

CHINA

Retiree, 97, uses pension to aid pupils

Former researcher commended for donating 2m yuan to help poor students

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At a conference last month to commend people who made outstanding contributions to poverty alleviation, the sight of an elderly woman in a wheelchair receiving a medal and certificate from President Xi Jinping touched many onlookers.

Over the past 15 years, 97-year-old Xia Sen has given most of her personal savings to help students from poor families gain an education.

Born in September 1923, Xia worked as a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences before retiring in 1982.

In 2006, she started providing financial support to students in Danfeng county, Shaanxi province, and Shangyou county, Jiangxi province. She has donated more than 2 million yuan (\$307,800) to help 182 students attend college.

According to Cao Qizhang, who worked with Xia for more than 30 years, the money she donates comes from her and her husband's pensions.

The nonagenarian joined the Communist Party of China in Yan'an, Shaanxi, in 1938.

Xia was only 15 years old at the time and despite her young years she became a teacher in Yan'an. While teaching she kept acquiring new knowledge in the belief that the development of society relied on well-educated young people.

"When she was working at CASS, she often told us to keep on reading and learning," Cao told the China Media Group.

Donation

In 2006, Xia visited Xijie Primary School in Danfeng. The dilapidated condition of the school and lack of facilities and teaching materials saddened her.

During her visit, she borrowed 20,000 yuan from friends and acquaintances and immediately bought desks and books for the students.

She soon took out another 20,000 yuan from her savings to reward and encourage outstanding students at the school.

In 2008, she donated 200,000 yuan and helped Zhaogou Primary School in Danfeng construct a teaching building.

"It is a two-story building with eight bright and clean classrooms, which is a complete change from its former situation," said Li Baoying, principal of the school.

The previous teaching building was made of earth and wood, dimly lit and unsafe, he said.

"In winter, students often felt so cold that they had to bring a coal heater from home to keep themselves warm," he said. "Now it's totally different."

Scholarship

In 2013, Xia used 1 million yuan of her savings to set up the "Xia Sen Scholarship" to support high school and college students from impoverished families in the two counties.

So far, at least 182 students have benefited or are benefiting from the scholarship.

Lai Houfang, from Shangyou, is one of them. Xia's scholarship supported her in completing a four-year teaching degree. She's now a teacher



Xia Sen with her medal and certificate at a conference held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to mark China's accomplishments in poverty eradication on Feb 25. LIU BIN / XINHUA

in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

"I made up my mind that I would learn from Granny Xia and use my strength to help others, from the first day I received support from her," Lai said.

"After graduation I went to teach in Xinjiang, which is where I was needed," she said.

Another beneficiary of Xia's scholarship from Danfeng, who chose to remain anonymous, was admitted to Tsinghua University in 2015.

In 2018, he and other students who received the Xia Sen Scholarship went to her home to visit her.

To his surprise, Xia and her husband led a very simple life and the furniture in their home was ordinary. "I was moved by Granny and her husband, both of whom are members of the Communist Party of China," he said. "At that time, I was planning to submit an application to join the CPC. By visiting Granny Xia and her husband, I had a deeper understanding of CPC members."

Cao said the couple have always lived a frugal life and say they have enough food and clothes and don't need much.

"But in terms of helping students, they always say that what they have done is far from enough," she said.

"She often says her life has improved so much compared with what she had in Yan'an decades ago. Now her only hope is that her money can be used to help students."

Project leader shoots for the stars

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Born on Mid-Autumn Festival day in 1968 when the moon was full, Zhang Yuhua has always believed her destiny was intertwined with exploring the universe.

A member of the scientific and technological committee of the Shanghai Academy of Spaceflight Technology and the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp, Zhang has been a key player in China's major achievements in space exploration.

She worked as the deputy chief commander of both the Chang'e 5 lunar exploration project and Tianwen 1, China's first Mars mission.

Zhang formed a powerful team for the Chang'e 5 mission, which made the world's first unmanned docking and transfer of moon samples during a lunar orbit in December. Chang'e 5 brought back the first lunar samples in 44 years, and China became only the third country to return samples from the surface of the moon.

Her team also overcome major difficulties facing the Tianwen 1



Zhang Yuhua at an exhibition in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mission, which was launched in July, such as the long flight time, developing sophisticated control systems and managing complicated space maneuvers.

The 5-metric-ton probe, which

consists of two major parts — the orbiter and the landing capsule — had flown for 224 days and about 475 million kilometers as of March 4, according to the China National Space Administration.

It entered its preset orbit above Mars on Feb 24 and will remain there for about three months before releasing its landing capsule.

"My three decades of work experience coincided with the country's development from the era of manned space flight to lunar probe and deep space exploration," said Zhang, who works at such a rapid pace that her young colleagues struggle to keep up with her.

Career choice

Born in Huzhou, Zhejiang province, Zhang was a straight-A student at school. She said she could have applied to study at prestigious universities such as Peking or Tsinghua, but decided to attend the National University of Defense Technology in Changsha, Hunan province. Part of her decision was based on the lower cost of living there.

After graduation, Zhang, who

dreamed of becoming a scientist since childhood, obtained a job at the Shanghai academy and started designing the power systems of spacecrafts, a novel research field at the time.

"People mocked scientific research in the 1990s and said that selling tea eggs was a better job than making atomic bombs," she said. "But I didn't give up. Major aerospace projects were launched one after another, and those days laid a foundation for China's achievements today."

Aerospace research and development requires meticulous work of the highest quality. Industry insiders said that the public only notices the successes, but a high chance of failure is the reality of such work.

Zhang said when a consultation group raised a query about a project they were working on, the team would do hundreds of experiments and tests to address their concerns.

Accountability

Zha Xuelei, who is on the same committee as Zhang at the Shanghai academy and the deputy chief designer of the Chang'e 5 probe system, said the success rate of a space flight is around 50 percent. Even successful missions have high inci-

dences of breakdowns.

Zhang said: "If an average company encounters difficulties, it may have the opportunity to just return the money to the client and admit that they cannot do it. But we can't. There are usually more than 100 institutions and more than 10,000 workers involved in an aerospace mission and many on the big team await the success of our steps to carry on that mission."

Women are usually in the minority of aerospace project teams, but Zhang said she rarely encounters gender issues in her daily work.

"Women have strong perseverance and a sense of responsibility as well as advantages in team work such as observation and intelligence," she said, referring to female colleagues who worked on the Chang'e 3 and Cheng'e 4 missions.

Zhang said when she worked at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province, she would often look up to the starry sky and think of what lay ahead for her and her colleagues.

"We'll go farther with our space probes for sure, which may broaden people's understanding of humanity's past and future and find potential options for the Earth as its resources are limited," she said.

Colorful ethnic art exhibition delights Shanghai

SHANGHAI — The Shanghai Museum of Glass is currently hosting an exhibition of Pingpo Miao paintings, which has been received with great fanfare by art aficionados.

The unique paintings are all created by a group of female villagers from mountainous areas of Guizhou province in southwestern China.

The paintings originated from the province's Pingpo village, Longli county, which is a major settlement of the Xiaohua Miao, a branch of the Miao ethnic group.

"These paintings amazed me when I first saw them. They are truly

vibrant," said Lei Jia, curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition, which offers glimpses into the Miao ethnic culture, kicked off on Feb 7 and has attracted more than 10,000 visitors.

Pingpo Miao paintings are mainly done by female artists ages 20 to 80, who unleash their creativity after a day of farm work and domestic chores.

They learn the art form from elderly villagers, absorbing it through personal examples and verbal instructions.

However, many of the female painters can hardly afford the painting materials, said Lei. The number

of female painters has also dwindled to around 20 as they have less leisure time to paint, he said.

Inspired by traditional customs and beliefs, Pingpo Miao paintings are full of beautiful and creative images. They depict changes in the daily lives of the Xiaohua Miao people in an authentic and vivid manner.

The female artists use abstract patterns to illustrate water and fish and the never-ending cycle of life.

To help more people understand the Miao ethnic art, the Shanghai Museum of Glass has created a modern neon installation as part of the exhibition. The

installation, named *Butterfly*, uses colorful neon pipes to reconstruct the symbol of the Miao people's ethnic origin.

Zhang Lin, director of the Shanghai Museum of Glass, said, "Visitors love these artworks created by passionate artists living in the mountainous regions of China as their works embody the originality of Chinese folk art."

The exhibition has also opened a window for visitors to experience their world, paving the way for a dialogue between the Miao culture and urban lifestyle, Zhang said.



A painter from Pingpo village in Longli county, Guizhou province, introduces her work to visitors at an exhibition held in Qianxinan prefecture, Guizhou, in July. LONG YI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Craftsman replicates fleet of explorer

KUNMING — After more than 600 years, the fleet of legendary Chinese navigator Zheng He has been brought back to life by Fu Kunxiang, a craftsman from Yunnan province.

During the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Zheng's fleet sailed to dozens of countries and regions in Asia and Africa, several decades before Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas.

"There are no seas around my hometown in Yunnan, but it was the birthplace of Zheng He," Fu said, sharing his inspiration behind creating the replicas.

In honor of Zheng's accomplishments, Fu decided to create models of the ancient fleet in 2012. But the 55-year-old craftsman, who developed a passion for such models at the age of 13, had no idea how tough the work would be back then.

Since the design and building plans of the fleet had long been lost to history, Fu had to travel across the country visiting experts of ancient sailboats and manufacturing sites connected to Zheng's fleet to form plans of his own.

"We don't know how many times we failed in the process of building just a single treasure ship," Fu said.

After three years of effort and an investment of over 10 million yuan (\$1.54 million), Fu and his team of more than 70 members finally replicated Zheng's fleet on a 1:50 scale.

The fleet consists of 208 model ships, including Zheng's flagship, 61 treasure ships and other vessels with various functions. It will require an exhibition area spanning more than 5,000 square meters to fully showcase the models. Fu, however, is not satisfied with what he has achieved and is determined to take on a bigger challenge — a more delicate model series on a scale of 1:100.

"I want to create models featuring cultural relics and use them to reproduce the exquisite shipbuilding skills of China more than 600 years ago," he said.

Fu spent several years honing his craft, visiting coastal provinces such as Fujian and Guangdong to acquire shipbuilding skills.

"The smallest pulley used on my ship models is only 2 millimeters long, and there is also a 0.5-mm-long bearing between the pulleys," he said. "I had to make over 100 pulleys for a ship model and sometimes even used a magnifying glass in the process."

Fu adopted a slew of construction techniques from ancient China, including using mortise and tenon joints to create his models.

"I want to use my ship models as a medium for illustrating the intangible cultural heritage of China," he said.

In 2019, a German museum took one of Fu's treasure ship models into its collection.

"I am very pleased that my work has been recognized," he said, adding that it will take three to five years to finish his new model series.

"I hope to exhibit my models in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative in the future," Fu said.

XINHUA