

LIFE

Life in Beijing gets back to almost normal amid recovery

It's been nearly three months since the novel coronavirus outbreak really took off in China.

Some regions, like Hubei province, were absolutely walloped by it. Some of the remote regions escaped with a few scratches. I guess Beijing fell somewhere in between. The capital has been busy shaking off the fading epidemic. Most businesses in my dis-



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Second Thoughts

trict of Chaoyang are operating again, including restaurants that had long been closed. The streets, once whisper quiet, are noisier now as traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian, return. And formerly barren parks are welcoming groups of guests once more.

It was one of these parks, Dong Xiao Kou, that my friend and I decided to meet at on a recent Saturday afternoon. He lives further north, so the plan was for me to take the subway over to Longze station, where he would pick me up and we would go to the park together.

I took the subway for the first time in months, and I was expecting it to still be fairly empty and, relative to what it normally is, I suppose it was. I was surprised that there were plenty of seats available. Still, there were more people than I expected — all masked and all motivated to get out and about.

My friend and I got to the park and struggled to find a parking space. There were quite a few people! We strolled around and chatted for a while, in English and Chinese (I'm still learning). It was nice to be out on such a nice day,

watching people laying on blankets on the grass and flying kites. It had been a while since I had seen so many folks hanging out and enjoying themselves all at once in the city.

Of course, we had to get temperature checks when we entered, yet another reminder that we're not out of the COVID-19 woods yet.

But it seems clear that Beijing, and China as a whole, is further along than most of the rest of the world in terms of the pandemic. Which makes sense, since China has been fighting it longer.

I couldn't help but think of my

friends and family back home in the United States — my father, stepmother and nephews in Atlanta, my friends in Florida, my brother in Chicago, my sister in Las Vegas, my grandmother in Virginia, and especially my aunts, uncles and cousins in New York, the place of my birth and the US epicenter of the novel coronavirus now. I also have friends and loved ones all over the world who are suffering from the pandemic in Malaysia, Philippines, Cambodia and various European countries.

When I talk to them and I hear their woes about the lockdowns in

their cities and the empty shelves in their supermarkets, I feel bad for them, but I'm also glad that I'm lucky enough to be here, where the epidemic is ebbing and life is slowly but surely returning to normal.

So far, nobody I know personally has come down with the virus, thank God. As the outbreak persists worldwide, naturally I remain concerned, but I'm also grateful that for China, the worst appears to be over.

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Candid camera: Explosive occupation



Yao Wenqiang, a bomb handler for a special operations squad of the armed police from Hefei, withdraws from the site safely after detonating "explosives" as part of a drill in Lujiang, Anhui province, on Tuesday. Yao, who has been doing the job for more than five years, undergoes vigorous training in outfits weighing more than 30 kilograms. XU WEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



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Pakistan students remember helping to tackle outbreak

WUHAN — Calling Wuhan their "second home", many Pakistani students answered their government's call to stay in the central Chinese city during the 76-day lockdown, volunteering to help on campus, working on their theses and sharing experiences with their family and friends.

After Wuhan, the former epicenter of the novel coronavirus outbreak, declared unprecedented traffic restrictions to contain the then rampaging epidemic on Jan 23, Taufiq Qureshi formed a team of 20 volunteers to help the Huazhong University of Science and Technology run the international students' apartments, when the majority of the staff who had been on Spring Festival vacation could not return to Wuhan due to entry restrictions.

"There was only one attendant, and I could see that she was exhausted. Somebody should be there to help," says the Pakistani PhD student in urban planning.

The team, which later increased to 54 members including 20 Pakistani students, helped distribute food, water and other essentials to each room and collect students' daily health reports and requests. Qureshi, the team leader, started his day at 7:30 am and did not sleep until midnight.

Messages and calls overwhelmed him. "I kept my phone charging all the time, and I even took it to the toilet with me, something I never did before, because I was afraid I would miss a student's message for help," says Qureshi.

With the epidemic waning and the lockdown lifted in Wuhan, Qureshi now has some free time to play badminton and relax. "I finished my thesis before the outbreak. I am now preparing for my thesis defense. Hopefully, I can graduate this year," says Qureshi, who is already a lecturer at a Pakistani university.

Huang Chao, director of the overseas students' office, said the students' apartments were sealed off during the lockdown, and the university provided three meals, masks and necessities to students on the campus every day. Student volunteers helped a lot with the service.

According to Hubei's foreign affairs office, there are more than 1,000 Pakistani students in Wuhan, a megacity with many universities. As Pakistan expressed solidarity with China in the anti-virus battle, many Pakistani students also shared how they stood united with Wuhan during its difficult time.

"I love China, and I love Wuhan. The city is my second home, and I must help," said another student volunteer, Miral Javed, who is in the final year of her master's in food science at Huazhong Agricultural University.

For the past 80 days, Javed focused on volunteer work, including distributing food and necessities, in the morning. She usually spent her afternoon writing her thesis and would talk with her family in the evening.

"The university has adequate supplies of food and water. My family worried about me, so I always consoled them in video



We can learn from China, not only the medical measures but also how to supply food for citizens during quarantine and how to manage isolation centers and so on."

Taufiq Qureshi, Pakistani student, Huazhong University of Science and Technology

calls and told them I was doing fine here ... With the guidance and encouragement of my professor, I have almost finished my thesis," says Javed, who is considering pursuing her PhD in Wuhan after graduation.

The decision to stay in Wuhan was not an easy one for some students, who had to struggle with worrying news from their hometowns, and sometimes even deaths of family members.

Mir Hassan, a PhD student of computer architecture at HUST, was visiting his friend at Wuhan University on Jan 22, a day before Wuhan's lockdown came into effect, and was "trapped" in his friend's apartment for 84 days. "The university provided food, masks and necessary equipment for me, as they did for their own students," Hassan says.

When Hassan was quarantined there, his father died of a heart ailment in Pakistan. "I will carry regret for the rest of my life because I missed the funeral of my father," says Hassan, who spent much of the time talking with friends and sleeping to reduce his stress levels.

"The Chinese government has already offered to support me in returning, but now the condition in Pakistan is critical, so our government has decided that we should stay here because it's good for us," says Hassan, adding that he will book tickets to go back as soon as the situation in Pakistan gets better.

"I will stay for one or two months to accompany my mother, then I'll come back to finish my studies. Wuhan is my second home. It's a hub for business and transportation. I also want to work here after graduation," Hassan adds.

As the epidemic worsened in Pakistan, Pakistani students began to share their experiences and offer suggestions to their hometowns.

"We are like ambassadors to our own country, telling them about our experience here, how to tackle or to follow precautions and how to deal with distress and anxiety when people are held up at home," says Qureshi, who shared his experience via a video meeting in March.

"We can learn from China, not only the medical measures, but also how to supply food for citizens during quarantine and how to manage isolation centers, and so on," says Qureshi.

XINHUA

Popular cadre dies for the cause of fighting poverty

By **CHENG YUEZHU** in Beijing and **YANG JUN** in Guiyang

For seven years, Wen Weihong worked and lived in different poverty-stricken villages as a resident cadre. Once a village shook off poverty, he headed to the next.

The year 2019 was supposed to be a year he could finally spend time with his family, as his wife came to settle in Daping village, Zhongzhai township, with him.

But last July, he died in an accident after getting an electric shock while inspecting some local industrial sites, and the villagers mourned his sudden death at the age of 45.

Ever since 1997, he had been working as a cadre in Yanhe Tujia autonomous county, a severely impoverished county in Southwest China's Guizhou province. Between 2013 and 2019, he worked in five of the county's outlying villages, and helped lift four of them out of poverty.

These villages are destitute and remote. Without a car, Wen rode a motorbike to and fro, on a journey which often took around four hours.

In March 2018, he once again volunteered to work in the impoverished villages, and was assigned to work as the secretary of the village.

Wei Kefei, now leader of the village's poverty alleviation team, arrived there two months after Wen, and worked closely with him for over a year.

To alleviate poverty, the cadres had to visit more than 100 households one by one and understand their individual needs, to ensure that they could support their everyday living costs, and get access to education, medical services and secure housing.

"He truly respected the farmers, and had a clear grasp of the resi-



Left: Wen Weihong (second from left), who passed away last year, discusses crop production with villagers in Yanhe Tujia autonomous county, Guizhou province, in April 2019. **Right:** Wen visits an impoverished household last June to help improve their financial situation. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

dents' conditions," Wei says. Sometimes even before visiting a household, Wen could analyze the financial condition based on the limited information, and his judgment often proved to be accurate.

The farmers were usually unfamiliar with governmental policies, and Wen helped them assess their individual conditions and apply for government subsidies.

"He also put great emphasis on developing local industries, because solving the villagers' problems or relocating them to new homes was a temporary relief. To target the root cause of poverty, we must boost the economy, and we explored a lot of measures to do that."

Wen inspected the main local produce, and decided to give priority to the honey industry, because of the favorable local natural resources. He then applied for government funds to develop beekeeping.

"He was still talking to me about beekeeping two days before his acci-

dent. Our first harvest was last September, generating a revenue of more than 60,000 yuan (\$8,472). The number may seem small to the outside world, but is actually a lot for a remote village," Wei says.

He explains that a prerequisite for the village to eliminate poverty is for the annual collective earnings to exceed 30,000 yuan, so the honey revenue alone met this requirement, while many other industries can only earn thousands or even less.

"He was a very optimistic person, always smiling, always maintaining a positive attitude. He was also very diligent. Apart from fulfilling his work duties, he spent his free time helping out the villagers with chores and farm work. He was always busy around the village," Wei says.

Wei recalls that Wen bought a car half a year after he started working in the village. Every time he saw the farmers walking, he offered to give them a lift, even if the farmers had just finished working and were



dripping with mud.

"They all respected Wen greatly and treated him as their own family, their own son."

Wen's son left home for university in 2018, so earlier last year, he persuaded his wife Li Zhengfen to come to live with him in the village and to help with the local industry of tobacco curing.

"My husband was really a very honest and kind-hearted man," Li says. "Two months after the accident was supposed to be our 20th wedding anniversary. Ever since we were married, he worked in different villages, and the conditions at the time were sometimes much worse than those of recent years."

In early February, Li went to the Red Cross office of Yanhe county and donated 5,000 yuan to support the COVID-19 pandemic control.

"It's nothing, not even worth mentioning," Li says. "I simply felt that I had received a lot of help, so I wanted to contribute as much as I could."