

YOUTH



Online sensation Feng Jiachen performs at the square of the Great Tang All Day Mall in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. Many tourists come from afar to meet and interact with her.
HUO YAN / CHINA DAILY

Last year's net gains

Ranging from the absurd to the serious, online personalities presented some precious moments, **Xing Wen** reports.

Chinese Lunar New Year is around the corner. A time to reflect, reminisce and consider what has gone. The last 12 months saw an increasing number of *wanghong*, or "internet celebrities" of all shapes and sizes, young and old, male and female, go viral as they attracted followers with their charisma, unique content, outlook and personal style. The following are 10 internet celebrities that hit the headlines, for various reasons, last year.

Literary wanderer

Clips of a tramp brightened our March days. But appearances can be deceptive. This was a tramp who knew his literature. With his matted hair and ragged clothes, he went viral on Douyin, or TikTok, a short-video platform in China. The tramp, named Shen Wei, talks about current affairs using proverbs and allusions from Chinese classic books, including *Zuo Zhuan* (Chronicles of Zuo) and *Shang Shu* (the Book of Documents).

Viewers were surprised that he could be so articulate and obviously well-read. Soon, in a bid to meet him, visitors began to arrive in their droves at the street — near a subway station in Shanghai's Pudong district — where Shen often films his soliloquies.

They asked about Shen's reflections on *The Analects of Confucius*, Thomas More's *Utopia*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and other renowned books. Dozens of phones and cameras were held aloft, ready to record his thoughts.

As the mysterious man attracted wider publicity and more attention from the media, his past was gradually revealed.

The 52-year-old Shanghai native was once a civil servant at the Xuhui district audit office. However, due to his "abnormal behavior", including collecting waste paper from rubbish bins and trash cans in the office building and sorting recyclable garbage, he was shunned by colleagues and was asked to retire early in 1993. He was sent to a mental hospital twice by his family. They later broke off contact with him. Shen then became a homeless man who used his meager income to buy books as he is a voracious reader, and has been since childhood.

After being dubbed the Vagrant Master, he was persuaded to, literally, clean up his act. The restorative powers of a shower, haircut and mustache trim, coupled with some clean clothes, became evident. He even opened his own channel on short-video platform Kuaishou which has garnered more than 1.4 million followers.

“I will stay grounded and keep improving the quality of my performance. My hometown is a city steeped in history and full of cultural treasure. I hope our performance will draw the public's attention to the city and traditional Chinese culture.”

Feng Jiachen, a performer in Xi'an, Shaanxi province

Over the past several months, he has toured many historical sites across the country, sponsored mainly by his fans, and vividly illustrated the background stories of these attractions via livestreaming sessions.

Fairy tales

Seven Dong women from Gaibao village in the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture in Guizhou province became online sensations after promoting their ethnic culture and agricultural products via livestreaming and short videos.

Their media work reportedly yielded a profit of at least 1 million yuan (\$145,000) for the village.

Wu Yusheng, Party secretary of Gaibao village, suggested the idea in 2018, in a bid to connect the remote village with the outside world.

"The culture of the Dong ethnic group is well preserved here. I found all these online video platforms could publicize us very well at a very low cost," says Wu, who then organized a group of young women to open a channel titled Seven Dong Fairies on Kuaishou.

Wearing traditional garments of the ethnic group, these Dong women showed how to fish in the river, design embroidery, make a type of sticky rice cake called *ciba*, and other details of a Dong villager's life, all of which helped earn more than 300,000 followers on the platform and attract attention from mainstream media.

The beautiful scenery of Gaibao village, with green mountains, clear water, and traditional Dong-style stilted architecture, is also displayed in the videos, attracting many tour-

ists to travel to the area for a taste of its unique culture.

Tumbling beauty

In November, the video clips of a 23-year-old woman tumbling like a roly-poly toy in Xi'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi province, attracted more than 1 billion viewers on Douyin.

Dressed in Tang Dynasty-style clothing, the performer, Feng Jiachen, rotates freely on a round iron base in the shape of a bowl. She appears to defy gravity while greeting audiences with movements so elegant that they seem effortless. However, they are far from it.

Feng's lower body is tied with a T-shaped frame fixed to the bottom of the bowl. Her weight — no more than 50 kilograms — ensures she always ends upright.

She has to control the base using lower-body strength, and her knees are always bruised after each performance.

Feng started to learn dance when she was 4 years old.

Two years ago, the preschool education and teaching major joined a cast that stage theatrical plays at the Great Tang All Day Mall in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

In July, she auditioned for the roly-poly role, beating 100 other candidates with her skill and technique.

After her video clips went viral online, visitors from across the country came to the square where Feng performs, in the hope of catching a glimpse of her graceful technique.

"I will stay grounded and keep improving the quality of my performance," she says.

"My hometown is a city steeped in history and full of cultural treasure. I hope our performance will draw public attention to the city and traditional Chinese culture."

A rural idol

Li Ziqi, 29, became one of the most popular Chinese vloggers on video-sharing platform YouTube, with more than 8 million users subscribing to her channel by the end of last year.

It was in 2016 that she first decided to film videos to record her idyllic rural life and portray traditional Chinese aesthetics. In her videos, Li, wearing traditional dress, shows the charm of Chinese cuisine and folk craftsmanship by doing everything from scratch, and displaying each step clearly, one after another.

In the videos, she uses natural ingredients to cook various dishes, harvests grapes to dye cloth, embroiders flowers and creatures on cloth, and makes furniture with planks and bamboo. She has also spent two years making paper from



Serene, idyllic rural life has been highlighted by many young people in their shared videos. Among them are the Seven Dong women (top and middle left and right) from Gaibao village in Guizhou province, who promote their ethnic culture and agricultural products such as rice and ginger, and Li Ziqi (above), one of the most popular vloggers who introduces step-by-step tutorials on Chinese cuisine and traditional aesthetics in her videos. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY