

# CHINA



Liu Yuzhi checks his collection at one of his three newspaper libraries in Guiyang, Guizhou province. ZHAO YANDI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Keeping a 'diary' of China

Newspaper collector finds value in old publications that record the country's past

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and LI HONGYANG in Beijing

For over half a century, 77-year-old Liu Yuzhi from Guiyang, Guizhou province, has been collecting newspapers of all kinds from all over the country. To date, he has a collection of more than 500,000 pieces in his self-built libraries.

Liu, a former clerk at the Guiyang Municipal Bureau of Grain, collected a wide range of "precious" newspapers such as the Xuantong Time Gazette of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and the first and final issues of different newspapers from the last century.

Other interesting pieces from his collection include commemorative publications named after the Chinese zodiac, a People's Daily edition printed on silk material, and news pages printed on an umbrella.

"For me, a newspaper is an encyclopedia containing various content," Liu said. "It is news at present and will be history in the future. We can read about life and learn lots of knowledge from it."

As Liu had only three years of primary school education, he experienced difficulties writing articles at work.

"It was urgent for me to learn how to write and I started to read the local newspaper and I kept copies afterward. I wrote useful sentences down from the paper and learned them by heart every day."

"When I encountered an article that I was interested in, I would cut out the article and paste it into a notebook," Liu said.

In 1964, Liu decided to develop his hobby into a serious "career" when a colleague told him that the first issue copy of Guizhou Daily he bought from a flea market was of high value.



Liu and his wife Jiang Xuemei pack his collection of newspapers at one of his libraries. YANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Since then, he continuously collected newspapers mainly from three sources: subscriptions, antique markets, and recycling stations.

For many years, his wife Jiang Xuemei was not able to understand his "career" and complained a lot. "To collect newspapers, he went through waste and rubbish nearly every day," Jiang said. "I only saw him at night. My friends made fun of me marrying a garbage collector."

Their family of five then lived in a house of just 46 square meters. However, "he removed the sofa and beds to fill our home with newspapers," Jiang said. "Our children and guests did not even have a place to sleep."

Those were not the only sacrifices that Liu made for his "career". In the 1990s, he discovered a volume of Ta Kung Pao between 1917 and 1927 at a recycling station in Guiyang. He

recognized it as a precious find, and took out all his savings and borrowed some money from relatives to purchase it for around 5,000 yuan.

In 2004, he traveled for about 30 hours by train to Beijing. After a day's hunt at the Panjiayuan antique market, he found the Xuantong Time Gazette from the Qing Dynasty.

As his newspaper collection grew, Liu bought 4 hectares of land and built three libraries in 2007. The project finished at a cost of more than 1 million yuan in 2012. Since they opened, about 8,000 people including some expats have visited his libraries for free.

Though Jiang felt embarrassed about his hobby, she still supported his "career" for the family's sake. However, she now understands him.

"There was an old man who recently visited our library a couple

of times, and I saw him burst into tears while reading the old newspapers," Jiang said. "He said it reminded him of his youth during the 'cultural revolution' (1966-76)."

"People cannot live without memories, and these can't exist without these old articles."

Every day, Liu will take at least six hours to read newspapers. For the rest of the day, he sorts out his collections with his wife, gives tours to scholars and artists, and follows up on leads about old newspapers through his nationwide online group.

During the last 15 years, Liu has held a couple of themed exhibitions.

In 2003, he held his first newspaper exhibition at the Guizhou Museum in Guiyang to celebrate the 110th anniversary of Mao Zedong's birth.

In 2005, he commemorated the 60th anniversary of the victory of War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) at the local police academy by displaying his newspapers. Since then, he has held several exhibitions every year in the city.

In October, he plans to gather and display all the reports about the liberation of cities by provincial capitals to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China in Guiyang.

Liu has a daughter and two sons, and he hopes that his daughter, a 51-year-old teacher, can succeed him. "These paper publications are the diary of our country," he said. "To keep them is to record history."

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

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## Earthworms like 'gold' in the earth

In a 1,500-square-meter warehouse in Southwest China's Chongqing, earthworms crawl in 500 blue boxes each about the size of a television set.

The warehouse is an earthworm farm in Longtai village, Wuxi county. The little wriggling worms have helped many out of poverty.

"In the past, earthworms were just little worms in the village," said Lu Maoliang, Party chief of the village. "Now, they are like gold in the earth."

The earthworm farm was set up with the help of the Communist youth leagues of Chongqing and Wuxi counties, and the China Construction Second Engineering Bureau.

Currently, the farm can generate a revenue of about 400,000 yuan (\$59,400) a year. It plans to expand to accommodate 2,000 boxes next year. "Earthworms can be used in medicine and cosmetic products," said Chen Keyu from the China Construction Second Engineering Bureau. "They also help to protect the environment."

Food for the earthworms comes from a cattle farm nearby.

"We feed the worms with dried cow dung," Chen said.

In the past, villagers thought the cow dung was dirty. However, with the earthworm farm, the waste can be effectively used.

"The cow dung is usually dried

and fermented before it is fed to the worms," he said. "On the other hand, the waste from the worms is natural organic fertilizer, and this can be used to grow vegetables and fruits."

The farms in the village are now using earthworm waste, and the quality of the vegetables and fruits has become much better.

"Vegetables are greener and stronger," Lu said. "The earthworm project truly has helped improve lives here."

Ding Weimi, 62, comes from one of the poor families in the village. Now, she can make more than 10,000 yuan a year working on the earthworm farm.

"There were 20 disadvantaged families in the village. Three of them, including Ding's family, work on the earthworm farm. The rest of them are eligible to share the revenue," Lu said.

Wuxi is home to 540,000 residents, and is one of the poorest places in Chongqing. From 2015 to 2017, more than 70,000 people were lifted out of poverty there. Authorities plan to help another 11,000 more people out of poverty by the end of this year.

China has set 2020 as the target to finish building a moderately prosperous society and to eradicate poverty.

XINHUA

## Illustrating Harbin's beauty with drawings

In his studio, Sun Jiaju takes his time to draw a sausage — part of a Russian-style dish. Within several minutes, the 63-year-old sketches some simple lines on a paper and fills the contours with colors.

Be it Russian cuisine, Western-style architecture or snowy landscapes, his works all depict characteristics of Harbin, the capital of the northernmost province of Heilongjiang and a city rich in tourism.

After retiring from the tourism department in Harbin, Sun picked up his drawing pen to illustrate the beauty of the city.

Known as either "Oriental Moscow" or "Oriental Paris", Harbin became popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s after the construction of the Chinese Eastern Railway which was financed by the then Russia Empire. Apart from its unique combination of oriental and European architecture styles, the city is also known for its ice and snow festivals in winter. It is also the busiest season for Sun.

"I got up before 4 am because I kept thinking about the work I didn't finish yesterday," Sun said.

Influenced by his family, Sun developed a wide interest in the arts when he was young, though he was not professionally trained. His father, who was educated at a private school, was good at calligraphy. His brother played the violin, and his sister liked to sing Russian songs.

"Growing up in Harbin with its peculiar cultural atmosphere, I

found people like us easily developing hobbies in the arts," he said. Sun spent most of his time drawing after classes.

He also sketched on bulletin boards when he served in the army. However, when the veteran started working for the local tourism bureau, he became too busy to draw. Sun did not pick up his pen again until his 50s, when a brochure introducing sketches of South Korean tourist resorts amazed him. The brochure was a gift he received on a business trip to South Korea.

"The sketches evoked some indescribable feelings in me. There's a charm in visual arts that cannot be replaced with words," Sun said. He thus decided to promote Harbin tourism with his drawings.

Sun started a studio after his retirement in 2015. To date, he has created more than 300 works connected to Harbin. His works are made into bookmarks, postcards, and brochures available in bookstores and tourist resorts.

Sun also plans to appeal to young people with his work. He has learned how to use Douyin, a video-sharing app also known as Tik Tok which is popular among young people. He also intends to teach drawing online.

"I hope both locals and tourists can find out more about Harbin, and make the city known to the world," said Sun.

XINHUA

## Team tackles ice in 20-km railway tunnel

By SUN RUISENG in Taiyuan and WANG XIAOYU in Beijing

For nearly a decade, a team of technicians has spent the winter months shoveling and removing ice from a railway tunnel in Shanxi province to safeguard passengers' trips.

The technicians are in charge of patrolling and maintaining all the bridges, tunnels, culverts and roadbeds along the Lyuliang section of the Taiyuan-Zhongwei-Yinchuan railway, which stretches 165 kilometers across mountainous terrain in northern China.

During the grueling winter months, when temperatures in the 20-km tunnel can plummet to as low as -19 C, the technicians are responsible for clearing snow and ice from the railway tracks.

"Water that seeps through cracks in the mountains morphs into large, overhanging icicles, which are likely to fall onto the tracks and cause safety hazards," said Lian Yuan-sheng, Party secretary of the tunnel maintenance department.

Each day, about 48 passenger trains travel through the tunnel, leaving a tight two-hour window for the team to work on the tracks.

Lian said the technicians often have to be on standby for hours, so that when permission from the control center is granted, they can immediately enter the tunnel and dive into work.

"Outside, we were shivering and stomping to gain warmth against the sharp bite of the chill wind," he said.

"And deep in the tunnel, we were soaked in sweat as the ice removal

work has to be fast, with no allowance for breaks."

The 12-man squad is often divided into two smaller groups during the mission. While one group is breaking apart compacted ice and shoveling fallen icicles with spades, the other group will be trudging forward to examine the remaining tracks.

"We also spray salt and ice-melting solution on the tracks to prevent ice from forming or to slow down the process," Lian said.

Although the mission is conducted only once or twice a week, the difficult conditions in the pitch dark, damp tunnel have already caused some technicians to have chronic rheumatic diseases.

"Just walking through the entire tunnel takes about eight hours," Lian said.

"The arduous chipping, shoveling and transporting of large chunks of ice means the technicians are totally burned out after a day of work."

During Chinese New Year, the team did not take days off to ensure the safe operation of train services.

Lian, who has been leading the team since it was formed, said he takes pride in his job as a guardian for passengers on trains.

"I can't reunite with my family members during the holiday, but thousands more who have been working far from their hometowns for almost a year will be able to ride the train and return home safe and sound," he said.

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Members of the maintenance squad clear ice on the wall of a tunnel along the Lyuliang section of the Taiyuan-Zhongwei-Yinchuan railway in Shanxi province. SUN RUISENG / CHINA DAILY