

LIFE

Cracking the 'hummus code' in a healthy tradition at home

As a longtime vegan enamored with many meat-free Middle Eastern dishes, which are much harder to find in restaurants in China, I made a powerful discovery in my own kitchen recently: I had finally cracked the "hummus code".

Jocelyn Eikenburg
Second Thoughts

Made of chickpeas, tahini sesame paste, olive oil, lemon juice and minced garlic, hummus is like a kind of high-protein manna from heaven to many vegans, including me. While most people serve it as a

dip, often with soft pita bread and raw veggies, you can also add it to your favorite sandwich, dab it on your salad, or even smear it on your morning toast in place of butter. And speaking of butter, some of the best hummus I've ever sampled evoked the flavors of this classic spread in a lusciously creamy texture that will have you hooked.

So naturally, as I had been spending more time indoors due to the coronavirus, preferring to cook at home, it was only a matter of time before I started craving what was to me a vegan comfort food.

I just never expected that this time around, I would produce a hummus so smooth and buttery

that even my husband Jun, a notoriously finicky eater, would be ooh-ing and aah-ing with every bite.

No doubt I owe some of my success to using a superior recipe this time around (from the blog Cookie and Kate, deservedly dubbed "best hummus recipe"), as well as my kitchen gadgets (pressure cooker and food processor both played pivotal supporting roles in the process). But regardless, the hummus proved a tasty revelation — that with my very own hands, I could actually whip up a version of the dish recalling restaurant offerings.

In this sense, I'm reminded of my mother-in-law in rural Zhejiang, who has over the years created on

her own a repertoire of dishes so mouthwatering that I had jokingly christened her dinner table the best restaurant in China. Tofu, *zongzi*, *jianbing* stuffed with veggies, *jiaozi* dumplings, hand-cut noodles, steamed *baozi*, even homemade fermented bean and chili sauces — nothing is too complicated or impossible to make in her kitchen. Even better, she cooks up the vast majority of these foods with produce picked from her own garden, and her own rapeseed oil, cold-pressed from the seeds she harvests every year.

She embodies a way of life that dates back thousands of years in China — a way of life that many of us have forgotten amid the hustle

and bustle of modern society. Spending time with her pulled the curtain back on so many dishes I had sampled before in China, demonstrating the love and care that went into each steaming plate — and proving that anyone with a little time and determination could serve up culinary wonders.

While my mother-in-law won't eschew a little help from kitchen gadgets (she too has a pressure cooker), she has long believed that if you truly want to eat well and with gusto, it's better to cook for yourself. Besides healthful and appetizing meals, you can also uncover a newfound sense of self-sufficiency and accomplishment, and turn the most

ordinary of everyday tasks — eating — into an unparalleled delight.

My mother-in-law might not share my exuberance over the hummus, since she's never tried it before and may not even like the food. But I have no doubt she would beam at me for, in essence, following in her footsteps in the kitchen, while carrying on a healthy Chinese tradition.

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Candid camera: High-wire act



Workers from the Sichuan Electric Power Transmission and Transformation Construction Co Ltd tighten wires on top of the Qinling Mountains in Shaanxi province on May 3. Nearly 10,000 workers are engaged on the construction of the 800-kilovolt high-voltage project, which will stretch more than 1,580 kilometers and is scheduled to be completed by the end of June. TAO MING / XINHUA



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Remembering Tagore on his birth anniversary

By TAREQ ZAHIR
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A micro-documentary that went online on Friday showed students and scholars from various cities in China singing in Bengali and Indian students and academics doing the same in Mandarin. They were marking the 159th birth anniversary of the poet Rabindranath Tagore and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-India diplomatic ties.

It seems a befitting tribute to a man regarded as "a father figure of India-China cultural relations in the modern era".

The poet was born on May 7, 1861, but his birth anniversary is usually marked according to the Bengali calendar, which fell on Friday.

The micro-documentary, aptly titled *Gitanjali*, was produced in a week. It's an ensemble of poetry, song, music, dance and art dedicated to a man who was himself a poet, novelist, playwright, musician and artist, and who played a pivotal role in building a golden bridge between the two ancient civilizations and neighbors.

The program was directed by Beijing-based author and media professional Suvam Pal. It has been produced by Pandit Sarit Das, a percussionist who is also a visiting faculty at China's Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. He has composed or arranged a major portion of the music for the program, complete with popular Indian string instruments like the sitar, percussion instrument tabla, a rare string instrument predominantly used in Rabindra Sangeet called *esraj*, and a slew of traditional Chinese instruments like *pipa*, *guzheng* and *yangqin*, apart from popular Western instruments like the piano and guitar.

Beijing-based Bharatnatyam exponent Jin Shanshan has specially created dance moves in the mould of Rabindra Nritya, a dance genre from Santiniketan, for the independent project, while an Indian classical dancer and Tsinghua University scholar,

Reshmita Nath, dances to a Tagore classic sung by a group of Chinese students who are studying Bengali.

Shenzhen-based graphics designer Qin Xiaoping, who studied fine arts at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan a couple of decades ago, has used the Chinese pen drawing style to draw a portrait of Tagore, who began painting after the age of 60.

The project is a result of the collaboration among students, scholars and faculty members from China's Peking University, Tsinghua University, the Communication University of China, Yunnan Minzu University, the United Kingdom's University of Bath, and India's Visva-Bharati and Doon University, as well as professionals from different cities in India, China and the UK.

The program was separately shot by the performers using their cellphone cameras in Delhi, Mumbai, Dehradun, Bengaluru, Bolpur, Jorhat, Bath, Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Yuncheng and Kunming.

The performers are aged from 9 to 91, indicating how Tagore's works transcend age and generations. Portions of a poem from one of Tagore's anthologies, *Stray Birds*, a Mandarin translation of which is popular in China, have been recited in Mandarin by Deborsmi Nath, a 9-year-old Indian student from Beijing, while 91-year-old Tan Chung, an eminent historian and son of late professor Tan Yun-Shan, the founder of Cheena Bhavan at Visva-Bharati, shared his thoughts on Tagore, who visited China in 1924 and 1929 and was given the Chinese name Zhu Zhendan by Chinese scholar Liang Qichao.

"This is a special tribute to Tagore by his admirers in both India and China as we have also made an effort to recalibrate our story-telling process under the new normal due to COVID-19," says Pal.

The program's creative producer and editor is Showbhik Chowdhury and advisor is professor Yuktishwar Kumar.

Nurse recalls bonds of friendship amid outbreak

By XU HAOYU in Beijing
and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

In the first few months of 2020, Wuhan, capital of Hubei province, China's hardest-hit area by the COVID-19 outbreak, faced a serious shortage of supplies and medical workers. Responding to the call by President Xi Jinping, countless doctors and nurses applied to go to the city to tackle the outbreak.

Ke Qiaohong, 31, the head nurse of a blood purification center at Anxi County Hospital in Quanzhou, Fujian province, also volunteered to help.

Ke worked in Wuhan for over a month. "I didn't feel lonely although I was far away from my home," she says. "Patients I met became my new family. Their strong will and kindness supported me fighting on the battlefield with a firm mind."

Ke says that it was her fate to become a nurse.

She remembers that when she was at kindergarten, they went on a spring trip to the actual hospital she currently works at. The hospital was funded in part by donations by overseas Chinese and the greenery around the hospital was amazingly beautiful. That trip left a very good impression. After graduating from junior high school, she didn't continue her study but started to work. But life wasn't easy for a young worker, so Ke's uncle suggested she might consider studying in a nursing school.

"I really enjoyed my studying experience, and it was such a dream come true to become a medical worker to heal people," Ke says.

Ke filled out the application form to support Hubei without hesitation. After the hospital informed her that she's one of five staff members who were chosen, her parents became so worried that they couldn't eat anything, although they finally respected her decision.



Left: Ke Qiaohong (left), a nurse from Fujian province, with one of her patients, Tian Muzhou, in a makeshift cabin hospital in Wuhan, Hubei. Right: Ke tests a patient's temperature and observes his blood oxygen level at the hospital. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Ke got engaged last Christmas Eve. The fiancé, Wang Zhenhu, works at the same hospital as a doctor in the department of nephrology.

"We both consider offering medical help to Wuhan as an honor," Wang says. "I'm proud that she is so brave, but I'm also worried about the potential consequence of her bravery."

On Feb 4, Ke embarked on the journey to Wuhan together with another 102 medical workers from Fujian. They started working in a makeshift cabin hospital in the Dongxihu district of Wuhan three days later.

Ke's daily job was nursing 30 to 40 coronavirus patients, most of whom had no significant clinical symptoms. She was there to reassure them, observe their condition, distribute medicine, take care of their daily life needs and participate in emergency treatment.

"I would be lying if I said I wasn't afraid, because the virus is invisible and the hospital was inundated by it," Ke says. "So we paid 120 percent attention to self-protection."

In the makeshift hospital, medical workers put the safety of patients before their personal needs.

The integrity of the protection suit had to be upheld, which meant that sometimes adult diapers were worn. Any discomfort had to be dealt with. Despite these challenges, Ke collected many warm memories of those days in Hubei.

Ke recalls that one day, a man, 60, ran into the hospital, panting. She immediately noticed that he was suffering difficulty in breathing. She quickly helped him to sit down on a chair and measured his blood oxygen level.

Ke vividly remembers the result, just 85 percent (it should be over 95 percent in normal cases). She asked

a colleague to get a doctor, transferred the patient to the emergency room, and put him on breathing equipment.

Ke remembers that as she was helping him, he begged her not to get too close as he did not want to infect her. "I held his hand and told him he would be OK," Ke says.

He stabilized and later his wife came to the hospital and hugged Ke very emotionally.

Keeping the spirits of the patients up was also a key task. Ke says they taught patients how to properly wash their hands; spent time together singing, chatting, dancing, celebrating birthdays, exchanging gifts and practicing *baduanjin*, a traditional Chinese healing exercise.

A patient named Tian Muzhou felt really down and anxious when he tested positive for coronavirus.

Ke noticed that they came from the same hometown, which was the origin of *tieguanyin*, a famous oolong tea from Fujian, so she brought him two packs, hoping the taste of home would cheer him up.

After treatment, Tian recovered and texted Ke when he left the isolation ward. He texted, "May good people (like you) be free from mishaps all their lives."

Indeed, Ke has kept in touch with many patients she met in Hubei after she came back to Fujian.

In the afternoon of April 27, Ke received a message from Dong Guanghe, who she nursed in Wuhan.

Dong wrote, "The outbreak is like a nightmare, but thanks to you, we met you, the angel in white. You helped us to regain our health bit by bit, and influenced by you, I've learned to help people in need. Thank you, again."

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Chinese and Indian students and scholars take part in a micro-documentary to mark the 159th birth anniversary of Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore on Friday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY