

# On the money: Shanxi among best provinces for economic growth

Robust trade and demand kept on right track by policies which include industrial upgrades and efficiency drives for State-owned enterprises



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi reported a GDP of 2.26 trillion yuan (\$357.68 billion) for 2021. It was the first time that the North China province surpassed 2 trillion yuan in annual GDP.

According to the Shanxi Provincial Statistics Bureau, the year-on-year increase in GDP reached 9.1 percent, ranking third nationwide.

Wei Yongjie, deputy chief of the bureau, said the per capita GDP surpassed 60,000 yuan, or about \$10,000 last year. It broke through 50,000 yuan in 2020.

"The remarkable achievement was made in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a severe flood and other related natural disasters in October," Wei said.

The official added that the growth was made with improving socioeconomic operations. These include an improvement in economic efficiency; a strong recovery in foreign trade, growing domestic demand and fixed asset investment; an increasing ratio of the service industry in overall economy; and a steady

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improvement to people's livelihoods.

Shanxi's GDP surpassed the 1 trillion benchmark in 2011 and that figure doubled in only 10 years, Wei said.

Yang Maolin, a researcher and chief of the Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences, said the 2-trillion-yuan GDP figure marked a good start for the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25).

"The achievement is a result of Shanxi's recent efforts in improving

its economy, including an industrial transformation to reduce its reliance on coal mining and other heavy industries and fostering emerging industries as new growth engines; guiding supply-side reforms through the use of fixed asset investment; and creating a better business environment to attract investment and encourage entrepreneurship," Yang said.

The improving efficiency of State-owned enterprises has contributed to this impressive growth, according to Wei.

The province's SOEs reported a combined business revenue of 1.64 trillion yuan for 2021, growing 13.16 percent year-on-year. Their total profits surged 230.93 percent to 66.1 billion yuan.

Jinneng Holding Group, one of the leading coal-mining and energy companies in Shanxi, is one of the best-performing SOEs in Shanxi.

Reporting a business revenue of 520 billion yuan and a profit of 17.2 billion yuan for 2021, the company ranks 44th among China's top 500 companies and 138th among the world's top 500 companies.

Company executives said its rapid growth in recent years can be attributed to its efforts in improving efficiency by stepping up the construction of smart coal mines.

Jinneng's subsidiary Tashan Coal Mine, for instance, has a special stu-



The 500th train bound for Europe departs from Shanxi on Sept 25. GUO YANJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

dio dedicated to smart mining.

The studio is used to design and develop technologies, solutions and scenarios for intelligent production, according to Chen Jianlong, chief of the studio.

"Tashan Coal Mine is one of the pioneers of smart mining in China," Chen said. "We are constantly upgrading our equipment and technologies to digitalize our operations."

These upgrades include the use of robots for coal mine shaft patrols and inspection, fully automated coal conveyance, and 5G-connected monitoring, according to Chen.

According to the company, by the end of 2021, Jinneng Holding had upgraded 111 coal mines, or 83 percent of its total, to advanced production sites using the latest technologies and new operational models. Its Tashan and Tongxin coal mines were listed as national pilots of smart mining.

Also driving Shanxi's growth is the foreign trade sector. It surpassed 200

billion yuan last year for the first time, according to Taiyuan Customs.

"Shanxi's foreign trade in cargo reached 223.03 billion yuan last year, growing 48.3 percent from 2020," said Lian Jianyu, a Taiyuan Customs official responsible for statistics. The growth rate is 27 percentage points higher than the national average.

Lian added that provincial exports increased 56.3 percent to 136.6 billion yuan. Meanwhile, imports grew 37.1 percent to 86.43 billion yuan.

The China-Europe freight train service — its Shanxi section opening in 2017 — is one of the major drivers boosting Shanxi's international trade, helping to build the province into a hub of opening-up in inland China.

Fully loaded with goods produced in Shanxi, a cargo train departed from the Zhongding Logistics Park in the provincial capital of Taiyuan on Sept 25 bound for Europe. It was the 500th train since the launch of the

Sino-European freight train service.

Over the years, the freight trains from Shanxi have reached 27 cities across 12 countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

"We have seen a steady increase of train dispatches over the years," said Zhou Yong, an executive at Shanxi Jinou Logistics, the operator of the train service. "The number has increased from 10 dispatches in 2017 to 50 in 2018, 107 in 2019 and 185 in 2020."

During 2016-19, Shanxi's foreign trade volume increased at an average annual rate of 9.3 percent, according to the Shanxi Provincial Department of Commerce.

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Shanxi's imports and exports of cargo amounted to a record 150 billion yuan, growing 4 percent year-on-year. The increase was 2.1 percentage points higher than the national average.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

## Medal-winning Olympic feats inspire people to give winter sports a try

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The 2022 Beijing Olympic Winter Games, which concluded on Feb 20 and where Chinese athletes secured nine gold, four silver and two bronze medals, have aroused a strong enthusiasm for ice and snow sports in Shanxi.

And many locals in this North China province said their love of winter sports was also encouraged by the 18-year-old Shanxi athlete Su Yiming, who won a gold medal in the men's snowboard big air and a silver in the men's snowboard slopestyle. This was the first time that an athlete from Shanxi had secured a medal in the Olympic Winter Games.

But local residents were not particularly surprised with Su's brilliant performance, as they think enthusiasm and tradition at the grassroots level are crucial for a region to produce top athletes.

Indeed, residents in Shanxi already have enthusiasm and tradition in winter sports.

The county of Youyu is a prime

example. Winter sports there have developed in multiple forms in recent years. The enthusiasm for the sports is so strong that many of the frozen water surfaces in the county are turned into skiing venues in winter.

On a lake in the county's Nanhe-wan Wetland Park, an ice and snow carnival has been held since late December. The site gathers hundreds of winter sports enthusiasts every day, who are attending amateur competitions, learning to ski from professional trainers, or just riding sleighs, ice slides and ice motorcycles for fun.

For many visitors, the most exciting sport might be riding an ice slide. Built on a natural slope of a mountaineer's path in the Nanshan Forest Park in the county, the ice slide is said to be the longest in North China.

Wang Xuefei, a local resident and a frequent visitor to the carnival, said he was thrilled with the speed when riding the slide.

"It takes only 28 seconds to finish the 360-meter trip," Wang said.



Residents in Youyu county attend an ice hockey competition. XIN TAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

"That's almost the speed of a car on the road."

Wang said he also takes his child to the venue to learn skating and skiing from the trainers.

The carnival also features ice and snow sculptures and snow lantern shows, offering a novel experience to tourists.

In the northern part of Shanxi, Youyu has developed itself into an emerging tourist destination based on its rich cultural, natural and ecological resources.

According to Zhang Zhenhai, Party secretary of the county, it has attracted a great number of tourists "to watch the blossoming flowers in spring, to escape the heat in summer

and to see the harvest in autumn."

"And the emerging ice and snow sports in winter have turned Youyu into a four-season attraction," Zhang said.

In Shanxi as a whole, the province's ice and snow sports have developed into a larger-scale industry. It has a number of clubs and professional teams in such sports as snowboarding, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and curling.

Official statistics show that Shanxi has 233 enterprises engaged in winter sports operations, with skiing and skating venues scattered throughout the province.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

## Tiger toys winning fans from across the world

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When Spring Festival was celebrated earlier this month, cloth tiger toys produced in the Shanxi county of Licheng were sought-after nationwide, this year being the Year of the Tiger.

The toys made in the county are called Lihou Tigers, whose production technique was listed as a national intangible cultural heritage item in 2008.

The toy is so-called because Licheng used to be fief of Lihou, or marquis of Li, during the Shang (c.16th century-11th century BC) and Zhou (c.11th century-256 BC) dynasties, according to local researchers in history and culture.

Other researchers thought that the name of the toy is related to the township of Lihou, which is a major production base of Lihou Tigers.

But most of them agreed that the technique can be traced back to the Shang Dynasty, when locals regarded tigers as their totem.

The presumption was justified by local archaeological excavations. A great number of tiger-shaped utensils have been unearthed in various sites across the region, which have been identified as Shang Dynasty remains. According to historical records, the worship of tigers has continued for about 3,000 years.

The cloth tiger toys produced in Licheng are quite different from those made in other regions. A Lihou Tiger always has a chubby shape and bright colors.

In Licheng, as well as the rest of

Shanxi, a tiger is a lucky animal for children, symbolizing strength, courage and health. It is a tradition during Spring Festival and other occasions like birthday celebrations to send cloth tiger toys to children as gifts, which is regarded as a show of best wishes.

For many centuries, Lihou Tigers had been popular in Licheng and neighboring areas, but little known in the rest of the country.

This changed in 1998, which again was the Year of the Tiger, when commemorative postage stamps were issued featuring varieties of Lihou Tigers. The cloth tiger toys were later exhibited in Beijing to celebrate the opening of the 2008 Olympic Games, drawing attention on the global stage.

Li Xiaomei, a provincial-level inheritor of the Lihou Tiger manufacturing technique, began to involve herself in the production and commercial promotion of the toy that year.

According to Li, Lihou Tiger manufacturing, with six procedures, is a combination of the arts of needlework, paper-cutting and embroidery.

Guo Lei, head of Licheng county's culture and tourism bureau, said the well-crafted Lihou Tiger toys are now gaining popularity in both domestic and overseas markets.

According to the official, there are more than 500 people in Licheng working in the production of Lihou Tiger toys.

Peng Ke'er contributed to this story.



Lihou Tiger toys produced in Licheng come in chubby shapes and bright colors. LIU YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Baijiu offers a taste of home to Chinese in Miami

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Xinghuacun Fenjiu, a renowned white liquor, or *baijiu*, brand in Shanxi province, hosted an evening gala on Jan 29 in Miami, the United States, to celebrate Spring Festival, which fell on Feb 1 this year.

The gala was also broadcast on a local Chinese-language TV station and social media, while local overseas Chinese, businesspeople and politicians were invited to the site.

Featuring 30-plus performances, the evening gala aimed to offer attendees and audiences an opportunity to experience Chinese culture as well as the branding strength of the time-honored distiller.

And there was also a liquor-tasting activity during the gala, where participants, especially overseas Chinese, said it was something that brought them back to the famed old town of Xinghuacun, which is what the brand was named after and is said to be the cradle of Shanxi *baijiu* industry.



Overseas Chinese in Miami attend the Xinghuacun Fenjiu evening gala on Jan 29. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Researchers in Shanxi believe the history of the town of Xinghuacun, located by the Fenne River in the city of Fenyang, dates back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

But the history of alcoholic beverage production there is much longer. Archaeologists found an ancient alcoholic beverage production site at the location of Xinghu-

cun Fenjiu Group, which is also based in Fenyang. Unearthed production utensils revealed that the site has a history of about 6,000 years.

Xinghuacun became a household name mainly because of a poem called *Qingming*, written by Tang Dynasty poet Du Mu. In the poem, Du described his mood dur-

ing his trip on Qingming, or Tomb Sweeping Day, in April. In Chinese, Xinghuacun literally means apricot flower village.

"A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Qingming day.

The traveler's heart is going to break on the way.

Where can a wine shop be found to drown his dismay?

A cowherd points to the apricot flower village far away."

In Xinghuacun, the production of liquor has continued for thousands of years. In modern times, Xinghuacun-branded *baijiu* has been a frequent winner of national and international awards, including a gold medal during the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the US.

In addition to the evening gala in Miami, Xinghuacun Fenjiu has hosted Spring Festival celebratory events in cities in the United Kingdom, France and Germany.

Liu Jiarui contributed to this story.