



ILLUSTRATION BY ZHONG JINYE

HIGH-QUALITY APPROACH PRODUCING BENCHMARK RESULTS IN XINWU

Birthplace of Wu culture carries on tradition of innovation, pragmatism

China Daily



A pearl among local economies around Taihu Lake at the heart of the Yangtze River Delta, Xinwu has developed in concert with surround-

ing major cities including Shanghai, Nanjing and Suzhou, and has played an active role in the regional integrated development of the delta. As the birthplace of the Wu culture, the district has a history that can be traced back 3,200 years.

At the end of the 11th century BC, prince Taibo together with one of his brothers went to Meili, or today's Meicun town in Xinwu district, and founded the Wu state, develop-

ing the economy and culture to the south of the Yangtze River. Thus Taibo was named the architect of the Wu culture. For the following thousands of years, the Wu culture, which values morality, literature, pragmatism and innovation and has been passed down by generations, has brought prosperity to the region.

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From the editor

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istorically, because of its abundance in fertile soil and its position as one of the most prosperous grain producers in China, Wuxi was known as the "land of fish and rice".

In more recent times, the city has been called "Little Shanghai" for its remarkable transformation into an innovation-based economy that is

ranked among the top 10 cities in the Chinese mainland in terms of comprehensive economic competitiveness and business environment.

At the heart of this phenomenal transformation is a district that is still little-known to most foreigners. Called Xinwu, this district is home to most of the city's high-tech enterprises.

Though it was officially established only about five years ago, Xinwu district has been a key cog in the city's plans to

develop itself into a major hub for internet of things, integrated circuit, biomedicine, new energy and high-end equipment industries.

In this special report, readers will learn more about this district's astounding achievements, its future goals, and how it has become a haven for foreign-invested companies. We have also spoken to expatriates, teachers, cultural professionals and even nature specialists, all of whom weigh in on the development of the district from their unique perspectives.

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The 220-square-kilometer district has a permanent population of some 570,700, who live in six subdistricts.

Xinwu, also known as the Wuxi National Hi-Tech District, has established a reputation for its sound industrial structure and robust economic growth.

Its GDP stood at 184.55 billion yuan (\$27.53 billion) in 2019, up 6.3 percent year-on-year. The district's paid-in foreign capital reached \$1.32 billion last year and foreign trade volume hit \$50.57 billion, accounting for 54.4 percent of Wuxi's total.

Industrial structure

Behind the growth momentum is a modern industry development system, which covers the sectors of the internet of things, advanced equipment manufacturing, clean energy and new energy vehicles, life science and technology, artificial intelligence, the modern service industry and emerging industries.

The district has developed into an industrial hub for new-generation information technology, with pillar sectors of the IoT and high-performance integrated circuits, supported by electronic information.

Businesses and researchers in Xinwu have developed a number of core technologies in the IoT industry and contributed to the formulation of industry standards, enabling a growing global influence and putting the district at the forefront of the country.

The district boasts a leading photovoltaic industrial cluster in China, with a complete industrial chain from research and development, product manufacturing, equipment supply, inspection and testing, and power plant installation to investment services. It aims to build itself into an automotive battery center in East China that integrates R&D, production and testing.

Xinwu ranked among the 2019 China Top 20 Biomedicine Industrial Parks in terms of comprehensive competitiveness and the Top 10 Competitive Parks honored by the National Center for Biotechnology Development, affiliated with the Ministry of Science and Technology, which provides a glimpse into its strengths in the life science and technology industry.

The district's advanced equipment manufacturing industry features a complete range of products and a domestically leading production capacity. It is considered a globally advanced manufacturing center.

The local AI industry focuses on developing the intelligent product portfolio, boosting R&D and production of key devices and components and thus creating an ecosystem of intelligent industries.

The modern service industry in the district puts emphasis on information services such as IT, science and technology, finance, commerce, cultural creativity and innovation, logistics, leisure tourism and healthcare.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

Xinwu has also pinned hopes on emerging industries, including 5G, AI, graphene, additive manufacturing and other sectors to gain an edge in industrial development in the future.



Currently, the district is home to more than 26,000 businesses, including 1,674 foreign-funded companies, 20 companies publicly traded on the main boards in Chinese and overseas capital markets and 77 listed enterprises in the over-the-counter market.

Foreign inbound capital is mainly from Japan, South Korea, the United States and Europe. Seventy-one Fortune 500 companies have invested in 119 projects in the district.

There are 26 multinational headquarters, including three comprehensive headquarters, four regional headquarters, two focused on

investment, two on marketing, and two on R&D and finance.

Innovation strengths

Xinwu is flexing its technological muscle, with the output value of its high-tech industry accounting for 66 percent of Wuxi's total and 3.76 percent of its GDP is spent on R&D, both ranking top among the city's districts.

The sectors of IoT, IC, software, big data, cloud computing and AI have all reported high growth in revenue in recent years.

To date, the district is home to 837 small and medium-sized businesses recognized as national-level tech-driven enterprises and 620 high-tech companies.

At the same time, 14 business incubators, three tech-startup accelerators, 21 R&D institutions and 21 national research centers are helping to improve local innovation capacities.

Organizations and individuals in the district have been granted 689,000 patents, enabling the invention patent ownership per 10,000 people to reach 126.

Such innovation strength relies on a pool of 275,000 high-level professionals in the district.

Of them, experts and specialists have started more than 770 businesses, founding startup teams of over 5,000 people. The district has brought in and fostered 115 national-

level experts, 16 professionals recruited in the Innovative Talents Promotion Plan of the Ministry of Science and Technology, 135 provincial-level experts, 17 teams and 65 PhD holders.

Wuxi National Hi-Tech District has won four national honors for attracting and fostering professionals.

Key research facilities in the district include eight national science and technology incubators, five national mass innovation spaces, two national enterprise technology centers, a national engineering technology research center, and the Wuxi High-Tech Entrepreneurship Service Center have been granted the status as the National Public Service Platform.

In addition, a widespread transportation network, which covers waterways, land, air and rail, adds the appeal of the district to investors.

Sunan Shuofang International Airport has launched more than 40 direct flights to Japan, Singapore, South Korea, as well as China's Hong Kong, Macao and Taipei among other cities.

The Shanghai-Nanjing high-speed railway has three stations in Wuxi, one of them located in Wuxi National Hi-Tech District. It takes just 30 minutes to travel to Shanghai and 4.5 hours to Beijing.

Wuxi plans to build eight light rail lines, half of them set to run through the high-tech district.

INNOVATION, EXPLORATION AT THE HEART OF XINWU'S SUCCESS

Wuxi's foremost high-tech district growing strong despite pandemic headwinds

China Daily

during the eight-month period, up 9.52 percent from the same period in 2019.

The strong resilience that Xinwu has demonstrated during the pandemic has validated the industrial mapping of the district over the past four years, exploring emerging industries and stressing the district's research and development capacity, said Jiang, who is also a vice-mayor of Wuxi.

"We have seen many industries start from scratch over the past few years. We have also seen many more expand or optimize their industrial structure," she said. "The key is to make Xinwu a cradle for emerging industries."

Clusters of emerging industries have already taken shape in Xinwu, playing a dominant role in the development of key industries.

By the first half of 2020, about 70 percent of Wuxi's new-age information technology companies, best represented by IoT technology providers, are located in Xinwu. Up to 60 percent of Wuxi's biomedicine companies are based in Xinwu, and more than 52 percent of the car parts makers are operating in the technology-focused district.

Coordinated growth

Regarding the coordinated development of the Yangtze River Delta region, which was elevated to a national strategy in November 2018, the competitive edge of advanced manufacturing industries has ensured that Xinwu can play an important role in the strategy, Jiang said.

While there are concerns saying cities in the Yangtze River Delta region may share some commonality in terms of industrial mapping, differentiated focuses and routes, companies' expansion plans, which are already in place, are the best way to dispel the doubts, she said.

UK pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, which set up its China headquarters in Shanghai, has built a supply base and a logistics center in Wuxi. Hangzhou-headquartered leading video surveillance company Hikvision announced in late 2016 that it is to build in Xinwu a 3.9-square-kilometer IoT town to apply the company's IoT technologies in real-



"We have seen many industries to start from scratch over the past few years. We have also seen many more to expand or to optimize their industrial structure. The key is to make Xinwu a cradle for emerging industries."

Jiang Min, vice-mayor of Wuxi and Party secretary of the city's Xinwu district

case scenarios.

When it comes to technological innovation, which is the major driver of companies' sustained growth, different places have shouldered different responsibilities.

For fundamental scientific research, Shanghai is irreplaceable given its huge appeal to international researchers. But some companies have put certain technology R&D functions in Xinwu to be closer to their production bases.

"The industrial chains will automatically look for what they need. The base rule is to trust companies' choices," Jiang said.

While China has adopted the dual circulation development pattern, in which domestic and international demands complement each other, Xinwu has also attached great importance to exploring overseas markets.

"IoT companies, which are the highlight of Xinwu, have helped the deep integration of manufacturing and modern service industries," Jiang said. "By creating world-class smart manufacturing and innovation bases in the district, Xinwu-headquartered companies will be more competitive in the global market, which will form new driving forces of Xinwu's outbound economic growth."

At present, foreign-invested companies contribute more than 75 percent of Xinwu's total GDP. By the end of the third quarter, Xinwu had attracted 1,670 foreign-invested companies, nearly one-fourth of Wuxi's total number of foreign-funded companies. At least 64 Fortune 500 companies have invested in 123 projects in Xinwu, taking up 62.4 percent of the city's total.

'All-around champion'

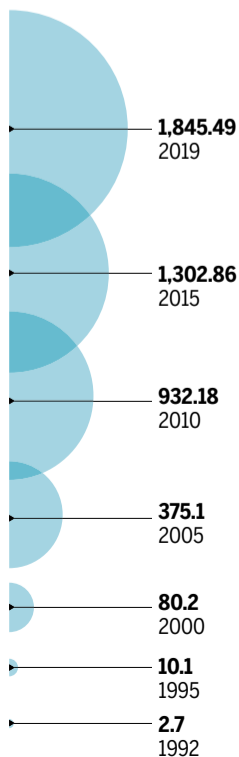
According to Jiang, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit the world hard this year, has also worked as a test of the quality of an area's outbound economy.

During the past few months of the year, Italian heating systems provider Ariston Thermo Group has transferred orders received at its headquarters to its Wuxi plant, which resumed operation in February.

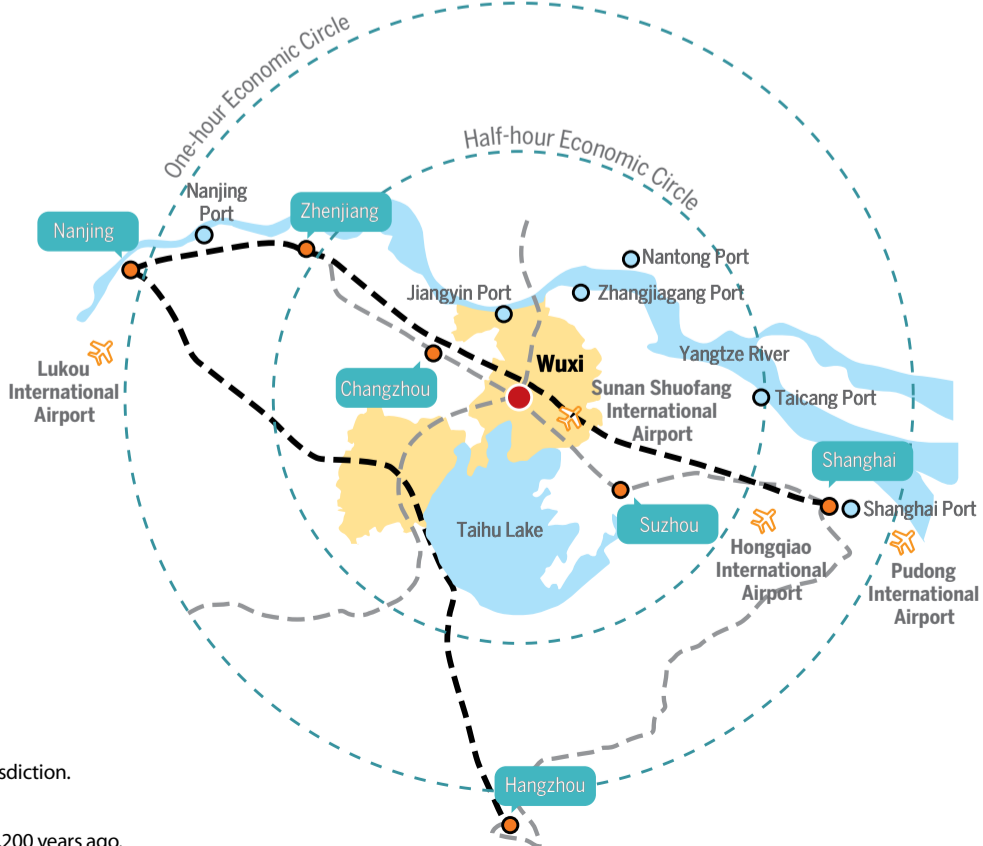
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Regional GDP

Unit: 100 million yuan

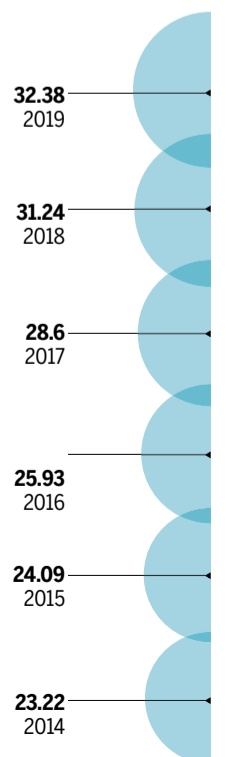


Total area: 220 square kilometers
 Population: 570,700
 Subdistricts: Wangzhuang, Shuofang, Jiangqu, Meicun, Hongshan and Xin'an within its jurisdiction.
 History: as the birthplace of the Wu culture, the district has a history that can be traced back to 3,200 years ago.



Per capita GDP

Unit: 10,000 yuan



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The same practice has also been adopted by South Korean chip maker SK hynix, as its highly automated production base in Xinwu has not stopped for a single day during the pandemic.

“The companies significantly impaired by the coronavirus are basically in the lower end of the industrial chain. As long as the company holds the core competitiveness, it is indispensable and thus will have the initiative in the market at any time,” she said.

The city government has high hopes for Xinwu. During a meeting in late May, Wuxi's Party secretary Huang Qin said the district should strive to become “an all-around champion” in terms of Wuxi's high-quality development, enhancing the industrial capacity and further optimizing the industrial structure in Xinwu.

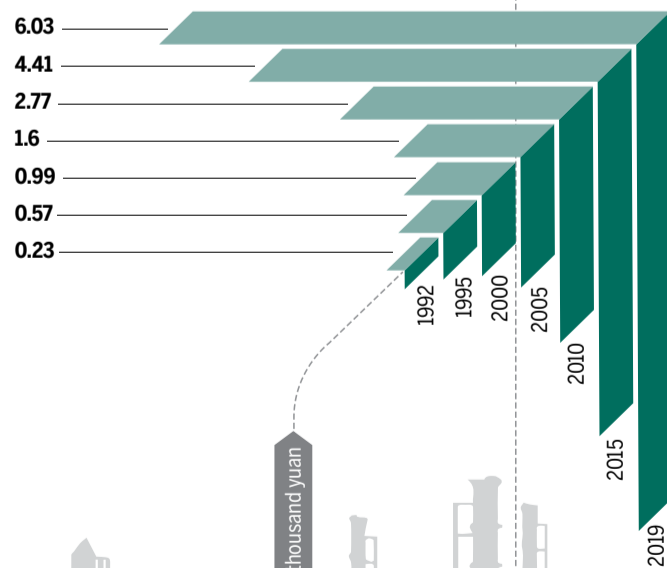
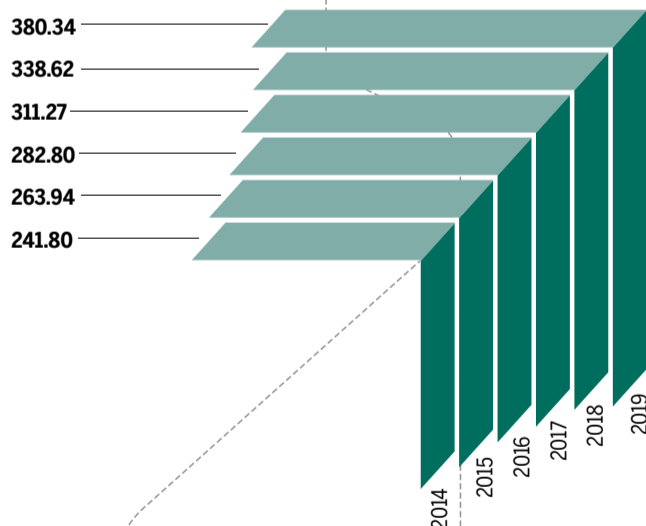
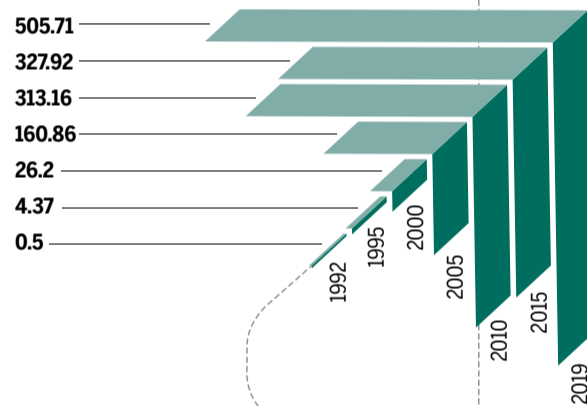
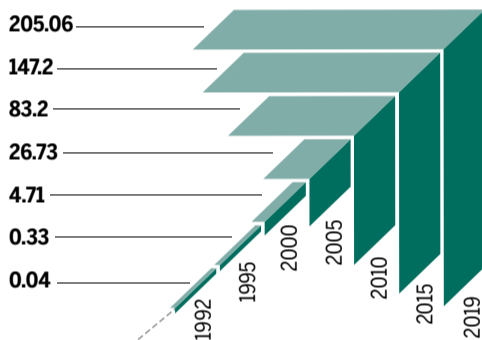
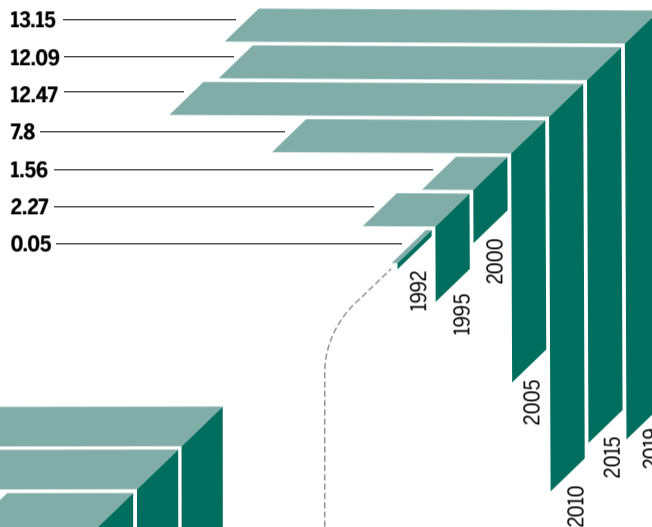
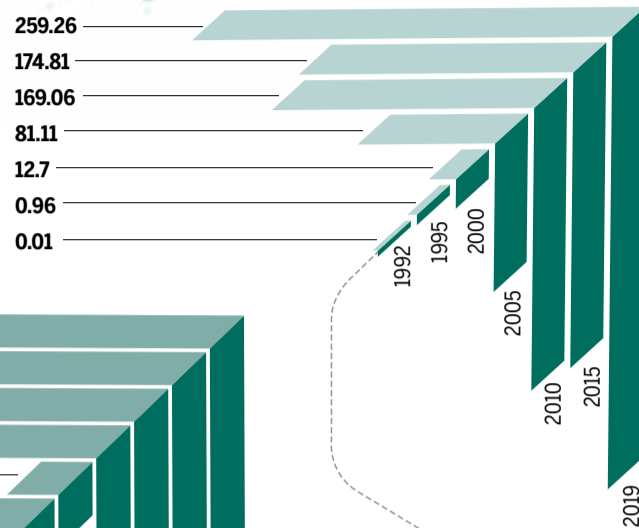
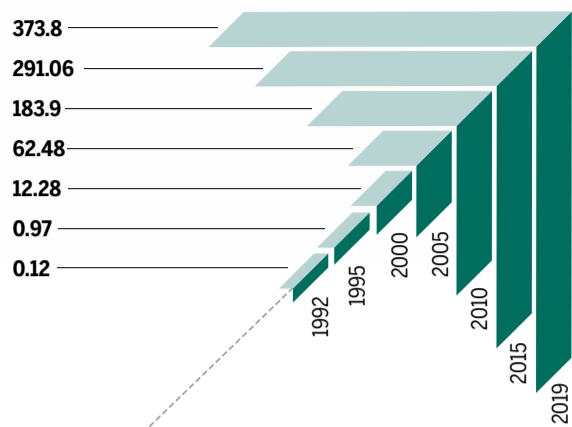
To meet such goals, specific targets have been set.

According to the district's committee, Xinwu's annual GDP growth is projected to remain at around 6 to 7 percent during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period, while fixed-asset investment is expected to increase 6 percent every year during the same period. The district's R&D investment will reach 4 percent of the total GDP volume in the next five years while the total retail sales of consumer goods will grow by up to 9 percent annually.

But goals will not be met in haste. Jiang said the creation of a friendly, efficient business environment comes first.

Land or government subsidies are not the best ways to solicit companies, because these are only one-time policies. To create ecosystems for various industries is a top priority on the government work agenda so companies can seek long-term development in Xinwu, she said.

“We need to trust the market and companies' judgment. Companies throughout the industrial chain will recommend to each other the most appropriate high-tech parks with an adequate supply of high-caliber human resources and supporting industries,” Jiang said. “The government only needs to provide the best business environment and let the market make the decision naturally.”



Total retail sales of consumer goods

Public budget revenue
Fiscal revenue

Paid-in foreign capital

Per capita disposable income of urban residents

Total imports
Total exports

ASTRAZENECA INVESTING HEAVILY IN HIGH-TECH DISTRICT

Global pharmaceutical companies attracted to area of innovation

Cai Mengqi

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he Wuxi National Hi-Tech District, also known as the WND in East China's Jiangsu province is a beacon of economic development in Wuxi and is pursuing technological innovation.

The biomedical industry has grown into an engine for the development of the district, which is also widely known for its booming internet of things businesses.

The industry's output value has increased steadily for several years in the district. In 2019, its output value surpassed 53 billion yuan (\$7.9 billion), placing the district among China's top 20 biomedical industrial parks.

In April, the district's government rolled out a three-year plan to guide the development of the biomedical industry, saying it will strive to attract 300 related enterprises, cultivate five listed enterprises, and help to raise the industrial output value to exceed 100 billion yuan by 2022.

The WND will provide strong support to biomedical enterprises looking to set up operations there, local officials said. A total of 500 million yuan is given out each year to provide enterprises with rental support, financing discounts and talent subsidies, according to the three-year plan.

Big names in the global life science industry have eyed new opportunities in the WND for several years.

The district is now home to more than 150 leading biomedical enterprises, including AstraZeneca, WuXi AppTec, Dical Pharmaceutical, and Jemincare Group.

AstraZeneca, a global biopharmaceuticals producer, chose the district when it first entered the Chinese market in 1993.

To date, the total investment of the British-Swedish biopharmaceuticals group in Wuxi has exceeded \$300 million. It has topped Wuxi's tax list for two years, paying nearly 3.5 billion yuan in taxes in 2019.

In 2001, AstraZeneca invested \$134 million to establish its Wuxi supply base, that now serves to develop and supply drugs for 75 countries and regions around the world.

In 2017, the company opened its China Healthcare Internet of Things Innovation Center in the WND to explore innovative IoT-based integrated diagnoses and treatment solutions.

So far, the company's smart healthcare achievements have been widely adopted in more than 1,400 hospitals in China and many programs have been introduced abroad.

In one initiative alone, over 700 pediatric nebulization rooms were established in countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and cancer screening programs were extended to 11 countries.

AstraZeneca announced the next strategic innovative move with the WND at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in 2019.

The deal commits the company to supporting the building of the Wuxi Interna-

tional Life Science Innovation Park, or the I-Campus.

It's another attempt by AstraZeneca to build an incubation platform for early research and development, industrialization of research achievements, display of intelligent products and professional services in the life sciences sector.

This platform covers four areas in the pharmaceutical industry: drugs, devices, diagnoses and digital, according to the company.

The new park is expected to provide a strong innovation center for startups at home and abroad to develop new medical products and technologies that meet more patients' needs.

Noting the importance of government incentives to help foreign investors overcome barriers, Steve Bates, CEO of the United Kingdom Bio-Industry Association, said: "The campus will become an attractive place for UK companies to invest. We are very keen to help with some of the challenges."

"Our healthcare internet of things strategy started here (in Wuxi); it will leave its mark

across the country and among those involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, bringing benefits to patients not only in China but across the world," said Leon Wang, the company's executive vice-president.

"We expect to attract more than 100 innovative companies in five years, gathering global talent and resources in cutting-edge technologies to build an international life science industry cluster," Wang added.

In April this year, the first 10 enterprises set up shop in the I-Campus. The I-Campus and its strategic partner, the Australian Trade and Investment Commission, also announced they will work together to promote the exchange and interaction of Chinese and Australian life science companies.

Bao Di, general manager of Greater China at the Australian Trade and Investment Commission, said the importance of innovation and cooperation between the health sector and enterprises is being highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said he believes that cooperation could help both sides to further expand coopera-

tion areas and make contributions to patients worldwide.

According to AstraZeneca, it plans to launch more life science innovation campuses in more Chinese cities in the future, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Hangzhou.

China is AstraZeneca's second-largest market in the world. In 2019, the company achieved nearly \$4.9 billion in sales in China.

The WND has become a strategic hub for AstraZeneca's R&D, production, operations and innovation in China, thanks to its advantageous location, supportive local government and top-notch infrastructure, according to Wang.

"When it comes to the local government, we have found officials open-minded, and the district's favorable tax policies make the city especially attractive," Wang said.

AstraZeneca's two supply bases and logistics centers in Wuxi and Taizhou, Jiangsu province export high-quality medicines to nearly 80 countries and regions around the world. In 2019, the company's total import and export volume exceeded \$4.2 billion.



Clockwise from top: Visitors try their hand at an intelligent rehabilitation system at AstraZeneca's China Healthcare Internet of Things Innovation Center in the Wuxi National Hi-Tech District. The center is equipped with a chronic respiratory disease data management system. AstraZeneca is commissioned to build the Wuxi International Life Science Innovation Park, or the I-Campus. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

SMART, GREEN LOGISTICS IS KEY TO ECONOMIC UPGRADING

Wealth delivered to China's smaller cities, rural areas

David Blair

The application of automation and artificial intelligence to China's logistics networks is improving normal life in unexpected ways. It is enabling the upgrading of the real economy of factories and agriculture. Plus, it is important in reducing poverty.

The capability to move many millions of packages is a key enabler to digital commerce which is building wealth and entrepreneurship in China's small cities and rural areas.

Also, a rapid and efficient logistics system is key to the Belt and Road Initiative's core goal of building a new Silk Road that supports trade throughout Eurasia.

The Cainiao warehouse in Wuxi's Xinwu district illustrates the upgrading and high-tech transformation of business in Jiangsu, and throughout China. Cainiao is the wholly-owned logistics arm of Alibaba.

Partly because of rising wages and great competition for workers, the warehouse has implemented some of the world's most advanced automation to cut the labor count from more than 2,000 to less than 1,000.

As in many other industries in Jiangsu province and throughout China, Cainiao shows that the idea that the nation's economic model is based on cheap, unskilled labor is outdated and wrong. Many companies in Jiangsu said that competition for labor is one of the factors driving them to upgrade their production processes.

Li Kaifu, Chinese AI specialist and founder of the venture capital firm Sinovation Ventures, said in an earlier interview with China Daily: "When you measure implementation



Cainiao Future Park in Xinwu district of Wuxi, Jiangsu province integrates internet of things technology with the logistics business. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and value creation, China is ahead. Roughly speaking, China's AI engineers are more massive in number, more hardworking and tenacious, and are moving forward and creating momentum."

He added that the Chinese tech sector is more competitive and its business model innovation is "definitely way ahead" of Silicon Valley.

He argued that massive amounts of data are a key factor in the success of China's AI and big data industries.

Yao Xinyu, senior manager of the east China region for Cainiao, said: "The key is AI. When we deploy more robots, we need to store more data on our system. So only Cainiao is able to support the huge orders from Tmall. We are the only company able to process this huge amount of data because we have the needed algorithm and system."

He added that Cainiao designs and builds the robots themselves. The core is not the

robots but the system and the algorithms. "If you visit us next year, you'll see new robots in our warehouse. They are faster and able to hold up heavier products," he said.

Another large benefit of automation is that the robots do the dangerous work of moving heavy packages, so workers' injuries have been practically eliminated.

A recent report by the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, a high-level international nonprofit organization which advises the Chinese government on environmental issues, recommended that China strengthen its governmental and other institutions to become the leader in making supply chains more eco-friendly.

Recognizing the importance of sustainable supply chains to reaching the national goal of building an ecological civilization, Alibaba has adopted initiatives that use smart routing to reduce delivery journey distances, deploy

new energy delivery vehicles, and also recycle and reduce packaging. In these cases, using technology to increase delivery efficiency also helps the environment.

An efficient logistics system is also an important component of China's poverty alleviation efforts. According to Alibaba, the number of Taobao villages in China exceeded 4,000 in 2019.

A Taobao village is defined as having online transactions exceeding 10 million yuan, more than 100 online businesses, and with at least 10 percent of households involved in e-commerce.

AliResearch, Alibaba's research arm, estimated that Taobao Villages created 6.8 million jobs in the 12 months ending June 2019 throughout the e-commerce value chain. In 2019, the 63 Taobao villages located in the country's most impoverished areas generated about 2 billion yuan (\$297.94 million) in e-commerce sales. Total sales of Taobao villages exceeded 700 billion yuan in the financial year from July 2018 to June 2019, according to Alibaba.

E-commerce is giving rural people throughout China the chance to achieve real prosperity. Even just 10 years ago, many young people had to leave their rural or small city homes to find opportunities. Now, many can use online sales to create their own opportunities near their families.

Finally, Cainiao is investing heavily in upgrading its international capabilities.

In June 2020, it announced its plans to bring about a 100 percent increase in logistics efficiency globally. Specifically, Cainiao will increase its number of chartered flights to 1,260 from 260 in the next nine months, reducing air freight time from the current seven to 10 days to three-five days.

Cainiao will also expand its overseas warehouse network, from 30 warehouses spanning one million square meters to over 2 million square meters in three years.

Along with other logistics companies, Cainiao is a fundamental part of the technical upgrading of China's economy and of the growth of domestic consumption.



TOP EXECUTIVES ATTEST TO DISTRICT'S FAVORABLE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Foreign-invested enterprises flourishing in Xinwu

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inwu district in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, is home to more than 26,000 businesses, including 1,674 foreign-funded enterprises, involving a total of \$23.3 billion in paid-in overseas capital. The

businesses, mainly focused on high-tech, new energy and modern service industries, are playing a vital role in the district's high-quality economic growth. Representatives from the local business community shared their views on Xinwu's business environment and tell of their companies' success stories in the district.



Shu Peng
operations
director at Jabil
Wuxi

With more than 10 years of experience working at Jabil Circuit (Wuxi), I have fond — and proud — memories of the progress we have made in Xinwu district. Once termed as "farmland" by one of our European customers at that time, the same piece of land is today a fully-developed free trade zone equipped with leading-edge infrastructure. Today, Wuxi leads Chinese cities in terms of per capita GDP. In tandem with growth, Jabil Wuxi also boasts one of the highest per capita revenue among Jabil sites worldwide. Jabil established its Wuxi subsidiary in 2004 and during the past 16 years, the company in the city has seen three major transformations. Today, manufacturing is a suite of turnkey solutions with automation and software powered by 5G technology. At all times, we challenge ourselves to provide more value-added services to our customers. This would not be possible without the assistance of the local government and authorities that supported our efforts to review and reform for the better. The user-friendly commercial environment, plus the combination of traditional culture and modern style, are attracting more global talents to start their careers or develop their own businesses in Xinwu.



Ye Celeste
vice-president
of Infineon

Moving to a country alone for the first time and starting a new life there can be challenging. However, my experience in China's Xinwu district was a smooth and pleasant one — thanks to its diversity and development.

Xinwu district is a well-developed, beautiful area that offers both modern conveniences and a natural charm. It is a hub for international companies in the city, as well as the highland of integrated circuits and internet of things industries in China. Infineon Wuxi has impressively been a part of the district for the past 25 years and shaping the semiconductor landscape for tomorrow. The district also prioritizes quality development and supports the enterprises. Such support follows in line with Infineon's motto to prioritize quality first. With quality as its competitive advantage, Next Level of Zero Defect is a core program of Infineon's operations management. Xinwu's leadership in high-quality development was evident again with the Wuxi Mayor Quality Awards presented to local enterprises, including Infineon.



Peter
Coppieters
general manager
of Atlas
Copco (Wuxi)
Compressor

Wuxi city continuously impresses me with its international business orientation, modernization drive and ecological focus. It has attracted several foreign-funded hospitals and international schools, improving the level of services and living conditions. The transportation network is well developed ... very convenient for commuting and traveling. Digitalization is spreading to more and more aspects in life. There is no need to take cash anymore and many things can be done efficiently using a smartphone. As Atlas Copco, we settled in Xinwu district 26 years ago, starting with one small factory in 1994. Over the years, we have expanded and built three factories in total. Atlas Copco Wuxi has now also a research and development center. During our development, we have received support from the district government in areas like efficient logistics, attracting talented people and social security benefits for employers. The good business atmosphere in Wuxi encourages us to explore new levels of win-win development aligned with the local government. Also this year, we are developing new products and investing significantly in enhancing our facilities with new capabilities.



Naiki Youichi
general
manager of
Sony Digital
Products
(Wuxi)

I came to Wuxi in January 2018 almost without knowledge of Xinwu district. Before I officially worked and lived here, I just had the chance to visit the district on business trips once or twice a year. After living in the district for more than two years, I find it a very livable place with generous people and wild green space. Talents are the wealth of enterprises. A healthy environment helps to cultivate talented people, which will benefit



the development of enterprises. We have been committed to creating an environment in which employees can work with joy and improve themselves constantly. Xinwu district has been actively supporting the operation of the enterprises. It has issued various kinds of policies to support their development. This year marks the 15th anniversary of our company in Xinwu. Without the help and support of the district, we cannot continue with our production, especially during the outbreak of COVID-19 this year, let alone contribute to the local society continuously.



Itadani
Sadanori
member of the
board and general
manager of
Wuxi Murata
Electronics

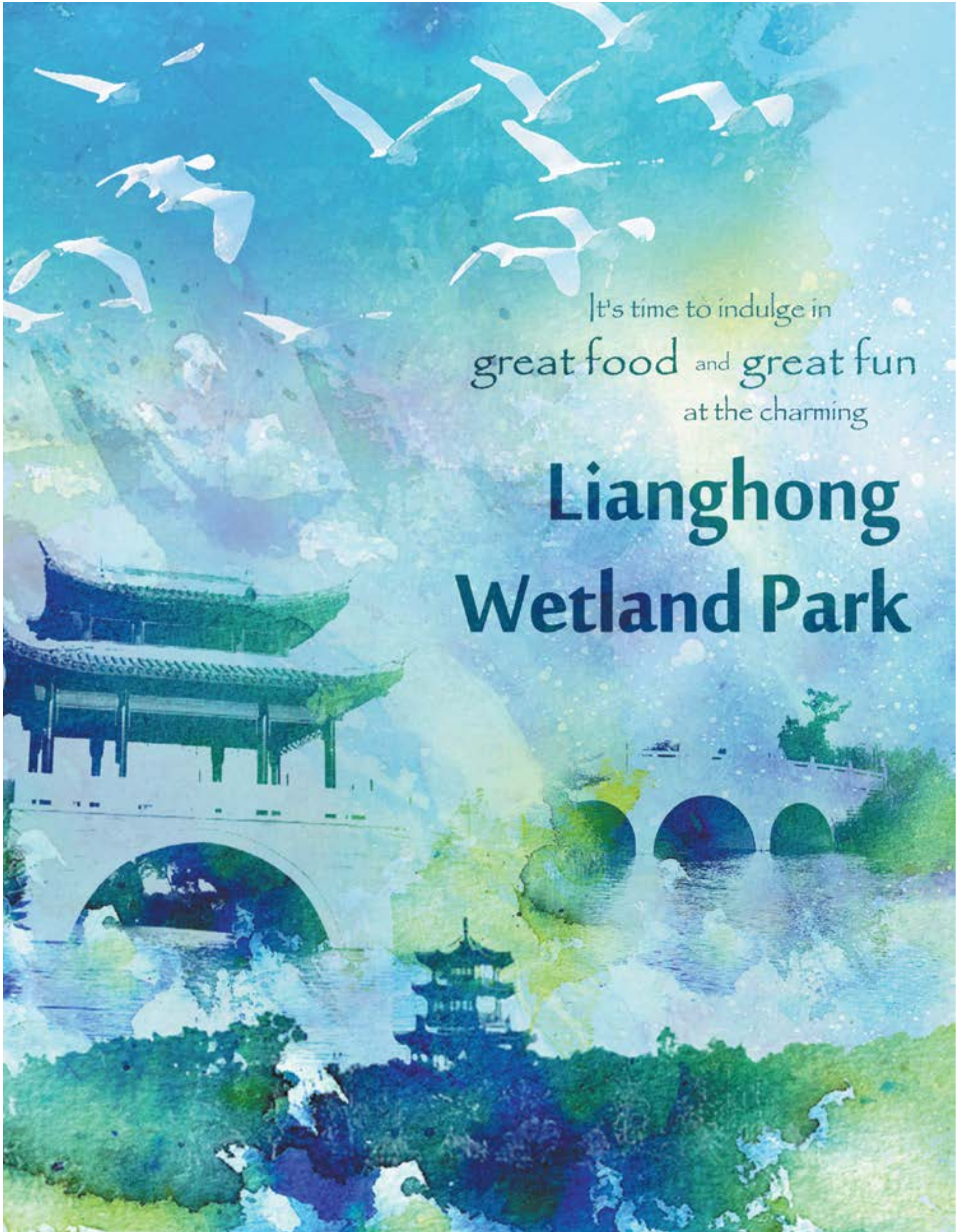
As one of the first batch of foreign companies settled in Wuxi, Murata Electronics initiated its 25-year journey in the city's Singapore Industrial Park in 1994. The company officially started production one year later. We manufacture electronic components, mainly multilayer ceramic capacitors. The Wuxi National Hi-Tech District has been giving us great support and assistance since the very beginning. It also provides good business and education environments, as well as excellent infrastructure, to help the company attract talent and develop smoothly. So far, we have more than 10,000 employees. This year's pandemic influences our company, but we managed to go through the difficult period with the help of the Wuxi government. Due to the expansion of production and the research on new products, we needed Japanese technicians to come to Wuxi during the outbreak of the virus. The Wuxi government took immediate action, arranged chartered flights and guaranteed our production. I'd like to take the

chance to express our gratitude to the government. Thanks to the development of 5G, unmanned vehicles and some other markets, our company has further expanded production after we established a second factory in Wuxi.



Chung Euntae
vice-president
of SK hynix
(China)

Founded in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, in 2005, SK hynix has become the largest foreign-funded single project in the province in terms of investment value, at the fastest development pace and with state-of-the-art technologies. It has become a successful example of South Korean high-tech companies' investment in Jiangsu and China. All these have proved that SK hynix's decision to set up a company in Wuxi's Xinwu district was wise ... the success of SK hynix in China not only relies on the company's efforts, but also on the continuous support and trust of the Wuxi government. It fully understands our culture and business philosophy, and offers great help in many areas, including land transfer and infrastructure construction. The government is nothing but the strong supporter and partner of SK hynix. In 2019, the leaders of the city and the district visited our company many times to give support when we were expanding the construction of the Wuxi factory. The project advanced much ahead of schedule with their support, especially in construction permits. Over the past 10 years, we have deeply integrated into the city. We not only pursue economic value, but also contribute to local society by holding various charity activities, including establishing schools and hospitals, to thank the people of Wuxi.



It's time to indulge in
great food and great fun
at the charming

Lianghong Wetland Park



RICH HISTORICAL RELIQS PRESERVED FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Museums reveal treasures of ancient Yue state

Alexis Hooi

T

he gray mud-pottery ball fits into the palm of a hand, its interlocking coils spotted with turquoise, ruby and brown-glazed motifs. Closer inspection reveals eight snakes seemingly intertwined

with each other, with the tail or body of one snake held in another's mouth, or the head possibly raised upward, its rounded eyes and slightly opened mouth part of the coiled body.

The look of the object, as elusive as its origins, forms what archaeologists call "the mystery of the openwork snake ball".

The object is the only one of its kind, excavated at the Qiuchengdun site of tombs for nobles of the Yue state (770-446 BC) in present-day Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province.

The tombs at Hongshan town in Xishan district were excavated jointly by the Nanjing Museum Archaeology Institute and Xishan District Cultural Relics Management Committee of Wuxi.

One of the tombs at Qiuchengdun stretches nearly 60 meters in the shape of the Chinese character *zhong* (meaning "center"; characterized by a rectangle with smooth edges and a long line down the middle). It is the second-largest one of its kind built for a Yue noble, smaller only to the tomb of the Yue king in neighboring Zhejiang province.

More than 1,000 funerary articles were found at the Hongshan site, including complete sets of pottery, musical instruments and jade ware.

Porcelain musical instruments, numbering about 500 in 10 varieties, make the tomb one of the largest underground storehouses of ancient instruments discovered, including the *yongzhong* (a type of bell) and *qing* (chime stone) from the central plains, *chunyu* (a metal percussion instrument), *dingning* (a bell with a handle), *duo* (big bell) and *ling* (little bell), which were made in typical Yue style, and the major discovery of the *fou* clay musical instrument.

The site's four spherical pottery pieces of the coiling snakes form rare research items that can aid the study of the origin of glass and crucial cultural exchanges between China and other countries.

The tomb dates back to the early years of the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), possibly during the reign of King Goujian who took the throne in 496 BC. The findings mark one of the most important archaeological discoveries on the Yue state to date. The site has far-reaching significance on the study of Yue history and culture, and offers insight into the



Above: Wuxi's Hongshan Site Museum is built based on the Hongshantombs. Left and right: Relics earthed on the Hongshan archaeological site are displayed in the museum.

PHOTOS PROVIDED
TO CHINA DAILY

ancient history of the area as well as that of music and porcelain production.

Visitors to Wuxi's Hongshan Site Museum based on the Hongshan tombs can get up close with these treasures. The museum forms a national key cultural relic protection site and was designed and built along natural and clean lines. The graphic design resembles a bow and arrow, with surrounding waterways and special bronze tiles on the roof. The top of the buildings along the central axis form two slopes, while the courtyard between the entrance and the central hall, paved with

black bricks, reflects the unique architectural style of the country's culturally important Jiangnan area south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

The museum was set up around the large Qiuchengdun Warring States aristocratic mausoleum. It covers more than 9,000 square meters, with a display hall over 3,400 sq m. The tombs and unearthed relics exhibition tell of the discovery, excavation and protection of the tombs. The attraction showcases the luxurious life and burials of the aristocracy and the institution of rites and music during the Yue state, making the site an important stop in line with latest efforts to draw on and preserve local cultural and ecological legacies on the country's development path.

Green spots

To that effect, Lianghong National Wetland Park, located east of Hongshan, and 22 kilometers from downtown Wuxi and 23 km from downtown Suzhou, offers an ideal green stop from the city. The park is near the major Shanghai-Nanjing Railway, Shanghai-Nanjing Expressway and Wuxi's Sunan Shuofang International Airport transportation links. There are also several lakes and rivers close by. Lianghong covers a planned area of 159 hectares and boasts riverine and marsh wetlands, with a wealth of flora and fauna.

Besides the natural environment, the park features hallmarks of ancient civilization including agricultural activities, water conservancy, folk dwellings and bridges. The adjacent Bodu River lays claim to being China's earliest man-made canal, according to written records dating back more than three millennia.

Set within an exhibition site of Chinese Wu culture in Wuxi's Xinwu district, the wetlands are close to Taibo Canal and bordered by Cao Lake in the east and Wangyu River in the south. It is named after a local tale of Liang Hong and Meng Guang, a couple who epitomized love and respect for each other.

Park visitors can row boats, listen to local folk songs and follow stories about Taibo, a legendary ruler who regulated the rivers and waterways, and experience Wu culture.

Earlier this year, a series of cultural gathering activities were rolled out in Wuxi under the theme "Walking Along The Bodu River".



HIGH-CLASS EDUCATION AIMS TO ATTRACT BEST MINDS FROM ACROSS GLOBE TO WUXI

Boston International School in Xinwu district offers peace of mind to foreign and local families

China Daily

To help attract talented people from all over the world, an international school is indispensable to help address family considerations — and Boston International School which opened in the

technology-focused Xinwu district in the southeastern part of Wuxi two years ago has everything to offer.

Covering some 86,000 square meters, the school has attracted a total investment of 350 million yuan (\$52 million).

Offering education from a kindergarten to high-school level, the school can enroll at least 1,800 students. Graduates will be offered both diplomas of Boston International School and St. Joseph High School in the United States.

Ever since its inception, the school's head count has tripled to more than 600 during peak periods. At present, there are about 400 students from 29 countries studying at the school. The number has dropped slightly due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Students learn to play the violin at Boston International School in Wuxi's Xinwu district.

PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

To address the diversity of students, Boston International School has hired more than 70 foreign teachers who, on average, have 10 years of international experience. One-third have a master's degree.

The school uses the International Baccalaureate program, which is an international education program used in more than 4,000 schools across 150 countries and regions.

Overseas employees will feel more comfortable in knowing that their children can get the best possible education. An international school can also help meet the long-term posi-



Brian Rotunno, the school's academic principal

tion of the city, the school's academic principal Brian Rotunno said.

"The school is based on the division of the Wuxi government, which wants to attract foreign businesses and foreign investment," Rotunno said.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has held up people's travel plans, including some of Boston International School's students who wish to return, there is a silver lining. The school's boarding program has seen enrollment increase by up to 30 percent so far this year. This is because parents outside Wuxi want to provide their children with a top-level international school experience, Rotunno said.

The language program is one highlight of the school. While English is the main tool of instruction, the school offers Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, French and German. These are available for students in a mother tongue or acquisition class. All the students can choose to take a third language in Grade Six, if they wish.

The after-school program, called Boston explorers, distinguishes Boston International School. Held during the afternoon from Monday to Thursday, the school offers about 85 extracurricular activities that range from soccer and orchestra to Brazilian jujitsu.

Although Boston International School is still in its early years, long-term plans are in place. Rotunno said the vision is to make it "one of the best schools in the world".

Feng Xiaochun, director of Xinwu district, said that Boston International School will connect the district to international high-end education resources. Not only will the district's educational resources be enriched, the education level in Xinwu will be promoted.

Hospital aids integrated development of medical sector in region

Liu Xia

As the three-year action plan for the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta proceeds at full speed, a new pattern for integrated medical development in the region is taking shape, with the Xinrui Hospital in Wuxi playing an important role.

The hospital is located in Xinwu district, Wuxi and opened in March 2019.

It is a nonprofit hospital built to the standards of a third-class medical institution (the highest grade for Chinese hospitals) and was jointly launched by Xinwu district and Ruijin Hospital affiliated with the Shanghai Jiaotong University School of Medicine. It aims to give Wuxi access to Shanghai's high-end medical resources and boost Wuxi-Shanghai medical cooperation.

Xinrui is meant to further the integrated development of healthcare in the Yangtze River Delta region, according to Yuan Jinxiang, Party secretary of the hospital. He said the hospital boasts high-end medical resources, advanced technology and prestigious doctors from Shanghai.

Leaders of the hospital's various clinical departments are all medical experts from Ruijin Hospital. A total of 309 experts from Shanghai have already registered at the Xinwu-based hospital and are carrying out regular diagnosis and treatment work.

The Xinrui Hospital seeks to reform the



The Xinrui Hospital opens at Xinwu district in 2019. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

medical system of the Yangtze River Delta through intelligent medical cooperation and improve the well-being of locals.

According to Yuan, the hospital boasts cutting-edge technologies and facilities, most of which were purchased at the request of experienced experts from Shanghai. It also set up a green channel for patient referral so people diagnosed with intractable diseases who fail to receive proper treatment in Wuxi can be transferred to Shanghai immediately.

In 2019 alone, over 200 patients were transferred to Shanghai via this channel, Yuan said.

The Xinrui Hospital is seeking to increase information connectivity and make a name for itself.

Modern information technology has made remote consultations, teaching activities, and diagnoses possible, providing people in Wuxi with a quality of care that rivals Ruijin Hospital.

Yuan said the hospital's remote diagnosis center had already benefited many patients and enhanced communication between doctors from Shanghai and Wuxi.

Medical care is an important part of the

integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta, Yuan said. "We began integrating the medical field before the national strategy was announced, and we have benefited substantially as a result.

"The local government has been very helpful, offering financial support and preferential policies, improving transportation and giving us publicity."

There are currently 27 clinical and medical technical departments and 39 specialized disease clinics in the outpatient section of the hospital, and 15 departments have also been set up in the inpatient section.

Our hospital wants to focus on the best disciplines of Ruijin Hospital and provide the strongest service in Wuxi.

For example, endocrinology and hematology rank first and second in the country, and a nephropathy center drawing on Shanghai's expertise will also be established in Wuxi this year, Yuan said.

"We hope to create a medical center for the entire Yangtze River Delta, connect medical institutions in Wuxi, and provide better medical services for locals."

As one of China's most economically active, open, and innovative regions, the Yangtze River Delta region is an important part of the country's modernization and opening-up.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued an outline for the integrated development of the region on Dec 1, 2019.



The Yunlin Life Apartment community provides a friendly environment and considerate services to elderly residents.

PHOTOS BY LI JIN / CHINA DAILY

COMMUNITY LINKS HELP KEEP RESIDENTS HAPPY IN CITY

Elder care a growing priority for Wuxi officials and businesspeople

Alexis Hooi

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wo years ago, Shanghai retiree Yin Yueqin moved to Xinwu district of Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province, because she did not want to live alone in the cosmopolitan financial hub.

Yin's loved ones — her son and his family — all live in Austria and she had wrestled with many daily chores with no help at her old place.

But the 80-year-old former printing factory employee is now all smiles and right at home in her 70-square-meter Wuxi apartment.

"I checked out many places before deciding on this one. People are very helpful here and I get to stay active. The food is also to my taste and I can enjoy all my favorite dishes, like fish and dumplings," she said.

Yin is a resident of the Yunlin Life Apartment community, developed under the Dutch Humanitas (Life Apartment) model that uses "a happy retired life" as its core concept for advanced elder care philosophies.

The development is touted as the first of its kind in the country, offering an open-air and ungated community where residents, young and old, can interact and access a full range of amenities, facilities and services. Perks include elder care-oriented apartments, a nursing center, a rehabilitation hospital, an affordable restaurant, a museum of nostalgic paraphernalia, a heated swimming pool and daily recreational events where the elderly can socialize.

Nearly 200 elderly residents make up about 300 households in the community.

The Jiangsu Yunlin Elderly Care Development Group, under the Jiangsu Sujia Group, rolled out the development four years ago as a "homelike and elderly-oriented community", working closely in line with the approach in the Netherlands, where there are more than 33 "life apartment" projects with waiting lists as long as 10,000 people for its award-winning elder care model.

Elder care at Yunlin offers a way for the country to face the challenges of an aging population as it moves firmly on the development path toward a moderately prosperous society.

In the next three decades, China will see its aging population grow at a faster rate, especially after 2030, when the number of senior citizens is expected to rise by 11 million a year, according to latest population research.

The old-age dependency ratio is also set to be higher than the children's dependency ratio by about 2030, with elder care becoming

a major responsibility of working-age people.

The trend of nuclear families replacing extended ones will also fuel the "empty nest" phenomenon, with the number of senior citizens living alone increasing from about 18 million in 2010 to more than 50 million by 2050. More rural residents will move to cities thanks to rapid development.

Yunlin apartments are sold to the elderly or for permanent use. Its residents are "surrounded by acquaintances, do not leave society, participate in social activities, have relatives and friends who can visit often, enjoy complete housekeeping, nursing and medical services ... all suited for an elder care community," according to the group.

Andreas Jager, general manager of the Yunlin Elderly Care Service Co at the facility, said the focus is on "living a happy life".

"First of all, happiness is universal ... People in the Netherlands want to be happy when they are old and people in China want to be happy when they are old. But of course, there are some cultural differences in how you feel happiness," he said.

The approach to happiness can also incorporate how medical care is given, which is an important aspect of elder care in China but also a major challenge for the industry, Jager said.

For example, it's hard to come across



Elderly residents have a dinner at the Yunlin Life Apartment community's restaurant. PHOTOS BY LI JIN / CHINA DAILY

patients who say, "I feel happy now because I've had a treatment or an injection," Jager said.

"I only hear things that, 'oh, it was a good activity, or I met new people.' That is making people happy. So those are areas we have to change a little bit."

There are doctors and physiotherapists who can help people do chores and exercises, but "it may be to walk a dog. It's cheaper, but it's also nicer," he said.

"To do activities like dancing ... that gives the elderly more self-esteem and more happiness, than when you taking the medical path," he said. And when it's necessary to see a doctor, you have to take a nurse to help you."

Hua Wei, vice-president of Sujia, said the group is involved in many advanced technologies and fields such as big data and real estate, but its focus is still on "high-end elder care services." "Whether it's healthcare or cultural tourism, we want to make life and living better," he said.

Xu Caibin, 48, said she moved to the complex two years ago and also bought a 70-sq-m apartment because it was near the school her daughter attended. There were many opportunities to interact with older residents and neighbors.

XINWU PROVES GOOD CHOICE FOR UK EXPAT

Vibrant Wuxi district provides lifestyle fit for international tastes

James Skinner

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aving lived in Xinwu district for nearly five years, I feel I can speak with some authority about my experiences of living in this fascinating part of Wuxi in East China's Jiangsu province.

Born in the United Kingdom, I came to this part of China in 2016 for a new job working in the media industry. I knew nothing of the area and had done little to no research about what my new home might be like.

To be honest, during my first few days here, I wondered if I had made a mistake. The crowds of people, the strange place names and unfamiliar foods gave me a serious dose of culture shock.

However, after a few weeks spent finding an apartment, identifying the best places for takeout and working out how to get around — I began to appreciate what the area had to

offer. It was modern and vibrant, with a lively bar and restaurant scene comparable to any Western city.

Living in a comfortable apartment near Changjiang North Road, I was able to explore some of the highlights of my new home. Soon, I was regularly enjoying meals at the numerous local Korean and Japanese restaurants that can be found along the Holiday Plaza, a local entertainment zone. I quickly discovered more places of interest during lengthy walks around the area, exploring thousands of shops selling pretty much anything anyone could want, from Chinese spirits to imported food.

After a few months of living in the district, I felt fairly settled and was enjoying my new job. My company is based in a particularly impressive part of Xinwu — Wuxi (National) Software Park, where some of China's most cutting-edge tech firms are based. Walking around the park at lunchtimes, it really gives one a sense of how Xinwu is likely to be at the forefront of developing future technologies, particularly internet of things applications.

These days, I feel truly at home here — and so much has happened during my time in Xinwu. I have moved apartments no less than four times, adopted several dogs, become an expert on all the best international restaurants, and made a fantastic bunch of friends.

For expats, the district's economy offers a healthy selection of jobs, with demand for everything from English teachers to engineers. And over the past few years, I have

met foreigners employed in a diverse range of industries, with many increasingly choosing to take advantage of local preferential policies to set up their own businesses, allowing them to put down roots and make a long-term commitment to the area. Since many live here with young children, the availability of good international schools is another important reason to stay put.

Due to my media work, I have traveled to places all around China — and Xinwu just happens to have excellent transport links. Thanks to the district's high-speed rail station, I can be in Shanghai or Suzhou in less than an hour. If I want to go further afield, Xinwu is home to Wuxi Sunan Shuofang International Airport, with direct flights to cities across China and to a number of countries in the region. And transport here is about to get even better, with a new metro line set to connect the area to the rest of the city.

Reading this, it might sound like the district is mostly just shops and industry, but this really isn't the case. There is green space almost wherever you look. As a pet owner, I have never been short of places for my dogs to stretch their legs — from the greenery that surrounds many of the business parks and residential areas, to beautiful public amenities, such as Lianghong National Wetland Park.

Of course, when living anywhere, financial considerations play a big role in a person's decisions. Traditionally, many expats have headed for megacities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, with their huge demand for skilled workers and long-established expat communities. But Xinwu is an increasingly attractive option for those who come to work in China. The district's affordable housing and general cost of living compares very favorably with its larger rivals, meaning that for many, basing themselves here is a smart choice.

Personally, my experience of living and working in the area has been extremely positive. I have felt welcome and valued, and it is somewhere that I would recommend to anyone looking to start their career or go into business. Indeed, the range of companies and industries available here makes it an obvious destination for gaining new skills and experience.

And if you were left with any doubt that the district truly values the contribution of its foreign residents, then let me leave you with this: In April 2018, I was awarded a prize by the local government recognizing my own contribution to Xinwu as an expat worker.

"Where else in the world would you get a prize for being a hardworking foreigner?" asked a fellow recipient, speaking to me at the awards ceremony.

Where indeed.



The author poses with an award from the local government recognizing his work in Xinwu district.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



James Skinner, a media worker from the United Kingdom, is presented with an award from the local government in April 2018 for his contribution to Xinwu district.

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"It is a more caring environment here and people are well taken care of," said Xu, who works in the financial industry and volunteers in elder care services at the facility.

Home advantage

Wuxi itself is located south of Jiangsu and at the Yangtze River Delta Plain. With the mighty Yangtze River to the north, Taihu Lake to the south, and the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal running through it, Wuxi is a

major waterside town.

Known as the "Pearl of Taihu Lake," the city covers more than 4,600 square kilometers. It had a permanent population of over 6.59 million by the end of 2019 and currently administers the two county-level cities of Jiangyin and Yixing, five districts of Liangxi, Xishan, Huishan, Binhu and Xinwu, as well as the Wuxi Economic Development Zone.

Wuxi has long been known as a cultural city at the south bank of the Yangtze River, recording more than six millennia of human civilization, three millennia of written records and 2.5 millennia of urban history, with its

rich cultural heritage drawing talent in great numbers.

The city continues to maintain a successful balance between culture and industry as well as the ancient and modern.

In 2019, Wuxi registered a GDP of more than 1.19 trillion yuan (\$177 billion), an increase of 6.7 percent year-on-year. The city has topped overall satisfaction ratings in national public service quality measurements and has been rated one of the most liveable cities in the Chinese mainland for three consecutive years.

Fourteen of the country's top 500 compa-

nies, 30 of its top 500 manufacturing companies and 15 of its top 500 service companies call Wuxi home.

Yunlin resident Yin Yueqin, whose family members visit her regularly, said she certainly does not feel lonely in her new city. Yunlin apartment complex employees often help her cope with the changes in daily life, such as keeping up with digital technology and smartphone apps to pay for utilities and other bills.

"I'm healthy and happy. I even get to use the shuttle bus service here to visit the malls in the city at least twice a week," she said.

ANCIENT TREASURES CHERISHED

Heritage education passes rich traditions on to future generations



Young visitors learn about Taibo, who is considered the architect of ancient Wu culture, at Taibo Temple. ZHANG HUILIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Children experience traditional culture at the former residence of Chinese scholar Qian Mu (1895-1900) in Xinwu district. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A stone park in Xinwu district combines stone art, landscaping and the Wu culture. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Xinwu residents celebrate Taibo Fair with lion and dragon dances on the ninth day of the first month on lunar calendar. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Clockwise from top left: Grapes grown in the Hongshan region have established a reputation for quality. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A local resident makes a traditional pastry. WU XIAOHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY Expats learn to make *qingtuan*, a green glutinous rice-ball dessert, in Xinwu district. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Hongshan Mountain is blanketed in morning mist. LYU YULUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



梅里 Meili

Meili, the ancient name of Meicun village, Xinwu district, Wuxi, Jiangsu province, is a rich land fostering many talents and has a special culture with a long history.

It was the capital of Wu, an ancient kingdom founded by the legendary king Taibo toward the end of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), as well as the birthplace of Wu culture.

Now the village, combining ancient and modern features, is striving to make it a new city full of hope and vigor, suitable for life and work.

TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT RESONATES CULTURAL DEPTH OF WUXI

Key city to the south
of the Yangtze River a prime
example of balance
between modern
industry and heritage

Alexis Hooi

A

sk any Chinese fan about the traditional two-stringed bowed instrument *erhu* and *Moon Reflected on Second Spring* will most likely be mentioned.

The piece was famously composed and played six decades ago by Ah Bing, a blind street musician whose real name was Hua Yanjun.

His hometown in Wuxi, East China's Jiangsu province, is known as a major production center of the instrument.

Erhu, one of the most representative traditional music instruments in the southern Yangtze River area, has a profound connection with Wuxi's Meicun town.

Meicun began producing the instrument in 1965. Led by master artisans such as Lu Linsheng, Wan Qixing and Wan Jugen, more people have since devoted themselves to the instrument.

An *erhu* guild has been set up, riding on the established "Meicun brand", that has grown to include at least 18 major groups producing more than 50,000 *erhu* annually.

The town has nurtured many craftsmen of the traditional instrument and continues to be a guardian of its musical form.

Wan Qixing is known for crafting the instrument, sometimes known in the Western world as the Chinese violin, for more than six decades, with a workshop in Meicun.

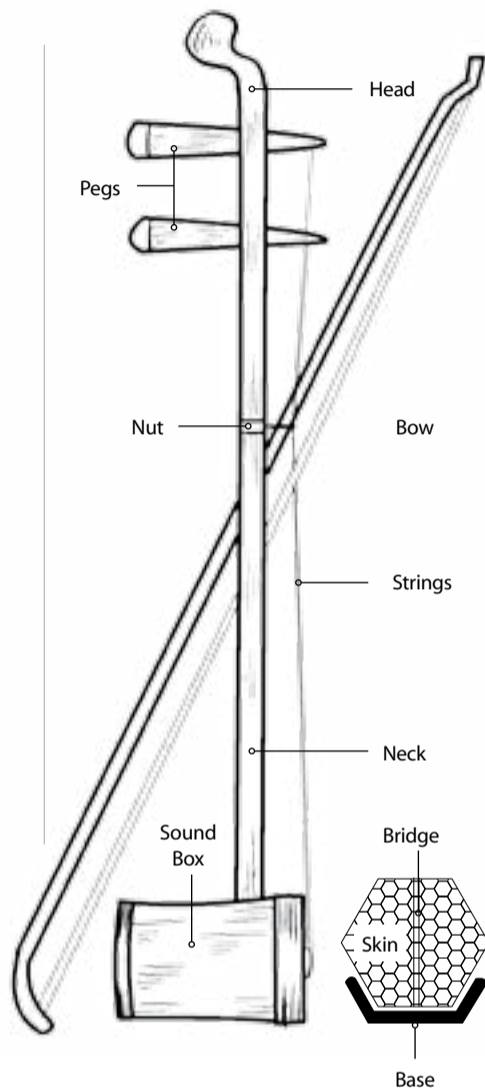
Wan, born in Meicun in 1938, founded the Guyue Erhu Workshop in 1991. In 2009, he won a gold medal at the "superior *erhu*" competition organized by the Erhu Society of Chinese Musicians Association and clinched the top accolade of "master *erhu* maker".

A year later, he was invited to the inaugural "international treasure" *erhu*-making competition, winning two gold and three silver medals as an "international master *erhu* maker". Wan's creations have been known to fetch up to 180,000 yuan (\$27,000) each.

Wan's son-in-law, Huang Jianhong, runs an *erhu* workshop in Wuxi and embarked on a radical move — using artificial leather to replace the snakeskin that covers the drumlike resonator — in an environmentally friendly attempt to update the craft that dates back more than 1,000 years.

Wan has described the exacting craftsmanship in making an *erhu*, centered on stretching a python's skin over the sound box. "This stage is crucial since it involves using the core techniques ... by which the skill level of artisans can be judged," he said.

Erhu is made up of a sound box, neck, peg, strings, nut and bridge. The sound box is a round, hexagonal or octagonal resonator, with the python skin covering its front end and an acoustic window on its back. The instrument's neck is slender with a bended head. Both the sound box and neck are made



of hardwood such as red wood, black sandal wood, ebony and rosewood.

Two inner strings, traditionally made from twisted silk but now increasingly of metal or nylon, are attached from the pegs to the base. The nut, flexible or fixed, is placed around the neck and two strings. The lower ends of the strings are bridged with bamboo or wood at the center of the snakeskin. The bow is made of a slender bamboo stick and horse hair, which runs against the strings, vibrating them. The vibrations are transmitted to the snakeskin via the bridge, resonating in the sound box to produce the instrument's characteristic sound.

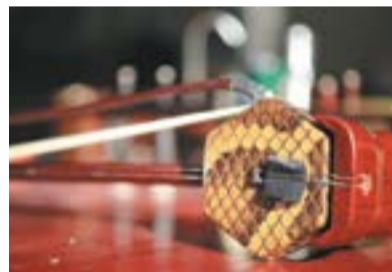
"Although sacrificing pythons for the *erhu* is not encouraged in many places, especially in European countries, we will not completely discard the traditional process because the techniques have been passed from generation to generation," Huang said. Almost every part of an *erhu* is made by hand. The wood, imported from African and Southeast Asian countries, takes at least two years to fully dry. Usually it takes at least two to three months to assemble an *erhu*, according to Huang.

His workshop has produced instruments for more than 10 countries and regions, including South Korea, Japan, Australia and some European countries. Huang said the *erhu* workshops import the skins of pythons, which are farmed, from Southeast Asian countries.

After 10 years of research with technology partners, Huang started applying artificial leather to the instruments for entry and mid-level players.

"The sound effect is very good. Even professional players couldn't tell which one was made using the artificial leather," Huang said.

Aside from the more simplified production



The above pictures show how *erhu*, a traditional Chinese musical instrument, is crafted. PHOTOS BY XU WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Scan the code
for *erhu* music

technique, the artificial leather is also immune from changes to humidity and temperature, making the process much easier, he added. But python skins cannot be replaced in high-quality *erhu*, at least not yet, Huang said.

"We will keep on investing in the technology and hope the instrument will get more popular in overseas markets," he said.

Reflecting the time-honored traditions and skills of the artisans, *erhu* making in Meicun has been placed on Jiangsu's list of intangible cultural heritage protection.

Wuxi itself has, in fact, been home to more than half of the top *erhu* artists in China in the past century.

Wuxi native Liu Tianhua, who has led the modern, academic school of *erhu* artists in China, came up with masterpieces including *Beautiful Night*, *Autumn Moon Over the Han Palace* and *Marching on the Bright Road*.

Such works are not only popular in China, but have resonated with audiences across the world.

Renowned Japanese conductor Seiji Ozawa counts himself as one of them. In 1978, Ozawa was invited to serve as the conductor at the China National Symphony Orchestra. He was then asked to lead a string ensemble based on *Moon Reflected on Second Spring*.

Ozawa later said he was deeply touched by the "paths of the piece", according to Japanese media reports.

"Bursting into tears, Ozawa said 'one should kneel down to listen (to the music)'" Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun reported.

The piece soon became a classic on the international stage of music.

Wuxi artists have also played a major role in promoting its musical heritage to the world.

In 2008, *erhu* master player Hu Jiandong staged a solo concert in Vienna featuring local masterpieces. The event contributed to the understanding of Chinese music among Western audiences. Hu is also the "image ambassador" for Meicun's *erhu* production and performing industries.

Meicun continues to be the hub of Wuxi's *erhu* performing arts. Since 2011, the town has been the permanent host of China's top-level *erhu* performing event. In 2012, the Erhu Culture Park, a facility for *erhu* production, performing, training and related cultural activities, was launched in the town.

In 2018, a month-long series of events, including concerts and *erhu* competitions, was hosted in Wuxi in memory of Ah Bing. He had lived in the old downtown area and earned his living by playing the *erhu* in the street, struggling with poverty for decades.

The folk musician was born in Wuxi in 1893. He learned to play the *erhu* and other instruments from his father.

Composer Hua Yanjun displayed immense talent as a teenager, but he led a tough life. After the death of his mother and father, Hua became homeless and had to play on the streets to make money. He also developed a debilitating illness and became blind, dying in poverty in 1950.

His magnum opus is *Moon Reflected on Second Spring*, or *Erquan Yingyue*. The piece resonates with an intense folk character that seems to echo the hardships, trials and tribulations of the composer's life.

To many listeners, the soft, smooth melancholic melody perfectly expresses the inspiration the composer drew from what would have been a deep sense of dissatisfaction and bitterness, perhaps revealing his longing for a better life.



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