



Business leaders from across China gather in the city of Taiyuan to attend the Innovation Annual Conference of the 2023 Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum on June 17-18. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Nation's top entrepreneurs dish out expertise at event



Jinshang merchants referenced at Yabuli Forum as inspiration to next generations

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A number of famed Chinese business leaders gathered in Taiyuan, the capital city of the North China province of Shanxi on June 17-18, sharing their insights on opening-up, innovation and economic transformation with local entrepreneurs and officials.

They were there to attend the Innovation Annual Conference of the 2023 Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum.

The event was jointly sponsored by the secretariat of the Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum and the Shanxi Department of Commerce. It was organized by the Shanxi Investment Promotion Bureau.

The Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum, initiated in 2001, is one of the most influential platforms for exchanges among entrepreneurs in China. It was named after Yabuli, a top ski resort and the event's inaugural host in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province.

The entrepreneurial spirit of the new era was one of the hot topics at

the event. The attendees agreed that those with a modern entrepreneurial spirit could draw inspiration from the values of the reputed Shanxi merchants, or Jinshang.

The Jinshang merchants refer to generations of businesspeople in Shanxi. It is said that Jinshang merchants dominated commercial circles in North China for about 500 years starting from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Many of these successful merchants began as small vendors selling products like tea and silk overseas. Over generations, they made their fortunes through hard work, trustworthy business operations and mutual assistance.

Many successful Shanxi merchants were known for their willingness to pay back to society in the areas where they started their business. Their contributions helped to improve the well-being of local residents, especially in the fields of education and infrastructure construction.

The event's attendees learned about these values through a visit to the Jinshang Museum prior to the opening ceremony, which was held at the museum on June 17.

Yu Minhong, founder of New Oriental Education and Technology Group, is the rotating chairman of the 2023 Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum. He said Shanxi's brilliant culture related to the Jinshang merchants and a longer history that spans more than 5,000 years, should be inspirational for the formation of a modern entrepreneurial spirit.

He said Shanxi is one of the cradles of Chinese commerce and featured a perfect combination of trade and finance during the heydays of the Jinshang merchants.

"Despite the interruption of Jinshang's business (some 100 years ago), the commercial tradition is still here," Yu said. "Shanxi's entrepreneurs still have the opportunity to grow their business to be better and stronger."

With the Jinshang values of hard work, honesty and collaboration still in place, Yu said Shanxi's businesspeople should be equipped with global vision and learn from international businesses.

Wang Linpeng, founder and board chairman of Chinese home decor giant Easyhome, said his company has been operating in Shanxi for more than 10 years.

"We have our partners in all the cities in Shanxi," Wang said. "The Shanxi businesspeople are always trustful partners because the traditional Jinshang values they uphold can still work as the basis for today's business development."

The event's participants also contributed their suggestions to Shanxi's high-quality development.

Yu of New Oriental said he is impressed with Shanxi's dynamic development as it is now carrying out an economic transformation campaign to reduce its reliance on coal mining and foster new growth areas.

He suggested Shanxi build an optimized and predictable business environment based on market rules and aligned to international prac-

tices so as to attract more investments to its various economic sectors.

He also said that Shanxi should make better use of the platform of the Yabuli China Entrepreneurs Forum for investment promotion.

He said the forum is a community for China's privately owned businesses.

"Among the Chinese private businesses on the 2022 Fortune Global 500 list, about half of them are members of the forum secretariat," Yu said. He added that the secretariat hopes to collaborate more with Shanxi's businesses, especially in the field of low-carbon and sustainable development.

The conference also served as showcase of Shanxi's latest development and business opportunities.

Jin Xiangjun, governor of Shanxi, said that the province is now implementing a series of strategies to boost local development. These include plans for economic transformation and energy revolution and the development of characteristic towns with local specialty industries.

The governor said that Shanxi's authorities are dedicating efforts to improve the business environment. There are a host of preferential policies to support the development of various market entities, especially private businesses. He hoped the conference's participants would take in-depth tours of Shanxi to find business opportunities and identify potential partners.

Yan Jie contributed to this story.

# Display of Shanxi culture dazzles guests at gala

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The 14th Annual Meeting of the New Champions, also known as the Summer Davos Forum, was held in the coastal city of Tianjin from Tuesday to Thursday.

More than 1,500 participants from business, political and academic circles throughout the world attended the three-day event.

Prior to the event's opening, attendees from home and abroad were treated to an evening gala hosted by Shanxi on Monday, tasting the genuine food and experiencing the culture and arts hailing from the North China province.

The evening gala was hosted by the Shanxi provincial government and organized by Shanxi Conference Group and a number of institutions under the provincial government. Its aim was to bring the province's cultural and tourism attractions as well as business opportunities into the spotlight during the most important international business event of the month in China, according to local officials.

More than 40 food and beverage varieties, including snacks, fruits and alcoholic drinks, which were deliberately selected by Shanxi Conference Group, were offered to guests at the party.

More strikingly, the food was contained in utensils made with Shanxi's unique and time-honored techniques. These included hand-polished lacquerware from Pingyao county, porcelain tableware from Yangquan city and glassware from Qixian county.

There were also food-making shows on-site, giving guests an idea of how these delicious food varieties were prepared and served.

Wang Zhanglong, a master chef of the famed Shanxi *daoxiaomian*, or knife-cut noodle, was one of the most popular performers at the shows.

Balancing a huge bowl of flour on his head and hauling a single-wheel cart equipped with a stove and pot, his presence aroused cheers and applause among the guests.

With all the equipment in place, he began to cut strips of noodles with his hands. After one minute, a serving of noodles was ready.

Tian Yuan, chairman of Chinese medical equipment producer Mevion, was offered a bowl of noodles.

He said Shanxi has made a unique effort to attract the attention of global businesspeople attending the Summer Davos Forum.

"Pleasing one's taste buds is the first step to win one's heart," Tian said. "On my part, I'd like to have an extensive tour of Shanxi someday now that I discovered the appeal of Shanxi food."

A guest from Africa was also pleased by the Shanxi food. He gave his thumbs-up time and time again when trying some varieties as he was unable to speak Chinese.

In addition to food, Shanxi's offerings also included shows of intangible heritage, arts and music.

Guo Meihua, a master paper-cutter, created her artworks at the gala. A guest surnamed Wu requested a paper-cut silhouette featuring his profile.

"In only one minute, you have a silhouette of great resemblance," Wu exclaimed.

Other on-site cultural heritage shows also included the making of wood-carving paintings, lacquerware and others.

At the evening gala, Shanxi's hosts also introduced the province's business opportunities to guests, which include the current economic transformation, the energy revolution move and the development of characteristic towns with local specialty industries, as well as landmark tourist attractions.

Yan Jie and An Xiaoyi contributed to this story.



Guests give a thumbs-up to Shanxi snacks during the evening gala in Tianjin on June 26. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Heritage campaign to develop province's tourism potential

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi province in North China is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization with a number of cultural heritage sites and ancient traditions still preserved intact to this day.

As these cultural assets are regarded as a source of pride among locals and a valuable resource for development, Shanxi province recently launched a campaign among the media to promote the local cultural attractions in a bid to develop tourism and enhance people's spiritual well-being.

In the first leg of this campaign named "Rediscovering the New Landmarks of Shanxi", the local Shanxi Evening News started a month of multimedia coverage of the central Shanxi city of Jinzhong on May 16.

Upon completion of this tour a month later, the newspaper's reporters said they have experienced many new things behind the unmovable cultural assets in the city, including touching stories behind the assets, an increasing enthusiasm for history and culture and the local authorities' determination to protect and revive the cultural legacies.

Jinzhong is a city standing at the center of Shanxi's historical and cul-

tural map, featuring cultures relating to both farming and commerce.

Wang Bing, head of the publicity department of the Jinzhong committee of the Communist Party of China, said that the city was the hub of business activities of the renowned Shanxi merchants, or Jinshang.

He said the Shanxi merchants were the pioneers of China's large-scale foreign trade business during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Their success in business has left a

precious legacy in Jinzhong, like their grand family courtyards scattered throughout the city.

The official said while protecting these cultural assets tops the local authorities' agenda, they also bear in mind how these assets can benefit local residents.

He said the new approach is to combine tourism with culture, creating a "cultural ecological system" through rediscovering the new values of culture and enhancing visitors' experience.

"Our mission is to bring these cultural assets to talk, giving tourists insights into the history and culture behind all the unmovable sites and intangible cultural heritage items," Wang said.

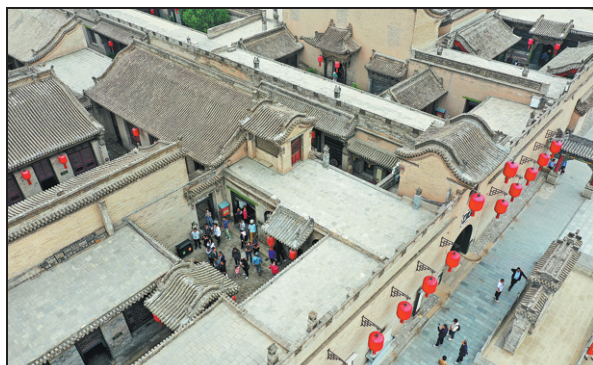
In the ancient city of Pingyao, for example, the local authorities are designing new tourism options based on its numerous old houses that used to be the headquarters of the Shanxi merchants' business.

A number of such premises have been converted into museums, with

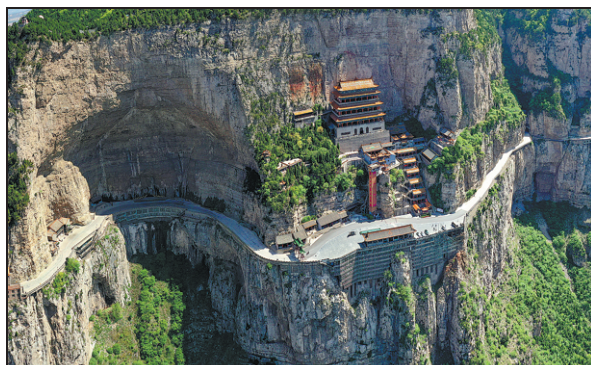
exhibits, pictures and multimedia demos telling the stories of the old firms, businesspeople and their families, giving tourists a vivid picture of the merchants as a whole.

Pingyao and other counties in Jinzhong are also capitalizing on developing characteristic towns based on their time-honored techniques relating to products like lacquerware and beef.

Shopping for lacquerware and beef is a part of the itinerary for many tourists to Pingyao.



From left: The Grand Courtyard of Qiao's Family in Jinzhong's Qixian county is a representative cultural asset left by the Jinshang merchants. Mianshan Mountain in Jiexiu county has its association with Jie Zitui, a renowned hermit during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). PHOTOS BY MA LIMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



The traditional techniques for Pingyao's hand-polished — or *tui-guang* — lacquerware made the national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2006. Those for beef production were included on the same list in 2008.

Pingyao now has more than 160 businesses — including companies, studios and household mills — in the production of hand-polished lacquerware, creating jobs for more than 5,600 local people. It is home to 22 large or medium-sized enterprises and 24 smaller mills producing beef with traditional techniques, with a total annual processing capacity of 32,000 metric tons.

Local officials told the Shanxi Evening News reporters that the development of characteristic industries and the tourism industry are complementary to each other.

"As more such products are sold to the country and the world, the recognition of Pingyao will increase among tourists," an official said. "The increase in tourists to Pingyao will also lead to more sales of the products."

The reporters' monthlong tour covered most of the cultural and tourist attractions in Jinzhong. Their experiences and findings have been presented to the public through the newspaper's multimedia means which include written stories, pictures and videos.

Zhang Yang contributed to this story.