



Women work at an embroidery factory in Xiyang county, Shanxi province. The traditional handicraft industry is now an important force to drive growth in rural Shanxi. LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shanxi employs variety of tactics for rural revitalization



Developing hallmark industries, relocating people to better areas and modernizing farming key moves

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Li Fentuan, a woman in Daixian, a county of Xinzhou city in Shanxi province, now sees her embroidery work as more enjoyable.

The trade, which she has been engaged in for about two decades, has earned her a decent livelihood. The revenue helped her support a family, escape poverty and move to a new, spacious apartment in the county seat.

The county seat is about 20 kilometers from the famed Great Wall pass of Yanmen. As such, the local craft is known as Yanmen Embroidery throughout China.

It has been a historical tradition that women in Daixian are encouraged to master skills in folk crafts such as embroidery and paper-cutting. It is said such skills are related to their happiness after marriage.

But it wasn't until the late 1990s that such crafts developed into industries with local characteristics.

Gao Fenglan, a retired female official, was one of the pioneers to devel-

op Yanmen Embroidery into a local industry.

An enthusiast and master of Yanmen Embroidery, Gao's initial goal was to protect the centuries-old intangible cultural heritage and pass it down to future generations. She did this by sharing her skills with the younger women in her neighborhood.

She later found their embroidery was so sought-after by customers that she decided to start her own business — the embroidery studio that Li Fentuan works for.

Thanks to the efforts of inheritors like Gao, Yanmen Embroidery was included on the provincial list of intangible cultural heritage in 2007.

Products made by the studio have been sold throughout the country and the world.

Gao's studio has also offered training to more than 6,000 people from Daixian and the rest of China.

Zhengxiasheng village in Ekou township, where the studio is located, is among the greatest beneficiaries from the industry.

"Boosted by the embroidery industry, our village was removed from the poverty list in 2016," said Tian Zhong, Party secretary of the village.

He noted that while it offers jobs to women, the embroidery studio has held training courses and helped to sell products made by local people.

"In 2016, the embroidery industry brought a per capita revenue of 80,000 yuan (\$12,700) to the people involved," Tian said.

The embroidery industry in Daixian is just one example of how Shanxi has used various means to

help with poverty alleviation and rural revitalization.

During a May 25 conference that summarized Shanxi's experiences in poverty reduction and promoting rural revitalization, officials said the province has achieved success over the eight years since the overall campaign for poverty reduction was launched.

They said all of Shanxi's 3.29 million impoverished people, 58 impoverished counties and 7,993 impoverished villages have been lifted from their poverty status.

The achievement was made thanks to the province's targeted poverty-reduction measures. They included developing industries with local characteristics, relocating residents to places with better living conditions and organizing vocational training, as well as improving healthcare, education and the rural living environment.

In many parts of Shanxi, local authorities have combined some of the targeted measures into a package, offering an integrated solution for poverty reduction.

In Gucheng township, Yanggao county, a huge expanse of greenhouses have been built near new settlements that host 959 relocated households.

The greenhouses, built on land rented from these households, were jointly developed by the Yanggao county government and Datong-based agricultural company Fangu Guizhen.

According to a new county policy, every household there is assigned one greenhouse, taking charge of the farming and harvesting of vegetables and fruit.

Zan Xiaoguo, 59, is one of the farmers working in the greenhouses.

"Compared with grain farming, vegetables in greenhouses can be planted and harvested throughout the year," Zan said. "It means my family can have a stable monthly income of more than 2,000 yuan."

But this is not the only source of revenue, Zan said. "We are paid land rental on an annual basis and some members of my family work at nearby factories."

There are a number of factories and plants in the neighborhood, offering a variety of jobs to residents. "As the factories were established for the purpose of poverty reduction, residents from low-income families are a priority in their recruitment," a local official said.

As Shanxi made a success in its poverty-reduction work, it is shifting emphasis to rural revitalization.

The May 25 conference also announced the establishment of a new organization, the Shanxi Rural Revitalization Bureau, to take the place of the Shanxi Poverty Reduction Office.

"We have made historic achievements in poverty reduction. However, we will never put an end to our efforts in improving the livelihoods of people in rural Shanxi," a senior provincial official said at the conference.

He said Shanxi's plans for rural revitalization will include modernizing agriculture, developing characteristic industries, promoting rural-urban integration, protecting the environment and improving rural governance.

Xue Lin contributed to this story.

Public brand marketing plan builds recognition

By YUAN SHENGGAO

To enhance market recognition of local products, many regions in North China's Shanxi province have invented an innovative marketing strategy called "public brands".

A public brand is similar to geographical indication — and GI itself also falls into the public brand category — but not limited to a certain variety of products, according to local officials.

In recent years, Shanxi has promoted seven provincial public brands for its products like millet, herbal tea and matured vinegar.

"Such provincial-level public brands are mostly related to agricultural products," a local official said. "They are of great significance to rural revitalization."

On May 18, the city of Gujiao released its public brand Golden Ox to cover more than 30 products in eight categories.

"With its coverage of various industries, the public brand of Golden Ox marked a breakthrough in local marketing strategy," said Liu Jinchun, mayor of Gujiao.

He said the public brand is inspired by the local traditional culture.

"Gujiao is called the Golden Ox City in honor of a legend of an ox who moved a mountain to facilitate transportation for the region," Liu said. "And the Golden Ox is a symbol

of the locals' enterprising spirit."

The Golden Ox brand highlights such agricultural products as hazelnut, sea buckthorn fruit and medicinal herbs.

A trade fair was also held during the public brand's release. Agreements were signed for product transactions with a combined value of 21.5 million yuan (\$3.36 million).

At the 12th Expo Central China held in Taiyuan from May 21-23, the Golden Ox-branded products attracted much attention from visitors.

Gujiao is not the first city in Shanxi to release cross-industry public brands.

In September 2020, the city of Linfen in southern Shanxi released its "Linfen Quality" public brand, which covers more than 40 products in agriculture and tourism industries.

Boosted by the branding strategy, Linfen realized online sales of 113 million yuan and offline sales of 430 million yuan last year for its high-quality agricultural products.

Shanxi aims to use the public brands to promote rural revitalization.

It released four provincial public brands for such products as cereals, medicinal herbs and fruits in 2020. In addition, another 11 public brands were launched by various cities in Shanxi.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



The city of Gujiao releases its public brand of Golden Ox on May 18. WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Village attracts tourists with mystery and myth

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Among the many ancient villages in Shanxi, Dachang at the heart of the Taihang Mountains is unique in attracting tourists interested in history, architecture and mythology.

Located in the north of Yuxian county, the village consists of more than 50 courtyards with about 500 rooms.

Regarding the history of village, some say it is about 1,500 years old and the oldest village in Yuxian.

Han Guoyin, head of the villagers' committee, however, likes to talk about material evidence.

"Han is the only family name of the village," said the official. "Judging from our family history book, the history of the Han family in Dachang should be about 300 years, since our founding ancestor Han Chongming came to settle in the early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)."

But this was not the beginning of the village, Han said. "Records on a stone slab in the Mountain Gods' Temple show that it was erected in 1197 during the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). That was 800 years ago."

Legend has it that a family of seven went to this place some 1,500 years ago. Later they all became immortals and were memorized by the locals as mountain gods.

Han said the selling points of the village as a tourist destination include its unique layout, architectural style and mystery.

The village consists of more than 50 courtyards on a mountain slope, with a layout resembling a typical Tibetan settlement in Southwest China.

Most of the houses are two- to three-storied stone structures. The upper stories are built on the arch-gated cave houses dug out of the slope. All the roads in the village are paved with stone slabs.

Han said the most mysterious thing in the village is that one of the statues in the Mountain Gods' Temple changes weight at different times of the day.

"Weighing it in the morning and in the afternoon, there is a difference of 2-3 kilograms," Han said. "This is something we cannot explain."

The population of the village reached its peak of nearly 350 in the early 1980s. However, it has become quieter in recent years as many people moved to other places to work or live.

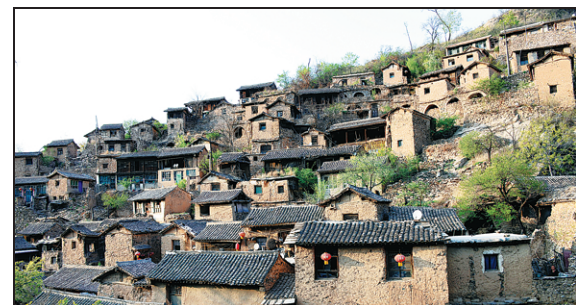
In 2019, there were only 13 permanent residents in Dachang, with an average age of 70, according to Han.

"But as more tourists come, some of our natives are coming back again over the past two years," Han said. "They are back to do tourism business — opening bed-and-breakfast businesses, working as tour guides and selling local produce."

Han said he believed the tourism industry can revitalize this quiet and almost dormant village by bringing revenues to locals and generating demand for the renovation of residences and village facilities.

"I hope this can bring life to this old village," Han said.

Peng Ke'er contributed to this story.



The village of Dachang is said to be the oldest village in Yuxian county. ZHANG ZHIHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Datong becomes center for frontier tech research

By YUAN SHENGGAO

An inauguration ceremony for a laboratory focusing on low vacuum tube maglev trains took place in the Shanxi city of Datong along with the groundbreaking of a test line in the same city.

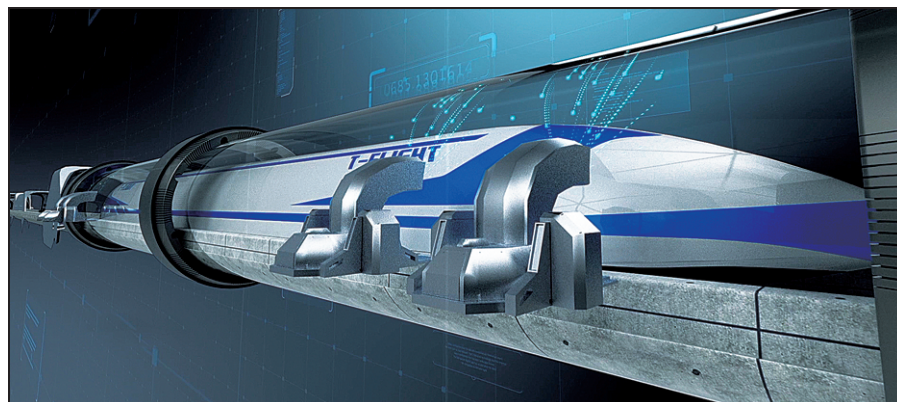
The pair of events marked the province's new effort in the research on frontier technologies for its advanced manufacturing industries.

The high-tech train, which is also known as vactrain or high-speed flying train in the industry, is designed to run inside a virtually air-free tube to reduce resistance.

The vactrain lab and test line project is jointly established by the Taiyuan-based North University of China and the Third Research Institute of China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp.

Yuan Hao, board chairman of CASIC, said the company began its research on vactrain in 2017 and have achieved breakthroughs in key technologies during the years since then.

He said the reasons that CASIC selected Shanxi as the location of its lab and test line project include Shanxi's offering of resources needed for the research as well as the strong support from local authorities.



A computer-generated model illustrates the low vacuum tube maglev train test line in Datong. Trial operation of the first phase of the line will begin by the end of September. WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Mao Kai, a researcher from the Third Research Institute of CASIC in charge of the vactrain research project, said Datong was selected out of seven candidate cities throughout the country.

Mao said the test line in Datong's Yanggao county will be a full-size line with a total length of 60 kilometers and will be built in three phases.

The test line's first phase will have a length of 2 km, which will be used to collect basic research data. The

trial operation of the first phase is scheduled to begin by the end of September.

After two years' research in the first phase, the line will be extended to 5 km and 15 km to test the vactrain's technologies for commercial use, Mao said.

"The vactrain project is expected to offer an even higher-speed option compared to the existing high-speed trains running either on wheels or using magnetic levitation," said Ni

Zhancheng, general manager of Datong High-Speed Flying Train Development Co, the entity responsible for the operation of the lab and test line.

Industry insiders said vactrains can reach a speed of more than 1,000 km per hour, much faster than the conventional bullet train that travels at under 400 km per hour.

Zhao Zhicheng contributed to this story.