



Foreign experts join residents of Huamao village, Guizhou province, to chat about their experiences of poverty alleviation. PHOTOS BY WU WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Growth: Guizhou takes the high road to success

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Traditionally one of the least developed and poorest provinces, mountainous Guizhou posted economic growth of 10.5 percent last year, the third-highest among the country's 23 provinces, five autonomous regions and four municipalities.

The figure was far higher than for national growth, which was 6.7 percent. Moreover, the Milken Institute, a think tank in Santa Monica, California, ranked Guiyang, the provincial capital, as China's best performing city of 2016.

Since 2011, Guizhou has maintained strong economic momentum, and in 2015 it posted GDP of more than 1 trillion yuan (\$152 billion) for the first time.

When he joined a panel discussion with delegates from the province at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, President Xi Jinping spoke highly of Guizhou's achievements during the past five years in areas such as infrastructure construction, poverty reduction and environmental protection.

Transportation

Christopher Aleksis Georgiou, a British national who works as an editor at china.com, brought several anti-nausea treatments with him after a Chinese colleague described the poor transportation infrastructure in the province, which would see the party bumping along rough mountain roads.

However, the treatments were not needed. "I didn't take any medication during the four-day visit, even though I spent more than four hours a day on the road when traveling in the mountains. The roads felt no different to those in Beijing or Shanghai," Georgiou said.

Guizhou has 5,128 kilometers of expressways, linking all 88 counties within its borders, and the province will receive funding of 1.15 trillion yuan to extend the network to 10,196 km by 2030, according to a plan for expressway infrastructure released by the Guizhou Transportation Department.

Bruce Connolly, another British national, noted that the

10.5 percent

growth registered by Guizhou, one of China's least developed provinces, in 2016.

7.8 million

number of people lifted out of poverty in Guizhou in the past five years.

poorest roads were in the most isolated parts of the province. "It appeared to me that most of the deprivation was concentrated in mountainous villages which lacked adequate roads. There were just rough tracks, so goods were transported by packhorse," he said.

The village of Huamao lies about an hour's drive from Zunyi along a valley that displayed diverse aspects of rural life — such as villagers washing clothing in ponds or making vinegar in their yards.

Huamao is home to a mix of Han Chinese and people from the Miao ethnic group. The village and the area that surrounds it have been hailed as prime examples of successful poverty reduction policies.

"Although a few older wooden buildings remain as reminders, the farmers and villagers live in modern homes constructed in keeping with local traditions," Connolly said.

The local government has beautified the village by cleaning the streets, removing waste and trash, and renovating locals' houses. To attract tourists, the government has also helped villagers to develop and sell local crafts such as pottery and *baijiu*, China's traditional rice spirit.

Tourism

Many villagers have turned their homes into hotels where they provide meals, rooms and activities — for example, visitors can pick fruit on farmland or learn how to make traditional pottery.

"Featuring a unique ethnic culture and lifestyle, Huamao is tapping into its intrinsic beauty to attract wealthy visitors from the city. The measures have resulted in great

improvements to the local environment, and the residents now earn more money than ever before," said Pan Kegang, secretary of the Huamao Party committee.

Akhil Parashar, an Indian national who works at China Radio International in Beijing, said: "Huamao is a role model, not only for poverty alleviation but also for sustainable development, especially when compared with villages whose economic development has been based on industries that can damage the environment.

If managed carefully, sustainable tourism is a way forward for parts of rural Guizhou, and the eco-friendly growth model should be introduced to other underdeveloped regions of China and the world," he said.

Digital development

Saying goodbye to the serene rural landscape, the foreign experts discovered the digital side of the province.

The Guiyang Big Data Exchange, in the provincial capital, is the first of its kind in China. It started operations in April 2015, and so far 2,000 member companies have exchanged and traded data-related assets and services, generating revenue of more than \$45 million.

"I was really surprised to witness the transformation of Guizhou's capital from relative poverty to a technology hub that has attracted thousands of tech-savvy entrepreneurs. This is turning Guiyang into a magnet for talent and attracting more young people who want to settle here," Connolly said.

"The big data industry is a perfect opportunity for Guizhou to develop its economy without introducing polluting industries, helping its poorer residents to shake off poverty."

Guizhou's authorities have raised nearly 7.8 million people out of poverty in the past five years, but 3.72 million in the rural areas still live below the poverty line of 2,300 yuan in annual income.

For the next five years the province will set its average annual economic growth target at about 10 percent, and will also work to eradicate poverty for 3.7 million people by 2020, according to Pan Feng,



Foreign visitors watch a member of staff at work at the Guiyang Big Data Exchange.



Bruce Connolly, a radio journalist who lives in Beijing, visits a pottery center in Huamao.



Connolly speaks during a discussion with Huamao villagers.

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Bruce Connolly, a radio journalist who lives in Beijing

FIRST PERSON

A unique place that is home to the 'Earth's ear'

Eddie Turkson, freelance journalist from Ghana



I've done my fair share of travelling around China, but the recent week-long trip to Guizhou was the first time I had visited the province. It was a real learning experience.

I must admit, Guizhou is one of the best-endowed regions in China in terms of its natural beauty and fascinating environment, rich culture and history.

With regards to development, Guizhou has some catching up to do compared with some other provinces. However, it is unique, not only for its amazing landscape but also for its rapid progress in many fields.

I was greatly inspired by the rural serenity of Zunyi and the modern development of Guiyang, the provincial capital, but I most looked forward to visiting the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical radio Telescope, known as FAST. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so I didn't want to miss out.

Located in a deep valley in Pingtang county, FAST is the world's largest telescope. I call it the "Earth's Ear".

It is believed to be the world's most sensitive radio telescope, and a key to unlocking the universe. The guide at the site told me the telescope is so sensitive that it could capture the signal of a cellphone being used on the Moon.

I am not a science fan. Actually I didn't know much about radio telescopes before I visited, but when I stood in front of FAST, I was so amazed. That was not only because of the magic of advanced technology, but also the universal glamour of human wisdom.

I don't think any other country could accomplish such a tremendous project in terms of labor, technology and money.

Guizhou's rise is visible. I have seen it myself.

Eddie Turkson spoke with Wang Keju.

deputy director of the Guiyang Cyberspace Administration.

Connolly said: "It goes without saying that to understand the history and development of modern China, one has to go back to the basics. By 'the basics,' I mean learning about small cities and villages such as Zunyi, Huamao and Guoba in Guizhou.

"These are some of the places where we can learn the lessons of poverty alleviation, and also learn about the spirit and determination of residents, especially villagers who embody the Chinese spirit."

When he visited the province in 2015, President Xi was quoted as saying: "A good life is created with one's own hands, so poverty is nothing to fear. If we have determination and confidence, we can overcome any difficulties."

While there are still considerable challenges to overcome in the reduction of rural poverty across Guizhou, the determination of the local people means the province is certain to achieve its goals.

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