it's very humid. So every six months I hire 5 people to clean and oil them."

The underground warehouse is 5 kilometres from Wang's home. The collection there is very safe, but Wang still likes to go over to look over his babies. Yes, the bikes have become a part of his family. If he doesn't see them for a few days he will miss them.

But recently his friend wanted to take the warehouse back and asked Wang to find another place for his bikes. This was a huge challenge for Wang. He tried many times but in vain. At last, Wang had no choice, but to sell them! "Well, they want their warehouse back. I can understand that. Now I must find a new home or perhaps a new owner for my bikes. It is too much for me to maintain them all the time and find, or rent, a new place that is better than the old one. I think it is time for them to find a new owner who can give them the good home they deserve."

Wang Mingxi has spent 50 years collecting bicycles. Now, he looks at his huge collection and feels sad to think they may leave him one day and find a new owner. "My ultimate aim is to open a bike museum. In the museum, people can see the development of bicycles around world. I hope the future owner of my bikes will open a museum for them. To some extent, these bikes will belong to nobody: they belong to the era that created them."

Now Wang Mingxi wants to sell all his 130-odd old bikes at a price of 3 million yuan. He says they're worth it. Not just because of the calculated monetary value of the collection, but also the time and effort that he has invested to find and maintain these bikes over the past five decades.

"After selling off my bikes, I will first give part of the money to the backward rural areas of the country to improve their living standards, and the country's Hope Project to make children in poor rural areas enjoy a better education," Wang Mingxi said. "I will also buy two new cars for my two married daughters. And also, I will save some money to open a technical school. I am an experienced fitter. My father and grandfather were fitters too. I want to pass my skills and experiences on to the young people. There is a great shortage of skilled fitters in the country."

Wang Mingxi says after he made the decision to sell his bikes, he has been being bombarded with phone calls. Some offer places for him to store his bikes, some negotiate the price of his bikes and some make suggestions of how to deal the challenge of keeping the bike. But Wang says he is too old to look after the collection. He hopes that the new owner, if there is one, will take care of his bikes and if possible open a bike museum: then he will come to offer his help and advice on how to keep these bikes in good nick.



Tasting Suzhou

his early twenties, he said it was romantic and fun. As he described walking in a small alley under an umbrella on a rainy day and then suddenly coming upon a brand new world of skyscrapers with neon lights and bustling crowds, I was filled with a sensation akin to an ancient Chinese wash paintings meeting western impressionistic paintings in a strange yet rhythmic dance.

A Night at the Teahouse

How lucky my colleagues and I were to have experienced the city's magic on the first night we arrived in Suzhou! Following the directions of some locals, we went to a teahouse on the downtown Guanqian Street to see a *pingtan* performance, traditional ballad singing in the Suzhou dialect.

Guanqian Street is Suzhou's key shopping district, where both locals and tourists can buy fashionable clothes and footwear as well as native Suzhou souvenirs like silk products. It took us some time to travel through the crowded shopping areas to finally find the teahouse named Pin Fang, which literally means "tasting fragrance", cozily lying at the far end of the shopping street.

Shoving all city-sounds and commotion outside, the teahouse has been restored to a traditional

keep up with what they sang, I later chose to just listen to the soft cadence of the tune, which was also an enjoyable and indelible moment.

More people came as night deepened. I couldn't help noticing people there were so into their local arts that I began to wonder if I should change my perspective about *Er Ren Zhuan*, a traditional folk song-and-dance duet from my hometown in north-east China, which I have at times avoided listening to as I find it a little too noisy.

The Oriental Venice

Encircled by the Grand Canal, Suzhou has unique scenery of crisscrossing waterways and streets lined with houses and stone bridges. The city is not only famous for being a "Paradise on Earth", but is also known as the "Venice of the East".

It has several famous water towns. And on the last day of our four-day stay in Suzhou, we enrolled ourselves into a tourist group for a sightseeing trip outside the city, in the water town of Tongli. Like a kid eager to see what birthday present is inside a box, we were embracing a determination to unwrap the city by leaving no part of Suzhou unexplored. By "we", I especially mean me and my colleague Liu Yudan, who took numerous fabulous photos of each place she visited in Suzhou.

It turned out the trip lived up to our expectations, not because I have already come back to Beijing, but because it made our dreams about the incredible, picturesque water towns come true.

Golden sunshine, delicate breezes, white and grey ancient houses and green willows: with these picturesque elements as our companions, we found ourselves on a boat drifting along a river. And accompanying the creaky sound of paddle hitting the boat and splashes of water were the fast clicks of camera shutters and more awe-inspired "WOWs" backed by melodic words about the scenery. It was like a

Before I first went to Suzhou earlier this summer, the only connection between me and the city was a university classmate of mine, a girl from Suzhou. I used to ask her while we were hanging out to teach me to read ancient poems in the soft Suzhou dialect, which I believe sounds more beautiful if spoken by a woman. Now that I've actually been there, I've become fascinated by more than just the dialect. Practically everything I saw, the classical, the modern, the cultural and the natural... It was love at first sight, and sometimes, more than words can express...

The City of Paradise

Classicality and modernity are antonyms, but they seem to have found a way of coexisting harmoni-



ously in Suzhou, a city more than 2,500 years old that lies in the south of the lower reaches of China's longest river, the Yangtze.

Compared with its eastern neighbor Shanghai, Suzhou is quite a small city, small but exquisite. It consists of two main parts, the old town and the new town. Taking a cab tour of both parts may cost you no more than twenty yuan, a small price to pay for the huge changes you'll see along the way. The views change between the classical and modern and your eyes almost never get a chance to rest. One moment you'll see a pavilion-shaped telephone booth, and the next you'll see an ancient garden. As a new comer to the city, I often tried to keep my eyes wide open and subconsciously my mouth, too, which constantly blurted out a lot of "Wows!" when I saw a little brook in the city, an arched bridge, traditional Chinese styled shop fronts, street lamps and even road fencing. I was told some of the traditional touches to the city had been added specially for the World Heritage Committee at the end of June, which was also the reason why I was there as a reporter.

An interviewee once told me that if using just one word to describe his hometown Suzhou, it would be "elegant", which I totally agree with, though based on my very short stay there. And when asked what life was like in such an ancient city for him, in

layout which, without a doubt, is a sharp contrast to its surroundings. Deep brown tables, white and blue china tea sets, ancient Chinese musical instruments on the wall, waitresses dressed in traditional clothes, and last but not the least, a performing section in the middle of the house's front part, where a male and a female performer sing *pingtan* while playing a *sanxian* (a three-stringed plucked instrument) and a lute.

As I mentioned before, I enjoy listening to the Suzhou dialect, the tone of which sums up the character of feminine beauty, tenderness, serenity, subtlety and elegance, and in which *pingtan* is sung. Unfortunately, what I am able to enjoy is its melody but not its meaning. But fortunately, the teahouse owner was so considerate that she prepared scripts for individual songs so that we out-of-townners could understand the stories they are singing. Plus, people can also order songs from that menu.

As I was secretly mimicking the performers' pronunciation while referring to the scripts at the table, others, that don't need any help, were absolutely ecstatic about the vivid and melodious story telling. My senior colleague Lin Shaowen, a big fan of *pingtan*, was simply carried away by the *Pingtan* performance. As for me, after failing to

flowing watercolor painting with its lines, pigments, tastes and sounds gently floating into my consciousness. But maybe I was even greedier, thinking if I could only stay for a few more days to experience the life in a water town from dawn to dusk, and then become a painter myself tracing out everything in sight!

The New Names

The truth was, watercolor fantasies or no, we took a train back to Beijing after our water town tour. But it seemed that our minds were still on that charming city, for quite some time, as can be seen from the new names we almost all gave ourselves on MSN.

When I logged on to MSN one day, I was excited to see everybody had changed their names on to Suzhou-related ones, such as Dreaming Back to Gusu (another name of Suzhou), Can One Not Remember Jiangnan (meaning south of the river, namely the South of the lower reaches of the Yangtze), Hearing Ping Tan at the Tasting Fragrance Teahouse, Isn't It Wonderful?...and mine changed too: Water Color Painting of Jiangnan with a Poetic charm.

It seems before we turn into painters, we are poets. Yet after witnessing the views in Suzhou, I somehow understand why a place like that can be home, or hotel to so many poets and romantics! (Ning Yan)