



Colored pottery figures (left) and the head of a stone bodhisattva statue are part of Taiyuan Museum's collection. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The bird-shaped zun — a kind of wine vessel — is the most precious item at Shanxi Museum.



The beast-shaped gong (left) and a copper plate held by a man riding a legendary animal are the precious bronzeware items at Shanxi Museum.



A Neolithic Age colored pottery bowl in Shanxi Museum

By YUAN SHENGGAO

As museums can give vivid presentations of the past and present of a region, a tour of one is usually the easiest and quickest way for many tourists to learn about local history, culture and life.

This is especially true in Shanxi province, as it is said to boast one of the largest numbers of historical relics in China.

According to statistics released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration in 2023, Shanxi had 197 museums, including those operated by both State-owned institutions and private entities.

The provincial capital of Taiyuan has about 101 museums, meaning that there was one for every 54,000 residents.

In comparison, Beijing, the national hub of culture, said in a recent plan that it expects to have one museum for every 50,000 residents by 2035. This means Taiyuan's museum penetration rate is higher than, or at least will be on par with, the capital.

Shanxi's cultural authorities are pinning hopes on the role of museums in the protection and development of cultural heritage. This role is now becoming prominent with the use of technologies, which offer solutions for relics protection and creating new ways for presentation — for instance, via 3D printing, virtual reality and artificial intelligence — that bring relics to life and tell vivid stories.

In Taiyuan, popular museums include the Shanxi Museum, Jinci Temple Museum, Museum of Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577) Murals, and the Taiyuan Museum of City's Memory. Among all the museums in Shanxi, Shanxi Museum is the most famous.

Shanxi Museum

It covers 112,000 square meters in land area and 52,000 sq m in floor space. It is the largest public institution in the province dedicated to the collection, preservation, research and display of cultural relics.

Shanxi Museum boasts a collection of more than 500,000 items. It is also home to about 110,000 ancient books. Its collection mainly includes objects sourced from archaeological excavations since the 1920s and what has been collected since then. Included in this is bronzeware, pottery, porcelain, stone carvings, Buddhist statues, murals, calligraphy works and paintings.

Among its bronzeware exhibits, the most famous include a bird-shaped *zun* — a kind of wine vessel — dating to the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-771 BC); a beast-shaped *gong* — another kind of wine vessel — dating to the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC); and a copper plate held by a man riding an animal dating to the Warring States Period (475-221 BC).

Other precious exhibits include jade items from the Western Zhou Dynasty, wall paintings, stone carvings, ceramics of various periods and calligraphy by renowned local calligrapher Fu Shan (1607-84).



With the help of digital technology, visitors can look at the details of a wall painting at the Museum of Northern Qi Dynasty Murals. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



From left: Shanxi Museum is the largest and most comprehensive museum in the province. Jinci Temple Museum in Taiyuan is famed as a "museum of ancient Chinese buildings". PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Taiyuan Museum is another large-scale museum in the same city. It has more than 50,000 items collected in more than 10 categories that include porcelain, pottery, jade, bronzeware, paintings and furniture.

In Taiyuan, there are also museums dedicated to specific fields.

Jinci Temple

The Jinci Temple Museum is the oldest ancestral temple complex in China. It was built as a temple for Shuyu, the first monarch of the vassal state of Jin (1033-376 BC).

Jinci's historical assets include gardens,

ancient buildings, sculptures, wall paintings and stone steles. There are more than 100 preserved ancient buildings built from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), earning it a reputation as a "museum of ancient Chinese buildings".

High-tech museums

The Museum of Northern Qi Dynasty Murals, located in the northeastern suburbs of Taiyuan, focuses on the exhibition of wall paintings of a tomb built in that period. A prominent feature of the museum is that it has "activated" the scenes depicted by the

paintings through 3D animation technology, giving visitors an immersive experience.

Also using technologies to enhance visitor experiences is the Digital Museum of Tianlongshan Grottoes in Taiyuan. The museum has used 3D-printing technology to duplicate the statues of the renowned Buddhist grottoes, allowing visitors to have close contact with the artworks.

Tianlongshan is another Buddhist cave art treasure house in Shanxi next only to the Yungang Grottoes in Datong. With carving beginning during the Eastern Wei Dynasty (534-550), the site has 25 caves and 500 stat-

ues spread over a distance of 500 meters.

Outside Taiyuan, there are many museums with prominent features. One of the most famous is the Yungang Grottoes Museum in Datong. It is a large exhibition venue in the renowned Yungang Grottoes Scenic Area.

Yungang Grottoes

Yungang Grottoes is one of the three most famous Buddhist grottoes sites in China, along with Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province, and Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang, Henan province.

It was built during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534). The grottoes were carved out of cliffs at Wuzhou Mountain in Datong's northwestern suburbs.

According to historical documents, a total of 54 main caves were carved out during the period from 460-524. Today, 45 main caves remain intact, which house more than 59,000 statues.

Yungang Grottoes was added to the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list in 2001. UNESCO said the site has a universal value as it represents "the outstanding achievements of Buddhist cave art in China".

The Yungang Grottoes Museum showcases the culture and history of the renowned Buddhist art treasure trove. It is, as well as the grottoes, managed and operated by the Yungang Grottoes Academy.

To improve the experience of visitors to the museum, the academy is using the latest technologies to represent the artworks.

Replicas made with 3D-printing technology are exhibited there. In addition, the use of digital, virtual and augmented reality technologies allows visitors to explore the grottoes' history and hidden details.

Jin State Museum

For tourists who want to tap into the source of documented history of Shanxi, the Jin State Museum in Houma city is something they cannot afford to miss.

The Jin State Museum was the first large-scale museum in Shanxi to be built based on a cultural relics site and the first Jin culture-themed museum in China.

The most precious exhibit at the museum is the Shuyu square *ding* — a bronze vessel with inscriptions that include the name of Shuyu. A square *ding* was the highest-level ritual vessel in ancient times.

Shuyu was the first monarch of Jin state. Researchers said the square *ding* was the only discovered bronze vessel owned by the founding monarch of Jin.

If the Jin State Museum is related to the beginning of the recorded history of Shanxi, the Yuncheng Museum is the one with material evidence pointing to a much earlier history without written language.

It has a collection of up to 20,422 relics and artifacts, including pottery made during the Neolithic Age some 4,000 years ago.

Li Yao contributed to this story.

Exhibition focusing on Jin state artifacts opens in Armenian capital

By YUAN SHENGGAO

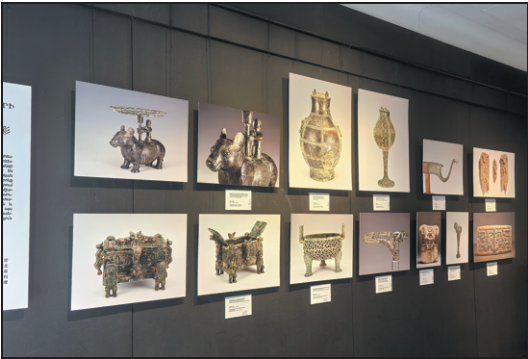
A digital exhibition showcasing the history and culture of the vassal state of Jin (1033-376 BC), titled *The Achievements of Jin Kingdom: Treasures of the Zhou Dynasty from Shanxi*, opened at the National Museum of Folk Art in Armenia's capital city of Yerevan on July 12.

The exhibition, featuring more than 50 digitized images of important cultural artifacts, provides visitors with the chance to explore the 600-year history of the Jin state and its renowned bronze art.

The vassal state of Jin, which belonged to the Western and Eastern Zhou dynasties (c. 11th century-256 BC), is where the documented history of Shanxi began.

This exhibition marks the first collaboration among Shanxi Museum, the National Museum of Folk Art in Armenia, the Development Center for Armenian-Chinese Cooperation and the Belt and Road Cultural Development Association.

The exhibition uses digital display tech-



From left: A photographic display of ancient relics is part of the exhibition at the National Museum of Folk Art of Armenia. Crowds of visitors attend the digital show from Shanxi at the Yerevan museum. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



niques to showcase valuable bronze and jade artifacts from Shanxi Museum. It offers a glimpse into the unique regional characteristics of Jin culture and daily life in

ancient Shanxi, as well as insights into the spiritual beliefs and aesthetics of the Chinese people.

The bronze artifacts on show offer an

overview of the evolution of the Zhou dynasties' ritual and music systems, providing valuable material for the study of early Chinese political institutions.

"Through these digital images, we hope to elucidate the historical evolution, ritual and music systems, social life and artistic achievements of the Jin state during the Zhou Dynasty for the Armenian people," said Guo Hong, director of Shanxi Museum's ancient books conservation department. "This exhibition aims to deepen the Armenian people's understanding of Chinese history and Shanxi culture," Guo added.

The exhibition will run until Sept 12. Following the opening ceremony, the collaborating parties held an academic seminar called Museum Exhibitions and Cultural Exchanges between China and Foreign Countries.

Armenia and China are friendly countries with exchanges dating back thousands of years. Armenia is also a participant of the Belt and Road Initiative. The digital exhibition marks an important move for cultural exchanges between Shanxi and Armenia under the framework of the BRI.

Xue Lin contributed to this story.