

Factory's restoration helps keep Yangquan people's history alive

Former site of water pump manufacturer turned into cultural park that honors industrial past and memories of those who had worked there



By YUAN SHENGGAO

A recently opened cultural park, which houses one of the oldest factories in the eastern Shanxi city of Yangquan, is bringing back nostalgic memories to locals and a novel experience to visitors.

The park, named City Memory 1947, is located at the former Yangquan Water Pump Factory. The factory was relocated to a new site in the city in August 2020.

Covering about 97,000 square meters, the cultural park was developed by Yangquan Cultural Tourism Corp. The first-phase investment in the project was 331.4 million yuan (\$52 million), according to Zhao Min, deputy chief for operations at the company.

Yangquan was one of the important bases for the Chinese revolution. It boasted the first city administration established by the Communist Party of China. The CPC-led Yangquan city government was

founded on May 4, 1947.

Founded in the same year, Yangquan Water Pump Factory was the first State-owned manufacturing enterprise in the city. The site's previous occupant was an armaments factory established in 1946.

When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, the factory began its transformation into a civil enterprise. It began to produce water pumps in 1952.

Over the seven decades since, the company has developed into one of the leading pump manufacturing enterprises in China. It now produces 168 product varieties with a wide range of applications.

Because of its rapid expansion, the company relocated to a new site with more space in 2020.

There was much speculation over what the old site in the center of Yangquan would be used for.

"Some people were afraid that the site would become an unpleasant 'rust zone' in the city," said Wang Jiwen, a worker with Yangquan Water Pump Factory. "Others guessed that it would be used for real estate development."

"But when the city government released the development plan, we were both surprised and delighted," he said.

"It's beyond our expectations that it would become a cultural park and a new tourist attraction of the city. That would be a perfect combination of history, life and fashion."

Wang, 53, has been working with the enterprise for more than 30 years. He said employees of Yangquan Water Pump Factory are among the happiest with the project. "We are emotionally attached to every inch of land in this old site, cherishing it as a spiritual place in our hearts."

Industry-related tourism has become a novel and sensational experience for many tourists in China, especially the young generation. One of the pilots in this field is the 798 Art Center. Developed on a former industrial district in Beijing, it is now one of the top destinations for many young, fashionable and cultured tourists.

Cui Xiaolin, general manager of City Memory 1947, said this cultural park is designed to offer a similar experience to tourists.

He said renovation of the old factory and its site began last year. "We have kept a lot of industrial elements in the park," Cui said. "These include the factory buildings, manufacturing equipment and other traces of past times."



The City Memory 1947 cultural park makes good use of the former Yangquan Water Pump Factory. XU MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

He said the high-rise chimney is still there, making the cultural park easily recognized from a long distance.

Before and during the renovation, the site was frequently visited by employees of the former factory. Their suggestions and emotional responses were incorporated into the design of the project, according to Cui.

Wang said visiting the cultural park is now part of his leisure routine.

"I often feel relieved when seeing the old plant, touching the old machines, feeling the smell of lubricant grease and bathing in the sunshine that is let in through the transparent shingles on the plant roofs," Wang said. "Things are changing every day but there are

also things permanently in our memory."

The cultural park is a showcase of not only the history of the factory but also that of the city, according to Cui.

A core part of the park is the Yangquan Memory Museum. "The museum is about every aspect of the city's history, with material exhibits, pictures and videos that show the life, people, culture, industries and commerce," Cui said.

It is worth noting that a great number of the exhibits were donated by more than 800 residents in Yangquan. Replicas of the old Yangquan Railway Station and the 1947 Yangquan city government building complex were also built near the museum.

According to Cui, the cultural

park is expected to receive 150,000 visits a year once it becomes fully operational.

He said the first phase of the cultural park project, with facilities for exhibition, experience, cultural creativity and recreation, has been basically completed. The second phase, which mainly focuses on catering, accommodation, education and other services, is underway.

Meanwhile, the new Yangquan Water Pump Factory is based in the Yangquan High-Tech Industrial Zone. The company is restructuring its operations with investments from several enterprises in the city. It is diversifying its production to cover such products as pumps, valves and iron and steel castings.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.

Mountain's legends and scenery draw tourists

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When talking about the origin of the Chinese nation, people would usually say that "we are the offspring of the Yellow Emperor and the Red Emperor".

The Yellow Emperor, or Xuanyuan; and the Red Emperor, or Shennong, are legendary leaders of the nation some 5,000 years ago. They are remembered to this day because of their achievements in governing the nation and teaching the people to farm.

The name of Shennong, which literally means the god of farming, is no doubt related to the Red Emperor's pioneering efforts in agriculture. He is also said to be the pioneer of China's medical sciences.

Despite the lack of written records and material evidence, there are quite a few regions that claim an association with Shennong's activities.

Laoding Mountain, a scenic area in the southeastern Shanxi city of Changzhi, is one such region.

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 stone farming tools discovered in the region," said Cui Xin, an official at the Laoding Mountain 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 Laoding Mountain, were where the legendary figure found and tasted herbs.

A household story about Shennong is that he tasted 100 herbs to judge the medical effect of plants.

The official said there are a number of memorial monuments in Laoding Mountain for people to worship Shennong. And the building of such monuments ranges from more than 1,600 years ago to the modern day.



The Shennong statue on the top of Laoding Mountain is said to be the tallest of its kind in Asia. SUN BINGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Among the many monuments, the most spectacular is a huge 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.

This statue is a must-see for many tourists to the scenic area, especially children who want to have a better understanding of Chinese history.

Under the huge statue, Wang Lei, a tourist from the Shanxi provincial capital of Taiyuan, told his child the tale of the legendary forefather of the Chinese nation.

"Laoding Mountain might be the location where Shennong tasted 100 herbs and might be the source of traditional Chinese medicine," Wang told his school-aged son.

Laoding Mountain is about 5 kilometers to the northeast of the city center of Changzhi. It covers an area of about 40 square kilometers.

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

Han Linfang contributed to this story.

Medical upgrades and reforms saving more lives in rural regions

By YUAN SHENGGAO

In the process of reforming the healthcare system, Shanxi's medical care sector is now focusing its efforts on improving services in rural regions.

Ren Changwa, a resident in the village of Dongdizhang in Yanhu district, Yuncheng city, is one of the beneficiaries of this deepening reform.

Ren is a patient of hypertension and cerebral hemorrhage. These diseases require regular checks on blood pressure and cerebral conditions, which in the past, could only be conducted in bigger hospitals in cities.

"Now the village clinic is equipped with a wide range of medical devices, so the checks can be made in my neighborhood," Ren said. "That has freed me from traveling a long distance to see doctors and saved me a lot of money."

Xiang Guodong, a resident in Ninghua village in Ningwu county in the city of Xinzhou, shares the same feeling with Ren.

He recalled that the village clinic was located in a shabby house, with an X-ray machine produced in the 1960s as the only examination equipment.

"I'm a hypertension patient but there was no sphygmomanometer available in the clinic in the past," Xiang said.

The change took place in 2017 when the county government of Ningwu began to renovate and upgrade its rural medical institu-

tions with huge investment.

The village clinic in Ninghua received 500,000 yuan (\$78,550) for upgrading. It has now relocated to a new, bigger house and is equipped with 31 devices for checking, diagnosis and treatment.

With improvement in infrastructure, rural medical institutions in Shanxi are also able to offer tailored services to patients.

These services include doctors' visits to households.

Wang Laiying is a patient with coronary disease. This disease sometimes requires quick response from medics and does not allow the patient to move, especially when there is a heart attack.

In July 2020, Wang suffered a heart attack and the village clinic's doctor arrived in several minutes. The doctor's treatment helped to save the life of Wang.

Wang was later offered a calling card and was told that doctors' home visits are available with only a phone call.

Since 2012, Shanxi has invested a total of 7 billion yuan in improving its rural medical infrastructure. That program included the renovation and expansion of more than 1,100 township medical institutions and more than 20,000 village clinics. A total of 274,000 sets of new medical devices have been added to these institutions and clinics, according to the Shanxi Health Commission.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Train axle producer on track for global success

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Loaded with 50 containers of train wheel axles produced by Taiyuan Heavy Industry Railway Transit Equipment, a freight train bound for Europe departed from Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone on Jan 31.

This was one of many recent shipments from the famed train equipment producer based in the Shanxi provincial capital of Taiyuan after it reported a rapid sales increase for 2021.

Despite the challenges of global market fluctuation and the COVID-19 pandemic, the company's 2021 business revenue and profit grew 48 percent and 89 percent respectively from the previous year.

Company executives said axles carried by that train represented the highest technological level of the producer.

Wei Huacheng, an executive for research and development at THIRTE, said this batch of axles was produced based on its latest patented technologies and the latest standards that the company proposed on behalf of the industry.

For its efforts in developing these cutting-edge technologies and



Workers at Taiyuan Heavy Industry Railway Transit Equipment assess product quality before delivery. SU XIAOYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

industrial standards, the R&D team led by Wei was awarded the second prize for science and technology progress in Shanxi in 2021.

Wei said the enhanced strength in R&D is the secret behind THIRTE's rapid and high-quality growth in recent years.

"Our R&D team has been constantly growing, from a dozen people several years ago to more than 50 at present," Wei said.

Along with the growth in personnel numbers is the growing innovation capacity of the team's members, according to Wei.

"In the past, we made products according to clients' designs," the executive said. "Now we can design advanced and pacesetter products to help to increase added value for customers."

In addition to its own standards, Wei said the company's products are also produced according to the highest standards in the world.

For instance, the company has been granted the CL65, the globally recognized certificate for raw materials used in wheel axle production. "This allows us to export our train wheel axles to more glob-

al destinations," Wei said.

A recent development is that THIRTE passed a quality assessment by Deutsche Bahn, the national railway operator of Germany, in 2021.

"As Deutsche Bahn's standard is the strictest in the world, the qualification means we are granted a passport to enter every market globally," Wei said.

THIRTE's innovation system is now composed of a provincial-level technology center, two provincial-level laboratories and four joint labs.

Zhang Ao, an executive for overseas sales at the company, found the company's highlight on markets involved in the Belt and Road Initiative is another reason for its rapid global growth.

"We encountered a downturn in sales in early 2018 because of market fluctuations," Zhang said. "But we quickly bucked the trend as we expanded on the BRI markets."

He said THIRTE is now one of the major suppliers in BRI markets including Iran, South Africa, Poland and Austria. Its sales in the emerging markets of Brazil, Chile and Columbia have also increased steadily in recent years.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Fancy dress lightens the mood for a child receiving treatment at one of the hospitals in Shanxi province. KOU NING / FOR CHINA DAILY