

Eco efforts bring new revenue streams to lake



Environmental work has attracted back wildlife and tourists

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Salt Lake in Yuncheng has been the most precious natural asset of this southern Shanxi city throughout its history of thousands of years and it continues to bring benefits to people.

The significance of this lake is a result of the millennia-long development of the salt mining industry.

As an indispensable substance for humans, salt exists in the form of sodium ions, maintaining water and electrolyte balance in the human body.

It is said that the salt mining industry was one of the crucial driving forces for human civilization. This was especially true in regions like Yuncheng, which is far from the ocean and where salt production requires more difficult techniques than simply drying seawater.

According to the current archaeological evidence and historical records, as early as the Neolithic Age more than 7,000 years ago, there were human communities existing around Salt Lake in Yuncheng.

In legends, there was a major battle between the tribes of the Yellow Emperor and Ci You some 5,000 years ago, vying for the control of the Salt Lake. The Yellow Emperor's tribe won, leading to the formation of a nation that gradually grew into today's China.

Since the Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties, the salt mining industry in Yuncheng



Salt Lake becomes colorful in the early summer, making it an attraction for tourists and photographers. YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

had developed into a major source of the nation's fiscal revenue. Historical documents show that taxes collected from Yuncheng's salt production accounted for about one-eighth of the national fiscal revenue during certain periods of the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Yuncheng's salt industry continued to grow and diversify. Salt Lake once became the largest mineral salt production base in the nation several decades ago.

However, salt mining on the lake was brought to a halt in 2020, for the purpose of restoring and protecting the ecological environment according to the requirements of China's central authorities.

When production reached its peak decades ago, the local ecological envi-

ronment was severely challenged, according to Diao Haipeng, vice-mayor of Yuncheng.

"These environmental challenges included damage to embankments, a decrease of vegetation along the lake and silting-up of water courses," Diao said. "After millennia of prosperous growth, the lake needs to slow down its pace of development and have respite."

The city of Yuncheng called a halt to salt-related production in September 2020 and began an environmental improvement program for the lake in 2021, according to the official.

He said that the program included dredging the entire lake and its connected watercourses, enhancing 98 kilometers of embankments and planting a vegetation belt along the lake.

After two years of efforts, Salt Lake has seen a steady improvement in its environment.

"The lake is now a better habitat for birds and other wildlife," said Sun Dongqing, head of the environmental protection and development center for Salt Lake.

He added that a total of 205 bird species have been recorded over the two years, including such rare varieties as flamingo, swan, pied avocet and great bustard.

The flamingo is an endangered species of stork mainly living in Africa, Central Asia and South Asia. Records show that the birds were first discovered in China in the late 1990s. And now the city of Yuncheng has become a favored winter habitat by the bird.

Sun added that the wetlands along

the lake are home to more than 30 varieties of plants unique to the saline and alkaline environment.

The water of the lake is supplied by streams originating from the neighboring Zhongtiao Mountains. The Zhongtiao area is another target of environmental improvement, according to Vice-Mayor Diao.

"The mineral-rich Zhongtiao streams are the lifelines for the lake," Diao said. "Through increasing vegetation coverage and economized use of water among residents and businesses, the streams' runoff into the lake has been increasing steadily over recent years."

He added that the streams' annual supply of saline minerals to the lake has now reached 200,000 metric tons, among the best levels in history.

When salt production temporarily

closed at the lake, Diao said how to ensure revenue was a concern among residents, businesses and officials.

The official noted that production will be back when the improvement program is completed, but in a rational scale aiming to strike a balance between environmental protection and economic growth.

He said additional revenues will come from industries derived from salt production.

"In the past decades, we produced salt for industrial use," Diao said. "But now we are diversifying into the fine chemicals sector, producing products for healthcare and the farming industry."

One example is the development of products based on black mud from the lake bed.

Black mud is a resource unique to Salt Lake. Containing fulvic acid and 38 varieties of minerals, the black mud is used for making products for healthcare, skin care and crop care.

Salt Lake is becoming an emerging tourist destination in Shanxi province, which has developed into another major stream of revenue.

"On this lake known as the Chinese version of the Dead Sea, floating on the water's surface is an unforgettable experience that you can never find elsewhere in the country," said a tourist on his WeChat account.

In recent years, the lake once again became a hit on social media because of eye-catching aerial photos of its colorful surface.

As temperatures begin to rise in early summer, the multicolored Salt Lake becomes a bustling attraction for tourists and photographers.

Scientists attribute the rich colors of the lake to the propagation and growth of halophilic algae and brine shrimp. The organisms change color at various temperatures, turning the lake into a huge painter's palette.

Li Ningbo contributed to this story.



The scenic village of Tongtan holds great appeal to painters and photographers. YANG SHUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Mountain village paints a picture of creativity

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The village of Tongtan in Tongyu township in the Shanxi county of Zuoquan has recently developed into a destination for a special group of tourists.

The visitors to this village in the heart of the Taihang Mountains are mainly painters and fine arts college students. They are there to photograph or paint from local life and nature. So the village is known to painters as a "sketching base in North China".

"A sketching base should have a unique appeal to painters, like picturesque scenery, ancient buildings and a distinctive lifestyle," said Luo Nanjie, deputy Party secretary of Tongyu township.

He said Tongtan village has boasted all of these properties.

"Tongtan is located in the most scenic part of the Taihang Mountains," Luo said. "It is usually referred to as 'the northern Guilin' thanks to the fact that it boasts crystal clear waters and lushly vegetated mountains similar to those in the famed destination of Guilin in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region."

In addition to its appealing natural resources, Tongtan is adjacent to some Red tourism sites, like the former headquarters of the 129th Division, a military force led by the Communist Party of China during the War of Resistance Against the Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

Luo is not a native of Zuoquan county. He used to be an official at the China Foreign Languages Publishing Administration in Beijing. He was assigned to Tongyu township in 2021 for a mission to assist in local rural vitalization.

Luo's vision and experience as a State institution official gave him a unique insight into the area's development. Upon his arrival, he immediately realized the township was a perfect destination for painters and photographers alike. And he said his connections with colleges and artists could help to draw visitors to the picturesque locale.

"After I proposed a plan, the county government and local businesses invested nearly 100 million yuan (\$14 million) in developing facilities and operations for the sketching base," Luo said. "The lodges here can offer accommodation to nearly 400 people a day, allowing visits by students from several schools at once."

The official added that this destination for painters and photographers should have a spillover effect on other groups of tourists.

"Photographers and painters tend to post their pictures on their social media accounts," Luo said. "This should be the best kind of advertisement, attracting more people to our village."

In addition to Tongtan, the county of Zuoquan has another two sketching bases in the villages of Zecheng and Laojing.

The three bases can offer accommodation for a total of 1,500 visitors. It is estimated that their annual business revenue can reach 28 million yuan a year.

The county of Zuoquan, which is known as the "50-kilometer natural gallery of the Taihang Mountains", has emerged as one of the top rural tourism destinations in Shanxi in recent years.

Liu Ruiqiang contributed to this story.

Forum emphasizes province's high-quality growth

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A number of businesspeople representing the world's top 500 companies gathered at a forum in Shanxi in late May, aiming to identify business opportunities and offer suggestions for the high-quality growth of the North China province.

The event, called Top 500 Enterprises in Dialogue with Shanxi, opened on May 29 in the provincial capital of Taiyuan. Business leaders from companies including France-based LafargeHolcim, South Korea-based CJ Group, Shanxi-based Jinneng Holding and Beijing-based Aerospace Changfeng delivered speeches at the forum, contributing their insights regarding development opportunities in Shanxi.

Li Yongqiang, vice-mayor of Taiyuan, introduced the investment environment of the city to forum attendees. He said that Taiyuan has set aside a special fund of 1.3 billion yuan (\$182.39 million) for investment promotion. Some projects deemed crucial for the city's growth can be offered an award of up to 50 million yuan.

Zhang Peng, vice-mayor of the city of Jinzhong said the unique appeal of Jinzhong to investors is



Business representatives attend the Top 500 Enterprises in Dialogue with Shanxi on May 29. YAN JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

its strong manufacturing sectors.

"Over the recent years, we have formed eight competitive industry chains in such manufacturing sectors as new energy vehicle, special steel and advanced equipment," Zhang said. "We are also developing three provincial-level and six city-level characteristic towns for local specialty industries like malleable iron and glassware."

He added that all the industries and characteristic towns offer huge business opportunities for

investors from home and abroad.

The forum saw the signing of seven large projects between investors and Shanxi's investment destinations. The projects cover such areas as new energy, advanced manufacturing, chemicals and new materials.

Su Zihua, president of Aerospace Changfeng, said his company has launched successful operations in Shanxi and plans to invest in more projects in the province thanks to its stable business

environment and great development potential.

"We have noticed that Shanxi's authorities at various levels are doing their best to create a sustainable investment environment through their increasingly efficient governance, their growing professionalism to offer services and their efforts to implement an economic transformation campaign.

"Shanxi is carrying out a transformation move that puts more emphasis on fostering strategic emerging industries and facilitating low-carbon development. This is in line with our medium and long-term development goals," Su said.

A renowned high-tech company in China, Aerospace Changfeng's operations in Shanxi cover such emerging and low-carbon sectors as information technology, electronics and advanced medical equipment.

"With the strong support of Shanxi's authorities, Aerospace Changfeng will continue to enhance its presence in such fields as IT, big data, energy storage and medical equipment, making greater contributions to Shanxi's high-quality development," Su said.

Yan Jie contributed to this story.

Baijiu maker brewing up women's World Cup fever

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup approaches, Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group, a renowned baijiu — or white liquor — producer in Shanxi province and one of the official sponsors of the Chinese women's football team, has begun its promotional campaigns to fuel enthusiasm among Chinese people in various regions.

The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup will be held in Australia and New Zealand from July 20 to Aug 20. The Chinese team is among the 32 teams to qualify for the final competitions in the two countries.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu International Trade, an arm for exports at the Shanxi distillery group, became a branding sponsor of the Chinese women's football team on March 25.

The company's recent move was a forum in Zhuhai, Guangdong province. Renowned former Chinese



Former football players Wei Haiying (center left) and Sun Yongxia (center right) pose with students in Zhuhai before giving them a training lesson. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

women's footballers Wei Haiying and Sun Yongxia, as well as representatives of local enterprises and communities took part.

Participants talked about the exemplary role that the Chinese

women's football team has played over the decades in the social development of Chinese women and the growing enthusiasm of Chinese women in various sports.

On the sidelines of the forum, Wei

and other former Chinese women footballers held a special lesson for female trainees at a local sports school.

Wei used to be one of the shining stars of women's football in the 1980s and 1990s, helping the national team garner a series of medals in international contests.

At the forum, an executive of Xinghuacun Fenjiu International Trade said that the Chinese women footballers' enterprising spirit, courage and tenacity in the face of difficulties resonate with the values of the Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group. "We are expecting to work together to present a vivid image of China through the forthcoming World Cup," he said.

The executive also hoped that the coming event will be a great chance to showcase the image of Xinghuacun Fenjiu, helping it expand in the markets in Australia, New Zealand and regions beyond.