

China's smaller cities attract foreigners

When Aziz Ullah returned to China from Europe months ago, he headed straight home to Yiwu, a small city in east China's Zhejiang province.

"I feel at home in Yiwu," said Aziz, 39, from Afghanistan. He has lived in Yiwu for 15 years.

As China's urban and rural development balances, metropolises such as Beijing and Shanghai are no longer the only places to live and work in for foreigners.

Aziz came to China in 2003 to make money. He chose Yiwu, well known as a production base for small commodities. Yiwu receives more than 400,000 overseas visitors each year and more than 10,000 foreigners live there.

"When I first came here, my Chinese was really poor," Aziz recalled. "I did not go far away from my home, since I could not read road signs and was afraid of getting lost."

Aziz registered a company in Yiwu in 2005, and has done well. His products, from household furniture to solar panels, are exported to nine countries.

After 15 years, Aziz speaks fluent Chinese, has become a foreign mediator for the local government, and has helped mediate six trade disputes between Chinese and foreign businesses.

"No matter how big my business gets, Yiwu will always be my second home," he said. "I had my dreams come true here. My career and friends are all in this city. It is safe and stable."

Besides doing business or teaching languages, small towns in China provide other career opportunities for foreigners.

Andrew Stokes did not achieve much back home in Australia after he graduated from the Australian Academy of Dramatic Arts. Years ago, he came to China by chance and has since been working as an actor in Hengdian, Zhejiang. Hengdian is a both a film making center and tourist attraction.

"Hengdian is a beautiful town, where my dreams of being an actor came true," Andrew said in fluent Chinese. So far, he has been in more than 30 movies and TV shows.

Improvements to small towns are encouraging foreigners to come.

Five years ago, Australian Tim Clancy came to his Chinese wife Chen Shuang's hometown Pujiang in Zhejiang, for the first time.

"He did not want to stay here for one more day," Chen said. Tim was always

complaining about the pollution.

But the environment has improved a lot. Tim and his wife now live there for several months every year. "We enjoy the beautiful nature and traditional Chinese culture here," Tim said.

Public services and infrastructure in small towns have also improved, making life there easier. "For example, people can use Alipay (mobile payment), rather than cash, almost everywhere in the town," Tim said.

Murder suspect undergoes plastic surgery to evade police

A murder suspect has been caught in northern China after having plastic surgery to evade police.

The suspect, surnamed Zhang, is suspected of killing five people 17 years ago following a debt dispute, police of Weichang county in Hebei Province said Friday.

Last month, Weichang police received information about Zhang's presence in northeast China's Heilongjiang Province.

Zhang was using the identity of a man surnamed Yu, despite the annulment of Yu's household registration, police said

Zhang was later caught in his home with the help of Heilongjiang police.

Police found scars on Zhang's face that indicated that he had gone through plastic surgery.

Zhang confessed that he killed five residents in his village and severely injured another in January 2000.

The investigation is ongoing.

Officials sacked for 'superstitious activities' in China

Two local officials were removed from their posts in central China's Hunan

Province for “superstitious activities,” disciplinary authorities said.

Tang Yuansong, former head of the housing and construction bureau of Linwu County, attended five fengshui training courses in different cities under the guise of “investigation tours” starting in 2008, said a statement by the commission for discipline inspection of Chenzhou City.

The training sessions cost 54,000 yuan (8,000 U.S. dollars) in total and were reimbursed as business trip expenses, said the statement issued Thursday.

Since 2014, he also received 5,000 yuan annually on average for “practicing fengshui” for others, it said.

Huang Xiaowen, former head of Tuqiao Township of Rucheng County, asked others to set up an altar to cast spells and paid 100,000 yuan in tribute each time, with hopes of being promoted.

Both of them have been expelled from the CPC, and judicial authorities will further investigate their cases for criminal activity, such as graft and embezzlement, it said.

Fugitive Guo Wengui's company fined, employees sentenced for fraud

A company of one of China's most-wanted fugitives Guo Wengui has been fined 150 million yuan (\$22.3 million) for crimes of fraudulently obtaining loans and bill acceptance, according to a court ruling issued Friday.

Two employees of Henan Yuda Real Estate Company were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to two years and another employee was exempted from criminal penalty, according to Kaifeng City Intermediate People's Court.

The defendants said they committed the crimes under direction from Guo Wengui.

Guo, the “actual controlling shareholder” of the company, fled China under suspicion of multiple crimes in August 2014 and is currently listed under an Interpol “red notice” for wanted fugitives.

China publishes first encyclopedia of ethnic groups

China has published its first encyclopedia of its 56 ethnic groups.

The 15-volume encyclopedia has more than 45,000 entries and 6,400 color images. It deals mainly with the history, politics, military, religions and customs of the ethnic groups.

The Han ethnic group makes up around 91% of the total population, according to the 2010 census.

Some 1,000 researchers have been involved in compiling the encyclopedia since 1997, according to the editor-in-chief Li Dezhu.

Late ethnologist Fei Xiaotong, also honorary editor-in-chief, said in the foreword that the book will open a window for the world to understand China's ethnic groups.

Fei passed away in 2005.