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Once in a lifetime

(Xinhua)
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Foreigners joining the 60th National Day parade march in T-shirts printed with, "I love China", while waving the Chinese national flag. Liu Zhen

For 181 foreigners who became the first expats to join the 60th National Day parade, the experience was a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity.

"It was a big surprise to me when I was invited to participate in the parade," says David Tool, 67, a US national who has lived in Beijing since 2001.

"I was really excited and honored because this was the first time that China had foreign paraders."

Beijingers are familiar with Tool as a torchbearer for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

He is a university professor and was named a Beijing Top-Ten Volunteer in 2006 for helping correct translation errors at cultural and tourism sites, and teaching English to the elderly.

"I was very happy also because (participating in the parade) meant Chinese people value my contribution," Tool says.

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DAVID TOOL
A US national who was a Beijing Top-Ten Volunteer in 2006

The foreigners come from 53 countries. Twenty-six wore Chinese-style attire or their traditional national costumes on the float themed "One World". The other 155 marched in T-shirts printed with, "I love China" while waving China's national flag.

Of the marchers, 97 were students and the remaining 58 were mainly foreign experts and representatives of foreign companies. Most of the 26 foreigners on the float were winners of the Friendship Award and Great Wall Friendship Award, and volunteers in Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

"When foreigners learned there was an opportunity to be in the National Day parade, they were eager to attend the event," Li Honghai, deputy director general of the foreign affairs office of the Beijing municipal government, says.

Some foreigners living abroad even wrote to the office to express interest in participation, saying they would cover their own costs, including transportation and accommodation, he says.



A total of 26 expats participate in the 60th National Day parade on the float themed "One World". Yang Shizhong

The oldest foreign participant was 70-year-old Frenchman Francis

City Special



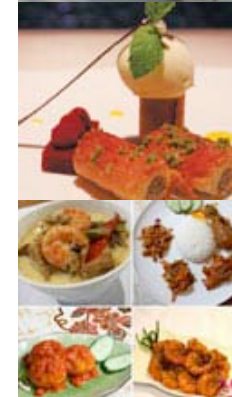
Director Zhang Yimou will present a trendy version of classical opera Turandot at Beijing's new landmark - the Bird's Nest, on Oct 6 and 7.



The **Food Reviews** musical **The Merchants of Bollywood** will be performed this weekend by a cast straight from India.



Tian'anmen is basically the most popular backdrop for Chinese people to take pictures.



Crystal at Hotel Kunlun has recently been turned into a Halal restaurant, with a cast of all-Muslim head chefs hailing from Egypt, Malaysia and China. Shanghai has quite a few Malaysian and Singaporean restaurants but not quite so many Indonesian ones



Wacquant, and the youngest were 8-year-old twins from Italy.

The foreigners spent a long time preparing for the official parade on Oct 1. They attended two rehearsals and

walked about 7 km during each rehearsal.

"The rehearsal was hard. We spent 12 hours on that on Sept 18, which ended at 3 am," Michael Crook, a Briton who was born in China and runs an international school in Beijing, says in fluent Chinese.

"I suggested to other foreigners on the float during rehearsal that we should sing 'Happy birthday, dear China' when passing Tian'anmen Square."

Australian Emily Cross, 63, who has lived in Beijing for six years, says she was so excited about joining the "spectacular" celebration that she got up at 4 am to get ready for rehearsals.

"I was extremely pleased not only for myself, but also because I can represent my country," she says.

Tool, who was on the float with Crook and Cross, says his arms ached from waving in rehearsals. "When the float passed Tian'anmen Square, all efforts were worth it," he says.

American David Tool (middle) is one of the 26 expats on the float. Xie Huanchi

Tool, who wore tangzhuang - a general name for traditional Chinese attire, which follows the Manchu fashion style of the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) - fell in love with Chinese culture when he started to study Chinese geography in the United States in the 1960s.

He says he has told his



family in the United States that he would live in China for the rest of his life.

Many foreigners are choosing to stay in China longer because of their draw to Chinese culture and Chinese people.

"I told my friends that I must have been a Chinese in my previous life," says Italian Pierluigi Cecchi, 65, adding he would stay in China to study the Eastern mentality.

Indian Manish Chopra, 39, who works for a foreign company in Beijing, says he loved Chinese people and Chinese food. He gave his 8-year-old son the Chinese name "Wang Fujing", after Beijing's main shopping area, which is a popular tourist attraction.

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