

Economic strategy helps Shanxi keep growing

North China province outperforms its neighbors by helping jobless families, updating agriculture and traditional manufacturing industries



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi has maintained steady economic growth over the first three quarters of this year, thanks to the government's efforts to stabilize growth amid the pandemic and its strategy to promote high-quality development.

According to data released at a provincial conference on economic affairs, held on Dec 16-17, Shanxi reported year-on-year GDP growth of 5.8 percent in the third quarter. That growth was achieved after it grew at 5.2 percent year-on-year in the first half. Both results rank the province as one of the best in North China.

The growth has led to a steady increase in employment. By the end of November, a total of 475,200 urban residents in Shanxi were offered new jobs. The figure is 5.6 percent higher than the target set for the whole year.

The growth is also a result of Shanxi's measures in assisting employment, according to Hu Huiqiang, an official at the Shanxi Bureau of Employment Promotion.

"We have been creating jobs at the community level, targeting residents from low-employment families," Hu said. "A total of 155,300 people have benefited from this move."

Hu added that the move led to the delisting of all "zero-employment families" in Shanxi this year.



The Shanxi Agricultural Valley in Jinzhong is among Shanxi's development zones pioneering rural modernization. GAO XIAOWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Gao Jianfeng, a researcher at the Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences, said the resilience of Shanxi's economy is due to fast growth in investment, foreign trade, industrial transformation, growing local market demand and the service industry's development.

Shanxi's growth is related to the province's recent transformation strategy, which involves the modernization of agriculture, upgrade of traditional manufacturing industries and cultivation of emerging industries, according to local officials.

In Shanxi, agricultural modernization mainly involves cultivating higher-quality crop varieties, improving farmlands and enhancing farming

efficiency through the use of machines, as well as promoting water-conserving irrigation.

Over several years, Shanxi has established 15 county-level agricultural demonstration zones for organic and water-conserving farming to benefit local crops.

In the past three years, such zones have seen an increase of more than 100,000 metric tons in their output of millet. This meant a 3,000-yuan (\$470) rise in average annual income for the 80,000 households involved, according to local officials.

The Shanxi Agricultural Valley, a development zone in Jinzhong city, is among those pioneering rural modernization in the province.

The zone is demonstrating the modernization of the whole process of operations, including the use of automatic equipment like drones and driverless farming machines and the application of e-commerce for product marketing.

In the manufacturing sector, the upgrade is phasing out outdated capacities, implementing stricter emission standards and using intelligent technologies. This is pushing Shanxi's traditional industries toward a more advanced level, local officials said.

Huafeng Explosion-Proof Motors in the county of Pingyao, for instance, is climbing onto the upper level of the industrial chain by using the latest

technologies and highlighting product quality control. Its 10 product varieties have been sold to more than 20 countries.

The service sector is another powerhouse driving Shanxi's economic growth. Local statistics show that the sector has contributed to more than half of Shanxi's GDP and accounted for more than half of the province's employment for a number of years.

Officials said the service sector's rapid growth is driven by such digital technologies as cloud computing and big data and new operational models like e-commerce and shared economy.

The volume of Shanxi's imports and exports grew 69.2 percent year-

on-year to 187.63 billion yuan during the first 10 months. The growth rate ranked it second nationally, according to Li Guorong, deputy chief and spokesman of the Shanxi Department of Commerce.

He said the province's fixed asset investment increased 10.7 percent year-on-year during January to October, which was 4.6 percentage points higher than the nation's average.

Li noted that investment from foreign investors also increased steadily. During the first 10 months, a total of 103 foreign-funded enterprises were newly registered in Shanxi. Their paid-in investment amounted to 240 million yuan during the period, increasing 16.9 percent year-on-year.

"The brilliant performance in investment and trade is related to the provincial authorities' plan to build Shanxi into a highland for opening-up in inland China," Li said. "The plan's implementation, which features a number of assistance measures, has led to the rapid and high-quality growth in investment and trade."

One such assistance measure is the 12th Expo Central China, which was held in the provincial capital of Taiyuan on May 21-23. A total of 883 enterprises from 15 countries attended.

The China-Europe freight train service, which opened in 2017, has played an important role in promoting Shanxi's foreign trade. Over the years, the freight trains from Shanxi have reached 27 cities across 12 Central Asian and European countries.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Coal recycling measures yield promising results

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The disposal of solid waste from the mining and production of coal has been a worldwide challenge. And this is especially true in the province of Shanxi, a major coal producer in China.

However, companies like Qiyuan Solid Waste Disposal, based in the city of Shuozhou in Shanxi, are trying to work out a solution.

At a construction site of the company, workers are busy building a plant that can recycle 5 million metric tons of coal ash per year.

According to Ju Yong, a manager in charge of the construction, more than 80 percent of the main structure has been completed and completion of the entire structure is expected next March.

Shuozhou has the largest volume of industrial solid waste in Asia, said Zhang Shouming, general manager of Qiyuan. "The city now has a stockpile of 100 million tons of coal ash and the volume is increasing by 3 million tons a year. This poses a severe challenge to the local environment."

Zhang said the new disposal and

recycling plant under construction targets comprehensive utilization of coal ash.

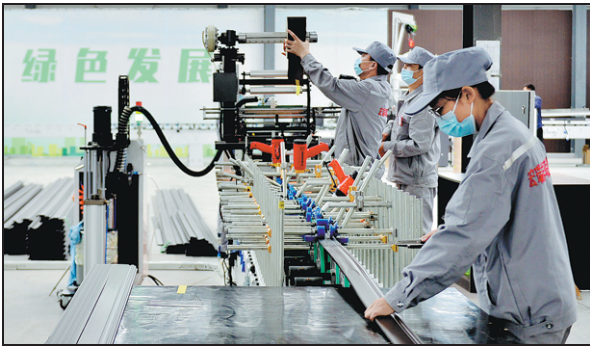
"The project is designed to turn coal ash into various products, like silicon-aluminum-iron alloy, ceramics and bricks," Zhang said.

Shuozhou is one of the 12 demonstration cities in China for the comprehensive utilization of industrial solid waste and the Shuozhou Economic Development Zone is the city's major destination for the coal mine waste recycling industry.

The zone now has four dedicated industrial parks for the industry, with operations focusing on coal refuse-fired power generation, coal refuse comprehensive utilization, coal ash recycling and the production of plaster with coal ash as the raw material.

Backing the sector's development is the Shuozhou Solid Waste Recycling Research Center, jointly established by the city's government and Beijing-based Peking University.

Over the years, the center has developed a range of technologies and solutions with internationally advanced levels, helping the industry grow at a fast pace.



New materials using recycled solid waste are produced at a plant in the county of Xiangyuan. WANG RUIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sun Guofu, chief engineer at the center, said the industry in Shuozhou should focus on the coordination of high and low-end players for sustained development.

"In the solid waste recycling and utilization industry, the production of high-end products can yield higher profits but features a lower utilization rate of resources," Sun said. "And the lower-end production represents a reverse direction."

Sun suggests an industrial alliance be formed, allowing resources to be effectively used with both low and high-end players working together.

Shanxi's authorities hope Shuozhou's experience can be

copied by the rest of Shanxi and offer the best solution to the mounting challenge of industrial solid waste.

Statistics show that Shanxi's stock of industrial solid waste was 1.4 billion tons at its peak, and there is a discharge of about 300 million tons of waste every year. This can lead to various environmental problems like pollution and threats to the ecosystem, local officials said.

In addition to Shuozhou, Shanxi has fostered the solid waste recycling industry in the cities of Jincheng and Changzhi.

Li Shu contributed to this story.

Village offers historical lessons in good living

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shao Linlin, an official of Lianghu in the Shanxi county of Gaoping, is happy to see that the village he is so familiar with is becoming known to tourists from across the country.

The village's history, which he said is more than a millennium long, has become an asset for locals to increase their income and is improving livelihoods.

Shao said the village's rise to fame should be attributed to rural cultural heritage researchers like Chen Zhihua.

The village, at the foot of Taihang Mountains, first attracted the attention of Chen more than a decade ago. He is a professor at Beijing-based Tsinghua University and a researcher of rural culture and architecture.

During his research tours of Lianghu, Chen said the village is a living fossil of ancient China. As such, it is representative of well-preserved ancient villages that were built in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

While showing his gratitude to experts like Chen, Shao said he has more to say about the history of his home village.

"Local legends said the village has a history of more than two millennia," Shao said. "But I can tell for sure the village should be more than 1,000 years, based on records from our family history books."

He said the first settlers in the village were two families with the surnames of Guo and Tian, who came here during the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

"Because of this, the settlement was called Lianghu — or two households — village," Shao said, adding the community became larger as other families moved in.

Most of the village's buildings, including a residence of a high-

ranking general, were built in the Ming and Qing dynasties, according to Shao.

"But the Yuxu Guan Taoist Temple was built at least 800 years ago," the official said.

Shao said he is proud of Lianghu's status as a renowned historical and cultural village in China.

"We have 17 Buddhist and Taoist temples built in various periods, as well as more than 30 well-preserved courtyards built in the Ming and Qing dynasties," Shao said.

He said the high level of craftsmanship that local builders used to build houses is one of the reasons why the ancient village has remained so intact to this date.

"Lianghu had been one of the most prosperous villages in the region. Locals accumulated their wealth through farming, commerce and handicrafts. The wealthy people highlighted the quality of their residences, hoping the properties could be passed down to as many generations as possible," Shao explained.

Among the ancient buildings, the most imposing is the former residence of Qing Dynasty official Tian Fengji.

Starting as a scholar, Tian later served as a civil official and a high-ranking general. After he retired, he returned to his birthplace of Lianghu to live a quiet life.

When studying the well-crafted ancient structures on-site and the lifestyles of ancient residents via local history books, Chen said Lianghu represented the best of rural China where people "enjoyed a decent life."

And that decent life continues to date, as locals live in prosperity and take pride of the culture created by their ancestors and themselves, Shao said.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.



The residence of Qing Dynasty official Tian Fengji is among the most imposing structures in Lianghu. ZHANG XIAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Innovative firms attract foreign money to zones

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As major destinations to host investment projects, Shanxi's development zones have attracted the attention of the overseas business community and secured an increasing amount of funds.

One example is the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, which sent a delegation of five companies to the fourth China International Import Expo held in Shanghai in November.

Through exhibiting their cutting-edge technologies and products like the recombinant human-origin collagen, these enterprises helped the zone draw attention from many international businesses who were seeking cooperative partners.

Shanxi is home to 88 development zones.

Among these development zones, the 69 zones for the manufacturing industry reported a combined fixed asset investment of 134.31 billion yuan (\$21.17 billion) during the first eight months of this

year, increasing 28.6 percent year-on-year.

In addition, the 12 modern agricultural zones reported a total fixed-asset investment of 6.06 billion yuan, increasing 39.3 percent. The seven cultural tourism zones reported a total fixed asset investment of 6.36 billion yuan, up 53.8 percent.

Promoting the high-quality development of the zones is a new requirement of the provincial authorities, who expect them to become powerful engines for Shanxi's economic growth.

To help the zones grow, the provincial government has recently released more than 30 incentive policy measures.

The investment boom in the development zones is manifested by impressive figures.

This year, the zones have held four massive signing events for investment projects. During the events, the zones secured a total of 1,144 investment projects with funding amounting to 628.1 billion yuan.

Of these projects, 1,133 began construction this year and 946 were put



Baska Machinery in Datong is one of the foreign-funded companies becoming operational this year in Shanxi. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

into operation. Officials from the Shanxi Department of Commerce expect that the newly operational projects can generate an output value of 170.8 billion yuan this year.

The investment boom is also a result of the local government efforts in improving the business environment.

A recent effort by the provincial government is the release of a five-year plan on Nov 16 for developing the business environment. This is the first five-year plan focusing on the business environment in Shanxi, which aims to further create an efficient, inclusive and fair environment for all business activities.

Over the past few years, Shanxi's governments at various levels have made remarkable progress in areas such as streamlining approval procedures, reducing administrative service costs and offering whole-process assistance — from business registration to operations — for investors.

Zhang Xiaosheng, deputy chief of the Shanxi Department of Commerce, said 14 strategic emerging industries have been established in Shanxi's development zones and these will lay a solid foundation for further attracting investment.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.