



**HANI TRIBAL HARMONY**

YUANYANG RICE TERRACES AND AN ECO-FRIENDLY LUNCH. P14



**DEUTSCHE OUTLOOK**

ENVOY APPLAUDS CHINESE TECH, GERMAN CARS, P5



PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Shandong artist Han Fang presents an 800-work homage to *erren zhuan*, the northeastern stage skit art at the Liu Laogen Museum, including a caricature of master artist Zhao Benshan (below).

**China cuts its reserve ratio again**

By WANG XIAOTIAN wangxiaotian@chinadaily.com.cn

China's central bank announced on Saturday it would lower the reserve requirement for commercial lenders by 50 basis points, the second time it has taken such action this year to inject more market liquidity and shore up the economy.

Effective May 18, the cut would release about 400 billion yuan into the market, said Lian Ping, chief economist at the Bank of Communications Co Ltd. After the cut, the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) for major banks will stand at 20 percent, while for small and medium-sized lenders, the ratio will be reduced to 16.5 percent.

"The move reflects that the Chinese economy fell into unstable conditions and timely adjustments in monetary policies are needed," said Wu Xiaoqiu, an economist at Renmin University of China.

The world's second-largest economy continued to slow in April, as industrial production registered the lowest growth in three years of 9.3 percent. Retail sales growth slowed to 14.1 percent from March's 15.2 percent, and export growth undershot expectations by falling to 4.9 percent from 8.9 percent one month earlier.

The new cut in RRR was mainly targeted at countering capital outflows, which would pose negative effects on current monetary policies, said independent economist Andy Xie.

China's foreign-exchange reserves dropped by \$4.69 billion from February to March — the first monthly decline since last December, partly dragged down by short-term capital outflows, said analysts.

Conditions are right for another RRR cut in May, said Liu Ligang, head of China economics at Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Ltd.

He said renewed political risks in the euro zone and a sharp fall in market liquidity led by a drought in maturing central bank bills called for further easing of monetary policy.

SEE "RATE" PAGE 2

**GRASSROOTS CONFLUENCE**

One is a veteran stage performer, and the other a ceramics artist. And, when they finally meet, they create enough kinetics to spark the creation of a brand-new art genre. **Zhao Ruixue** reviews the results.

To capture humor in cold clay is hard. To embody the living stagecraft of performance art in a series of static sculptures takes even greater talent and dedication. But this is what happens when comedy veteran Zhao Benshan chances upon the art of Shandong potter Han Fang. The fruit of their combined talents is now manifested in a permanent exhibition paying homage to the northeastern Chinese art of *erren zhuan*, the popular multi-disciplinary stage skits performed in a male-female duet. It is an act that combines singing, dancing, comedy, cross-talk and acrobatics, usually involving much twirling of silk handkerchiefs and fans.



Zhao, acknowledged as *erren zhuan's* most well-known practitioner, has also been its most fervent guardian. He has a school coaching young couples in the art, and his media empire encompassing stage, television and films provide his students with platforms to practice their craft.

He has also built a museum at Beijing's Qianmen East Road dedicated to the history of his native art of *erren zhuan*. It is here that ceramic artist Han Fang helps showcase the art's finest forms in a series of clay sculptures.

In 2009, Zhao met Han through a friend and became fascinated by his work.

"He thought the characters in my work showed a strong sense of humor and richly reflected the style and flavor of farming life. These were exactly the same characteristics essential to *erren zhuan*," Han describes their first encounters. As Han recalls, Zhao was also captivated by the "clay fragrance".

One of Zhao's most famous stage characters was an old farmer named Black Earth, who partnered White Cloud, his gap-toothed wife played by another stage veteran Song Dandan. The names were typical of *erren zhuan's* grassroots base, and it may also explain Zhao's attraction to Han's earthy art.

Han appreciated Zhao's interest in his art and accepted the commission to create a series of ceramic sculptures that would document 300 years of *erren zhuan*. For Han, it was a project that took him back to his own roots.

Born to a farmer's family in East China's Shandong province, Han later moved to a village in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang and grew up there. He is therefore no stranger to the rural lifestyle that had inspired *erren zhuan*. In fact, his signature works already encompassed much of the grassroots characteristics.

In the summer of 2010, Han handed over his first batch of *erren zhuan*

ceramics to Zhao. This group consisted 50 pieces, each a ceramic vignette of the *erren zhuan* skits on stage — either singing, striking comic poses or adopting funny gestures to earn laughs from the audience gathered.

Han also captured the response from the audience, laughing and enjoying the performance.

When Zhao saw the first lot of ceramics, he was delighted.

"He was also born to a farmer's family, and had deep empathy with rural hardship and characteristics. He praised my work, saying it was three-dimensional art that truly captured the spirit of the art," Han remembers.

But Zhao also pointed out areas that Han could fine-tune.

"He told me to put more effort into the eyes, because they were the most important part of the performers' expressions."

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**Contacts**

News: (86-10) 6491-8366  
 Subscription: (86) 400-699-0203  
 Advertisement: (86-10) 6491-8631  
 E-mail: editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
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