



Six centuries after Zheng He left Liujiagang Port in Taicang to start his seven historic voyages across the Pacific and Indian oceans, the city is still an important hub on the Yangtze for river-ocean transshipment. ILLUSTRATION BY SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Modern garden city starts to flourish

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People who have visited Taicang often remember it as a small, comfortable and habitable city with an appearance similar to a foreign town.

In recent years, the city in East China's Jiangsu province has endeavored to brand itself as a modern garden city.

The city boosted afforestation, infrastructure construction, the housing security system and public services to improve the living environment for local residents.

According to a local plan, the city aims to develop its urban and rural areas in a balanced way. The core of its modern garden city construction will be modern industries and ecological agriculture.

Taicang's agricultural development will be done in a "technology-based" and "eco-friendly" way.

This year, the city aims to add 2,134 hectares of high-standard farmland and expand the area of modern cooperative farms to 16,008 hectares. The city is determined to push the output value of its eco-friendly agriculture up to 10 billion yuan (\$1.6 billion), and train more modern professional farmers.

While supporting technology-based agriculture, the city will also make efforts to build ecological rural villages.

Taicang has proved that promoting modern agriculture does not necessarily mean a financial burden for the local government, and can lead to environmental improvement, according to local government officials.

To achieve its goal of building a modern garden city, Taicang has placed ecological construction at a strategic position. The city has completed a plan for ecological construction and set strict principles to tackle pollution.

To enhance the functions of the city, the local government has paid great attention to the equality of public services, including education and medical treatment, between its urban and rural areas.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development gave Taicang the China Habitable Environment Prize in 2013.

In terms of industrial development, Taicang plans to carry a new round of upgrades from this year in areas including infrastructure, emerging industries and modern services.

Taicang has more than 200 enterprises in the emerging industries that bring in 103.6 billion yuan worth of products and services a year.

Attractive destination

Taicang's enhanced industrial foundation and improved business environment have made it an increasingly attractive destination for foreign investment, especially investment from Germany.

On March 31, Taicang was

agreed as the location for the Taicang German Center, an investment of \$12 million by Bayerische Landesbank.

The German center is a not-for-profit organization that helps German businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises investing overseas, by offering information consultations, research, exhibitions and other services.

It is the eighth center of its kind globally and the third in China. The first two are in Shanghai and Beijing.

The center will provide comprehensive services for German companies in Taicang and nearby regions, and will play an important role in boosting cooperation between German and Chinese companies.

According to Zhu Wanli, vice-mayor of Taicang, the fact the center will be in Taicang is significant for the city.

In his opinion, SMEs have made great contributions to Germany's manufacturing industry.

Zhu said Taicang should learn from German experience in upgrading its industries by focusing more on SMEs.

He believes the German center will become a higher-level cooperation platform for companies from both countries.

In China, Taicang is known for its high concentration of German companies.

Since Kern-Liebrs Taicang Co Ltd was established in 1993, more than 220 German-funded companies, including ventures by globally renowned companies such as Schaeffler and Siemens, have settled in the city. These companies generated annual output of more than 30 billion yuan in recent years.

A group of small German companies covering high technology, high profit and economical land usage industries, have gathered in Taicang.

Taicang and Germany have offices in each other's remits to deepen exchanges and cooperation in trade, education and culture.

In 2008, Taicang was named the "cooperation base for Chinese and German enterprises" by the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Economy and Technology of Germany — the first and only one in China.

FACTS

Name of the city: Taicang

Location: In the south of Jiangsu province, 30 minutes' drive to Shanghai Hongqiao Airport and 1 hour to Pudong Airport

Size: 620 sq km

Population: 470,000

Per capita GDP in 2014: about \$25,000

Historic port thrives

Taicang to use shipping hub to boost ties and get behind the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative, Liu Xiangrui reports.

At the Port of Liujiagang in what is today the city of Taicang, where the Yangtze River meets the sea, a mighty armada, with more than 27,000 people on 130 ships, prepared to set sail in 1405.

This maritime expedition was famous Chinese navigator Zheng He's first of his seven historic voyages conceived by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) to establish peaceful ties with then unknown realms in far-off regions around the globe.

Zheng's expedition was 87 years earlier than the great voyage made by Christopher Columbus.

Today, Taicang Port in East China's Jiangsu province, where the former Liujiagang Port was located, remains busy with cargo ships heading for destinations at home and abroad following the ancient Maritime Silk Road established many centuries ago.

"The openness of the nation and the pioneering spirit represented by Zheng He are still inspiring people in Taicang," said Wang Genghong, chairman of the Federation of Literature of Liuhe

Town in Taicang.

With beautiful scenery and rich history as well as cultural heritage, Taicang is known as a garden city. It has the inclusiveness and openness typical of a coastal city.

As China endeavors to speed up development of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, Taicang plans to enhance cooperation with major foreign cities and try to connect with domestic cities along the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze River.

The One Belt, One Road initiative, proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, includes the Silk Road Economic Belt, which stretches from China's coastal area to Central Asia and Europe, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which runs from the east and south of China to Southeast Asia and Africa.

Taicang also aims to strengthen connections with other cities, especially Lianyungang, in northern Jiangsu province, and take advantage of the Eurasia Land Bridge to enhance business links with countries and regions along the Silk Road Economic Belt.



A statue of Zheng He stands at Taicang Port. The pioneering spirit of China's greatest navigator is still inspiring people in the city. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lianyungang is at the eastern end of the Eurasian Land Bridge, with a railway and highway system extending all the way to Europe.

Cooperation on economy, trade, energy, finance, services and infrastructure is expected between Taicang and the northern Jiangsu region,

according to local officials.

China's central government recognized Taicang Port as an important part of the Shanghai International Shipping Center and an important terminal for containers as well as a transfer port for river-ocean transshipment.

Jiangsu's government

requested that the local government build Taicang Port into the province's biggest port for international trade.

So far, Taicang Port has 78 quay berths, including 34 berths that can accommodate ships of up to 10,000 metric tons.

It has a designed annual capacity to handle 1.3 million tons of bulk cargo and 4.35 million containers.

The port has 171 container shipping routes linking various regions in the country and the world.

According to Hu Hong from Taicang's port management committee, Taicang Port will speed up construction to make itself a hub for river-ocean transshipment to better modernize southern Jiangsu province.

It will enhance integration of the free trade zone and port to better serve local logistics and industries, and provide stronger support for Jiangsu's goal to upgrade its economy and realize modernization, as well as for the development of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

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Taicang is known as a garden city because of its beautiful scenery and good ecology. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



German expats enjoy themselves during a beer festival in Taicang. The city has a large German community as it is home to more than 220 German-funded companies. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY