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## LIVING, BREATHING HERITAGE

Ensuring the survival of China's intangible cultural treasures

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## Preserving Cultural Identity

Late last year, at a meeting of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bali, Indonesia, China's traditional shadow puppetry was included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

This is good news, not only because this long-standing and beautiful art form has now been recognized by the global community, but also because it symbolizes China's broader contribution to enriching the world's culture.

Intangible culture forms an integral part of a country's heritage. Having its origins largely in the daily or spiritual lives of people, intangible culture, like its tangible counterpart, often reflects the values, as well as the creative and imaginative capacity of a nation. It should therefore be duly protected so that a nation's distinct cultural identity will be maintained and carried on into the future.

As a country with more than 5,000 years of history, China boasts numerous intangible cultural treasures, ranging from folk art and handicrafts to traditional medicine and social rituals and customs. Over the years, the Chinese Government has spared no effort to protect the country's intangible as well as tangible heritage. Authorities have passed legislation, introduced regulations and allocated special funding in order to keep invaluable traditions alive.

Despite these efforts, many intangible cultural items still face a number of difficulties. A shortage of capital, lack of determined and qualified successors, ineffective protection measures, a lack of awareness and sheer neglect mean that many treasures have either fallen into oblivion or are on the verge of extinction.

Far more effort needs to be made to preserve and protect China's intangible cultural traditions. Apart from the conventional approaches of increased government funding and more effective enforcement of protective measures, one of the top priorities should be the launch of comprehensive education campaigns. Society as a whole needs to be made aware of the importance of preserving traditional art forms, skills and techniques.

School children, in particular, should be taught to cherish these cultural treasures. As far as possible, children and young people should be given the opportunity to learn and participate in the crafts, art forms, performances and rituals that comprise the nation's intangible heritage.

Only the active involvement of young people and the broad awareness of society as a whole will keep China's heritage alive, and allow Chinese society and the world to benefit from these unique cultural forms for generations to come. ■

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E-mail: [contact@bjreview.com.cn](mailto:contact@bjreview.com.cn)

President & Editor in Chief: Wang Gangyi

Vice President: Qi Wengong

Associate Editors in Chief: Li Jianguo, Huang Wei,

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Photo Editor: Wang Xiang

Photographers: Jiang Xiaoying, Wei Yao

Art: Li Shigong

Art Director: Wang Yajuan

Chief Designer: Cui Xiaodong

Designer: Zhao Boyu

Proofreading: Qin Wenli, Ma Xin

Distribution Director: Pan Changqing

Human Resources: Zhang Xiaoli

International Cooperation: Pan Shuangqin

Legal Counsel: Yue Cheng

North America Bureau

Chief Reporter: Chen Wen

Tel/Fax: 1-201-792-0334

E-mail: [chenwenwendy@gmail.com](mailto:chenwenwendy@gmail.com)

General Editorial Office

Tel: 86-10-68996252

Fax: 86-10-68326628

English Edition

Tel: 86-10-68996259

Advertising Department

Tel: 86-10-68995813

Fax: 86-10-68329398

E-mail: [ad@bjreview.com.cn](mailto:ad@bjreview.com.cn)

Distribution Department

Tel: 86-10-68310644

Fax: 86-10-68328738

E-mail: [circulation@bjreview.com.cn](mailto:circulation@bjreview.com.cn)

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Tel: 86-10-68413849 Fax: 86-10-68412166

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## Tackling Water Pollution

Firemen dump neutralizers into a pool at a hydropower station at the upper reaches of the Longjiang River to dissolve contaminants found in the river on January 30.

The river, which flows through Hechi, southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, was found to contain excessive cadmium levels in mid-January. Cadmium, a chemical that is mostly found in industrial effluent, is a known carcinogen. More water is being discharged from the station to dilute the pollution, and neutralizers, such as activated carbon, quick lime and aluminum chloride, have been dumped into the water to mitigate the damage.

**“The Chinese Government is greatly concerned about the safety of the Chinese workers, and an emergency mechanism has been activated for the rescue of the workers.”**

Qiu Xuejun, head of the Chinese working group sent to Sudan to help rescue Chinese workers who are missing or being held hostage after an attack on a Chinese company camp in South Kordofan State, speaking to the press in Khartoum on January 31

**“We firmly oppose the use of force to resolve the Syrian issue, firmly oppose the practice of pushing through ‘regime change,’ which violates the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the basic norms governing the international relations.”**

Li Baodong, Chinese permanent representative to the UN, speaking at an open meeting of the UN Security Council on the current situation of Syria on January 31

**“This represents a major step forward toward closer and irrevocable fiscal and economic integration and stronger governance in the euro area. It will significantly bolster the outlook for fiscal sustainability and euro area sovereign debt and enhance growth.”**

European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, commenting on a new fiscal treaty finalized by EU leaders at the EU summit in Brussels, Belgium, on January 30

**“The labor market is showing no sign of falling into hibernation, while actually it remains very robust.”**

German Economy Minister Philipp Roesler, commenting on data showing the unemployment rate in the country is down to 6.7 percent from 6.8 percent in last December, a record low since the country's unification 20 years ago



**GUTEN TAG!** Chinese Peking Opera actress Wang Yi acknowledges the applause after performing at the opening of the Chinese Culture Year in Germany in Berlin on January 31

## Agricultural Incentives

Chinese authorities issued their first policy document for 2012 on February 1, underscoring the importance of scientific and technological innovation for sustained agricultural growth.

China will intensify its efforts to encourage the development of both frontier agricultural technologies and basic research, so as to maintain sustainable agricultural growth, said the document issued jointly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, China's cabinet.

It said the government will lend support to agricultural research focusing on bio-safety, farm product safety, the effective use of farmland, ecological restoration and genetic

regulation.

According to the document, the country will continue to expand its fiscal budget for agriculture in 2012 and direct more of the country's fixed asset investment toward the sector.

Government data show China's grain output rose to a record high of 571.21 million tons in 2011. The figure represented a year-on-year increase of 4.5 percent and marked the eighth consecutive year of growth for the country's grain output.

## Food Standards

China will overhaul its current food safety standards, integrating new specifications and weeding out others in a move largely aimed at avoiding repetition and contradiction, the

Ministry of Health said on January 30.

By the end of 2015, the ministry will have basically completed its work on the mandatory contents of China's current 1,900 national food standards, 1,200 local standards and 3,000 food industrial standards, said a statement.

In the meantime, efforts will be made to revise the standards on food additives, food labels and food contaminants, biotoxins and pesticide residues.

The ministry will also accelerate the formulation and modification of the national standard of food safety, so as to fill certain important gaps in the existing version, resolve inconsistent standards and enhance the standards' scientific base.

## Rising Citations

An annual report has revealed that papers on science and technology written by Chinese scientists were cited more than 5 million times over the past 10 years, making China the seventh largest source of such citations.

The report was published on ScienceWatch.com with the support of Thomson Reuters. Twenty countries' citations were recorded in overlapping five-year increments starting from 2001.

Of the top 20 countries, the United States remained first with 48,862,100 total citations, followed by Germany, England, Japan, France and Canada.

According to the report, the number of citations from Chinese scientists' papers

**ART OF INGENUITY** A customer admires a root carving in a shop in Jian'ou, Fujian Province, on January 31. The city, China's major supplier of root carvings, has more than 290 factories and 16,000 workers engaged in the industry



## Best-seller Queried

**Han Han**, one of China's most renowned young writers, filed a lawsuit against Fang Zhouzi, who claims that some of Han's novels were written by ghostwriters.

Han asked for a public apology and compensation of 100,000 yuan (\$15,860) from Fang for slander. Han is quite confident in the lawsuit because he said he would provide a 1,000-page manuscript that he wrote between the year of 1997 and 2000 to the court to refute Fang's accusation.

Han's first novel *Triple Doors* sparked a debate about the quality of China's current education system because he dropped out of high school due to too many failed subjects. Besides being a best-selling author in China, the 29-year-old is also a professional rally driver, singer and one of the most popular bloggers in the country.





SHANE

**SAFE LANDING**

Chinese workers who fled an attack on their camp in Sudan's South Kordofan State arrive in Khartoum on January 30. Twenty-nine Chinese nationals were reportedly held hostage by rebels. The Chinese Government has dispatched a working group to Sudan to aid the rescue mission

between 2007 and 2011 nearly quadrupled compared to citations in the 2001-05 period, with chemistry, material science, engineering and mathematics being the most-cited fields.

However, a separate report released in December 2011 by the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China noted that the number of average citations for each Chinese scientific paper, a benchmark for the quality of research papers, remains at a lower level.

In 2011, the average number of citations per paper was 6.21, up by 5.8 percent year on year, but still far below the global average of 10.71 citations, according to the report.

**Taiwan Investment Zones**

A new state-level investment zone for businesses from Taiwan was established in the mainland's southeastern Fujian Province, lo-

cal authorities said on January 31.

The investment zone is located along the Taiwan Straits in Quanzhou.

According to related business policies, the state-level investment zone will provide more effective services and a more convenient investment environment with greater limits of authority for examinations and approvals.

Local authorities said the investment zone will focus on wind power equipment manufacturing, photo-electricity, intelligent transportation, and high-end service industries.

In the meantime, another Taiwanese investment zone in Fujian, the Fuzhou Taiwanese Investment Zone (FTIZ), was expanded to 11.46 square km from 1.8 square km.

As one of the first two Taiwanese investment zones on the mainland, the FTIZ will become a major base for metallurgy, electricity, IT, and equipment manufacturing, among others, local authorities said.

**Farmer Singer**



**Zhu Zhiwen**, a farmer in Shandong Province good at singing, was invited to perform at the 2012 Spring Festival Gala of China Central Television, a popular TV variety

show on the eve of the Chinese Lunar New Year.

Zhu grabbed the limelight earlier in *I'm a Big Star*, a talent show produced by Shandong TV, where he perfectly sang the theme song of a well-known Chinese TV series. His talent and strong baritone was almost the same as the song's original singer, leaving the show's judges nearly speechless.

Zhu's performance was uploaded to the Internet and sparked public interest because of the sharp contrast between his powerful voice and his plain appearance on stage. Dressed in an old heavy coat and a wool cap, Zhu was nicknamed by netizens as "Brother Coat."

Zhu, 42, hasn't received any professional training in singing. He just loves singing. When he works in the fields, he often sings for himself, which led other villagers to think he was crazy, but he enjoys it very much.

**Foreign Experts**

Some 81,000 foreign experts were working in Shanghai at the end of 2011—30 percent more than in 2005.

Shanghai has more foreign experts—overseas professionals recognized by a government certificate—than any other city in China, said the Shanghai Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau on January 31.

It's estimated that one in six of the foreign experts in China are based in Shanghai.

Certified foreign experts mostly work in the cultural, educational and research sectors. This category does not include other foreigners legally hired to work locally on work permits.

At the end of 2010, some 210,000 foreign nationals were living in Shanghai, according to the latest population census.

Over the past five years, 370,000 foreign expert employment contracts were established or renewed in China, according to official statistics.

**INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION**

China's leading agricultural scientist Yuan Longping is presented the 2011 Mahathir Science Award in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on January 31, for his contribution to the development of hybrid rice



YHNIK

## PMI Bounces Back

China's Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), a barometer of the country's manufacturing activity, rebounded to 50.5 percent in January 2012 from 50.3 percent in December 2011, said the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing (CFLP).

"The figure is a signal that the Chinese economy remains on a solid footing, with both industrial production and consumption stabilizing," said the CFLP. "But the positive development is in part due to impact of the Spring Festival and the long-term trend remains to be seen."

The new orders sub-index, an effective gauge of domestic demand, stood at 50.4 percent in January, compared with 49.8 percent in December 2011.

## Property Loans Down

Banks in China extended 1.26 trillion yuan (\$200 billion) of property loans in 2011, a

decrease of 770.4 billion yuan (\$121.7 billion) from a year earlier, said the People's Bank of China, the central bank.

"Property loan growth weakened last year due to restrictive policies in the real estate industry," said the central bank in a report.

China introduced its toughest-ever policies against property speculation last year to tame inflated home prices. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, 52 out of the 70 monitored cities witnessed month-on-month drops in new commercial house prices in December 2011.

## Combating Hot Money

China will continue cracking down on illegal cross-border capital flows this year in an effort to protect economic and financial security, said the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE), the country's top foreign exchange regulator.

The SAFE investigated 3,488 cases of illegal cross-border capital flows in 2011, and

confiscated a total of 503 million yuan (\$79.59 million) in illegal funds, more than twice the amount collected in the previous year.

In the past year, the SAFE has also cracked down on illegal private banks, Internet-based speculation in foreign exchange and illegal foreign exchange trading.

The SAFE said that it would further strengthen the monitoring of foreign exchange transactions and prevent risks from abnormal cross-border capital flows this year.

## Sany Expands

China's construction equipment giant Sany Heavy Industry is set to take over Putzmeister, a German engineering firm, the Chinese company said in a statement.

Under the deal, Sany's wholly owned subsidiary, Sany Germany GmbH, will pay 324 million euros to own 90 percent of Putzmeister's shares. The remaining 10 percent would be purchased by China's Citic Funds.

Putzmeister, founded in 1958, is a family-owned firm based in Aichtal. Sany said that the deal would help upgrade its research, development and innovation capacities, improve its international operations and management expertise and lead to the creation of a global leader in concrete machinery production.



**LABOR SHORTFALL** A job seeker looks at recruitment boards at a job fair in Qingdao, Shandong Province. A number of enterprises in east China are facing difficulties hiring enough workers due to labor shortages

## Numbers

# 10.37 trillion yuan

The Ministry of Finance said that the nation's fiscal revenue grew 24.8 percent year on year to hit a record high of 10.37 trillion yuan (\$1.64 trillion) in 2011.

# 345.2 billion yuan

China invested 345.2 billion yuan (\$54.75 billion) in water conservation projects last year, up 71.2 percent from a year earlier, according to the Ministry of Water Resources.



## Brokerages Suffer

China's securities companies posted a combined profit of 39.38 billion yuan (\$6.24 billion) in 2011, just half of what they reported in 2010, according to data from the Securities Association of China (SAC).

A total of 109 securities firms earned an operating income of 135.95 billion yuan (\$21.5 billion) last year, representing a 30-percent drop from 2010, said the SAC.

The gloom was a result of the dismal performance of stock markets last year. Due to tightened bank lending, the battered real estate sector, and weak external demand, China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index dropped 21.68 percent in 2011.

## IPO Mania

China's A-share markets will see around 300 initial public offerings (IPOs) in 2012, raising 270 billion-300 billion yuan (\$42.7 billion-\$47.4 billion) in total, said the Beijing-based research company Zero2IPO.

Because of gloomy sentiment on secondary markets, domestic stock markets received 282 listings and raised \$43.7 billion in 2011, down 19 percent and 39.3 percent respectively from 2010, said the report.

The report predicted that the secondary markets will rebound in 2012 but the IPO market will not see sharp growth as the China Securities Regulatory Commission may slow down the pace of IPOs this year to ensure ample market liquidity.

**TRADE BOOM** A foreign businessman talks to a shop owner in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, China's largest petty commodities market. Zhejiang's foreign trade rose 22 percent year on year to reach \$309.4 billion in 2011



**BRIDGING NANJING** Construction on the Nanjing Yangtze River No. 4 Bridge is accelerating. The bridge, built at a cost of 6.86 billion yuan (\$1.1 billion), is scheduled to come into use by the end of this year

## Record Breaker

Chinese speed skater **Yu Jing** broke the Women's 500-meter world record at the World Sprint Speed Skating Championships in Calgary, Canada, on January 29, 2012.

Yu, 26, who competed for China at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, clocked 36.94 seconds at this year's championships to become the first woman to break the 37-second barrier. The previous world record was set in December 2009 at Salt Lake City by Germany's Jenny Wolf.



# 7.8 trillion yuan

China issued 7.8 trillion yuan (\$1.24 trillion) worth of bonds in 2011, down 20.4 percent from a year earlier, according to the People's Bank of China, the central bank.

# 360.957 tons

China's gold output totaled 360.957 tons in 2011, an increase of 5.89 percent year on year, making the country the world's largest gold producer for the fifth consecutive year, said the China Gold Association.



XINHUA/AF

## INDIA

Indian President Prathibha Patil pays homage at Raj Ghat, the memorial for India's founding father Mohandas Gandhi, in New Delhi on January 30, the 64th anniversary of Gandhi's assassination



Job hunters wait in line at an employment office in suburban Madrid on January 27 as the jobless numbers in Spain hit 5.27 million in the final quarter of last year

XINHUA/AF

## SPAIN



XINHUA/AFIP

Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gamba (right) attends an agreement signing ceremony with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in Tokyo on January 28. The two ministers said Japan and Russia need to address disputes over islands off northeastern Japan in a calm manner

## JAPAN



XINHUA/AFIP

Mexican soldiers burn marijuana plants at a field in Sinaloa State on January 30 as part of an operation to fight drug crime

## MEXICO



XINHUA/AFIP

Baby elephant Ludwig (center) explores his enclosure on February 1 in a Munich zoo. Ludwig was born in the zoo in May last year

## GERMANY

## EGYPT

Police struggle to contain a riot at a stadium in Port Said on February 1. The riot, which followed a football match, left more than 70 people dead



XINHUA

## COVER STORY

# SPRING STEPS

Resurgent traditional culture adds color to Chinese New Year festivities By Yu Yan

**A**t the tail of the Chinese Lunar New Year, the whole country is still immersed in gaiety. The joyous atmosphere lingers in the red lanterns along the streets, in the colorful candy wrappers, and in the brilliant folk art performances.

For many Chinese people, old or young, to watch dragon dances, paper cutting, shadow puppetry shows and local dramas is the best part of the festival. All good wishes for a new year burst out at those moments.

Indeed, the various folk art performances have been an indispensable part of this traditional festival since ancient times. As one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations, China has a wealth of intangible cultural heritage. As precious cultural genes of the Chinese nation, some folk arts have been listed as world cultural heritage by UNESCO. In the past two decades, the country has made enormous efforts to identify, recognize and protect such treasures. Shadow puppetry and *Kunqu* opera are two prominent examples.

### Shadow puppetry

The ancient performing art of shadow puppetry regained center stage after a long period of neglect, after it was newly added to UNESCO's World Intangible Cultural Heritage List on November 27, 2011.

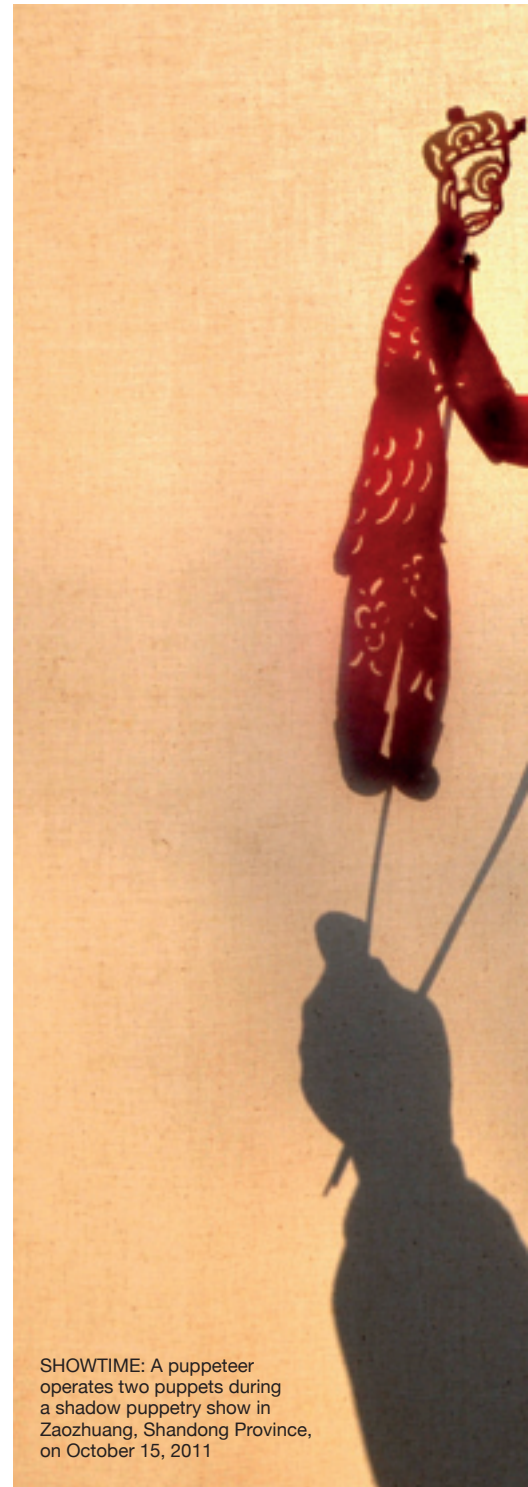
Shadow puppetry is one of China's earliest performance arts. It appeared in the Han

Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220) and became very popular in many parts of the country during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Shadow puppetry is a combination of performing arts and the carving art. The puppeteers operate the puppets behind a back-lit curtain screen. The audience sees the action unfold as the shadows play across the screen. The puppets, which are made of ox, sheep, or donkey skin, are essential stage props as well as brilliant handcrafted artworks. They present not only the characters, but also all kinds of objects from everyday life, such as clothes, ornaments, towers, pavilions, furnishings, and scenery.

The faces of the shadow figures, including human, supernatural, and animal beings, are carved intricately. Their facial features are often exaggerated. The young heroes and heroines, for example, often have elegant and noble slanted foreheads and noses. Treacherous characters always have extremely large eyes.

The origin of shadow puppet dates back over 2,000 years. It is said that a favorite concubine of Emperor Wu in the Han Dynasty died of an illness. The emperor missed her so much that he lost enthusiasm for life. One day, a minister happened to see children playing with dolls. When they played, the shadows on the floor moved vividly. Inspired by this scene, the smart minister got an idea.



SHOWTIME: A puppeteer operates two puppets during a shadow puppetry show in Zaozhuang, Shandong Province, on October 15, 2011

He made a cotton puppet of the concubine and painted it.

At night, he invited the emperor to watch a performance. The emperor was very happy to see the lively puppet of the concubine.

However, in modern times, amid the surge of film and television, people gradually lost interest in puppet shows, and the art form faced extinction.

"We should preserve the tradition of our shadow puppetry. We should preserve not



only the puppets and props but also the theater texts and music. They are part of Chinese culture. They may help promote Chinese culture and contribute to the creation of new art forms," said Sun Jianjun, a professor at the Academy of Arts and Design at Tsinghua University.

Liu Nianhua, a 57-year-old puppeteer in Qianjiang, central China's Hubei Province, felt the urgency of passing on this ancient art. "I was worried this precious art maybe lost to

the world," said Liu.

Currently, there are no more than eight puppeteers in Qianjiang, he said.

But the inclusion of shadow puppetry on the UNESCO list could provide a vital lifeline to the dying art form. Since then, a flood of visitors have rushed to Haining, east China's Zhejiang Province, to appreciate puppetry shows.

Haining, an important center of shadow puppetry, has attached great importance to

shadow puppetry protection. It has carried out a project to protect several classic shows through sound and video recording. Also, the city passed a five-year plan on the protection work.

So far, it has sorted out documentaries totaling 280,000 words, rehearsed 37 plays, and recorded more than 60 performances. And it has collected more than 1,000 stage props.

Xu Ernan, an old shadow puppeteer from Haining, said he is confident for the future. ►►



PUNXINGDONG



"I felt full of energy when it occurred to me that my efforts could enable shadow puppetry to be passed on," said Xu.

### **Kunqu Opera**

While shadow puppetry is the latest Chinese item to make the UNESCO list, *Kunqu Opera* was the first to be inscribed onto it in 2001. Efforts to invigorate this ancient art have already been rewarded.

"As a living performing art, *Kunqu Opera* should be constantly developed with the changes in real life," said Dong Wei, Director of the Arts Department of the Ministry of Culture, at a meeting to celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Kunqu Opera*'s listing in Beijing in 2011.

With a history of over 600 years, *Kunqu Opera* is known as the mother of all operas in China. The opera sounds hauntingly graceful. It features good control of the voice and rhythm. When performed, the opera is accompanied by various kinds of traditional Chinese musical instruments. However, this ancient performing art was on the verge of extinction before 2001.

"Years ago, when I was asked by taxi drivers about my job, I felt ashamed to tell

him I was a *Kunqu* actor," said Ke Jun, head of Jiangsu Provincial *Kunqu* Opera Theater.

"Once, when I performed, there were more than 20 performers on stage, while only three in the audience below. Of the three, one was sleeping, one was walking around and the other was cracking and eating melon seeds," said Ke.

Fortunately, this situation has changed since the opera was recognized by UNESCO in 2001. So far, it has gradually regained dignity and its rightful status in modern society.

"When you find a fabulous thing, you will fall in love with it. When you love it, you will be devoted to it. *Kunqu Opera* is an art with unique charm. We are determined to be devoted to it and pass it on," said Ke.

In Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, the cradle of *Kunqu Opera*, a museum was built in 1993 to promote this traditional art.

But the opera is not just a museum piece. It has been regaining popularity. For instance, the most popular play *Peony Pavilion*, which was based on its namesake ancient romance by Tang Xianzu in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), is now staged in theaters, on campuses and at clubs, both at home and abroad.

This owes to the ceaseless efforts of *Kunqu Opera* lovers such as Ke. In recent

years, Ke has devoted himself to breaking the mold and bringing many modern elements into classical plays.

Ke strived to make the opera in tune with the pulse of modern society. During the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010, the Jiangsu Provincial *Kunqu Opera* Theater cooperated with a Noh theater from Japan. The two created a multi-media *Kunqu* play on environmental protection. In total, the 20-minute play was performed more than 6,000 times during the expo, attracting large international audiences.

What's more, Ke also cooperated with a lot of big private companies as a means of attracting more social forces into the promotion of the opera. He visited South Korea, Sweden, Japan, India and other countries to introduce the opera, gaining international fame.

"I believe as long as I stick to it, *Kunqu Opera* can embrace a better future one day," said Ke.

### **Passing the craft on**

In addition to shadow puppetry and *Kunqu Opera*, UNESCO has in total recognized 27 more items of living heritage in China by now. But they are only a small part of China's



ZHU BINGZHEN



ZHANG WENKUI

(Left) DREAM-LIKE CHARM: Zhu Bingzhen, heroine of the Kunqu Opera play *Dream of Red Mansions*, performs at the play's press release in Beijing on August 8, 2011

ALL ABOUT DETAILS: A middle school student appreciates Chinese traditional New Year's painting works at an exhibition in Zhengzhou, Henan Province, on January 15, 2012

(Above) RED BLESSING: A paper cutting work on the Chinese totem of dragon is displayed at a Spring Festival folk culture fair in Shenyang, Liaoning Province on January 25, 2012

rich human treasures ranging from song, music, drama, skills to crafts.

To better preserve and pass on these treasures, China introduced a national project in 2005 to recognize and fund representative inheritors of folk crafts to pass them down from generation to generation.

Chen Xingcai, 93, is one of them. As one of the inheritors of Mianzhu New Year's painting craft, he has already passed the craft to his grandson, Chen Gang, and Chen Gang is teaching his five-year-old son to paint already.

Mianzhu in southwest China's Sichuan Province is one of the four famous manufacturers of New Year's paintings in China, along with Yangliuqing in Tianjin, Taohuawu in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province and Weifang in Shandong Province. It features bright colors and intricate hand painting, a style dating back to the Song Dynasty (1644-1911) but fell to the wayside in recent decades. Young people have been reluctant to learn the skills required to master the handicraft. But the reconstruction after the 2008 Earthquake in Sichuan has saved the art form, which is protected as an intangible cultural heritage, from the brink of extinction.

Under a partnership plan which encourages cities nationwide to mobilize capital and labor to support the reconstruction in Sichuan, Suzhou spent more than 30 million yuan (\$4.62 million) establishing a New Year's painting base in Nianhua Village. Now more than 90 percent of the villagers make a living on making New Year's paintings, as well as related businesses in the process. Jiangsu has also helped with sales of the paintings.

The Chen family is living in a government-funded quadrangle courtyard now, making an income of more than 100,000 yuan (\$15,400) annually from the business.

Chen Yunlu, uncle of Chen Gang, started to learn the craft at the age of 10 and is now instructing young painters at the local museum.

"We can only keep such a traditional craft alive by infusing new content into it," Chen Yunlu told *Beijing Review*. "Although we are working around the clock to meet the orders, we think innovation either in content or form will secure us better market prospects."

The younger generation is able to take advantage of e-commerce. "We sell about 10,000 paintings every year, of which 10 percent are for online orders and this percentage

is still increasing," said Chen Gang.

## Legislation efforts

In addition to the inheritor system, the Chinese Government has also made efforts to protect the nation's cultural heritage through legislation.

After a decade's drafting, China's first law for intangible cultural heritage came into force on June 1, 2011. The legislation is expected to ensure better preservation of the country's cultural legacy.

"The primary target of China's heritage protection efforts used to be tangible items including artifacts and historic relics. The enactment of this new law means that for the first time Chinese traditional cultural practices now have legal protection," said Zhu Bing, an official from the Standing Committee of National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

The law is responsible for the traditional cultural expressions and practices of China's various ethnic groups, which have been handed down through generations.

It specifically covers traditional oral literature, performing arts, craftsmanship, medicine and folk customs. ■

✉ yuyan@bjreview.com

## COVER STORY

# KEEPING CULTURAL GENES ALIVE

A two-day forum discusses how to better preserve China's rich living heritage By Bai Shi

China's contemporary culture and the protection of its diverse cultural heritage have become some of the most talked about issues today. Cultural prosperity was put forward as an important objective of the Central Government's national development strategy last year. However, the industrialization and commercialization of China's culture have been both criticized and celebrated. Many scholars believe industrialization and enormous government investment may not be the best means to protect intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

The Ninth Forum on International Cultural Industries was held by Peking University in Beijing between January 7 and 8. Over 400 guests, including scholars, experts, officials and entrepreneurs, discussed the state and future of cultural issues during the two-day meeting. The protection and revival of intangible cultural heritage were also a heated topic of discussion.

### Saving endangered heritage

While it is a driving force of cultural diversity, living heritage is very fragile. But it has received international recognition in recent years. Protecting distinct traditions, art and craft forms has become one of the priorities of international cooperation thanks to UNESCO's leading role in the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

China has a continuous civilization of over

5,000 years, and is therefore endowed with a rich cultural heritage. By the end of 2011, UNESCO had inscribed 29 Chinese ICH items on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and seven on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. China is home to more UNESCO certified ICH traditions than any other nation in the world.

Despite this recognition, many of China's folk traditions and cultural rites are on the verge of extinction due to lifestyle changes and technological advances. Still, the country has made enormous efforts to save this fast vanishing heritage.

"During the past five years, China has made a lot of efforts to protect its living heritage," said Ma Shengde, Deputy Director of the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the Ministry of Culture, in a speech at the forum.

To protect the country's living heritage, the State Council, China's cabinet, also released a national list for it. Initiated in 2006, the list now comprises 1,219 items. According to a nationwide survey, there are nearly 870,000 living heritage items in China. The government has also certified 1,488 masters—craftsmen, jewelers, carpenters, and cooks, who have inherited and will pass on distinct traditions.

As of 2011, the special fund for protecting intangible cultural heritage stood at 1.5 billion yuan (\$237 million). Crucially, China's first

law protecting intangible cultural heritage was passed by the National People's Congress on February 25, 2011, and went into effect on June 1, 2011.

"All these measures are echoed strongly and widely in the country," Ma said.

### Avoiding commercialization

In addition to policies and laws, China has also incorporated the notion of "protection through production" into its preservation philosophy.

"Productivity and market appeal are common features of a lot of intangible cultural heritage," said Ma. "The approach has proved very helpful in protecting heritage, particularly traditional crafts."

Nevertheless, "protection through production" has been criticized for commercializing traditions and damaging their authenticity.

Some see this commercialization as effectively eroding cultural heritage. For example, the fact that fine arts works are manufactured in large quantities in factories instead of being handmade in workshops is threatening the sustainable inheritance of traditional craftsmanship.

"These cultural items are invaluable. We can't produce them limitlessly like mining coal resources," said Ma. "Cheap copies of traditional crafts dominate the market, affecting the existence of authentic artworks. The commercial production of *Thangka*, traditional Buddhist scrolls painted in Tibetan areas, is one example where mass production







**DRAWING THANGKA:** Painters are working on their *Thangka* works in an exhibition center in Xiehe County of Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province

is eroding the livelihood of real artisans.”

Before drawing an authentic *Thangka*, painters must hold a worship and cleansing ceremony to express their respect to the Buddha and their ancestors, which is the core value of this Tibetan cultural heritage. Machine printed *Thangka* loses this cultural connotation and spirit.

“Ancient traditions of fine arts will be destroyed by over-commercialization if we don’t stop the excessive industrialization and commercialization of living heritage,” said Ma.

## Overseas experience

China is not the only country facing the challenge of protecting its ancient traditions and cultural heritage. Many other countries initiated efforts to preserve, revive, and reinvigorate their traditional culture several decades ago and China can benefit by learning from their experiences.

Zhou Qingshan, a researcher of the Institute for Cultural Industries at Peking University, spoke about the efforts other countries have made to protect their heritage. “Legislation is an important approach to protecting cultural heritage in Japan,” he said.

“Japan issued a special bill for protecting cultural heritage as early as in 1950, establishing a human treasure identification system to ensure intangible cultural heritage can be transmitted successfully,” said Zhou. “In contrast to the rich experience of Japan, we still have a long way to improve the related laws

and regulations.”

Denmark is another example. Eric Messerschmidt, Chairman of the Danish Culture Institute, mentioned the use of creative and cultural events for preserving the traditional culture of Denmark. The Danish Cultural Institute is a non-governmental organization that promotes cultural exchanges between Denmark and China.

“Creativity helps foster flexibility, openness and the ability to adapt and see new ways of doings,” said Messerschmidt. “Intangible cultural heritage must be regarded as a living tradition which can only be safeguarded by its constant reinvention.”

One example he offered was the literature of Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen.

Worldwide readers are acquainted with his stories, but until recently his work was in hibernation and treasured by only a few scholars and experts, instead of being a vivid part of contemporary Danish cultural life and practice.

“Thanks to the use of creative, cultural events, and multimedia, these stories are regaining their central position in the consciousness of Danish people and what is even more important: They’ve become part of the national brand or story,” said Messerschmidt.

Education plays an important role in protecting tradition too. “In an increasingly globalized world with tremendous competition, Danes have realized that the only means to succeed lies with an education system that

can provide us with a competitive advantage as a nation and as a region,” he said.

## Sticking to tradition

As experts are now paying more attention to problems in living heritage protection, mass production of fine arts and craft works has been extensively criticized.

“Sticking to tradition should be the fundamental principle for heritage protection,” said Tian Qing, Dean of the Music Institute at the Chinese National Academy of Arts.

Tian gave the example of carved lacquer. Carved lacquer is an ancient Chinese cultural heritage. According to traditional methods, each piece of lacquer ware should be brushed with varnish to form 80 to 100 layers in a period of six to eight months. After painting, workers begin to carve various designs into the lacquer. A piece of handcrafted lacquer ware usually takes a year to complete.

However, some small factories use plastic and integrated technology rather than natural paint and hand-carving to make fake lacquer ware today, which has seriously damaged the reputation of Chinese lacquer.

Tian also gave the example of Chinese operas which are now being melded with popular dramas to attract more viewers.

According to Chinese aesthetics, dramatists usually set the scene by means of abstract performance. For example, a horse whip often shows that the performer is riding a horse in the story. But many artists try to modify traditional operas by using modern dramas and musicals as a reference.

“That’s not the correct way, if the cultural tradition, the soul of intangible cultural heritage, is changed by modifications, then the so-called development is bound to fail,” said Tian.

Ultimately, while people favor rapid development of the economy and technology, returning to tradition is necessary in order to better protect intangible cultural heritage. “Cultural heritage is a way of life that people inherit from their ancestors and transmit to their descendants. It’s not something that can easily be modified, improved or disseminated with modern technology,” he said.

Allowing these distinct and invaluable traditions to survive and flourish will be a major challenge for the Chinese people and government over the next few decades. ■

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HURUN REPORT

## 2012

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Best Overall Watch  
Best Watch with High Complications  
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Best Accessory  
Best Luxury Writing Instrument  
Best Luxury Mobile

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Patek Philippe  
Patek Philippe  
Cartier  
Giorgio Armani  
Chanel  
Hermès  
Montblanc  
Vertu

### Automobiles, Yachts & Private Jets

Best Super Luxury Car for Business  
Best Super Luxury Car for Self-Drive  
Best Luxury Sedan  
Best Luxury Coupe Cabriolet  
Best Super Luxury Performance Car  
Best Executive Car  
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Best Roadster  
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Best Super Luxury Yacht Brand

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Bentley Continental GT  
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Gulfstream  
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Christie's  
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BE Education

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Best Premium Whiskey  
Best Ultra Luxury Cognac  
Best X.O Cognac  
Best Chinese Spirits  
Best Champagne Brand  
Best Premium Wine

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Royal Salute  
Louis XIII  
Hennessy Paradis  
Moutai  
Perrier-Jouët  
Château Lafite Rothschild

### Private Clubs & Travel

Best Golf Club  
Best Golf Club in Shanghai  
Best Golf Club in Beijing  
Best Golf Club in South China  
Best Golf Villa in East China  
Best Luxury Real Estate Brand  
Best Global Property Investment Advisor  
Best Luxury Boutique Hotel  
Best Spa Brand  
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Best International Luxury Destination  
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Pine Valley Golf Club  
Mission Hills  
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Star River  
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Park Hyatt  
Banyan Tree  
Air China  
Singapore Airlines  
France  
Sanya  
Chang'an Club  
The Roosevelt Club  
Hong Kong Jockey Club  
China Club

### Electronics & Home

Best Luxury Kitchen Appliance  
Best Camera

Gaggenau  
Canon

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Large Size Business Jet  
Ultra Long Range Business Jet  
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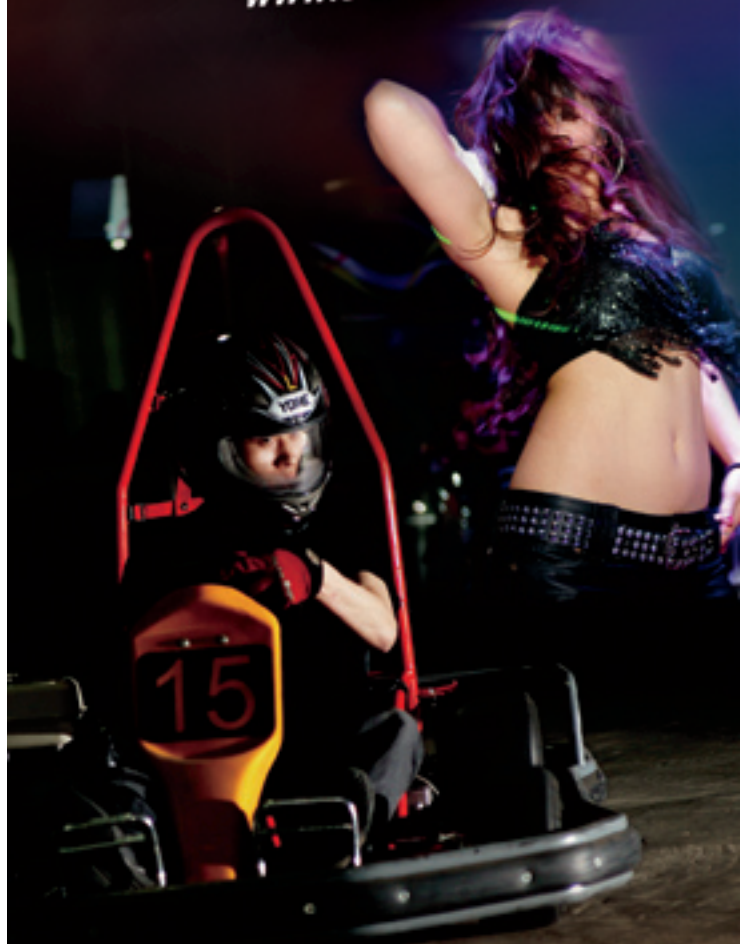
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