

Agricultural triumph blossoms in Shanxi

Herb grown in province's Datong city becoming known for its quality



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Daylily, a plant with beautiful blossoms and poetic connotations, is now seen as a source of pride, delight and hope by growers in the northern Shanxi city of Datong.

The plant has been chosen by Chinese poets throughout history because it is a symbol of love between children and their mothers.

The Book of Songs, or *Shijing*, a collection of poems compiled by Confucius more than 2,500 years ago, mentioned this herb by calling it worry-free grass.

Legends have it that when a son is about to leave his mother for a long journey, he would usually plant the herb in the courtyard, hoping to relieve the mother's worries about him when seeing its beautiful blossoms.

As its name suggests, the plant is relieving the worries of growers in Datong. It has now developed into a big industry worth millions of dollars and is a major source of revenue for farmers in the city.

Daylily, which is also known as yellow flower or golden-needle vegetable, is a popular food ingredient in China. It is also sought-after in Chinese communities in regions like North America and Europe.

Datong has a history of growing daylily that dates back 600 years. It

is among the top four production bases for the herb in China. According to the Datong government, the city's planting area of the crop now accounts for about one-fourth of the country's total.

The daylily products from the city are renowned for their quality, thanks to local farmers' experience and the unique soil, sunlight and irrigation.

In recent years, the local daylily industry has expanded substantially due to authorities' efforts to drive modernization, promote branding and increase planting areas. Local statistics show that the total planting area of daylilies in Datong reached nearly 18,000 hectares in 2021, an exponential increase from just 1,000 hectares in 2010.

According to An Yiping, head of the Datong Center for Daylily Industrial Development and Services, the entire industrial chain of daylilies in the city is estimated to reach 4 billion yuan (\$594.74 million) this year.

The local industry's strength is also represented by 109 villages specializing in plantation, 14 leading enterprises in processing, and six brands with nationwide recognition.

The village of Tangjiapu in Yunzhou district is one of the major bases for the growth and processing of daylilies in Datong.

Local villager Yang Qi is one of the pioneers in Tangjiapu who helped the industry grow in both scale and strength over the past decade.

He founded a daylily-farming cooperative in Tangjiapu in 2011. That was among the earliest such cooperatives in Datong. The cooper-

ative's initial stakeholders were 50 impoverished families who contributed their 33 hectares of land as the stake.

Now the cooperative has developed into a comprehensive enterprise for growing and processing daylilies and the sales of finished products.

The company, called Huaqingcheng, owns a daylily processing plant with a floor space of more than 6,000 square meters. It is equipped with two automatic production lines for finished daylily products.

"In addition to processing daylilies from our own farms, we also purchase produce from farmers in neighboring areas," Yang said. He added that the business revenue of his company reached 20 million yuan in 2021.

Tang Wan, a resident in Tangjiapu, is one of the suppliers to Yang's processing plant.

"My family earned about 50,000 yuan last year by selling daylilies to Huaqingcheng," Tang said. "That was a big part of my family revenue."

Tang added that the orders from Huaqingcheng are a driver for his constant revenue increase.

He admitted that sales are always the biggest concern of individual growers. He recalled that when he began to grow the crop in 2005, his family's annual income from growing daylilies was less than 2,000 yuan. "We didn't dare to expand the scale because we were not sure if we could sell all the produce."

Now that concern is being addressed by the company. Its success has led to increased orders



Tourists get hands-on experience with daylily harvesting on a farm in Datong's Yunzhou district.

SUN RUISENG / CHINA DAILY

made to farmers, Tang said. "Last year, I planted 2 hectares of daylilies. That was a 60-fold increase from what I began with."

Gou Chunwei, an official of the village, said a price hike also contributed to the growth in farmers' income.

"The price of fresh daylilies increased from 3 yuan per kilo in 2020 to 5 yuan last year," Gou said. "That meant a revenue increase of 2.98 million yuan for the entire village."

He noted that the prices of Datong-produced fresh daylilies grew at a rate much higher than the average in the domestic market, demonstrating a recognition of the quality of Datong's produce.

An of the Datong Center for Daylily Industrial Development and Services said the city will further improve the industry's competitiveness through the use of smart operations.

Technological upgrades include installing automatic and digitally connected devices for soil condition



Datong has about 18,000 hectares of daylily farms, making it one of the top production bases of the crop. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

monitoring, irrigation and fertilizing.

Other initiatives include promoting the branding of Datong-produced daylilies, according to Pang Youjun, head of the agriculture and rural affairs bureau of Yunzhou district.

He noted that Datong's daylilies were recently granted a geographi-

cal indication by an authoritative national organization. Also, Yunzhou district was recognized as a demonstration zone for the standardized growth and processing of the crop.

Han Linfang contributed to this story.

Temple a demonstration of ancient engineering

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When talking about the ancient architectural wonders in Shanxi province, which is said to have the largest number of ancient buildings in China, Xuankong Temple in Hengshan Mountain, Hunyuan county is without a doubt a classic case ripe for study.

In the minds of many Chinese people, temples are mostly seen as structures built on the ground. But Xuankong Temple, which means "temple hanging in the sky", or suspending temple, is a strong exception.

The temple was built on the surface of a cliff and is one of only seven ancient temples in China with such a status, according to researchers.

Constructed out of wood, tiles and stone during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), the temple is made up of two three-story pavilions and a yard linked by staircases and steps. The staircases and steps run along the surface of a sheer cliff rising 90 meters above a stream at

the foot of the mountain.

Seen from below, Xuankong Temple appears extremely precarious. It is supported by only a few thin scaffolds rising from protruding rocks. For that reason, it was selected by Time magazine as one of the 10 most dangerous buildings in the world in 2010.

But "precarious" and "dangerous" are not the right adjectives for this structure preserved for more than 1,500 years. Despite several renovations in various historical periods, the temple has survived the winds, rains and earthquakes for one and a half millennia.

Researchers revealed some secrets behind what has kept the structure intact.

For instance, a number of large, deep holes were dug into the cliff's surface, and two-thirds of the length of the beams together with wedges were driven into each one. That structure offered a firm foundation for the whole temple.

Other than its sturdy construction, researchers have also found



Xuankong Temple, built on a cliff face in Shanxi's Hengshan Mountain, is a prime example of engineering achievements in ancient China. SUN RUISENG / CHINA DAILY

that the section of the cliff above the temple acts like an umbrella to shield the complex from rain and sunlight. In summer, when the day is longest, the temple only receives about two hours of direct sunlight a day during the morning.

The narrow valley it faces also changes the direction of airflow. The wind usually blows toward the cliff in the opposite direction of the temple, but rarely reaches the buildings.

Many tourists said that as the temple has been standing firmly on the Hengshan cliff for more than

1,500 years and is still intact and solid, a study of the temple is an exploration of an ancient Chinese engineering miracle.

The temple is used for worship by believers of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism.

There are nearly 80 statues of the three religions in the temple, showing how the Chinese nation's cultural inclusiveness has allowed the coexistence of different religions.

Xing Aitian contributed to this story.

Birds winging their way to nest in wetland park

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Gucheng National Wetland Park in the Shanxi county of Yuanqu welcomed an increased number of birds in late spring, which shows it is becoming an attractive home to wildlife.

The park, on the northern side of Gulangdi, a large reservoir on the Yellow River, is Shanxi's first national-level wetland park. Benefiting from its improving ecological environment, local people said it has offered them a better living environment too.

Han Jun, a resident in Gucheng village, operates a family bed-and-breakfast business near the park.

"Over the past 10 years, we have seen a growing number of visitors to the wetland park," Han said. "As more customers have come to my lodge, my family revenue has increased year by year."

Qiao Xiaozhan, another Gucheng resident, recalled that

the site had been a huge mud flat before it became a wetland park.

"The mud flat, covered by rampant weeds, used to be a dangerous natural trap for all," Qiao said. "Nobody dared to walk there."

But now it is a popular destination for tourists to visit and locals to relax. The change is a result of a 10-year renovation project launched by the county government of Yuanqu.

According to Pang Weimin, head of the park's protection center, the renovation project involved returning 1,200 hectares of farmland to wetland, moving local residents out of the park and banning polluting agricultural activities nearby.

The official said the hardest part of the initiative was the relocation of more than 20,000 residents.

"The relocation was made possible with persuasion, compensation and multiple measures to



Gucheng Wetland Park in Yuanqu county is the first national-level wetland park in Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

offer them jobs and business opportunities," Pang said.

Xi Lanying, a former resident in the wetland park site, said she was glad to move out.

"My farmland near the reservoir could be flooded several times a year," Xi said. "It was not a reliable source for making a living."

Now Xi and her husband are hired by the park to take care of its tree seedling greenhouses. Their annual net income is more than

50,000 yuan (\$7,435).

Pang said he is happy to see the increasing numbers and varieties of birds and animals in the park. One important mission for him is to record the number and activities of wildlife.

"Now we have more than 20 black storks in the park," Pang said. Black stork is an endangered species on China's protection list.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Awards pay tribute to skilled model workers across various trades

By YUAN SHENGGAO

No one is born with talent. It is hard work, dedication and long-term concentration that make a master in a certain trade. This is shown by the award-winning craftsmen in Shanxi.

The awarding ceremony of Shanxi's Master Craftsmen of the Year 2021 was held in Taiyuan on April 30. Ten model workers in different industries won the award.

Xue Xiaodong, an inheritor of hand-polished lacquerware, an intangible cultural heritage item unique to the county of Pingyao, was one of them.

Learning the traditional technique from his father, he has been in the trade since he was a child.

Xue, 60, is often referred to by his colleagues as a "dull old man who does not know how to enjoy his leisure time".

Xue, however, said he is not a dull man by nature, and he is so called because he has devoted most of his energy to making good lacquerware items.

Known as one of the top four lacquerware varieties of China, the hand-polished lacquerware in Pingyao is a brilliant representation of the craft in the country. It is made of natural raw lacquer and varnished by hand using a special technique.

As the creation of the traditional artworks involves complicated techniques ranging from embedding, sculpting and carving to colored painting, a successful craftsman in hand-polished lacquerware needs decades of experience, concentration and an unflinching taste for aesthetics, Xue said.

A frequent winner of various national awards, Xue also views innovation as the lifeline of the hand-polished lacquerware. His recent works show a combination of the realistic and abstract, the Chinese and Western styles, which gives a new lease of life to this traditional art with a history of more than 1,000 years.

Another winner of the Shanxi's Master Craftsmen title is Liu Xiaochen, a wood-carving artist from the city of Xinzhou.



Ancient structures in Shanxi inspire wood-carving artist Liu Xiaochen's works. WU JIA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Liu said his love of wood-carving art was inspired by the many ancient architectural structures in Shanxi.

"Shanxi is the province with the largest number of ancient buildings and structures like the Sakya-muni Pagoda in Yingxian, the Hall of the Holy Mother in Taiyuan's Jinci Temple and Xuankong Temple in Hunyuan are the representatives of ancient Chinese architectural achievements," Liu said.

Liu has spent more than 20 years visiting various ancient architecture sites in Shanxi and the rest of the country, aiming to represent them in his own way.

While these representative structures appeal to visitors with their spectacular sizes, Liu's representations went in an opposite direction. His renderings of these large structures are wood-carving miniature copies with sizes reduced to dozens of inches.

"A wood-carving miniature requires a great sense of accuracy," Liu said. "And the margin of error for every part should be less than 0.3 millimeters."

Several workers in the modern manufacturing industries were also on the list of master craftsmen. These included Liu Rui, an operator of machine tools in Huaihai Industries Group in Changzhi; and Shi Zhijie, a steelmaking worker from Taiyuan Iron & Steel Group.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.