

The courtyard at Baojin Alley in Yangquan is the site of the first city administration established by the Communist Party of China.

ZHANG ZHEYUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Shanxi's key Party sites draw visitors ahead of centenary

Tourists across province and China flock to Yangquan for patriotic education and inspiration

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Baojin Alley in the city of Yangquan, eastern Shanxi, looks like any ordinary alley in the North China province.

Several old houses and courtyards are scattered along the alley, and are surrounded by a great number of modern buildings.

A courtyard with its gate decorated with a red five-point star and a plaque inscribed with red Chinese characters is the most remarkable among the old houses and structures.

The characters read: "the first city administration established by the Communist Party of China". With the centennial of the CPC on July 1 approaching, the site is the pride of the city.

Since it was opened to the public on April 21 as a museum of the city's history related to the CPC, the courtyard has become a top destination for visitors.

The courtyard has a number of rooms with plaques describing its function as government and Party departments more than seven decades ago.

On April 26, the site welcomed more than 1,600 students and teachers from the Xiazhan Primary School in Yangquan. They listened to the introduction given by a tour guide.

"Yangquan is a Red city, with many locations related to the history of the CPC and the nation's revolutionary past," the guide said. "This commonplace courtyard where we are standing is the site of the Yangquan CPC committee and the city's people's government."

Founded on May 4, 1947, the CPC-led Yangquan city government is the first city administration established by the CPC, the tour guide said.

In addition to the first city administration site, Yangquan has many other historical things to be proud of.

The city, located at the heart of the Taihang Mountains, used to be an important base for the CPC-led Eighth Route Army during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

Shinao Mountain, in the southwestern suburbs of Yangquan, was an important site for the Hundred Regiments Offensive. The major campaign of the Eighth Route Army

divisions was commanded by general Peng Dehuai (1898-1974) against the Japanese army in North China in 1940.

The Eighth Route Army mobilized more than 400,000 soldiers in 115 regiments for an offensive against the Japanese invaders from August to December in 1940.

The Communist forces attacked Japanese garrisons and destroyed facilities they were using for supplies in its aggression in China. These included railways, highways, bridges, tunnels, coal mines and factories.

The offensive was the greatest victory of the Eighth Route Army during the war. A museum and a monument were built on top of Shinao Mountain to remember the heroism, courage and dedication of the Eighth Route Army soldiers.

Like Yangquan, many other cities and regions in Shanxi are using their Red cultural resources to help CPC members and residents to learn about the history of the Party and be inspired.

Changzhi, a city in the southeast of Shanxi, for instance, is home to

the first campus of the Chinese People's Anti-Japanese Military and Political University.

The university, also known as Kangda in Chinese, was founded in January 1937. It was an important base for the CPC to train military and political cadres for the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.

The first campus of Kangda, located in Gangshang village in Changzhi's Tunliu district, was founded in December 1938. It trained the largest number of military officers and political officials of all the Kangda divisions for the fight against the Japanese aggressors.

In recent years, the district government has invested more than 20 million yuan (\$3.08 million) in renovating the site of the first campus of Kangda, making it a top tourist destination in Tunliu.

The site receives tens of thousands of visitors annually, offering a base for patriotic education while creating jobs and generating revenues for locals.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Building technique delivers remarkable efficiency

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A conventional mason would be astonished at the modern efficiency of house building upon paying a visit to a civil engineering company in the city of Yuncheng in the south of Shanxi.

The solution offered by the company, Yuncheng Construction Engineering Group, is a revolutionary one: houses are not built but assembled.

Building members are manufactured at the YCEG plant and delivered to construction sites for assembly. The construction process can be several times faster than conventional ways.

Li Xiaodong, a manager for research and development at the company, said buildings constructed this way are called assembled structures.

"Compared with conventional ways of construction, assembled structures, especially the steel structures, have unrivaled advantages," Li said. "The new way of construction features greater efficiency, saves labor and resources and promotes better safety."

Haozhao Southeast Green Construction is another provider of assembled structures in Yuncheng.

In the two years since its establishment, it has been commissioned to assemble key structures at the 2022 Winter Olympics venues in Beijing and Zhangjiakou in Hebei province, as well as the No 3 terminal of Yuncheng Airport.



Building members are produced at a plant of Shanxi Construction Investment Group. LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Assembled structures represent a new direction in the civil engineering sector, industry insiders said.

In Shanxi, about 18.7 percent of the buildings, or 8.23 million square meters in floor space, were constructed with the assembly techniques in 2020, according to the Shanxi Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.

The ratio was even higher in the provincial capital of Taiyuan, with 3.3 million sq m, or 25.48 percent of new buildings being assembled structures.

The department predicts the ratio of assembled structures in Shanxi will reach 30 percent in 2025.

Lai Zhongyi, chief engineer at the Taiyuan-based Shanxi Institute of Architectural Design and Research, said the new way of construction also has many environmental benefits.

"As building members are manufactured in plants with automated production facilities, the use of raw materials and other resources can be minimized," Lai said. "And the assembly process at construction sites substantially reduces the use of sand, bricks and concrete, leading to a decrease in solid wastes."

Lai estimated the assembled structures can lead to a reduction of 70 percent in solid waste, and also save timber, cement and water by 60

percent, 55 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

"More importantly, many of the building members can be recycled after the life cycle of a building expires," Lai said. "Disposal of the solid waste after tearing down outdated buildings is a big challenge that the civil engineering sector must face in the future. And assembled structures can offer a solution to this challenge."

The assembled structures industry has also become increasingly driven by high tech.

One example is Xiaohu Construction Industry, based in the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone.

The company is using numeric-controlled technologies and robots in its manufacturing process.

"With these cutting-edge technologies and devices in place, we are capable of producing superlarge steel structural members with a length of 16 meters and width of 4.5 meters," said Feng Jingbang, an engineer at the company.

According to the Shanxi Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, there are 18 enterprises in the province engaged in the manufacturing of building members for assembled structures. Their combined production capacity recently reached 18.7 million sq m a year, which can meet the demands not only in Shanxi but also other regions in the country.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.

Village life has new take on ancient saying

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As an ancient Chinese proverb says, "people living in mountains should live on mountains".

This saying still holds true for residents in Yujiayu village at the heart of Lyuliang Mountains in the west of Shanxi province.

But slightly different from what the proverb implies, "nowadays people living on mountains does not mean exploiting resources from the mountains, like cutting trees, hunting wild animals or mining", said Zhang Qiulin, head of the village in Shilou county of Lyuliang city. "On the contrary, people are giving back to the mountains by planting trees on them."

The official said most local farmers are members of the village forestry cooperative, which was originally founded for the purpose of poverty reduction. The villagers received dividends and salaries from the cooperative by planting trees in the vicinity of the village.

Residents in Yujiapan, another village in Shilou county, are doing the same thing.

"As a member of the village cooperative, my job is to plant trees on barren hills and slopes in the neighborhood," said Ji Haipeng, a villager in Yujiapan. "I like this job. It generates a monthly revenue of nearly 3,000 yuan (\$460) for me while substantially improving the local ecological environment."

According to the Lyuliang city government, there are nearly 1,400 forestry cooperatives in the city that bring added revenues to about 500,000 residents by giving

them dividends as members or offering them jobs related to tree-planting or forest management.

For residents who cannot live on mountains, the city has offered another option — helping them find jobs through labor skills training.

Local vocational schools focus on training for the nursing and home service industries.

Ma Jinlian is the founder of Yixing Home Service. She started her career as a home service worker after receiving skill training about a decade ago.

Ma first worked as a nanny and then established her own business. Her company has helped more than 200 families overcome poverty by offering people jobs.

Ma also opened her own home service training school, benefiting nearly 2,300 people.

Also helping Lyuliang's poverty reduction is its steady economic growth, which offers residents more opportunities to find jobs, start businesses and increase revenues.

Local statistics show the city's GDP increased from 570 million yuan in 1978 to 153.8 billion yuan in 2020. As a result, per capita disposable income of urban residents increased from 223 yuan to 30,382 yuan and that of rural residents grew from 83 to 10,656 over the past 42 years.

Lyuliang announced last year that it had eradicated absolute poverty, meaning its previously impoverished population of 590,000 were all lifted out of poverty.

Li Shu contributed to this story.



The Lyuliang Mountains are greener as a result of local residents' work to plant trees. FENG SHUAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Sacred mountain host to 'engineering miracle'

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As one of five sacred mountains in China, Mount Hengshan is about 10 kilometers south of Hunyuan county and 62 km from downtown Datong, Shanxi province.

Like other mountains in China with a strong Taoist presence, Hengshan has been considered sacred since the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC).

Standing 2,016.8 meters above sea level, Tianfengling is the main peak of Hengshan, which is surrounded by a number of peaks almost its height.

Like other sacred mountains in China, Hengshan is known for its temples and monasteries, which are mainly located on the southern slope of Tianfengling.

The leading temple in Hengshan is called Beiyue Temple, or the Shrine of the Northern Mountain. First built during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), the main structures which remain were built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). It is accessed via a 103-step stairway.

The temple was dedicated to the mountain god. Mount Hengshan's god has had a steady rise in status over thousands of years. It evolved from a minor deity two millennia ago to a major one with a status next to the Jade Emperor in Chinese mythology during the

Song Dynasty (960-1279).

However, despite Beiyue Temple hosting the main god of the region, the most renowned ancient structure in Hengshan is Xuankong Temple.

Xuankong Temple, also known as Hanging Temple, was first built in the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), about 1,500 years ago.

Constructed of wood, tiles and stones, the temple is made of two three-story pavilions and a yard linked by staircases and steps. The staircases and steps line the face of a sheer cliff 50 meters above a stream at the foot of Hengshan.

From the ground, Xuankong Temple appears extremely precarious. It is supported only by a few thin stanchions standing on protruding rocks. For that reason, it was selected by Time magazine as one of the 10 most precarious buildings in the world in 2010.

Sun Shupeng, chief engineer at Shanxi Ancient Architecture Group, however, refuted the notion that Xuankong Temple is a dangerous structure.

"The temple has been standing firmly on the Hengshan cliff for more than 1,500 years and is still kept intact and solid," Sun said. "A study of the temple is an exploration of an ancient Chinese engineering miracle."

Peng Ke'er contributed to this story.



Mount Hengshan in Hunyuan county, Shanxi province, is one of the five sacred mountains in China. LI YI / FOR CHINA DAILY