Capital of vinegar honored by pair of national organizations

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Qingxu county in central Shanxi province has been recognized as "the capital of vinegar in China", the county government said on Jan 8.

According to a document released by the China National Light Industry Council and the National Food Management Center of China Light Industry, Qingxu is so named for its long history and high-quality vinegar production.

Liu Zixia, vice-mayor of Qingxu, said at the Jan 8 news conference that Qingxu is the largest production base of vinegar products in the nation. It has 45 certified vinegar producers, which collectively produce 700,000 metric tons of edible vinegar each year. This accounts for about 80 percent of Shanxi's and nearly 30 percent of China's total vinegar output.

She added that the county is home to two nationally and 14 provincially well-known trademarks in the edible vinegar industry. Local enterprises have developed more than 200 product varieties that are being sold across China and in more than 20 foreign countries. The vinegar industry generated a combined revenue of 7 billion yuan ($1.08 billion) last year.

Liu said Shanxi's and the nation's vinegar industry originated in Qingxu, with a history of about 2,500 years.

"Qingxu is especially renowned for its matured vinegar. The centuries-old techniques for vinegar making, which involve steaming, fermenting, smoking and maturing, were included on the national list of intangible cultural heritage in 2006," she said.

Among the many vinegar-producing enterprises throughout the county, Baoyuan Matured Vinegar Factory in Yangfang village is among the oldest. Locals say the company is the perfect place for people who want to develop a deep understanding of the industry's history in Shanxi.

Baoyuan had been a top-quality vinegar producer since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and its products were supplied to the royal kitchens of the Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Nowadays, the old factory site is a museum that shows the history of vinegar production in Qingxu. It does not produce vinegar for the market anymore.

In the museum are old vinegar-making equipment and documents recording the ancient production techniques.

One of them, a Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) book called *Qimin Yaoshu*, said there were 22 methods in vinegar making in Qingxu. It says Qingxu began its commercialized vinegar production in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24).

A variety of the current vinegar products are on display in the museum, giving visitors an opportunity to taste the authentic vinegar of Qingxu.

"I thought vinegar should be sour in taste," a visitor said. "Now, I recognize the richness of the taste of Qingxu vinegar was beyond my expectations."

Although the Baoyuan factory site has been transformed into a museum, its products continue to be made.

The company evolved into Shuita Vinegar, owner of one of the two nationally renowned trademarks in Qingxu. The company is still making vinegar products with ancient techniques in the county.

Li Yali contributed to this story.

With over 10,000 vinegar jars at its factory, Shuita is a renowned producer for its high-quality vinegar made using traditional techniques. ZHAO YANTING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Stork Tower is a landmark attraction in Yongyi city because of a much cited poem written by poet Wang Zhihuan. HU ZENGCHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Iconic Stork Tower a historic inspiration

History buffs flock to giant structure to take in breathtaking views

By YUAN SHENGGAO

There have been few poets in China that have become famous from just one or two pieces of work.

Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Wang Zhihuan, is one of them.

He was not a productive poet, as only six of his poems were recorded in the *Complete Collection of Tang Dynasty Poems*. However, he became a household name because of his much cited work, *Ascending Stork Tower*:

The setting sun beyond the mountains glows,
The Yellow River seaward flows.
One can enjoy a grander sight,
By climbing onto a greater height.

Wang was a native of North China's Shanxi province, and this poem helped Stork Tower in the Shanxi city of Yongji become a renowned attraction.

Stork Tower, also known as Guanquelou in Chinese, is widely recognized as one of the nation's top four ancient towers along with Yellow Crane Tower in Wuhan, Hubei province; Tengwang Pavilion in Nanchang, Jiangxi province; and Yueyang Tower in Yueyang, Hunan province.

Historical records show this tower by the Yellow River was first built during the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557-581) but collapsed during the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234).

Reconstruction of the tower began in December 1997 and it opened to the public in September 2002.

Huang Xuxiang, a tourist from Shaanxi province, visited the tower in early January.

He said he was very eager to climb the tower because he wanted to see the setting sun above the Yellow River and experience the same emotions as the poet.

"Ascending a tall building gives various experiences and emotions to the climbers at different periods of time," Huang said.

"In a period of conflicts and wars, ascending a tower gave one a feeling of homesickness as there might be small hope of returning home. This was the emotion expressed by poet Wang Can in the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) and early Three Kingdoms Period (220-280).

"But in a period like the early and middle Tang Dynasty, when people were confident and inclusive, ascending a tall building gave people a sense of loftiness and transcendence," Huang said.

According to a tour guide at the Stork Tower scenic area, the tower was originally built by Yuwen Hu, a general of the Northern Zhou Dynasty, as a watchtower for the purpose of defense.

During the following Sui (581-618) and Tang dynasties, the tower was no longer used as a military facility. Instead, it became a habitat for storks and other birds and earned its name for that reason.

Historical records show the original tower was 20 to 30 meters tall. However, as the highest point on the plain along the Yongji section of the Yellow River, it became an attraction favored by many poets and writers, who dedicated their poems and prose to praising the spectacular views provided by the tower.

The original building stood for almost 700 years, until it was destroyed by the invading Mongolians led by Genghis Khan in 1222.

The other three of the top-four ancient towers suffered the same fate. All were destroyed in the previous centuries.

Following the reconstruction of the Yueyang and Yellow Crane towers as well as Tengwang Pavilion, locals in Yongji and Shanxi strongly appealed for the rebuilding of Stork Tower.

The new tower, completed in 2002, is a nine-story building with a height of 73.9 meters, making it an imposing landmark along the Yellow River.

According to Li Guishun, a manager in charge of the reconstruction project, the new Stork Tower is the largest Tang-style structure in the country.

In addition, Tang Dynasty murals, which were collected from elsewhere in Shanxi and restored by experts from the National Cultural Heritage Administration, have been put on the interior walls of the tower.

"A tour of the tower is a trip back into the millennium-long history of the nation, where you can exchange with the great personalities of ancient China like Wang Zhihuan," Huang Xuxiang posted on his WeChat account. "And you are also in a process of sublimation with the boundless sights of the Yellow River and North China Plain before your eyes, and the infinite flow of history in the mind."

Li Yali contributed to this story.

Technology focus gives Shanxi firms the edge

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Chinese companies are making inroads into global markets thanks to the country's continued reform and opening-up. Among them is Shanxi-based Jinneng Holding Equipment Manufacturing Group, which has secured orders from the European Union for its round-link chain products.

"Our round-link chain products have earned the EU-wide standards certificates by authoritative certification organizations in the EU, paving the way to reach broader overseas markets," said Li Feng, a senior executive of Jinneng.

Round-link chain is a crucial component in coal-mining conveyors. Due to the high requirement for heat treatment technology for tensity, the higher end of the market in China has been dominated by overseas manufacturers for many years.

To break the monopoly, Jinneng began researching high-tensity round-link chains in 2013.

Over the past eight years, its research and development team has developed 28 product varieties to meet demands in both domestic and international markets.

In China, Li said its new products, as a substitute for imports, can help clients reduce costs by about 40 percent.

"We have applied our independently developed technologies to the whole process from heat treatment to welding," Li said, adding that the company will continue its efforts to develop more localized products for coal mining.

Because of its continuously increasing investment in R&D, Jinneng is currently China's second-largest and the world's third-largest company in coal mining and coal-mining machinery. The company owns more than 460 technologies with self-developed intellectual property rights.

Jinneng is only one example of Shanxi's recent efforts in technological innovation covering the six areas of new infrastructure, new technologies, new materials, new equipment, new products and new industries.

Xinyuan Coal Mine, a subsidiary of Yangquan-based Huayang Group, for instance, is now increasing investment in its new infrastructure facilities for coal mining.

The coal mine's production sites are now connected to 5G networks.

"The connection allows us to monitor and control mining processes in shafts as deep as 500 meters below the ground, helping to increase efficiency and improve safety substantially," said Cui Maosheng, a technician at Xinyuan. "In the past, all monitoring was carried out by workers, who needed to walk 5-8 kilometers a day in the shafts. And now all monitoring can be done with 5G-connected robots."

More projects related to the "six new areas" have settled in Shanxi, creating new growth.

These include a smart manufacturing base invested in by Great Wall Computer in Taiyuan, which became operational in July last year, and an energy information technology base that was put into operation in Datong in last October.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

From left: Technicians at a new-energy battery company in Datong check product components inside a lab. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY High-tensity round-link chains roll off the production line at a plant of Jinneng Holding Equipment Manufacturing Group. CUI YANAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Building company shows its mettle to complete project

The second phase of the polycrystalline silicon production base under construction in Leshan, Sichuan province, is built by Shanxi Construction Investment Group. YANG YANCHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A polycrystalline silicon production base is near completion in Leshan, Sichuan province, and is expected to give the city a reputation of being a green Silicon Valley in China.

Polycrystalline silicon is a crucial part of photovoltaic materials, which are widely used in solar power stations.

Local officials in Leshan said this base is expected to produce 160,000 metric tons of polycrystalline silicon annually, representing one of the largest outputs in China.

Shanxi Construction Investment Group, a civil engineering company from Taiyuan in North China's Shanxi province, is one of the contractors to the project.

SCIG was commissioned to build the second-phase project for technological upgrading. Upon completion, the facility will be able to produce 45,000 tons of high-purity polycrystalline silicon a year.

"We arrived in Leshan in August last year," said Zhang Yu, a SCIG manager in charge of the project's construction. "This is not a big project for us. However, we greatly value it because we want to make it a demonstrative project to show our strength and help us enter the local market."

The manager said it wants the client to know that SCIG is an innovative contractor and can create added value for clients with its own solutions and standards.

"We work with design drawings provided by the client, but are not confined by the drawings," Zhang said.

One of SCIG's missions was to build a company dormitory near a gymnasium.

"The dorm was only 6 meters away from the gym and the original design required open-pit excavation for laying foundations. The distance meant we needed more support structure for safety.

"We talked with the client and revised the foundation design. This helped to save 150,000 yuan ($23,200) for the client and shortened the period of work."

In addition to an innovative spirit, Zhang said the team from Shanxi had shown a strong will to overcome difficulties.

After two months of continuous rain, Leshan was hit by the most severe flood in a century back in August.

"For a building company from the north, the extreme rain and the flooding are something we haven't experienced before," Zhang said.

Despite the difficulty, the SCIG team completed its mission according to schedule.

"I was really touched by the determination and perseverance of our colleagues in the face of adversity," Zhang said.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.