

The Fenhe reservoir in the county of Loufan ensures a stable water supply to the lower stream of the river in Taiyuan.

SU XIAOJIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Rejuvenated Fenhe River now a source of happiness and pride



Shanxi province's decades-long strategy to improve the local environment pays off

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Wang Xiaoyan, a resident in Shanxi's provincial capital of Taiyuan, moved to her new home in a residential community near the Fenhe River two years ago.

Since then, she has developed a hobby of walking along the river's banks in the evening.

"The Fenhe River scenic belt is now my favorite place to visit every day," Wang said. "The fresh air, the lush vegetation, the clean water and the reflection of lights on the river make it a real attraction."

But things were different about two decades ago, Wang said.

"Living near the river was unpleasant in the past. And no one would like to jog or walk along the

river," Wang said. "Fenhe was almost a dry river throughout the year. If there was some water, it stank."

With a length of more than 710 kilometers, Fenhe is the second-longest river in Shanxi. The Taiyuan section is about 100 km, about one-seventh of the river's total length.

Wang Xia, an official and engineer at the administrative committee of the Fenhe River Scenic Area in Taiyuan, said she is a witness to the positive changes of the river over the decades.

"Taiyuan launched an environmental improvement project for the river in 1998 and I began to work for the project in 1999," Wang Xia said. "At that time, my job was to inspect the river, locate pollution sources and put forward proposals for pollution control, ecological recovery and landscaping design."

She said Fenhe was initially revitalized when water from the upper stream was continuously supplied to the water course in Taiyuan in 2000.

Efforts have since continued in the areas of pollution control, ecological restoration and landscaping development. It has turned the region along the river into a pleasant habitat for both wildlife and human beings and an attractive scenic

belt for visitors and locals, according to Wang Xia.

"The Fenhe River Scenic Area is now a showcase of Taiyuan's ever-improving environment, culture and economy."

The latest move for Fenhe's development was the launch of the fourth-phase river improvement project in June 2020, according to Guo Fan, another official at the administrative committee of the Fenhe River Scenic Area.

"The new phase of the project includes enhancing embankments to control floods, developing wetland parks and adding other infrastructure facilities," Guo said.

The fourth-phase project was completed in September 2021. As a result, 1.9 million square meters of green land; sightseeing paths with their length totaling 43 km; and a water body with a surface area of 1.6 million sq m and a volume of 5.5 million cubic meters were added to the Fenhe River Scenic Area.

Contributing to the Fenhe River's revival are the strict discharge and emission standards for local enterprises and the construction of more industrial and domestic sewage treatment facilities, according to Wang Ji'en, an official at the rural and urban management bureau in Taiyuan.

"There are seven large domestic sewage treatment plants in Taiyuan, which can dispose of 1.27 million metric tons of sewage a day," Wang Ji'en said. "That's a huge capacity compared with Taiyuan's daily discharge of 950,000 tons."

Improving rivers is one of the priorities on the environmental protection agenda in Shanxi. Similar programs have been launched for other rivers in the province.

Shanxi's innovative practice to harness and improve its rivers is to appoint chiefs for each river. A river chief is usually the head of the local government according to each section of the river. It can be the head of the township, county, city or provincial government.

Shanxi's waterways are now taken care of by 16,053 river chiefs at village level; 4,336 river chiefs at township level; 899 river chiefs at county level; and 78 river chiefs at city level.

The province's eight major rivers, including the Yellow River and Fenhe, are taken care of by provincial-level river chiefs, who are the leaders of the provincial government and the provincial committee of Communist Party of China.

Li Shu contributed to this story.

## Medics on a mission to save lives in Africa

By YUAN SHENGGAO

At the departure lounge of Taiyuan Wusu International Airport, a group of medics were sent off by their relatives, friends and colleagues on Jan 5.

They were members of the Shanxi medical team ready to leave for the African country of Djibouti for a year-long assistance mission.

The medical team is composed of 12 members from five hospitals in the cities of Jinzhong, Xinzhou and Taiyuan.

Zhou Naizhong, 51, is the oldest member of the team. An expert in acupuncture, he is a doctor from the Secondary Hospital Affiliated to the Shanxi Medical University.

"I was told by my colleagues in Africa that acupuncture is well-received by the locals," Zhou said. "I joined this team in the hope to promote the traditional Chinese medical science to Africa."

Zhao Ke is a doctor at the gastroenterology department of the No 1 Hospital of Jinzhong. He said while helping the locals fight disease, he hopes this mission in Djibouti can broaden his vision and build up his experiences.

"Experience is the most important thing for a medic," Zhao said. "There are a number of unique digestion system diseases in Africa caused by local viruses, bacteria and parasites. A study of these will be a good opportunity for me to accumulate experience."

Hou Wei is the head of the team. When he was ready to depart from

Shanxi, he was concerned with his mother who was in poor health.

He said his 85-year-old mother underwent an operation for rectal cancer two years ago.

"The operation was successful at the time but metastasis of cancer cells was detected last year," Hou said. "This is something that worries me a lot."

He said his mother was reluctant to be hospitalized despite his repeated calls as she wanted to spend Spring Festival, which falls on Feb 1 this year, at home.

But when his mother heard about his African mission, she agreed to go to hospital if she feels unwell. He said that made him relieved to some extent.

Hou's team is the 21st that Shanxi has sent to Djibouti. Since the late 1960s, Shanxi has dispatched more than 60 teams and more than 1,300 medical workers to the three African countries of Cameroon, Togo and Djibouti.

The teams have helped locals fight various diseases, including Ebola, malaria and hemorrhagic fever. The team members' professionalism and devotion have been widely recognized by locals and 256 of them have won various honorary titles from the three governments.

The Shanxi medical teams are an important part of China's medical assistance to Africa. China began to dispatch medical teams to Africa in 1963.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Shanxi's 21st medical assistance team to Djibouti bids farewell to Taiyuan on Jan 5. GUO JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Millions more workers covered by insurance

By YUAN SHENGGAO

For many residents in Shanxi, 2021 was a year that gave them a deepened sense of gain, happiness and security, thanks to an enhanced social security system.

This was especially true for Li Ming, a delivery man working in the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

He said when he began to work with his company two years ago, he was only offered accident insurance.

But last year, his company promised to offer him other insurances like a pension fund for retirement and medical care insurance.

It did so according to a new regulation issued by the provincial government that requires businesses to extend insurance coverage for their employees.

"That means I can have a pension after I retire so I will no longer need to worry about the costs of healthcare," Li said.

According to the Shanxi Department of Human Resources and Social Security, the three basic insurances sponsored by both businesses and governments — pension for retirees, unemployment insurance and workplace accident insurance — were extended to cover 26.45 million people, 5 million people and 6.39 million people.

It is worth mentioning that, more than 95 percent of Shanxi's residents, or 32.43 million, were covered by fundamental medical care insurance. Such a medical care insurance system was also supplemented by other initiatives like a special fund for severe diseases and an assistance fund for people with financial difficulties, ensuring that all the residents in Shanxi can be covered by a comprehensive medical care insurance umbrella sponsored by both the government and social entities.

Liu Ting, a resident in Taiyuan, said she was glad her child and aging parents could enjoy better medical services thanks to the enhanced medical care insurance.

"In the past, the medical care insurance for my child and parents only covered the costs when they were hospitalized," Liu said. "But last year, I found that the costs of outpatient services could also be reimbursed."

As a means to address the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, Shanxi began to offer free vaccinations for all its residents in 2021.

According to the Shanxi Health Commission, more than 27 million people had been vaccinated against COVID-19 by Nov 1, 2021.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



Students at Shanxi University, Taiyuan, receive free COVID-19 vaccinations on campus. WU LIUHONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Passion snowballs for winter sports

The enthusiasm toward winter sports among residents in Shanxi is increasing as the 2022 Winter Olympic Games approach. This is demonstrated by the increasing number of winter sports events in the province.

One of the largest winter sports events in Shanxi is the third Datong Ice and Snow Festival held in the northern Shanxi city of Datong from Dec 13, which attracted more than 3,000 athletes to take part in a range of sports. The event is also regarded by the local government as an opportunity to promote the integration of sports, tourism and industrial development.

LIU TONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Changzhi celebrates legacy of renowned leader

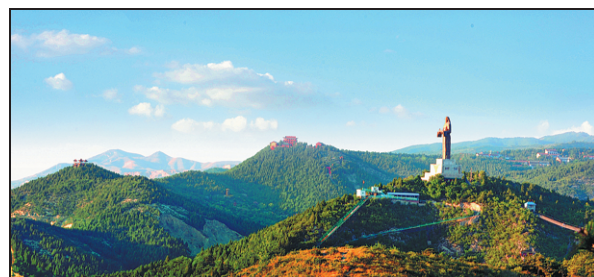
By YUAN SHENGGAO

Under the huge statue of the Red Emperor in the Laodingshan Scenic Area in the southeastern Shanxi city of Changzhi, Wei Lei, a tourist from the provincial capital of Taiyuan, told his child the tale of the legendary forefather of the Chinese nation.

The Red Emperor, or Shennong, was one of the great leaders of China some 5,000 years ago, Wei said. He added that his contributions to the nation include teaching people how to farm and developing the science of herbal medicine. A famous story tells of Shennong tasting 100 herbs to judge the medical effect of plants.

Local residents believe the city of Changzhi, which was known as Shangdang in ancient times, is closely related with the activities of Shennong.

"Shangdang is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization, with many



The 39-meter-high statue at the top of Laodingshan is the tallest statue of Shennong in Asia. HOU MANYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

stone farming tools discovered in the region," said Cui Xin, an official at the Laodingshan Scenic Area. "The tools have been identified as artifacts dating back to some 5,000 years ago, the period when Shennong lived."

Cui said many people believe that the plains in Changzhi were where

Shennong developed the farming industry and the mountains, including Laodingshan, were where the legendary figure found and tasted herbs.

The official said there are a number of memorial monuments in Laodingshan for people to worship

Shennong. And the building of such monuments ranges from more than 1,600 years ago to the modern times.

A landmark monument in the scenic area is the bronze statue of Shennong which stands 39 meters tall and weighs 150 metric tons. It was built in the 1990s.

This is the tallest statue of Shennong in Asia, according to Li Min, another official at the scenic area.

Laodingshan is about 5 kilometers to the northeast of the city center of Changzhi. Also known as the Laodingshan National Forest Park, it covers an area of about 40 square kilometers.

As 70 percent of the area is covered by forests, Laodingshan is regarded by tourists in Shanxi and the rest of the country as a retreat from the frenetic pace of urban life.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.