

Reviving a unique Anhui merchant culture

Characterized by teamwork, moral integrity, honesty, and loyalty to the country

By ZHAO SHIJUN

Over a thousand-year period, the merchants of Anhui province, collectively known as the Huishang, became a legend for their hard work, enterprise, and honesty and made a unique contribution to China's development.

They began as vendors of small articles in the countryside and cities of this ancient land dominated by self-reliant agriculture, on China's east coast.

Gradually they turned to bigger operations with a sales network that covered the country. Their success was unparalleled, except by the merchants of Shanxi, who were also famous for their business acumen.

The name Huishang was first used during the Jin Dynasty (265-420) and, for the next thousand years, Anhui's merchants flourished, with a long period of prosperity during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Then, the sun began to set on the Huisheng lifestyle, during the late Qing Dynasty because of the intense competition from businesspeople in China and abroad who were skilled in modern commerce.

Nonetheless, that unique culture that grew out of the Anhui merchants — teamwork, moral integrity, honesty, sympathy for the poor, and loyalty to the country — is still remembered by the province's people and is even recognized in the rest of the country.

Huishang conference

Now, Anhui's leaders are looking to create some new

legends by reviving those millennium-old traditions, again, for greater economic growth.

One way to do this is through the International Huishang Conference, which is held annually held in Hefei, Anhui's capital.

This is the seventh year of the event, which is sponsored by the provincial government, and is being held at the Binhu International Convention and Exhibition Center in Hefei, November 8-11.

Its official name is the China Anhui Investment and Trade Expo and it has become the province's most important fair trade and investment fair.

The organizing committee reported that more than 3,000 representatives of Chinese and foreign businesses will participate in both the conference and the China Hefei High-tech Fair, previously an independent event but now a part of the conference, as of this year.

According to Yang Benqing, deputy chief of the organizing committee, 81 of the Fortune 500 companies will attend the event, compared with just 50 last year.

Local enterprises will be promoting key investment projects, worth a total of \$1 billion, to attract foreign and domestic investors. In fact, major parts of this year's event will be the investment promotions and trade talks, in addition to the normal product exhibits.

The authorities also want to use the venue to describe the province's history and show its tourist attractions, economic



The Wuhu Yangtze River Bridge is a transport pivot linking the south and north of Anhui.

growth history, and business opportunities.

Rebirth

Anhui's economy rose sharply after China's reforms and opening-up were instituted three decades, and its GDP has grown faster than the national average, thanks in part to its proximity to the Yangtze River Delta.

In 2008, Anhui, which lies inland on a 139,600-sq-km area and has a population of 68 million, began to grasp the opportunities that relocating coastal industries and those from abroad presented.

Last year, provincial GDP was 1.23 trillion yuan, compared to 1.02 trillion yuan in 2009, allowing it to enter the nation's "trillion-yuan club."

By the end of last year, there were 51 Fortune 500 companies operating in the province.

And it is now developing the Industrial Transfer Demonstration Zone, a part of the Anhui Yangtze River City Belt. This east-west zone offers a new area for companies in areas lying to the east or form overseas who want to relocate.

It also has tourist attractions that include Huangshan, a mountainous natural heritage site, the Jiuhua Mountains, home to Buddhist temples, and some ancient residential compounds scattered across southern Anhui, which are remnants of the prosperous merchant past.



Maanshan Steel and Iron Corp is one of the leading steelmakers in the country.



Still well preserved today, sprawling ancient residential compounds in south Anhui are a symbol of the Huangshang's former prosperity.



The Huangshan Mountains are one of the few tourism destinations in the country that have been designated both a world cultural and natural heritage site as well as a world geopark.

Province has plenty to offer

BY ZHUAN TI

Anhui provincial authorities hope to use the upcoming China Anhui Investment and Trade Expo 2011 as a place to exhibit their resources and recent infrastructure developments to give investors and traders a better understanding of the province's business-friendly environment. Here are the things to look for:

Resources

• Land:

Anhui has plenty of arable ground, suitable for various crops, notably grain, which is grown on 5.73 million hectares. It is an agricultural production center and led in some of the rural reforms of 30 years ago. The incomes of farmers have increased as its agriculture becomes more modernized.

Its grain, oilseed, and cotton output ranks among the highest in China.

• Human resources:

Hefei, Anhui province's capital, was the nation's first scientific and technological innovation pilot, which is one reason for its pool of talented people.

Its scientific research institutes and schools include the University of Science and Technology of China, the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Hefei Institute of Physical Science, Hefei University of Technology, and Anhui University.

• Water:

It has about 71.6 billion cubic meters of water and systems for

flood control and irrigation.

• Animals and plants:

Forests cover a total of 3.6 million hectares in the province and it has more than 300 types of woody plants and more than 2,100 types of herbs. It is also home to more than 500 animal species, including 91 nationally protected animals such as the Chinese alligator and white fin globefish.

• Minerals:

The province has more than 135 types of minerals, 105 of them with proven reserves.

Of its minerals, 38 rank among China's top 10 and 18, among the top five. Coal, iron, copper, sulfur and alum are its most important.

• Science and education: Anhui ranks high in China for its science and technology grads. By the end of 2008, it had 1,533 scientific research institutes and about 1.47 mil-

lion technicians.

Infrastructure

• Highways:

Anhui has 2,810 km of expressways reaching 17 cities. It takes three hours to drive from the western to the eastern part of the province and six hours, from north to south.

• Railways:

The Beijing-Shanghai, Beijing-Kowloon, Lianyungang-Lanzhou, and Nanjing-Xi'an lines pass through Anhui and it has one of the densest, longest rail systems in central China.

Several high-speed railways connect it with the major cities of neighboring areas, so travel from Hefei to Nanjing takes only an hour, and, to Shanghai or Wuhan, only two hours.

The Beijing-Shanghai high-speed railway went operational in May of this year and the Nanjing-Anqing and Hefei-

Bengbu lines are under construction. It takes only three hours from Hefei to Beijing.

• Airlines:

Anhui has six airports in Hefei, Huangshan, Fuyang, and elsewhere which provide direct flights to more than 30 large or medium-sized cities in China. Hefei's Xinqiao International Airport is under construction and is scheduled to go operational in the fourth quarter of 2012. Another new airport will be built near the tourist resort at Jiuhua Mountain.

• Water transportation:

Three major river systems flow through Anhui — the Yangtze, Huaihe and Xin'an — and have great potential for further inland water transportation development.

The 400-km watercourse of the Yangtze has ports at Anqing, Tongling, Wuhu, Maanshan and Chizhou.



Synchrotron radiation lab in Hefei, one of the facilities representing leading-edge frontier sciences in Anhui.