

Green policies improve lives in Yellow River drainage area

Integrated development provides new pathways for people to raise incomes



By YUAN SHENGGAO

During the 12th provincial congress of the Communist Party of China, which was held in Taiyuan from Oct 25-29, Shanxi's Party secretary Lin Wu once again reiterated Shanxi's role in safeguarding the ecological well-being of the Yellow River.

At the congress, Lin said Shanxi's targets are to become an important experimental zone for ecological protection and for high-quality development in the Yellow River drainage region.

The 5,464-kilometer-long Yellow River is the second-longest river in China. It is regarded as the mother river of the nation as it has nurtured the Chinese civilization for millennia.

The Shanxi section of the Yellow River is 965 km in length. More than 73.1 percent of the land in Shanxi belongs to the river's drainage basin, which is home to 73.4 percent of the province's population and takes up 75.8 percent of Shanxi's GDP.

As Shanxi is located on the Loess Plateau, where soil erosion has been a severe challenge for millennia, it holds an important position in protecting the ecological environment of the Yellow River.

Shanxi began to implement its strategy to develop itself into an important experimental zone for ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River drainage region in 2017. And Shanxi's authorities have put the strategy high on their work agendas.

In late November, Shanxi Party chief Lin Wu and Shanxi Governor Lan Fo'an made tours of the cities and counties along the Yellow River and its tributaries, to see how work is proceeding in areas relating to soil erosion control, environmental improvements and green development.

Lin visited the famed Hukou Waterfalls on the Yellow River in the county of Jixian. During the trip, he suggested protection of the Yellow River's ecological environment be integrated with green development.

"The growth of Hukou's tourism industry should be combined with the development of unique local cultural resources," Lin said.

The Party chief noted that rational plans for industrial development are crucial to the environmental protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River drainage region.

"Safeguarding ecological well-being, especially ensuring the



Swans are spotted in a wetland park near the Yellow River in Pinglu county, showing the improving ecological environment in the region. LIU WENLI / FOR CHINA DAILY

rational utilization of water resources, should be the prerequisite for local growth," Lin said. "So environmentally friendly industries such as forestry, tourism, modern agriculture and eco-friendly manufacturing should be the highlights."

The village of Xuegong in Linyi county, for instance, stands on the mud flat of the Yellow River.

The village's latest practice is to combine farming with tourism by building a unique ecological and industrial chain.

"We have turned the former grain fields on the mud flat into lotus farms," said an official in the village. "When lotus flowers bloom in the summer, our village becomes a popular destination for sightseeing tourists."

There are also hairy crabs and crawfish in the lotus ponds, forming a wetland ecosystem featuring aquatic plants and animals. The official said such a system cannot only improve the water quality for the Yellow River but also create a destination for study tours for students.

In addition to tourism, the sales of hairy crabs, crawfish, and lotus roots and seeds can also bring revenues to local residents.

The village of Longmenyuan in Liulin county is another example of how improving the environment can benefit the livelihoods of locals.

The village is located at heart of the Lyuliang Mountains, which used to be one of the regions that suffered from the most severe soil erosion.

Because of the infertile land as a

result of long-term soil erosion, Longmenyuan used to be one of the poorest villages in Shanxi as residents could hardly support their livelihoods relying on grain farming.

The village started a massive afforestation move several years ago, planting trees that can both improve the ecological environment and generate revenues.

Over the past years, the village has planted more than 4,000 hectares of trees, including 2,700 hectares of walnut trees.

Zhao Qulin, a Longmenyuan villager, is one of the beneficiaries of the project.

He said he is now a forestry worker in the village, earning a stable income from planting and taking care of the trees.

"Villagers can also have additional incomes from selling walnuts," Zhao said.

Du Haiwang, head of the forestry bureau of Liulin county, said the Longmenyuan afforestation project is funded by the county government as part of its efforts in poverty alleviation.

"In addition to Longmenyuan, similar projects have been implemented in other underdeveloped villages in Liulin," Du said. "This program has benefited about 13,000 residents in total."

The official noted that local forestry experts have selected a number of plant varieties, including walnuts and chestnuts as well as medical herbs for the local afforestation move, which can both stabilize soil and generate benefits.

"As a result of increasing vegeta-

tion coverage, there are fewer soil erosion cases in Liulin even during severe floods," Du said. "The improved environment has also led to a substantial increase of grain output, although the proportion of grain farming in the local economy has decreased."

The Fenhe River in Shanxi is the second-largest tributary of the Yellow River. Improving its environment is also crucial to the environment of the Yellow River.

The Shanxi provincial government and governments of regions along the river have made great efforts to improve its environment in recent years.

One of the efforts is a campaign to develop an ecological tourism belt along Fenhe, which has brought a fundamental change to the river.

Through controlling pollution, increasing water supply and greening both banks of the river, Fenhe has grown into a river with better water quality, a new attraction for tourists, and a pleasant habitat for humans and wildlife, according to local officials.

Shanxi's innovative practice for river management is to appoint chiefs for each river. A river chief is usually the head of the local government according to each section of the river. It can be the head of the township, county, city or provincial government.

There are a total of 18,000 river chiefs in Shanxi province and their responsibility is to ensure that the rivers can maintain a good water quality and good ecological environment.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Huairen ceramics fire industry progression

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The end of the year is the busiest time for Hongda Ceramics based in the Jinshatan Ceramics Industrial Park in the Shanxi city of Huairen.

Its production facilities operate at full capacity to meet the increase in orders from home and abroad.

Equipped with four kilns, the company has an annual production capacity of about 80 million various ceramic items, according to Zhang Cai, sales manager of Hongda.

He said the company's products include tableware, ceramic tiles and ceramic artworks.

Zhao Lixia, 39, is a worker from the neighboring village of Beixin. She has been working with the company for two years and her current salary is about 4,000 yuan (\$630) a month.

"We are expecting a pay rise next year," Zhao said. "That is very likely considering the booming sales of our products."

The city of Huairen is pinning high hopes on the ceramics industry for its economic growth as the sector is expected to be developed to a scale of more than 10 billion yuan in the near future, according to local officials and industry insiders.

As an important base for ceramics in North China, Huairen has a

1,000-year history of ceramics production.

The industry has been developed to an advanced level of operations, featuring products having higher technology content and targeting overseas markets.

To date, there are five enterprises engaged in foreign trade, with their products exported to Europe.

These companies are using the latest technologies to upgrade their production, aiming to deliver high-quality products targeting upmarket clients at home and abroad.

Huafo Ceramics, for instance, is using one of the country's most advanced production lines to make ceramic products.

"This is a fully automated production line, which requires only four operators compared with 12 for our previous lines," said Zeng Peng, a technical executive at the company. "The entire production process has also been shortened from 48 hours to four hours."

He added that there is a substantial improvement in product quality thanks to the higher level of automation.

Huairen was recognized by the China Federation of Light Industry and China Association of the Ceramics Industry as "a hub of ceramics in North China" in 2019.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



Livestreaming is one of the new ways for Huairen's ceramics companies to promote their products. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fortified residences tell stories from the past

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When mentioning a fortified residence, most people are reminded of old castles scattered across Europe. However, China has its own equivalent.

The *tulou* buildings in East China's Fujian province and *gubao* complexes in North China's Shanxi province are representatives of such Chinese architecture.

In Shanxi, fortified residences can be found throughout the province — in prosperous cities and remote villages.

There are two types of fortified residences in Shanxi — those built by wealthy families and civil settlements converted from ancient military sites.

Representative fortified residences built by successful merchants, high-ranking officials and wealthy landlords include the Qiao Family Grand Courtyard in Qixian county; Chang Family Grand Courtyard in Jizhong city; and the Imperial Prime Minister's Residence in Yangcheng county, which are household names among tourists.

The latter, also known as Huangcheng Xiangfu, was the home of Chen Tingjing, a renowned prime minister during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Chen was the teacher of Emperor Kangxi and was the country's prime minister for about half a century.

Covering 36,580 square meters, the complex has 16 courtyards and 640 rooms. Over the past three centuries, the residence was used

as a fortress to fend off attacks from bandits and rebels, thanks to its solid city walls and high watch towers.

About 300 meters to the south of Huangcheng Xiangfu is another fortified residential complex called Guoyu Gubao. It is almost a small city surrounded by huge, high walls including watch towers.

Inside the complex are residential buildings, temples and gardens. It is said to be the family residence of another Chen family.

Deshengbao in Xinrong district in the city of Datong represents another type of *gubao* in Shanxi — a civil settlement converted from a military facility.

As its name — Desheng means victory — suggests, the residential complex evolved from a fortress of the same name. Deshengbao and two neighboring fortresses used to be a part of the Great Wall stronghold called Desheng Pass in the north.

Local residents said Shanxi was no more a frontier area during the Qing Dynasty and Deshengbao, along with other military facilities, was then transformed into a civil settlement.

Researchers said fortified residences were popular in Shanxi as it used to be at the borders between the farming Han people and northern nomads. Frequent conflicts and wars gave rise to the need of building homes with a means of defense.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.



Xiangyu Gubao in Qinshui county is one of the typical fortified residence complexes in Shanxi. ZHANG TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Province displays rich history of performing arts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi province is known throughout the country for its rich variety of folk arts.

An example of such cultural wealth is that all six candidate townships and counties were included on the 2021-23 list of "China's famous towns of folk arts" released by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in early November.

On the list were Zuoquan county for its folk songs; Yingxian county for Shuahaier Opera; Hequ county for Errentai Opera; Nanzhang township in Zhangzi county for Bayinhui concerts; Dayang township in Zezhou county for its centuries-old folklore; and Jiangzhou township in Xinjiang county for drumming performances.

Shuahaier in Yingxian, which inherits the ancient performing and singing arts of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), is called the "living fossil of ancient Chinese opera" by insiders.

Errentai, which means "the stage for two performers", is among the oldest local operas in Shanxi and the neighboring Inner Mongolia autonomous region.



Two artists perform Errentai Opera in the county of Hequ.

WANG PEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Bayinhui, which means "concert of eight instruments", is said to be a musical performance originating from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The drumming of Jiangzhou is popular among Chinese audiences, being staged throughout the country frequently. It is also a seven-time winner of the Galaxy Award, the nation's highest award for folk art performance.

Yang Dinghong, head of the Jiangzhou Drumming Troupe, said the art is popular because of the wide participation of local people.

"Drumming performances are held on many occasions in Jiangzhou," Yang said. "It is an indispensable part of festivals, celebrations and weddings."

Over the past few years, the

Jiangzhou Drumming Troupe has performed in many countries including Denmark, Morocco, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea and Canada, giving those nations an understanding of Shanxi through this traditional art, according to Yang.

The county of Zuoquan is known for its folk songs. Local farmers have developed a tradition of singing folk songs and holding folk song contests for hundreds of years.

Tourists are always amazed by the fact "a tour of Zuoquan is usually accompanied by folk songs", with many saying that "folk songs can make a trip both impressive and relaxing".

Realizing that the folk songs are a unique resource for cultural tourism, Zuoquan's tourism authorities launched the Zuoquan Folk Song Gala in 2019. The gala has since grown into an annual event, attracting folk song singers from across the country and involving the participation of locals and tourists alike.

Li Shu contributed to this story.