

# Building healthier lives for the elderly

Physical and mental stimulation are crucial to the well-being of senior citizens

## NOTES

From staff reports

### BEIJING

#### Culture forum

The First International Forum on Chinese Culture and World Peace was held over the weekend.

The forum was attended by about 40 prestigious researchers, professors, and scholars on traditional Chinese culture, history and philosophy.

The event focused on such issues as the applications of Chinese culture and philosophy in analyzing and solving international conflicts and restoring world peace, traditional Chinese culture and modern life, Chinese culture and education in the family, and Chinese culture and personal development.

A new book entitled "Chinese Culture and the 21st Century," compiled by the Beijing Happy Life Culture Research Centre and published by the China Yanshi Publishing House, was released at the forum.

The forum was organized by China Association for the Advancement of International Friendship, the International Education Foundation and the Confucius Studies Centre of Renmin University of China in Beijing.

#### Fall festival

The week-long National Day holiday launched the third "Autumn Climbing-Up-Mountain Festival" which will run through October 19 in western Beijing's Shijingshan District.

According to tradition, Chinese people would climb a mountain to enjoy a distant scene on the Double Ninth Festival, the ninth day of the lunar calendar's ninth month, which fell on Saturday this year.

Badachu Park in Shijingshan District is a perfect venue for people to visit in autumn. Visitors can take part in friendly climbing contests on foot or mountain bikes.

Meanwhile, a tea fair is held in the Badachu Park. Visitors can learn about the history and culture of tea in China.

The festival also features the 2003 Beijing International Sculpture Exhibition at the district's Yuquan Park. In its third year, the theme of the exhibition is "environmental protection."

#### China Week

A comprehensive cultural exhibit entitled "China Week: Port City of Quanzhou and Maritime Silk Road," will tour Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt and Syria in December.

The port city of Quanzhou, whose ancient name is Zaitun, in East China's Fujian Province, is the starting point of the ancient Maritime Silk Road, which ends in the Persian Gulf area. It connected ancient China with many foreign countries and regions, especially Arabian countries.

The exhibition tour to the Gulf countries will showcase a bulk of artifacts, cultural relics, Muslim culture in Quanzhou, sculptures, paintings and other works of arts depicting the Maritime Silk Road.

The exhibition tour is co-organized by the Ministry of Culture, Quanzhou municipal government, Fujian Provincial Culture Bureau, China International Exhibition Agency and Poly Culture and Art Co., Ltd.

#### Music video

China Central TV (CCTV) and Jiangsu Langtao Film Co Ltd have jointly produced a music video entitled "The Yellow River, My Mother," starring soldier singer Sun Weiliang.

Composed by Fu Ke and with lyrics by Kang Jianchun, the song was the theme song of a CCTV programme to promote the environment protection along the Yellow River.

### SHENZHEN

#### New album

China Record Shenzhen Corporation has released an album by Yu Fengxiang entitled "Lead a Good Life." The album was produced by Lan Zhai and Hou Jun and includes 10 songs written by Zhang Hongguang, Meng Qingyun, Sun Yiyong and Yu Hai.

Born in Anshan in Northeast China's Liaoning Province, Yu overcame a deformed leg and developed his singing talent at a young age with help from vocalists Lei Mingzhe and Gu Dongping.

Arguably the most economically energetic country in the world today, China is also coping with an ageing society. According to the 2000 national census, the percentage of the country's total population over the age of 60 was 10.32 per cent. Defiant of any concerns about being a burden on society, more and more elderly Chinese are actively participating in all kinds of social activities and attempting to adopt a healthier lifestyle. This report by China Daily staffers YU NAN and CHEN ZHIYONG examines the issues concerned with the life of the aged when people have just celebrated the Double Ninth Day (the ninth day of the ninth month of the lunar year, which fell on Saturday this year), the day for delivering thanks and respect to the aged.

Before young people rush onto the bustling streets to begin a busy working day, Yan Mei, 61, a retired middle school teacher, has already finished her regular morning exercises in a park near her home in northern Beijing.

Over 1,000 fellow seniors are her companions, exercising in the park early every morning, doing everything from jogging, tai chi, and gentle calisthenics to singing and dancing.

Yan's morning routine is gentle calisthenics and jogging. She chats with neighbours while enjoying the tasteful ballroom dancing.

"Now I feel even more energetic, both physically and mentally, than when I was at work," Yan said.

Similar scenes are common in most urban parks across China.

Far from isolating themselves from society after retirement or passively waiting for care, many elderly Chinese, especially those in cities, are getting themselves organized to enrich their lives, according to Wu Cangping, a well-known gerontologist at Renmin University of China.

"They are becoming more positive in improving their life quality now," Wu said. The percentage of China's total population over the age of 60 will steadily increase, to 12.06 per cent by 2010, 15.90 per cent by 2020,

and 27.88 per cent by 2050. "Longer life does not necessarily mean improved quality of life for the elderly, so promoting healthy lifestyles becomes more important," said Wu.

It could also greatly alleviate the burden on both society and the family, he added.

#### Mental needs

Enhanced awareness of psychology, diet, and exercise makes a healthy lifestyle in old age possible, according to Wu.

"Physical health used to be the most pressing issue for the elderly, while mental health needs were widely neglected," he said.

But the elderly themselves now realize the importance of mental health. In a study conducted last year by the Department of Psychology at Peking University, over half of the elderly surveyed responded that they thought their longevity was determined more by their mental condition than physical health.

Their top mental needs include communicating with people, receiving care from their own children and having places for gathering, chatting and playing. A stable marriage and the care and companionship of a spouse also help satisfy their mental needs.

Yan, the teacher, said it was a loss when retiring but an active and timely adjustment was needed. "It's very important to have a moderate emotion and an optimistic attitude towards life,

which is prerequisite for a healthy body," she said.

Zhang Liren, 75, who suffers from chronic high blood pressure, is an active member of the New Fourth Army Chorus. The chorus, formed by over 100 retired soldiers and their children, is one of the largest among the hundreds of senior choirs in Beijing. They rehearse for three hours every Monday afternoon, and the oldest member is 86-year-old Tong Shumin.

"When I am singing, I forget all about my health problems. I feel vivacious and powerful," Zhang said.

The chorus is like a second family for many of the elderly members, who freely share their troubles and joys.

"To chat with people of a similar age is more relaxing than with young people because the former have more patience and won't complain to me about being 'too gossipy,'" she said.

#### Diverse choices

As their lives have improved, the elderly in urban centres now have a wider range of choices to alleviate their mental strains. For example, the development of the Internet offers almost infinite space and many more ways for the elderly to communicate with each other and the world.

Although the number of Internet users over the age of 60 remains small, www.cnolder.com is one of the most popular websites for the aged in China, offering health information, dietary advice, message boards and chat rooms for senior citizens around the country.

Since the website was established last February, about 29,000 elderly people have left messages there.

Still, work and sports remain older Chinese.

Known as a master player in his community, Yu Tian, 61, plays table tennis from 7 am to 10 am every morning with his elderly neighbours. After a noon break to read the newspapers, practise calligraphy or take a nap, he voluntarily teaches the children in the community to play table tennis from 3 pm to 5 pm. He then spends the evening watching TV or playing poker and Chinese chess with his old friends.

Over the week-long National Day holiday, Yu went with his wife on a tour of Hangzhou, Suzhou and Shanghai.

"It's a good time for us to put all our hearts into enjoying life," he said.

But not every one wants to totally join in the easy life. Zhong Xue'an, 65, a senior technician, established a company with several friends in Beijing after he retired from a big State-owned company. "So far the business is running very smoothly and keeps expanding," he said.

"I will continue to work for five more years until I am 70," said Zhong. He plans to learn driving as soon as possible so he can go travelling with his wife.

Engaging in more work allows the elderly to have better self-esteem, raises their sense of identity, and alleviates their loneliness and depression, said Tao Liqun, a research fellow of the social security research office with the Old Age Committee.



Graceful display: Elderly women perform the traditional "fan dance" in the stadium at Ganzhou, Jiangxi Province.



Unique skill: Li Zhanchun, 77, performs his unique skill "playing iron balls" on Beijing television in August.



Above: Chen Puru, 70, poses with his wife, who is wearing her wedding gown, in Taizhou, Jiangsu Province. Right: Even after passing his examination after attending a driving class specially for people over 60, Zhou Xingran heads advice from his driving coach in Changchun, Jilin Province.



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