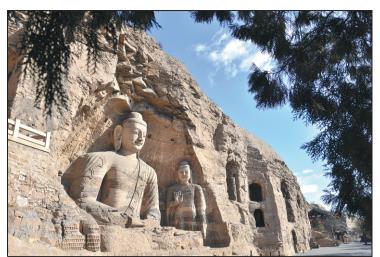
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Journey of discovery across Shanxi

Almost 30 teenagers from nine countries travel to province and learn about their Chinese ancestors



hanxi is one of the cultural roots of Chinese people, wherever they are. That's what a group of teenage reporters learned when they fin ished a recent journey across the North

A total of 29 teenagers from nine countries wrapped up a special study tour called the 2024 Shanxi Summer Camp for Young Reporters on Aug 9. The members reported what they saw and learned in throughout their tour.

During the 12 days, the tour covered 10-plus reputed places of historical interest, including Jinci Temple in Taiyuan, Yungang Grottoes in Datong, the Great Wall fortress of Yanmen Pass in Xinzhou, and the ancient city of Pingvao in Jinzhong

assigned to the summer camp, informing members of the history of the sites they visited, engaging them in cultural heritage protection activities and teaching them livestreaming and other skills related to new-media reporting.

As all the camp members are from overseas Chinese communities, they showed a keen interest in tapping into the history

Cindy Liu from Canada said she had prepared herself for the trip by learning some

of the history and culture of Shanxi. "I learned that Shanxi, with a history of more than 5,000 years, is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization," Liu said. "And I was also informed that the long history has left a wealth of cultural assets here that have earned Shanxi the fame as one of China's top regions in terms of preserved cultural heritage items."

Liu brought with her a question that struck a chord among the camp members. "Some overseas Chinese communities are usually known as Chinatowns to many." Liu said. "But we overseas Chinese like to call them *tangrenjie* — the towns of Tang people. So my question was what is the origin of this term."

"I guess in Shanxi I could find the answer to the question why our folks like to call ourselves Tang people," Liu said.

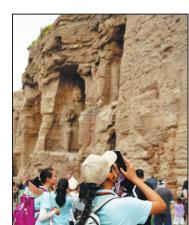
She visited Jinci Temple in Taivuan, the capital city of Shanxi province. A teacher showed the camp members a stone stele in the temple, with inscriptions written by Li Shimin, one of the founding emperors of the powerful Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The teacher said that why overseas Chinese like to call their communities "towns with this dynasty that was founded by Li and his father.

"Tang was a powerful and prosperous dynasty in Chinese history, featuring a developed economy, flourishing culture and booming international exchanges,"

said the teacher. "China has two powerful dynasties that people have taken pride in for thousands of years — the Han (206 BC-AD 220) and

Tang," the teacher further explained. source of the Tang Dynasty because Li Shi-



Experienced teachers from Shanxi were Overseas students take photos of the



This was the first time I tried my hands on relics repairs. It was a mission impossible for me this time, but it gave me a clear idea on the importance, difficulty and imperativeness of cultural heritage protection."

Taiyuan and used to be military governors of the city, the political center of Shanxi. They country and founded the Tang Dynasty.

But the teacher noted that the Tang Dynasty was not the first to use Tang as the name of their sovereignties.

"Jinci Temple now we are visiting is something closely related to the earliest Tang state," said the teacher. "It is known to many that Jinci is an ancestral temple dedin the Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-256 BC) — and its founding monarch Shuvu.

"But I must tell you all that the Jin state was also called Tang and the full name of the founding monarch is Tang Shuyu," the teacher said. He added that the Jin state was where the recorded history of Shanxi

Legend has it that Ji Song became the econd monarch of the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC) when he ed his father to become the second king, he was young. He once played with his younger brother, Shuyu, sending him a lump of The playful game was recorded by his

ministers, who required the monarch to give his brother a certain territory as a fief- expanded during the following millennia, Hall of Sacred Mother, saying that "this dom, appointing him the king of it because becoming the largest ancient building might be the oldest tree still alive in Chi-Ji honored his promise and Shuyu

 $\operatorname{called}$  Tang — in the central part of today's Shanxi - at that time.Shuyu made a great contribution to the nent of the fiefdom, by leading

building irrigation projects. When Xiefu, the son of Shuyu, succeedchanged the fiefdom's name to Jin.

locals to improve agriculture through

Xiefu built Jinci - which means the ancestral temple of the Jin state - to memorialize his father. The ancestral temple was renovated and

The quest of the spiritual roots of over-

of the young reporters and broadcast across the world through livestreams. Kim Woo-jin from South Korea used his camera to record every detail of Jinci. He

told his friends and audience about his dis-

coveries of the ancestral temple complex

"The temple has some oldest things in China," Kim said. "It is, for instance, the oldest ancestral temple and the oldest roy-

al garden in China." He targeted his camera to a huge cypress tree, which stands at the left side of the

He said there are two trees of the same make stone rubbing

the two trees - one at the right side died in the early 1900s, only leaving its trunk were planted by Shuyu himself and have a history of more than 2,900 years."

The teacher affirmed that the age of the trees is not a legend. "Carbon-14 dating ved that they are 2,600 to 2,990 years old," he said.

While tapping into the history and culture of Shanxi, the camp members were offered an immersive experience of how the historical assets are protected and cul-

inheritance in Jiexiu, Jinzhong city, the images on the paper. To their delight,

prints, are one of the major inventions from ancient China, Using paper and ink. is an important skill for preserving and the engraved surfaces can be copied as images to depict history.

Under the instruction of the studio's information about history culture, art and teachers, the members used pieces of life in ancient China," the teacher said. "They moistened paper to cover the surfaces of stone steles with inscriptions or carved ics but also the carrier of history and precious images. They then used stiff brushes to inscriptions or images to light.

When the paper was almost dry, they used inked pads to tap or squeeze the sur-At a studio for heritage protection and face, leaving the inked inscriptions or taught by professionals how to repair and when the paper was peeled off, they saw impressions of the engraved texts or picture that preserving a historical and cultural few centimeters to 17 meters in height.

A teacher said this traditional technique passing down Chinese cultural heritage. "The stone rubbing works contain loads of

are not only the copied images of cultural relmemories from China's past." At Yungang Grottoes Academy, an institution engaged in the operation, research and protection of the famed Yungang Grot-

preserve historical relics.

1,500 years ago would be a challenge in any country. But Yungang Grottoes fulfilled the task thanks to the efforts of researchers and professionals in recent decades. Yungang Grottoes was built during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), when Datong, which was then called Pingcheng,

served as the nation's capital. The grottoes

were carved out of sandstone cliffs at Wuzhou According to historical documents, a total of 54 main caves were carved out during the period from 460-524. Today, 45 niques, should be employed. main caves remain intact, which house

more than 59,000 statues, ranging from a





Camp members search for information about Pingyao when walking on the city

The video productions of the camp members show the unique traits of vigor, curiosity, innovation and originality. They have presented vivid stories of

Shanxi with their own

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points of view." Guo Yanbin, an official from the United Front Work Department of the Shanxi Committee of the

UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in 2001. UNESCO said in a document that the site has a universal value as it represents the outstanding achievements of Buddhist cave art in China".

While proud of its increasing recognition in global academic circles, the local authorities and researchers understand that, after Yungang Grottoes having been battered by wind, rain and snow for over 1,500 years, protecting this precious cultural heritage site has become a pressing

Initial preservation work on the grottoes started in the 1930s and systematic protection has been made since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Efforts in protection have been enhanced since the establishment of Yun gang Grottoes Academy in February 2021. An expert at the academy, who was teaching the camp members about relics repair and protection, said that the main target is to maintain the authenticity of the relics and the grottoes as a whole. For this purpose, he added that, a scientific and systematic approach, which combines both traditional skills and modern tech-

"We are teaching you some fundamentals on repair," the expert said. "But I want to tell you that repairing relics require

sections of relics can take several years to

The camp members made their attempts on some replica wall paintings. During that process, Piao Zhiyan from South Korea was careful about everything, although he didn't expect an immediate

"This was the first time I tried my hands on relics repair," Piao said. "It was a mission impossible for me this time, but it gave me a clear idea on the importance lifficulty and imperativeness of cultural Alicia Jiang and Jin Jiavi from Spain

also showed a keen interest in relics repair. 'Compared with seeing the exhibits and hearing the stories of relics, engaging yourselves in relics repair will help you etter understand the value of cultural heritage," Jiang said. In many locales in Shanxi, the camp

members had the opportunity to make cultural heritage items, like wood carvings and pottery.

Learning to improve their livestreaming and video-making skills was another important task for the camp members There were dedicated teachers to help them in video-making procedures, like interviews, shooting and post production. improvements he made are always in the details. When hosting a short video featuring a Shanxi merchant residence in Jinzhong, he was confused by the pronunciation of Shanxi and Shaanxi.

"This is the Qiao Family Courtyard in Jinzhong, Shaanxi ... oh sorry, Shanxi province," he said to the camera. A teacher told him that the pronunciation differs with the accent and he immediately found the

Guo Yanbin, an official from the United

Front Work Department of the Shanxi Committee of the Communist Party of China, had been with the young camp members during their journey. He said he felt the growth of the youngsters during the 12 days in terms of livestreaming and video

"The video productions of the camp members show the unique traits of vigor, curiosity, innovation and originality," Guo said. "They have presented vivid stories of Shanxi with their own points of view."

The summer camp was sponsored by the Chinese Language and Culture Education Foundation of China, an organization promoting Chinese language and cultural

Under the arrangement of the organization, four Chinese-language schools from Germany, the Netherlands, Pakistan and Myanmar signed agreements with two schools in Taiyuan on Aug 8, aiming for enhanced curriculum and teaching meth-

odology cooperation. SCS Delft, a Chinese-language school in Delft, the Netherlands, is among the

schools to have signed up. Liu Yan, an SCS Delft teacher, said he with the sharing of resources between China's and overseas schools through more











nbers visit the Great Wall fortress of Yanmen Pass in Xinzhou. FFNG SIQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY Students learn to make wood carvings at a studio in Jiexiu, provided to china daily Camp members From left: Local students perform the traditional instrument of zheng at the closing ceremony of the summer camp. LIYAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Two camp members host a livestream at an ancient castle in Jiexiu city. LIYAO / FOR CHINA DAILY Camp me attend a class on video post production. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY