



Left: The wedding ceremony of Qi Liangliang (right) and Ji Pengcheng is broadcast to over 3,000 residents in their neighborhood on May 2.

Above: The couple's parents watch on screen during the livestream of the online wedding.

Neighbors rally to support an online wedding during lockdown

Lin Lixin

“Does anyone have anything useful for decorations? We would like to decorate our rented home a little, so we can celebrate our online wedding on May 2 with parents back in our native hometown. Please do send the word around.”

This is a message sent on April 29 by the intending bride, 28-year-old Qi Liangliang, to a volunteer WeChat group in Xuelinyuan neighborhood in northern Shanghai's Baoshan District.

The ongoing lockdown upset the couple's original plan for a wedding in their hometown of Yancheng, Jiangsu Province. Given the travel restrictions, they had to make do with an online wedding.

It never occurred to Qi that her casual request would elicit so much help from her neighbors.

“I thought people might experience a sense of distance in a megacity like Shanghai, but I have felt a lot of kindnesses and love here,” she said in a recent interview with Yicai, a local business news portal.

Dozens of volunteers began to forward her message to their compound's WeChat groups, and some began to explore if there were any items that could be put to use.

A neighbor even set up a new WeChat

group for others to participate and figure out the best solution. Over 300 neighbors joined in within a short time, sharing pictures of various kinds of decorations.

Some cut flowers in their yard and made them into a bridal bouquet. Others found a heart-shaped candle, champagne, a couple of bear dolls and even located their own wedding dresses.

Shasha, who works in human resources, took the responsibility of recruiting people and successfully set up a core team of 16 experts, including a dresser, a photographer and a master of ceremonies.

At 12:36am on April 30, less than four hours after Qi sent her initial plea for help, Wang Siyu, another neighbor, came up with the first version of the online wedding plan.

The team designed an invitation and decided the playlist of background music based on the couple's favorite Hong Kong movie, “A Chinese Odyssey.” The planning discussion lasted until nearly 2am.

Qi fell in love with Ji Pengcheng in 2013. They are tenants in the Xuelinyuan community.

Ji is currently doing his PhD study at Shanghai University. Qi quit a stable job in Yancheng six months ago to be with him and found a job with an auto company in Hongqiao area. On an average



Neighbors show different decorations and items they've gathered for the wedding. — All photos by Ti Gong

workday, it took her about three hours to commute.

They'd been preparing for their wedding over the past year. They flew to northwest China's Qinghai Province to take wedding pictures in a desert scene modeled on “A Chinese Odyssey.”

However, the pandemic outbreak in Shanghai ruined the plans. After a lockdown of more than 10 days in the neighborhood from March 4, Qi and Ji both signed up to work as volunteers, all the time secretly worried about the planned wedding in Yancheng on May 2.

At the end of April, as the lockdown extended, they knew there was no chance

of going back for the ceremony.

“The original date is auspicious and our families didn't want to change,” Qi said. So they decided to hold their wedding ceremony online.

The ceremony was decided to be held in the volunteers' working area in the community club.

On May 2, it began at 5:20pm, with only the bride, the bridegroom, the master of ceremonies and photographers in protective suits. Two fixed cameras at different angles broadcast the wedding for the couple's families back in Yancheng and over 3,000 residents in the Shanghai community.

Wearing masks, Qi and Ji went on stage while audiences could see the couple's parents on screen at the same time.

The newlyweds have also received a surprise gift: a six-minute video containing blessings from residents in different ways, some dancing and some playing the piano.

Qi was so moved that she burst into tears several times. While the couple walked home after the ceremony, residents sent down their wishes from balconies. An old man shouted: “Wish you a happy marriage and love throughout all seasons!”

“It's the most special wedding ceremony and one that I will never forget,” Qi said.