

FOOD STAR

Peruvian agriculturist Victor Otazu gives Qinghai province a helping hand with its potato production. **Liu Xiangrui** reports in Xining.

Victor Otazu describes his decadelong collaboration with China as “fruitful”.

The 70-year-old Peruvian agriculturist was a pathologist for the International Potato Center for years before he retired in 2015.

He managed three laboratories that helped identify genes resistant to diseases in the crop.

The International Potato Center, headquartered in Lima, is a global research institution that aims to offer sustainable solutions to issues of hunger, poverty and the degradation of natural resources.

“One of our activities is to coordinate with and improve research work like potato breeding in different countries,” Otazu tells China Daily in Xining, capital of Qinghai province.

When a team of researchers from the Qinghai Academy of Agriculture and Forestry Sciences visited the organization in Peru years ago, Otazu first established his links with China.

He was invited by the Chinese organization to visit Xining in 2007. He visits the institute every other year and has since served as a consultant.

Otazu says Qinghai was not on the “potato map” of China a decade ago. By then China was already a leading potato producing country in the world. There were very few varieties of potatoes in Qinghai earlier.

But when he first arrived in Qinghai, he was excited to find that the photos of the highlands there showed certain similarities with places where his experimental stations are located in Peru.

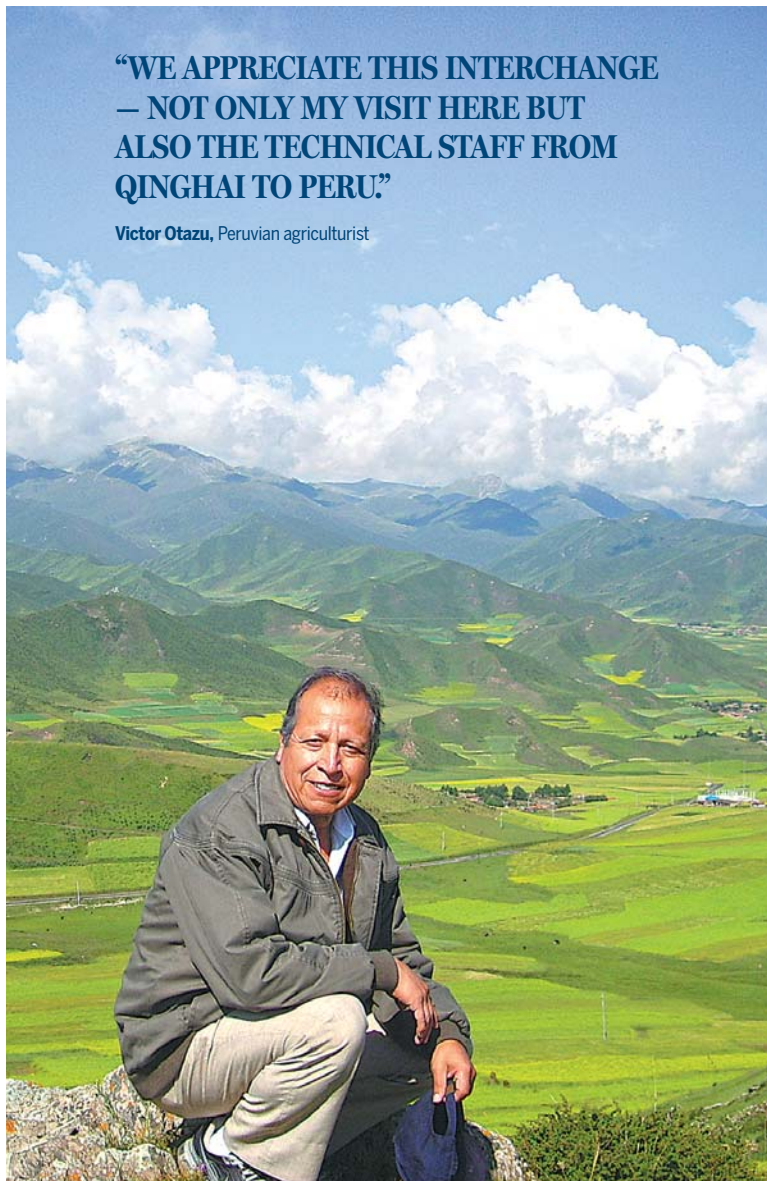
He found that the local climate and geological conditions were favorable for potato seed production, because they would prevent the crop from harm by insects and also lower the risk of transmittable diseases.

Otazu says he felt that Qinghai could become an important seed producer.

He gave a few suggestions to the Qinghai institute based on his observations and was surprised to see his Chinese partners taking them seriously. Soon some changes were made to the institute’s operation, such as cultivation plots, to improve production efficiency.

His visits are usually short and come with tight schedules.

Besides delivering presentations on technical issues and exchanging ideas with Chinese researchers, he also visits the seed bases of the



“WE APPRECIATE THIS INTERCHANGE — NOT ONLY MY VISIT HERE BUT ALSO THE TECHNICAL STAFF FROM QINGHAI TO PERU.”

Victor Otazu, Peruvian agriculturist



Top: Victor Otazu has visited Qinghai province regularly since his collaboration with Chinese researchers started in 2007. Above: Otazu visits a seed base for potato in Qinghai. LIU XIANGRUI / CHINA DAILY

institute in Xining and other parts of the province.

This year, he has visited China twice, staying for about a

month each. He had the time to even visit farmers in Qinghai to check if there farm produce had any abnormalities.

“I try to get the best of my time here, so that Qinghai can get something out of my experience in potatoes. That’s the

objective of my visits,” Otazu says.

Otazu has also helped the Qinghai institute share some resources of the International Potato Center in breeding and disease prevention in the past years.

The cooperation has allowed the Qinghai institute to make strides in potato breeding — the efficiency has increased 10 times compared with a decade ago. Now Qinghai is among the main seed producers in China and has sold seed potatoes to more than a dozen other provinces in the country.

The Qingshu-9 type of potato, which was bred in Qinghai, is now the most widely grown variety in China. By 2016, it had been grown across 1 million hectares and increased net income for farmers by 2.81 billion yuan (\$42 million).

“He gave us advice that helped solve many technical problems,” says Wang Jian, deputy director of the Qinghai institute.

Otazu is a “friendly and sincere” person, and gets along well with the Chinese researchers. They manage to communicate with each other despite a language barrier, according to Wang.

In Otazu’s opinion, the cooperation has been useful for both sides.

“We appreciate this interchange — not only my visit here but also the technical staff from Qinghai to Peru,” he says.

Otazu says potato production is very important today, especially in some developing countries in Africa, where potatoes, as a relatively new crop, are not only used as food but also important income sources for local farmers.

He believes Peru, as the native place of potatoes and with a rich gene pool, can make contributions to the world through cooperation with other countries, including China.

Thanks to his contribution to potato research and production in Qinghai, he was honored with the Friendship Award in October by the Chinese government.

The award is given to foreigners who have made important contribution to China’s social and economic development, and in his case, to China’s agricultural development.

Although he has retired, his collaboration with China continues, and now he can spend longer time in Qinghai for more programs, Otazu says.

China is the largest potato producer in the world.

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Wu Shuigen instructs his daughter in making silver jewelry in Shidong town, Guizhou province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dating festival offers Miao artisan platform

By YANG JUN in Guiyang yangjun@chinadaily.com.cn

The Miao ethnic group in Shidong town of Southwest China’s Guizhou province celebrates a festival called “sisters’ meal” on the 15th day of the third lunar month every year.

The dating custom is designed to enable young women to meet their future husbands at a lavish feast, wearing stunning traditional clothing.

Although the annual festival is closer to a beauty contest for the local Miao women, Wu Shuigen, a 51-year-old silversmith, sees it as an opportunity to showcase his work.

As a national-level intangible cultural heritage inheritor, Wu has made silver jewelry over the past 40 years. His creative designs have made him a celebrity in Shidong.

Each year, Wu prepares two or three sets of silver jewelry for young women who wear them to the festival. Each set includes a crown, a necklace and other accessories, which take him three or four months to make. After the festival, the artisan usually gets more attention from potential customers.

“It is time-consuming to complete a design by hand. The work is exquisite and requires skillful execution,” Wu says.

Wu’s daughter, Wu Chunxiu, says her father insists that all jewelry has to be checked several times before being sent to the customers, to ensure product durability.

Wu Shuigen has explored different types of crafting skills in silver with his father since he was aged 8. He asked his father questions about new designs each time he saw one on a piece of jewelry.

“It is really a struggle to wear such a huge silver necklace now, and I prefer my silver jewelry to be more handy and practical for people’s use today,” says Wu Shuigen, who



Miao women wearing traditional silver jewelry.

has a different view of the traditional large-sized Miao silver jewelry.

Besides, he enjoys traveling out of Shidong to visit silver shops in cities and likes to experiment with fusion — modern design with traditional craftsmanship.

Wu Shuigen established Shui Gen Ethnic Jewelry Co Ltd in 2010, and made a profit of 2 million yuan (\$300,000) in 2016.

When asked about challenges in business, he smiles and says: “I don’t think keeping skills to yourself will make you rich but sharing them will and does.”

Compared to some other silver artisans in rural Guizhou, he seems more open-minded to share his skills.

Since 1993, Wu Shuigen has trained more than 40 apprentices from neighboring villages. And, 16 of them have their own businesses now.

He has also encouraged his daughter to learn the craft — traditionally only Miao boys are allowed to inherit the craftsmanship.

Wu Shuigen recruits two apprentices every three years and spends his leisure time on teaching the craft at Kaili University in the province.

Chen Zhuo contributed to the story.

Danish touch in renovation of Beijing hutong

By CHINA DAILY

With bungalows on one side and office spaces on the other, Qinglong Hutong, an alleyway in Beijing, is witnessing a renovation since September.

Many other such old alleyways in the Chinese capital have been newly designed in recent times.

Some 11,000 people live in and around the Qinglong Hutong area, which has a street named after it, with the alleyways of Cangjingguan and Xilou nearby, as well as the subsidiary Beixiaojie Street.

As the host city for the 2018 Beijing Design Week, Copenhagen is bringing its eco-friendly urban planning concept to help rebuild the area.

In 2012, Beijing and the Danish capital signed an agreement to help each other in sustainable development.

Copenhagen aims to become the world’s first “zero-carbon city” by 2025, according to Marc Jorgensen, the urban planning head of Copenhagen.

At the Sino-Danish Roundtable on Livable Cities, hosted by Copenhagen city on Sept 24 as part of 2017 Beijing Design Week, Jorgensen suggested that Qinglong Hutong should focus on the development of local heritage and create better public spaces for informal meetings.

After a tour of the Qinglong Hutong area, the official and other specialists from Denmark and China discussed the renovation project.

Stensgaard Moller, CEO of Copenhagen Municipality, introduced the city’s experience in making changes to its architecture to help it become greener.

“We aim not just to make (a) nice postcard (look of the place). We want to make something that is really perceivable by the residents of the hutong.”

Mads Jensen Moller, CEO, Danish company Archiland

“In 1980, Copenhagen was a totally different city,” Moller said.

“Now, we have 450 kilometers (of) bike lanes and 62 percent of all trips to work are made on bikes.”

Li Zhaohong, executive deputy director of the Dongcheng Administrative Committee, presented the Qinglong Hutong Community renovation plan at the meeting.

Mads Jensen Moller, CEO of

the Danish company Archiland, which is working on the project, said gray, green and blue — respectively representing mobility, soft connectivity and water — will be the main colors for the renovation.

A top wish of the residents, according to a survey by the Dongcheng district, where the area is located, was getting more room for social activities in the narrow lanes that were crowded by cars.

Wang Wei, dean of Urban Planning and Design Institute under the Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, says the concept of urban renewal and renovation of the city should follow the larger plan.

“Urban context is the collective memory of the city. Urban culture is the soul and the old urban areas are the core of this context,” Wang says.

Moller has lived in China for four years, including one year in a hutong. He moved back to Denmark with his adopted Chinese daughter in 2011.

He sees the old alleyways as a cultural heritage not just of Beijing but the whole world.

Moller and his team are bringing in the Danish perspectives of livability to the Qinglong project. But he says the design will also reflect the reality of how people live in



The project in the Qinglong Hutong area in Beijing focuses on eco-friendly urban planning. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

this hutong area in Beijing.

Moller’s team is introducing “Qinglong loop” to support connectivity and the movement of people in the area.

Upon the completion of the project in 2020, people will find it easier to commute from different parts of the city to and from the area.

“We aim not just to make (a)

nice postcard (look of the place). We want to make something that is really perceivable by the residents of the hutong,” Moller adds.

Qinglong Hutong’s process of rebirth has started.

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