

Revitalized waterway system hailed by Shanxi residents

Regional campaign to improve environment of the Fenhe River marks its first success



By YUAN SHENGGAO

When Yuan Lili, a resident of Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi province, drove home alongside the Huyu Stream on July 11, she said the journey was a more pleasant experience compared to several years ago.

Huyu is a branch of the Fenhe River, the second-largest river in Shanxi. Yuan recalled the former state of Huyu, saying it was a stream filled with wastewater and garbage.

“It was so stinky that you could not roll down your car window,” Yuan said. “But now there is no more garbage or wastewater. The water has become clean and the stream has turned into a scenic belt with trees and grass on both sides.”

Yuan said she is pleased with the improved environment of the stream.

Like Huyu, fundamental changes have taken place throughout the Fenhe River water system.

The 716-kilometer-long Fenhe has been a symbol of Shanxi for thousands of years. Running through 45 counties and districts of six cities, the river is the second-largest tributary of the Yellow River.

Since residents began using the Fenhe to irrigate farmlands more than two millennia ago, the river has played an important role in nurturing the local economy.

However, with the development of an economy reliant on coal min-



Initial progress has been made in improving the environment of the Fenhe River after years of efforts by local governments and residents. XUE JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing and heavy industries, the river became severely polluted in recent decades.

Yang Wei, a cycling enthusiast, recalled the conditions: “The Fenhe River area was an unpleasant place some 20 years ago.

“It smelt badly with garbage littered everywhere and wastewater discharged into the almost dry river. As there were no trees and grass along the river, the area was often covered in dust in springtime.

“Nobody would want to cycle or walk along the river,” Yang added.

Over the past decades, the Fenhe had seen a continued deterioration in its water quality. Water samples at major monitoring points were rated as worse than the grade V standard, according to the Shanxi Department of Ecology and Environment.

Grade V is the standard for the worst water quality in China.

Shanxi began a provincial campaign to improve the environment of the Fenhe and other rivers in 2015. It was marked by the release of a river improvement plan for 2015-30, according to Pan Xianzhang, chief of the Shanxi Department of Ecology and Environment.

Pan said curbing pollution from industrial and household wastewater is the most crucial part of the campaign. Wastewater discharge used to account for about 90 percent of the runoff of the Fenhe River.

“As the river flows across six cities in Shanxi, we have required concerted efforts in pollution control in various regions,” Pan said.

The official said the province stepped up its pace in improving the river’s environment since May 2019. This was when the provincial government issued a document requiring a fundamental change in the

Fenhe’s water quality by 2020.

As a result of the joint efforts among various governmental institutions in different regions, Shanxi’s river improvement campaign achieved progress this year.

By the end of June, all the monitoring points along the river reported water quality better than grade V. It was the best performance in three decades, according to the Shanxi Department of Ecology and Environment.

With efforts continuing to improve water quality, provincial authorities have launched new moves to increase runoff volume and green the areas along the river.

A great number of wetland parks have been built along the river in recent years.

In Dongjia village of Jinzhong city, villager Kang Liyi operates a grocery store near the point where the Fenhe and Taiyu Stream meet.

“As a wetland park has been established at the confluence, more tourists come to our village and my business is getting better,” Kang said.

He added that the wetland park and other embankment enhancing projects have played an important role in flood control, making local farming and people’s lives safer.

In the next 15 years, Shanxi will invest more than 87 billion yuan (\$12.42 billion) in improving the environment of the Fenhe River, according to Pan.

“We have made initial success this year. However, there is a long way to go to reach satisfactory results in improving the environment of the Fenhe,” the official said.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Cycling event draws 1,000 enthusiasts

A cycling event entitled Healthy Shanxi is held on July 11 in Taiyuan, involving the participation of nearly 1,000 cycling enthusiasts aged from those in their teens to those in their seventies. Held on the newly completed Dongxishan sightseeing highway, the event is part of Shanxi’s recent sports campaigns aimed at improving the fitness and spiritual well-being of residents. The city hosted the Tour of Taiyuan International Highway Cycling Race in May 2019, showcasing local enthusiasm for cycling and Shanxi’s recent socioeconomic development.

ZHONG QING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Qikou revels in its historical glory

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A live show called *Dreamy Qikou* made its debut on July 3 in Qikou in Linxian county, Shanxi province, showing how the ancient town achieved prosperity in different historical periods.

Qikou, by the Yellow River in the west of Shanxi, used to be a military stronghold a millennium ago because of its strategic position in defending against the invasion of nomads from the north and west.

It reached another peak in prosperity during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties as a transport hub for the renowned Shanxi merchants.

It is said the Shanxi merchants dominated commercial circles for more than five centuries by trading with regions in North Asia and Europe.

Qikou, which literally means “port

by a torrential river”, is located on the eastern bank of the Yellow River.

In the past, Shanxi merchants used the Yellow River as a channel to transport cargo.

However, cargo ships were often disrupted by the 500-meter-long Qikou Torrent, which has a height of more than 10 m.

To solve the problem, a transshipment port was developed in Qikou. Receiving more than 150 ships a day at its peak, Qikou had become a transportation hub for Shanxi merchants.

Home to more than 400 companies during that period, Qikou was called the “No 1 town by the Yellow River”.

Nowadays, with highways and railways taking over from the Yellow River as the major means of transport, the town has developed into a destination for tourists.

Major attractions in the town



Li Shixi is a well-known and popular tour guide in Qikou. MA LIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

include well-preserved historical residences, commercial properties, piers and temples.

Local resident Li Shixi, 64, is said to be the No 1 tour guide in the town.

The elderly man can be easily recognized among all the tour guides because of his unique dress-

ing style. He usually wears a black, handmade jacket, with a white scarf on his head and a copper tobacco pipe in his mouth.

Li got his fame from his familiarity with the town’s history.

According to Li, today’s Qikou is only one-third the size of what it was a century ago.

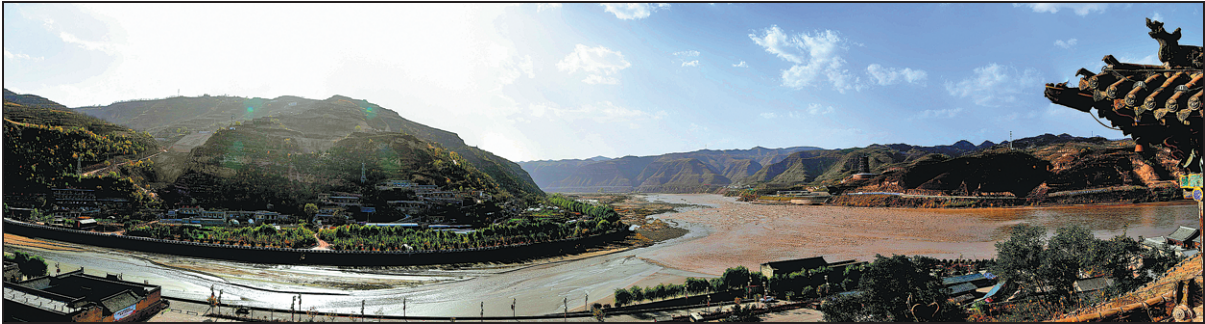
Despite this, Qikou still retains its ancient style, with most of its old structures remaining intact.

Li said the Black Dragon Temple, which was dedicated to the river god, is a must-see attraction in the town.

“There were a lot of shows on the stage in the temple in the past. People hired folk opera troupes to perform when they held celebrations for the river god or sent off their relatives to do business overseas,” Li said.

He also reminded people of the stone, wooden and brick engravings on the old buildings, saying that there are all rare artifacts that can be seldom seen in other places of the country.

Li Yu contributed to this story.



A former transshipment hub for Shanxi merchants, Qikou is now a renowned attraction in Shanxi. MI LIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Shanxi chef Wang Zhanglong shows his noodle-making skills during an international event. LI PEIPEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Frontline medics and master chef honored

By YUAN SHENGGAO

To mark their contributions to society, an awards ceremony for the “2019 top 10 inspirational role models in Shanxi” rated by the local media was held in Taiyuan on July 10.

Wang Zhanglong, head chef of Shanxi Guildhouse, was one of these figures. Wang is known for his skill in making a variety of noodles.

At an international event hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the promotion of Shanxi province on Feb 25, 2019, Wang displayed his stunning skills to a worldwide audience.

Out of 4 kilograms of wheat flour, he made a balloon with a diameter of 2 meters and noodles as thin as hair.

Wang, in his late 30s, is said to be capable of making more than 100 kinds of noodles. He has been a regular winner of cooking competitions throughout China.

He made his international debut in 2014 when he cooked in front of 158 ambassadors at the United Nations headquarters in New York. After that, he visited more than 20 countries to advocate unique Shanxi noodle dishes.

“Shanxi is renowned for its variety of noodles. As making noodle dishes has developed into a culinary art and culture in Shanxi, I’m proud of my status as an envoy to promote this art,” Wang said.

Also present at the awards ceremony were Qiao Sukai, an expert

engineer in nuclear power generation equipment maintenance; Xu Junze, a model teacher at Changzhi No 2 Middle School; Wu Zhihua, a community official; and Wang Xiang, a firefighter who has been involved in countless rescue missions over the past two decades; as well as village officials Xing Wangli and Ye Zhuai.

A special award was granted to medical workers who have fought on the front line against the novel coronavirus pandemic.

From Jan 26, Shanxi dispatched 13 medical teams with 1,516 members from 189 medical institutions to Hubei province, the center of the epidemic in China.

They worked in 16 hospitals in the cities of Wuhan, Xiantao, Tianmen and Qianjiang. There they treated 3,527 patients, with a collective recovery rate of more than 95 percent.

The teams also carried out 18,000 nucleic acid tests and 3,377 CT scans, and trained more than 6,200 local medical workers. During their two-month tour, no cases of infection were reported among the medics.

“Nobody is born a hero. The heroes are always those who are determined to shoulder their responsibility when there is a need,” said Xue Jian, one of the organizing officials of the awards ceremony.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Province’s splendorous assets impress expat

By MARIA SAFROSHKINA

Shanxi is a landlocked province in North China. The capital and largest city of the province is Taiyuan.

Shanxi is a leading producer of coal in China and has more coal companies than any other province.

The province is most known for its extensive use of vinegar as a condiment, as well as for a huge variety of noodle dishes, particularly *daoxiaomian* or knife-cut noodles, which are served with a range of sauces.

But these are all well-known facts about Shanxi.

Not everyone knows that the province has one of the most beautiful mountain roads and city views.

There are many places that are hidden from tourists’ eyes and today I’m going to show you some of them.

Don’t forget that the name Shanxi means “West of the Mountains”, a reference to the province’s location to the west of the Taihang Mountains.

Taohuagou, or Peach Blossom Valley, in the suburbs of Taiyuan, is probably one of the best places to relax, where you can spend a couple of days with your family and friends to enjoy fresh mountain air, nice food and bird watching. In the evening you can enjoy a romantic sunset there. Up the mountain there’s another beautiful scene, where we had the pleasure of seeing the beautiful Taiyuan city.

Another great place for hikers and cyclists is located in the northeast of Taiyuan. It is the Fenhe River Second Reservoir Scenic Area, a place you definitely don’t want to miss. Going up to the top of the mountain at the end of the day will give you the



Maria Safroshkina poses with a bouquet of flowers in Taiyuan. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

chance to enjoy a magnificent sunset.

On the way to the top of the mountain you will come across some small villages and moreover there is a little cafe on the way to the peak.

If you are looking for a safe and beautiful place for hiking, then Shanxi province is definitely a place to go.

In addition, I have a few suggestions for the city of Taiyuan.

I hope the government will build a pioneering industrial park for foreigners, just like those in such cities as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. It will improve the economic strength of Taiyuan as more professional foreigners will move to the city and start their own businesses.

It will be better for our foreigners to be offered a community in Taiyuan, Shanxi. If we can live together, it would be much more convenient for us.

The writer is a Russian working at Xinhua Boyue Culture and Media Co in Taiyuan.