

Inspiring Ningbo's Rural Revitalization with Traditional Art

By Dong Na

Recently, the Red Peony International Home, a traditional Chinese culture and art promotion center, was inaugurated on the shores of Ningbo's Jiulong Lake. More than 80 foreign nationals from over 50 countries, including Malaysia, Poland, and Italy, joined the opening ceremony.

This new venue will inspire art learners from around the world and foster new ideas and sensitivities on art and beauty. The peony will serve as a symbolic bridge uniting communities around the world, spreading harmony, and bringing international friends closer to Chinese culture and the charms of rural China.

Bonding People Together

Under the guidance of the Chinese painting instructor, an elegant peony formed under the brush tip of Mattia Marchetti Aloisio from Italy. "In Chinese painting, the peony represents beauty. It is this kind of profound cultural heritage that made me fall in love with China during my decade here."

The foreigners participated in traditional Chinese cultural activities such as ink wash painting and calligraphy.

"The Home is a true 'embassy' that facilitates international friendships and intercultural exchanges. People from different countries can come together to share ideas about art as well as their experiences in China. It is a place where foreigners could understand China and meet new friends," said Dr. Magdalena Gimbut, an instructor at NingboTech University from Poland.

In the future, the Red Peony International Home will host a series of international cultural exchange events featuring peony painting and tai chi to support Jiulonghu town's rural revitalization.

"The Red Peony International Home will play a significant role in promoting local art and culture in the international community. Not only will foreigners learn to become better artists, they will also get to know local people through their local culture. Art connects people in highly meaningful ways through cross-cultural dialogue between communities," said Wizani Rosmin, Consul of the Tourism Section of the Consulate General of Malaysia in Shanghai.

Art Invigorating Rural Growth

As long-time observers of China's



An elegant peony forms under the brush tip of the foreign friends. [Photo by Tang Yan]

rural revitalization, Dr. Magdalena Gimbut and Dr. Artur Piotr Rega have visited many villages in Ningbo, including Gejia (which they have visited seven times), Chengyang, and Jiulonghu. Jiulonghu has long captivated their attention.

In recent years, Jiulonghu has made great efforts to develop tourism. Thanks to Hengxi, Qinshan, and several other villages that have gone viral online, Jiulonghu now receives over 1 million tourists annually.

After many thorough visits to these villages, the two researchers discovered that the key to successful rural revitalization in China is to inspire villagers through art and other means. When the villagers change, so will the village.

"Art is a language that people understand intuitively. It opens doors which would otherwise be closed: the door to imagination, the door to simple pleasures that are often invisible," said Dr. Gimbut.

As Dr. Rega sees it, increased participation in artistic activities can empower the villagers. It inspires them to be more creative and willing to open their hearts to those around them. As the villagers form a stronger sense of ownership, they will be more motivated to improve their community. In this way, art becomes an engine for collaborative development.

"After all, the goal of rural revitalization is to improve people's lives. We believe China's mode of development is worthy of study for people around the world," said the two scholars.

Boosting Rural Culture and Tourism

"We were especially impressed by the abundant tourism resources and beautiful natural environment of the villages in Jiulonghu. Qinshan has many promising destinations and agricultural products. The next step for Qinshan would be developing more boutique hotels and attractions for short-stay travellers," said Dr. Gimbut.

The two researchers have been named "international consultants" for the Jiulonghu Rural Revitalization Project; they will participate in Qinshan's tourism development project from the outset.


Similar to Qinshan village, Red Peony International Home is expected to be part of Ningbo's rural revitalization effort, especially in boosting cultural activities and tourism.

"Leveraging the Red Peony International Home, Jiulonghu will use the power of art to revitalize the countryside," said Xu Hongtao, Secretary of the CPC Com-

mittee of Jiulonghu Township. Xu stated that Jiulonghu would make full use of its natural environment and resources to advance rural development.

With its strong partnership with local authorities and community, the new art center will surely attract visitors and art lovers who want to enrich their lives with art and inspiration in addition to enjoying the natural scenery.

"We are convinced that the new art center will soon become an important part of the local identity and an additional attraction of Jiulong Lake," said Dr. Rega. In his view, as the new art center improves its operations and as the local community becomes more involved in its growth, its appeal to visitors will increase, as will its ability to showcase the spirit of the region and the ethos of the contemporary era.

Wizani Rosmin is also optimistic about Ningbo's rural development. "Villages and their lifestyle, culture, architecture, history, and customs can be an important tourism offering. Ningbo's villages have all of the elements favorable for developing tourism and attracting visitors. I believe Ningbo has a lot of potential to become a prime international tourism destination in the near future," said Rosmin. 

SPOTLIGHT

Studying the Fascinating Science of Genetics

By Jin Lu

Recently, the students of Georgia School Ningbo (GSN) had a memorable class: they studied the fascinating science of genetics by extracting strawberry DNA.

Extracting DNA is critical to exploring the causes, diagnosis, and treatments of various diseases. It is also an essential practice in forensic science, genome sequencing, and environmental virus detection.

To teach students the process of isolating DNA from living organisms, GSN's Middle School Science teachers designed an experiment with strawberries.

"The long, thick strands of DNA store genetic information vital for the growth and function of cells," explained Ms. Liezl Andal, the teacher of the science class. DNA is a set of biochemical instructions needed for an organism to develop, survive, and reproduce. It is present in the cells of all living beings.

Strawberries have large genomes, yielding more DNA per gram than most other common fruits. They are also octoploid, which means they have eight of each type of chromosome. Because of these factors, strawberries are ideal subjects in DNA extraction lab experiments.

"Science is fascinating! In our science class, I learn a great deal, and now I can answer my own questions about life and the world around me," says Anna, a Grade 9 student at GSN.

Carol, another student, said about the strawberry DNA extraction lab, "DNA is such a magical thing, and this experiment allowed me to see real DNA for the first time!"

A GSN representative told the correspondent that this experiment is part of the school's science curriculum. The program is built upon the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which are developed to ensure a comprehensive and modern science education for all students.

Under NGSS, students will gain an in-depth understanding of scientific concepts and learning content and master key skills such as communication, collaboration, inquiry, problem-solving, and flexibility. These are skills that will serve them throughout their academic and professional lives.

"Georgia School ensures that students are exposed to a wide variety of learning opportunities," says the GSN representative. Students from GSN are currently busy preparing for the school's upcoming Science Fair on April 16th, where they would do research and experiments on a project of their choosing and present their results.

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INFO&TIPS

Ningbo Reading Month: A Festival for Book-Lovers

By Gou Wen

"A city of culture and a gateway to the world" is Ningbo's official motto, reflecting the unique charm of this port city. This year marks the 1,200th anniversary of Ningbo's founding. Though over ten centuries old, this city is brimming with dynamism and optimism.

To celebrate the upcoming World Book Day, Ningbo is launching a Citizen Reading Month with the theme "Reading Ningbo's Centuries of Glory".

To engage more citizens, this year's Reading Month features special exhibitions, thematic forums, and book club discussions in addition to individual reading. These events aim to strengthen citizen identity and facilitate the sharing of the city's history and memories.

In the Art Space on the second floor of Ningbo Library's new building, there is an exhibition commemorating the first anniversary of *Ningbo's Regulations to*

Promote Citizen Reading.

The exhibition presents every visitor with the question: "who is reading?" Eight reading promoters from different backgrounds gave their answers.

"Reading can change a person's life. I hope more teenagers could fall in love with astronomy and discover joy and a sense of purpose from it," says Zhuang Qining, a reading promoter committed to promoting astronomy knowledge among the general public who participated in the founding of Ningbo's first planetarium. Despite being 75 years old, he is still an avid reader.

Zheng Sanglin, another reading promoter and hospital volunteer, also gave her own answer, "Reading helps us see our goals more clearly as we pursue our dreams; it prevents us from blindly following other people's footsteps."

Every visitor to the exhibition can form their answers to imbue the act of reading with their unique, personal



The themed exhibition "who is reading" at Ningbo Library. [Photo by Gou Wen]

meaning.

According to Ningbo Library's staff, more than sixty activities will be held at the Library this month, including "Tianyi Sounds: A Tale of One City with Two Languages". This event invites participants to record themselves describing the city's most iconic attractions in both English and Chinese. People can listen to and rate the recordings online via mobile app.

There will also be internationally-themed events such as Korea Theme Day, to be held on April 24. Korean friends in Ningbo will be invited to participate in a

dialogue and introduce their customs. These events reflect Ningbo's inclusiveness towards other cultures and its openness in sharing its own culture.

During the Reading Month, Ningbo Library will continue to release foreign-language book recommendation lists, helping readers discover different cultures around the world. The theme of the latest list is "DK (Dorling Kindersley) Books"; it features books from the famous publisher founded in 1974, such as *The Sherlock Holmes Book*, *The Literature Book*, and more.