

MOSAIC

Fujian's traditional teacups runneth over with beauty

I discovered something in Beijing recently that truly is, as the expression goes, my cup of tea.

Much as in romance, it was the sheer beauty of what I beheld that first caught my attention. But it was the integrity of, and story behind, the objects of my obsession — *jian zhan* teacups — that eventually won me over.



James Healy
Second Thoughts

Interestingly enough, many of my Chinese friends mistakenly believe these teacups, also called tea pots for their sturdy construction, are of Japanese origin. But this clay teaware that I've grown so fond of has a long tradition in China, with roots reaching back to Fujian province in

the Song Dynasty (420-479). The beauty of the cups comes from the iron-rich clay and glaze used in making them, as well as the glorious transformation that occurs in the superheated, fire-belching traditional kilns. The result is an astounding array of spectacular glaze colors and patterns. The appreciation of *jian zhan* increases as one gains a better understanding of how a certain magic determines the magnificence, and hence the asking price, of these unique teacups.

In the West, the word "teacup" often calls to mind dainty porcelain pieces meant for genteel sipping. *Jian zhan*, however, are weighty in the hand and solidly constructed, and tea sophisticates swear by them.

According to the website of Crimson Lotus Tea, "When we're analyzing teas for purchase we can't use



A *jian zhan* teacup.
JAMES HEALY / CHINA DAILY

these cups. They make everything taste better."

The website Verdant Tea says *jian zhan* absorb tea oils over time and tend to "smooth out teas, bringing out their sweetness while evening out texture".

Some fans, including myself, buy a single special cup that comes with

a fancy wooden or leather carrying case.

My favorite *jian zhan*, purchased recently for a mere 650 yuan (\$93), is a gorgeous blue whose sheen on the inside rim reminds me of a favorite Bianchi bicycle from years back, which had light blue, metal-flake paint that virtually glowed in sunlight.

The process by which *jian zhan* take shape begins with the earth underfoot, or more precisely the clay. And not just any clay, but a very special type specific to Fujian.

The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory says this about the teacups' composition: "New analysis of ancient *Jian* wares reveals the distinctive pottery contains an unexpected and highly unusual form of iron oxide. This rare compound, called epsilon-phase iron oxide, was only recently discovered and characterized by scientists and so far

has been extremely difficult to create with modern techniques."

The lab says the findings by an international team of researchers "could lead to an easier, more reliable synthesis of epsilon-phase iron oxide, enabling better, cheaper magnetic materials including those used for data storage".

The Berkeley Lab summarizes the *jian zhan* production process thusly: "To make the pottery, ancient artisans used local iron-rich clay coated with a mixture of clay, limestone, and wooden ash. Kiln temperatures of 1,300 C (nearly 2,400 Fahrenheit) hardened the clay, melted the coating, and bubbled oxygen within the glaze, pushing iron ions to the surface. As the glaze cooled, molten iron flux flowed down the sides of the ceramics and crystallized into iron oxides imparting characteristic patterns." And there you have it. But nei-

ther the lab nor any amount of science can explain why this ancient form of teacup is so endearing.

Maybe it's the dense, earthy feel that helps ground our thoughts and emotions as we drink tea. Perhaps it's the way the teacups dazzle the eye (some feature real leaves of golden autumn hues embedded beneath the glaze). Or maybe they appeal to our longing for simpler, traditional ways.

But whatever the reason, whenever I encounter these glorious reminders of long-ago China, I quickly succumb to their iron-flux magic.

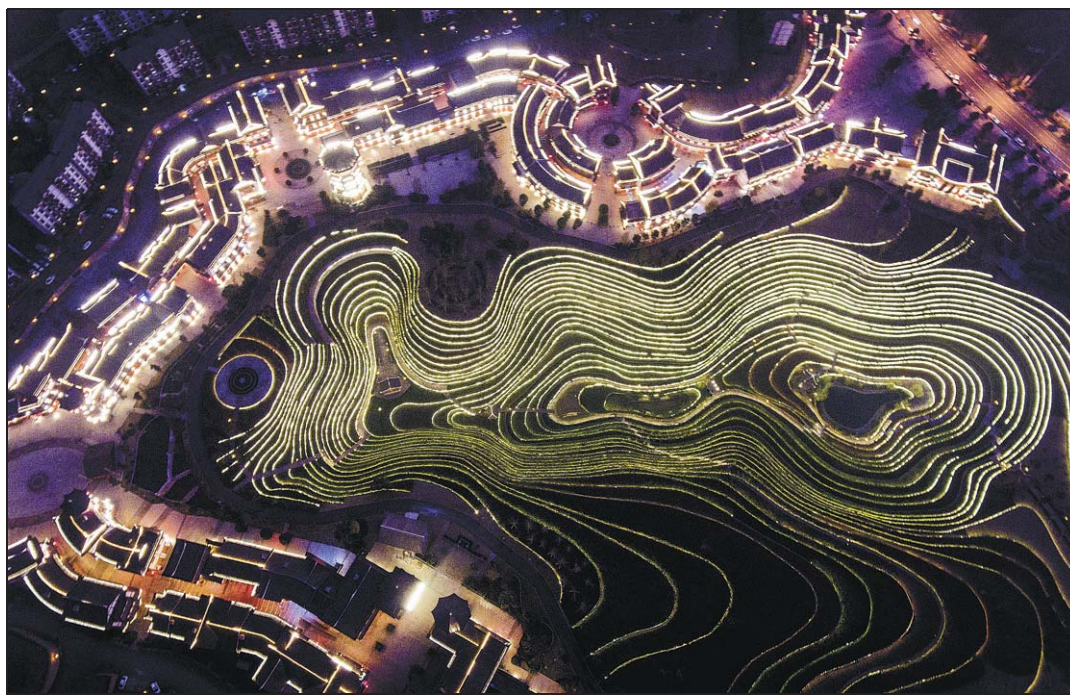
Contact the writer at jameshealy@chinadaily.com.cn

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Candid camera: Night light

Illuminations turn terraced fields in Shexiang town, Guizhou province, into a winter wonderland on Dec 16. The town is home to the Yi ethnic group.
LUO DAFU / FOR CHINA DAILY



This Day, That Year



Editor's note: This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of New China.

On Dec 25, 1954, the Sichuan-Tibet and Qinghai-Tibet highways were completed and went into operation. They were the first modern highways in the Tibet autonomous region.

With a total length of 4,360 kilometers, the highways were built by soldiers of the People's Liberation Army and locals.

An item on Jan 5, 2005, from China Daily showed a section of the

Sichuan-Tibet Highway.

Tibet got its first air route in 1965 when the Lhasa airport opened.

By the end of last year, the region's expressways open to traffic reached 97,800 km.

With the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway in 2006, the region was connected with the rest of the country's inland cities by rail for the first time.

Major transportation links — including the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, which stretches nearly 2,000 km and connects Tibet with neighboring Qinghai province — have significantly boosted Tibet's tourism sector in recent years.

Last year, the autonomous region drew more than 33 million visitors, reaping more than \$7 billion in tourism revenue, compared with the

Roads of change revitalize Tibet

As the Tibet Autonomous Region approaches the 40th anniversary of its establishment, Zhao Zongshi and Jiu Lipin of China's Tibet report on how highways have transformed the local economy and the lives of the local people

The region has now opened five airports, with 96 domestic and international routes connecting Tibet and 48 major cities nationwide by the end of June.



region's 1.8 million visitors and about \$274 million in revenue in 2005, the year before the railway's launch, according to figures from the regional government.

As an extension of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway, the construction of the Lhasa-Shigatse railway was com-

pleted in 2014, and construction of the Lhasa-Nyingchi Railway has reached its track-laying phase.

The region has now opened five airports, with 96 domestic and international routes connecting Tibet and 48 major cities nationwide by the end of June.

The newspaper and beyond

On our Sina Weibo

Mobile court brings justice to remote island

A video showing a circuit court holding session on a boat has gone viral. In the clip, a temporary court is set up, and judge Chen Daozhen and his colleagues can be seen meditating on a dispute over loans in Naozhou island, Guangdong province. The court was set up on the boat as a measure of convenience for fishermen. It consists of three members and they mediate various disputes among the roughly 60,000 residents that live in the island's 46 villages.



Nanjing Massacre survivor dies at 94

Shi Jiaxiu, a Nanjing Massacre survivor, passed away on Friday at the age of 94. With Shi's death, the number of registered survivors has declined to 77 from more than 1,200 recorded more than three decades ago, according to the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders. Shi said in her testimony that she and her elder sister had to shave their hair, wear shabby clothes and pretend to be boys before hiding in a cellar to avoid Japanese soldiers. The Nanjing Massacre began on Dec 13, 1937 when Japanese troops captured the then-capital of China and killed about 300,000 civilians and unarmed soldiers over the next six weeks. [Check more posts online.](#)



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Society: Train boosts Hulunbuir winter travel

A tourist train running on the Hulunbuir Prairie in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region started operations on Sunday, filling a gap in China's high-end railway travel market. CRRC Corp announced. Named Hulunbuir, the train runs between Hailar Railway Station and Wangong Railway Station in the region. The tourist train provides services such as sightseeing, food, accommodation and entertainment. It has business, soft sleeper, children's theme, dining and entertainment carriages. Each train can carry more than 200 passengers. The train, equipped with private bathrooms with showers, tries to provide a hotel experience on wheels. After witnessing the vast grassland and the quiet forests along the railway, passengers are taken directly to scenic spots.

Culture: Disney has a Marvel-ous year

Seemingly an unstoppable entertainment juggernaut, Dis-

ney has already powered past a world milestone of \$10 billion for 2019 for its homegrown films and toward \$11.94 billion with the Fox titles added, which are now under Disney's banner. This gives Disney a lock on nearly 40 percent of the market in the United States.



People: Man creates miniature Xi'an

Liang Dehuai, 80, a retired carpenter in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, recently completed construction of a miniature Xi'an city made with bamboo and wood. It covers an area of about 44 square meters, and is built to a 200:1 scale. It has reached a perimeter of 27.2 meters, is 8.3 meters long and 5.3 meters wide. In addition to the city's iconic architecture —

bell tower, drum tower, the great wild goose pagoda and the small wild goose pagoda — the miniature consists of more than 100,000 bamboo and wooden accessories and parts. This includes the city walls, such as 18 gates and 2,500 city buttresses. The city served as the capital under many Chinese dynasties.

Trend: Win-win voted as our Word of the Year

Our app has received 10,569 votes from readers and 38 percent of the votes went to win-win as the word to conclude the past year and to signify the year to come. The concept of win-win is highlighted and hailed in many international arenas. It encapsulates effective and joint measures to enhance and strengthen global partnerships and bring benefits to the world. Visit our website to find out more.

Online
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What's on

Top Restaurant

When: Dec 27-Jan 9, 7:30 pm
Where: The Capital Theater, Beijing

Produced by Beijing People's Art Theater, the drama tells of the vicissitudes of the time-honored Peking duck restaurant Fujude in Beijing.

In the early 20th century, Fujude's manager is forced to retire because of illness. He hands over the restaurant to his two sons. However, the young men are not interested in the family business. While the older son is obsessed with Peking Opera, the younger one likes martial arts.

As the two cannot cover their expenses from the restaurant's income, the vice-manager Wang Zixi recommends his best friend, Lu Mengshi, to manage the business. With help from his lover Yuchu, chef Luo Datou and head waiter Chang Gui, Lu manages to revive Fujude's popularity. A decade later, the two brothers, jealous of the restaurant's success, want to drive Lu away.

Murder on the Orient Express

When: Dec 25-Jan 12, time varies
Where: Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* is full of dramatic plot twists.

Board the exotic and mysterious Orient Express as it takes off into the opulence and grandeur of the 1930s, with a train full of suspects, each with a motive and an alibi.

Detective Hercule Poirot is determined to find out who did it in the thrilling murder mystery. Ten passengers board the train that's traveling from Istanbul to Western Europe. But after the train unexpectedly stops in the isolated, snow-swept mountains, only nine of them are still alive. A man has been murdered in his room overnight, and suddenly every passenger becomes a suspect. Tensions rise as Poirot searches for the killer lurking in their midst who just may strike again.

Two Dogs' Opinions on Life

When: Dec 31-Jan 19, time varies
Where: East Pioneer Theater, Beijing

How would you see the world if you were a dog? You may just find out if you go to see *Two Dogs' Opinions on Life* directed by the avant-garde Meng Jinghui.

Audience members will get to explore some of the big questions plaguing Chinese society from a canine perspective. The two dogs at the center of the play will look at all kinds of everyday issues, from online relationships to weight loss campaigns, poisonous food to traffic jams, and even sky-high education fees.

The play combines the creative techniques of Chinese comedy folk performance, Italian improvisational comedy, vaudeville, and absurdist drama. Its dark comedy explores the relationship between ideals and real challenges of life in contemporary urban and rural China.

Mr. Donkey

When: Jan 4 and 5, 7:30 pm
Where: Renmin University of China Rulun Auditorium, Beijing
Writer-directors Zhou Shen

and Liu Lu set the play in a rural village in the early 1940s, where a group of idealistic academics run a school. To raise funds, the teachers trick the government into paying a salary to a donkey that brings them water.

When a bureaucrat arrives, the faculty scrambles to find someone who can pretend to be Mr. Donkey.

Beneath the Red Banner

When: Feb 18-22 and 25-29, 7:30 pm; Feb 23 and March 1, 2 pm
Where: Shanghai Dramatic Arts Center

Beneath the Red Banner is adapted from Lao She's autobiographical novel.

The play is set in Beijing at the end of the 19th century. Capturing the events shortly after his birth in the winter of 1899, Lao She's pen vividly depicted the life of the Manchurian people, during the turmoil as the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) was dying. Foreign troops invaded, the peasants revolted and democratic reform was carried out — but soon failed.

The Manchus had a rigid sense of organization. Their military and civilian communities were grouped into eight banners, identified by colors, and the red banner was one of them.

As the Qing Dynasty declines, the nobles managed to continue their depraved life and were not fully aware of the nation's dangerous position, and their future. But there were others who realized that the nation's fate was hanging in the balance.

They devoted their lives to fight against the invaders.



The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

When: March 12-15, 7:30 pm
Where: Beijing Poly Theater

Of all the works of William Shakespeare that have graced the theaters in China, *Hamlet* is arguably the most famous.

The latest version of the play, entitled *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, directed by Li Liuyi, will soon hit Beijing Poly Theater.

Veteran Chinese actors Hu Jun, Pu Cunxi and Lu Fang will play the leading roles. Before *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Li directed the Chinese version of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

The National Center for the Performing Arts has been working with the Royal Shakespeare Company, a theater organization based in the Bard's hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon, on the Shakespeare Folio Project. This aims to make the playwright's work more accessible to Chinese speakers.