

Ecological efforts take flight on Yellow River

Improvements in water quality, wildlife and tourism among benefits being felt by Shanxi people and environment



By YUAN SHENGGAO

With substantial improvements in water quality and the ecosystem, Shanxi, a province in the middle reaches of the Yellow River, is striding toward its goal of becoming an important experimental zone for ecological protection and high-quality development in the river's drainage region.

The 5,464-kilometer Yellow River, originating from Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and emptying into Bohai Bay, is the second-longest river in China. It is regarded as the mother river of the nation because it has nurtured Chinese civilization for millennia.

The Shanxi section of the Yellow River is 965 km in length. More than 73.1 percent of the land in Shanxi, covering 114,600 square kilometers across 11 cities, belongs to the river's drainage basin. The river's drainage area in Shanxi is also home to 73.4 percent of the population and makes up the majority of provincial GDP.

Responding to calls by the central authorities to protect the ecological environment of the river and realize high-quality growth, Shanxi began to implement a strategy to become an experimental zone for ecological protection and high-quality development in 2017.

Since then, Shanxi's provincial authorities have put the strategy high on their agenda and remarkable progress has been made in improving the region's environment over the past few years.



Flocks of birds including cranes and egrets in the Fenhe River wetland in Shanxi's provincial city of Taiyuan. The Fenhe is a major tributary of the Yellow River. PHOTOS BY LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

In 2022, 82.8 percent of the water bodies of the Shanxi section of the Yellow River and its tributaries in the province were tested as having good or excellent water quality, according to data collected in 58 monitoring stations across the province. The rate represented an increase of 16.7 percentage points compared with 2021.

The Shanxi section of the Yellow River main course reported a good or excellent water quality rate of 87.5 percent for the whole of 2022, according to data from eight monitoring stations. This marked an increase of 12.5 percentage points from 2021.

The improvements are a result of the local authorities' relentless efforts in curbing pollution and repairing the ecosystem.

Sewage discharge into the Yellow River and its tributaries had been a major challenge. In 2020, Shanxi province launched a campaign to investigate all sewage discharge outlets along the Fenhe River, the largest tributary to the

Shanxi section of the Yellow River.

Based on the investigations, the provincial and local environmental authorities have proposed solutions and implemented measures to control water pollution, according to Li Jie, an official at the Shanxi Department of Ecology and Environment.

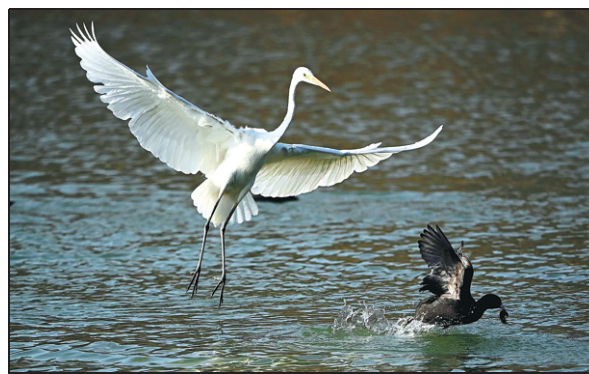
She said the investigation campaign was spread to the Yellow River mainstream and all its branches in Shanxi in March.

Cangtuo in Hejin city, for instance, was one of the first villages in Shanxi to develop sewage treatment facilities.

Cangtuo is near a huge wetland at the confluence of the Yellow River and the Fenhe River.

After a government-funded sewage treatment plant was built in the village in 2020, local residents said they were glad to see a transformation in the environment.

"Before that year, sewage from households was directly discharged into the wetland through open ditches," local residents said. "The accumulation of dirty water made the



wetland and its vicinity, including our village, stinky all year round."

Now with an underground pipeline system and a treatment plant, there is no more sewage in the open ditches in the village and the wetland has become a new tourist attraction, according to residents.

Hejin is one of the pilot cities and counties in Shanxi developing rural sewage treatment facilities. Since 2020, the city has invested a total of 500 million yuan (\$72.3 million) in building sewage plants and pipeline systems in all its 94 villages, according to local officials.

Curbing soil erosion is another effort taken by local governments to improve the environment of the Yellow River drainage basin.

As Shanxi is located on the Loess Plateau, soil erosion has been a challenge to the ecological environment of the Yellow River for thousands of years.

In the early 1950s, the area of soil erosion in Shanxi was 108,000 sq km, of which 67,600 sq km was in the

Yellow River drainage basin. Soil erosion-induced annual sediment in the Yellow River was 366 million metric tons during that period.

The northwestern part of Shanxi, which is close to the Mu Us Desert, had been one of hardest-hit regions.

Li Haomin is a resident of Laoniawan village in the northwestern county of Pianguan. He said his past memories about the local environment was all barren hills and sandstorms.

"There were no trees on the hills because of soil erosion," Li Haomin said. "And there were frequent sandstorms resulting from environmental deterioration."

But things have completely changed now. Decades of greening efforts have resulted in a vegetation coverage of more than 40 percent in Pianguan county.

Laoniawan, which literally means old ox bend, is the place where the Yellow River enters Shanxi province. It has now been transformed into a tourist attraction featuring green

mountains and clear waters. The Yellow River there has become clear because a reservoir was built, according to Li Haomin.

Shanxi began its initiative in curbing soil erosion in the 1950s and the pace has accelerated since 2012.

After years of continuous efforts, 63 percent of Shanxi's territory had been freed from soil erosion by the end of 2022, according to Li Jie of the provincial department of ecology and environment.

She said in Shanxi, the efforts in soil erosion are a combination of greening and engineering measures.

With regard to greening, Shanxi has seen an addition of more than 333,000 hectares of forests annually over the past two years. Engineering measures, such as building level terraces and works for gully head protection, have also proved successful in erosion control, according to Li Jie.

Both humans and wildlife are benefiting from the improved environment.

In a wetland park along the Yellow River in Hequ, a county to the south of Pianguan, local officials have recorded more than 100 varieties of wildlife, including rare birds, animals and fish.

The park has also become a site for locals to watch birds, relax and exercise.

Back in Laoniawan village in Pianguan, Li Haomin and a number of his fellow villagers are now running rural bed-and-breakfast businesses, gaining revenue from the booming tourism industry thanks to the new appearance of one of the most spectacular bends of the Yellow River.

Cheng Guoyuan contributed to this story.

City's economy boosted by digital breakthroughs

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Yangquan, a major coal-mining city in the east of Shanxi, is setting an example on using digitalization to upgrade traditional industries and foster new growth engines for the province.

During the annual sessions of the Shanxi People's Congress and the Shanxi Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference held in January and the provincial conference on economic affairs held in December, Shanxi's authorities cited Yangquan as an example in developing the digital economy.

In Yangquan, the city government is mapping out a growth model driven by the digital economy, with a focus on areas including digital infrastructure development, digital industrialization and smart city management.

For digital industrialization, the highlights are on both upgrading traditional industries and cultivating new industries for the development of digital technologies.

One example of digital industrialization is Huayang New Materials

Technologies Group. It launched a 5G-connected, intelligent coal-mining shaft in June 2020.

"This was the world's first coal-mining shaft equipped with a 5G network," said Dai Liangjun, a worker at the Huayang coal mine. "With the network reaching a depth of more than 500 meters under the ground, we have basically realized automation for coal cutting and conveying, greatly improving efficiency and safety."

He explained that the automatic tunnel boring machine for coal cutting can now proceed at a speed of about 50 meters a day, a record in the country.

To date, Yangquan boasts two smart coal mines and 78 intelligent coal-mining shafts.

Digitalization is also applied to the machinery industry in Yangquan. Huayue Huayi, a coal-mining equipment manufacturer, has used digital-controlled machining centers in its production.

On the afternoon of March 30, Zhang Shuai, an operator of one of the machining centers, finished a day's work by reporting the qualification rate of components manufactured.



Baidu's cloud computing center in Yangquan is a major force supporting the city's digital economy. HAN WANCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

"The qualification rate is 100 percent again as usual," Zhang said. "Such a performance was unimaginable when we used conventional machine tools several years ago."

The company's executives said all its 70-plus machine tools are digitally controlled and network-connected, allowing full automation for almost all the machining procedures.

Yangquan's digital industrialization has also been extended to the logistics and transportation sectors, featuring unmanned delivery and autonomous driving.

Mengxian Economic and Technological Development Zone is an important base for Yangquan's digital economy. It boasts almost all the application scenarios of the digital industry.

It is home to an intelligent urban management and operational center that is known as "the new brain of the city" among locals.

Other digital applications in the zone also include smart agriculture, smart logistics, smart tourism and e-commerce.

Backing the city's digital industrialization are a number of big data and cloud computing facilities, software developers, communication carriers and information technology providers. The industries, which are collectively known as information and communication technologies, or ICT, reported a year-on-year business revenue increase of 27.3 percent in 2022, according to local officials.

Gao Hua contributed to this story.

White liquor wins over expo guests in Sweden

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As the only Chinese white liquor brand displayed at the 2023 VINORDIC, the largest spring expo for alcoholic drinks in Sweden, Fenjiu made by Xinghuacun Fenjiu, a renowned distillery in China's Shanxi province, attracted the attention of visitors and buyers.

The event was held in the city of Gothenburg from April 14-15, attended by 150-plus suppliers and more than 22,000 visitors from across the world.

Magnus Reuter Dahl, a Swedish reporter, was one of the visitors drawn to the Xinghuacun Fenjiu booth.

"This Chinese liquor has a unique fragrance and taste," he said.

After tasting the company's different liquor varieties, he said two cocktails were the most impressive. "One is a cocktail with watermelon flavor and another featuring a lychee taste."

Reuter Dahl said it was not his first time to try these drinks from Shanxi.

Earlier in March 21, Xinghuacun Fenjiu hosted a tasting event in Spritmuseum, which displays spirits and related art, in Stockholm. Reuter Dahl, as a reporter covering the alcoholic beverage industry, was present along with industry experts and clients' representatives.

At the Gothenburg expo, many visitors said this was their first time to taste the white liquor of Xinghuacun Fenjiu and they "like the taste and fragrance very much".

Some visitors keen on Chinese culture said they were interested in the cultural connotations of the liquor after the company's representatives introduced to them the history of the time-honored brand.

After studying relics of an ancient production site at the location of Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group and examining related documents, researchers believed Xinghuacun Fenjiu is one of the earliest liquor products in China. And its development has been associated with literature as it had been frequently referred to by ancient poets and literati.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is also one of the pioneering liquor companies of China to go global, according to the company's representatives.

After it won a first prize at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the United States, in 1915, Fenjiu-branded white liquor began to attract the attention of international buyers. Since then, Fenjiu brands, including Fenjiu and Zhuyeqing, have become popular in overseas markets.

But the early 20th century was not the beginning of Fenjiu's globalization.

A bottle with a Fenjiu label, which was used to export Fenjiu liquor made in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), is exhibited in the British Museum in London. Researchers said this bottle is evidence of China's first labeled export of liquor to Europe.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu began its commercial-scale exports following the Panama Expo. It stepped up its globalization process in the late 20th century.

To date, white liquor products made by Xinghuacun Fenjiu have been sold to foreign markets through its 50-plus dealers. They are available in more than 200 cities in 80-plus countries, according to the company's representatives.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Holiday promotions to spur provincial tourism

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As the five-day May Day holiday approaches, Shanxi's tourism authorities at various levels have recently announced a raft of incentive policies and measures to attract tourists from across the country.

The incentives released by the Shanxi Department of Culture and Tourism as well as similar institutions in Shanxi's 11 prefecture-level cities cover such areas as preferential ticket prices, offering convenience to visitors, providing subsidies to tourism operators, and organizing promotional activities.

Reduction or exemption of ticket fees will be a common practice of many tourist attractions in Shanxi during the holiday period spanning from April 29 to March 3.

In the city of Xinzhou, for instance, destinations like the famed Laoniawan, or Old Ox Bend, along the Yellow River, will have a 50

percent reduction in ticket price for all, with tourists in some age groups enjoying a total exemption.

In Datong, reputed attractions including Yungang Grottoes, Hengshan Mountain and Xuankong Temple will offer free entrance for students.

There will be rich forms of promotional activities across the province for tourists to enjoy the local cultures and natural attractions, as well as experiencing the local life.

In the city of Yuncheng, for example, there will be a bauhinia cultural festival.

In April and May, the vast spans of bauhinia flowers in full bloom constitute one of the most spectacular spring sights in the city.

While watching the flowers, tourists will be treated to vibrant forms of local culture like ancient architecture, wall paintings and Taoist healthcare practices. There will also be relaxation and sports activities



A show is staged near the famed Wooden Pagoda in Yingxian county. More events will be staged throughout Shanxi during the forthcoming May Day holiday. ZHANG MEIPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

like Yellow River wetland exploration and mountain climbing.

In the city of Jincheng, there will be a food festival featuring a rich array of dishes made from wheat flour.

Shanxi has recently released 60-plus touring routes for the whole year and about 30 routes are designed for tours in the current spring and the forthcoming summer. The list is targeted to offer convenience to tourists when

they are making trip plans.

The province is pinning high hopes on tourism to drive local growth. To assist in tourism development, the provincial tourism authorities are also offering incentives for tourism operators to attract tourists.

The provincial department of culture and tourism has set aside a special fund to award outstanding travel companies in tourism promotion.



Visitors sample drinks provided by Xinghuacun Fenjiu during the VINORDIC expo in Gothenburg. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY