

GOING GLOBAL

# Stamping footprint overseas

Phosphorus giant Wengfu expands by exploiting business presented by the Belt and Road Initiative

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Guizhou-based Wengfu (Group) Co Ltd, a State-owned enterprise dealing in phosphorus and chemicals, is pressing ahead with its expansion in the Middle East, in its bid to utilize opportunities presented by China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The company was founded in the 1990s, and has since mastered phosphorus mining technology, which helps it in extracting 95 percent of phosphorus out of phosphate ore after removing impurities.

The technology also helps lower Wengfu's costs and raises the recovery rate at production.

In 2007, using its advanced technology and management experience, Wengfu outplayed many big enterprises in Europe and the United States to win the bid for the then world's largest mineral processing project in Saudi Arabia.

From 2008 to 2015, Wengfu signed several contracts with Saudi Arabian companies, and the total contract amount reached \$550 million. Over the seven-year period, Wengfu earned a profit of 878 million yuan (\$135 million).

Jin Gang, assistant general manager and senior economist at Wengfu, said Saudi Arabia appeared rich in natural resources like phosphorus, petroleum reserves and natural gas. The country is keen on achieving high and rapid growth, but lack advanced technologies to process its natural resources.

"Wengfu is mainly responsible for technology and management guidance in Saudi Arabia, and local firms send their own workers," Jin said.

Wengfu, he said, has also driven the growth of other related equipment enterprises in China, and helped them to expand overseas by taking their assistance in the operations of the phosphorus project in Saudi Arabia.

The country, located in the heart of the Persian Gulf and along the Silk Road, has significant resources and rising



He Guangliang (in the middle with glasses), chairman of Wengfu Group, works with his company staff in the central control room of the phosphorus processing project in Saudi Arabia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

demand for modern resource-processing technology, he said.

Jin further said the country boasts a culture that is different from China's. Adapting to it and mingling with locals is not easy. West Asian countries have sound, strict legal systems, and it is essential for the Wengfu staff to obey the local laws, respect social customs and the Islamic faith, he said.

Besides, the tough local natural conditions and big temperature difference between day and night have posed challenges to Chinese workers, he said.

In the past, China lacked phosphorus resources and could not exploit technologies, leading to reliance on imports from the US. But Wengfu learned and innovated on its own, eventually developing China's own technologies.

Now the company boasts key national laboratories and work stations for post-doctoral researchers. It has become a technology- and export-oriented enterprise, and owns thousands of related patents.

"Back in 2007 and 2008, Wengfu suffered a loss in its domestic operations because of the (global) financial crisis.



He Guangliang (second from right), chairman of Wengfu Group, talks with a Saudi Arabian businessman on the site of the operation and maintenance of phosphorus processing project in Saudi Arabia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Saudi Arabia project, which took around two years to complete, helped save the company through intellectual property exports," Jin said.

Wang Jiangping, deputy director general at the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, and former deputy governor of Guizhou, said: "It is impossible for all industrial sectors in Guizhou to rank at the top of the world. However, some companies such as Wengfu Group can lead world markets through technological innovation and

brand-building."

Saudi Arabia is not the only overseas market for Wengfu. The introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative provides significant growth potential for dozens of countries along the route to integrate with the global economy.

Wengfu has grabbed the opportunities to carry out cooperation projects with many companies in the West Asian and African markets, including Oman, Jordan, Iran, Tunisia, Kenya and Kazakhstan.

“Weng Fu is mainly responsible for technology and management guidance in Saudi Arabia.”

Jin Gang, assistant general manager and senior economist at Wengfu

Currently, in Jordan, a local company plans to cooperate with China Minmetals Corp in Chongqing, and produce high-end phosphorus and potassium fertilizer by utilizing its rich phosphorus and potassium resources. Wengfu will serve as the consultant, and work on a feasibility study for project design.

"The project in Saudi Arabia helped a lot of our staff to gain valuable experience in overseas project management and engineering construction. This paved the way for our further expansion in other markets," Jin said.

HIRING

# Chinese firm helps Botswana employee realize house dream

By XINHUA in Gaborone

## Only 1

Chinese for every 15 staff at CCECC's Botswana company

After working for China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation for some 13 years, Kegomoditswe Mukani is now building her second house in Mmopane, a village lying to the north of the capital city of Gaborone.

Construction of this three bedroom-house was assisted by free-interest loans provided by CCECC's Chinese staff, who raise funds from their own pockets.

"When I started building the new house, I went to the general manager to seek help, and they agreed. My husband and I are so happy and really appreciate their help," the 38-year-old administration clerk told Xinhua.

CCECC launched its first project in Botswana in 1985 for the Botswana railway's upgrading. Since then, the company has fully implemented social responsibilities.

Botswana staff are the majority in the company. "We have only one Chinese for every 15 staff," said George Guan, general manager of CCECC Botswana branch. It also provided a five-storey house with furniture and living goods for Botswana orphans and made donations, even provided houses to the poor.

"It is called Africa, we call it home," the company's motto, placed in a prominent place at its office compound in Gaborone, screams, reflecting its commitment to the locals.

Mukani entered CCECC in 2003, first as a receptionist, then was promoted to the current position as a senior employee in 2009. Shortly after promotion, she built her first house in Mahalapye vil-

lage, around 200 kilometers north of Gaborone.

"I never expected to have these houses before working in CCECC," said Mukani.

"These people (Chinese) listen. When you have problems they will listen. At the end of every year I get a bonus. When you negotiate a salary increment they still take that into consideration."

Mukani is convinced that experience and knowledge she acquired from the company could help her to have a place in job competition.

"I have to thank CCECC for the knowledge I have acquired in permit application procedures as well as company transport logistics, so if the company ever closes down I would not be left entirely helpless," she said.

Thirty-year-old Gadifele Ntshole is an account assistant in CCECC, who believes that she has the best job ever.

"I finished school and job-hunted for two years. Just when I was about to lose hope I saw a vacancy CCECC had advertised for a secretary. I applied and got the job. After two years of job-hunting you can imagine my absolute joy," she said.

According to her, this job changes her life and her family. "Not every employer can do what CCECC has done for me," said Ntshole, adding that the CCECC equips her with more skills.

"They saw potential in me, and gave me a chance," she said.



A Dong ethnic woman sells local snacks in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Size: Interior design turns a fast-growing sector

FROM PAGE 13

interiors also help make homes unique and personalized. Interior design has become "a fast-growing sector in recent years", the CNFA report said.

"Decades ago, almost everyone in urban areas used to live in an apartment that was close to his or her workplace. The space, floor plan and even the color of walls were similar and predictable. Furniture made by carpenters came in a limited number of models and designs," said Han Xian, a 42-year-old interior designer who works with Shanghai Dijia Interior Design Firm.

Han is one of the first-generation interior designers. He entered the trade around 1995 when the sector became popular nationwide. Han says consumers are now exposed to many housing styles and tech-

nologies. Modern supplies offer consumers a much wider range of choices.

"Customization can be sub-categorized into several modes, based on customers' demands. Some want a particular color, some others want a certain product in a specific size. Some like to give shape to a concept or theme like 'Mediterranean Holiday'. And some want the interiors to be functional, like rooms that encourage children to read, or a cat-friendly kitchen," said Han.

Francois-Xavier Lienhart, CEO of Lixil Group, a Japan-based construction materials supplier, said that experience-oriented production and solutions design are dominating China's higher-end interior design and custom furniture market.

"Take kitchen, for example. There can be thousands of details that need to be taken



An interior decoration company staff work on a tailor-made interiors design for a customer at a property market in Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

into consideration when designing kitchenware, stove, cupboard and sink. The cooking habits, dining habits, the number of family members and family structure will all

influence the usage, floor plan and necessities in the limited space. In more affluent families with spacious kitchens, the place is not only a space for preparing food but a space for

communication and quality time together. So, the safety of children must be embedded in every detail of the kitchen design," said Lienhart.

To reduce the risk of complaints against designers and suppliers, communication is key, which can produce good results in custom interior design, according to market experts.

Zhu Yuanmin, marketing director with Beijing-based Easy Home Ltd, said as customization of interior design and furnishing involves a lot of steps, it is essential to include every detail explicitly in the contract with the consumer, to ensure efficiency and transparency in the entire design, manufacturing and installation process.

Such a contract would also help consumers as it would pre-empt misunderstandings, said Zhu.

# Effect: Rice noodle makers buoy Liuzhou

FROM PAGE 13

with Liuzhou Municipal Commission of Commerce, said around 5,000 river snail rice noodle restaurants can be found in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, and even in the United States and Canada.

"The online market also expanded at the end of 2014 when local plants improved food production and packing techniques to develop instant versions of the rice noodles with a shelf life ranging from 30 days to 180 days," said Ni Zhaoyang, president of river snail rice noodle association in Liuzhou.

The number of instant river snail rice noodle manufacturers has increased from one in early 2015 to more than 50 now. There are more than 1,500 online stores selling the specialty, and it ranks number one in terms of rice noodle sales on Alibaba's e-commerce shopping sites.

Statistics also showed that the online revenue of river snail rice noodle last year surpassed 500 million yuan (\$77 million) with daily sale of

more than 100,000 packages.

"The river snail rice noodle has developed into a pillar industry in Liuzhou," said Cheng Fangxiao, who added that the processing plants and restaurants related to it have offered jobs for around 60,000 people.

To further boost the industry, Liuzhou government established a special industrial park for it. Seven plants have moved in. It is expected to produce 100,000 packages of such noodles on a daily basis in the second half of this year, with an output value reaching 1.5 billion yuan three years later.

The city also mapped out food safety standards involving cooking materials and processing procedures on this specialty, which will take effect in May.

Yao Hanlin's company has already sold instant river snail rice noodle to foreign countries, such as the US, Australia and Canada with the help of distributors.

"We will expand businesses to more countries and regions, helping this traditional Chinese food to appear on dining tables of more people," said Yao.

# Change: Online decor makes market transparent, solid

FROM PAGE 13

so I advise them to use higher-priced wooden floors. As Internet-based platforms enable price comparison, clients feel the whole process is transparent and clear," said Wang.

Market analysts said the home decor market has been undergoing major changes in recent years as demand and supply get diversified.

A research note from Essenses Securities Ltd said the construction materials

market may further consolidate as the big players, particularly the A-share listed ones that play a leading role in the market, may increase their market shares through Internet-based platforms, exploiting their reputation and

existing market lead.

The note said without Internet-based platforms, market players were segmented and scattered, and products were not integrated. Exposure via online platforms will help the big players to

further expand their presence.

Some players that focused on corporate business may now extend their services to the retail market and win business from individual consumers.