

Hope springs eternal

Award-winning film is a heartwarming tale of four springs, three kids, two parents and a family finding meaning in everyday life, **Li Yingxue** reports.



Director
Lu Qingyi

Amateur director Lu Qingyi's debut work, *Four Springs*, which won the best documentary at the FIRST International Film Festival, hit Chinese cinemas on Jan 4.

The documentary follows Lu's family life over four Spring Festival celebrations from 2013 to 2016, and reunions with his parents, elder sister and brother in Dushan county, Mawei town, Southwest China's Guizhou province.

Lu's documentary mainly follows the daily lives of his parents, Lu Yunkun and Li Guixian, and the fun and humor before Lu's camera presents the audience with a simple but touching story.

Born in 1973, Lu left home when he was just 15 years old. He has had various jobs, including soccer player, bar singer, editor and cameraman.

He turned the lens on his parents during Spring Festival in 2013, when he returned home for the holiday, and for four years he recorded his visits home.

During that period, his elder sister passed away and the film bears witness to his parents' journey to rediscover their vitality following the funeral, culminating with them dancing after cleaning their daughter's tomb.

"The happiness of life is to see that one's vitality leaves a mark in life. Life is beautiful, and one should find strength when facing difficulties," Lu said at the film's premiere on Jan 2 in Beijing.

It all began seven years ago when Lu posted on Douban, an online platform in China for shared-interest communities, under the nickname of Qichuang, Chifan ("get up and eat").

His two articles, *My Dad* and *My Mom*, which were uploaded with photos, resonated with many of his fellow users on Douban and attracted numerous comments. It was this reaction that encouraged him to start making videos of his parents.

In 2015, Lu watched an interview with director Hou Hsiao-hsien from Taiwan, who said that if you want to make a film, you just make it, and the experience will come as you shoot. He decided, then, to compile the videos into a film.

He stopped recording following Spring Festival in 2016. Lu explains that he made the decision to stop because he noticed his parents aging a lot more acutely following the death of his sister.

"I wanted my parents to see the final film, so I started to cut and edit the film after I shot footage in the spring of 2016."

Lu's original version ran up to five hours, because he found it difficult



Clockwise from top: Lu Qingyi's parents Lu Yunkun (left) and Li Guixian take a picture when traveling; the couple play instruments together in their leisure time; and Lu Qingyi and his parents eat dinner in their yard. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Unlike other documentaries... this film has an uplifting spirit and offers the audience a brighter outlook.”

The committee of the FIRST International Film Festival

to cut the 250 hours worth of footage on his own. However, last July, the final 105-minute version was finished.

Four Springs was nominated for the best editing award at last year's Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival, but lost out to Lei Cheng Ching's *Dear Ex*. However, in July it won the best documentary award at the 12th FIRST International Film Festival in Xining, Northwest China's Qinghai province. Li Ziwei, organizer of the film festival, described the film

as “an epic, starring ordinary people.”

The committee of the film festival stated that in *Four Springs*, “The placid singing of the parents infuses warmth into their daily life, and shows that meaning can be found in reunions and the loneliness after separation. Unlike other documentaries that tend to be serious and are focused on marginalized sections of society, this film has an uplifting spirit and offers the audience a brighter outlook.”

As the film's honorary producer, actor Chen Kun shed tears when he watched the film at the premiere. He explained that it was not because he felt sad but because he was touched.

“The story tells us that we can find the bigger meaning of life in just normal everyday things,” he says.

Film critic Shi Hang adds: “The life recorded in *Four Springs* reminds me of my own.”

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Fans get Chinese version of *Mamma Mia!* again

BEIJING — Shen Xiaocen still remembers the moment when she received an audition notice for the Chinese version of *Mamma Mia!*, nine years ago in London.

Shen, a star singer active in China during the 1980s, now lives overseas.

“Starring in *Mamma Mia!* is the ultimate dream of my singing career,” she says. “I longed for an opportunity to sing in this globally popular production, using my native language back in my motherland.”

Mamma Mia!, a jukebox musical that premiered in London in 1999, is based on 22 songs of iconic Swedish pop group ABBA. It tells the story of kinship, friendship and romance.

As of 2018, it had been performed in 440 cities in 50 countries, attracting an audience of over 60 million people.

The Chinese version of *Mamma Mia!* made its debut in Shanghai in July 2011, constituting its 14th language version, and has been performed 400 times. The show has just ended its run in Beijing, and will be staged on Friday in Chongqing, on Jan 22 in Nanjing and on July 19 in Shanghai.

In the show, Shen plays the role of Tanya, a position she continues to hold. As for the others, many have made progress from previously uncredited roles.



A scene from the Chinese version of *Mamma Mia!* staged at the Guangzhou Opera House in 2013.

GAO DIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhou Xiaowei, who was studying directing at Shanghai Theater Academy when the first season of the Mandarin version of *Mamma Mia!* was holding auditions, did not pass her final round audition for Sophie. But that did not mark the end of her ties to *Mamma Mia!* as she now plays Lisa in the fourth season.

Speaking of her progress, Zhou says many talented people benefited from being part of the Chinese version.

Tian Yuan, who helped introduce the original version of *Mamma Mia!* to China in 2007, moved on to become the producer of the Chinese version.

Looking back, Tian says that when she saw the original version in London, it immediately occurred to her that she wanted to “do something” for China.

“China's market for musicals is still in its infancy. But there's huge growth potential as audiences become increasingly aware of this art form,” says Tian.

However, she says the number of people who like musicals is still small, and the speed of growth doesn't match the number of new productions. “Therefore the market faces a tremendous challenge and needs to be gradually built up.”

China needs to begin with learning, which is done through in-depth exchanges with international teams, says Tian.

Speaking about the Chinese production, Mark Whitmore, international manager of *Mamma Mia!*, says: “I am very proud of the version. It has very high standards and is as good as any other version around the world.”

XINHUA

Bringing the past into the future

By **XING WEN**
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Zhang Xiaodong's obsession with ancient books has urged him to revive a forgotten binding technique from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and to hand-make different kinds of paper books with exquisite workmanship.

“I loved reading in university,” he recalls.

“I found that many books are subtly designed.”

This enticed the 37-year-old to become a book designer after graduation.

But the market has declined in recent years with the prevalence of online readers, smartphones and tablets.

Zhang has been studying historical documents about dragon-scale bookbinding. Bookmakers must paste the edges of hundreds of pages on a long scroll at certain intervals to ensure the margins create complete pictures across the pages.

“It's marvelous,” Zhang says.

“I believe this endangered art shouldn't be lost.”

“Some ancient arts are at the risk of becoming obsolete. I think commercialization is a good way to protect them.”

Zhao Pu, TV host and producer



He spent years studying the technique, although he couldn't find many references to guide him. He succeeded in creating books using the method in 2010.

The story of dragon-scale binding and Zhang's efforts to sustain it will be featured in a TV documentary about traditional folk arts in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Filming of the 100-episode series, *Blooming Crafts*, will start this month. It'll explore how craftspeople are adapting to modernization.

The first season will show crafts in such countries as Australia, Ethiopia and Turkey, and seven Chinese cities, including Beijing, Suzhou and Jingdezhen.

Host and producer Zhao Pu, a former China Central Television anchorman, has long been passionate about traditional culture.

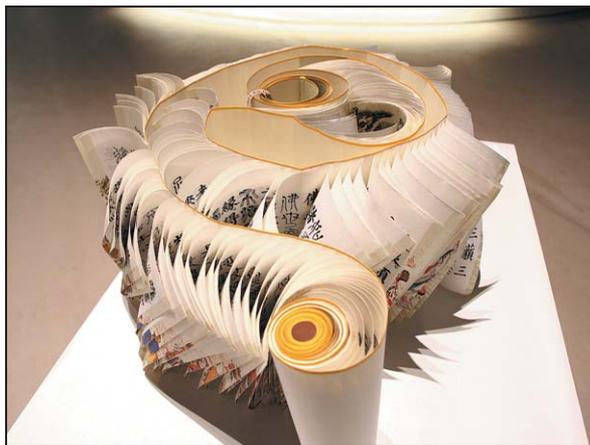
“Crafts are a borderless language,” Zhao says.

“They connect people from different cultures. Some ancient arts are at the risk of becoming obsolete. I think commercialization is a good way to protect them.”

He's cooperating with Dongjia, an e-commerce platform that links craftspeople and customers.

“We're not just recording and promoting those crafts. We want to try a new way to bring real profits to artisans.”

Documentary viewers can scan QR codes on the screen to purchase the featured crafts via Dongjia's app. Dongjia's co-founder, Zhu Jian-



Artist Zhang Xiaodong's effort to revive China's ancient dragon-scale binding technique (pictured above) will be presented in a documentary named *Blooming Crafts*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

shan, says customers can order customized items like furniture, tea sets and jewelry. They can contact the creators to explain their requirements.

“Makers can also draw inspiration from users' suggestions and requests,” Zhu says. “This helps craftspeople keep pace with the times.”

Zhu's platform has gathered

around 7,500 craftspeople. All the creators featured in the series will be invited to join Dongjia and develop connections with customers, according to Zhu.

The first season of *Blooming Crafts* will air on Xi'an Radio and TV Station after the first World Craftsman Conference kicks off in Xi'an on May 28.