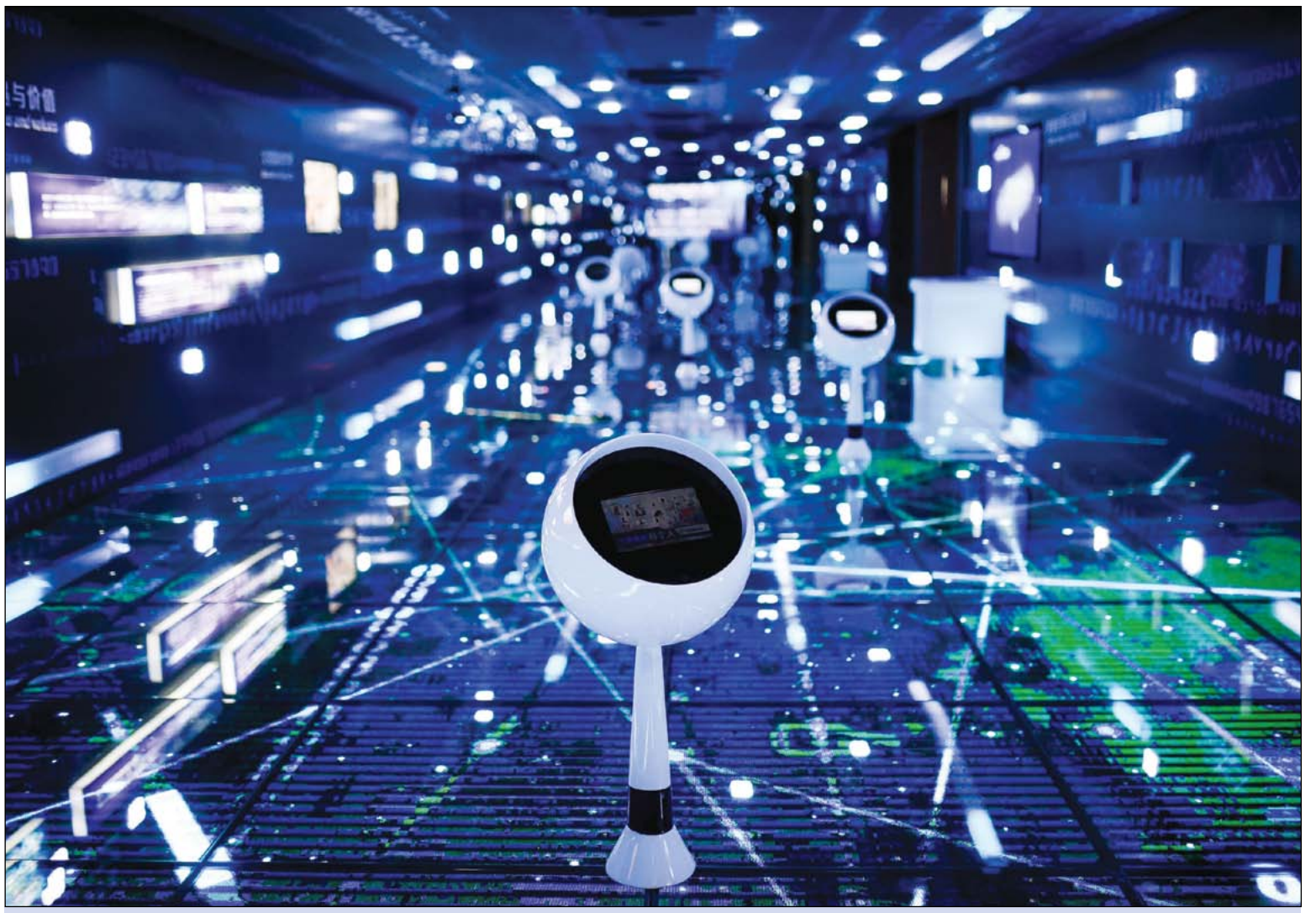
Guizhou province takes advantage of new opportunities as top tech companies from China and overseas move in

Big expectations from big data



A "time tunnel" effect is displayed at a big data demonstration center in Guiyang, Southwest China's Guizhou province. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

By CHENG YU in Beijing
and **YANG JUN** in Guiyang

Guizhou in Southwest China struggled with unemployment and poverty before big data created a big future for the province.

Nestled in a mountainous region, it has been transformed in the past three years into an innovation hub as major global companies, such as Apple, Alibaba and Hyundai Motor Group, flocked to the area.

"Big data has helped relieve local poverty as it has brought huge opportunities to impoverished areas and created jobs at the same time," said Jing Yaping, deputy director of the bureau responsible for Guizhou province's big data development.

Innovation and cutting-edge technology has fueled economic growth across China, with big data playing a crucial role. This transformation is in line with General Secretary Xi Jinping's remarks during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October.

Xi emphasized that innovation is the primary force driving development.

"We will move Chinese industries up to the medium-high end of the global value chain, and foster a number of world-class advanced manufacturing clusters," he said.

Xi called for more efforts to develop advanced manufacturing, promote further integration of the Internet, big data and artificial intelligence with the real economy.

Guizhou has certainly adopted this approach to achieve rapid growth.

Official data showed the industrial output of large-scale digital information manufacturing in the province was at 5.26 billion yuan ($800 million) in the first half of this year, a jump of 64 percent compared to 2016.

It was first time the sector had contributed double-digit numbers to industrial growth.

"In Guizhou, big data has become the new growth engine for economic transformation," said Qin Rupei, executive vice-governor of Guizhou.

Figures also revealed that software and IT services produced revenue of 15.59 billion yuan in the first half of 2017, a 36.4 percent increase year-on-year.

"Thanks to big data, Guizhou has been able to rejuvenate itself," said Jing from the province's big data bureau.

An hour's drive out of the provincial capital of Guiyang is Guian New Area, an industrial technology park packed with blue-chip brands.

The China International Big Data Industry Expo 2017 in Guiyang in May attracted more than 310 enterprises and institutions.

Hyundai Motor is one of the latest names to open a big data center there. The South Korean auto company plans to collate and analyze massive amounts of data for its advanced automated vehicles. It will also use the information for research and development.

Hwang Seung-ho, executive vice-president and head of the auto intelligence division, said on the company's website: "Hyundai Motor's know-how in big data analysis, coupled with Guizhou province's push into (the sector), will surely accelerate development in connected car technologies."

Earlier this year, it was reported that more than 400 companies in the big data industry had set up in Guian New Area, including Apple, Microsoft, Alibaba, Tencent and Huawei. China's major telecom operators — China Telecom, China Mobile and China Unicom — also have centers there.

Around 20 Fortune 500 companies and 14 of China's top 500 firms have a presence in the technology park.

Apple, for example, invested $1 billion in its first big data center in the country. The Guian setup will be used to help meet growing demand for advanced cloud services.

The global tech giant's decision to ramp up investment in China comes at a time when it has been losing ground to domestic rivals such as Huawei. Still, the company hopes that this move will cement its place in the Chinese market.

Another high-profile name in Guizhou is FAST — the Five-hundred-meter Aperture Spherical radio Telescope. The installation recently celebrated its first anniversary there. The world's largest radio telescope, FAST is able to collect celestial big data by detecting emissions from stars and galaxies across the cosmos. FAST has also been used to study pulsars, or pulsating radio stars.

"New discoveries, such as pulsars, have been made by FAST, which is of great importance to solving key physics problems," the National Astronomical Observatories of China stated at a media conference.

Back on Earth, BaishanCloud, which provides cloud-computing services, said it has increased its sales volume more than 50-fold since opening in Guizhou in 2015. Indeed, firms such as BaishanCloud have helped create jobs and fuel the province's economy.

Last year, e-commerce turnover in the province's rural areas increased by 27.1 percent and helped the added value side of the agricultural processing industry.

Statistics from Guizhou Poverty Alleviation Office also showed that poverty rates dropped from 26.8 percent in 2012 to 10.6 by the end of last year. Additionally, as many as 1,500 villages have been removed from the poverty-stricken list.

"We have made significant progress in fighting poverty in the past few years through industry development," said Qin Rufang, deputy director of the province's Poverty Relief Office.

Contact the writers at chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn and yangjun@chinadaily.com.cn

Dong Xianwu contributed to this story.