

Counties in Shanxi lifted out of poverty

Province makes great strides in creating job opportunities and improving social welfare

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The last 17 counties, including Guangling, Tianzhen, Hunyuan, Ningwu and Jingle, were removed from the list of impoverished counties in Shanxi on Feb 27, according to the provincial government.

As of that date, each of the 58 impoverished counties in the North China province had their poverty statuses removed, marking a great stride in Shanxi's poverty reduction.

Shanxi had been a major focus of the nation's poverty relief campaign, due to its large area of impoverished regions.

According to the provincial government, Shanxi used to have 36 counties on the nation's list of impoverished counties, with residents' per capita annual income less than 2,300 yuan (\$330).

The province's mountainous regions, including Lyuliang, Yanshan and Taihang mountains, featured the highest concentration of impoverished populations.

During the past several years, the government of Shanxi has carried out effective measures for targeted poverty reduction according to the conditions of different regions.

The measures include relocating impoverished people to better-developed areas, combining poverty

reduction with environmental improvement and developing industries that can create more job opportunities and boost local economic growth, according to the provincial government.

The local economy of Guangling, a less-developed county in the mountainous northern Shanxi, used to depend heavily on farming, without enough industries to create jobs and boost residents' incomes.

However, the county is also famous for its many skilled craftspeople in various folk arts.

The local government proposed that residents establish cooperatives for various crafts and has helped them sell their products in both domestic and overseas markets.

"Most of the craftspeople are women. They can work at their homes while looking after their children and elderly family members," said Liu Jinping, a woman in Touquan township in Guangling.

Liu founded a cooperative for hand-knitted items in 2013, hiring about a dozen women at the beginning. The cooperative has grown into a medium-sized enterprise with 1,085 employees.

"Our staff members include 41 women with disabilities and 732 women living under the poverty line before they were employed," Liu said.



A solar farm on the outskirts of Datong city. The solar power sector is one of the key industries in Shanxi used for poverty reduction.

SUN RONGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Li Xiaohong, one of the employees at the cooperative, is limb-impaired after an amputation caused by illness.

She works at her rented home in Guangling while taking care of her school-aged children.

"The cooperative pays me more than 2,000 yuan a month. I'm planning to buy an apartment in the county seat," Li said.

Guangling is especially renowned for its paper-cuts, which have a nationwide reputation.

In 2007, the county government helped to establish a paper-cutting industrial park and built the nation's

first paper-cutting museum.

The park is now a site for production, exhibition and tourism.

To date, Guangling-made paper-cuts have been sold to more than 20 countries and regions, according to the county government.

In Pianguan in the northwest of Shanxi, the local government has used the solar energy industry as a major means to reduce poverty as the county gets plenty of sunlight.

"With an average annual precipitation of 420 millimeters, the ecological environment in Pianguan is far from satisfactory," said Wang Yuan, Party secretary of the county.

However, Wang said the rich sunlight is good for the development of the solar power industry.

The county government has helped villages develop their own solar farms as a means to increase income for farmers.

Photovoltaic panels have been installed on the barren hills and on the roofs of farmers' residences.

Hu Kuanzhen, a farmer in Tianfengping township, Pianguan county, said she is happy to see the "blue panels" on her house that can bring her revenue.

"My family was paid 500 yuan two years ago and 1,000 yuan last year for the 'blue panels' on the roof," Hu said, adding that the income will continue to rise as more power is generated and transmitted to the grid.

According to the Shanxi provincial government, all the poverty-relief-oriented solar power projects in Shanxi are expected to generate a total income of 2.63 billion yuan (\$378.34 million) a year, which means a per capita revenue of 1,100 yuan for 2.32 million people involved.

In Lyuliang city, most of the impoverished population used to

live in mountainous areas with unfavorable living conditions.

To tackle the problem, the city began a relocation program in 2017, moving residents to areas with better living conditions and more job and business opportunities.

In the city's Linxian county, for instance, more than 41,000 residents have been relocated.

All the 41,000 residents had moved to their new residences in larger towns by November last year, which were built with financing from the county government.

"I never expected I could move from a mountain village to my new home in the county seat, with electricity, water and gas readily available," said Wang Engui, a resident relocated from Duanxian village at the heart of the Lyuliang Mountains.

Li Yali contributed to this story.

Heading back to work with chartered flight service

On Feb 29, a chartered flight of Shenzhen Airlines carried 157 workers from Yuncheng, Shanxi province, to their workplaces in Guangdong province, as companies resumed operations amid the outbreak of the novel coronavirus epidemic. This was the second flight after 153 workers in Yuncheng used a chartered plane on Feb 27 to go back to their workplaces outside Shanxi province. Also on Feb 29, a fleet of five buses carrying 113 workers left Yuncheng for Yiwu in East China's Zhejiang province and its neighboring areas. The chartered flights and bus services are part of the local government's efforts to help companies resume operations, either in Yuncheng or the rest of the country. YAN ZHIQIANG AND HU ZENGCHUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Father and son resurrect ancient calligraphy crafts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The "Four Treasures of Study" — a high-quality writing brush, ink stick, paper and ink slab — have been sought after by ancient scholars and today's enthusiasts of calligraphy and Chinese painting.

When deciding to buy one, they can make a decision judging from its geographical indication.

Chengni ink slabs produced in Jiangxian county, Shanxi province, are a favorite of enthusiasts.

Chengni ink slab is one of the top four ink slabs in China, along with *duan* in Zhaoqing, Guangdong province, *she* in Shexian, Anhui province and *taohe* in Zhuoni county, Gansu province.

Unlike other ink slabs, which are made from natural stone, *chengni* in Jiangxian is produced by firing a silt-rich clay collected from the riverbed of the Fenhe, the second-largest river in Shanxi province.

Chengni ink slabs also feature elegant shapes and delicate engravings, which make them valuable pieces of art.

However, if not for the efforts of father and son craftsmen like Lin Yongmao and Lin Tao, a piece of



Lin Tao, a *chengni* ink slab master, shows a piece of his artworks.

GAO XINSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

chengni ink slab cannot be easily bought.

The technique for making the clay-fired ink slab is said to date back to the Han Dynasties (206 BC-AD 220). Its production reached a peak during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

The craft was lost during the Qing

Dynasty (1644-1911), meaning buyers and collectors could only select from the ancient relics from the several dynasties prior.

Lin Yongmao and his son decided to revive this ancient technique in 1986.

The father and son visited many libraries to read historical docu-

ments and many museums to study exhibits.

They learned that to make a *chengni* ink slab, they needed to master knowledge in many fields. This included chemistry, physics, painting, engraving, calligraphy and literature.

After much trial and error, they succeeded in making three *chengni* ink slabs in 1991. In 1994, their ink slabs won a gold prize at the China Expo of Famous Ink Slabs.

The father and son were recognized as Shanxi folk art masters by the provincial government in 2006.

To help people learn about the artworks and production techniques, the Lins have displayed their ink slabs in a number of exhibitions and held many training sessions.

"I have been fond of *chengni* ink slabs for many years and finally got one during the Shanxi Cultural Industry Expo last December," said Zhang Hong, a 24-year-old calligraphy enthusiast from the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

"Brush writing with ink ground from a *chengni* ink slab is a totally different experience," Zhang said.

Bai Jie contributed to this story.

Investment puts clean energy at the forefront

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Construction of a plant to produce advanced rigs for extracting coal-bed methane began on Feb 24 in the Jinjiang Industrial Park in Jincheng, Shanxi. It heralds the province becoming the nation's most important base for coal-bed gas equipment production, according to project executives.

The plant is funded by Shanxi Gas Group, a subsidiary of Shanxi Jincheng Anthracite Coal Mining Group, and Cortech, a mining equipment manufacturer based in Beijing.

According to Wang Baoyu, general manager of Shanxi Gas, the plant is also part of provincial efforts to reduce its reliance on coal by exploring other energy sources like coal-bed methane.

According to local statistics, Shanxi's proven reserves of coal-bed methane amount to 8.31 trillion cubic meters. Its output accounts for about 96 percent of the nation's total. Proven reserves of the gas at Qinshui Coal Mine in Jincheng city account for about 70 percent of the national total.

"Coal-bed methane used to be the primary threat to coal-mine safety as 80 percent of fatalities have been caused by gas-related accidents," Wang said.

The general manager noted that coal-bed methane is also a type of clean fuel, like other kinds of natural gases.

"How to develop safe and efficient ways for exploring coal-bed gas has become a pressing issue in Shanxi's energy industry," Wang said.

Jincheng Anthracite Coal Mining was one of the earliest companies in

China to engage in coal-bed gas research, development and production, according to the executive.

In the past two decades, he said the company has formed a coal-bed methane industrial chain that covers gas extraction, production and transportation.

The construction of the rig plant in Jincheng is the company's latest effort to create advanced equipment production for the industry, according to Wang.

Local officials praised the pioneering role of companies like Jincheng Anthracite Coal Mining in promoting Shanxi's energy industry reform.

"Coal-bed methane is a unique clean energy resource in Shanxi province. The development of the industry can help solve the problem of a short supply of oil and gas in China and can help protect the local environment," said Hou Bingrang, deputy chief of the Shanxi Energy Administration Bureau.

"Jincheng Anthracite Coal Mining is a role model in the development of this new, clean energy by offering useful experience for other enterprises in the transition from coal to gas," Hou said.

According to Shanxi's development plan for the industry, two production bases for coal-bed methane equipment will be established in Jincheng and Taiyuan, the provincial capital.

The Jincheng rig plant is part of this provincial industrial plan. With an investment of 100 million yuan (\$14.4 million), the first phase of the project is scheduled to run in June.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Business executives and officials break ground for the coal-bed methane rig plant in Jincheng on Feb 24. WU XIAOYU / FOR CHINA DAILY