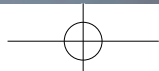
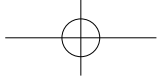




老手艺，新生活

Character Bean Candy: An Old Craft Has Its New Life



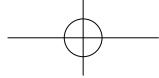


Character Bean Candy: An Old Craft Has Its New Life

Located in the southern part of Anhui Province, Qimen County can be found at the western foot of Mount Huangshan. During ancient times, Qimen was one of the six counties governed by Huizhou. Ninety percent of its area is covered by mountains, five percent by water, and the rest by farmland.

On a hot summer day, a bamboo raft appeared on the clear water of Qimen, and on it stood a blonde woman in red named Rachel from the United States. In her hand were two pieces of candy, each with the Chinese character 福, or blessing, on it, which were really amazing! This is a special local candy whose unique Chinese character has a lucky meaning. “Hi, I’m Rachel, and I’m on a bamboo raft in Qimen County, Anhui Province. It’s absolutely stunning. And I’m going to learn how this candy is made here.”





Using this bamboo raft, Rachel came all the way to a village where she found the home of Master Jin Huimin, an inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of the “Character Bean Candy”. Master Jin was boiling the maltose syrup. “You can now smell it. It is very fragrant. It smells very sweet right now. Master Jin, do you make this candy every day?” Rachel asked.

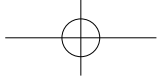
“Not every day, I make it at home only once or twice a year, but usually I make it in the factory,” he answered.

Master Jin dipped a pair of chopsticks into the maltose syrup, then took them out and pulled them apart. The syrup between the chopsticks was as thin as paper. “Oh, that’s so cool!” Rachel marveled.

Master Jin said, “When the maltose syrup is boiled to this point, it’s ready for making character bean candy.”

Master Jin added the freshly boiled syrup to two different bowls, one with sesame powder to create the dark Chinese character inside the candy and the other with soybean flour to create the outside of the candy. Rachel said, “Ever since I first saw this candy, I’ve actually been very curious about how they get the character inside the whole length of the candy. It will be really very cool to watch how he does it.”

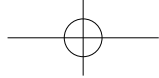
After several clever combinations and folds, Master Jin pieced together the dark sesame dough layer and the soybean dough layer into a big 福 character. At this time, the dough piece was still warm, comfortable to feel and easy to mold. Losing no time, he and another candy maker pressed it and stretched it out to make it smaller and thinner, shrinking the character 福.



“This part needs to be finished quickly. It is hard to pull the dough when it cools down. So, it’s important to do this part very quickly, because the dough will harden soon. They have to stretch it out while it’s still warm. After the dough is pulled into a thin bar, it is cut into small slices, and each slice has the character 福 on it,” said Rachel. After the dough bar is cooled, Rachel tried to cut it again. Although she tried hard, the sliced candy pieces were still unshaped. Smiling at these pieces, she shook her head.

“In the past, when celebrating birthdays or weddings, every family would buy this candy to distribute among their guests to share in the joy and happiness,” Master Jin said to Rachel. “You will be very happy if you eat the character 福.”





Rachel ate one piece of candy and said, “It’s really chewy. I thought it would taste less sweet, and a little bit more sesame. But it’s really nice balance all the flavors together. I’m very surprised in a good way.”

After experiencing the entire production methods, Rachel said, “I think the whole process of making this candy by hand is so amazing to watch.”

The craft of making character bean candy has lasted for nearly 100 years, and today, this ancient snack has been modernized and mass-produced. Invited by factory Director Wang, Rachel came to the candy factory to see how modern technology and equipment have helped the efficiency and cleanliness of the candy-making process.

Before entering the workshop, Rachel put on a dustproof hat, went through the disinfection room to sterilize her whole body, and then came to the workshop for a tour led by Director



Wang. Wang said, “We have adjusted the processing techniques of the raw materials, like the fineness of the soybean flour, the sweetness and hardness of the maltose, and all these indices are different from the hand-made process. Now, we only need to set the temperature in the computer and just monitor the temperature. In the past, it depended on the masters’ experience to tell whether it was okay or not by pulling