

## MOSAIC

The *huotong*: A seat of warmth and ingenuity at the table

Late autumn, in the days I lived with my in-laws in rural Zhejiang province, meant the arrival of one of the warmest companions I ever had at the dinner table — the *huotong*.



Jocelyn Eikenburg  
Second Thoughts

Imagine a wooden, thimble-shaped stool that's half-enclosed, with one side open like a stage, cradling a metal receptacle built to hold burning embers, and you have an idea of what this traditional piece of dining room furniture looks like. Whenever the first chilling winds of the season would sweep through the village, my in-laws would fill one with a gener-

ous helping of warm cinders from their fire-powered wok, and place it near the table, usually right where I used to sit.

They were no strangers to my aversion to the cold of winter in a province that didn't enjoy the steam heat typical of northern parts of China, nor the heating vents I relished at home growing up in Cleveland, Ohio, where almost every school year saw at least a handful of snow days or times that proved too frigid for us to attend classes. As a child, I would rush home from school in January and February and immediately ensconce myself in front of the heater.

Who would have imagined I would marry into a family accustomed to winters of wearing multi-



A warming *huotong*.  
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ple layers of clothing and your jacket at all times, even at home.

Not surprisingly, my winter strategy at their home involved heavy use of an electric mattress pad and

excessive layers of blankets. I felt loathe to leave the cocoon of warmth I had built for myself in the bedroom, including when meal-times arrived. For me, that made the *huotong* such a welcome addition around the table.

It's amazing how this simple invention could generate such a substantial amount of heat. Being perched on top of the *huotong* during meals transported me back to the comfort of those weekday afternoons following school when I leaned back on vents at home to soak up every bit of warmth in the house. But even better, the *huotong*, with its open design, also allowed my legs to feel just as cozy as I tucked into a delicious meal at the table.

The *huotong* appears to have had

a long history among my husband's family in rural Zhejiang. My mother-in-law, once pointing to the piece with more small knicks and scratches among its lovely mahogany wood, revealed it was a family heirloom, presented to her and my father-in-law on the occasion of their wedding. And she proudly shared that it worked just as well, if not better, than the newer and more polished *huotong* they owned.

My husband Jun also has fond memories of the *huotong*, which he recalls serving as more than just a warm seat at the table. During Chinese New Year, the family would roast long, white sticks of *niangao*, or New Year cakes, over the embers in the *huotong* for a gooey holiday treat.

Now that Jun and I live in Beijing, where late autumn and winters offer the snug delights of plentiful steam heating at our home, years have passed since we last sat on a *huotong*. But I will always cherish those days when I first came to know this distinctive piece of furniture. It stands as a unique example of the many ingenious inventions people south of the Yangtze River have developed to survive and thrive during the coldest months of the year.

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## A moment in time: Tracking progress

Workers (above) assemble train carriages at a Changchun railway factory in Jilin province in the 1990s. From steam, diesel and electric trains to maglev models, the nation has become a leader in high-speed train technology. Train speeds have been raised six times from 48.1 kilometers per hour in 1993. In 2017, the Fuxing, "rejuvenation", bullet train (right) went into operation with a maximum speed of 350 km/h.



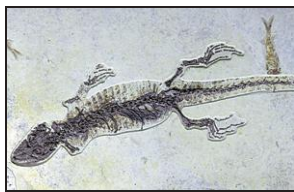
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## The newspaper and beyond

## On our Sina Weibo

## Lizard fossil 100 million years old unearthed

Researchers have found a rare fossil of a reptile that lived 100 million years ago that shows undigested food in its gut, shedding light on how small and medium-sized reptiles preyed on other animals. The stomach contents of the fossilized lizard, *Yabeinosaurus*, contained a 13-centimeter-long crayfish, a species of crustacean popular on dining tables today, according to scientists from the China University of Geosciences. The discovery was published in the bimonthly journal *Cretaceous Research*. *Yabeinosaurus* is the first lizard species found in the Jehol Biota, an ecosystem in northeastern China that thrived between 133 and 120 million years ago.



## Didi delays Hitch in Beijing and Shijiazhuang

Ride-hailing company Didi relaunched Hitch on Wednesday in three cities — Harbin, Heilongjiang province, Taiyuan, Shanxi province, and Changzhou, Jiangsu province. But the service has been delayed, due to technical adjustments, until next month in Beijing and Shijiazhuang, Hebei province. However, the service will be available in Shenyang, Liaoning province, and Nantong, Jiangsu province, from Nov 29. The service was suspended following the murder of a passenger by her Didi driver.



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## On chinadaily.com.cn

## People: Go master announces retirement

South Korean Go master Lee Sedol, the only human to beat Google's artificial intelligence Go player AlphaGo, announced his retirement on Tuesday. The 36-year-old officially stepped down by submitting a letter of retirement to South Korea's Go Association. Lee started playing the Chinese strategy board game when he was 6 years old. In a career spanning 24 years, Lee scored 18 victories in global competitions.

## Society: Slight drop in wealthy family number

The slowdown and trade tensions between China and the United States have resulted in a minor slide in the number of affluent families in China, said the Hurun Wealth Report 2019 released on Tuesday. As of Dec 31 last year, the number of high-net-worth Chinese families with household assets of 10 million yuan (\$1.4 million) dropped 1.5 percent from a year earlier to

1.98 million, according to the report. The number of ultra-high-net-worth Chinese families with household assets of 100 million yuan also contracted by 4.5 percent to 127,000. Beijing is still home to the largest number of high-net-worth families, with 288,000 households owning assets of at least 10 million yuan.



## Culture: Street dance hits perfect rhythm

The second Street Dance Festival held in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, showcased 15 original Chinese dance works this week. Since the art form was introduced to China during the 1980s, street dance has grown into a diverse pop culture

among youngsters and developed into different styles combining Chinese culture. The festival was initiated by the China Hip-Hop Union Committee, which was founded by the Chinese Dancers Association in 2013. Since the committee was established, more than 30 sub-committees have been launched.

## Travel: Skiing lures more Chinese tourists

As the 2019-20 skiing season begins, more and more Chinese tourists are inspired to engage in the breathtaking sport as a form of winter entertainment. Tourism website Mafengwo announced that the search volume for the keyword "skiing" increased by 21.7 percent this month, compared with the same period last year.

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## What's on

## Parsifal

**When:** Nov 24, 4 pm  
**Where:** Jiangsu Center for the Performing Arts, Nanjing  
*Parsifal*, by the Mariinsky Theater, is an opera in three acts by German composer Richard Wagner. It is loosely based on *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, a 13th-century epic poem of the Arthurian knight Parzival and his quest for the Holy Grail.

The work was first performed at Bayreuth, Germany, in 1882, not long before Wagner's death.

Based on one of the medieval epic romances of King Arthur and the search for the grail (the chalice allegedly used by Christ at the Last Supper), the five-and-half-hour opera recounts over three acts how a "wild child" unwittingly invades the sacred precincts of the grail, fulfilling a prophecy that only such a child can save the grail's protectors from a curse.

The Mariinsky Theater is based in St. Petersburg, Russia.

## The Little Match Girl

**When:** Dec 1, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Beijing Exhibition Theater

Based on a short story by Danish poet and author Hans Christian Andersen in 1845, the musical is about a dying child's dreams and hope.

It begins on a cold, snowy winter night. A poor girl tries to sell matches because she was ordered to do so by her father and he won't allow her to return home until all the matches are sold on pain of a beating.

She tries to warm her hands by lighting the matches. After lighting the last match, she sees her dead grandmother whom she loved very much and who eventually takes her to heaven.

## Into the White Night

**When:** Dec 14, 2 pm and 7:30 pm; Dec 15, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Shenzhen Poly Theater

Based on the mystery novel *Byakuyako* by Japanese author Keigo Higashino, musical *Into the White Night* is about an unsolved death, which puzzles a police detective. The dead man's family and circle of friends may provide answers for the detective who continues to investigate.

Han Xue stars as the lead female character in the musical.

## Swan Lake

**When:** Dec 20 and 21, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Hangzhou Grand Theater  
Directed and choreographed by former Bolshoi Ballet Soloist, Konstantin Uralsky, the Russian State Ballet and Opera House is coming to Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

*Swan Lake* is a tale of two young women, Odette and Odile, who resemble each other so closely that one can easily be mistaken for the other. It is a compelling legend of a tragic romance in which a princess, Odette, is turned into a swan by an evil curse.

Prince Siegfried chases upon a flock of swans while out hunting. When one of the swans turns into a beautiful young woman he is instantly captivated — but will his love prove strong enough to break the evil spell that she is under?

The ballet brings the passion and vibrancy of the Russian character to this well-known work.

## Alexandrov Ensemble

**When:** Dec 20 and 22, 7:30 pm; Dec 21 and 22, 2:30 pm  
**Where:** Guangzhou Opera House

The Alexandrov Ensemble, commonly known as the Red Army Choir, is the official army choir of the Russian armed forces. Founded during the Soviet era, the ensemble consists of a male choir, an orchestra and a dance ensemble.

The ensemble has entertained audiences both in Russia and throughout the world, performing a range of music including folk tunes, hymns, operatic arias and popular music. It attracted international attention when it won first prize at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1937.

## The Nutcracker

**When:** Dec 23-25, 7:15 pm  
**Where:** Shanghai Grand Theater  
The Shanghai Grand Theater's version of *The Nutcracker* premiered during the Christmas season in 2010, and has been staged almost every Christmas season since.

In order to rejuvenate the classic work, the Shanghai Grand Theater and the Shanghai Ballet have made a new production and British director Derek Dean has subtly blended Chinese elements with the classic tale into Tchaikovsky's iconic score.

The ballet tells a story about a girl who befriends a nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve and wages a battle against the evil Mouse King.

## The Hotel

**When:** Dec 29, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Wuxi Grand Theater

*The Hotel* tells a story about a hotel you may be familiar with. Seven performers present seven types of people that could turn up in your daily life.

Produced by the Li Xing Dance Studio, the dance drama probes into conflicts between people and the social environment.

## A Passage to Bollywood

**When:** Dec 30, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Wuxi Grand Theater  
*A Passage to Bollywood* is a stage musical with foot-tapping music, colorful costumes and a gripping plot.

Covering various aspects of the Indian Bollywood culture, Ashley Lobo's smash hit performance comprises old classics as well as the latest Bollywood songs.

## Faust

**When:** Jan 9-12, 7:30 pm  
**Where:** Beijing Poly Theater

Lithuanian director Rimas Tuminas will bring his latest work *Faust*, an adaptation of Goethe's dramatic play, to Beijing audience in January.

The tragic play stars Liao Fan as Mephistopheles, the devil, and Yin Zhusheng as Faust.

Considered one of the most famous plays in German literature, *Faust* is based on a classic German legend, in which Faust is a discontented scholar who makes a deal with the devil in order to attain worldly knowledge, pleasure, and power at the expense of his soul.