

Arts festival attracts bigger audience via online broadcasts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When the third Shanxi Arts Festival kicked off on July 5, few people expected this online event could achieve greater popularity than its previous two sessions that were held offline.

But it did. Incomplete statistics show that, by Aug 1, the online festival had generated about 61 million views. Nearly 28 million people took part in the event through various interactive platforms, a figure that some organizers said goes far beyond their imagination.

Held online from July 5-31 according to the requirements for pandemic prevention and control, the event was described by the organizers as a long-lasting gala, as the shows and interactions are scheduled to go on after its official conclusion.

In the theme of "a gala of arts and a festival for the people", the event highly valued the participation of audiences, and this was made possible with the internet and various interactive platforms, according to the organizers.

On July 23, Ye Xiangfei, a Shanxi native living in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, had an interview with a media reporter in Shanxi after watching the dance drama of *Liu Hulan*.

Ye said his hometown is Lyuliang, the same city where the story of Liu Hulan, a heroic girl relating to the revolutionary history of Shanxi, took place.

"Performances relating to Liu Hulan are always among my favorites, be it a drama or a movie," Ye said. "It is amazing to have an opportunity to watch a Liu Hulan drama in the city of Guangzhou, which is more than 2,000 kilometers away from Shanxi."

Ye said during the previous two sessions of the festival, people had to go to a theater to watch a show and they might not succeed in booking tickets because of the limited number of seats.

"Now there is plenty of room here, thanks to the event's online platform," Ye told the reporter. "There are a wide range of options for you to select from if you have enough time."

According to the organizers, there were 15 subevents, 92 drama and opera performances and an exhibition of 850 calligraphic and

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Ye Xiangfei, a Shanxi native in Guangzhou

painting works on show through the online platforms.

Lu Xiaohua, a resident in the Shanxi provincial capital of Taiyuan, said the most amazing part of the festival is that audiences can hear the comments and interpretations from experts when watching the shows or exhibitions. "This is something you cannot experience when watching a show in a theater or an exhibition in a museum."

Event organizers said the "experts' comments" are a newly added link to the festival, aiming to help audiences better understand the rich forms and cultural essence of the varieties of arts in Shanxi, especially local operas and folk musical arts.

Shanxi is said to be one of the sources of traditional Chinese opera, with a couple of ancient varieties still alive on today's stage. One representative of Shanxi's operas is Jinju Opera, which became one of the highlights of this year's festival, with 29 shows staged.

To encourage the artists' enthusiasm for protecting, inheriting and passing down these time-honored arts, Shanxi province has designed the "Apricot Flower Awards" for outstanding artists and excellent works.

The 17th Apricot Flower Awards ceremony was once again a highlight of this year's festival. This time the selection of outstanding artists and excellent works is no longer limited to the experts' panel. The votes from audiences, which were made online, also played an important role, according to the festival's organizers.

Han Linfang contributed to this story.



Dance drama *Liu Hulan* is staged during the third Shanxi Arts Festival. HAN LINFANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Passengers are ready to board an intercity train from Taiyuan to Xinzhou. ZHANG JIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Bullet train latest step to create a city cluster

Shanxi officials link up Taiyuan and Xinzhou in integration program

By YUAN SHENGGAO

In the early morning of July 4, a bullet train departed Taiyuan South Railway Station and ran north for about 50 minutes to arrive in the city of Xinzhou.

It marked the latest addition to intercity trains between Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi, and Xinzhou.

To date, there are a total of 12 intercity bullet trains running round trips between the two cities, bringing them into a one-hour commuting circle.

The train service has greatly assisted in travel for residents in both cities. But its significance goes far beyond passenger transportation. It is also an important part of the Taiyuan-Xinzhou integration program, a recent move that aims to build a city cluster and a powerhouse for development in the center of Shanxi, according to local officials.

The urban integration program of the two cities was launched in 2021 by the Shanxi provincial government, according to the central government's requirements.

In March 2021, the State Council released a guideline for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), requiring Shanxi



China Shanxi

to foster a city cluster in its central region. The cluster is proposed to host industries relocated from the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, where an integrated regional development plan is in place.

Grasping the historic opportunity, the Shanxi provincial government proposed promoting the development of Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone in the months that followed.

The zone officially opened on Dec 29, marked by the establishment of the Promotional Center for the Development of Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone.

In less than nine months, the fledgling development zone has reported impressive achievements.

On March 28, Taiyuan-Xinzhou Integrated Economic Zone held a groundbreaking ceremony for 183 key projects settling there.

The projects were funded by businesses from across the country and

involved a combined investment of 103.8 billion yuan (\$15.37 billion).

However, Xinzhou was not the first city to integrate with Taiyuan. An earlier development program had paired up Taiyuan and its southern neighbor Jinzhong.

The two cities are linked by the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, which is now the biggest integrated development zone in Shanxi.

Officially established in November 2016, the zone sitting between Taiyuan and Jinzhong consists of four national development zones, three provincial development zones and one university industrial park with a total planning area of 600 square kilometers.

Over the five years since its establishment, the demonstration zone has been the major test site for Shanxi's economic transformation. This features reducing reliance on coal-mining and other heavily resource-consuming industries and fostering emerging sectors as new drivers for Shanxi's development.

The demonstration zone is planning to foster four large industrial clusters — precise electronics, synthetic biology, photovoltaics and modern services — each with an

annual output value of more than 100 billion yuan as well as other emerging industrial clusters each with an annual output value of 10 billion yuan. They include information technology, silicon carbide, sapphire substrate and other new materials. All these sectors are expected to form a modern, advanced industrial system in the zone, according to local officials.

Large investment projects settling in zone include operations funded by Shanghai-based Cathay Biotech, solar power equipment producer Jolwood and lithium battery producer Housheng, which are both based in Jiangsu province.

Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone is also a test site of the province's institutional reforms, which aim to create a better business environment for enterprises.

These reform initiatives include the delegation of power in business registration and approval, streamlining licensing systems, whole-process assistance for enterprises' operations and policies for easier market access.

From the demonstration zone, these practices have been promoted to other development zones, as well as the whole province. This has led to substantial improvements in the business environment and a boom in entrepreneurship.

On June 22, Shanxi's development zones and industrial parks held a joint event for the signing of agreements, groundbreaking ceremonies and operation of investment projects. The event, the second of its kind this year, saw the signing of 321 projects, 302 groundbreakings and the operation of 189 projects.

Since August 2020, Shanxi has hosted eight such events, attracting the attention of business circles across the country and from overseas.

In the province as a whole, the boom in entrepreneurship is demonstrated in the steady growth of business entities.

According to the Shanxi Market Regulation Bureau, the number of business entities there reached 3.58 million by the end of June, an increase of 21.47 percent from the same period of 2021. The number of newly registered business entities reached 560,800 in the first half of this year, up 133.91 percent year-on-year.

The Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone recently applied to national authorities for its status to be lifted to a free trade zone and a national new area. The aim is to play a more important role in leading Shanxi's high-quality development and high-level opening-up, according to local officials.

Yan Jie contributed to this story.

Province uses herbal resources to grow TCM industry

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi is firmly on track to grow into a strong province of traditional Chinese medicine with a deep-rooted tradition, a rich variety of products and an enhanced service system, Feng Lizhong, spokesman for the Shanxi Health Commission, said at a news conference on Aug 1.

Feng, who is also the deputy chief of the commission and head of the Shanxi Center for Disease Control and Prevention, announced at the event that a set of new administrative regulations for the TCM sector were taking effect from the same day.

"The new regulations, with articles relating to TCM services, protection of TCM resources, industrial development, TCM inheritance and innovation, as well as market regulation, are expected to offer a sound policy and legal environment for the sector's healthy, sustainable and high-quality development," Feng told the news conference.



A forsythia farm in the county of Yicheng. LIU JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

The official said Shanxi has unique and rich resources for developing the TCM industry.

A recent survey shows that Shanxi is home to 1,788 varieties of medical herbs that can be used for making medicines. Of these varieties, the herbs of polygala root, forsythia, Chinese Baikal skullcap and Chinese thorowax account for 70 percent, 50 percent, 40 percent and 25 percent of the domestic market share. Ten vari-

eties, including hairy asiabell from Pingshun county, astragalus from Hengshan Mountain and forsythia from Anze county, have been granted national geographical indications.

In recent years, Shanxi has stepped up efforts in domesticating wild medical herbs and developing standardized herb farms.

According to Wang Shuanfu, an official at the Shanxi Department of Agricultural and Rural Affairs, Shanxi has now dedicated more than 230,000 hectares of land to the domesticated farming of herbs and another 67,000 hectares to standardized herb farming.

"These farms had an annual output of more than 500,000 metric tons in recent years, with annual sales revenue surpassing 8.2 billion yuan (\$1.21 billion)," Wang said. "More than 1,000 enterprises and cooperatives have been engaged in the farming and processing of medicinal herbs."

The huge market scale of the TCM

industry in Shanxi is also represented by the huge number of finished TCM products.

Statistics show that the province is home to 790 finished TCM products, including 113 varieties unique to Shanxi.

According to local media reports, Shanxi's TCM sector played a role in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. The province was among the first in China to propose TCM-focused therapies for the prevention and treatment of the virus.

Shanxi released an implementation plan for building a strong TCM industry in 2020, requiring more medical institutions focusing on TCM to be developed in the county-level administrative regions.

To date, 88 counties and cities in Shanxi have TCM hospitals and TCM clinics have been established in most townships, according to the Shanxi Health Commission.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

World of wonders awaits tourists at Yunqiu Mountain

By YUAN SHENGGAO

If tourists want a destination with multiple resources — natural wonders, cultural and historical legacies, rustic life, recreation and relaxation facilities — the Yunqiu Mountain scenic area in the Shanxi county of Xiangning would be a good choice.

Yunqiu Mountain, which was given the highest 5A ranking by the State's tourism authority in 2020, is now among the most popular destinations in the southwest of Shanxi province.

One of the unique attractions of the scenic area are nine old villages, which are included on the national

list of renowned ancient settlements.

The village of Ta'erpo is the most remarkable of the nine, which is said to have a history dating back about 2,500 years. It has 43 courtyards, each consisting of several cave rooms.

Cave rooms are unique dwellings on the Loess Plateau, which consists of the provinces of Shanxi and Shaanxi and other nearby regions.

Cave dwellings can be simple or sophisticated. The ones in Ta'erpo are classified as sophisticated because most have arched stone ceilings and ornamental interior structures.

Kangjiaping is another ancient village with a similar scale to Ta'erpo. Its 40-or-so courtyards are surrounded by lush mountains and a clear stream. Farmlands are scattered along the lower reaches of the stream.

Among the ancient buildings in the Yunqiu Mountain scenic area, the most spectacular is the Jade Emperor Tower. Sitting on top of Yunqiu's peak, at an altitude of 1,629 meters, the imposing tower is part of a Taoist temple complex originally built in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and rebuilt or renovated in the centuries that followed.

In addition to the ancient build-

ings, rich forms of folk art help to bring tourists to the scenic area. Visitors can be treated to a variety of performances, like local operas, dancing and singing shows, puppetry and the ancient techniques of making of bean curd and other local snacks.

The scenic area is also attractive to tourists with its unique natural resources. Yunqiu Mountain features limestone landforms that are rarely seen in North China.

Like the karst areas in the south, caves are abundant in Yunqiu Mountain. But unlike their southern cousins, the ones in Yunqiu are mostly ice caves.

Locals call them ice caves



The Jade Emperor Tower is the most spectacular building in the Yunqiu Mountain scenic area. ZHANG ZHIGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

qiu Mountain have opened to tourists.

To date, five such ice caves in Yun-

Zhang Zhigang contributed to this story.