

High-tech, industrial firms choosing Shanxi as a base for growth

More than 1,400 projects are secured by plethora of development zones and parks across northern Chinese province in just a 15-month period



By YUAN SHENGGAO

With a business environment improving sustainably, economic development zones and industrial parks in the North China province of Shanxi are growing in appeal to investors at home and abroad.

One example is Yuncheng Economic and Technological Development Zone in the southern Shanxi city of Yuncheng.

Shanxi Beitong New Material Technology is a copper and copper alloy manufacturing enterprise founded in the zone in January 2020.

Zhang Baoning, deputy general manager of the company, said he and his colleagues are amazed at the efficiency of local administrators.

“From environmental assessment to permission for construction, it took only 15 days,” Zhang said.

This is also the case in Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone located in the cities of Taiyuan and Jinzhong.

Li Xiaoqiang, an executive of a high-tech company newly estab-

lished in the zone, said it took 15 days for the company to complete all the procedures ranging from land acquisition to beginning construction.

Shanxi now sees industrial zones and parks as a driving force for local economic growth. And authorities in the zones view improving business environment as a crucial part of attracting investors.

In the Taiwan Industrial Park of Gaoping Economic and Technological Development Zone in the city of Gaoping, more than 10 factories are about to be completed.

Zhou Jianfeng, an official of the park’s administrative office, said these buildings will be leased to enterprises at a favorable rate upon completion.

“We make it a common practice in our zone that projects can begin operations right away once they are approved,” Zhou said. “In addition to those under construction, we have plans to build more factory and office buildings.”

The Taiwan Industrial Park is an investment destination targeting businesses from Taiwan province. According to Zhou, the park is now hosting projects with a pledged investment totaling 7 billion yuan (\$1.03 billion). The investments are mainly in the medicine and health food industries, especially those relating to the development of local medicinal herbs.

To date, the industrial park has completed factory buildings with a total floor space of 120,000 square meters, offering premises for 18 enterprises, according to Zhou. He added that another 100,000 sq m of similar buildings are now under construction.

Elsewhere in the Gaoping development zone, Beijing-headquartered 3D-printing equipment producer Kangshuo Group is busy building its second- and third-phase projects after its first phase became operational in the zone a year ago.

According to Li Yong, deputy general manager of Kangshuo Group’s Shanxi branch, the second-phase project — with an investment of 150 million yuan — is now in the equipment-installation stage. Operations are expected to begin at the end of May.

The executive said that as a key intelligent manufacturing enterprise in Shanxi, Kangshuo’s Gaoping facility has won much support from local authorities. The administrators’ highly efficient and considerate services are the main reasons for the company to begin operations so quickly and smoothly, he added.

“Our three phases of operations will range from molding and alloy production to printing machine manufacturing,” Li Yong said. “This facility can help to form a complete 3D-printing industrial chain in Shanxi.”



The Baidu cloud computing center is among the latest of investment projects in the eastern Shanxi city of Yangquan. LI SHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

In Yangquan in the east of Shanxi, Shenzhen-based Jonter Digital Technology launched a new company in the city’s high-tech industrial development zone.

According to Kou Zhiqiang, a senior executive of Jonter Shanxi, the new company was founded in June 2021. It began construction of its production plant in July that year and saw the operation of its first production line by September.

“From the project’s founding in June to trial production in September, it only took three months,” Kou said. “This is something we could not imagine in the past.”

The company now produces about 7,000 sets of intelligent wearable devices every day. “After it becomes fully operational, it will produce about 30,000 sets a day or more than 10 million sets a year,” Kou said.

Jonter in Yangquan is also the original equipment manufacturer for internet company Baidu’s Xiaodu smart speakers.

He said it was the business-friendly environment and welcoming services provided by officials that prompted Jonter’s decision to launch its business in Yangquan.

“We will not only focus on our own growth, but contribute to boosting Yangquan’s economic development and industrial upgrading,” Kou said.

In Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, Huayang Jolywood, a company founded by Jiangsu province-based Jolywood Solar Technology, has enjoyed the same high-quality services from local authorities.

“It took less than three months to complete all the procedures to keep our project running, from negotiation and agreement signing to plant construction,” said Lin Jianwei, board chairman of Huayang Jolywood.

Jolywood Solar Technology is one of the nationally recognized high-tech companies specializing in the development of photovoltaic cells and components.

Huayang Jolywood launched its first-phase project in July last year. According to Miao Yunzhan, deputy general manager of Huayang Jolywood, construction of the first phase is near completion and production will begin in the near future.

“Our second-phase project will also be completed in the second half of this year,” Miao said. “Upon full operation, we will have an annual capacity to produce 10 billion yuan worth of 16-gigawatt, high-performance photovoltaic cells.”

The executive added that the facility is expected to create more than 2,600 jobs for Shanxi residents.

Authorities in Shanxi province are now creating an administrative framework to help accelerate the construction of new projects and support their operations. Efforts include shortening the approval time for new projects and offering tailored, whole-process services to support business growth.

As a result of the wide-ranging efforts, industrial zones and parks in Shanxi secured 1,427 large and medium-sized investment projects from January 2021 to March this year.

Of these, 1,291 projects, or 90.5 percent of the total, are under construction or have become operational, according to the Shanxi Department of Commerce.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Whole new lease of life for relocated villagers

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Chen Fuqing, former Party secretary of the village of Zhaojiawa in Shanxi’s Kelan county, left his post in July last year after completing a five-year mission to relieve poverty.

Now serving as an official at the county’s people’s congress, Chen is still concerned about residents’ livelihoods even though they’ve already left this impoverished village at the heart of Lyuliang Mountains.

Thanks to a relocation program targeting poverty alleviation, former residents of Zhaojiawa now live in new homes in a settlement in Songjiagou village near the county seat of Kelan.

Chen was one of the officials that had arranged for the last six households in Zhaojiawa to move.

Zhaojiawa used to be a rundown village featuring a row of dilapidated adobe houses dotted along the slope of a loess mountain and infertile farmlands in the mountain valley.

Before 2017, many of the houses and farmlands had already been abandoned as their residents moved out of the village in search of better lives. Some of the villagers — 21 people in six households to be exact — who had stayed behind were struggling with extreme poverty.

Cao Liuren was one of them. His bedroom, bereft of any furniture or

ornaments except a brick bed with newspapers pasted on the walls and the ceiling, mirrors the stark condition of the family.

The Lyuliang Mountains region in Xinzhou city, due to its inhospitable loess land and steep ravines, used to be one of China’s poorest places. And the village of Zhaojiawa was a typical case of such conditions.

“Because of the drought, crops could be grown for brief spells only and the yield was low. The villagers lived at the mercy of the weather,” Chen said.

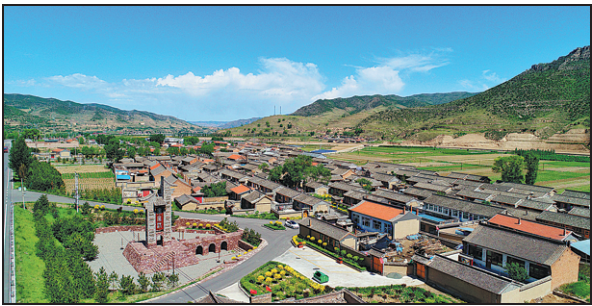
Chen and his colleagues made their final attempt for a poverty-alleviation relocation program in 2017.

He recalled that convincing the last residents in the village to move out was a painstaking endeavor at first.

“I was reluctant to move when officials came to persuade me in 2017,” Cao said.

Cao’s major sources of revenue back then came from herding a few sheep and goats on nearby hills, plus a meager yield of corn from his farmland.

He said officials did not force him to move. Instead, they gave him two options: he could move to a new home in Songjiagou and find a new job with the government’s help, or he could stay in the village with his sheep and goats.



The new settlement for relocated residents in the village of Songjiagou in Kelan county. ZHAO WENJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

His main concern with moving was whether he and his wife could find new jobs to support his family.

In his visits to the Guanghuiyuan community, the new settlement in Songjiagou, residents there told him a number of enterprises had been established in the neighborhood to help with poverty alleviation. Jobs were easily available with recommendations from the government.

Convinced, Cao and his wife made the decision to move. They now live in an apartment with access to running water, gas and central heating.

And like Cao, the other five households have also since moved to the new settlement.

After their relocation, Party chief Chen was still with them. He said he had to make sure the residents could find jobs and adapt to their new lives.

He said he even devoted his time and energy to teaching them how to use electrical appliances, and how to

pay bills for electricity, gas and water. “These were all new experiences to the residents,” Chen said.

Cao now works in a nearby factory, with a monthly pay of 2,800 yuan (\$415). “That is a big increase in revenue, as I could only earn 4,000-5,000 yuan a year when I was in Zhaojiawa,” he said.

The new residents in Songjiagou have all seen substantial improvements in their quality of life. They either work in nearby factories and other entities, or do farming work in vegetable greenhouses near their homes.

Kelan county announced last year that absolute poverty had been eliminated. Local statistics show that the per capita income of formerly listed poor residents reached 14,216 yuan in 2021, an increase of 9 percent from 2020.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.

Craftsman masters the art of locomotive parts

By YUAN SHENGGAO

In an era of automation and digitalization, craftsmanship — qualities which include skill, experience, dedication and initiative — still remains crucial in modern manufacturing. The story of an award-winning worker in Shanxi has demonstrated this.

Li Xiaofeng, a machine tools operator at CRRC Yongji Motors based in the southern Shanxi city of Yongji, was granted the National May 1 Award during the May Day holiday for his performance that has contributed to the growth of one of the leading advanced manufacturing enterprises in the province.

It is the latest in a string of honors he has won over the years. Li said he is an ordinary worker like many of his colleagues in his company. But he is a master in his post in the eyes of many, including the instructor who first trained him.

Specializing in the making of molds for locomotive motor components, Li is now a versatile operator of many kinds of machine tools, ranging from turning, milling, boring and planing to pressing.

Producing components for locomotive motors, which can deliver speeds up to 350 kilometers per hour, requires incredible accuracy. When it comes to making the molds for components, the accuracy tolerance is between 0.03-0.05 millimeters, according to Li.

But for Li himself, the accuracy rate is controlled to 0.02 mm, equal to one-fourth of a strand of hair.

Li, 37, began his career as a machine tools operator and mold maker in CRRC Yongji Motors in 2005.

Ci Guoqiang, 51, who instructed Li when he started, said: “It is almost a miracle for an ordinary worker to grow into such a skilled expert in his trade in a period of 17 years.”

Ci went on to say that the secrets behind his incredible growth are his unimaginable diligence, cleverness and strong will to learn.

“He has been keen to learn everything, from hands-on skills to the latest techniques,” Ci said. “And he is always trying to find the best solutions to the challenges in his job.”

According to Ci, Li is now among the best workers in the company who can use computer-aided manufacturing systems to guide his work and create solutions.

Over recent years, Li has proposed 25 solutions to improve manufacturing techniques and to overcome difficulties.

Now an instructor in his workplace, Li is keen to share his experiences with his apprentices.

Among the nine workers that received his coaching, seven have won awards in skills competitions at various levels.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



Li Xiaofeng inspects a locomotive motor component at CRRC Yongji Motors. DAI CHENKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fenjiu offers clues to China’s history of distilling

By YUAN SHENGGAO

It is speculated that China has a history of alcoholic beverage production dating back more than 5,000 years. The speculation is based on written records and even legends.

However, an archaeological discovery in Xinghuacun town of Shanxi’s Fenyang city has offered material evidence for the long history and extended it to 6,000 years.

One of the remarkable findings at the site, which is located in the premises of today’s white liquor producer Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group, was a waving spindle-shaped bottle with a distinctive feature of Yangshao Culture, an ancient civilization in the middle reaches of the Yellow River between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago. Archaeologists identified it as a utensil used to brew alcoholic beverages.

The discovery suggests that Fen-

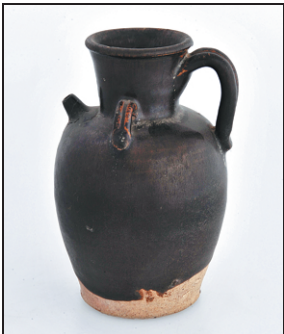
yang, along with its neighboring areas in Shanxi province, could be the birthplace and hub of China’s alcoholic beverage industry.

The fame of Fenyang-made alcoholic beverages, or *Fenjiu* as locals call it, has been associated with its status as a special offering to the royal families since the Tang Dynasty (618-906).

Tang was also a period of frequent international exchanges. And that was when *Fenjiu* from Shanxi began to exert influence on the overseas alcoholic beverage industry and became recognized in foreign countries. Japan was one such region to see its industry influenced by *Fenjiu*.

To learn the Chinese culture and technologies, Japan began dispatching large groups of exchange scholars to China during the Tang Dynasty.

Kuhai, a Japanese Buddhist



A Tang Dynasty liquor jar discovered in Shanxi. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

monk, was one of the scholars.

During his three-year stay in China, he not only studied the Buddhist sutras, but also learned some *Fenjiu*-

making techniques in his spare time. Historical records said he brought the techniques back to Japan.

In Japanese, liquor made with a distilling technique is called *sake*. This is a pronunciation derived from *shaofiu*, the Shanxi pronunciation of distilled liquor.

Historical records said the city of Fenyang is the birthplace of distilled liquor in China. The double-distilling technique, which is still used by today’s distillers like Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group, has been the secret of making high-quality and high-purity liquor that is sought after in East Asian markets including Japan.

The exchanges have endured in modern times, and a number of distilling masters from Shanxi have been invited to share their experiences with Japanese counterparts.

Liu Jiarui contributed to this story.