



Loyal son of the soil

Former soldier defies age to continue serving the people by combating desertification, **Xing Wen** and **Mao Weihua** report.

“In some people’s minds, Wang is a hero who has devoted himself to bringing benefit to the city and its people. Meanwhile, some onlookers might hold that he is a fool who fails to keep abreast with the times.”

Chen Siqing, playwright of stage play *I’m Wang Chengbang*

A summer breeze gently blows through the woods, ruffling the tree branches along the banks of the Kongque River in Korla, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

This is how the favorite season for Wang Chengbang, 85, announces itself. Those green, lush trees that serve as a shelter to check sandstorms which used to hit the area, prevent soil erosion, purify the air and shade passersby from the hot sun, are glowing with vitality.

Korla, the capital of the Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture, sits just 70 kilometers away from the Taklimakan Desert. It is an arid place once surrounded by deserts, the Gobi Desert and barren mountains. However, an incredible gardening and afforestation drive has been made to control desertification in and around Korla over the past few decades, and now it is among the country’s model cities in environmental protection.

“Trees are the region’s lifeblood,” says Wang, who has volunteered to plant more than 1.5 million trees including poplars, willows and elms in the city over the past 30 years, creating large leafy expanses on both banks of the Kongque River.

Although his sunburnt face and hands are wrinkled, the old man, wearing a faded green army uniform, is still ramrod straight and radiates optimism.

Before he retired from the army and settled in Korla in 1988, Wang was a deputy chief of staff of a



Top: Wang Chengbang (right), retired army officer and a volunteer at the gardening and greening bureau of Korla, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, helps allocate tasks to the workers.

Above: Wang walks in a willow wood he cultivated in Korla.

PHOTOS BY ZHANG XIAOLONG / XINHUA

PLA division in Kuqa of the Aksu prefecture.

Instead of enjoying the relaxed life of retirement like many others in their 50s, Wang applied to be a volunteer with Korla’s gardening and greening bureau, helping with afforestation efforts via cultivating seedlings and planting trees day after day.

“We’d study how to cultivate saplings with a high survival rate on our own to save the cost of buying saplings from outside the city,” says Wang.

He also worked out water-efficient irrigation systems to help save water and endeavored to diversify

the types of tree species in the city.

He who plants a tree plants hope, he believes. His dedication to afforestation has not only brought hope to the city, but also, to some extent, worked miracles for himself.

In 2005, he was diagnosed with lung cancer and was told that he only had six months to live. However, he insisted on taking care of his beloved trees till the last minute of life rather than lying on the hospital bed.

Six months passed, and he was still alive. He felt that the pain in his lung gradually eased. After a physical examination, he found that the cancer cells had miracu-

lously disappeared.

“I often occupy myself with weeding the fields, trimming the branches and forking over the soil without noticing the time or thinking about the pain. Then, they’ve all gone,” Wang says.

Recently, he has been working at a sapling cultivation site in the suburbs of Korla from 9 am to dusk every day. His lunch is usually oven-baked bread and a few bottles of water.

Why does Wang live such an ascetic life? A stage play, titled *I’m Wang Chengbang*, has been produced by the Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture’s culture center to explore the spiritual world of the heroic ex-soldier who takes “serving the people” as his life motto.

More than 40 cast members, mainly from the Xinjiang Theatrical Troupe, are undergoing intensive practice and rehearsals to prepare for its debut in June.

Playwright Chen Siqing and some other members from the play’s production unit have visited places Wang once lived in or worked at and interviewed many people around him.

Chen found out that after Wang was invalidated out of the army, he was once offered a chance to be a financial supervisor for a local company. And some of his friends also asked him to join them to run a business at a flourishing wholesale market in Korla. However, he just declined the lucrative opportunities. Instead, he chose to do volunteer labor to green the city.

“In some people’s minds, Wang is a hero who has devoted himself to bringing benefit to the city and its people. Meanwhile, some onlookers might hold that he is a fool who fails to keep abreast with the times,” says Chen. “We want to explore Wang’s spiritual world through the art form of a play.”

The play involves a group of actors who would step into different formations from time to time and use the variety of body postures to help create a certain atmosphere onstage. They also provide commentary on actions and events that were taking place in front of the audience with recitation, sometimes in the local dialects of Xinjiang.

“In this way, a sarcastic contrast between those who vie to chase after personal interests and Wang, a man who always prioritizes collective interests of the country and its people, will be displayed,” says Wan Liming, the play’s chief director and also a teacher with Shanghai Theater Academy.

Wan adds that he doesn’t want to portray Wang as a mentally strong hero but depict him as a common person, who would get lost or feel confused at certain stages of life.

“For instance, the play shows Wang’s frailty when he is diagnosed with cancer,” says Wan. “On that scene of the play, we’ve also adopted expressionistic style to retrospect his 33 years in the army to probe into how he became so patriotic and willing to make self-sacrifice.”

Wan says that the play will also present how Korla has changed over the past three decades. And the local cultures and customs will also be integrated into the play.

“The play is created not just for theatergoers but a wider group of audience,” Wan says.

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Guiyang legal clinic serves up remedy of justice

On a tour of the comprehensive service center for the Jinyuan community in Guiyang, the capital of Southwest China’s Guizhou province, the last thing I ever expected our guide to say was, “This is our legal clinic.”

A red sign with the Chinese characters for “legal clinic” hung just above the door, and inside, behind a desk, sat a middle-aged man wearing a military green button-down shirt. As I

peered inside, I noted the curious smile on his face, as if he were just as surprised to find a foreigner observing him from the hallway as I was to discover this clinic. Never before had I seen a lawyer

within the walls of a community service center anywhere in the world.

“Pardon me, but could I ask you a few questions?” I said to him, as I stepped into the clinic with an outstretched hand and my fascination.

He introduced himself as Liu Yuanhe, the head of the clinic’s legal team and a retired soldier from the People’s Liberation Army. While his career as a lawyer dated back to 1996, when he passed exams to become certified in the profession, he had been involved in legal aid service in the community over the past year. Liu said the clinic, which had officially opened its doors in January, helped people free of charge with anything at all involving the law. While typical cases involved matters like contract disputes and recovering unpaid wages, he emphasized they handled any legal problem and would even file lawsuits, if needed, at no cost. In his view, the work he did at the clinic was part of a selfless dedication to give back to society.

Moreover, he stressed the importance of justice to people’s well-being. “What do people want? They want some form of happiness. What is the essence of happiness? I think it is a kind of social fairness and justice.”

He invited me up to the center’s second floor, where he walked me through the larger, additional office for the legal aid clinic, with a conference table, a desk, and a sign bearing his namesake — Liu Yuanhe — in bold white characters set against a royal blue background. Liu had a buoyancy about him throughout our conversation and the brief tour, as if uplifted by his noble work of serving the people through the law.

The entire encounter with Liu and his clinic stirred up a slew of emotions within me.

While I knew of legal aid clinics growing up in the United States, I had never once seen one housed within a community there. And US legal aid often came with glaring exceptions, reserving free help for the neediest groups only, such as the homeless and destitute. Average Americans, meanwhile, must generally fend for themselves in a legal system where real justice eludes those who can’t afford lawyers.

But here was a community in Guiyang, which, in opening a legal aid clinic within its service center, had elevated the pursuit of justice to become a common good for everyone, based on need, not wealth.

Liu’s clinic is a model not just for China, but also the entire world. If we ever hope to achieve justice for all, it might just start with building into every community a humble office with the words “legal clinic” affixed above the door, open to anyone seeking free help with the law.

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Flower grower sees business blossom

By **MA ZHENHUAN** and **LI XUEQING** in Jiaxing, Zhejiang



land rental, dividends and product sales.

On Oct 29, 2008, Xi Jinping, then vice-president of China, visited Miaojia village and encouraged Chai to fully develop his flower-growing business, assuring him that the rural farm land transfer and circulation policy will get full government support.

“It is after the conversation with Xi in 2008 that I decided to stay with the flower business, enhancing my initial investment and witnessing economic benefits from the company growing year-on-year,” recalls Chai.

So far, his company has doubled its income of 2008, and has opened sales outlets in Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang, forming a complete industrial chain which links flower-seed cultivation, growing, sales and

marketing. Chai has also helped over 100 fellow farmers in the town to grow flowers since 2008, making Dayun town the largest fresh flower production base in Zhejiang with a total plantation area of over 367 hectares.

With the province’s call to make rural Zhejiang a picturesque “big garden” in the thriving rural tourism era, Chai says he is now considering developing new products such as cut flower bunches and potted plants to enable tourists to bring them back to their hometowns.

So far, more than 98 percent of the rural farm lands in Miaojia are transferable, offering great potential to the rising rural income for the local farmers. The village registered a collective income of 13.8 million yuan (\$2.14 million) last year, with per capita rural income surpassing 50,000 yuan, six times and five times of those in 2008 respectively.

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Chai Jinfu has helped more than 100 farmers in Dayun town to plant flowers in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Chai Jinfu, flower grower, Jiaxing, Zhejiang province