

SNAPSHOTS



Gold-paste master Kang Shouguang and his apprentices transform the walls of Daci Temple in Chengdu, Sichuan province, into splendid artworks. PHOTOS BY TAN XI / WESTERN CHINA METROPOLIS DAILY



NEW GOLD DREAM

Four unknown gold-paste masters are re-creating some of the Buddhist murals lost from the Daci Temple in Chengdu

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In 1056, when the Song Dynasty (960-1279) poets Su Shi and his younger brother Su Zhe traveled to the Daci Temple in Chengdu, in Southwest China's Sichuan province, they admired the mural works of Tang Dynasty (618-907) artist Lu Lengqie, calling them "sublime". There were once more than 15,500 Buddhist mural artworks there. Unfortunately, none survives today, as the temple was destroyed by successive wars.

But now, 961 years later, four unknown gold-paste masters from Datong, in North China's Shanxi province, are re-creating the murals. The first 4-meter-high Tianlong gold-plaster mural has already been completed. It is hard to believe that the four good-natured artisans were originally farmers.



One of them, Kang Shouguang, has loved painting since childhood. One of his representative works, a 16-meter-high sculpture of Buddha, is currently China's highest indoor statue.

Gold paste is an ancient art form that is widely used in aristocratic ornaments and Buddhist statues. It is hard to imagine how artisans hammered gold bars into gold foil, and how they attached them to objects.

The production process involves more than 10 procedures. One gram of gold can be made into about 0.5 square meter of pure gold foil, with a thickness of only 0.12 microns. It is lighter than a feather, thinner than an onion skin and softer than silk. The foil can keep its luster for at least 70 years.

A special glue is needed to create the gold paste. The viscosity of the glue and its thickness are the key to its success. The humidity of the air determines the amount of time it takes to dry.