

LIFE

With shops shuttered, heroic e-commerce platforms take up slack

Since the onset of the novel coronavirus, life has been considerably more difficult for local consumers.

Want to buy face masks or hand sanitizer in stores? This is still very difficult to do, though I have heard reports that some of these items are beginning to reappear in some places.

Want to go out to eat? You can find a needle in a haystack faster than you can find an open restaurant nowadays.

Want to order items for delivery? It seems delivery for goods other than medical supplies takes longer to arrive now.

With so many brick and mortar businesses closed or restricting their hours in my area during the epidemic, online shops have become our heroes.

My water delivery service that I use via WeChat has continued, though I have to haul the 19-liter bottle from the gate of my apartment complex myself since the deliverymen are no longer allowed inside the compound.

In addition, e-commerce platform Baopals has been pretty awesome. Though many of my expat colleagues prefer the more popular Taobao, I prefer Baopals because it offers an English interface. I'm not literate in Chinese yet, and I like to be sure about what I'm buying and what buttons I'm pushing when I'm ordering something. Plus, I can receive assistance in English from its customer service staff if necessary.

Baopals came through for me in a big way recently. I had been worried about running out of masks, especially with authorities pressuring

everyone to wear them in public. It's been said that disposable masks should not be reused for health reasons, but what other option do people have if they're out of fresh masks and face criticism for showing their bare faces in public? What else can they do?

As my supply dwindled, I decided to order some online and just prayed that they would arrive in a timely manner.

I was pleasantly surprised to see that I received the masks fairly promptly.

I now have a decent supply, but decided I wanted something even

better. So next, I ordered a reusable electronic mask.

That mask arrived even more quickly than the disposable ones did.

Food delivery has also been good as of late. I was disappointed when Sherpa's shut down for a while (full disclosure: it has very recently began offering service again), but I found another platform called JSS that is very similar in terms of its English interface and customer service. It's good to know that there are other reliable options out there.

I want this virus madness to end as much as anyone. It's unfortunate

that tasks like going to the bank or enjoyable activities like going out to eat are no longer the norm. And being unable to have items delivered to your doorstep anymore is another annoyance, especially when the items are really heavy. I'll be much happier when things go back to the way they were before the epidemic.

In the meantime, as physical businesses remain shuttered, I'm happy that the virtual ones are keeping their digital doors wide open.

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Jamal Branford
Second Thoughts

Candid camera: Riding safely



A scooter driver passes through a "sanitation passage" before entering Houjiawan village, Chang'an district in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Monday. The 5-meter-long "passage", set up on Feb 9, is filled with a cloud of disinfecting steam. Before entering the "passage" to return home, villagers need to present their passes, write their names in a registration book and have their temperature taken. LI JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Japanese actor looks forward to cherry blossoms in Wuhan

BEIJING — As a Japanese citizen, Yano Koji, 46, has seen cherry blossoms numerous times in his home country. But now what he longs to see are the cherry blossoms in Wuhan, central China.

"When the novel coronavirus epidemic is over, I will go to Wuhan and enjoy the cherry blossoms while sipping my Japanese *seishu* (a kind of clear liquor)," he says.

Wuhan, capital of central China's Hubei province, is the epicenter of the novel coronavirus outbreak.

Yano has appeared in many Chinese TV dramas and is one of the most popular Japanese actors in China. After the outbreak began, he donated 130,000 protective masks to Wuhan. The news went viral and thousands of Chinese web users expressed their gratitude on Sina Weibo.

"I learned about the epidemic from news reports and was very worried," he recalls. He has some friends in Hubei, and his wife's family is in the adjacent Chongqing municipality.

He made the decision to do something to help in the battle against the virus. He met with a friend in Japan who bought protective masks, and helped facilitate their donation to those hardest hit by the virus.

Due to the size of boxes and relevant regulations in Japan, they used as many as 500 boxes to ship the 130,000 masks.

Packing was a hectic endeavor and it took 10 people almost 20 days to complete. He volunteered to help pack the masks whenever he was not working.

Reading thankful messages from Chinese people, he says: "I just did what I should do."

"I began working in China in 2000. Throughout those years I received support and encouragement from many Chinese people, without which I could have never become who I am today," he says emotionally. "I am grateful to China and the Chinese people."

"I feel sad seeing China in such difficulty," he added. "In fact what I did is nothing. But I will be happy if I could make my Chinese friends feel warm, even a little bit."

He was hesitant, at first, to be interviewed. "While people in China are combating the epidemic, it is not time for a foreign actor to talk."

But he is glad to see the epidemic bring Chinese and Japanese people closer. From Tokyo's iconic Skytree tower, with an illuminated "Be strong, China" sign to the poetic verses written on boxes of donated masks, Japanese residents have touched the Chinese with their



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Yano Koji, Japanese actor

timely help and kind words.

"Today many Japanese appreciate Chinese culture and are concerned about what's happening in China," he says. "We two countries are neighbors and should help each other. When we had difficulties, we received aid from the Chinese as well."

Currently working in Japan on a detective TV show, he was scheduled to take part in the production of a film in March, but the plan was postponed due to the novel coronavirus epidemic.

While he has no idea when his work will hit the screen, the actor takes to social media to ask his fans to protect themselves against the disease. "Wash your hands frequently, wear masks and take good rest," he says. "You may feel bored confined to your apartment, but there are actually lots of things to do: exercise, learn something new, read a book or watch the movies that you don't otherwise have time to watch. This difficult time shall come to an end."

Talking about Wuhan, he says. "I traveled there to work and stayed for about a week. I tried local food which was really yummy. It was a pity that I was too busy then to walk around."

"After the epidemic, I will definitely go there again," he says. "I will sit underneath the trees and enjoy the beauty of the cherry blossoms."

XINHUA

Home confinement has a silver lining

By **YANG FEIYUE**

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It's probably the longest time that I have been stuck with my parents since I flew the nest for college more than a decade ago.

The novel coronavirus outbreak undoubtedly made the recent Spring Festival holiday one of the most memorable I can recall.

The holiday is usually the only time of year that I leave Beijing for my hometown in Fujian province in eastern China and reunite with my parents.

Over the years, in that limited space of about a week, I would often spend a considerable amount of it catching up with my old buddies and former classmates.

I didn't talk much with my parents and rarely engaged in any interactive fun activities with them, which I'm sure is the case for many other grown-ups. Yet, they never complained, and the happiness on their face when I was home had me assuming that my presence alone was enough for our get-together.

However, the epidemic had us all confined to my apartment during the holiday this year, which, surprisingly, has offered us new opportunities for intimacy.

I found my parents taking great pleasure in sharing interesting posts on social media with me and offering their own interpretations of them. Conversations ensued afterwards. It suddenly occurred to me that it is a joy that we didn't have before.

Although the epidemic put a grim complexion on things, the situation has unexpectedly offered me an opportunity to reconnect with my parents.

In addition, I saw a silver lining in more ways than one.

Whenever we watched TV or flipped through social media, such as the Chinese microblogging service Sina Weibo or Douyin, known as Tik-Tok overseas, we saw updates of the nation's fight against the



Top: A resident gets his temperature taken at the entrance of Hongfu residential community, Qinnan district, Qinzhou of Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Wednesday. ZHANG AILIN / XINHUA **Above:** A citizen of Tongren, Guizhou province, scans a QR code to register with his community on Wednesday. CHEN XIAOLAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

virus, including real-time statistics of patients and the cured across the country, as well as expert lectures on virus prevention, and the latest discoveries and treatment about the virus.

The extensive coverage has not just kept each of us informed, but turned out to be very educational.

My mother, in her 60s, is a creature of habit, and she has been a firm believer in handpicking groceries when shopping on her own for as long as she has lived. At the beginning of the virus outbreak, she gave in to her inner drive and insisted on going to the supermarket, with the idea that catching the virus

was as unlikely as a lottery win.

Yet, after keeping abreast of the virus status and experts' advice, she came to her senses and allowed me to order takeout, which she had frowned upon before.

To my surprise, she also learned, from news coverage, how to properly sanitize the package and everything else afterwards.

My mother is certainly not the only one that fully understands the necessity of taking extra precautions.

A few days later I found major online shopping platforms had also launched such measures as self-help pickup and no-contact delivery

to reduce potential virus infections.

I'm grateful that they responded in such a short time, in addition to managing to function and delivering us fresh food. I couldn't say a big enough thank-you to those delivery men who always wore a mask and waited for me to pick up my order at the entrance of my residential community and kept their distance when I showed up.

Temporary tents have been set up right at the entrance too, where I saw street committee workers busy keeping track of the recent travel history of people coming and going through my community, which makes each of us feel safe and assured that the transmission of the virus will be contained soon.

Indeed, I can feel the joint effort of everyone in this fight against the virus, whether it be the less crowded streets or everyone I spot wearing a mask in public.

Positive things will continue to arise, with the nation planning to amend the Law for Wild Animal Protection to crack down on those indiscriminately trading or eating wildlife, as well as a possible medical breakthrough against the virus.

As for my friends and colleagues with whom I stay in contact online, most of them have shown a positive attitude toward the fight against the epidemic.

Some of them have stopped ordering restaurant takeout and began to cook for themselves. I see heated discussions about recipes and nutritious food selections and photo posts of their work, a trend which has been catching on.

Those into body building at gyms have long since started exercising at home, and even a few of the lazy bones around me have joined in the home exercise wave.

We all agree that a good lifestyle boosts immunity, which is the most valuable commodity of all at the moment, and all of us are looking forward to the excitement of a reunion with friends that is, hopefully, on the horizon.



Japanese actor Yano Koji (left) helps pack protective masks he donated to Wuhan. The actor, who worked in China, donated 500 boxes carrying a total 130,000 masks. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY