

Kite-making helps city soar

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In Weifang, Shandong province, kites are not just toys. They symbolize both culture and an industry for the city.

Widely known as the world capital of kites, Weifang has a history of flying kites dating back about 2,400 years.

Legends say that ancient Chinese philosopher Mozi made the first kite in the world in the Lushan Mountain area, which now belongs to Weifang. It is said that the kite, made of wood, took him three years to finish but then fell and broke on the first day it flew.

Others believe that the true inventor of kites was Mozi's contemporary Lu Ban, a famous craftsman and engineer who has long been regarded as the patron saint of Chinese builders and carpenters. His kite, made of wood and bamboo in the shape of a magpie, flew three days before it fell, according to an ancient book.

A statue of Lu stands in front of the gate of the Weifang World Kite Museum, the largest kite museum in the world.

With a total floor area of 8,100 square meters, the museum has a design that resembles the dragon-head centipede kite, the most famous Weifang kite pattern. The roof is made of blue glazed tiles with a ceramic dragon in the ridge, and the walls are covered in white mosaic patterns.

Built in 1987, the museum has more than 1,000 kites in its collection, most of which have been flown. They represent different schools of kite-making in both China and overseas regions such as the United States, Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia.

One of the largest kites in the museum is about 140 meters long and features 108 portraits connected by a string, which are based on the characters in the Chinese classic novel *Outlaws of the Marsh*. The kite was first flown in 1985.

The smallest exhibits are no more than 5 cm long and visitors must use magnifying glasses to see them clearly. These miniatures use the same materials, techniques and patterns as the full-size models.

In addition to displays of kites, the museum has historical documents, models and videos depicting the history and culture of kites.

Even without wind, Li Naigang, vice-director of the museum, can fly a kite indoors. He does this performance with a specially made kite in the museum during his spare time.

He said he first saw indoor kite-flying in 2007 by an overseas team at the annual Weifang International Kite



A man flies a dragon-head centipede kite in a kite contest in Weifang, Shandong province, in April. ZHANG CHI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Various kites are shown at the 2015 Weifang International Kite Festival in April. JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY



Workers at a kite factory in Wangjiazhuangzi area. ZHANG ZHAO / CHINA DAILY

“The museum is a window through which we showcase the kite culture from across the world.”

Li Naigang
vice-director of the Weifang World Kite Museum

Festival. He then spent more than a year studying the techniques himself.

He said the museum attracts about 100,000 visitors a year.

“The museum is a window through which we showcase the kite culture from across the world,” he said.

In Yangjiabu village, northeast of the Weifang city center, kites were originally byproducts of local woodblock New Year's prints, a national intangible cultural heritage item that dates back some 600 years.

In the beginning, standard prints were made into kites for children, and later, the bright colors and exaggerated figures of the prints became popular features of local kites.

Yan Kechen has carved woodblocks for more than 40 years and now demonstrates the skill at Yangjiabu Folk Art Park. He said his largest work

took three years to finish, while regular-sized blocks require about five days.

Another master, Yang Junyou, has 50 years of experience in printing. He said the technique he uses is the same as that used 600 years ago, except for the paint, which is a modern chemical product.

Although many people in the village can make New Year's prints now, not all make a living from it. Yan said he has had about 30 students, but only two of them have become masters.

The village produces about 21 million New Year's prints a year, many of them sold to more than 100 countries and regions overseas.

In contrast to Yangjiabu kites that focus on craftsmanship, kites made in the Wangjiazhuangzi area highlight practicality and industrialization.

The community, compris-

\$32.2 million

annual revenue from kite industry in Weifang's Wangjiazhuangzi area

ing four villages, was honored as the Chinese modern kite industry base by the International Kite Union this year. It has a total population of 4,650 people, about 2,200 of whom are involved in kite and kite component manufacturing businesses.

There are more than 80 kite factories in the area with annual production capacity of 80 million kites and revenue of 200 million yuan (\$32.2 million).

“Many local people can make kites in the traditional way, but the handmade kites require much time and the profit is low,” said Yuan Yan, chief of the community. “So 20 years ago, we started industrial kite manufacturing.”

Yuan said an industry chain has been formed in the area, with local companies specializing in different parts of the kites.

Sun Yuemei, 39 years old, opened her own kite factory 10 years ago after being a worker at another factory for two years.

Her factory hires 50 workers, all local farmers, in its busy season, which lasts from November through May, and about 30 workers the rest of the year.

It produces a maximum of 10,000 kites a day during the busy season, Sun said.

“The busy season of kite manufacturing happens to be the off-season on the farm,” she said.

Sun said the factory earned revenue of 2 billion yuan for the 12-month's ending this May, increasing from 1.5 million yuan a year earlier.

“People are increasingly interested in outdoor sports,” she said. “Flying kites combines Chinese traditional handicraft and outdoor sport trends that are popular in the West.”

She added that the designs of her kites are mostly traditional themes, such as goldfish and swallows, to avoid copyright disputes.

The factory also makes customized kites and blank kites so customers can add their own designs.



A visitor photographs a giant mural at the 2015 Chinese Painting Festival in Weifang. JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

Weifang invests in rich cultural heritage

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2,000 art galleries
in Weifang

The hometown of many of China's leading artists and cultural scholars including Mo Yan, the country's first winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Weifang is a recognized city of culture whose government has been making efforts to improve local cultural and tourism facilities and services.

In the past century, local artists developed a unique school of calligraphy and painting, whose works can be found in some of the 2,000 galleries across the city. Today, Weifang is one of the most important painting markets in the nation.

More than 1,000 painting exhibitions are held in the city every year. The annual Chinese Painting Festival, one of the most influential, attracted more than 10,000 artworks last year, with trade volume valued at nearly 1 billion yuan (\$161.1 million).

A project in the Shihuyuan area in the city center is one of the newest cultural attractions in Weifang. Covering nearly 10 hectares, the project has some buildings that date back more than 200 years, while newly added constructions have been built in the style of the same period.

The complex combines art exhibitions and trade, traditional displays and shopping facilities. It will house food vendors, handicraft stalls and souvenir shops when completed by Oct 1, although part of it is already open.

A traditional-style stage stands behind the Wenchang Pavilion, a 22-meter-tall landmark in the area, where art performances have been shown every evening since May 22.

About 50 cultural activities have been held in the area over the past two months, including international painting exhibitions, with all open to tourists free of charge.

Du Gang, manager of the area, said the local government spent 1.4 billion yuan on the project, although the total rent for business facilities in the area is only expected to meet half that investment.

“The government has never wished to cover its investment with rent, because its true aim is to let the people enjoy the benefit of culture,” Du said.

In Weifang's Qingzhou

county, the 1.3-square-kilometer Songcheng area opened a painting and antique market in 2012, which has become a popular tourism site.

The area not only boasts buildings and roads built in the style of the Song Dynasty (960-1279), a reminder of its most prosperous period, but showcases about 100 performers demonstrating Chinese intangible cultural heritage items.

“We invited the masters to come out of their homes to show their skills at the site, not only to attract more tourists, but also to promote the heritage by letting more people see them and know them,” said Gao Lingyun, publicity chief for Qingzhou.

Qingzhou Museum is China's only top-level museum housed in a county, and welcomes about 300,000 visitors each year.

One of its most valuable collections is an exam paper belonging to Zhao Bingzhong, who in 1598 won the title of *zhuangyuan*, an honor given to the scholar who achieved the highest score at the highest level of the Chinese imperial examinations.

It is the only original exam paper of a *zhuangyuan* preserved on the Chinese mainland, on which Zhao wrote his suggestions for the emperor on how to improve the management of officials and the country.

The museum also has about 4,000 items from the Xiangshan tomb from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), of which about 2,000 are on display.

The tomb was discovered by accident during a construction project in 2006. The relics discovered were dug out from an accessory pit, which means there could be even more treasures still buried in the main tomb chamber, said a guide at the museum.

Other tourist attractions in Weifang include Yishan mountain in Linqu county, a national 5A-level tourism area with a Taoist background, and the archaeological sites and museums for dinosaurs in Zhucheng county.

Zhucheng: Where dinosaurs roamed

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While millions of people worldwide were stunned by the dinosaurs created in the Hollywood blockbuster *Jurassic World*, few know of the real world of the prehistoric giants in Zhucheng county in Weifang, Shandong province.

Dinosaur fossils have been found at more than 30 sites in Zhucheng, covering a total of 1,600 square kilometers, when the total area of the county is only about 2,200 sq km.

Dinosaur fossils were first discovered in the region in 1964. When prospectors from the former Ministry of Geology were looking for oil, they discovered fossilized dinosaur remains later identified as being from a Shantungosaurus giganteus, the largest non-sauropod dinosaur yet found.

Following that there have

been three excavation projects, the latest of which was conducted in 2008, when a museum for the Tyrannosaurus, commonly known as T. rex, was built on a site where archaeologists found fossils of the Zhuchengtyrannus magnus, Asia's largest and China's only tyrannosaur species.

Part of the original excavation site is exposed to visitors with some 2,000 pieces of fossils that belong to four dinosaurs, including a tyrannosaur.

Yan Tuanxiang, chief of the museum, said both carnivorous and herbivorous dinosaurs had been identified at the site, which means there could have been a hunt taking place before all were killed by a sudden mudslide.

Compared with T. rex, which usually draws the spotlight in movies, the real superstar in the museum is a fossil

of the Y. rex, or Yutyrannus huali, the world's only found tyrannosaur with feathers.

The Y. rex was about 9 meters long and weighed 1.4 metric tons. Its sharp teeth and claws made it a nightmare for its contemporary dinosaurs, Yan said.

The fossil, discovered in Liaoning province, is seen as evidence that birds evolved from dinosaurs.

In another museum, the Zhucheng Dinosaur Cubic, 48 restored dinosaur skeletons are displayed, in addition to pictures, models and videos.

The most valuable exhibits include some ceratopsid dinosaur skeletons, said Wang Kebai, director of the Zhucheng Dinosaur Culture Research Center.

The ceratopsid dinosaurs were believed to exist only in North America until 2008, when Chinese scientists dis-

covered fossils of the genus in Zhucheng. They named them *Sinoceratops zhuchengensis*.

Wang said the Chinese ceratopsid dinosaurs were ancestors of their North American counterparts.

“Some of them traveled from Asia to North America, as the two continents were once connected,” he said.

Near the Zhucheng Dinosaur Cubic is the world's largest dinosaur fossil site, where more than 10,000 fossils have been found in diggings 500-m long and 26-m deep.

Based on this, the local government is planning a new tourism area that will include exhibitions and interactive displays. The project will take about 10 years to complete, Wang said.

The 2008 excavation also found more than 11,000 dinosaur footprints that date back some 100 million years. The



The Zhucheng Dinosaur Cubic houses 48 restored dinosaur skeletons. JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

site is not yet open to tourists.

Dinosaur attractions in the area welcome 500,000 visitors a year, mostly children. Activities are sometimes organized, such as simulated fossil excavations, dinosaur drawing and

model skeleton installation.

“The dinosaur relics are resources owned by all of humankind,” said the director. He added that the government plans to cooperate with Steven Spielberg, producer

of the *Jurassic Park* movie series.

“These breathtaking dinosaur sites will give him inspiration, and maybe the next episode of the story will happen in Zhucheng,” Wang said.