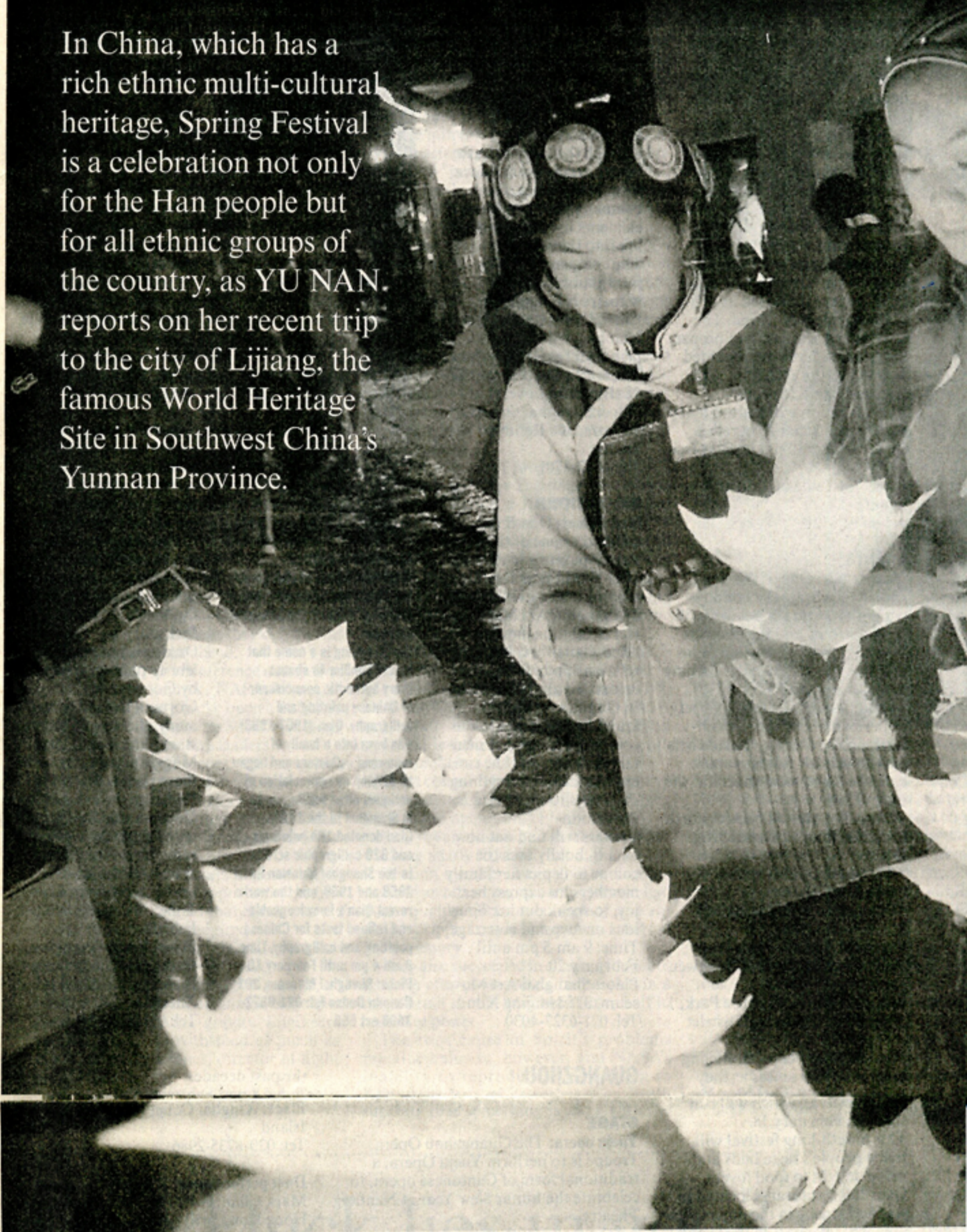


NAXIS GO LUNAR AT NEW YEAR

In China, which has a rich ethnic multi-cultural heritage, Spring Festival is a celebration not only for the Han people but for all ethnic groups of the country, as YU NAN reports on her recent trip to the city of Lijiang, the famous World Heritage Site in Southwest China's Yunnan Province.



Her rosy cheeks glowing, Zhang Weiqiu, 23, an interpreter with the Lijiang Cultural Museum, said she misses her deceased grandparents very much, especially during the Spring Festival holidays.

In the past, she and all her relatives would gather together on Chinese New Year's Eve at her grandparents' home in Longpan village, in the Yulong (Jade Dragon) Naxi Autonomous County, 60 kilometres from Lijiang.

She said the Naxi celebrate life with many festivals. Some festivals coincide with those of the Han people, such as the Spring Festival (the Chinese New Year's Day).

Others are of their own ethnic origin. One of the most important is the Sanduojie Festival – an extremely spirited gathering that takes place twice a year, in the second and eighth lunar months. During these festivals, the Naxi people hold horse races and dances or go out for picnics.

Other popular festive occasions include the Dongbangjie Festival on the 15th day of the first lunar month, the Jiandangjie Festival on the eighth day of the second lunar month, the Dragon King's Festival in the third lunar month, the Torchlight Festival in the sixth lunar month, and the Mules and Horses Fair in the seventh lunar month.

"Spring Festival is the most important festival for us Naxi people. It's a time to offer sacrifices to our ancestors,

pay respects to the elderly and enjoy the happiness of family gatherings," said Zhang.

"I wouldn't for anything miss these wonderful family gatherings."

It has been several years since her grandparents passed away, but the big family gathering on Spring Festival Eve – a party that includes all of the brothers of Zhang's father, Zhang Shuxun, and their children and wives – is still held every year.

"Sometimes there are more than 50 of us," recalls Zhang.

"And the traditional customs are still followed," she emphasized.

Respect for gods and ancestors

One of the key parts of the Spring Festival for Naxi people is the ritual ceremony for gods and ancestors, according to Zhang.

The ritual ceremonies of the families are pretty much private affairs, attended only by family members, she explained.

The *danian sanshi* (the last day of the old year, or Spring Festival Eve) is always the busiest day of the whole holiday time.

"Everybody gets up earlier than usual. The men are responsible for cleaning the entire house and the women are kept very busy preparing the food for the coming evening's feast, as well as the food for the ritual ceremony. Everything should be ready by noon."

The animals for sacrifice include chickens, ducks, fish and major meats used in local cuisine.

Mushroom and vegetable dishes are also prepared, which are plentiful in local markets, with the spring-like climate.

While the grown-ups are busy with their preparations for the rituals, the children have fun playing games and letting off firecrackers. "I still remember the memories of my childhood," Zhang recalled.

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include pig – the four major meats used in local cuisine. Mushrooms and vegetables are also prepared, which are plentiful in local markets, with the spring-like climate.

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clean and untouched before the rituals, explained Zhang.

The ritual ceremony normally begins at 3 pm. The first step is to pay respect to the ancestors. All the family members kneel down before the family altar table.

One of the most important sacrificial foods on the table is the meat from the pig's head, which is believed to bring good luck for the new year.

Afterward this initial ceremony, the members of the family all walk down to the river that flows by the village, to pay respect to the god of water, whom they believe, brings them clean water and good fortune.

Then the most spirited dinner party of the year begins. Both women and men dress in their traditional ethnic costumes.

"We waste no time in indulging ourselves in the mouthwatering food and fragrant wines until everyone is tipsy with joy," said Zhang.

The party goes on until the morning of the first day of the New Year, when another round of rituals will be held in front of our ancestors' tombs.

"There, I feel that I can sense the presence of my beloved grandparents again," Zhang recalled.

Some changes

It seems that all the traditions are well kept except one, added

Zhang. In the Naxi culture, wives are in charge of the work of making a living as well as all the house work, while husbands lose themselves in their beloved art work, as they are famous for their talent in music, calligraphy and painting.

"In this kind of life, men bear no responsibility," said Zhang.

So as a form of thanks for all their hard work, it is traditional that wives never get up early on the first day of Spring Festival. It is the husband's job to make a beautiful breakfast for his wife.

However, this tradition has gradually changed in recent years, as some husbands are starting to work in the city, said Zhang.

"In my family, mum prepares breakfast on the first day of Spring Festival, because dad has a job in a local company," Zhang said.

"Although mum doesn't complain about it, I still think it's unfair! Mum does all the housework every day. A nice breakfast prepared by dad would bring a breath of fresh air into her heart!"

Zhang said she is going to marry a Naxi young man this year.

She has made a deal with her future husband, whom she wants to remain anonymous, that he will make the sweetest and most important breakfast in the year for her after their marriage.

Above: Local Naxi people pay tribute to their ancestors during Chinese New Year celebrations.

GU BIN

Above right: A quiet street in the city of Lijiang, listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

YU NAN

Left: Masters of Dongba, an indigenous religion among the Naxi people in Lijiang, write festival couplets in the Dongba language, a pictorial religious script.

WANG FA

Traditional vs modern in Xiamen festivities

By Lin Qi

XIAMEN: For us young people growing up in Xiamen, in East China's Fujian Province, Spring Festival is the perfect time to join our parents in following the country's old new year traditions.

We pay Chinese New Year's calls on our friends and relatives on the first day of the festival, visit our maternal grandparents on the second day, and stay at home on the third day.

Today, the fifth day of the New Year, is when many young people visit their teachers, gather together with former classmates and friends or go shopping.

Others, like me, may just want to

stay at home, surfing the Net, to avoid the terrible crush of shoppers outside.

For my grandmother, Spring Festival celebrations in urban Xiamen these days are much simpler than they were when she was a child.

Traditionally, preparation for Spring Festival here started on the 24th day of the last month of the lunar calendar.

People would do two things that day – bid farewell to the Kitchen God for the year and thoroughly clean the house.

In Chinese culture, the Kitchen God, who has control over a family's good fortune and misfortune, is believed to live in the kitchen.

At the end of the year, the Kitchen God went back to the heavenly palace

for the Spring Festival. They should prepare copious offerings to see him off.

I have never taken part in these ceremonies. But Zhang Y, my classmate, who also grew up in Xiamen, has.

"I still remember kneeling in the hall, and then looking in the direction of the door family on that day," Zhang said.

"On the second or third day of Spring Festival, we would do another sacrificial ritual to the Kitchen God's home."

Today, only the most traditional families in rural areas still

When I asked my grandmother about the traditional ways of celebrating the arrival of the lunar new year, she cited many old routines that I had never heard of, let alone seen.

She said that people used to put a fire pot under the table for Spring Festival Eve dinner. Gathering "around the stove" was regarded as a very important part of the traditional family reunion.

But I think it must have been terribly hot. Anyway, nowadays more and more families are having their big "round the stove" reunions in restaurants or hotels.

As far as food goes, as Xiamen is a coastal city, people are used to eating all kinds of seafood, which is used in

all the main entries for the big Spring Festival dinner.

But now people are told that the most important thing for us Xiamenese is that we should not cut the vegetables into pieces or slices, neither for cooking nor for eating. This is a special way for the younger members of the family to wish for a long life for their parents.

Another food people in Xiamen are mad about at Spring Festival is New Year's cake, or rice-cake.

During the holidays, it is common to see long queues waiting to buy rice-cakes at the Xinnanxuan Restaurant, which has a history of nearly 100 years. You can feel the rice-cake's delicate fragrance spreading to every cell in your body.

There are three kinds of rice-cakes. One is called "carrot-cake," and is salty, with tiny bite of carrot in it.

Another is made from polished glutinous rice and has jujubes and dried longan in it.

The third type of cake, dyed red, is made in the shape of a turtle, and is supposed to bring you health and longevity.

Every year before the Spring Festival, my aunt brings us stacks of carrot-cakes and sweet rice-cakes.

On the first day of the first month of the Lunar Calendar, she always gets up early, and with a handful of joss sticks, joins the stream of people going to pray in South Puto Temple.