

# Shanxi widens coverage of social welfare

Government's efforts to improve livelihoods enhance locals' sense of gain and happiness



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Improving the livelihoods of people has been a major priority for the government in North China's Shanxi province in recent years, local officials said.

According to Ju Limei, deputy chief of the Shanxi Department of Civil Affairs, improving people's livelihoods through establishing a broad social security system is a crucial part in building an overall well-off society.

By enhancing people's sense of gain, happiness and security, Ju said the governments at various levels in Shanxi have increased their budget for subsidizing low-income families and improving services for elder care.

Since 2009, the provincial government has increased its subsistence allowance for low-income families for 13 consecutive years, with more than 1.57 million people benefiting from the system. The allowances for urban and rural residents reached 615 yuan (\$95) and 472 yuan per month this year respectively.

According to Ju, since the beginning of last year, the provincial government has implemented a temporary subsidy system to deal with the fluctuation of commodity prices caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a total budget of 486 million yuan. About 12.4 million people have benefited from the subsidy.

Shanxi has seen steady growth in its aging population in recent years, and so how to help elderly people live high-quality and decent lives has become key concern among governments.

An elder care service industry, which has been invested in by the government and various social and commercial entities, has emerged in the province, according to Ju.

Wang Baochen, a retired official in the village of Zhongliang in Xiangfen county, enjoys spending time in relaxation centers for seniors. He said that there is one in almost every community in the county.

"These centers, offering meals, relaxing activities like painting and calligraphy, as well as a range of helpful services, are among the most frequently visited venues by elderly people," Wang said.

There are similar facilities for seniors in the community of Xiyu



Residents in Taiyuan enjoy socializing at a community elder care center. KOU NING / FOR CHINA DAILY

in Wanbailin district in Taiyuan.

After finishing his exercise each morning in the park, Wei Yinsheng, 67, usually goes to the community canteen for breakfast.

"The meal costs a dinner about 3 yuan and the food is delicious and healthy," Wei said. "It is much cheaper than eating at restaurants or even cheaper than a breakfast you cook at home."

The canteen, established for seniors, also offers lunch and dinner.

Du Zhenguo, 76, eats three meals a day at the canteen.

"I'm now living with my wife in Xiyu," Du said. "We seldom prepare our meals at home as the amount of food we need is so small that we don't want to bother to cook."

According to a staff member in the canteen, it is a not-for-profit entity invested in by the local government and operated by the community.

Despite its cheap costs, diners say the food and service it offers are always satisfactory.

Wang Sujie, a diner at the canteen, said they are always treated as family members by the employees there.

"They are fully aware of the health conditions and special requirements of every diner," Wang Sujie said.

Wang Sujie has diabetes and

needs to take medicine right before his meals.

"Every time I come here, the service workers will bring me a cup of water and remind me to take my medicine," Wang Sujie said.

According to an official in Xiyu, the community has more than 1,600 people aged over 60, accounting for more than 20 percent of its total population.

"The canteen is among the government's recent efforts to address the needs arising from an aging society," the official said.

Song Haibin, another deputy chief of the Shanxi Civil Affairs Department, said Shanxi encourages the involvement of various social and commercial entities in the elder care industry.

"We are building Shanxi's unique elder care industry driven and led by the government and supported by businesses," Song said.

Song said Shanxi plans to foster 10 famous elder care brands and 200 model community elder care organizations in the next few years.

Shanxi is currently home to 1,001 elder care organizations and 7,945 elder care facilities in its urban and rural areas, according to the department.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.

## Millennia-old shadow puppetry art to be rejuvenated



With a history of more than 2,000 years, shadow puppetry in Shanxi represents an art form of ancient Chinese folk theater. The art in Shanxi stands out from other varieties across the rest of the country thanks to its unique techniques in making puppet figures. The figures are usually made of cleaned cow hide crafted with more than a dozen processes, including leather making, silhouette painting, carving and coloring. A craftsman may spend several weeks completing the process. The performing art involves puppeteers manipulating the figures behind the screen while singing the libretto to tell the story. Local artists are trying to rejuvenate shadow puppetry by encouraging more young people to learn the art. LI LIJUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Agricultural modernization boosts rural revitalization

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On March 8, engineer Gao Pengfei was conducting the final trial of a strangely shaped farming machine on an experimental farm in Jinzhong High-Tech Agricultural Demonstration Zone in the city of Jinzhong, Shanxi province.

Developed by the Smart Agricultural Machinery and Equipment Lab of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, it is China's first autonomous-driving farm-spraying vehicle with replaceable batteries.

"The new farm-spraying machine can be as much as three times more efficient than conventional machines," Gao said.

According to Gao, research and development on the machine began in July 2020 and trial operations began in January.

Established in the high-tech agricultural zone last year, the CAS Smart Agricultural Machinery and Equipment Lab is one of the zone's latest efforts to drive rural revitalization and agricultural modernization in Jinzhong

as well as Shanxi province as a whole.

Known as "the Agricultural Valley" in Shanxi province, Jinzhong High-Tech Agricultural Demonstration Zone was founded in 2017. It was approved by the State Council as a national-level high-tech agricultural zone in November 2019.

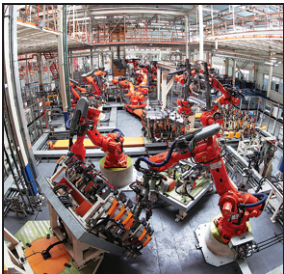
Its latest technological breakthroughs include a smart agricultural operational system and China's largest gene bank for quinoa.

Also playing a crucial role in Jinzhong's rural revitalization is the booming tourism industry.

The city is known as a popular tourist destination in Shanxi for famous attractions, such as the ancient city of Pingyao and the centuries-old residences of the famed Shanxi merchants.

Leveraging its branding awareness among tourists, Jinzhong's focus on tourism was recently shifted to the countryside in an aim to boost rural development.

One such example is Zuoquan county, which is using its unique cultural resources — folk songs — to



Robots are used in vehicle production at a plant in the city of Jinzhong. PEI XIAOJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

attract tourists to its rural areas.

The county's farmers have developed a tradition of singing folk songs and holding folk song contests for hundreds of years.

Some tourists to Zuoquan claimed that "a tour of Zuoquan is always accompanied by folk songs and the folk songs can make a trip extremely impressive and relaxing."

Realizing that the folk songs are a unique resource for cultural tourism,

Zuoquan's tourism authorities launched the Zuoquan Folk Song Gala in 2019. The gala has since grown into an annual event, attracting singers from across the country and involving the participation of locals and tourists alike.

As the folk song gala becomes more popular across the nation, its major sightseeing attractions, which are collectively known as the "50-kilometer natural gallery", are gaining recognition among tourists in China.

The natural gallery is now home to more than 280 tourist attractions and the growing inflow of tourists has played an important role in poverty alleviation.

According to the county government of Zuoquan, the tourism industry has offered jobs to more than 5,000 rural residents over the past three years. The industry has also helped more than 2,100 people out of poverty, with their per capita annual income increasing 6,200 yuan (\$959) in three years.

Li Shu contributed to this story.

## University experience an unforgettable memory

Many overseas students based in Shanxi province have gained a better understanding of the province and China. This section, named Shanxi in the Eyes of Foreign Students, will tell their stories in the province and share what Shanxi looks like from their perspectives, giving accounts of the local environment, customs and culture, as well as their personal experiences.



this North China province.

For a student studying Chinese language and culture, it has been a worthwhile experience to get to know the locals and integrate into their lives.

By INGABIRE JOSIANE

I found Chinese people are very fond of sports and physical exercise, especially the middle-aged and the seniors.

If you can get up early in the morning and have a walk in one of the parks in Taiyuan, you can always meet crowds of people doing various sports.

In the evening, many of the public squares in the city turn into venues for joyful parties. These places are always full of men and women dancing in different styles.

Shanxi people are both friendly and curious. When I stroll on one of the streets, there are people inviting me to take pictures with them and expressing their intention to become friends. They like to know what my country looks like and they will never hesitate to praise my "language talent" when I talk with them in Chinese.

With so many friendly people to talk with, I found my skills in communication have improved substantially over the years. I have also learned a lot of other things from my teachers and friends, like self-motivation and teamwork.

I believe my stay in Shanxi will be among the most precious experiences in my life.

*The author is a student from Rwanda, who studies at the School of International Education and Exchange at Shanxi University.*

## Yangquan welcomes academic cooperation

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On July 11, officials in the eastern Shanxi city of Yangquan welcomed a group of academics from Nanjing University in East China's Jiangsu province.

The group, with members mainly consisting of scholars with PhD degrees, toured Yangquan for two purposes — visiting its famous Red tourism sites and seeking cooperative opportunities.

Yangquan is known for its history as a major base for the Communist Party of China-led Eighth Route Army to fight the Japanese invaders during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

The group visited Shinao Mountain in the suburbs of Yangquan, an important site for the Hundred Regiments Offensive. The major campaign of the Eighth Route Army was commanded by general Peng Dehuai (1898-1974) against the Japanese army in North China in 1940.

After their visit, the group members were received by local officials and both sides held talks.

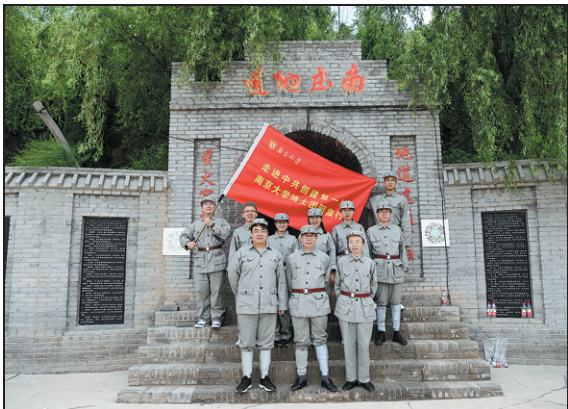
The officials introduced the city's latest developments, business opportunities and talent-attraction policies to the academics.

Members of the group expressed their intention to cooperate with local businesses in research and development and help to bring industrial projects and introduce professionals to Yangquan.

Sticking to an innovation-driven growth strategy, local officials said Yangquan is seeking professionals and technologies more eagerly than ever.

"To make the strategy possible,

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



Academics from Nanjing University wear period costume visiting a Red tourism site in Yangquan. KOU NING / FOR CHINA DAILY