

# CHINA



Huang Dafa walks along the side of the Dafa Canal in Caowangba village, Zunyi, Guizhou province, in 2018. LIU XU / XINHUA

## A want for water leads to village's prosperity

Huang Dafa was determined to create canal in hometown



By **LUO WANGSHU**  
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An elderly man from a remote village deep in mountains became well-known nationwide for building a canal to bring water to local residents.

The man, 85-year-old Huang Dafa, has lived his entire life in Caowangba village in Zunyi, Guizhou province.

For 36 years, he dedicated himself to one thing — leading villagers to create and then maintain a 9.4-kilometer-long “life canal” along the side of karst mountains to bring fresh water to the village.

With the irrigation channel in place, people in Caowangba finally had sufficient drinking water and could irrigate rice and other crops,

boosting their incomes and improving their quality of life.

The channel is named the “Dafa Canal” in Huang’s honor.

On June 29, Huang became one of 29 people who received the July 1 Medal conferred by the Communist Party of China Central Committee to outstanding members.

Huang has been dubbed the modern “Yu Gong”, a figure in China’s folklore.

According to legend, Yu insisted on moving two mountains in front of his home so that he could lead a more convenient life.

Mocked and questioned by neighbors, Yu was nonetheless devoted to the task. Impressed by his efforts, gods helped him move the mountains.

Huang did not receive help from the gods, but his persistence made the impossible possible.

Born in 1936, both his parents died when he was young, so his neighbors brought him up,

Bringing water to Caowangba had been a long-cherished dream for the residents. Things started to change in 1959, when Huang became a leader in the village.

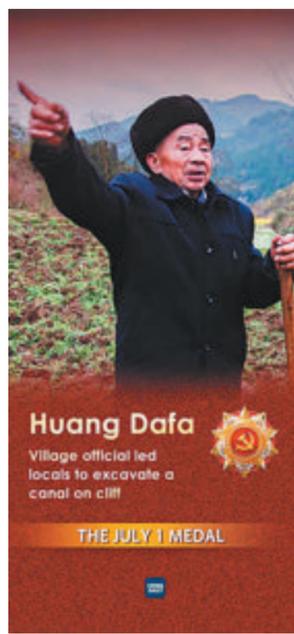
“I decided to do three things for the villagers: bring water to the village, build a road and provide access to electricity,” Huang said, recalling his early days.

He found that a village near Caowangba had water to spare, but the problem was that a mountain lay between them. Nevertheless, he took on the task.

Things did not go well at first. Knowing very little about water conservancy, Huang was not able to build a workable canal, and after more than 10 years, water remained a pipe dream.

Although some people said that Caowangba would never get access to water, Huang never lost hope.

At the age of 53, while he was working temporarily at the local water management station, he start-



ed to study water conservancy technology on his own.

After three years, he learned a great deal about canal digging and was determined to achieve his dream.

With his newfound knowledge and persistence, he raised money from the local government.

Starting in 1992, Huang oversaw the efforts of 200 people to dig the canal.

Their work paid off in 1995 when water rushed into Caowangba through a 7,200-meter main canal and 2,200 meters of branch canals.

With ample water now available, people were able to transform their nonirrigated farmland and grow rice. Huang then helped the village increase the rice-growing area to 48 hectares.

The same year, the village gained access to electricity, and a new road was built. All three projects were overseen by Huang.

He also helped build two schools — one in the 1960s and another in the 1990s.

As the days passed, the villagers increased their incomes thanks to the improved land and living conditions. Huang’s efforts won him the titles of “National Model Worker” and “Model of the Times”.

Following retirement, he occasionally gives inspirational talks to young Party members about the difficult process of canal building and the hardships undertaken by CPC members.

Yang Fan contributed to this story.

## Anti-desertification push in Xinjiang shows promise

By **XING WEN** and **MAO WEIHUA** in Urumqi

The Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region has restored about 1.89 million hectares of desertified land in the past five years, officials from the Xinjiang Forestry and Grassland Bureau said earlier this month.

Situated in the hinterland of the Eurasian continent, Xinjiang has an arid climate with long hours of sunshine, intense evaporation and little precipitation. It has three deserts — the Taklimakan, Gurbantunggut and Kumtag — and a vast area of sandy land, and its arid climate has led to severe desertification in the region, Xu Hongxing, deputy director of the bureau, said.

He added that effective action is required to combat desertification and protect the fragile environment. Supported by the central government, Xinjiang has been carrying out the Three-North Shelter Forest Project, turning marginal farmland into forests and grassland, conserving water and soil and setting up closed-off protection zones of desertified land in recent years.

“The region has made notable progress in revegetation and desertification reversal,” Xu said.

He said that a “forest chief” program, a supervisory system to better evaluate how forestry departments achieve their goals in protecting and expanding forests and grassland, has been rolled out in the region.

“We’ve been working to enhance the quality, stability and the carbon absorption capacity of forest environments to curb illegal acts that destroy forests and grasslands, and improve the abili-

ty to prevent and control fires and biohazards,” he said, adding that more than 50 percent of the farmland in sandy areas have adopted water-saving irrigation systems.

Xu also noted that Xinjiang continues taking economic benefits into consideration while managing desertification.

Fruit orchards, medicinal herbs and other economic crops have been widely planted as a part of the afforestation projects. There were more than 90,667 hectares of drought-resistant plants, such as goji berries, roses, licorice and sea buckthorns, by the end of last year.

Hotan prefecture, located on the southern edge of the Taklimakan Desert, has suffered from wind and sand erosion for generations.

Rose willow, which is wind resistant and good for stabilizing the sand, is one of the species being grown on a large scale in the prefecture to control desertification and promote agriculture.

Strips of it can be used as skewers for cooking mutton and other kinds of meat and also as material for weaving baskets, griddles and other tools. Additionally, it’s a host plant for *cistanche herba*, a type of parasitic flower that has high economic value.

“The *cistanche herba* is hailed as ‘desert ginseng’ and known for its tonic properties,” said Imin Barat, a farmer who grows the flower, along with rose willow, in Lop county, Hotan.

“Once the tonic herbs are ripe, companies come to purchase the yield. That brings us healthy profits.”

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People build a hay barrier to combat desertification at the Taklimakan Desert in Qiemo county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in March. GAO HAN / XINHUA

## Globe-trotting senior visits five continents, says travel an ‘attitude’

By **CHEN MEILING** in Beijing and **FENG ZHIWEI** in Changsha

Have you ever thought of traveling around the world? Yi Jiufan will tell you it can be more than a dream.

Over the last 27 years, the 87-year-old from Changsha, Hunan province, has visited 27 countries on five continents, including Singapore, Russia, South Africa, the United States and the Netherlands. The total cost was about 400,000 yuan (\$61,900).

Three of the four walls of his living room are studded with his travel photos, each bearing labels like “Africa”, “Oceania”, “Europe”, “America” and “Asia”. His travel diaries are more than 300,000 words long, and he has about 7,000 photos and 150 compact discs recording his trips.

Yi’s experiences had received about 120 million views on Sina Weibo by last month. One netizen commented that he has done something that many young people have always wanted to do. Others said he was lucky to have spent most of his retirement traveling, instead of staying at home and taking care of grandchildren like many older people in China.

For Yi, travel is just an attitude. “Some retired people play mahjong and drink alcohol every day, but I don’t like that. Travel broadens my horizons and allows me to make friends. It’s also a form of exercise. It has a lot of benefits,” he said.

Yi retired as a grassroots community worker at the age of 53.

After that, he opened a store with his wife selling and renting books and videotapes. Now the store sells stone carvings instead. He said that he always wanted to see famous world attractions, learn new things and meet new people, but he didn’t have time when he was younger.



Yi Jiufan at his home in Changsha, Hunan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In 1994, Yi made his first journey, a trip to Beijing, and discovered the pleasure of travel. In 2008, he went abroad for the first time, visiting Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand for 11 days. Following trips to Asian countries, he took a 15-hour flight to South Africa when he was 80.

“Some thought I was a wealthy Chinese person, but I’m just a farmer,” he joked, adding that he never bought expensive items, but brought back souvenirs — miniature versions of the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower and Big Ben are among his collection.

Yi knew no English but did not find that was a problem.

“We can communicate with gestures. Besides, the tour guide helped,” he said. If he wanted to take photos with people he met on the way, he would show them travel photos on his phone and they quickly understood what he wanted. He said he has

made hundreds of new acquaintances on his trips.

### Special tips

He said his most impressive travel experience was to Vietnam in 2013 with a group of special friends: a visually impaired massage therapist, a disabled man and a recently recovered lung cancer patient. Yi himself lost his spleen after a fall while hanging a banner over a stage when he was 35.

The massage therapist, Zhou Yunhui, said he liked to travel, too, but few people were willing to go with him because of his impairment. Yi was different, he said.

The four friends visited major attractions in Vietnam and looked after each other during the six-day trip. They became closer afterward, he said.

There have also been difficult moments. In 2014, Yi was on a pack-

age tour to Hawaii. When he finished a tour at a museum, he suddenly discovered that everyone else had gone. “I had to go to the next stop, Pearl Harbor, by myself, but the tour guide soon found me,” he said.

“I carried a card every time I went abroad. On it, in both Chinese and English, was my name, the name of the travel agency and the telephone number of the tour guide, so people could help me,” he added.

For Yi, the most important part of travel is learning about different cultures, and sharing what he’s learned with friends, so he always asks a lot of questions and is always busy taking photos or filming.

While looking through one thick travel diary, Yi stopped at a page written about his first overseas journey to the Grand Palace in Thailand, Chinatown in Singapore and the Petronas Twin Towers in Malaysia. He pointed to photos of parasailing. “It was so much fun! I shot videos for everyone. But when it was my turn, it was too dark to go,” he said.

He usually spends a week writing his diaries after returning from a trip. He also invites neighbors to watch his videos. “It’s great to share beautiful memories,” he said.

When he was younger, his family supported his wish to travel. Now approaching 90, his children don’t want him to go anymore, but Yi is determined.

His wife, Zhang Yuqing, said that she has traveled with him to Jiangxi, Sichuan and Hubei provinces but has not been abroad because of poor health. “I remember that we had fun wherever we went. How can I ask him not to travel? He wouldn’t listen anyway,” she said.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yi’s last overseas trip was to Myanmar in 2019.

Zhu Youfang in Changsha contributed to this story.

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## Old ties still celebrated in ancient maritime hub

FUZHOU — It was just before noon. Fifty-year-old Fu Ruichang, drenched in sweat, was busy grilling a suckling pig outside his restaurant in the Nanshan community in the city of Quanzhou in East China’s Fujian province.

The pig, a traditional dish from Bali, would be served to dozens of foreign students.

Nanshan is home to more than 500 overseas Chinese returnees, particularly from Bali. It is planted with lush tropical plants like palm trees and jackfruit, and the houses have red rooftop finials reminiscent of the houses in the famous Southeast Asian travel destination.

In October, with the support of the local government, Nanshan set up an Indonesian food street to celebrate the area’s cultural diversity.

Fu was among the first to open a restaurant.

Born and raised in Quanzhou, he learned how to make Indonesian food from his parents, who spent the first few decades of their lives in Bali. His dishes have been praised by Indonesian customers as authentic.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he imported ingredients and spices directly from Indonesia, and Quanzhou and Bali share a long history of exchange.

Spices were one of Indonesia’s major exports along the Maritime Silk Road. Quanzhou was the starting point of the ancient route and a maritime hub of the East and Southeast Asia trade networks between the 10th and 14th centuries. On July 25, that past was recognized as the city became China’s 56th UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In 1961, together with hundreds of other ethnic Chinese, 19-year-old Cai Jinji sailed from Bali to settle in Quanzhou, which is home to many overseas Chinese returnees.

Sixty years later, Cai still speaks fluent Indonesian. After retirement, he began teaching the language to children in Nanshan during school vacations.

Residents keep memories of Indonesia alive in other ways. Many wear sarongs, traditional Indonesian attire, or clothing made from batik, a colorful traditional print. In the evenings, they dance to Indonesian songs in the community square.

These aspects have made Nanshan a center of bilateral exchange. For decades before the pandemic, people from Indonesia and China visited each other every year.

Fu visited Bali for the first time in 2001. “I learned Indonesian from my parents and, to my surprise, I was able to communicate with the Balinese without any problem,” Fu said.

“We even had the same accent. It gave the place a sense of familiarity.”

Cai has been to Bali more than 10 times since 1996. As a core member of the community’s art club, he once took a young group to Bali to give performances that combined Chinese and Indonesian styles.

“Chinese Indonesians have learned more about modern China from these kinds of exchanges,” Cai said. “They admire our lives here, especially the favorable policies for the elderly.”

Aside from cultural exchanges, Nanshan and Bali have also helped each other during times of difficulty.

“Last year when the epidemic was severe in China, people in Bali mailed many face masks to us,” said Luo Ping, Party secretary of Nanshan Community, adding that the community has sent many masks this year to Bali to return the goodwill.