

## CHINA



Farmers in Tancheng county, Shandong province, prepare to ship straw handicraft articles they made via express delivery.  
FAN CHANGGUO / XINHUA

## Local straw plaiting tradition pays off for Shandong farmers

JINAN — Winter is a slack season for most Chinese farmers, but that's not the case for Jiang Suye and her friends.

While chatting in her living room, they plait straw into pads and strips by hand.

Jiang, 67, is from the town of Xinhe, in Pingdu, Shandong province. She works eight hours a day making plaited handbags out of wheat straw or corn husks, bringing home up to 2,000 yuan (\$290) a month.

People in Xinhe have been plaiting straw for nearly 400 years, and the skill was listed as a provincial intangible cultural heritage in 2013.

But villagers never expected their traditional skills would be connected to fashion, drawing orders from international brands.

To meet the high standards of foreign companies, Jiang plants wheat and corn in her backyard, and is very picky in selecting the materials.

"We have to choose the middle layer of the corn husk, which can't be too tender or overgrown. The wheat straws need to be shiny," she said.

In a workshop of Qingdao Yufengxiang Artware, a straw handicraft company in Xinhe, workers using sewing machines busily plait straw into handbags.

The workers are mainly female farmers from the area in their 50s or 60s who learned straw plaiting from older generations. The company's orders exceed 100,000 units a month on average.

Wang Jianming, its general manager, said that in addition to the 60-plus workers in the workshop, it has outsourced the plaiting to more than 10,000 villagers.

"Up to 90 percent of the processing can be attributed to local farmers," he said, adding that the company's output was worth 25 million yuan last year.

Xinhe is now home to more than 90 straw handicraft enterprises. Of the 103 villages in the town, more than 80 have set up straw-plaiting outsourcing stations, with over 20,000 part-time workers.

The output of the straw-plaiting

“Environmental friendliness and craftsmanship are our main considerations in choosing partners in China. Xinhe straw plaiting has a long history, mature skills and obvious industrial advantages”

**Zhao Jinli**, an employee of the China branch of a British design company

industry was valued at 2.4 billion yuan in 2018.

The finished articles are exported to more than 50 countries and regions, including the United States, Britain, France and Japan. Favored by fashion brands, straw-plaited bags and hats even appear on the catwalks of international fashion weeks.

Zhao Jinli, 40, works for the China branch of a British design company that has long cooperated with British brands.

Based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, it has been doing business with straw handicraft enterprises in Xinhe for about five years, with annual orders totaling around 6 million yuan.

"Environmental friendliness and craftsmanship are our main considerations in choosing partners in China," Zhao said. "Xinhe straw plaiting has a long history, mature skills and obvious industrial advantages."

To make the handicrafts more profitable, the town government registered its own brand in 2018.

"We expect to transform the traditional straw-plaiting sector into a fashion industry," said Jiang Xun, director of its rural vitalization office.

XINHUA

# Volunteers are giving young cancer patients a head start

Hair donated to barber goes into free wigs for children undergoing chemotherapy

By **ZHOU HUIYING** in Harbin and **HAN JUNHONG** in Changchun

About 120 volunteers have donated their hair to Changchun barber Liu Jianjun over the past 18 months to help children with cancer who have lost hair due to the side effects of chemotherapy.

Liu, 50, who runs a barber shop in the capital of Northeast China's Jilin province, launched a charity program with a local media outlet in June 2018.

"I provided free haircuts for them and another 80 volunteers posted me their hair," he said. "All the hair has been turned into wigs by a company in Shanghai free of charge."

More than 100 children in the city have received free wigs that can help them regain their self-esteem and self-confidence during cancer treatment.

Patients receiving chemotherapy, especially children, have weaker immunity and can only wear wigs made from human hair, not synthetic fibers.

"A wig needs about two donors' hair, with a length of more than 40 centimeters," Liu said. "A wig made from real hair costs several thousand yuan up to 10,000 yuan (\$1,450), which seems a huge burden for most of the young patients' families."

Changchun resident Wang Hongying, 71, had last cut her long hair 17 years ago.

"The hair was well-preserved and I'd refused several people who wanted to buy it till I got to know about the charity program," she said. "Although I really liked my black hair and planned to keep it as a souvenir, I donated it without any hesitation."

Her daughter also became one of the volunteers and began to introduce the charity program to her friends.

"I have visited the sick children in hospital several times," Wang said. "When I saw their smiles after wearing the proper wigs, I thought it had all been worth it."

Wan Fei, a regular customer of Liu's shop, is growing her hair longer so that she can donate it too.

"When I saw the posters promoting the idea of helping those young patients, I decided to keep my hair longer," she said. "My hair is still not long enough, so I have to keep waiting."

"I have a daughter who always wants to have a pretty look, so I can well understand the children who are afraid of playing with others due to hair loss."

"The children may become more sensitive, especially when they experience rejection from strange eyes. What the volunteers do can help them regain confidence in life and become optimistic and positive."



**Clockwise from top:** Liu Jianjun helps a young patient wear a wig properly at the First Bethune Hospital of Jilin University in Changchun, Jilin province. A volunteer displays the hair she donated to young cancer patients in Changchun. Liu gives a volunteer a haircut after she decided to donate her hair to Liu's project. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

After two years' treatment at First Bethune Hospital of Jilin University, a 4-year-old girl nicknamed Duoduo returned to her home in a village in Jilin city recently.

"She is now in stable condition and only needs regular examinations," said her mother, Yang Dan. "My thanks go to those who gave us great help in the past two years, such as the wig for my daughter."

Duoduo was diagnosed with a serious adrenal tumor in December 2017 and began to receive chemotherapy and radiotherapy at the hospital.

The initial treatment caused severe reactions, including high fever, anorexia and hair loss.

"I could do nothing but accompany her in the hospital," Yang said. "One day when I washed my hair, Duoduo suddenly asked me

“I have visited the sick children in hospital several times. When I saw their smiles after wearing the proper wigs, I thought it had all been worth it.”

**Wang Hongying**, Changchun resident

where her hair was. At that time, I felt my world seemed shattered."

After finishing her sixth chemotherapy session, Duoduo received a wig from the charity program.

"She was too young to understand the meaning of beauty, but she showed us a smile after wearing the

wig," Yang said. "Her smile is my biggest happiness."

"Duoduo will keep wearing the wig till her hair grows longer. Without being afraid of playing with others due to hair loss, her dream of playing outside can finally come true."

Zhang Yuan, head nurse of the pediatric oncology department at First Bethune Hospital of Jilin University, said: "For those young patients, the treatment may become a tough time in their memories. It would be another blow for them when they meet strangers' curious stares and inquiries about their bald heads."

"With the help of the wigs, they can regain confidence and happiness."

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## Guizhou schools help preserve ethnic cultures

GUIYANG — Pan Qunfang, 13, has been practicing brush writing for around three years. The characters he writes are similar to Chinese ones, but only people from the Sui ethnic group can understand the ancient writing.

"This character means 'gold', and the other means 'fire,'" Pan told a group of visitors to his home village in Southwest China's Guizhou province.

Pan lives in Shuiwei village in Qiongdongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture. There are 314 students at his school — with 215 from the Sui ethnic group.

The Sui are among China's 56 ethnic groups, with more than 400,000 Sui people mainly living in Guizhou and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

To cultivate students' interest in their own culture, Pan's school introduced Sui culture in classes in 2017.

"My grandpa and father know

how to read and write Sui characters, but they are too busy to teach me at home," Pan said. "At school, three teachers teach us to read and write Sui characters."

Wei Yongliang, one of the teachers, said, "More and more students are becoming interested in learning Sui culture, and the cultural knowledge enriches students' lives at school."

Pan's school is not exceptional. According to Guizhou's Education Department, there are more than 5,000 schools offering interest-oriented lessons about ethnic cultures, up from around 100 in 2002.

Guizhou was one of the first provinces to include ethnic cultures in school classes, beginning around 2000. The contents of the lessons include ethnic martial arts, musical instruments, dances, songs, sports, literature and customs.

The curriculum at Liuguan Junior Middle School in Anshun, Guizhou, includes lessons on woodcarving and



**From left:** An instructor teaches children a dragon dance at a kindergarten in Qiongdongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA A teacher teaches calligraphy at a middle school in the prefecture. HUANG XIAOHAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tunpu culture, as well as local opera and folk costumes dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Cao Zijian, who has taken woodcarving classes for a year, has learned to carve masks.

"I saw these types of masks when I was younger, but I never knew how they were made and had been curious until I joined the woodcarving class," Cao said, adding that he has

also learned about the stories behind the masks and has fallen in love with carving masks.

Ren Fujiang, a 47-year-old craftsman, has been teaching carving at the school since 2012.

"The school has been trying its best to encourage more students to get involved in woodcarving," he said. "The reason I chose to teach craftsmanship at school is



that I hope more and more students will like woodcarving so that the skills can be passed on."

More than 1,000 students have participated in woodcarving lessons since 2006, according to the school.

"Introducing ethnic and folk cultures into the curriculum can not only pass down the cultures from generation to generation but also enrich students' multicultural

cognition, as well as cultivate students' cultural confidence," said Zhao Chenghong, headmaster of the school.

"It doesn't matter whether they will continue the craftsmanship or not. The most important thing is that they have a unique experience."

XINHUA