

BUSINESSFOCUS

FROM THE GRASSROOTS



Geely setting new benchmarks

Automaker utilizing automation, high-tech to make cars people want to drive

By WANG XIAOYU and YANG JUN in Guiyang

Highly automated and flexible assembly lines alongside a consumer-centric strategy have enabled automaker Geely's factory in Guiyang, Guizhou province, to build a unique product portfolio and make inroads in overseas markets, according to a senior manager.

The production plant's first batch of exports — a seven-seat SUV model catering to Filipinos' demands for spaciousness — was exported to the Philippines in October, said Gu Jianguang, deputy general manager of Guizhou Geely Automobile Manufacturing Co Ltd.

"About 700 such cars have been exported there as of recently, and about 600 more are expected to arrive in the Philippines by the end of Jan," Gu said.

"We are also aiming to make a foray into the Middle East in June. Compared to foreign competitors, Geely automobiles will stand out in terms of advanced designs and reasonable prices," he said.

The optimism regarding overseas sales is bolstered by the automaker's robust and versatile production capability, according to the company.

The company's futuristic Guiyang plant is spread over across 68 hectares. It broke ground in late 2015 and went into operation in April 2018. It contains four major facilities responsible for stamping, welding, assembling, painting and final assembly.

"The stamping plant, containing 257 automated machines, has an automation rate of about 75 per-



Top: Automated production lines at Guizhou Geely Automobile Manufacturing Co Ltd on Jan 5. Above: A worker assembles a vehicle at Guizhou Geely Automobile Manufacturing Co Ltd, on Jan 5. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

cent," Gu said. "Altogether, the entire production line can churn out 45 cars per hour."

A hallmark of the factory is its flexibility in producing different types of automobiles at more or less the same pace, he added.

"We are able to manufacture conventional gasoline-powered vehicles as well as cars running on methanol and hybrids. Many Geely factories in the country are designed to produce one specific type of automobile, but we are aiming for a diversified product portfolio from the very beginning at this facility."

To survive and thrive in an industry where technological upgrades,

big or small, are being invented and employed rapidly, Gu said the plant has also intensified efforts devoted to research and development, including decoding emerging trends in the market and improving hardware.

When the COVID-19 pandemic halted production at the plant for a brief period last year, Gu said more attention was devoted to hammering out details in the design and production of new models, paving the way for the smooth rollout of a new model in June.

"Thankfully, the factory began to resume production on Feb 20 and fully returned to normal by March," he said.

Nestled in the picturesque and pristine hills of Guiyang, Gu said the company is envisioning partnerships with colleges in the region to nurture more local talent in the automobile industry. At the moment, there are about 2,500 employees at the plant, with 90 percent of them natives of Guizhou province.

Contact the writers at wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn



Online See more by scanning the code.

East Century uses big data for flood control

By WANG XIAOYU and YANG JUN in Guiyang

As climate change heightens the threat of flooding, a big data and cloud computing company in Guizhou province is intent on harnessing a range of information to track risk factors and send alerts in a rapid and cost-effective manner.

The conventional method for predicting floods relies on setting up physical hydrometric stations in high-risk areas. Based on information transmitted from sensors placed near waterways, a number of variables are monitored, including water level, flow rate, temperature, rainfall and evaporation, and then analysis is conducted accordingly.

The method is effective and essential, but the caveat is that to increase its precision inevitably requires investing more in infrastructure, said Li Tao, chief engineer at Guizhou East Century Science & Technology, a company founded in 2000 in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province.

With extreme weather shifts becoming more common, it is not feasible to continuously establish new hydrometric stations in every

area deemed as flood-prone, Li said. The company, set up in the city regarded as the epicenter of China's emerging big data scene, has instead looked to the digital sphere to tackle mounting flood hazards.

The novel warning system, known as East Auspicious Clouds, first aggregates meteorological and geographic information, as well as data on water bodies and rainfall, from different government departments and research institutions.

Both real-time and historical data are fed into an analysis model that boasts one of the fastest speeds in the world to complete one session of comprehensive analysis of all data at hand.

"The system breaks from the traditional flood forecasting mechanism that usually costs a lot in terms of construction and equipment maintenance. It also covers a much wider range of areas and achieves a high precision rate," Li said.

"The traditional sensors measure the amount of water on the ground. By comparison, the system begins calculating and forecasting the amount of rainfall when raindrops begin forming from water

vapor in the air," he said.

Yu Linmei, deputy general manager of the company, said in an earlier interview that the system is able to renew its alerts every 15 minutes. The normal speed for domestic counterparts is one hour to 90 minutes, and for most advanced global competitors about 30 minutes.

On average, the system is able to issue warnings for small and medium-sized bodies of water about one to four hours in advance. The window of opportunity for early preparedness is estimated to reduce economic losses by up to 90 percent, according to the company.

The idea of tapping into big data's potential for flood prediction work was first hatched in 2014. The first version of the system was rolled out in 2018 and the second in May 2019.

So far, the system has been mainly applied in Guizhou province and is also making headway in other parts of the country, the company said.

In June, the system had successfully predicted 10 hours in advance that a stretch of railway tracks connecting Guizhou and Sichuan provinces were at risk of being submerged.

Homestays key to rural tourism sector's revival

By WANG XIAOYU and YANG JUN in Guiyang

When Xingli Group, a tourism, culture and e-commerce company in Guizhou province, offered to renovate houses in Pianpo township for free in 2018, villagers in the mountainous area were skeptical, worrying that the company would charge them later and swindle their limited savings from farming.

But eventually they embraced the arrival of the company, as well as travelers swarming the town for its combination of bucolic landscapes, comfortable accommodations and a variety of cultural events by the local Bouyei ethnic group — known for their indigo-dyed fabrics and rice wine brewing skills.

"Xingli Group covered all renovation costs, and we get 60 percent of total revenue from homestays," said Chen Tingchao, the 85-year-old owner of an old wooden house converted into a popular hotel annexed to a pub, a teahouse and a small library.

His daughter, Chen Weixiu, was one of the first villagers in Pianpo to start a homestay business on her own in 2008.

Following a brief boom in local tourism around 2010, Chen said her income became unstable as the number of visitors to Pianpo plunged due to outdated infrastructure and monotonous sightseeing activities.

Sitting in the refurbished homestay, Chen said she was relieved and happy to see that her hometown's tourism industry has regained popularity. Her small business has grown from five to nine rooms and three workers are hired to help with cleaning and cooking.

"Now during the peak travel season in May, all rooms are booked," she said.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, total revenue from the tourism industry in Pianpo likely reached 478 million yuan (\$73.9 million) last year, up by nearly 30 percent from 2019, according to the township government.

Zhang Yu, manager of Xingli's branch that oversees the project at Pianpo, said: "The expansion of a firm's business in the countryside and the improvements of local residents' livelihoods should be equally valued. Our strategy is to enroll villagers in the process so that we can all get richer together."

Zhang said the company had invested more than 2 million yuan into repurposing and upgrading 60 homestays in Pianpo. After they were put into operation, proprietors like the Chen family can get 60 percent of the revenue and the company claims 30 percent.

The remaining 10 percent is either distributed to poverty-

The expansion of a firm's business in the countryside and the improvements of local residents' livelihoods should be equally valued. Our strategy is to enroll villagers in the process so that we can all get richer together."

Zhang Yu, a division manager at Xingli Group

30 percent

year-on-year growth of revenue from the tourism sector in Pianpo, Guizhou province, last year

stricken households in Pianpo or used for property maintenance, he added.

In 2019, all of the 86 impoverished residents in Pianpo had emerged from poverty and their annual income had reached nearly 12,700 yuan on average, according to the local government.

The revival of Pianpo's tourism is typical in China's drive to achieve rural rejuvenation — a national development plan first proposed in late 2017 to boost rural incomes and raise living standards for residents in the countryside.

To further bolster the income of locals, Zhang said Xingli planted 16,700 square meters of sunflowers and plans to raise crawfish in 4,700 square meters of fields, in preparation for launching a new sightseeing and fishing project.

"In addition, we are helping farmers to sell vegetables, fruits, sausages and tofu to other regions via our online and offline channels to create another income stream for them," he said. Zhang added that local industrial development plays a critical role in drawing more migrant workers to return to their hometowns.

"So far, five employees at the company are natives of Pianpo who have given up job opportunities in other parts of Guizhou province and decided to stay in their hometown," Zhang said.

"It is very difficult for a company from outside the village to truly reach the goal of rejuvenating the countryside. We are also pinning our hopes on more returns from large cities to fully unearth the charm of Pianpo," he said.



Bouyei ethnic residents of Wudang, Guiyang, Guizhou province, perform a traditional song for tourists on Jan 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY