



Luo Jie

What do Chinese parents tell their kids about Santa?

HOT POT



DEBBIE MASON

My house, and unwitting neighbors, recently hosted a children's Christmas party to which Father Christmas (or Santa, in the United States) rode up on a tricycle. He sat on an artificial reindeer, complete with red nose, in the front basket. My son goes to a Chinese kindergarten so we invited two of his best Chinese friends, along with all the other Western and mixed-race children we've known for years. Everyone got excited when the cracked bells clanked and the old, flat-tired tricycle squeaked into the public courtyard carrying a plump, wobbling, slightly slurring, white-bearded, red-clothed old man. "Santa's here!" shrieked the Western kids. "Shengdan Laoren tai le!" screamed the Chinese, no less thrilled. Watching their excited little faces and their expectation when he handed out his goodie bag of gifts, I wondered about how this flat Western figure in red goes down in Chinese families. Our children are simply lied to. "He delivers presents to all the children in the world. On the same night. By himself." "His reindeer can fly." "He comes down the chimney, even though we haven't got one." They are also bribed and black-mailed. "He only comes to children who are asleep." "He only comes to good children."



Pang Li

At home with 'Mr Mom'

► Not every trailing spouse of an expat on the move is a woman. **Qiu Yijiao** profiles two high-flying executives whose husbands manage the home front



Janet Ang and Anthony Cheah with their daughters.

It is often said, "behind every successful man lies a woman". But as more women storm traditional male bastions and scoop up top jobs, shattering the proverbial glass ceiling, it seems "behind every successful woman is a man" — taking a backseat and playing a supportive role at home.

The recent Global Relocation Trends Survey shows that 20 percent of expatriates the world over are women — an all-time high. Many of them hold key positions in multinational companies while their husbands stay at home and ensure its smooth running. No longer is man always the breadwinner and woman, the homemaker.

This shift in gender roles can, sometimes, complicate the challenges of living in a whole new environment. The findings of the survey suggest that working women faced with good career prospects abroad are often constrained in their decision to move by resistance from their spouse and the family's inability or reluctance to adjust to a new set-up.

But Singaporean Jill Lee faced no such issues when asked to assume responsibility as the first Asian CFO of Siemens in China, in 2004. Her husband Kelvin Leong felt very proud and encouraged her to accept the opportunity.

"Both of us felt that it was great to have this foreign exposure while we were young and my husband thought the overseas schooling would help our son mature faster and adapt to new challenges," says Lee.

Both Lee, who is currently chief

diversity officer at Siemens' headquarters in Munich, and Leong, are convinced the decision they took in 2004 was a good one.

Janet Ang, vice-president of IBM's Global Technology Services, found herself in a similar situation when she was posted to Beijing four years ago. Her husband Anthony Cheah readily backed the idea of moving to China. The Singaporean expatriates were living in Tokyo at that time and Cheah had been playing "Mr Mom" to their four daughters ever since they left their home city in 1998.

"It was unthinkable for a man to be without a job. But Janet is doing well at work and enjoys it so much," says Cheah, who turned full-time homemaker from real estate agent. "We could live off Janet's income in Tokyo while I helped the whole family get used to the new environment."

He admits that he learned on the job. "Although it was messy and noisy sometimes, no one complained because they knew it was difficult for me," Cheah recalls.

Ang is thankful to her husband for his efforts. "Anthony knows well that I am better suited to outside work. Surprisingly, he managed to handle all the nitty-gritty within the house," says the fast-talking businesswoman.

Later, Cheah got involved in community services and school ac-

tivities, a rarity for men in Japan. He remembers the shock on the faces of Japanese mothers when he told them he was a househusband.

"Anthony changed their traditional beliefs that men did not make good homemakers. The school our girls attended even renamed the Mothers' Association to Parents' Association," Ang says proudly.

"Right from the beginning, I was very open-minded about this (the different gender roles)," Leong says. "It is also great that both Jill and I share the idea that each of us plays an equally important role in the family. We are very comfortable with the different responsibilities we manage."

Once one of Lee's colleagues who had not met Leong before asked him which department he handled. "I told him I was responsible for Jill and we both had a good laugh."

Lee has no qualms about telling people that at home Leong is her CEO. The fact that she can leave all decision-making to him once she returns home after work is extremely relaxing, she says.

Like any other homemaker, Leong makes sure the needs of the family are met. When friends and relatives from Singapore pay a visit here, he is the one taking them around Beijing. Leong likes to keep himself well-informed of current news from the press and Internet, particularly of



Jill Lee and her husband Kelvin Leong with their son (center).

the business world and, especially, the real state sector.

Almost 10 years after relocating to a different country, Cheah feels life is much easier now. The family can afford a domestic help in Beijing, leaving Cheah more time for himself. He works as a training program coordinator in a local orphanage and an honorary teacher helping kids to improve reading skills and hangs out with other male trailing spouses.

"My skin is getting thicker now," Cheah jokes. "In a party, I am comfortable exchanging notes with mothers about where to buy fresh food and how my children perform at school, while other men usually talk about business."

For both Ang and Lee, family is a priority. Weekends are strictly for the family, at home or outdoors. Ang, for instance, makes it a point to attend all events in which her daughters take part. She spends a lot of time with them on the phone when she is on a business trip, inflated bills notwithstanding.

"I envy Anthony's having a special bond with the girls." The girls surround their father like a flock of birds every time the couple is back home after an evening out, turning to hug her only late. "But they know they can approach each of us on different issues."

Lee's son is now doing military

service back in Singapore. She and her husband make it a point to sort out their occasional differences before communicating with their son.

"It is important for a couple to feel comfortable playing their different roles and agreeing on what is important for the family," Lee says.

"I think the combination of being a home-dad and living abroad has made our family bond even stronger. I have become more open-minded, adaptable and have begun caring for small but important family needs," says Leong.

Yvonne McNulty, a researcher from Monash University, Australia, who has been following 21 male trailing spouses for the past four years says, "(the phenomenon) has little to do with Eastern or Western culture. Each family decides who goes out for work."

"I think the whole power balance in relationships is happening quicker these years, which means women assuming a breadwinner role in a relationship is probably becoming a more acceptable, and less unique, phenomenon that it used to be," says McNulty.

Her research has found that the non-traditional spouse who agrees to the reversal of roles prior to the relocation is likely to adjust better after the move. And the division of labor also helps build a strong family.

WHAT'S NEW

New role for martial arts whiz

Unlike Bruce Lee or Jet Li who both portrayed Chen Zhen as a tough martial artist, Donnie Yen is set to add a new identity to the fictitious character — special agent.

Yen plays the title character in *The Legend of Chen Zhen*, a star-studded film being shot in Shanghai by *Infernal Affairs* co-director Andrew Lau.

Chen Zhen, a frequent character on China's big and small screens, is usually portrayed as a student of martial-arts legend Huo Yuanjia (1867-1910). On the screen, Chen Zhen lives in 1920s Shanghai.

Bruce Lee interpreted the role in the 1972 film *Fist of Fury*, while Jet Li followed in a 1994 remake.

Lau has told the media that Donnie Yen's Chen Zhen is not just a martial-arts master, but also an agent who plays the piano and can speak several languages.



"This will be a brand-new Chen Zhen," Yen says.

The Legend of Chen Zhen features Shu Qi as a Japanese spy. Other cast members include Anthony Wong, Huo Siyan and Huang Bo.

The film's domestic release is set for next year, with possible international releases in Australia, New Zealand and Europe.

Musical reprises old film

Street Angel, a Chinese black-and-white film, has been revamped into a musical, and premiered at the China Film Museum at the weekend. The makeover gives the classic film a hilarious and insightful touch, to suit a new generation.

It tells the story of five film lovers, as they attempt to remake the 1937 movie *Street Angels*. The group joins a competition and experiences many ups and downs before winning the top prize. The musical also touches on many hot topics of the day.

"We should try to revive the sparkle of old films. The emotions of ordinary people make very good subjects for films," says Zha Wenbai, director of the musical.



Painting fetches record price

Snowy Mountain in Switzerland, a Chinese painting by Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), fetched a stunning 52.64 million yuan (\$7.72 million) at Beijing Council International's autumn auction, setting a new world record for the artist.

The painting was inspired by Zhang's 1965 trip to Switzerland and created later at his mansion in Brazil. It has been exhibited in many countries, such as the United States and Canada, but never appeared on the Chinese mainland until this auction.

The previous record for a Zhang work was set by the "splashed color" (*pocai*) style *Red Lotus on a Golden Folding Screen* that fetched HK\$20 million (\$2.58 million) at Sotheby's 2002 Hong Kong auction.