

# Incentives from Shanxi officials make staying put an easy choice



Instead of traveling home for Spring Festival, workers on duty will enjoy a slew of benefits

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Spring Festival is the most important traditional holiday in China for families to reunite, regardless of how far away from home they are.

However, Hou Jianhua from Northeast China's Heilongjiang province and his other colleagues decided to stay where they work in North China's Shanxi province during this year's Spring Festival, which falls on Feb 12.

Hou is a worker at the Foxconn Taiyuan Science Park, based in the capital city of Shanxi.

"In previous years, I would be at home with my family several days before Spring Festival," Hou said. "I made the decision to stay this year in response to the government's

requirement for pandemic prevention and control."

Over the past weeks, sporadic cases of COVID-19 have been reported in several regions across the country, prompting the government to raise its alert level against the pandemic.

In Shanxi, the provincial department of health and other government institutions jointly issued a notice asking local businesses to persuade employees, especially those whose homes are far away from Shanxi, to stay in the cities where they work. The government also promised to reward companies and employees who actively respond to the proposal.

The incentives include direct subsidies to the companies and their employees.

As the Spring Festival period is traditionally a slower season for production and business activities, the government of Shanxi proposed that enterprises hold workplace skill training for staff members.

The notice said that the government's subsidy for enterprises holding training is 300 yuan (\$46) per person a day during the Spring Festival holiday.

"The government's subsidy will eventually go to employees and our company will have additional bonuses to offer," said He Qihua, head of operations of the Foxconn Taiyuan Science Park.

"According to the State's regulations, the payment to our employees on duty from Feb 5-20 will be two to three times their normal wages. In addition, we will give red envelopes containing up to 3,600 yuan to employees who stay at the company," He explained. "Those who work during the festival can still take their days off sometime later in the year as a compensation."

As the government urges local businesses to take special care of the staying employees, he said the company will provide a number of festive activities.

"We will have big parties, big dinners and a variety of shows for the festival. And our budget for such activities will surpass 10 million yuan," He said.

But the most exciting news is that the company plans to provide vaccinations against the COVID-19 virus for the employees, to protect their health.

In addition to Foxconn's Taiyuan park, its industrial park in Jincheng city also offers similar treatments to employees staying during the Spring Festival holiday.

The government is fully aware that rising unemployment is possible during a period with fewer business activities. In response, authorities want to give a helping hand, said Shi Guangwei, deputy chief at the Shanxi Department of



Staff members of Shanxi Guild, a restaurant chain in Taiyuan, are staying where they work to serve clients during Spring Festival. WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Human Resources and Social Security.

"We will provide special assistance to those who recently lost their jobs and could not return to their homes," Shi said.

The official said the government will offer incentives to enterprises recruiting laid-off workers.

"Small and micro-sized businesses signing contracts with laid-off workers valid for more than one year during the Spring Festival period will be offered a per-month subsidy of 300 yuan for each person they recruit," Shi said.

The official added that a per capita subsidy of 1,000 yuan will also be given to enterprises that sign recruitment contracts valid for more than half a year but less than one year.

Many migrant workers and businesspeople who worked and lived in Shanxi for a long time said they are not surprised with the special treatment.

Zhao Qingmei, now in her 30s, is a native of Shandong province who has been working and living in Shanxi for 10 years.

"We have been enjoying the care of the local people and the government over the past decade," Zhao said. "We have never been treated as strangers. The locals called us *xin Shanxi ren*, meaning that we are new residents of Shanxi."

Zhao left her hometown in Shandong to work in Shouzhou city, Shanxi province, 10 years ago.

"I was inevitably homesick in my first few years here, so I returned to my hometown to be with my par-

ents almost every Spring Festival," Zhao said.

Zhao now has a new family in Shouzhou with her husband and children.

They run a successful snack store in the city but still keep the tradition of going back to their hometown in Shandong during Spring Festival.

After informing her parents of her plan to stay this year, Zhao said she is very supportive of the government's pandemic response.

"The government gives us red envelopes containing cash and we can also enjoy other incentives like free bus rides," Zhao said. "This is our second hometown and we're used to life here."

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Residents shop for Spring Festival decorations at a store in Houma city. LI ANYUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Holiday dough snacks a unique gem in province

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As Spring Festival draws near, residents in Shanxi province are busy making snacks with dough and other ingredients.

The dough snacks are meant not only to serve diners during the most important festival of the year, but also to bring fortune and good luck to the families.

Wenxi, a county in the south of Shanxi, is renowned throughout the province for its auspicious dough snacks.

Dough snacks there are made with centuries-old techniques, and the process was included on China's intangible cultural heritage list in 2008.

Zhang Duanduan is a master of dough snacks, especially dough buns, in Wadi township in Wenxi.

Dough buns are also called "flowery buns" due to their rich shapes and colors.

Several days before Spring Festival, which falls on Feb 12 this year, the 82-year-old woman was busy working in her flowery bun studio with fellow villagers.

The studio is a small household business she founded to make products for markets in Shanxi and in other parts of the country.

Zhang was preparing an order from a client in Beijing, who wanted to buy a batch of tiger-shaped buns for the one-month celebration of his newborn baby and also for Spring Festival.

"Tiger is the lucky animal for babies, as it symbolizes strength, courage and health," Zhao said.

Zhao, who has been in the trade for half a century, has an admirable skill in making buns with traditional forms. But her fellow villager, Zhang Haiyun, in her 30s, likes to modernize the art to meet

the demands of younger customers.

The flowery buns Zhang Haiyun makes are even more flowery. They feature festively colored flowers like roses and lilies.

Zhang Haiyun operates a company for her innovative local specialty products.

"While catering to the aesthetics of younger people, we maintain our traditional techniques to keep the genuine taste of Wenxi flowery buns that stand out from other varieties throughout the country," the entrepreneur said.

In Shanxi, making flowery buns is usually accompanied with other arts like paper-cutting, making red lanterns and writing Spring Festival couplets.

The popular folk traditions for Spring Festival have drawn enthusiasm among foreigners living in Shanxi.

On Feb 1, more than 20 foreign students at the international school of Taiyuan University of Technology toured a community in the provincial capital of Taiyuan to experience the local Spring Festival culture.

They wrote couplets, made paper-cuts and cooked traditional Chinese dishes with local residents.

"I have celebrated three Spring Festivals in China and I made dumplings and cooked noodles every time by myself," said a Nigerian student who goes by the Chinese name of Wen Xinbian.

"But the most exciting thing is writing Spring Festival couplets, because I've made steady progress in Chinese calligraphy and gained a better understanding of Chinese culture over the past three years."

Guo Yanjie and Li Shu contributed to this story.

## Foreign experts laud local hospitality and care

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Six foreign experts deciding to spend their Spring Festival in Xinzhou city, Shanxi province, said they won't feel lonely thanks to the special care they're getting from local officials and residents.

Jiang Jian, a semiconductor expert from Singapore and general manager of Xinzhou-based integrated circuit manufacturer BWIC, is among the six experts.

"I decided to stay during Spring Festival to follow the local government's guidelines on pandemic control," Jiang said. "As a senior executive of a Chinese company, I see it as my responsibility to do my part in the fight against COVID-19."

Jiang, a Singaporean-Chinese, is a veteran specialist who has been in the semiconductor industry for nearly 20 years. He is also the head of the board of overseas experts hired by the Xinzhou Economic Development Zone.

He said that he was very happy to receive specialty food from development zone officials on Feb 1.

"There are also big celebrations for Spring Festival in Singapore because there is a huge population with ancestral roots in China.



Japanese expert Yasunori Bito (right) instructs a BWIC technician on product design. FAN JINGJING / FOR CHINA DAILY

"It's a pity that I can't be with my family in Singapore for this special occasion," Jiang said. "However, celebrating a typical Chinese Spring Festival with my friends here in Xinzhou will be a blessing as well."

Another overseas expert feeling the festive joy is Yasunori Bito from Japan, who is also a specialist in semiconductors and works with Jiang at BWIC.

"Chinese and Japanese people share many similarities in culture," Bito said. "We both celebrate Spring Festival — although the festival is celebrated on Jan 1 in Japan — and value reunions with our families."

He said when he received New Year's food as a gift from the development zone's officials, he was very happy that many typical Japanese

varieties were included in the package.

"Thanks to the officials for their consideration. I felt so much closer to home when I saw the familiar food," Bito said. "I'm increasingly attached to this city because of the considerate officials and friendly people."

Ding Litian, head of the administrative committee of the Xinzhou development zone, expressed his special gratitude to the experts staying in Xinzhou.

"The six experts have been in Xinzhou since the beginning of last year and they will stay for another Spring Festival due to the guidelines on pandemic response," Ding said.

Jiang said he is very glad to stay in the city.

"The stay will be good for our health as it will avoid the risk of getting infected while traveling," he said. "I love living in this city, where life is convenient and the environment is clean. I'd like to pay a visit to the nearby Wutai Mountains, which is a Buddhist holy land and renowned tourist attraction in China."

Wang Liqiang contributed to this story.

## Decorated history helps baijiu maker grow and flourish

By YUAN SHENGGAO

While many companies are relaxing the pace of business activities to allow employees to spend the Spring Festival holiday with their families, a renowned *baijiu* — or white liquor — producer in Shanxi is witnessing its most prosperous period in production.

At a production plant in Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group, based in Fenyang city, workers were busy bottling, sealing, labeling and packaging the company's *baijiu* products. A huge display on the wall of the production line was 12,000 bottles per hour.

"The production boom is a result of skyrocketing demand for high-quality *baijiu* during the Spring Festival period," said Jin Gang, an executive in charge of production at Xinghuacun Fenjiu.

"Spring Festival is always accompanied with *ganbei* — proposals for toasts. Premium *baijiu* brands like Fenjiu are sought-after because they are better for consumers' health," Jin said.

The executive said Fenjiu represents China's millennia-long history in *baijiu* production and *baijiu*-re-



Wearing traditional clothes, executives of Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group announce the market launch of a new *baijiu* product made at its old distillery. CAO QINGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

lated culture.

Archaeologists found an ancient alcoholic beverage production site in Xinghuacun in Fenyang, the location of the company. Unearthed production utensils revealed that the site has a history of about 6,000 years of production.

But Xinghuacun became a household name mainly because

of a poem called *Qingming*, written by Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Du Mu. In the poem, Du described his mood during his trip on Qingming, or Tomb Sweeping Day, in April. In Chinese, Xinghuacun literally means apricot flower village.

"A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Qingming day.

The traveler's heart is going to break on the way.

Where can a wine shop can be found to drown his dismay?

A cowherd points to the apricot flower village far away."

In Xinghuacun, the production of liquor has continued for thousands of years. Today, Xinghuacun-branded *baijiu* is a frequent winner of national and international awards, including a gold medal during the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the United States, according to Li Qiuxi, chairman of the *baijiu* group's board of directors.

"While continuing to innovate in technology, Xinghuacun Fenjiu still keeps its centuries-old techniques in some of its old distilleries," Li said. "Keeping those techniques gives customers an authentic taste of the brand's history."

The company also operates the Fenjiu Baijiu Museum, where tourists can experience the old liquor-making process while tasting the newly distilled white liquor.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.