

MOSAIC

Oh, *maqiu*: Mistaking a winter solstice treat for *tangyuan*

All those years, I had it all wrong about *maqiu*, a traditional winter solstice food for my husband Jun's family in rural Zhejiang province.

Whenever Jun mentioned the sesame balls he had eaten for the holiday while growing up, I had always imagined a version of *tangyuan*, those delicious glutinous rice balls stuffed with sweet sesame or red bean paste typically enjoyed in southern China.

Except, he called them sesame balls or *maqiu*, not *tangyuan*. So I thought, maybe *maqiu* was just another name for *tangyuan* in the local dialect?

But then years ago, one night before winter solstice with Jun's family, I watched my mother-in-law prepare *maqiu* in her kitchen and did a double take. She dropped inch-sized balls of glutinous rice dough, made from glutinous rice flour and cold water, straight into a wok of boiling water without tucking anything inside. Had she lost her mind? Where was the muss and fuss of filling the dough with sesame paste that I'd had to slog through all those years before, when Jun and I used to live in the United States?

Once the rice balls floated to the top, which took only a few minutes, she fished them out of the boiling water and then rolled them in a sweet mixture of toasted black sesame seeds and white sugar that coated every inch of the dough. That's



Freshly made *maqiu* from my mother-in-law's wok. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

when I realized it — it was my mistake, not hers.

"Here, eat them while they're hot," my mother-in-law said as she pressed a steaming bowl of them into my hands.

"But that's it?" I replied, my face

almost flushed with embarrassment. Could she tell that I had confused *maqiu* with *tangyuan* all along?

"Eh, it's simpler! You don't need to worry about all that trouble of filling them."

Oh, I knew all about that trouble. All those years in the US, I had slaved hours upon hours to make so-called *maqiu* — never realizing the actual recipe could be so quick and easy.

Sometimes, family traditions get lost in translation when you've never experienced them. Previously, I

had only learned about *maqiu* through long-distance phone conversations with Jun's family over the years and through my husband (who had clearly omitted a few critical details in his descriptions of the cherished holiday dish).

But aren't you bound to misunderstand when you learn something secondhand? During our huge winter solstice dinner that year, I tried sharing some of the foods we used to eat for Christmas — cranberry sauce, turkey and mashed sweet potatoes. How do you describe "cranberry sauce" to people when they've never even seen the actual berries at the heart of this sweet-and-tart holiday delight? How can you explain the aroma of a turkey fresh from the oven when they've never tasted turkey and don't have an oven? Even

though people grow sweet potatoes in the village, including Jun's family, chances are they've never tried anything like my creamy, buttery sweet potato and parsnip mash. I wonder what went through their minds when I chronicled Christmas dinners of the past?

Well, you live and learn — especially when you've had the opportunity to live with family. And what I learned brought me enormous holiday relief. Never again would I have to fiddle around with filling balls of rice dough in the name of tradition.

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Online

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LI ZHIYUAN / XINHUA

A moment in time: Healing hands

A Chinese doctor (above) treats patients at a makeshift hospital in Afgooye, Somalia, in 1968. In 1963, China's first foreign aid medical team arrived in Africa. Over the past 56 years, the Chinese government has sent more than 20,000 medical personnel to the continent, treating some 220 million patients, according to the National Health Commission. In the latest mission, Chen Youxin, director of the ophthalmology department at Peking Union Medical College Hospital, discusses treatment with a patient in a hospital in Windhoek, capital of Namibia, last month.



PAN SONGGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

The newspaper and beyond

On our Sina Weibo

Milan Kundera's Czech citizenship restored

Milan Kundera's Czech citizenship has been restored. It had been withdrawn by the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1979 after the publication of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, a novel that features Czechoslovak citizens opposing the government. Now, 40 years later, it has been handed back to the dissident novelist. The idea of returning his citizenship came from Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis, who met Kundera in Paris last year, where the novelist has been living in exile. Having meanwhile become a French national, he now holds dual citizenship.



Japan firm bans licking fingers to handle papers
A Japanese taxi company went viral for its rule banning employees from licking their fingers when handling papers. On Nov 22, Sanwa Kotsu in Yokohama, Japan, shared a photo of the memo on its official account on social media, informing employees about a new rule on forbidden behavior. It prohibits its office workers from licking their fingertips when leafing through papers, and also its drivers from licking their fingers before counting out the bills they give customers as change, on the grounds that it's gross to make someone else indirectly touch their spit.



Online

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Science: Scientists unveil secret of long life

Scientists say that the secret to living more than 100 years comes down to a hardy immune system, thanks to an abundance of a particular infection-fighting white blood cell. In a study coordinated by scientists at Japan's Riken Center for Integrative Medical Science and Keio University School of Medicine's Center for Supercentenarian Medical Research, they discovered that supercentenarians — age 110 years and over — have an excess of cytotoxic CD4 T-cells. These "super" immune system cells, according to the study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, are more aggressive and known to kill any damaged cell that crosses its path, such as virus-infected or cancer cells. Japan, with a population of 127 million, has around 150 supercentenarians. Visit our website to find out more.



Culture: Art reunion after 32 years

Five painters who put on an exhibition in Shanghai in 1987 are hosting a reunion exhibition. It features more than 30 paintings, sculptures, images, installations and other artworks from the five — Wang Dalin, Li Shan, Zhou Changjiang, Hong Jijie and Xia Baoyuan. It opened at the Shanghai History Museum on Tuesday. Their oil painting exhibition in December 1987 at the Shanghai Exhibition Center was regarded as one of the most avant-garde in China at the time and a milestone in Chinese contemporary art. Hosted by the museum and the Shang-

hai Artists Association, the exhibition will be open until Dec 19. Admission is free.

Biz: Discovery enters STEAM sector

Media giant Discovery in the United States has introduced its preschool education product in China as the company bets big on STEAM education to further expand its presence in the country. The product, dubbed Buddy&DD, offers children ages 3 years and beyond interactive videos on STEAM, or science, technology, engineering, art and math. It marks Discovery's first entry into the country's STEAM education market. The move comes after the company unveiled a plan to build its flagship theme park in Shanghai.

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What's on

Pride and Prejudice

When: Dec 10-12, 7:30 pm
Where: Beijing Poly Theater

Pride and Prejudice is a theatrical novel of Jane Austen's classic novel involving manners, courtship and relationships.

It is the story of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, their five daughters, and the various romantic adventures at their Hertfordshire residence of Longbourn.

Finding a husband is hardly Elizabeth Bennet's most urgent priority. But with four sisters, an overzealous matchmaking mother, and a string of unsuitable suitors, it's difficult to escape the subject.

When the independent-minded Elizabeth meets the handsome but enigmatic Mr. Darcy, all feelings of attraction are muted by his pride and her prejudice. As their worlds keep colliding, their attraction increases.

Sarah McKenzie

When: Dec 14-15, 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm

Where: Blue Note Beijing
Sarah McKenzie hails from Melbourne, Australia; she earned a bachelor's in jazz at Perth's West Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

McKenzie has performed at iconic venues, including festivals in Monterey, Juan-les-Pins, Marciac and Perugia, Dizzy's and Minton's in New York. Together with the Boston Pops Orchestra, she premiered one of her compositions at Boston's Symphony Hall. Her version of *We Could Be Lovers* won an award in Australia.

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.

Still Life with Chickens

When: Dec 18-21, 7:30 pm; Dec 22, 2:30 pm

Where: Shanghai Grand Theater

Award-winning playwright D.F. Mamea's slice-of-life story paints a vivid portrait of a local neighborhood and colorful characters.

When the mother discovers a mischievous chicken invading her garden her first instinct is to reach for the spade. But what starts out as a skirmish develops into an unlikely friendship. It is an intimate, heart-warming and funny play about friendship, loss, love and life.

Still Life with Chickens won the Adam NZ play award in 2017 and the Playmarket Best Play the same year.

It was developed with the support of the Auckland Theater Company.

Carmen

When: Dec 24, 7:30 pm
Where: Mei Lanfang Theater, Beijing

Established in 1985, the Spanish Ballet of Murcia has performed in countless theaters and taken part in arts festivals the world over. The company has always had its own identity and engages in various forms of Spanish dance, including Flamenco.

Its dance adaptation of the classic opera *Carmen* has won awards for choreography, stage effects and the skill of its dancers. *Carmen*, written in 1847 by French composer Georges Bizet, is one of the most-performed operas in the world.

Vocal Recital by Soprano Kristine Opolais

When: Jan 11, 7:30 pm
Where: Shanghai Oriental Art Center

Kristine Opolais is a Latvian operatic soprano. Her particular passion is for the operas of Puccini, and she has sung title roles in his work to widespread acclaim at the world's leading opera houses.

In 2011, Opolais made her debut with London's Royal Opera, singing the title role in Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*.

Flamenco Reborn

When: Jan 21 and 22, 7:30 pm
Where: National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing

The Barcelona Flamenco Ballet and its show *Flamenco Reborn* fuses three dance styles; jazz, contemporary and flamenco, which result in an innovative performance.

One interpretation of "reborn" in Barcelona Flamenco Ballet is that of reconstruction. The dancers are constantly reconstructing the ambience they produce onstage. They build up a movement, or a rhythm, with repetitive, vigorous motions — and then break it, instantly stopping, rupturing the established order, then beginning again, with a new movement, a new rhythm. In this way the rhythm itself is reborn — constantly renewing the dynamics of the performance, keeping it fresh and alive. These transitions from the exuberant outpourings of passion to quiet moments of intimacy mean that the production is constantly in flux, in a process of reinvention.

Lin Zexu

When: Dec 14-22, 7:30 pm
Where: National Center for the Performing Arts, Beijing

Directed by Wang Xiaodi and written by playwright Guo Qihong, the play *Lin Zexu* features actor Pu Cunxin as the protagonist and actress Xu Fan as Guan Shuqing, Lin's wife.

In 1838, the Chinese scholar and Qing dynasty (1644-1911) official, was sent to Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to stop the illegal importation of opium by the British. Lin arrived in the spring of 1839 and launched the destruction of opium in Humen, a port town, on June 3, 1839. About 1,400 metric tons of opium, confiscated from foreign traders, was destroyed within 23 days. The incident triggered the First Opium War (1839-42).

Marking the 180th anniversary of the war, the play, commissioned by the National Center for the Performing Arts and Guangzhou Dramatic Arts Centre, will be premiered in Beijing. It also incorporates dance to showcase the battle scenes.