

LIFE

Imposed idleness a good time to build body's defenses

While cooped up, like countless others, during the recent Spring Festival holiday, I actually savored the solitary time, because I could, as

I have done for six years now in Beijing during this festive period, concentrate solely on a deeper study and practice of tai chi.

While most people during the coronavirus outbreak were inside looking out, I was inside looking inward, taking stock of activity within my body's walls.

Especially in light of the outbreak, I took heart in how tai chi, which includes self-defense among its features, offers a first line of defense against such natural onslaughts as the coronavirus.

In fact, science now bears out the

age-old claims that tai chi, an intangible cultural heritage of China, offers a range of benefits.

The rewards go beyond the physical realm, touching as well on aesthetic, mental and spiritual development.

Regarding its broad scope, Chen Xin wrote, in *The Illustrated Canon of Chen Family Taiji*, published in 1932, that "the secret of Taijiquan ... lies in the fact that its movements exist not of themselves, but are elements in an ancient tapestry of thought and consciousness, combining philosophy, healing and fighting into a single fabric."

And so I found myself, during the self-quarantine, conducting an inventory of the plentiful reasons for making the practice of tai chi a daily habit.

For starters, you need no equipment, no special clothing or gear, and not even a partner. As for space, the smallest area will suffice.

My *shifu*, Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei, himself a direct descendant of the creator of tai chi, once told us that if you have enough room to stand in the Single Whip posture — legs extended to the sides at about three times shoulder width, with arms likewise stretched sideward — you have enough room to practice tai chi.

You might have to adjust your steps during the practice routine, he said, but you nonetheless can still do proper tai chi in a small area.

My living room offered space aplenty, even with two cats underfoot and the various books I was reading scattered about.

While practicing *Black Dragon Emerges From Water*, *Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg* and a host of other colorfully named moves — all connected by Chen-style tai chi's characteristic coiling and rotating motions — I was simultaneously lubricating my joints,

motivating my circulatory system, strengthening my respiratory capacity, clearing my thoughts and inspiring myself to improve day by day.

Tai chi allows us to listen deeply to our inner workings as well as our muscular and skeletal networks as we slowly move through a series of postures. This reflective exercise, which engages our mental and imaginative acuity, comes as a real blessing in times of imposed idleness. It can help ward off the dreaded "cabin fever" made famous by *The Shining*.

Similarly, the constant inventory we take of the body's alignment in each move — including proper posture, suitable distribution of weight and appropriate relaxation throughout the body — fosters the aesthetic sense needed for daily improvement.

In addition, with or without music, tai chi offers a pleasant and

rewarding method of moving meditation.

But mostly, during the outbreak, I came to appreciate anew the fact that tai chi fortifies our body's immune, circulatory and respiratory systems.

Zhong Nanshan, an epidemiologist and pulmonary specialist who is a leading adviser in the nation's fight against the novel coronavirus, is co-author of a 2018 study, published in *CHEST Journal*, a publication of the American College of Chest Physicians, that touts the benefits of daily tai chi practice.

The study notes how respiratory function improved among patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease who practiced the 24-movement routine of Yang-style tai chi for five hours per week for 12 weeks.

Likewise, research by Shin Lin, a fellow tai chi disciple and a professor at the Department of Develop-

mental and Cell Biology at the School of Biological Sciences at the University of California, Irvine, has found that tai chi strengthens our immune system, increases the body's defenses against cancer, and generally offers the range of benefits of which Chinese lore has long boasted.

If you haven't already learned tai chi, even the basics, the coronavirus outbreak should motivate you to learn it soon. That way, the next time you find yourself with little to do but remain indoors, you'll have a wonderful way to pass the time and improve your body's defensive capabilities.

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Candid camera: Hair today



Customers queue up in an orderly fashion, and keep their distance, as they wait for a free haircut arranged by the estate management of a residential community in Xinglong township, Wanning, Hainan province, on Monday. The second day of the second month of the lunar calendar, *longtaitou*, or, "the dragon raises its head", is traditionally a day for people to get a haircut. XINHUA



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Key moments covered

BEIJING — A book about China's efforts on the prevention and control of the COVID-19 outbreak has been co-published by the China International Press and the People's Publishing House.

Using selected excerpts from Chinese media reports, the book focuses on key moments, individuals and events critical to China's ongoing fight against the epidemic.

The book has been compiled to

show the strength of the Communist Party of China's leadership and China's socialist system, as well as the country's efforts in strengthening cooperation with the international community to jointly safeguard global and regional public health security.

The book will also be published in English, French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic.

XINHUA

Artist frames the spirit of combating outbreak

By WANG RU
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In a spectacular mountainous region, a towering peak looks like a giant clenched fist, giving the impression of a powerful force pointing into the sky.

This is the painting *Fighting!* Wuhan created by artist Shu Yong to encourage Chinese people to fight against the COVID-19 outbreak.

"The fist symbolizes courage, determination, firmness and solidarity. It means people are cooperating in the fight against the epidemic. Holding the fist high also means we swear to conquer the virus. It shows our confidence," says Shu.

The 46-year-old contemporary artist has been producing work, in several mediums, for more than two decades. His creations include oil paintings, sculptures, photography and performance art.

His representative sculpture *Golden Bridge on Silk Road* based on the broad narrative of the Belt and Road Initiative has been exhibited at many international events, including the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017, and Expo 2017 Astana in Kazakhstan.

According to Jiang Yingchun, general manager of Poly Culture, "Shu's works usually combine elements of China's political, economic, social and media landscape, and vividly reflect the development process of the country."

The painting is one of a series Shu is creating to pay tribute to those who have made great contributions to fighting against the disease, especially those who work on the front line, like doctors and nurses.

Since Jan 26, Shu has spent a

dozen hours every day searching for inspiration in changes to the epidemic situation and creating a painting, he says. His paintings record touching stories and his own thoughts during the epidemic period.

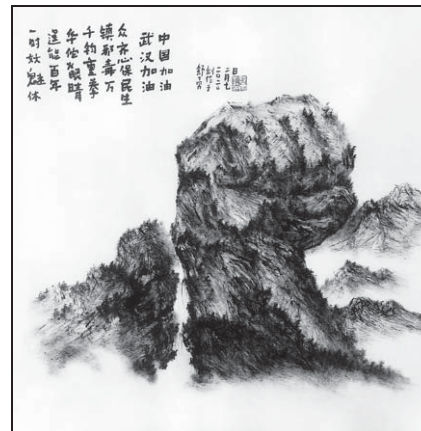
He also produced a video about his drawing process, promotes the paintings and videos online and plans to donate the paintings to the heroes of the fight in the future. He says he is determined to create them until the end of the epidemic.

Since the World Health Organization declared a public health emergency of international concern over the outbreak of novel coronavirus pneumonia in China, our country has met great difficulties, Shu says. "But, however difficult the situation is, some people stand out, fight on the front line and protect all others. The ordinary heroes give me the passion and inspiration to create the series."

The artist has mixed feelings when creating the works. "My feelings fluctuate with the changes of the epidemic situation. Sometimes I feel anxious, heavy and worried, but other times I feel full of power and confidence."

All of the pieces are Chinese landscape paintings, which are drawn only in black and white, and mountains can be seen in most of the paintings, which symbolize power and faith.

Shu says the paintings show his development of understanding the epidemic situation. "Although this epidemic has had a disastrous influence, it enables us to realize the power of solidarity, courage, diligence in our country and look forward to a better future. Infinite beauty can only be seen at the perilous peak."



Artist Shu Yong's painting *Fighting!* Wuhan is one of a series he is creating to pay tribute to the heroes fighting the COVID-19 outbreak. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Belgian pianist tunes into fight against virus

By CHEN NAN
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Belgian pianist Jean-Francois Maljean planned to go to Wuhan, Hubei province, in February to collaborate with a Chinese *bianzhong* (chime bells) player. However, the novel coronavirus outbreak forced him to postpone the trip.

The musician, who visited China for the first time in 2002 and has been a frequent visitor since then, decided to write a song after discussing the idea with his Chinese business partner, He Liu, who is a Wuhan native responsible for coordinating his performances.

"I have been playing concerts and traveling around China for almost 20 years. I have so many friends there, including friends in Wuhan. I also wanted to show my consideration to those people affected by the virus and those who are fighting in the hospitals, especially the doctors and nurses," says Maljean, 67, in an email interview with China Daily.

According to He, who met Maljean about five years ago when the pianist performed in Wuhan, it took the musician about three days to finish the song, *Chime of The Dawn Bells*, which was released online on Feb 10.

He, who works for a local media company in Wuhan, also invited 15 local residents to sing the Chinese version of the song, which was released on the country's social media platforms on Saturday.

"I wrote the Chinese lyrics and the 15 people singing the song are from all walks of life in Wuhan, such as medical staff, teachers and students," says He. "We are having a



Belgian pianist Jean-Francois Maljean poses with Dong ethnic girls in Liping county, Southwest China's Guizhou province, in 2016. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tough time right now, but people in Wuhan stay strong."

Maljean composed the music first, since the pianist already had an idea of a melody, which is inspired by a new piano solo album he is working on.

He Liu also discussed Wuhan's landmark buildings, such as the Yellow Crane Tower, and the city's famous scenery, such as its cherry blossoms, as well as the Yangtze River and *bianzhong*, which Maljean put into his music. Robert Murray, an English author, finalized the text, which gave the lyrics a poetic touch.

Last year, He gave the pianist, who was in China at the time, a small *bianzhong*. The melodic sound of *bianzhong* was also used in the song, which gives it a "Chinese touch".

Maljean's daughter, Noemie Maljean, who is a professional singer, performs the lead vocals and Mal-

jean, who has been learning Mandarin for years, sings the middle part — written by He — in Chinese.

"I have sung with my father at private events, but I haven't yet performed with him onstage. I hope that we will be able to do it very soon, maybe in China when the outbreak is over," says Noemie.

"I hope that my music can comfort people suffering in Wuhan and in China, and give them hope to fight this outbreak," says the pianist, whose parents were both medical doctors.

Born in Verviers, Belgium, Jean-Francois Maljean started to learn piano at 6 years old. At about 12, the classically-trained pianist became interested in a diversity of music genres, especially pop music like that of The Beatles. He went to the United States to learn jazz music at the Berklee College of Music in Boston and when he came back to Belgi-

um, the pianist, then 23, eventually launched a career as a professional musician.

Jean-Francois Maljean initially started studying medicine following the advice of his parents but after two years, he quit and concentrated on music, "which is my true passion since childhood," he says.

His music, as he describes it, is full of hope and peace. He made a number of piano solo albums and instrumental albums, most of which have been released in China.

During his music career, the pianist experimented with musical fusion in China, mainly with Chinese ethnic groups. His trips to Qiongdongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Guizhou province saw him become interested in ethnic music there. He also traveled to Yunnan province and North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region to experience local music. In 2010, Maljean collaborated with Chinese singer Shang Wenjie during the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

The Hubei Provincial Museum is known for its collection of the globally famed 2,400-year-old bronze chime bells of the Marquis Yi of Zeng State. A set comprises bells of varying sizes that produce different sounds when struck. Maljean has been interested in mixing his music with *bianzhong* for a long time.

"I've learned about chime bells in Hubei province and I definitely want to go to the museums to see them," says the pianist. "I hope that my first concert back in China will be in Wuhan, and I already dream of playing this concert with chime bells players from Hubei."