



The scenic belt along the Jinyang Bridge section of the Fenhe River is a new tourist attraction in Taiyuan. PHOTOS BY LI ZHAOMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Success flows from river's transformation projects

Residents and tourists embrace beauty and ecological improvements of Fenhe scenic area



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Early summer is the best season for the Fenhe River in Taiyuan. Surrounded by lush vegetation, its lucent waters resemble a jade belt winding through the provincial capital of Shanxi province.

The Fenhe is the second-largest river in Shanxi and the second-largest tributary of the Yellow River. It is known as the mother river of Shanxi. The Taiyuan section of the Fenhe River stretches 188 kilometers, with 43 km passing through the urban area.

Zhang Pingguo is the head of the administration committee of the Fenhe River scenic area. Every time when talking about the river, he said the Fenhe is the pride of Taiyuan residents.

"The entire stretch of the 43-km river in urban Taiyuan is a scenic belt that draws in millions of visitors every year and an ecological corridor protecting the environmental well-being of Taiyuan," Zhang said.

The Fenhe scenic area, which is managed by Zhang's committee, has a total area of 20 square kilometers, including 8.5 sq km of greened embankments and a water surface of 11.5 sq km.

"The water volume of this river section is about 30 million cubic meters, equaling to a medium-sized reservoir," Zhang said. "Such a volume can rarely be seen in cities in the north of China."

The official said the river and its adjacent green spaces are playing a crucial role in Taiyuan's ecological environment, especially in the fields of flood control, air purification and temperature conditioning.

But several decades ago, the Fenhe was a polluted river with an environment totally different from what it looks like today, according to local officials and residents.

Lin Hao is a native of Taiyuan. He said he is a witness to the river's



Flocks of egrets are spotted on the Fenhe River in Taiyuan.

changes over the past decades.

"We were told by the seniors that the Fenhe is a scenic river in history with eight famed scenic attractions in its Taiyuan section," Lin said.

However, because of overuse of water, a decrease in vegetation coverage and industrial pollution, the river lost its historical glamor several decades ago.

"The period spanning the 1980s-90s was the worst time for the Fenhe," Lin said. "It was a dry river for the majority of the year, or polluted with yellowish, odorous water for the rest of it."

He said the deterioration of the river was the result of pollution from coal-related industries in nearby regions. "This was also evidenced by a landscape blackened by coal dust," he said. "The trees along the river and even the sparrows on the trees were black."

The water supply began to shrink in the 1970s, leading to substantial decreases in runoff volume and worsening water quality.

Changes began to take place in the late 1990s, when Taiyuan launched environmental improvement projects for the river, with local authorities focusing their efforts on pollution control and increasing water supply to the river, according to Zhang.

In addition to the main stream of the Fenhe, environmental improvement projects have also been implemented for its nine branches, with a focus on pollution control and sewage treatment.

"We began to see fundamental

improvement in water quality in 2020, with the elimination of water bodies with a quality worse than Class V in all the Fenhe's drainage areas in Taiyuan," Zhang said.

Surface water quality in China is divided into five classes, with Class V being the worst and Class I being the best.

But that was only the beginning. In 2022, the Fenhe River and all its tributaries in Taiyuan reported water qualities better than Class III, according to data released by the Taiyuan bureau of ecology and environmental protection.

There were also efforts to improve the ecosystem through increasing water supply to the river and greening the lands in its vicinity.

The Fenhe began to have steady runoff in 2000 and the water supply has been further ensured and stabilized with a water diversion project starting from the Wanjiashai Dam on the upper reaches of the Yellow River beginning to supply water to the Fenhe in 2017.

There are also greening and landscaping projects to beautify the scenic area. Trees and grasses have been planted and pavilions and bridges have been built along the river.

"With lushly vegetated hills and clear waters, we just feel we are living in a garden-like city you can see elsewhere in the south and east of China," said local resident Lyu Hong, who has recently developed a hobby to take pictures in the Fenhe River scenic area.

The scenic area has now formed a pleasantly unique ecosystem for

both humans and wildlife.

More than 230 varieties of plants have been growing along the river, the pedestrian paths and the cycling roads, making the scenic area increasingly appealing to relaxing, exercising and sightseeing visitors.

The wetlands along the river are also the habitat for more than 160 species of wild birds, including such rare varieties as the swan, egret, heron and spot-billed duck.

A total of 24 bridges have been built across the river to offer convenience for pedestrians, cyclists and commuting passengers. Among these bridges, the most beautiful is the Jinyang Bridge.

Jinyang Bridge, featuring two rainbow-shaped arches, has become a landmark on the river and one of the top attractions in the city since its construction in 2019.

Lyu said the bridge constitutes the most attractive part of the Fenhe River.

"It is especially beautiful in the evening when the lights and the rainbow arches are reflected on the clear water of the river," Lyu said.

The Fenhe scenic area has also become an attractive destination for tourists from the rest of the country.

According to the city's culture and tourism bureau, the scenic area received about 300,000 tourist visits during the five-day May Day holiday spanning from April 29 to May 3.

The city's authorities are planning for further efforts to improve the river this year, according to Hou Gang, an official at the Fenhe River scenic area's administration committee.

"We will add more cultural and public service facilities along the river," Hou said. "The most exciting news for both locals and tourists is that we are making the Fenhe a navigable river. That should lead to the revival of the famed historical attraction of 'evening ferries on Fenhe'."

The area near the Jinyang Bridge used to be a berth for boats to shuttle passengers across the river in ancient times. The business was once so prosperous that 'evening ferries on Fenhe' topped the eight famed attractions in Taiyuan.

Ding Yuan contributed to this story.

Hospital collaboration aids medical reform

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On April 27, the renowned Bethune Hospital in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi province, received a group of visitors from East China's Jiangxi province.

The visitors were from the Jiangxi Xiangya Hospital. The purpose of their tour was to learn about its experience in medical reform and management.

"Like many hospitals in China, we are in the second phase of medical system reform," said Liang Bin, Party secretary of Jiangxi Xiangya. "Here we have found the experience of Bethune Hospital can be inspiring and replicable for our reforming plans."

Starting its reform in 2019, Bethune Hospital is now the leading player in Shanxi's latest round of medical system reform.

To address the public requirements for affordable, accessible and better-quality medical services, the Chinese government began to implement a reforming initiative in October 2019, calling for the establishment of regional medical hubs in a number of provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions. The regional hubs feature the pairing of leading hospitals of two provincial-level regions to share their resources to benefit the broader public.

Shanxi and Central China's Hubei province were designated as one of the pilot regions in this reform, and Bethune Hospital in Shanxi and Tongji Hospital in Hubei are the leading hospitals.

But the two hospitals reacted even earlier than the Chinese government's formal announcement.

In August 2019, the two institutions signed an agreement to build cooperative medical hubs for the two provinces. In December that year, experts from Tongji Hospital were stationed in Bethune Hospital to help launch joint development programs.

Tongji Hospital, an affiliate of the renowned Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, is a strong force in research and management, so the partnership can bring visible benefits to Bethune Hospital, according to an executive of the Shanxi-based hospital.

Benefiting from the partnership, Bethune Hospital now ranks among the top 100 in the nation in terms of CMI, or case mix index, said the executive, adding that there are also substantial improvements in research and education.

Wu Hua, vice-president of Tongji Hospital, is now the president of Bethune Hospital. In addition to leading an expert team to help improve the research capability of the Shanxi hospital, he said the focus of his mission is to reform the existing medical system.

"All the reforms should benefit the general public," Wu said. "That is also the target of our reform in Bethune Hospital."

He noted that China began its first medical system reform campaign in 1985, which featured

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Wu Hua, president of Bethune Hospital

increasing autonomy for hospitals and operations according to market rules.

"The first reform led to the expansion of the medical service market and the accumulation of resources in bigger cities," Wu said. "But problems also arise, including the rapidly rising prices for medicines and services, and the inaccessibility of advantageous resources in smaller cities and rural areas."

Wu said now that the country is implementing a second reform to divert from the situation, Bethune Hospital's priority will be given to offering affordable, accessible and better-quality services to patients throughout the province.

"To reach this goal, we must rely on refined management to increase efficiency and cut costs; foster a competent force of medics to offer better services; and branch out to cover more patients in the province," Wu said.

One initiative is to shorten the hospitalization period of patients.

Liu Xiansheng, who is also from Tongji, is the vice-president of Bethune Hospital. He said the key to shortening the hospitalization period is scientific management.

"This is a practice closely relating to procedure management," Liu said. "It requires close collaborations among the testing, impatient and information technology departments. New technologies like big data analysis can substantially improve efficiency and optimize procedure management."

In 2022, the average hospitalization period for patients in Bethune Hospital was 8.86 days. That was 2.72 days less than that in 2020. In the first quarter of this year, the period was further cut to 8.46 days, according to Liu.

"A shortened hospitalization period means a decrease of costs for patients," Liu said. "Patients are also benefiting from substantial decreases in medicine prices, which are a result of our accurate procurement management."

As a part of its branching-out initiative, Bethune built its first county-level subsidiary in Yonghe in April 2019. Since then, the hospital has launched cooperative programs to support 35 county-level hospitals. In addition, its 26 departments have established regional alliances, offering assistance to more than 1,000 members throughout the province.

Jia Lijun contributed to this story.



Medics from both Tongji and Bethune hospitals discuss a plan for a surgical operation of a critical patient. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Renowned baijiu brand's globalization boosts promotion of Chinese culture

By YUAN SHENGGAO

On April 30, the Fenjiu Experience Center in Singapore welcomed officials from the Chinese embassy in Singapore.

The center was launched in December 2021 by renowned white liquor producer Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group based in China's Shanxi province.

The officials were there to attend a networking event for the promotion of the Chinese liquor and the culture associated with this time-honored brand.

Chinese diplomats praised the role that Xinghuacun Fenjiu has played in the promotion of Chinese culture in the process of its globalization.

White liquor, or *baijiu*, is an alcoholic beverage variety unique to China. In its centuries of development, white liquor has had a deep-rooted association with culture, arts and poetry. And Xinghuacun Fenjiu is a typical example of such an association, according to an executive at the center.

The brand Xinghuacun is actually named after a poem written by

Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Du Mu. In the poem, Du described his mood during a trip on Qingming, or Tomb Sweeping Day, in April. In Chinese, Xinghuacun literally means apricot flower village.

"A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Qingming day.

The traveler's heart is going to break on the way.

Where can a liquor shop be found to drown his dismay?

A cowherd points to the apricot flower village far away."

The poem is so popular in China that almost all school children are

able to recite it. This popularity has helped to make the white liquor brand Xinghuacun a household name.

History books show that the first reference of the Fenjiu brand name was made by an emperor during the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577).

The ancient technique for the production of the white liquor, which has been observed for centuries, is now on China's national list of intangible cultural heritage.

The Chinese embassy's officials said Singapore has a large population with ancestral roots in China,

so they have a better understanding of the Chinese culture embodied in the Xinghuacun Fenjiu liquor. On the other hand, Singapore is an international metropolis, which can play a crucial role in boosting Xinghuacun Fenjiu's globalization.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is one of the pioneering *baijiu* companies of China to go global.

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, Xinghuacun Fenjiu brands have become popular in overseas markets. The products were first sold to Southeast Asia and East Asia and then to Europe and the Americas.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is now among the top three exporters in China's white liquor industry. To date, its products have been sold to more than 60 countries and regions, through its 50-plus overseas dealers and more than 9,000 outlets in foreign countries.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.