

BUILDING THE NEW ERA | IN OUR TIME



Clockwise from top left: NPC deputy Yang Changqin makes a bamboo-weaving product for her company in Chishui, Guizhou province; NPC deputy Wei Zuying at the Great Hall of the People during the two sessions this year; Song Shuixian, another NPC deputy from Guizhou, at the fifth session of the 13th National People's Congress; and Yang (middle) works on a bamboo-weaving product with her employees. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Comparing lifestyles in nations a world apart

By mid-June, I will have lived in China for three years. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven't been back to my own country, the United States, in all that time.

Lately, I've become more nostalgic about my life in the US. As the saying goes, there's no place like home, so, of course, there are many things I miss about my beloved Florida.

That said, there are great things about living in China, too, that I will inevitably miss once I eventually leave.

These thoughts inspired me to make a list of some of the advantages that the US and China have over each other. Of course, these advantages are

purely from my perspective, and some are somewhat fastidious.

I'll start with the US.

Standard home appliances: In my adult life, I had never lived in a home that did not have both a dishwasher and a clothes dryer until I came to Asia (to be

fair, this isn't just a China issue). These machines are practically standard in American homes, but not on this side of the world, where people generally wash their dishes by hand and hang their clothes outside. I really appreciate the convenience of such machines, and I think Asian people are largely missing out on the ability to be as lazy as we Americans are when it comes to cleaning things.

Comforters: In the US, you can buy what we call a comforter, a quilted blanket in which the cover is generally not removable because the inside is stitched to it. In China, it seems impossible to buy one. Every time I try, I can only find duvets.

With duvets, the cover and blanket are separate, and you have to stuff the latter into the former. It drives me crazy, seriously. I've even tried to watch tutorial videos online about how to do this effectively, but I still fail. Can I please just buy a comforter in China? Please?

Heaters: Americans should really cherish their ability to control heating in their homes during the winter. Most of us have thermostats that enable us to do this. But in China, this appears not to be the standard. Heating seems to be controlled by the building managers who follow set dates to turn it off and on. This can be problematic, as sometimes the heat is turned off early, leaving people to shiver in their homes and offices until temperatures officially get warm. And it's even worse for people who live in places such as Shanghai or Nanjing, Jiangsu province, who don't have heaters provided at all, despite cold temperatures, because they are officially part of South China.

Now, in what ways is China better than the US?

Holidays: I really like that China offers more holidays than the US does. American holidays are typically just one day only. Sometimes, companies may add an extra day off for Thanksgiving or Christmas, but this is far from typical. Most Chinese public holidays last at least two days, with three — Spring Festival, Labor Day and National Day — lasting a week or longer. Cheers to that!

High-speed rail: There simply is no comparison. High-speed rail here absolutely trumps the rail system in the US. It's fast, convenient, and expansive. America has a lot of catching up to do in this regard.

Paying by phone: To be fair, this is also being practiced in the US via programs like Apple Pay. Still, WeChat Pay and Alipay are the dominant payment systems in China, whereas in the US, most people still purchase things with either cash or credit or debit cards. China is quickly becoming a cashless society, much to my delight.

Bathroom stalls: This is common sense. Bathroom stalls should not have large gaps in the doors so people can see inside them when people need privacy. In the US, we have failed to grasp this. China, though, like other Asian nations, has stalls that properly afford people the privacy they need.

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CRAFTING SPECIFIC PROPOSALS

Guizhou's deputies to the NPC have enjoyed success in promoting the region's intangible cultural heritage, **Wang Ru** in Beijing and **Yang Jun** in Guiyang report.

In 2019, just one year after Song Shuixian was elected as a deputy to the 13th National People's Congress and submitted a motion to establish a horsetail embroidery museum, a demonstration center for the national-level intangible cultural heritage was inaugurated in her hometown, where the craft originated, in Sandu county, Southwest China's Guizhou province.

"Since then, my 'babies' have had a stable home," says Song, a national-level inheritor of the craft, referring to the tens of thousands of horsetail embroidery works she has collected and made, all of which are now showcased at the center.

As both a craftswoman and NPC deputy, Song has worked hard over the past four years to spread knowledge of her craft, which has played an important role in the rural revitalization of Sandu.

She is just one example of the Guizhou NPC deputies who have made contributions to their hometowns by promoting local cultural heritage.

Shi Liping, a deputy to the NPC from Songtao county, is a provincial-level inheritor of the Miao ethnic group's embroidery, an intangible cultural heritage. Her work is about passing down to future generations not just the craft, but also the culture behind it. "I continue to dig into the cultural connotations contained within our craft, trying to tell people stories about it and the people who are engaged with it," says Shi, who, in 2020, wore an outfit featuring Miao embroidery to the Great Hall of the People as a representative of her fellow craftswomen.

Her company selling embroidery products has offered jobs to more than 4,000 women in Songtao, enabling them to work at home and to be paid according to the number of products they produce.

NPC deputy Wei Zuying has made a similar contribution. After working at a textile mill in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, for 10 years, the woman, who learned Miao embroidery during her childhood, returned to her hometown in Congjiang county, Guizhou, to open her own embroidery workshop. In 2018, the business generated an output value of more than 800,000 yuan (\$126,000).

In 2020, her embroidery company was established with the help of the local government. She then established a poverty alleviation workshop in a community of people who used to live in the mountains, and has employed 300 locals.

"We work and live in the same apartment, and can earn at least 3,000 yuan each month. It is Wei who offers us employment and makes us realize our value," says Zhu Lanfeng, one of Wei's employees.

Moreover, Wei, like Shi, pays attention to the inheritance of Miao embroidery, and organizes activities in schools to help more children learn about it.

For Shi, as well as trying to impart the knowledge and skills of her craft to others, she also organizes training courses in local communities and villages.

Her idea is echoed by Song, who, since last year, has cooperated with the Disabled Persons' Federation of Tongzhou district in Beijing, and organized lessons, teaching the horsetail embroidery craft to local disabled people.

"It provides them with the opportunity to gain a skill and help them find jobs. At the same time, I can spread horsetail embroidery culture to others," says Song.

NPC deputy Yang Changqin based in Chishui, a county-level city in Zunyi, Guizhou, is a provincial-level inheritor of Chishui bamboo-weaving. She has brought the intangible cultural heritage to campus. Her bamboo-weaving production and research base in Chishui has become an extracurricular practice center for many students in Zunyi since 2021.

"The craft is part of local culture. I hope students can learn about it and inherit it, especially the craftsmanship spirit of the older generations," says Yang.

Many of them try to combine their respective crafts with other industries. For example, Shi is exploring a combination of Miao embroidery and local medicine. She has rented an 18-hectare plot of land to cultivate medicinal plants, and plans to make Miao-style perfume sachets or pillows containing medicinal herbs. Song, meanwhile, is exploring avenues in fashion, developing cultural and creative products based on the embroidery style.

Development of cultural industries also helps to boost tourism, says Song, who notes



NPC deputy Shi Liping from Guizhou's Songtao county displays a pattern created using the Miao ethnic group's embroidery technique during the two sessions in Beijing this year. She is a provincial-level inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of Miao embroidery. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

that some young people visit Sandu county to enjoy the landscape and local Sui ethnic group culture.

Some of their motions to the NPC have been carried out. Yang says she proposed to specify that more developed cities provide partner assistance to Chishui, and in recent years, specific policies in industrial cooperation and talent cultivation have been carried out, making the assistance more effective.

This year, she proposed to build a high-speed railway between Luzhou city, Sichuan province, and Zunyi, so that local products can be transported to other places more easily.

"I have learned so many things since becoming a deputy to the NPC, and it has enhanced my sense of responsibility. I like to bring the voices of the grassroots to the two sessions (the annual sitting of China's national legislature and top political advisory body) and help people solve their problems," says Yang.

Song, on the other hand, feels "extremely happy" when recalling what she has done over the past four years. The horsetail embroidery, a tradition of the Sui ethnic group, once only survived within the boundaries of Sandu, where Sui people live, and it was extremely hard to introduce it to the outside world. But after being elected as a deputy to the NPC, she has helped to bring much more publicity to the craft, and local people who are engaged with the industry can earn much more money than before.

"Now our horsetail embroidery has built its own brand. I feel very pleased to see my efforts help spread the craft of our hometown, and increase the income of local people," says Song.

Her enthusiasm for traditional culture urged her to propose the speeding up of the world heritage application of *shuishu*, the written language of the Sui ethnic group, during this year's two sessions.

"As a pictographic language similar to Dongba writing (the writing used by the Naxi ethnic group), *shuishu* has a history of several thousand years. It is a calling card of the Sui ethnic group, and China," says Song.

On Jan 26, the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued a document to support Guizhou in forging a new path in its development, and, as such, Shi sees more opportunities in the future.

"Over the past four years, I have seen my efforts to promote Miao embroidery being supported by the country and society, which motivates me to continue, and gives me a lot of confidence.

"The issuing of the document makes me believe Guizhou is welcoming a new golden decade. I will focus on how to seize the opportunity," Shi says. "And I hope more people will be attracted to invest here."

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