

CHINA

Martyr's grave maintained by family through generations

Tending to tomb has evolved into monthly tradition of respect, honor

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Before this year's Qingming Festival, or Tomb-Sweeping Day, on Friday, Xie Nanjing methodically cleared away weeds and fallen leaves from a grave in a small village in Ganzhou city, Jiangxi province.

Nestled among green bamboo and cypress trees in Shihan village, the grave belongs to Deng Yigang, a former commander of the Red Army.

After carefully tidying the site, Xie sat in front of the tombstone and said in a hushed tone, "Commander Deng, I've come to visit you again."

It is a ritual he repeats almost every month. As a result, it has become a familiar sight for the villagers.

Xie is the third-generation guardian of Deng's grave. For 93 years, his family has passed down the tradition from his grandfather to his father, and now to him.

The story dates back to February in 1932, when Deng was shot and critically wounded on the front line while leading an attack on a fortress near Ruijin city in Ganzhou.

"After the battle, my grandfather, Xie Shiyuan, found Deng hiding in a small mountain hollow in Shihan village and brought him home under cover of darkness. Unfortunately, Deng succumbed to his injuries and passed away half a month later," Xie Nanjing said.

Deng died at the age of 28 due to excessive blood loss. After Deng's burial, Xie Shiyuan told his son Xie Benrong: "The Red Army fought for the people and the country without fear of sacrifice. Our duty is to take good care of the martyrs' graves."



Xie Nanjing puts flowers on Deng Yigang's tomb in Shihan village in Ganzhou city, Jiangxi province.

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Since then, Deng's grave and those of nearly 20 other unnamed martyrs have remained undisturbed. In the 1970s, Xie Nanjing and his father, concerned about potential mudslides, moved Deng's grave to a nearby location. Due to limited resources, they could not erect a tombstone at the time.

In 1981, after saving money originally intended for building a house, Xie Benrong and Xie Nanjing decided to commission proper tombstones. They erected a separate one for Deng and four tombstones for the 22 unnamed martyrs, combining them into a large tomb.

"Xie Nanjing lived a frugal life. He wouldn't even buy himself new clothes or shoes, yet he spared no expense in refurbishing Commander Deng's grave," said Feng Liangming, a member of the Kuantian

Township Party Committee.

In 2009, Xie Nanjing invested over 3,000 yuan (\$413) to have a marble tombstone made for Deng, and constructed a drainage system, making the entire grave site solemn, clean and tidy.

In 2001, Xie Benrong suffered a sudden cerebral hemorrhage. Before he died, he repeatedly told his children and grandchildren that they must "take care of Deng as you would do for your ancestors and visit his grave every year."

This tradition has since become a family rule. Every Qingming Festival, all members of the Xie family gather to clean Deng's grave.

"The family has taken care of Deng's grave, rain or shine. From the grandfather's generation, guarding for more than 90 years, it has already reached five generations,"

said Zhu Dongsheng, the village's Party secretary.

Deng's great-grandson and others initially planned to move his remains to their ancestral home in Hunan province. However, moved by the grave's pristine condition and the Xie family's reverence, they chose to leave the remains undisturbed. At the graveside, Xie brushed dirt from his calloused hands, shouldered his hoe, and said: "In the past, you (Commander Deng) suffered without medical care or even a hot meal. My grandfather carried that guilt. Now, with paved roads at our doorstep, we live in comfort and prosperity."

In November, Xie Nanjing was recognized as one of the Good Samaritans of China for his family's commitment to protecting Red Army martyrs' tombs.

Colorful sticky rice wakes the taste buds of spring

By ZHANG LI in Nanning
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In the serene Jingxi village in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Liang Sizhen immerses herself in crafting a dish of vibrant five-color sticky rice, a traditional food cherished by the Zhuang ethnic group.

Clad in an apron, Liang meticulously selected glutinous rice on a weathered yet pristine wooden table within her flower-filled courtyard.

She was exceptionally busy for the peak season of the Sanyuesan Festival, which is celebrated by Zhuang people on the third day of the third month of the Chinese calendar. This year the festival fell on March 31.

"Colorful sticky rice holds a special place in my heart, encapsulating the happiest memories of my childhood," Liang said.

Growing up in a mountainous village of Liucheng county, Guangxi, the 41-year-old said she cherished all the moments spent with her grandmother, from whom she fostered a deep love for the food and learned some basic traditional practices of making it.

The techniques of making the dish were listed among the third batch of the region's intangible cultural heritage in 2010.

Realizing its growing value, Liang started to focus on studying the techniques.

With over two years dedicated to the craft, Liang not only mastered the skills, but also developed her own creations.

Using local flowers and herbs, she made more than 10 natural dyes that added more colors and styles to the dish.

"To make exceptionally delicious colorful sticky rice, the grains must be plump, glossy and possess a substantial feel," Liang said.

However, it is the dyeing process that forms the soul of the food, she added.

Liang grasped a handful of maple leaves and placed them in an iron pot. As she pounded them vigorously with a wooden mallet, a delightful fragrance filled the air.

"Maple leaves can display the purest black hue, accompanied by a distinct aroma," Liang said.

When she finally lifted the steamer lid and unveiled a treasure trove of colorful sticky rice, the vibrant hues and enticing smell were captivating.

Typically, Liang's workday starts at 6 am and sometimes lasts until 2 am the following day.

"Compared with other products, my handmade colorful sticky rice with plant-based dyes are not only healthier but also more eco-friendly. I also choose a wood fire to steam the rice to keep the natural flavor," she said.

Liang has made videos showcasing her creation process, which have garnered widespread acclaim online. She receives orders for more than 600 kilograms of colorful sticky rice a year, which are not only sold in Guangxi, but also to Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces.

In the future, Liang wants to launch her own unique brand.

"Nature and the countryside harbor boundless treasures. My aspiration is to furnish everyone with authentic culinary delights and enable them to savor nature's marvels with every bite," Liang said.



Liang Sizhen makes colorful sticky rice in her home in Liucheng county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

LI HANCHI FOR CHINA DAILY

Tourism takes flight over blossoming countryside

As spring sweeps across most of China, temperatures are rising and people are eager to embark on journeys to witness stunning floral spectacles.

The growing popularity of flower-viewing tourism has given a vibrant boost to the springtime economy, with modern technology playing an important role in driving this trend.

Adding vibrancy

From late March to April, vast fields across China's countryside are carpeted in dazzling yellow rapeseed flowers, creating breathtaking landscapes.

Social media comes alive with photos of people adorned with flower garlands, celebrating the season's charm. However, the yellow blossoms in Jiangxi province are part of a colorful display, with cherry pink, peach red, snow white and light purple blooms coming as a painting from nature's palette.

These multicolored flowers are the result of 11 years of research by Fu Donghui, a professor at Jiangxi Agricultural University. His team has cultivated a wide range of species in 75 colors. The widespread popularity of "bloom chasing" photos online years ago made Fu realize that the sea of rapeseed flowers had the potential to become a signature tourism attraction. However, the single yellow color could lead to aesthetic fatigue, limiting the industry's growth.

Since 2014, Fu has used genetic engineering and hybrid breeding to create new colors, such as introducing the purple gene from radishes into rapeseed flowers.

The tech-enhanced blooms have revitalized local tourism, transforming scenic spots featuring the colorful rapeseed flowers into popular photography destinations. Visitors flock to these vibrant landscapes, feeling as if they have stepped into a Chinese version of Monet's Garden.

Fu's team has forged cooperation with over 100 scenic spots for scientific demonstration planting, boosting rapeseed flower-themed tourism in over 20 provinces.

These genetically engineered flowers offer more than just a visual feast.



From top: Helicopter club Flight Now offers tourists helicopter rides to admire the floral landscapes in Chengdu, Sichuan province. TAO KE / FOR CHINA DAILY Tourists enjoy colorful rapeseed flowers in Wuyuan county, Jiangxi province, on March 21. WAN XIANG / XINHUA

They make real contributions to the industrial economy, as they have been proven to yield higher rapeseed production as well as oil output.

Rapeseed is one of China's primary oilseed crops, with its annual planting area and total production ranking among the highest globally.

Aerial adventure

This year's peak flower season is being blended with the latest tech trends. In addition to the traditional flower-viewing walks, visitors to Chengdu, Sichuan province, can board fixed-wing aircraft or helicopters, soaring just a few hundred meters above the ground to take in sweeping views of the vast floral landscapes.

Despite waiting five hours due to

airspace restrictions, a tourist sur-named Zhao said her 10-minute helicopter ride last week at helicopter club Flight Now was still a "worthwhile experience".

The club said that on weekends, the number of daily flights can reach 30 to 40. Beyond aerial sightseeing, there is also a growing demand from tourists for hands-on aircraft flying experiences.

Data from e-commerce platform Meituan showed that the number of merchants launching "helicopter ride" and "sky-high tour" services on the platform has doubled year-on-year, and the number of group bookings for such low-altitude flight services has nearly quadrupled.

Airports in cities such as Chengdu and Shenzhen, Guangdong province,

have also tapped into the flower-themed tourism market, launching a growing number of routes for flying over blossoms since March.

The low-altitude flower phenomenon provides more than a fresh lens to appreciate nature. It is a trend of modern tourism that integrates cutting-edge aviation with scenic exploration. Fancy flying vehicles, such as electric vertical take-off and landing aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles and future-oriented aircraft are poised to open new air routes across China, pioneering the next chapter of aerial tourism.

In the city of Tianshui in Gansu province, visitors can board a vertical take-off and landing aircraft and enjoy a low-altitude flight at 300 meters to view the 1,600-year-old Maijishan Grottoes.

Hefei-based Zero Gravity Aircraft Industry has designed a spacecraft-like unmanned electric flying vehicle called the ZG-ONE, a star product that consistently attracts attention at exhibitions across China. It is specifically aimed at low-altitude tourism and short-distance travel.

State-owned enterprises such as the Aviation Industry Corporation of China are also entering the market, developing civil airships such as the AS700 for scenic tours.

China recently made public a plan on special initiatives to increase consumption, highlighting the orderly development of low-altitude consumption sectors, including low-altitude tourism, aviation sports and consumer-grade drones.

Zhao Deli, founder of the Chinese flying car company Xpeng Aeroht, said that the policy will infuse new vitality into the development of the market. "This includes accelerating infrastructure construction, attracting greater capital investment and encouraging increased consumer participation," Zhao said.

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Xizang residents using cleaner fuel for heating

200,000 residents

will benefit from clean heating pilot projects in the Xizang autonomous region.

LHASA — In Nyanrong, a county with an average altitude of over 4,700 meters in Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, clean energy projects are transforming winter heating for residents.

The temperature in Nyanrong can still fall below zero toward the end of March, but the home of villager Sangtso was warm.

"No more collecting cow dung for months ahead of winter. Our village's solar-powered heating keeps us cozy," Sangtso said.

Cao Lin, a local official, said, "The photovoltaic heating system is operating well, generating over 2,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity daily." He added that Xizang boasts abundant solar energy resources, ideal for solar heating.

Meanwhile, in Dingri county's Yejing village, quake-affected families like Sangye Chosphe's are burning smoke-free biomass pellets made from processed livestock dung. "This fuel burns cleaner than regular dung and lasts much longer. One bag of the fuel keeps us warm for days," said the 58-year-old.

On Jan 7, an earthquake struck the county. Many houses collapsed or were severely damaged. Within days, temporary housing was erected while electricity and water supplies were fully restored, with biomass pellets neatly stacked by the stoves.

These pellets, donated by Shenzhen's One Foundation, can reduce emissions and produce almost no sulfur dioxide.

The biomass fuel utilizes solid fuel combustion technology, converting agricultural and livestock waste into clean energy. The foundation has distributed 465 metric tons of the pellets, ensuring locals stay warm through the long winter.

Backed by 3.78 billion yuan (\$522 million) in social investment, Xizang's clean heating pilot projects expanded to seven counties and districts last year.

As of May, an additional 6.2 square kilometers of heating coverage will have been completed, benefiting over 200,000 residents, according to the regional department of housing and urban-rural development.

The region has also introduced policies to achieve clean heating in areas above 5,000 meters in altitude. Last year, 1,553 households across 25 high-altitude villages transitioned from dung-burning to clean heating.

"The heat pumps work fast and cut costs," said Gungdrak, a resident of Pumaqangtang, China's highest township, in Nakarze county, Xizang. "My knees don't hurt like they used to."

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