

Closing the cultural divide

His vision is a world that better understands China. His mission is to start with building bridges in the United States. Zhao Qiguang shares his dreams with **Cang Lide**.

For the last two decades and more, Chinese-American Zhao Qiguang has given countless talks and lectures on Chinese culture in the United States where he is Burton and Lily Levin Professor of Chinese at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota.

To Zhao, international cultural exchanges are no less important than bilateral trade, and he feels there is a definite deficit at the moment.

While China exports more commodities than it imports, the opposite is true when it comes to culture. At the moment, China imports more than it exports and it absorbs more foreign influence at home than it manages to spread its own culture abroad.

That's why Zhao feels it is his responsibility to let the world know more about the rich cultural heritage that China commands from thousands of years of history and philosophy.

Born in Beijing, the 64-year-old Zhao comes from a family with a talent for science — his parents were both physics professors. One year after he obtained a master's degree at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in British and American literature in 1981, he went to the US, where he earned another MA and a PhD in comparative literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Since he started returning to China, he has been a frequent guest on Chinese television and a visiting professor to some Chinese universities, speaking on culture and international relations. For instance, his discussions on Taoism and the philosophy of Laozi on Shanghai and Shandong television were very well received.

These days, "soft power" has become a buzzword in international relations. In Zhao's view, soft power is the international currency of a country that will convince others of its worth.

"You cannot use military or economic influence to force other people to believe what you believe," he says, and China's rich culture, culled from a long and continuous history, is part of that soft power.

"When we say Chinese culture, it seems we often refer to Confucianism only. There are other aspects, such as Taoism, which emphasizes harmony between human and nature, and harmony within man himself.

"It can be very convincing to people outside China because both confront universal problems of modernization, and we all have anxiety when we are faced with the stress of rapid industrialization," he says.

Zhao adds that his American students are deeply curious about Taoism.

"When we practice tai chi, they can feel the inner strength of this

philosophy, and they need not be forced into believing. So this is a very typical form of soft power."

Zhao believes the revival of Laozi's philosophy will insert a thundering crescendo into the symphony of the New Age.

As a philosopher who lived in the 4th century BC, Laozi was first in many things. He dealt with universal truths about people's understanding of the world from a special point of view.

For example, in his masterpiece *Tao Te Ching*, he does not mention a specific person, a specific event or place. He represented man talking with nature, and in this aspect, he is unparalleled.

According to Zhao, Laozi was the first in his time to accord respect to women, and was a precocious forebear of today's feminism. He spoke highly of the power of the yin, the weak, and put forward the belief that the weak, the female, can take over the stronger male.

"He was the first to talk about dialectics, realizing that everything goes into the opposite. Hegel and other philosophers found this out 2,000 years after him."

The professor calls himself a "practical Taoist".

Among his published works in recent years is something named *Do Nothing & Do Everything* — a summary of the course he teaches in the US.

He tells his readers that tai chi is not only body movement but also mental inspiration.

"So people follow the course of nature, understand the harmony between human beings and nature, and establish a healthy mind. This is the way to understand Taoism, and it is also the Taoist way to health and longevity."

Zhao says like any ancient Chinese wisdom, Taoism is of universal value and may offer answers to modern problems.

"Confucius emphasizes social structure, success, consequence — if you work hard you'll be paid; if you raise good children you'll get filial piety; if you are loyal and a good scholar you'll be recognized by the emperor. Good. The Chinese used this for thousands of years for success," he says.

But Zhao says we should not focus only on success.

"If we focus only on success all the time, we'll pay a great cost because we ignore other things, such as health, harmony, and interpersonal relationships."

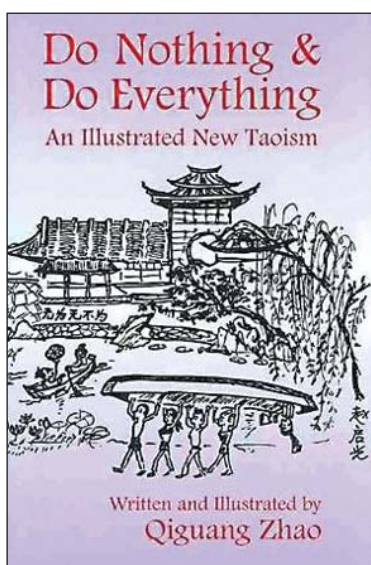
He says modernization has also damaged the environment.

"Laozi tells us to respect nature. We don't want to conquer it but to appreciate and coexist with it. So Laozi is the first environmentalist. There is a lot that the world can learn from him today."

In Zhao's view, China must step up



The ancient wisdom of Laozi is frequently re-interpreted in publications like this one displayed at a bookstore in Yichang, Hubei province.



Zhao Qiguang's work on Taoism.

cultural exchanges with major world partners, such as the US.

"When two big powers like the US and China coexist, we must have a flow of ideas, of knowledge, of personnel, of capital. People live on ideas. Material things disappear but ideas last.

"You add love to a house and it becomes a home. You add truth to a school and you have education. You add ideas to the world and you have civilization. You put all of them together and you have a future."

That is his dream, that he can build cultural bridges between the



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ZHAO QIGUANG, CHINESE-AMERICAN SCHOLAR

two countries, between the East and West.

"I believe Taoism is a universal ideal and that China can present its ideals of nature, harmony and beauty to the world, and the world will listen.

"I believe I can contribute by teaching about how we think, and I believe this is the peaceful way to spread Chinese soft power."

Contact the writer at canglide@chinadaily.com.cn.

bookbriefs

Stories from the angle of a son

Writer Liu Hongqing has written a new book on famed Chinese author Shen Congwen, based on dialogues with Shen's eldest son Shen Longzhu.

The book, *Shen Congwen and His Family*, reveals some unknown details spread over eight chapters.

It chronicles the different phases of Shen Longzhu's life, growing up with his father.

"The book is not strictly a biography, but it contributes to studies on Shen and contemporary literature, for it brings new material and a new angle," says scholar Xie Yong.



The book has 100 pictures, including photos taken by Shen Congwen and sketches of the family's old houses by the son.

With his representative works like *Border City*, the late Shen was said to have almost won the Nobel Prize on literature in the 1980s. He's also known for penning the beauty of his hometown Fenghuang, an ancient town in Hunan province, now a tourist attraction.

This year marks the 110th birthday of the literature master. New Star Press has already worked with Liu on three other books related to Shen.

MEI JIA

Trade teaches us all about exchanges

Peking University Press has released *All Are Exchanges*, a book about business strategies focusing on exchanges. Its author Hao Daqin is a veteran business consultant and he writes a regular column in *The Economic Observer*.

In the book, Hao opines that most behaviors or interactions are rooted in trade or exchanges. With 11 chapters, Hao combines real life cases with historical wisdom to produce readable stories on how to gain from and balance exchanges, as well as how to form business strategies based on the theory.

Hao has spent a year researching and drafting the book, which reveals his wisdom in various fields. He hopes his book offers insights into business management and personal life.

MEI JIA

It's no longer science fiction

To boost the creation of original fantasy novels, more than 50 top Chinese writers and critics recently gathered in Beijing for a symposium organized by China Children's Press and Publishing Group.

Director of the group's publishing center, Xu Dexia, says fantasy novels are becoming mainstream children's books, and Chinese writers are becoming increasingly important in a market previously dominated by translated foreign works.

Xu believes it's the right time for original stories to shine because the group and other publishers have gathered young writers who were born and trained in an environment that is open and abundant in information technology, and whose works are tested and proven by the market.

One of the group's most successful productions is *Luoling's Magic*, centering on a 13-year-old alien girl who's brought up on Earth. The series has sold 1.5 million copies.

During the two-day symposium, the group launched 20 new fantasy novels for the summer vacation reading, including two works by Wang Junxin, an 18-year-old high school student from Fujian province.

MEI JIA

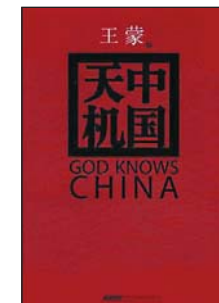
Veteran writer offers insights into China

Veteran writer Wang Meng offers his interpretation of contemporary China's political events in his new book *God Knows China*.

Based on his firsthand experience, the book covers the period from the founding of New China in 1949 until today.

The 78-year-old is perhaps the most eligible author to write about the subject, since the ups and downs of his life have been inseparable from the country's political turbulence.

Wang joined the Communist Party of China in 1948 and started publishing in 1955. He was wrongly condemned as a "rightist" in the late 1950s for his short story *A New Arrival at the Organization Department*. For that, he was sent to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to be "reformed" through labor in the early 1960s and stayed there for more than 10 years. After the "cultural revolution" (1966-76), his grievance was redressed. He served as the country's culture minister from 1986 to 1989.



YANG GUANG

Mind the gap, a break from reality

By ZHANG YUE

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Wu Fei's trip to New Zealand put him in the spotlight and made him money.

His book, *Gap Year on a Working Holiday Visa*, tells of his one-year traveling and working experience in the country and has sold over 50,000 copies since it was published by China CITIC Press in February.

The 28-year-old from Shanghai has held more than 20 book-sharing salons over the past few months, and has thousands of followers on his micro blog, *The Journey of Wu Fei*.

Wu's work is the latest book on experiencing a gap year since 2009, when the first of its kind was published in China, according to Li Jingyuan from China CITIC Press,

who is in charge of travelogue publications.

"Books that tell of an author's gap year experience overseas are popular in China these days," Li says.

The idea of a "gap year" became popular in 2009, when the 20-something Sun Dongchun from Guangdong province published his book — *The Delayed Gap Year* — about his experience of traveling in six countries in Asia, also by China CITIC Press.

It was a first for China, Li says.

Another gap-year book, *Backpacker for a Decade*, published in 2010 by Xiao Peng (who has been on a continuous 10-year-long gap year) remains a bestseller with 300,000 copies sold.

"These authors are mostly in their 20s, very passionate, and live in big cities. They are also very smart, and



Wu Fei, author of *Gap Year on a Working Holiday Visa*.

dying to make a change in their lives," Li says.

Mostly, they have the idea of producing a short movie, a novel or a

travelogue when they start their gap year, so they have rich images and journal materials when they return, Li explains.

Their books may not have much literary weight, but appeal to readers with their dramatic, unique experiences, Li adds.

Since the first gap-year book was published in 2009, Li and her colleagues have organized book-sharing salons for these young writers with their readers.

"Most people interested in the gap year idea are university students and white-collar workers in big cities," Li says.

"Our salons are held on campuses. University students are the most passionate about gap years."

Wu, the author, says that when he left Shanghai and started his gap year in April, 2010, not many acquaintances

knew what it was.

This has changed, he says.

Wu's book tells of his one-year experience working 12 jobs, including at a Japanese restaurant in Palmerston North, cherry picking and acting as a ghost at a tourist destination.

Wu includes many travel tips in the book and gives guidance on how to find cheap, safe accommodation and jobs in New Zealand. The book also includes many pictures of New Zealand.

"Before the trip, I had lived a designed way of life, which is good, but not something I truly wanted," Wu says.

"I was eager to take a year's break and try something that really thrilled me. Now, I am glad I can help others who want to make the same move."