

VISUAL

Villager dedicates life to greening mountainside

Concept of ecological development taking root in people's hearts



Wang Zizhong (left) and Wang Tao take a break during their patrol of the forest they planted near Ciyu village in Zibo city, Shandong province, on March 10. PHOTOS BY ZHAO DONGSHAN AND CHEN MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

By CHINA DAILY

Wang Zizhong, a 78-year-old farmer from Ciyu village in Shandong province, has devoted the past 42 years of his life to greening mountains and protecting forests alongside his 55-year-old son, Wang Tao.

Their unwavering dedication has transformed the barren mountains near their village into lush green landscapes, demonstrating Xi Jinping Thought on Ecological Civilization, and showing that the concept of green development is increasingly taking root in people's hearts.

In 1983, Wang Zizhong gazed upon the barren hills to the north of Ciyu and started thinking about planting trees on the desolate land. The lack of vegetation and severe soil erosion on the mountains had greatly impacted the livelihoods of the villagers.

He made the bold decision to leave his job as a rural teacher, rented the land from the local government and took on the task of greening the barren hills.

He led his family up the mountains, settling in a stone cave to begin the arduous journey of planting trees.

At that time, he and his wife left their two teenage sons in the cave while the couple dug holes for the trees on the slopes. Due to the lack of roads, Wang Zizhong had to carry sacks of seedlings on his shoulders up the mountains, walking several kilometers to fetch water.

Each load could only water seven or eight trees, requiring dozens of trips each day.

The family would stay on the mountains for

over a month at a time, sleeping on makeshift beds in the stone cave, surviving on water from the mountain streams and simple meals of pancakes and pickled vegetables.

As the pancakes hardened over time, Wang Zizhong would soak them in water to make them easier to eat.

In 1997, Wang Zizhong's wife passed away suddenly from a heart attack while on the mountains due to accumulated fatigue.

Despite the devastating loss, Wang Zizhong's determination to green the barren hills remained unshaken. He continued to live and work on the mountains, planting trees without pause.

Over the course of 42 years, the Wang family overcame numerous hardships and planted over 200,000 trees, including cypress, locust and poplar, covering more than 133 hectares.

Their efforts transformed the once desolate mountains into a big patch of forest, leaving behind an invaluable "green treasure" for future generations.

In 2002, the 50-plus hectares of forest planted by Wang Zizhong and his family were designated as a national public welfare forest. Wang Zizhong took on the responsibility of guarding the forest while continuing planting more trees.

In 2017, as Wang Zizhong grew older, he passed on the task of forest protection to his son.

Wang Tao, who had been influenced by his father since childhood, eagerly took up the baton, tirelessly working in the forests every day to continue the family's legacy of greening and protecting the mountains.



Wang Zizhong (fifth from left) promotes forest protection and fire prevention to his fellow villagers on March 10.



Wang Zizhong (left) and Wang Tao walk toward the slope where they plan to plant more trees on March 5.



Wang Tao (left) supports his father while walking on their patrol route in the forest.



From left: The father and son check the health of trees in the forest on March 10. After a day's work, Wang Zizhong (right) prepares to eat his dinner at home on March 10.