

CHINA

BUILDING THE NEW ERA | BASES OF HOPE

Editor's Note: China Daily is running a series of stories on old revolutionary bases with profound history and heritage that are striving to lead local people on the road to prosperity in the new era.

Guizhou focuses on chile pepper bonanza

Plan to raise quality, processing to transform province into major producer of spicy delight

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and YE ZIZHEN

Zunyi, Guizhou province, is developing its chile industry to consolidate poverty alleviation efforts. Having played a pivotal role in the history of the Communist Party of China, the city was the location of the Zunyi Conference, a crucial turning point in the Long March (1934-36), which led to the ultimate success of the revolution.

By 5 am, the chile trading center in Zunyi's Xinpu New District is already bustling as farmers and merchants try to broker the best deals.

"The center provides farmers a better trading environment, abundant storage and better transportation services," said Wu Yingbo, a chile farmer from nearby Xinzhou town. "It's a convenient way for everyone to develop their business and is a good platform."

Wu Yingbo is a 45-year-old farmer from Yumen village in Xinzhou town. He now oversees 12 square kilometers of chile plantations across the country, including plantations in Gansu province and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

"I used to work on a cotton farm in Xinjiang in 2004, but I saw that the agricultural sector was better developed there than in my hometown, so I decided to plant chiles," Wu said, adding that he brought seeds from Guizhou to the autonomous region.

During a trip back home in 2017, Wu saw a villager in her 60s carrying homemade dustpans to sell in town. "She took five days to make eight dustpans and sold each for 5 yuan (74 cents) apiece," he said.

Wu felt that he should move some of his business home to provide better opportunities for his fellow villagers.

Today, he manages chile plantations with an area of about 2 sq km in Guizhou. Their yields are sold to Kunming in Yunnan province, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Chongqing, cities known for their love of spicy foods.

"In Guizhou, the picking and cutting of chiles is done by hand to ensure the best quality," Wu said.

Two years ago, he set up a chile cooperative, which provides jobs picking and processing chiles.

"Cutting chiles is something that can be done by people of different ages," he said. "Those who cut fast can earn 110 yuan a day."

Like Wu, chile farmers from nearby Xiazi, Xinzhou and Yongle are frequent visitors to the trade center.

Called China's Chile Town, the center opened in 2017. With 13 chile drying lines and cold storage warehouses, it is one of the biggest chile trade centers in southwestern China. It sold 550,000 metric tons of the peppers last year, worth 9 billion yuan.

It not only deals in chiles produced in Guizhou, but also in those produced in other areas like Hunan and Henan provinces and Xinjiang. There were over 40 registered chile cooperatives in Xinpu last year, employing 2,800 households and producing 135,000 tons of peppers.

Apart from creating trade platforms, the local government also works with agronomists to improve the output, taste and quality of chiles.

Tian Hao, deputy director of Zunyi's Chile Research Institute, has been working on improving chile seeds for a decade.

"It is widely accepted that the quality of chiles grown in Zunyi is high. However, problems also exist, such as the poor purity of cultivars, low resistance and low yields after years of production," Tian said.

Chiles can only be planted once a year in Guizhou, so to shorten the time needed to breed new varieties, Tian and his fellow scientists have split their time between Hainan, where the climate is much warmer, and Guizhou for the past decade to speed up the process.

"Good seeds grow well with good planting, so training farmers is also critical to ensuring good yields," Tian said, explaining another important part of his work.

Data shows that in 2020, Guizhou produced 7.24 million tons of chiles valued at over 24 billion yuan.

"We will focus on developing new varieties, improving quality, brand-making and standardizing manufacturing centers," said Bu Tao, deputy director and spokesman for Guizhou's Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs at a news conference on the Chile Expo held in Guizhou last year.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

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A farmer displays chiles he has just harvested from the field in Zunyi, Guizhou province.

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Chiles are aired on the sunning ground in Zunyi.

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A variety of chile sauces on display at an exposition held in Guizhou. HAN YU / FOR CHINA DAILY



Employees at a chile processing company in Zunyi work on the production line.

HU ZHIGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: An aerial photo shows a chile industry zone in Zunyi, Guizhou province. FENG KUI / FOR CHINA DAILY



The short, but important life of the Hunan revolutionary base

Centered around Hunan's picturesque Zhangjiajie area, the Hunan-Hubei-Chongqing-Guizhou Revolutionary Base flourished briefly during the mid 1930s.

Nevertheless, it made its mark on the Communist Party of China's history as it was the last Red base south of the Yangtze River after the Central Red Army's Long March began in October 1934, and it successfully coordinated with the Long March while serving as one of the pillars of the Red Army.

In the early 1930s, CPC-led forces faced attacks by the Kuomintang, or the Chinese Nationalist Party, on multiple fronts.

The Hunan-Western Hubei Revolutionary Base — which straddles the border of the two provinces and was first set up by He Long (1896-1969), later one of 10 PLA marshals — came under heavy attack in 1934. As a result of faulty military strategy and radical attempts to purge internal enemies, the number of soldiers decreased sharply and the base was unable to

defend itself. The Third Red Army, which was in charge of the base, fought its way out in May 1934 and began to create a Red base in eastern Guizhou. By September that year, the Eastern Guizhou base comprised 67 village-level Soviet governments.

Around the same time, the Sixth Red Army Corps from the Hunan-Jiangxi Junction Revolutionary Base, headed by political and military leader Ren Bishi (1904-50), managed to escape KMT encirclement in August and marched west.

The two armies joined forces in Yinjiang, Guizhou on Oct 24, and the Third Red Army renewed its former designation as the Second Red Army Corps. Together, they could count on about 8,000 soldiers. However, the Eastern Guizhou base did not have a large enough population to support its long-term development. Following discussions, Ren and He began to set up a new base in Longshan, Hunan.

To alleviate the pressure on the Central Red Army, which had just



The site of the Zunyi Conference in Zunyi, Guizhou province.

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started the Long March and was under heavy attack, the corps launched the Western Hunan Offensive in November, despite being outnumbered.

They captured several counties, and by mid-December they were marching toward Changde, a key city in western Hunan. The KMT

hastily relocated four divisions that had been busy preventing the Central Red Army from crossing the Xiangjiang River. Having achieved their strategic goal, the Red corps returned to their base.

Meanwhile, an area-wide CPC committee, a military area command and a provisional Soviet government were

proclaimed in the area centered around Dayong county (present-day Zhangjiajie city). As Chongqing did not become a municipality until 1997, the base was historically known as the Hunan-Hubei-Sichuan-Guizhou Base and was part of CPC-led guerrilla zones in today's rural Chongqing, which was governed by Sichuan province at the time.

The CPC launched land redistribution campaigns, and training sessions were organized to conduct the campaign. The family members of those who joined the Red Army were given preferential policies. By mid-January 1935, the Soviet area had a population of about 500,000, and the two corps had about 10,000 soldiers.

The KMT launched massive encirclement campaigns in 1935. During months of resistance, the two corps zigzagged around the area and attempted to fend off enemies on various occasions.

Meanwhile, as the Central Red Army — led by Mao Zedong (1893-1976), who gained command after

the Zunyi Conference in January 1935 — reached safety in sparsely populated western Sichuan, the Second and Sixth corps' mission came to an end. In November 1935, it was agreed after a meeting that continued attempts to hold the base were of little use and the two corps began their own Long March on Nov 19.

Passing through Hunan, Guizhou, Yunnan and the former Xikang provinces, they joined forces with the Fourth Front Red Army, which had split off with the Central Red Army after an internal conflict, in July 1936. The two corps were reorganized as the core force of the Second Front Red Army.

They marched northward together and in late October, the Second Front Red Army arrived in Jiangtaipu in today's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, where they joined forces with the Central Red Army, or the First Front Red Army, completing their Long March.