

BALANCED PROGRESS OF XIAMEN

Economic development spread evenly across coastal island city's several districts, thanks to 2002 strategy

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Huang Luxu, deputy general manager of Xiamen Container Terminal Group

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Cross-island development has brought prosperity to the coastal city of Xiamen in East China's Fujian province as it has made strides in integrating the development of its downtown and suburban areas.

In 2002, the Xiamen city government issued the cross-island development strategy, mapping out its transformation from an island city into a bay city. According to the strategy, the local government vehicles to integrate the development of its six administrative districts, with Siming and Huli on the main island and the other four of Haicang, Jimei, Xiang'an and Tong'an on the mainland.

Since then, Xiamen has followed this blueprint in city construction. It has moved with the times to update its strategy. So far, the city has formed a layout featuring the cross-island development of industries, public services, culture and ecology.

New business forms such as scientific and technological innovation, finance,

and headquarters economy have been sited in the downtown areas of the main island. Meanwhile, suburban areas on the mainland have witnessed the construction of new towns.

The balanced development has allowed more people to participate in Xiamen's city construction and helped them realize their dreams by working and living there, local officials said.

Burgeoning industry

Listed in the first batch of national-level high-tech zones, the Xiamen Torch Development Zone for High Technology Industries was established in 1990 in Huli district. In the past 10 years, the torch zone has expanded across the city, setting up branches including an industrial zone, high-tech centers and software parks in the suburban areas of Tong'an, Xiang'an and Jimei. It is home to high-tech businesses and industries, playing a significant role in the city's innovation and industrial development.

As cross-island development accelerates, Xiamen has built 10 industrial chains

each valued at 100 billion yuan (\$15.83 billion). Among them, biomedicine and new-type functional materials have been included in the first batch of national strategic emerging industry clusters. By 2025, the output value of Xiamen's new material and new energy industries is expected to surpass 160 billion yuan.

Transportation

On Duding Island in Xiang'an district, Xiamen's new airport is under construction. The new airport is a major transport infrastructure project, which comes from with automated identification systems, and is a milestone for Xiamen's cross-island development strategy, according to local officials.

The airport will be a new engine to drive Xiamen's cross-island development and an essential platform for the urban integration of Xiamen, Zhangzhou and Quanzhou and the coordinated development of eastern and western Fujian province. It will also be a transportation hub assisting cross-Straits industrial integration and serving the country's opening-up and development.

Apart from aviation, port services are another highlight of Xiamen's cross-island development. This sector has seen burgeoning growth in its transportation volume and intelligence upgrading and transformation.

"Ports were one of the first industries that responded to implementing the cross-island development. The Port of Xiamen had planned business in Haicang district since the cross-island development strategy was launched in 2002. This strategy boosted confidence for the port to build deep-water berths outside the main island, preparing the ground for the rapid growth of the port over the past 10 years," said Huang Luxu, deputy general manager of Xiamen Container Terminal Group.

Since 2002, the container throughput at the Port of Xiamen jumped six places to rank 13th in the world. The business volume at the Haicang Port area accounts for 74 percent of the total in Xiamen, an increase from 43 percent 10 years ago.

In terms of intelligent transformation, a series of cutting-edge technologies have been deployed at the Port of Xiamen. At Haicang wharf of the Haicang port area, 56 high-speed thoracic technology were adopted to enhance the efficiency of the wharf.

Sitting in a monitoring room, Wu Wenfeng, a senior technician and experienced crane driver, takes only a few seconds to operate a bridge crane 2 kilometers away by remote control.

In recent years, the wharf has seen rapid progress in intelligent development, Wu said.

"In the past, I had to be close to the crane to operate it. I never expected to control it by sitting in an office and just like playing a video game," he said.

Around the wharf, a series of intelligent technologies have been employed. For example, with artificial intelligence, one driver can control and operate multiple heavy cranes. Most container trucks have been replaced by driverless vehicles and the wharf's entrance has been installed with automated identification systems.

Such a scenario could not have been imagined 10 years ago, but building a world-class AI-driven port has become a consensus now, said an official from the administrative bureau of the Port of Xiamen.

"The Port of Xiamen is a pillar of the special economic zone. It is inevitable to insist on self-innovation and conduct wharf revolution based on intelligent transformation," the official said.

Higher level

Over the past 10 years, Xiamen has formed a multilayered and overall opening-up pattern. It features a special economic zone, pilot free trade zone, maritime cooperation, and the BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution Innovation Center. These have created more opportunities and given Xiamen an edge in cross-island development, local officials said.

The city is embarking on deepening cross-island development through the construction of innovation facilities and international cooperation with the BRICS countries of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

For example, the BRICS Future Innovation Park has welcomed a slew of high-tech businesses featuring 5G, big data, AI, digital content and cross-border e-commerce. It is located in Jimei district, the hub of Xiamen's construction of a new industrial revolution innovation center. In the first half of this year, the import and export volume of Xiamen to BRICS countries reached 38.42 billion yuan, up 20.4 percent year-on-year.

In addition, Xiamen Science City, a landmark innovation project initiated by the city government in 2021, is experiencing rapid development across Tong'an, Xiang'an and Jimei districts.

So far, the science city has attracted more than 600 businesses and research and development institutes, with a total registration fund of more than 15 billion yuan, according to local officials.

Tourism booms after investment in culture, including arts and music

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Xiamen, a coastal city in Fujian province, has made notable progress in its culture and tourism over the past decade, which has led to an increase in people's sense of gain and happiness, said local officials.

Huang Bishan, head of the culture and tourism bureau of Xiamen, said culture and tourism are playing a major role in building the city into a cultural hub, and a city of arts and music, as well as a world-class tourism and leisure city.

To ensure residents have access to cultural facilities within a 15-minute walk of their home, Xiamen has built a wide range of facilities. They include Baishan Grand Theatre, Xiamen Poly Theatre, Strait Grand Theatre and other facilities at city, district, town and village levels. It has been calculated that Xiamen offers a 2,000-square-meter area of public cultural facilities for every 10,000 residents.

Visits to all of the public cultural venues in the city are free of charge. Among them, 10 public libraries and seven cultural centers are of a national first-class standard. On average, each resident has access to 1.8 books in the city's libraries. Xiamen Library's Jimei branch, a building of more than 80,000 sq m, is the largest public library in Fujian province.

Artists in Xiamen have created many excellent works that extol the virtues of local people. Seventy-one performances have won national-level awards and 320 won provincial-level awards. The city has held a total of 4,000 cultural activities and 720 performances annually during the past decade.

On May 4, the theater show *Xiamen Happy Events* debuted on stage. It offered audiences an immersive, 360-degree viewing experience. "I couldn't tell whether I was an audience or an actor during the show," said one spectator called Chen Jianxin.

The show told a story about a group of Chinese who returned from overseas and embarked on missions to contribute to the construction of their hometown, Xiamen. During the 120-minute show, the audience followed the lives of eight characters and garnered a deep understanding of the culture, history and intangible cultural heritage of Xiamen.

Zhou Xiao, general director of the show, said that Xiamen has a good environment for the cultural and tourism industry to grow, and boasts good policies and resources. "We have received support from local government sectors in charge of tourism, port management, construction and natural resources planning," Zhou said.

"Our show contains a debilitation at the end — it is 'Dedicated to this city you love and to you who love this city.' We hope that residents of Xiamen and tourists will love this show and it can become a new calling card for Xiamen's cultural tourism industry," he added.

Xiamen has also seen fruitful results in the protection and utilization of cultural relics. Data from the local government show that Xiamen has 250 cultural relic protection sites, 80 Taiwan-related cultural relics and historical sites, 12 museums and 94 revolutionary sites, or Red tourism destinations, attracting more than 10 million visits annually.

Gulangyu Island is one of the most familiar landmarks in Xiamen. Located in Siming district, it has been listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and witnessed the growth of Xiamen's tourism industry over the past decade.

The culture of Minnan region, or southern Fujian province, is prevalent across Xiamen. The Qing Chun ceremony and rituals are one of the representatives of Minnan culture. It was developed in the Minnan region and it is a series of folk customs worshipping Qing Yoh, a deity believed to protect people and their lands from disasters. The ceremony was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

A series of Minnan culture-themed events have been held during the past few years. They included a song contest using Minnan dialect, a festival to commemorate national hero Zheng Chenggong (1624-62) and promotions on school campuses. There are 54 centers where residents can learn about 91 intangible cultural heritage items in Xiamen.

Xie Lida, the owner of an old garden villa on Gulangyu Island, has been living on the island for more than 30 years. He said Xiamen became sought after in 2003 thanks to a slew of backpackers and travelers.

The boom in tourism kindled a longing in Xie to renovate his villa. Xie spent two years and 3 million yuan (\$418,010) on renovations and finally decided to turn it into a coffee shop in 2008.

It soon became popular among celebrities and was considered as a must-see place for tourists. The likes of Xie's shop mushroomed on the island afterward. "That was a golden age of local tourism," recalled Lin Conghai, head of Gulangyu's bed-and-breakfast guild.

In 2021, there were 23,000 cultural businesses in the city. Of them 560 cultural enterprises were above designated size.