

Grand veneration ceremony in Xinzheng city of Henan province to mark the birthday of Emperor Huangdi.



Martial arts and mysticism: the allure of Zhengzhou

By HAN TIANYANG

As one of the ancient capital cities of China, Zhengzhou has a vast historical and cultural heritage. With more than 2,000 historic sites spread across the city, the capital of the central province of Henan has proved a hugely alluring destination for both domestic and overseas tourists.

Martial Arts
The most famous tourism attraction in Zhengzhou is its Shaolin Temple. It is a Buddhist temple built on the Songshan Mountain in Dengfeng, 70 km away from downtown Zhengzhou. The Shaolin temple was founded in 495 AD by an emperor of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534) and was intended to accommodate the Indian dhyan master, Batuo, who had traveled to China to teach Buddhism.

In 527 AD, the 28th patriarch of Buddhism, Bodhidharma arrived at the temple and introduced Chan Buddhism, which later became the dominant sect in Chinese Buddhism.

During its history of more than 1,500 years, the temple has been destroyed and rebuilt several times. Most of the current buildings were constructed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The main buildings include the Shanmen Gate, the Bodhidharma Pavilion, as well as the Baiyi, Dizang and Qianfo Palace Halls.

According to legend, Hui Ke, a student of Bodhidharma and the second patriarch of the Chinese Chan Buddhism sect, once stood in front of the pavilion to wait for his teacher whilst the heavy snow piled to his knees.

Yellow River scenic area



which still hangs on the Shanmen Gate to this day. For most people, the Shaolin Temple is better known for its association with Chinese martial arts or kung fu, rather than for its link to Chan Buddhism. Yet the two are frequently combined. Practicing kung fu is a way of practicing Chan, many believe, saying: "Kung fu is the materialization of Chan, while Chan is the spirit of kung fu."

Many tourists are drawn to the temple by its great influence on Buddhism and the martial arts, including visits from a number of celebrities, ranging from the NBA star, Shaquille O'Neal, to the former president of Russia, Vladimir Putin.

Historic spots
In addition to the Shaolin Temple, Zhengzhou also has many other historic sites, each representing different aspects of different times and cultural occurrences. The most highly recommended are:

Stellar Observatory
The stellar observatory is located in Dengfeng. About 700 years ago, during the early days of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), the famous astronomer and mathematician, Guo Shoujing, built the observatory. It is the oldest observatory in China and one of the earliest astronomical observatories still in existence anywhere in the world. In 1280, Guo formulated the most advanced calendar of the time - the Shoushi Calendar.

Songyang College
Songyang College was built in 484 AD at the southern foot of Songshan Mountain. It is among the four most prestigious ancient Chinese colleges and is well known for its Neo-Confucianism practices. Several masters of Neo-Confucianism in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) lectured there, including Chen Hao, Chen Yi, Sima Guang, Fan Zhongyan and Zhu Xi. The col-

lege has two of the oldest cypress trees in China, dating back over 4,000 years.

Kangbaiwan's Mansions
Kangbaiwan's (Kang is the family name and "baiwan" means millionaire) Mansions are located in Gongyi, 82 km from Zhengzhou. The whole manor house area consists of 19 buildings, covering a total space of 64,300 sq m. It is a typical example of the feudalism stronghold architecture, common on the Loess plateau in northern China, during the 17th and 18th centuries. Its stone, wood and brick carvings throughout the mansion are of particular artistic value.

Du Fu's Home Place
The famous Tang Dynasty poet, Du Fu, was born in Gongyi, an area under the direct jurisdiction of Zhengzhou. The ancestral hall of Du Fu was located here. Its actual date of construction is unknown and the hall has been restored many times since the days of the Qing Dynasty.

Grotto Temple
The Gongyi Grotto Temple was first established in the Northern Wei Dynasty. It now comprises five caves, one shrine, 255 small alcoves, three large cliff-face Buddha statues, 7,743 Buddhist statues and more than 200 stone inscriptions. The adornments on both sides of the cave gate are very rare in terms of their compact design, lifelike shapes and sleek lines, making them highly distinctive relics.

Song Mausoleum
The Song Mausoleum is located in Gongyi. It is the largest group of royal tombs in central China. The Song Mausoleum has over 200 tombs. It is 15 km long from north to south and 10 km wide from east to west. The stone sculptures of people and animals in the Song Tomb are the only existing group of Song Dynasty statues in China, making them valuable relics.

The Ancient Buildings of the Songshan Mountain
The group of ancient buildings on Songshan Mountain is the subject of a UN World Cultural Heritage application. These buildings bore witness to a number of now extinct traditions, including sacrificial ceremonies. They were also home to educational facilities in former times.

Cultural tour
As Zhengzhou has such a proliferation of cultural relics, the local government has been working hard to establish them as ideal attractions for contemporary tourists. The following are some of the projects that should be high on any visitor's "must-see" list.

Huangdi's Home Place
Huangdi, also known as the "Yellow Emperor", was born in Zhengzhou. Huangdi and another tribal ruler, Yandi, are believed to be the co-founders of the Chinese nation and civilization. The local government has built a scenic shrine in Huangdi's hometown, allowing Chinese visitors to worship their ancestor. The shrine includes five separate areas: Chinese Surname Square, the ancestral hall of Huangdi, the birthplace of Huangdi - Xuanyuan Mound, an art exhibition zone and the treasure tripod zone.

Wen Temple
The Wen Temple, also known as the Confucian Temple, was first built during the time of the Eastern Han Dynasty. It was originally a place where students studied the Confucian classics. During the Ming Dynasty, its name was changed to Wen (Literacy) Temple. The major shrine of the Wen Temple features a Xieshan-style roof, with nine ridges.

Yellow River Scenic Area
The Yellow River scenic area is a national AAAA scenic spot, covering 17 sq km. In 1987, the local government began work on two statues of Yangdi and Huangdi by the river. The two statues, which were only completed in 2007, both now stand 106 meters high.

The Shaolin Music Show
This outdoor performance consists of five segments - music of water, wood, wind, light and stone. This impressive show combines martial arts with the modern lighting and audio techniques, as well as the choral singing of Shaolin monks. A number of celebrities, including the president of the International Olympics Committee, Jacques Rogge, and the president of Singapore, S.R. Nathan, have visited the show and subsequently spoken very highly of it.

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Monks practice kungfu at the renowned Shaolin Temple.



Monument marking Du Fu's birthplace



Stellar Observatory



Song Dynasty mausoleum

Ancient grandeur, birth of a culture

By Cui Wei

As one of the nation's largest provinces and a birthplace of Chinese culture, Henan offers a museum of nature and history to tourists:

Birthplace of Emperor Huangdi

Emperor Huangdi is considered the ancestor of Chinese people. A large number of historical accounts and unearthed relics demonstrate he was born in Xinzheng city of Henan province, where he eventually established an empire. Five thousand years ago the man who would become known as Emperor Huang, whose name was Xuanyuan, united his kingdom with Yandi and established Xinzheng as the capital of the empire.

His reign saw the creation of Chinese characters, development of cloth weaving and boat making, and the invention of the compass. The Chinese lunar calendar was also used for the first time, and the Neijing, the first book about traditional Chinese medicine, was written. The advancements laid the foundation for the prosperity of Chinese civilization. Through the following centuries, descendants have held commemorative activities every year on his birthday to mark his contributions.

In downtown Xinzheng, Xuanyuan Road has been built to highlight China's inception. The road has sections for the worship of Emperor Huangdi, his ancestral temple and a square containing Chinese family names.

Along the road is a huge statue of the emperor, the Huangdi Museum, the Huangdi Cultural Corridor and a wall with 3,000 family names.

Every year, thousands of visitors including overseas Chinese come to Xinzheng to attend a veneration ceremony to mark his birthday on the third day of the third lunar month, which often falls in spring.

Archaeologists say Huangdi worship dates to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). The ceremony has nine steps - observing silence, firing guns, lighting incense sticks, paying a courtesy to the ancestor, reading eulogies, lighting a sacred fire, singing odes, dancing and celebrating the harmony between heaven, earth and human beings.

The ceremony was listed as part of China's intangible cultural heritage in 2008.

impressive - wood and brick carvings, elegant roof and mural designs and an abundance of phoenix and dragon sculptures.

Its wooden lattice windows are particularly characteristic, making it a bit easier to imagine the temple in all its old glory. The highlight of the site is a statue of the City God Chenghuang in the main hall dressed in judicial costume.

Zhongyue Temple

Located at the foot of Huanggai Peak in the Songshan Mountains, Zhongyue Temple is one of the best-preserved ancient sites at the five most-important mountains in China. Initially built in the Han Dynasty (206BC-25AD) and rebuilt during the reign of Emperor Gaozong (1736-1796) of Qing Dynasty, the temple has the same design and architectural style of the Forbidden City in Beijing. It has 400

Chenghuang Temple

Chenghuang Temple, or the Temple of the City God, in downtown Zhengzhou was built to consecrate gods believed to be protecting the urban area and its people. Built during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD), the temple was a structure of imposing beauty with many halls and grand gates.

The temple today has lost much of its religious function and become a place for exhibitions of art and culture. A mural along three of the walls in the temple's main hall depicts the morals of the socialist revolution, clearly showing changes have come to the former religious site.

The buildings, although renovated, still retain a typical Ming style, while the decor is

halls covering 100,000 sq m. Among its 11 main buildings, the most famous and splendid is Junji Hall that covers 920 sq m at a height of 20 m.

Shang Dynasty ruins

Located in downtown Zhengzhou, the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century BC) city ruins cover 25 sq km. Remnants of a 7-km-long rampart from the ancient city wall still visible today have yielded a number of relics, including two rare square copper pots used by the imperial court.

In 1955, archaeologists found ruins of house foundations, cellars, wells, ditches, and graves. Ornaments and tools made of bronze, stone, bone, shell and jade have also been unearthed, as well as pottery and primitive porcelain.

'Shaolin in the Wind'

A combination of martial arts, folk music and dance performed by monks from the Shaolin Temple, birthplace of kung fu, and the cream of the Zhengzhou Song and Dance Troupe, the play is China's



Songshan Mountain geopark



Chenghuang Temple



Shang Dynasty ruins

Henan's 'Happy Star' TV show a huge hit with kids



Scene from the popular 'Happy Star' series with its young cast. It is China's first science fiction show for children.

By FANG XIAOWEI

A Henan-made TV series has won the hearts of children across the nation and become the province's top original brand. "Happy Star", the first Chinese science fiction TV series for children, was produced by the Henan Chaofan Film Production Co and began airing on CCTV channels in the second half of 2004.

The TV series became a hit with children and won many awards, including for outstanding literary work, during the 10th national campaign promoting cultural and ideological progress. Spin-offs of the "Happy Star" brand have also been a success. The brand now not only includes the TV show, but also books, audio-visual products, and children's

toys and even food. TV production in China has progressed rapidly in recent years. Roughly 10,000 TV dramas hit the screen annually, but few have been produced for children.

Zhong Chengxiang, vice-chairman of China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, said there is

an oversupply of TV shows for adults, but those for children are in serious shortage.

To "promote healthy growth of minors and create happiness for Chinese children", the Henan Chaofan Film Production Co took the lead in the country to create children's television programs and movies.

Its three seasons of the "Happy Star" series have been the broadcast on the CCTV Children's Channel as well as CCTV 1, 3, 8, 12 channels and dozens of local TV stations in prime time. "Happy Star" had the highest audience rating - 1.9 percent - for CCTV Channel 8 and its official website happystar.com.cn has about 10,000 visits daily.

In 2004, a "Happy Star" series of novels and comic books was published by the Beijing

Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, with the sales once exceeding the Harry Potter books to become the No 2 bestselling children's books in the nation.

First published in 2005, "Happy Planet" cartoon books had sales of about 2 million copies over 18 months.

Audio-visual products with the same name produced by the Guangdong Foshan Tianyi Audio Co sold well and are listed as national key audio-visual products in the 11th Five-Year Plan period (2006-10).

Happy Star Child Nutrition Noodles produced by Henan Jiaye Food Co have also been listed as one of children's favorite foods.



Li Rui plays the leading role as Ding Kaile in 'Happy Star'.