

► Huang Ke has hosted a home banquet every night for seven years, even when he's away. **Raymond Zhou** gorges for details

Be my guest

In olden times, royal courts and aristocrats would have a coterie of artists and writers, giving them food for thought – and for the stomach.

In today's Beijing, there is one household that holds a banquet every night for an assemblage whose members are recruited mostly from the ranks of the creative community. Although they do not depend on the host for their livelihood, some do stay around for days on end.

This unbelievable but true story happens in a 300-square-meter apartment in the city's northeastern Wangjing area. Every night around 6, guests start to arrive. The guard at the elevator would blast: "Get off the 6th floor and turn right," startling first-timers before they opened their mouths to ask for directions.

The doorway is littered with dozens of slippers, but few bother to wear them. People slouch on the sofa or hang around the CD collection. The surprise is, many of them don't really know the host Huang Ke; they are friends' friends, sometimes by several degrees of separation.

Over the past seven years, Huang Ke has played host to 20,000-plus people. On some evenings there are as few as seven, but other times as many as 60; and with that many mouths to feed, these guests have to take turns eating. None of them have to pay a penny or bring a gift.

Occasionally, a person would come and eat quietly, not conversing with the host or any of the guests. Nobody knows whose friend he is. But usually, the rule of thumb is, you go with someone who has already been there.

However, the host may not know every old guest, because he does not ask you to sign in or leave your card.

Huang Ke's motto is: "Whoever comes here is my guest. Everyone is equal in my house."

It's not an empty slogan. Sharing his table are ministers and clerks, renowned scholars and college kids, wealthy financiers and starving artists. He is courteous to everyone and would never hog you with attention if you are rich and famous.

As a matter of fact, many of his guests are celebrities in a literary or artistic field. They come for the mouth-watering food, and the chance to meet like-minded people. Hence, it has developed a reputation as the city's best-known cultural salon.

Friends who are at odds may bump into each other here. Divorced couples may bring their new beaux and share a table, creating moments of awkwardness. And more than a couple of times, people unknown to each other hit it off sitting around the Huang-style hotpot and ended up sharing more than a hotpot – even a bed.

So, who is this Huang Ke? And why does he throw his door open for all arrivals and wine and dine them until some would fall into an inebriated karaoke frenzy or a creative burst?

Huang, a 50-something, is the own-



I collect friends or friendship, if anything.

HUANG KE
Owner of a business consulting firm

er of a business consulting firm. But he has relegated daily management to someone else, focusing instead on his hobbies such as reading and listening to music. The walls of his rooms are plastered with paintings and calligraphy, but he says he is not into collecting things.

"I collect friends or friendship, if anything," he said.

Huang's story has a Hollywood arc, or more accurately, a movie flashback: In 1993, while traveling in Hainan Province on Chinese New Year's Day, the speeding car he was riding in spun out of control to avoid a band of local kids lighting firecrackers. It rolled over a dozen times, killing all three of his fellow travelers.

"I was saved, because I was plump and stuck in the window. So, tell your readers that losing weight is not always a good thing," he said with his characteristic humor.

The accident gave him an epiphany: Life is not only about making money. It's about friendship.

But feasting night after night has its cost. The 20,000-yuan (\$2,600) monthly food bill may not be a big sum for a wealthy businessman, but the time and stress of putting on such banquets could be prohibitive.

Consequently, his wife left him. "No mistress of the house could stand such a habit," said a friend. "Now, people can act like school-boys and don't need to adjust their

behavior according to the mood of the hostess."

The maid is another "victim." She was hired from Sichuan Province and trained by Huang. "She has her own cooking assistant," Huang said. Cleaning up after the guests would take two or three hours.

The Huang household consumes more beer than the rest of the building's apartments combined. One brewery even offered to sponsor the banquets with free beer, but Huang declined.

Huang and some of his guests are such epicureans that they may take over the cooking from time to time and get into a culinary can-do flourish.

Huang, a Chongqing native, indulges in the spicy cuisine of his home, but says: "We're expanding on our choices" as masters of other gastronomic schools drop in to show off their specialties.

Huang jokes that since you eat for free, you don't get to order your dishes. But there are two items that have become popular staples: one is a beef hotpot soup and the other, "Huang-style beef".

Now, those who want to customize their orders have a choice. Under the encouragement of friends who feel embarrassed about continually gorging for free, Huang has opened a restaurant in the gallery community, called Salt Under the Sky. The name is partly based on a biblical allegory and also on the fact that salt is considered the source of all tastes. Business was so good that a second outlet soon followed.

"But after they dined in the restaurant, some have come back. They

say the frat-house environment is homier," Huang said.

Huang's guests call themselves "huangke", a play on his name. So far, registered guests have reached 10,000, with their own publications penned by illustrious names.

"I heard the huangke committee has five female members who had a crush on me, but I didn't know who they were. In the end, they married other members," Huang laughed.

Friends have ambivalence towards his marital status.

"We want to see him married and happy, but we also fear that'll be the end of the endless dinner party," some admitted.

Song Lin, a poet, describes Huang as a "Buddha sitting at the head of the table".

Zhao Bo, a freelance writer, attributes Huang's generosity to "an ancient spirit", which is "rare in today's world".

Mang Ke, another poet, recalls that "when my wife was pregnant, Huang would personally boil soup and deliver it to my home".

Everyone enthuses about his unconditional friendship.

While the creative minds of the city "eat big portions of meat and drink big gulps of liquor", Huang Ke often smiles and watches them with an attentive yet amused look, rarely lost in the jollity. It seems that all of them are living life with abandon but in slightly different ways.

A novelist has written a fictionalized account of Huang's story, but who can tell what's actually going through his Zen-teel mind? That's when the person, as well as the banquet, takes on a mythical proportion.

It's bliss to count sheep at my local barber

HOT POT



GRAHAM BOND

Since the sudden and, frankly, disturbing revival of the Happy Hardcore musical movement in my Guangdong hometown, I've tended to shun the local pubs and clubs, opting instead to get my weekend kicks in the hairdressers. I've long been a fan of the Chinese hair wash. Some of the local establishments may not be suitable to take the wife, or mother, for a visit. However, such is my love of the purer pleasures of the salon experience that I have introduced both to visit my favorite joint.

Last Friday night comprised my usual hour-long wash and blow-dry. All the normal routines were observed: The five-minute struggle to get the air-conditioner working was lively as ever; the conversation about the fact my feet were hanging off the end of the bed followed a well-trodden path; we danced around the subject of whether I wanted my ears cleaning – me trying not to sound too eager, my attendant implying she didn't wash the aural passages of just anybody.

With an impressive five lathers and rinses behind us, "No.17" (as she insisted I call her) said my hour was up and suggested that I "xiuxi, xiuxi" ("rest, rest"). I had just spent the last hour being pampered as only a 21st Century metrosexual can without enduring severe dignity loss and/or a beating behind the bike sheds. I had spent not one calorie on mental or physical exertion (beyond, perhaps, burning off a baozi when trying to remember how to say: "Could you turn the Happy Hardcore down a jot?"). And here I was, being told that what I really needed to do now was take a proper rest.

The Chinese word "xiuxi" does not equate to having a lie-in, reading a book, or playing golf. The xiuxi is a paradox worthy of Laozi: The xiuxi that looks like a xiuxi is not a true xiuxi. For example, that hair wash didn't count because, one, somebody was touching me, and, two, I was chatting with the person next to me. A real Chinese xiuxi is about closing one's eyes and shutting down all life systems. It's about momentarily ignoring the 1.3 billion people and retreating into your own personal bubble. It's meditative, man.

A xiuxi is what unfolds when a hard-pedaling courier slumps himself across his metal cart and takes a nap beside a six-lane city center thoroughfare. It's what travelers do when they close eyes and pull beatific expressions as the aircraft's engines scream on take-off. It's what I do when somebody tries to press advertising material into my hand.

It's also what Chinese shops do when they want to close for the day. I love the way shop signs don't use that cold, unfriendly word "closed" but prefer "resting" instead. The owners haven't gone anywhere. They're probably asleep on a table somewhere out back. Bang hard enough on the door and they may even awake and let you in. In China, the xiuxi may be a beautiful thing, but it's only ever temporary. Especially where Happy Hardcore is concerned.

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REVIEWS

EVENTS

Guqin plus Kunqu

A very traditional Chinese performance will be staged at Zhongshan Park, west of the Forbidden City on Saturday night.

Young artist Wu Na (pictured) and her friends will play guqin, a seven-stringed instrument, and stage excerpts from a Kunqu Opera. Both guqin and Kunqu have been listed by the UNESCO as intangible cultural heritages for mankind.

Starting at 8 pm in the wooded courtyard of Lajinyuxuan Teahouse, the show includes solos of guqin and xiao, a vertical bamboo flute. Zhou Haolu, a young Kunqu actress, will sing elegant arias of *Seeking Dream* and *Wandering in the Garden*, two of the most enchanting parts in *Peony Pavilion*.

Wu Na has been playing guqin for



20 years and coaches students at the teahouse, where they also discuss Chinese history, literature and martial arts with scholars.

Wu also collaborates with rock bands on improvisation. Rock stars like Cui Jian and Dou Wei are among those who have praised her talent. In June, Wu will

visit Germany for an international music festival held in Cologne.

Liu Jun

Photo symposium

Spring auctions are blooming. Vintage photos and photos associated with contemporary art to be sold in the coming weeks by Beijing-based auction houses have already attracted huge attention from collectors.

To tackle artistic, technical and legal issues about the emerging artistic photo market, an academic symposium on artistic photo collection and auction was held last weekend in Beijing.

Attended by about 60 veteran photographers, art critics, photo gallery owners and legal experts from across China, the symposium was co-organized by Beijing Huachen

Auctions and major trade media for the photographic art.

Zhu Linyong

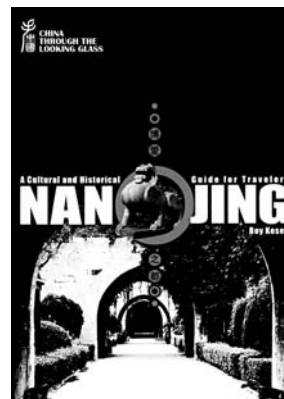
BOOK

Hidden Nanjing

Nanjing, a 2,500-year-old city in East China's Jiangsu Province, ranks among the top destinations for travelers from home and abroad.

However, many people come and go in such a haste that they pass by without knowing the many treasures hidden in the corners that tour guides themselves may not be aware of, said Chen Gang, vice-mayor of Nanjing, at a recent book launch in Beijing.

American author Roy Kesey has published *Nanjing: A Cultural and Historical Guide for Travelers* this month for any one interested



in exploring the best-preserved walled city in the world.

Part of the *China through the Looking Glass* series, the book, divided into four major sections and written in terse English language, offers a feast of information about the city at the lower reaches of the Yangtze River with plentiful photos, maps and useful tips.

Topics range from the city's geographical features to cultural heritages such as Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum, and major events that changed the history of China such as the Taiping Rebellion and the Rape of Nanking. (100 yuan or \$20, Atomic Energy Press, April 2007)

ZLY



New direction for old journey

► In the past, some rural women ate rations and slept in tiny boats to take part in a centuries-old tradition. But modern life has changed the way many Buddhist pilgrims make their way to Hangzhou. **Xie Fang** reports

Having spent 15 hours on a boat, 62-year-old Pu Yueqing arrived in Hangzhou of East China's Zhejiang Province at 3:30 am. Despite the long trip, she could hardly contain her excitement as if it was the first time she had visited the place.

Actually, Pu has been coming to this city annually for the past 18 years.

For Pu and her fellow villagers in the neighboring Jiangsu Province, there is nothing more important than making a pilgrimage to the temples in Hangzhou.

The women aged between 42 and 78 fastened yellow lines around their waists carrying yellow Buddhism cotton bags covered in the many red stamps collected during their various monastery visits.

The bright red plastic flowers that the women clipped to their gray or even silver hair lit up their faces.

"I think it's very pretty," Pu said with a big smile.

"I don't care what the urban people think about us. It just shows how happy we are. Every year this is the only chance for us to travel."

Their first destination was the Linyin Temple, the biggest Buddhist shrine in the city. Thousands of worshippers had already arrived there to make wishes for the new year.

Hangzhou is a renowned center of Buddhist worship.

More than 1,000 years ago, Qian Liu, founder of the Wuyue Kingdom in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (AD 907-960), developed Hangzhou and encouraged Buddhism.

The Faxi, Fajing and Fajin temples on the Tianzhu Hill and the Linyin Temple became the most popular places of worship for both the royal family and ordinary folk after Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) made Hangzhou its capital.

Every year, thousands of pilgrims flock here from all over the country to visit its sacred sights and temples. Many of the pilgrims are called "canniang" (Silkworm Lady, or female silkworm breeders).

The lower reaches of the Yangtze River where Hangzhou is located has had a 5,000-year-long history of raising silkworms. Women breeding silkworms at home have traditionally brought in about half the families' income as the men laboring in the fields.

Legends say a Silkworm Lady once prayed at Hangzhou temples and her silkworms grew much better. Soon more women came to pray and tour the city as well.

This pilgrimage has evolved into a festival where hardworking women even borrow money to make the trip.

Most of them come from villages or towns in Jiaxing, Huzhou, Suzhou, Wuxi and Changzhou. They visit Hangzhou only once a year during the first three months of the lunar Chinese calendar.

Some 20,000 pilgrims a day crowd into the most famous temples during the peak time.

Their rustic appearances make them appear quite different from modern tourists. In effect, they have become a unique attraction of the city in spring.

An improvement in the standard of living has seen a change in the women's approach to their pilgrimage.

Pu recalled that in the past, her mother made straw mats in her spare time to make money for the trip. It took her at least two days from the village to the city by a small boat. She and other worshippers slept on the boat at night and ate cold sticky rice and fried rice flour to save money.

But now Pu has more options. Boats, trains and buses are available and she can find good food at reasonable price at the temples and hotels.

Lu Aiqing, Pu's fellow villager, said she didn't need to worry about traveling expenses. Her children have set up their own businesses and give her support.

"They know the pilgrimage is my vacation. They want me to enjoy it as much as possible. They've given me more money than necessary. I could become rich via the trip," the 60-year-old joked.

After leaving their luggage at the Fajing Temple, the elders headed for the North Great Hill to pray for good fortune at the temple of the God of Wealth.

Instead of climbing the mountain path, they were fascinated by the cableway, which costs 30 yuan (\$3.75) per person.

They crowded at the entrance, and couldn't wait to try the modern transportation that would save them more than hour to get to the top of the hill. Still, a few were reluctant to get inside the cabin, as if it was a spaceship ready to blast them into outer space.

They burst into laughter by mocking at each other, and their smiles smoothed out their heavily creased faces.

The trip includes climbing Tianzhu Road to visit the three temples by foot, where the pilgrims bow at the waist of the hill toward the temples, burn joss sticks, shake spicy smoke up into the air with both hands to communicate with the heavens, and wish for family prosperity.

Besides praying and sightseeing, the pilgrims also shop at the small shops outside the temple. They believe that buying umbrellas, Buddhism accessories, toys, bags and rubbers can bring good luck.

Pu had already bought several umbrellas, but got a headache from finding gifts for her family, who say that the things she buys are old-fashioned.

Hangzhou native Zhao Xiangyong has run a shop outside the Fajing Temple for eight years.

Zhao said the pilgrims are no longer interested in big steel-made pots and enamelware washbasins, instead they prefer accessories and toys for their grandchildren. They also seem to be more fashionable — some don't wear head clothes and even carry leather bags.

The number of worshippers who jointly rent a coach to visit the temples has increased rapidly over the past five years. Zhou Juying is one of them.

The Jiangsu native paid more than 200 yuan (\$25) for the 3-day trip.

The 55-year-old wore a brocade satin top with a card pinned to her chest, stating the name of the coach company as well as the contact number of the leader, which made her look more like a tourist than a pilgrim.

She said that a "xiangtou" (Pilgrim Head, a person who organizes the pilgrimage in the village) asked them to join the trip to Hangzhou a month before the Spring Festival. When the numbers exceeded 60, the organizer called travel agencies to arrange transportation and accommodation, making the trip much easier for them.

"As a grandmother, I have less domestic chores. There is always something new and interesting in the annual pilgrimage. It goes to show that you are never too old to make the trip."

Rural pilgrims to Hangzhou, of East China's Zhejiang Province, use the Chinese Lunar New Year as an opportunity to relax and leave their work behind.

Photos by Deng Jianbin

Arctic monkeys are stating the freezing obvious

HOT POT



GRAHAM BOND

Northerners probably don't need reminding that it's been a bit nippy recently. Those who still find themselves shoveling snow or thawing numbed limbs may be consoled to hear that their pain was shared by the citizens of the south. In fact, things were so bad down here that the Hong Kong Observatory felt moved to issue one of its knee-trembling Cold Weather Warnings for the benefit of the uncomprehending populous.

"Members of the public are advised to put on warm clothes," entreated the experts as the mercury plunged, dipping into a knowledge base so specialist that, apparently, it takes four years to earn a degree in meteorology.

"If you must go out, avoid prolonged exposure to wintry winds," added the guardians of public health, now assuming the impatient tone of a nagging mother-in-law.

"If you know of elderly persons or people with chronic medical conditions staying alone, call or visit them occasionally to check if they need any assistance," went the final piece of priceless advice.

Anyone who caught the news or watched the press conferences might have assumed that — at that very moment — small children were ice skating across Victoria Harbor, marveling at the world's newest glacier out of which only the tip of the 88-storey IFC 2 tower was now poking.

Alas no. Unlike Shenyang or Dalian in Northeast China, Hong Kong didn't find itself victim to vicious blizzards or experiencing power cuts during Arctic temperatures. The problem in well-fed, well-sheltered, well-rich Hong Kong was that the temperature fell below about 15 C. In Hong Kong — and I quote — this construes a health "threat" and thus the well-honed warning mechanism kicked in.

It reminded me of British autumns past where, despite absolute seasonal predictability, fallen leaves on railway tracks would cause the train network to literally grind to a halt, and with it the entire economy.

If it's cold, do we seriously need telling to wear clothes? If it's a bit windy out, should we really be frightened into staying inside? Now I'm no expert — and I certainly haven't got a degree in meteorology — but it all seemed a little over the top. I don't need to have spent several years in university to know that most human beings have a little thing called a nervous system which rather puts Hong Kong's Cold Weather Warning to shame.

It's an amazing contraption, developed over several millennia, and pre-programmed into every new born baby for absolutely free. Here's how it works: If it's hot, you sweat and remove superfluous layers of clothes. If it's cold, you shiver and crawl under the duvet. If someone cuts your arm off, your scream, then call for a doctor. And if someone fires a machine gun, you duck, or run. Despite what nagging mother-in-laws and Hong Kong Observatory officials may think, we don't always need reminding of the bleeding obvious.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to bed. It's freezing in this apartment, and — for some reason — I've never quite got round to buying a heater.

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Many pilgrims visiting Hangzhou's temples buy religious souvenirs, which they believe will bring good luck.



Burning joss sticks is a traditional way of paying tribute to the Buddha.

REVIEWS

DVD

The Amityville Horror

Directed by Stuart Rosenberg, starring James Brolin, Margot Kidder

Eddie Murphy once did a routine about how white folk react to hints that their house is haunted. He said that a WASP couple would look at black goo rising in their toilet and say "that's peculiar".

Re-watching this ghoulish drama — supposedly based on a true story — I couldn't help but think of Murphy's observations. Even when a friend of the terrorised family becomes possessed and says in a demonic voice that their house is the path to hell, they still stay there.

In a sense, their stupidity is beneficial for viewers. If they had fled too early we wouldn't have been able to enjoy the scene-chewing antics of Rod Steiger, who plays a



tortured priest.

As George Lutz, James Brolin skips between two expressions: sullen and crazed.

You can actually chart the development of the plot by the red rings around Brolin's eyes. Oh, and we can't forget his hair that starts out looking like a Neil Diamond album cover only to descend into a death metal mop. Overwrought to zany extremes, if these events actually took place, this dramatized version does the victims little justice.

Ben Davey

The Island

Directed by Michael Bay, starring Ewan McGregor (pictured right), Scarlett Johans-



Shouldn't be too difficult for a band of military elite-turned-mercenaries to capture two escaped clones, should it? Especially given that the clones have a 15-year-old's education? But considering *The Island* comes from the producer/director team behind *Armageddon* and *Bad Boys*, the hardened bounty hunters will no doubt end up proving no match for the dim fugitives.

And it would have been naive to expect Jerry Bruckheimer and Michael Bay to approach the science fiction genre with any degree of subtlety. Their story of genetics gone wrong soon collapses into a flaccid chase film.

We can only hope that Scarlett Johansson's toe-dip into the pool of dumb explosion movies was more experiment than statement of intention.

This tale of human cloning, featuring more slow motion shots than an R&B clip, is indeed a frightening vision of the future.

BD

East of Eden

Directed by Elia Kazan, starring James Dean (pictured top right), Raymond Massey

One of three films that created the cult of James Dean, here the star plays Cal Trask, the less favored son of pastoralist father Adam (Raymond Massey). When Adam loses most of his money in a failed scheme, Cal tries to trump his brother, Aron (Richard Davalos), by earning his father's losses back.

To do so he'll need the financial help of



his mother (Jo Van Fleet) who abandoned him to run a nearby booze den. Throw in a competition for the affections of Aron's girlfriend

(Julie Harris) and a knot tightens in the family ties. A condensed adaptation of John Steinbeck's novel, this is notable as Dean's major debut but his Brando-esque performance allows little breathing space for any other cast member.

Director Elia Kazan must have been enamored with the young actor to grant him this kind of leeway. But Dean's overacting simplifies the complexity of Steinbeck's book.

BD



Collision of discovery

► A new super machine will allow Chinese scientists to discover more than ever before. **Jia Hepeng reports**

Senior physicist Fang Shou-xian vividly remembers the exciting moment marking China's first major science project in high-energy physics. October 17, 1988 was a history-making date comparable to the launch of China's first satellite. On that day, the Beijing Electron Positron Collider (BEPC) successfully staged its first experiment.

The machine is one million times more powerful than a hospital X-ray machine and allowed scientists to explore the microscopic world of electrodes. As one scientist put it, the BEPC could be used to "observe the heart of an ant".

"Everyone was applauding, and people said we Chinese eventually could feel proud among our foreign colleagues in basic science researches," recalled Fang, the former director of Institute of High Energy Physics (IHEP), which designed and built the BEPC.

In 2003, Chinese scientists used the BEPC to accurately describe the structure of SARS virus proteins and

in 2004, revealed how spinach leaf molecules performed photosynthesis.

The BEPC has now finished a key renovation step. What took scientists 100 days to finish in the past will be finished in just one day.

After observing and analyzing the collision and the new particles resulting from it, physicists are able to identify many kinds of basic particles.

Quark, for example, is the component of protons and neutrons.

More than 10 years after the US and Canadian scientists used the electron positron collider in Stanford University to observe and confirm the existence of quarks, Chinese physicists began to consider the possibility of constructing an electron positron collider of their own in the late 1970s.

"The disastrous 'cultural revolution' (1966-76) was just over and many basic researches had not been resumed, so we did not expect the government to support this project," Fang told China Daily.

Unexpectedly, after hearing the proposals of leading scientists, Deng Xiaoping (1904-97) decided the machine was a priority.

The central government established a special steering committee, consisting of top State leaders such as Song Ping and former minister of aeronautics and astronautics Lin Zongtang. With an investment of 240 million yuan (\$104.3 million at the exchange rate then), the construction of BEPC was launched in 1984.

"Song told us: 'Our purse only has a certain amount of money. But we hope you can take this precious chance and exert your biggest creation for our nation,'" Fang said.

There were many technical difficulties to be solved, however, China was lucky enough to have a Nobel Prize winner to lend a helping hand.



The new BEPC will be 100 times more powerful.

American Chinese physicist Professor Tsung-Dao Lee, who won the 1957 Nobel Prize for physics, helped Chinese and US scientist work together.

The Columbia University professor has long been a major patron for China's international science co-operation.

"During the construction of BEPC, I could taste the great wisdom of Deng Xiaoping. The project construction not only improved the national science and technology capacities, but also promoted the close co-operation of Chinese and US scientists, playing as an important vehicle for the two nations to understand each other," Fang said.

Besides being used for observing particle collision, BEPC also provides synchrotron radiation, which is a kind of X-ray used to detect the structure of molecules.

"If an X-ray machine in hospital can clearly scan human bones, our synchrotron radiation can be used to observe the heart of an ant," said IHEP director Chen Hesheng. "Its strength is at least one million times of those used in hospitals."

Each year, BEPC was used for 10 months, five for particle collision, three for synchrotron radiation and two for equipment adjustment.

"In the West, such a big science project was operated just six months per year to ensure its stable operation," said Chen.

"But we have no other choice. It is the only such facility in China and hundreds of users line up each year to use it."

Scientists from China, the United States, Japan, South Korea and the United Kingdom have worked together to study particle collision.

The synchrotron radiation service is provided freely to users selected among hundreds of applicants.

Jin Changqing, a professor at the Institute of Physics, CAS, has studied the superconducting features of material by using synchrotron radiation of BEPC.

"We have to highly cherish the precious time (of using BEPC) by carefully designing our experiment. Each minute here cannot be wasted," he said.

In early 2004, the renovation of BEPC was launched. In five years and with an investment of 640 million yuan (\$82 million), BEPC's performance will be boosted by 30 to 100 times.

The BEPC upgrade is still going on and is scheduled for completion by the end of 2008.

However, a tight schedule, much higher requirement on equipment and technologies, and the limited space to locate new facilities, all pose challenges to BEPC innovation.

"When BEPC was first constructed, we could not consider to leave larger space underground for further development. It would have needed more investment than we had," said Chen.

After repeated design, the improvements needed to boost the power were accommodated. "There was no second such design in the world," Chen said. "But compared with the innovations like the twirling design, our biggest harvest from BEPC and its innovation is a group of innovative scientists," said Chen.

Making a scientific racket

The electron positron collider is the most important way to observe and test particles in physics. It makes beams of electrons and positrons accelerate to near light speed — 300,000 kilometers a second — along very accurate orbits. When the two particle beams collide, collision data is detected by a piece of equipment called a spectrometer.

Beijing Electron Positron Collider (BEPC) entered formal operation in 1990. It was one of the eight large electron positron colliders in the world and the only one focused on studies on the energy level marked with C-quark.

Consisting of direct-line and ring-like accelerators, spectrometer and the synchrotron radiation facility, BEPC looks like a huge tennis racket lying underground in western Beijing.

China Daily

Faith moves mountains, crazy cabbies

HOT POT



GRAHAM BOND

I made a grave mistake last week. I mentioned the word "crash" while riding in a taxi, which was speeding along the wrong side of the road, on a darkened highway.

Of course, I didn't suggest we were going to crash.

I was attempting to offer an explanation for why I was desperately trying to tug the seatbelt strapped out of a hitherto undiscovered fissure between seat and door.

"No, No, No. There's no need to do that," exclaimed the embarrassed driver. My new friend was clearly struggling to cope with the magnitude of the insult that was unfolding (or unfolding, at least) within the holy confines of his cab.

"Oh, I'm sure you won't crash," I said calmly, while plunging the seatbelt buckle into the socket with the break-neck speed of an Amazonian spear fisherman. "It's just — how to say? — my habit."

The driver's countenance immediately turned cloudy and troubled.

"Please don't speak like that," he replied in hushed tones. "This is your foreign way. In China, you mustn't be so direct. What you should say is: 'I trust your driving skills.'"

Now I can lie, but the possibility of configuring the words "I", "trust", "driving skills", and "your", into a single sentence while in the company of a man who, in defiance of the inky black night, had neglected to turn on his headlights, seemed beyond the limits of language.

Nevertheless, I apologized profusely for my injurious comment and passed the rest of the 30-minute journey in a kind of tranquil stupor that one can only enjoy after every last drop of blood has drained from the face and knuckle regions.

Back home, my wife expressed surprise that I wasn't immediately ejected from the vehicle for making such a faux pas.

Crashes in themselves may be part of life — a very entertaining part judging by the mobs that stare quizzically at car wrecks or felled pedestrians — but to actually utter the word "crash" before a crash has actually taken place is not on.

Apparently, the logic has it that if you think about crashing, you will crash and so it was that in one single moment, several of my biggest confusions about life in China were instantly laid to rest.

I suddenly realized why it was that drivers rarely look before joining traffic on a main road, or why pedestrians tend to stare straight and true while crossing busy streets.

To even entertain the idea of ill-fortune is to invite it. Cheerful optimism and steely confidence can override all dangers. In the words of George Michael, you gotta have faith.

Which is, of course, an admirable attitude to life that looks all the more impressive to someone from the cynical and paranoid Western world (George Michael excepted).

However, next time I go to cross the road, I am going to have a problem.

For how exactly can I have faith when I know there are lunatics driving around on the wrong side of the road with no headlights on?

REVIEWS

DVD

Babel

Babel's success at the Golden Globe Awards sends a clear message to China's big-name filmmakers about the future of mainstream Hollywood movies — internationally successful films do not have to be told in English.

Although Hollywood stars Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett received top billing in *Babel*, the most powerful performances were from a Japanese teenager, a middle-aged Mexican woman and Moroccan children.

These down-to-earth players communicate their passion and pain in their native languages, but as Mexican director Alejan-



dro Gonzales Inarritu says, emotion does not need translation. *Babel's* Mexican wedding scene is intoxicating and the highs and lows of partying with the deaf Japanese teenager is so enthralling. *Babel* is testament to the universal truth that we all want to be no matter what language is used. Good stories transcend languages and action speaks louder than words.

Patrick Whiteley

BOOK

Tibet's high life

The Aristocratic Families in Tibetan History 1900-1951 by Tibetan sociologist Tsering Yangdzom provides some rare insights into Tibet's most prominent aristocratic families in modern history, a subject that few scholars in the world have touched. With its vivid language and rare pictures that shed light on the lives of Lhasa's nobility, the book is not only for Tibetologists but also attracts the average reader with little knowledge of Tibetan history.

But what is more touching than the power struggle among the Dalai Lama and the noble families is the discussion of women's social status. The author speaks out for her gender with passion when it comes to arranged marriages.

The book's English version has hit major bookstores in the country.

Liu Jun

CD

The Chinese Madonna

In her first CD album *Universal Gravitation*, Wan Qian (Regina Wan) from Shanghai presents a number of tracks reminiscent of the power pop beats of a modern Madonna.

Though still a new name to most people, Wan has shown her versatility in performing arts including roles in the National Theatre Company's drama *Wilderness and Man* and a popular TV series named *Secret Order 1949* aired last April.

Her songs *Pink Love* and *Universal Gravitation* gained her the award "Best New Singer of the Year" voted by 11 radio stations in the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Dance music seems to be Wan's main direction, as is indicated in her latest album released by Starzbank Music of Shanghai.

Mu Qian

