

# BUSINESS



## Development brings Liuzhi residents better prospects

Infrastructure improvements boosting local economy, helping communities in Guizhou get jobs and overcome geographic barriers

By HAN JINGYAN

hanjingyan@chinadaily.com.cn

Dubbed “the Cool City of China”, prefecture-level Liupanshui in Southwest China’s Guizhou province is proud of its county-level Liuzhi special district which is home to people from 32 ethnic groups, such as Han, Yi and Miao, living in picturesque places with their unique customs.

Liuzhi was set up in the 1960s due to its inaccessibility in the mountains, which helps it fend off outside intrusion and safeguard its lifeline of mineral and water resources.

The local natural beauty has been well preserved, but it awaits big pillars to shore up its socioeconomic progress, with better transport a top priority.

Abutting on the Central Guizhou Economic Zone, a key economic zone of the State, Liuzhi is the east axis of the Panzhihua-Liupanshui Rich-resource Area Economic Belt under national planning and construction, as well as a main gateway from Guizhou to Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in the south.

Liuzhi is trying to develop a traffic network with railways and expressways — two running vertically and two running horizontally.

On Sept 8, 2011, the 2,730-kilometer Shanghai-Kunming Expressway was fully connected, running through Liuzhi. But amid rapid economic growth, the traffic pressure on the existing four-lane road section in Guizhou had been immense, said Dai Xi, a driver from Zunyi in Guizhou.

To alleviate congestion and adapt to regional economic development, Guizhou decided to expand the Anshun-Panzhou section of the Shanghai-Kunming Expressway, with the expansion commencing in March 2023, he said.

For Liuzhi, its main crops are rice, corn, wheat, potatoes and rapeseed, while coal, machinery, electricity, building materials, food processing and other industries are its industrial pillars, leading to a regional GDP of 18.499 billion yuan (\$2.6 billion) last year, an annual hike of 5.9 percent.

Liu Qiang, head of Liuzhi district government, promised earlier this year that the district will improve its transport to make local travel easier and help boost its socioeconomic advancement.

Li Shifu, Party secretary of the No 3 Bid project department of China Railway No 4 Engineering Group, which is partially building the section, said: “The new eight-lane expressway will make passenger and goods transport in Liuzhi faster and easier.”

Luo Tiantian, a 42-year-old native of the Buyi ethnic group in



**Top:** The Anshun-Panzhou section of Shanghai-Kunming Expressway, being partially built by China Railway No 4 Engineering Group, progresses steadily in Guizhou province.

SHI JIAMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Above:** CREC4 workers decorate the road they built free of charge for local villagers in Liuzhi special district in Guizhou in August.

CHUI TINGTING / FOR CHINA DAILY



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**Li Shifu**, Party secretary of the No 3 Bid project department of China Railway No 4 Engineering Group

Guizhou, is a staff member of Li’s project department. Luo said he felt honored and proud to participate in the construction in his hometown. “I will hold myself to high standards while in engineering construction, and not let down people’s trust,” Luo said.

### Free roads for locals

The natural vegetation in Guizhou is dense, with large mountains, deep ditches and rugged roads, leading to a severe shortage of basic farmland, and income sources for the locals were scarce.

When CREC4 builders arrived, they got to know that a big bottleneck plaguing the lives of the locals who live very scattered was that they had difficulty in their daily travels.

Governing 15 townships and towns, three sub-district communities, with a total population of over 750,300, Liuzhi houses 253 villages and urban neighborhood communities, with rich mineral and water resources.

While building the expressway, CREC4 employees decided to offer a helping hand by building additional free roads for locals.

Li Guang was chief engineer of the project, and fully considered the living habits of the locals when planning the access roads. “Our technicians visited nine villages and towns and marked in detail the existing roads’ potholes, steep slope sections, and the main travel routes of the villagers before finalizing on a road

improvement task,” he said.

In four months, Li Guang’s team renovated 17.25 kilometers of existing roads, built three pedestrian overpasses and a new steel wharf for the villagers to travel, allowing them not to detour or walk on muddy roads.

In addition, they also added a 436-meter mountain road and a 159-meter auxiliary road near Xujiawan Bridge to slash the travel time from Yanjiao town to Yongfeng village in Longhe to 20 minutes from one hour.

Wang Xingming, a local Miao elderly man, said to go to the market in Longhe from his Yongfeng village, he used to carry a basket and detour several miles on the mountain road, and it was more difficult to walk on rainy days.

“Now, it’s much convenient for me,” he said.

### More tech and jobs

Li Guang stressed that though building roads is important, helping the locals get jobs and increase income is equally vital.

“One-third of the villages of Longhe are Miao ethnic villages, and most young people rely on migrant work to improve their lives,” he said, noting that helping locals improve their skills and find jobs nearby is imperative.

“Our project department organized 30 free training sessions and pre-job training on steel bar binding and welding for over 200 people, and finally hired some of them for

the construction work,” he said.

The locals were thrilled. Yang Wenfu, a Miao ethnic worker from Longchang village in Longhe town where Li’s project department is based, joined the CREC4 construction team six months ago.

“Previously, I had to depend on my 0.2-hectare paddy field and rapeseed fields to make a living, but now, as a steel reinforcement worker, I can proficiently tie and knot steel bars to earn a handsome monthly salary to support my children in education,” he said.

“My dad used to say that our Miao ethnic family relied on the mountains for food, but the mountains are too high and the roads were too steep, so young people had to work outside our home for better income,” Yang said, noting that he is happy to seek a job on his doorstep and help build an expressway for the hometown.

Zhang Yonghong, from Shuanglong village, has been attending classes on welding steel bars for bridge deck crash barriers. “When I master this skill, I will be able to find a job,” he said.

Li Shifu noted that since their construction work started, they have provided 1,647 jobs for locals, including 142 ethnic minority workers, paying them 118.584 million yuan in salaries.

“Moreover, our 2,400 staff members working here have also boosted the economy of Longhe through our spending, helping it with better roads, and fuller wallets for the villagers,” he said.

### Children in school

During construction work, the CREC4 project department learned that some local families have children who are left behind in villages by their parents going to cities for migrant jobs, posing some psychological challenges among them, while some families even have difficulties with their children’s education.

“We decided to extend a helping hand to aid cash-trapped students in one middle school and three primary schools,” Li Shifu said.

“After conducting surveys on disadvantaged families, we started a ‘one-on-one’ aid drive, pairing 10 young workers with 10 students needing the help,” he said, adding that his colleagues provided subsidies ranging from 500 yuan to 2,000 yuan for them, as well as school bags, stationery and other supplies according to the actual situation.

“The uncles and aunts from CREC4 also renovated the basketball court for us. I will cherish the chance, study hard and strive to give our contribution to the society like them in the future,” said He Tingting, a fifth grader at Qiaoliang Elementary School.

## Protecting traditions while advancing rural vitalization progress

By HAN JINGYAN

Twenty eight years ago, John Gjestrup, a Norwegian who was a board member of the International Committee of Museology, traveled to Liuzhi special district in Guizhou province to plant a tree that marked the start of the Sino-Norwegian Friendship Trees.

As editor-in-chief of Nordisk Museologi, he went there to guide the building of the Liuzhi Suojia Miao ethnic ecomuseum in Suojia town. Earlier, in October 1997, the heads of State of China and Norway witnessed a signing ceremony in Beijing that would lead to the establishment of the first ecomuseum in China.

In 1997, construction of the Suojia Ecomuseum Information Center started with the aid of 880,000 Norwegian kroner (\$87,950) from the Norwegian government for the construction of the venue and the collection of physical objects. On Oct 31, 1998, the ecomuseum officially opened to the public.

As the first ecomuseum in Asia, the Suojia Miao Community is located in Longjia village at an average altitude of 2,000 meters and some 42 kilometers north of Liuzhi. Situated in high mountains, its natural conditions were extremely challenging and water sources were scarce.

In the neighboring 12 villages, there resides an ancient and mysterious branch of the Miao ethnic group — the Qingmiao branch, also known as the Longhorn Miao branch, with some 5,000 residents. Before the establishment of the ecomuseum, they lived in extremely harsh conditions and were regarded as a living fossil of pre-industrial life.

The Longhorn Miao village was built against the mountains with earthen walls and thatched cottages. With a simple way of life, the villagers worked from sunrise to sunset, spun and wove fabrics, waxed embroidery and used needles and threads to sew beautiful clothes and skirts.

The ecomuseum aims to keep a record of their social structure, housing, dressing habits, production, lifestyles, music and dance, displaying their gradual integration with the outside world.

Unlike a traditional museum, an ecomuseum aims to record a region’s community, residents, heritages, cultural memory and public knowledge, instead of the buildings, collections, scientific knowledge and research.

The ecomuseum showcased China’s gradual understanding of the importance of ecological preservation, said Yin Shigang, Party secretary of the project department of China Railway No 4 Engineering Group in building the Anshun-Panzhou section of Shanghai-Kunming Expressway, which traverses Liuzhi.

Liuzhi, sitting on the watershed of the Yangtze River and the Pearl River water systems, is a picturesque place with high mountains and more than 40 rivers and streams.

Liu Qiang, head of Liuzhi district government, said earlier this year that the district should continuously optimize its ecological environment.

Protecting the local environment has thus become a top priority while constructing the expressway, Yin said.

Inside Yongfeng village on the banks of Sancha River near his project department, the terraced

fields are lush green and the main piers of the Xujiawan Bridge stand on both banks, forming a beautiful ecological picture, Yin said.

“During our construction work, we tried our best to maintain the original natural terrain and set up retaining walls and other engineering structures in areas with steep slopes and poor geological conditions to bolster their safety and stability, reducing the risk of soil erosion and minimizing the impact of construction on the environment,” he said.

On both sides of the Xujiawan Bridge are terraced fields for farmers, which are a main source of income for the villagers, and Yin’s project department has thought of scientific means to reduce damage to young crops in the construction area.

He said as the natural vegetation in Guizhou is dense, with large mountains, deep ditches and rugged roads, there is a severe shortage of basic farmland, and they need to stick to strict forest protection.



From building roads and helping impoverished students, they have truly built a bridge of friendship, injecting strong momentum into the rural vitalization in Longhe.”

**Wang Yongyue**, Party secretary of Longhe town

“As we are building an expressway, we need to set up a prefabrication yard to precast beams, which may occupy some 7 hectares of land traditionally,” Yin recalled. “But following the principle that ‘lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets’, we finally decided to increase investment and build our smart beam yard in the mountains.”

This not only helped reduce the land by nearly half, but also minimized the damage to the ecological environment, he added.

For Yin from CREC4 Fourth Engineering, his life during the past two years in building the expressway has been fruitful and rewarding.

He worked with over 2,400 employees, including 142 local ethnic minority workers who are glad to have the motorway in their hometown.

During traditional Miao festivals, the villagers of Yongfeng often invited Yin’s colleagues to participate in cultural activities, enjoying art performances and Miao dances, expressing their sincere thanks to the builders with long-table banquets.

“The CREC4 employees have enabled our villagers to learn skills and steadily increase their income at their doorsteps. From building roads and helping impoverished students, they have truly built a bridge of friendship, injecting strong momentum into the rural vitalization in Longhe,” said Wang Yongyue, Party secretary of Longhe town, adding that “the locals have come to recognize this”.



Women from the Miao ethnic group in Liuzhi special district in Guizhou province don their ethnic costumes to attend a gathering in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY