

Reviving the ancient art of 'pot casting'

A virtual reality project of UNESCO, supported by Chinese tech giant Tencent, aims to promote traditional Chinese games.

At upscale parties during ancient China's Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), the host would often invite his guests to a game of "pot casting" where, between drinks and ad-libbed lines of poetry, they would take turns to try and throw arrows by hand into a long-necked pot from afar.

By the end of Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), this traditional Chinese game that had been popular for around 2,000 years had all but disappeared from existence. To revive this lost art, a team of six students from the Communication University of China have reinvented this ancient game of artistry and precision using virtual reality.

In January, the game was showcased at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris as part of its Open Digital Library on Traditional Games project.

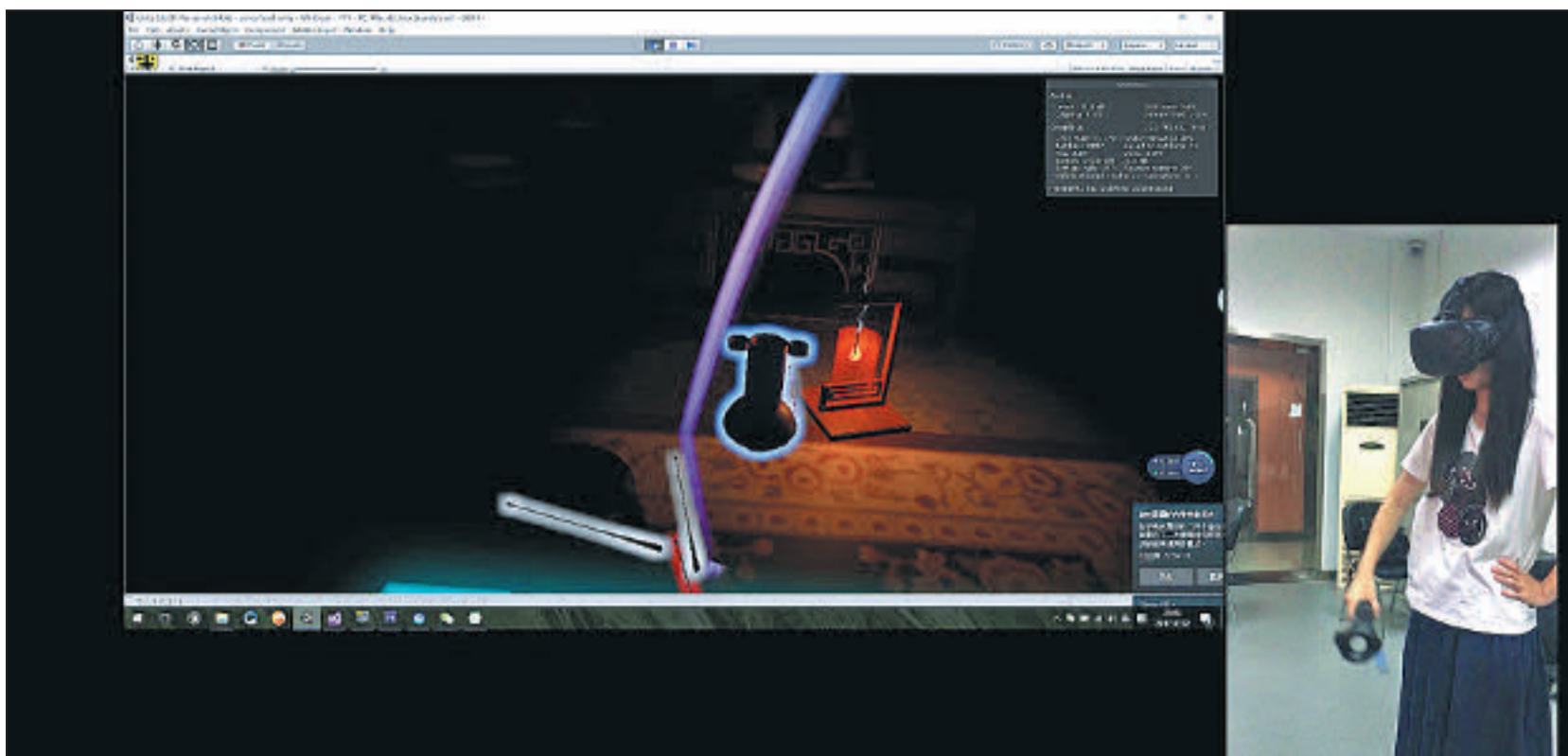
Renamed *hu*, which was inspired by the pitch arc of the arrows, the game renders the wooden interior of an ancient Chinese chamber.

Strapping on the VR headsets, players will find themselves in the carpeted center of the chamber, surrounded by the furniture of olden times — a writing desk, a high-backed chair, a sword, a Chinese zither, a tea stand and two stools — as works of calligraphy adorn the walls.

"We based our design on historical grounds, particularly those of the Qing Dynasty," says Liu Ting, 22, one of the VR game's art designers.

Liu says they took screenshots of indoor scenes from the 2010 TV series rendition of Cao Xueqin's epic novel, *The Dream of the Red Mansions*, and used it as a model for their interior designs.

In the VR game, there are six pots of different colors, appearing to be made of bronze, gilded or wooden materials positioned across the chamber. Every time an arrow lands in a pot, a lamp lights up, revealing a portion of the chamber's interior. When the player succeeds in scoring all six shots, he or she will gain the full set of pots, which will fully illuminate the room.



A player wearing a VR headset can throw arrows into six different pots in a virtual wooden chamber.



From Left: Marielza Oliveira, the director of UNESCO Cluster Office in Beijing, speaks at a conference for the Open Digital Library on Traditional Games project at the UNESCO headquarters in January; players test the game *hu* when it is showcased at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in January. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The team wants players to relive the ancient Chinese way of life and revel in the gameplay. "It's much harder to throw an arrow into the cast pot with a game pad than with your bare hands," says Feng Weiwei, 21, one of the project's programmers who is studying game design. To improve the gameplay in a VR setting, the team has designed the pots to look wider and shorter than the original ones. They have also pro-

grammed the gameplay so that the arrows leave a trail of their trajectory behind for a few seconds to help players make adjustments between shots. "This was my first time designing an ancient Chinese-themed game," Liu says. "I was able to learn more about China's traditional games." The Open Digital Library on Traditional Games project was first launched in 2015 by UNESCO with help from Chinese tech

giant Tencent Holdings Ltd, aiming to safeguard and promote traditional sports and games in an effort to pass them down to future generations. "Preserving China's traditional games certainly helps with reviving Chinese culture," says Gao Jinyan, an art teacher from the Communication University of China who has been studying Chinese traditional games for more than a decade. Gao pitched the idea of recre-

ating pot game to Feng Weiwei and Liu Ting's team because it appeared to be "VR-friendly". In her book titled *Traditional Folk Games*, now a text book for Chinese students majoring in games design, Gao defines traditional games as "the gaming and leisure-related activities and behaviors that are spread and passed down generations by word-of-mouth". In China, traditional games range from athletic events

such as wrestling and dragon boat racing to tabletop games including Chinese chess and *Go*, not to mention word games like lantern riddles and rhyming couplets.

"Games do carry distinctive cultural genes. The same game played in different cultures would look different," Gao says.

Gao cites early prototypes of the now popular board game *Aeroplane Chess* as an example. While similar games were played around the world, the Chinese version called *sheng guan tu* (literally "rank promotion road map"), which first appeared in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), employed a unique Chinese printing technique for the game board, and each space was designated with the title of an official government position at the time.

Gao says reviving Chinese traditional games like "pot casting" does not just help to bring back the inherent cultural value of the games, but also helps people revitalize other Chinese cultural gems such as poetry and the 24 Solar Terms.

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civilization," she says. "To play is human nature."

Apart from the Communication University of China, the Open Digital Library for Traditional Games project has attracted students from more than 10 universities from home and abroad, including Tsinghua University, Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Students from these institutions engage in using information and communications technology to collect and store records of people playing traditional games in countries and regions around the world. All the data collected can be accessed for free on the project's official library platform.

"Young people have already started taking action to learn and safeguard the knowledge of traditional games and sports, from conducting research to exploring innovative ways to transform materials stored in the open digital library into creative content," says Marielza Oliveira, the director of the UNESCO Cluster Office in Beijing.

This year, they are working on researching and recovering traditional games portrayed in the Dunhuang Frescoes, according to Li Xiaoxiao, director of the Open Digital Library for Traditional Games project at Tencent.

The project will continue to encourage young people from China and outside to lend their creativity and insight into rejuvenating traditional games, Li adds.

Liu Yinglun contributed to the story.

Volunteers share stories from the 2018 Paralympics

By LI YINGXUE
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The extra end of the wheelchair curling final is underway at the Gangneung Curling Centre, where China is competing against Norway in its bid to clinch its first-ever gold medal at the Paralympic Winter Games.

Valeria Bokhan-Cherepanova is standing with some photographers in the photo area, while Hwang Dong-pil and Wang Jie are sitting in the spectators stand with the Chinese delegation cheering on Team China.

They were just three of the 5,180 volunteers involved in the 2018 Pyeongchang Paralympic Winter Games, who helped to organize the national teams, venues, the media, transportation — and a host of other tasks.

Cherepanova served at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro specializing in engineering work, her major at college. This time, she chose to be a volunteer for Pyeongchang. "I wanted to do something good for society," says the 23-year-old Russian.

Cherepanova missed her first Skype interview after she filled in the online application to become a volunteer last year, because she forgot about the time difference. She had to reschedule the interview for 4 a.m. "They asked me if I'm afraid of the cold," says Cherepanova. "I said, 'Come on, I'm from Russia!'"

Cherepanova helped at the ticket office during the Olympics and Paralympics, before serving as a photo assistant at

the curling center with around 20 other volunteers, the most international team of all the volunteers.

At the beginning of the Paralympics, Cherepanova caught a cold, yet she was warmed by the care and support shown to her by fellow volunteers.

During her day off, Cherepanova would visit the seaside or watch the games. "My friend is a Paralympic sportsman for the Norway ice hockey team who I met in Sochi, so I came to watch him and support his game".

She left South Korea the day after the closing ceremony, but says she didn't feel sad about it. "For me, endings are good, because later on you will have these great memories and when I return home, I will share them with all my friends."

Cherepanova has decided to continue her volunteer experience at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, as has Hwang Dong-pil, a Korean volunteer who helped the Chinese delegation during the Paralympics in South Korea.

During the Winter Olympics, Hwang was assigned to help the Lithuanian delegation with arranging their accommodation, transport and other requirements.

In 2014, Hwang volunteered for the Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea, but this was the first time that the 25-year-old had joined a Paralympic event. Hwang was touched by the skills of the Paralympic athletes.

"I don't ski so well. They are disabled, but they can ski very well, even though it's harder for them."

Hwang's cousin has a hear-



Clockwise from top: Volunteers for the Pyeongchang Olympics Winter Games celebrate Chinese New Year; members of the Chinese delegation cheer on Team China at the final of wheelchair curling at the Gangneung Curling Centre in South Korea; and Wang Jie helps with transportation at the Paralympic Village during the 2018 Paralympics. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing impairment, and this volunteer experience made him understand more about people with disabilities.

"I learned that it's not polite to help the athletes without asking them first. They will ask if they need help," says Hwang. "Actually, they are just the same as everyone else."

After having spent a year learning Chinese at Qingdao University in 2016, Hwang felt more involved with the Chinese delegation. He joined the delegation to cheer on China during the semifinals and finals of the wheelchair curl-

ing games, and watched China win the gold medal.

"As a member of Team China, I'm so glad the Chinese team won the gold medal," says Hwang.

"I heard it was the first medal in the history of the Chinese Winter Paralympics. I'm very proud of them and I'm glad that I was part of that history."

Hwang obtained his bachelor's degree in political diplomacy in February and has started to look for a job. Working in China is one option he is considering.

Wang Jie met Hwang dur-

ing the final of the wheelchair curling games, where they were seated next to each other, cheering for China. She took time off from her job of organizing transportation at the Paralympic village to support China on the day of the finals.

Wang is in the final year of her Master of Interpreting and Translation course at the Central South University of Forestry and Technology in Changsha, Hunan province. Besides taking on volunteer work at the Paralympics, she also had to work on her thesis for the degree.

Volunteering is nothing new to Wang, as she had joined her local volunteer federation in her freshman year. Having missed out on applying for the Rio Olympics, Wang was determined to volunteer for Pyeongchang. She started the application process at the end of 2016 and after a written test and interview, she finally received her offer in September.

"I feel so lucky to have experienced all this volunteer work," Wang says. "Seeing all these athletes doing sports makes me realize that any difficulties I meet in the future, I

will be able to overcome."

Wang made friends with many other volunteers and enjoyed hearing their stories. One of her roommates was a 65-year-old Korean elementary school teacher, who treated her like a daughter.

"She wasn't married, but she treats all children as her kids."

Another volunteer Wang knows fell in love with an ice hockey player when she was helping him interpret sign language at a run-up event. Wang would watch the ice hockey game with her friend and cheer on her boyfriend's team.

She also has her own Pyeongchang love story to tell — she met her boyfriend, who is also a volunteer from Wuhan, during a training session.

"The Olympics have given me a boyfriend," says Wang. "Both of us are into volunteer work, that connects us."

Wang was selected by her manager, Jeong Eui-ho, to join the transportation team, as Jeong was a fan of Chinese culture.

Jeong has been reading classic Chinese literature *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* since he was a boy, and he became a huge fan of the main characters like Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang. He is also teaching himself Chinese.

Most of the volunteers who worked with Jeong at the Paralympics were Korean, and he is happy to have had Wang on his team.

"I was a bit worried about her at first because all her colleagues were Korean, but she fitted in very well and we made a lovely team," says Jeong.

"Thanks to all the international volunteers, they helped us make a success of the Paralympics."