

CULTURAL HERITAGE



As he carries out research at the Hongshilazi site in Panshi, Jilin province, archaeologist Meng Qingxu often imagines such scenes: during the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), also the World Anti-Fascist War, under the oppressive rule of Japanese invaders, the entire Northeast China was shrouded in darkness. Yet, like fireflies, resistance fighters from various directions flocked to this area, gradually illuminating the land with their strength.

Later, under the encirclement and suppression of Japanese forces and the establishment of the "Manchukuo" puppet regime in Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces, and part of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, these small points of light were extinguished one by one. Yet, even the faintest remaining sparks had the potential to ignite a great fire, ultimately leading to victory, he says.

These scenes describe how the Northeast United Resistance Army played a significant role in the war.

On Sept 18, 1931, Japanese invaders plotted an explosion on a railway section owned by a Japanese company near Shenyang, Liaoning, to falsely accuse Chinese troops of sabotage, marking the beginning of the war. Later, they occupied Northeast China and established the "Manchukuo" puppet regime.

Chinese people then fought back. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, they gradually formed the army and fought as guerrillas deep in the mountains where winter often lingers for more than five months a year with a temperature as low as -40 C.

Wearing poor clothing, armed with rudimentary weapons, and lacking permanent bases for 14 years, the soldiers endured extreme weather conditions and starvation but persisted in their brave efforts to tie down hundreds of thousands of enemies, preventing them from advancing into other areas of the country.

When the war ended in 1945, only about 700 soldiers from this army had survived, a number which had reached more than 30,000 in 1937, according to Sun Taizhi, an official from Jilin province's Party history research office.

Amid the 80th anniversary of the victory in the War of Resistance, people are telling more accurate stories of this heroic army, using the latest archaeological evidence.

Over the years, though many stories about the army have been told, people have found few traces of their battles. As guerrillas, they could hardly establish stable base areas. Moreover, the already identified bases were in shambles. With time, people cannot find obvious traces aboveground, says Meng, a researcher at the Jilin Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

That's where archaeological studies come into play. Archaeologists led by Meng have studied the Hongshilazi site since 2021, which was used as an early base area against Japanese aggression in Northeast China.

The archaeologists have discovered more than 3,300 relics in an excavation area of 5,000 square meters, and determined the site's layout and its four major types of relics: barracks, lookout posts, combat fortifications, and training grounds, says Li Ningning, the executive head of the archaeological team.



Left: An archaeologist excavates and cleans a *diyinzi*, underground or semi-subterranean dwelling where Northeast United Resistance Army soldiers lived decades ago from the Hongshilazi site in Panshi, Jilin province. **Right:** A technician takes photos of the cultural relics unearthed from the site. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Digging for true war stories

Experts study resistance army relics, putting together a historic puzzle of hardship, bravery, and perseverance, report **Wang Ru** in Beijing and **Liu Mingtai** in Changchun, Jilin.



Top left: A visitor to the exhibition of relics unearthed from the sites of Northeast United Resistance Army looks at the weapons used by resistance fighters at the Museum of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. **Top right:** A visitor takes a photo of a coat worn by a soldier. **Above left:** A pair of crudely-made shoes worn by a soldier on display in Beijing. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY **Above right:** An oil bottle used by the soldiers on display at the Northeast United Resistance Army historical exhibition hall in Benxi, Liaoning province. LI XUEQING / CHINA DAILY

She says they have also unearthed more than 1,000 pottery, iron, bronze, porcelain, and glass artifacts, which were used as weapons, farming tools, and daily utensils.

A highlight of their discoveries is clarifying what a *miying* (secret camp) actually was. The word *miying* comes from oral accounts of soldiers who survived the war and refers to their secret barracks in the mountains. Archaeologists' findings discovered that it was a more complicated system than originally thought.

A *miying* often finds its location

in the dense forests deep in the mountains, on a leeward slope. At its entrance were multiple obvious and hidden outposts. Entering the *miying* are the barracks, which often had underground or semi-subterranean dwellings. Surrounding the settlement area were many combat fortifications and large platforms for outdoor activities, says Meng.

He also describes the underground or semi-subterranean dwellings, called *diyinzi* by local people. They were often built on the foot of a hillside to comply with

the mountainous terrain. One such dwelling excavated at the Hongshilazi site, for example, was made by digging a 3-meter-deep hole in the ground and concealing the opening with branches and turf.

"For fear of being discovered by their enemies, the soldiers gave up comfort and built such 'houses', which were stuffy, humid, and dark, to survive," says Meng.

"In the 20th century, why should some people live in such poor conditions? They left their comfortable homes, dived deep into the mountains, and lived in shabby

underground houses, enduring every hardship. All they wanted was to drive out the Japanese invaders from their homeland," he adds.

Aside from continued archaeological efforts to uncover more facts, stories of the Northeast United Resistance Army have been told in museums.

The Northeast United Resistance Army historical exhibition hall in Benxi, Liaoning province, showcases a saber once used by Yang Jingyu, one of the founders of the forces who arrived in 1934 and established base areas.

According to Zhou Hao, director of the exhibition hall's research department, the 1.03-meter saber was specially made for Yang, who was 1.93 meters tall. When Yang organized guerrilla fighting in Benxi, he was saved by villager Jiang Guo'en, and they became friends. In 1938, before leaving for Jilin, Yang gave his saber to Jiang as a gift. Two years later, Yang sacrificed his life in Jilin.

Soon after Yang's army left, Japanese troops rushed to Jiang's family to get revenge. Jiang heard of the plan and hurriedly led his family members to hide in the mountains, putting the saber on the beam of his house.

After they failed to find Jiang and his family members, Japanese invaders set fire to his house, causing the saber's handle to burn away, leaving only the blade. In 2006, the saber was donated to the exhibition hall.

To confirm if it was the actual saber that once belonged to Yang, staff from the hall immediately took it to Liu Xishun, in his 90s living in Shenyang, Liaoning, who once worked as an orderly for Yang.

"Liu was very excited at first glance and told us it was the saber Yang held," says Zhou.

"He said at that time, Yang rode a horse and had this large saber slung on his left side and a Mauser military pistol on his right. It was quite imposing! Liu brandished this saber and began singing the army song composed by Yang in 1938," says Zhou.

To mark the 80th anniversary of victory in the war against Japanese aggression, *A Special Exhibition of Relics from the Sites of the Northeast United Resistance Army* opened at the Museum of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, putting the remarkable efforts of the army in the spotlight through 1,289 artifacts, many of which were unearthed from the Hongshilazi site, as well as the Jiguanshan site in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, another significant base for the resistance army.

The exhibition also restores and replicates the army's living environment from spring to winter.

"Visitors can have an immersive experience so they understand that each season posed different challenges for the soldiers in the mountains of Northeast China," says Meng.

"It rained frequently in the spring, so they found it easier to find pot-herbs as food, but the underground houses were extremely humid. Summer was also humid, and sunlight could not filter into the houses. Autumn signified the coming winter, when the mountains were covered with heavy snow. They had to keep warm and forage for food while taking part in the battles," he adds.

Meng mentions this is another time they have organized such a large-scale exhibition based on archaeological research at Hongshilazi outside Jilin. The first exhibition was held in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, in 2023.

"We want to honor the wishes of the soldiers. First, they longed to see Yan'an, the settlement of the CPC Central Committee at the time, a sacred place in their hearts; then to Beijing, to see the New China they sacrificed their lives to establish, and to tell them we finally obtained victory," says Meng.

Li Xueqing contributed to this story.

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Archaeological discoveries confirm Qin governance system

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Pottery fragments and jars bearing a seal that reads "*lang xian*", which archaeologists believe is an abbreviation for "*langya xian*" or Langya county, have recently been unearthed in a village of the West Coast New Area in Qingdao, East China's Shandong province.

Archaeologists agree that the seal imprint is the first official seal-type relic discovery that directly confirms the establishment of Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) commanderies and counties in the region.

The excavations were conducted from March to May by the Qingdao Institute of Cultural Relics Protection and Archaeology, in collaboration with the West Coast Museum, at the site, approximately 800

meters north of Yingqian village in Langya town.

The excavation team unearthed 112 sets of artifacts from 51 ruins, including 13 tombs, six wells, and nine ash ditches. The pottery jars and fragments that bear the seal imprint "*lang xian*" were found in two ancient wells, making them the excavation's most important findings. Other unearthed artifacts include jade-ornamented swords and burial goods.

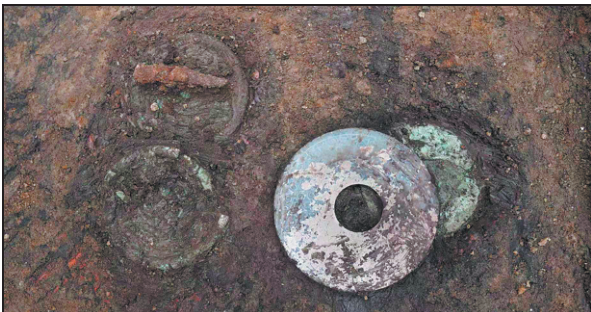
"The shape of the seal imprint and the font of the characters match known Qin Dynasty official imprints, marking the first time that official seal-type relics have been excavated, and confirming that the region embraced a commandery-county governance system during the Qin Dynasty," says Peng Yu, head of the Archaeological Research

Department of the Qingdao Institute of Cultural Relics Protection and Archaeology.

"The unearthing of '*lang xian*' inscriptions is a major breakthrough. It is like a missing piece of a puzzle that helps us better understand the history of the Qin Dynasty," Peng says.

Archaeologists have also uncovered a well-preserved network of ancient water facilities at the Yingqian village north site, offering new insights into handicraft production during the transition period from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) to the Qin and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasties.

The discovery, located in the excavation site's lower-lying western section, features an orderly, arranged complex, including two parallel ditches, 17 square pits, and two



Fragmentary remains of ritual objects placed over the head of the tomb occupant of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) discovered in Qingdao, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

water wells, all predating the Han Dynasty tomb area found in the site's higher eastern section.

Yin Fengchao, director of the Qingdao institute, says: "The integrated system using wells dug at higher elevations, ditches for water transport, and storage pits, reveals sophisticated hydraulic planning."

"While its exact function requires further study, preliminary analysis

suggests it supported water-intensive handicraft production," he adds.

The discovery at the Yingqian village north site corroborates historical records and, alongside the remains of high-status architectural complexes and kiln sites of the Qin Dynasty at the Langyatai Ruins, collectively testifies to the dynasty's governance in Language — including imperial tours to the east — as

part of its broader unification campaign, says Yin.

The Langyatai Ruins are also located in Langya town, 6 kilometers from the Yingqian village.

Excavation of the Langyatai Ruins revealed structural foundations atop the mountain, along with vestiges of rooms, pathways, and an advanced drainage system.

The Langyatai Ruins were identified in January as a major state project constructed during Emperor Qinshihuang's (259-210 BC) eastern tours.

"The findings will deepen our research into the area's political and cultural shifts during this pivotal era, offering new insights into China's territorial integration in its early age," says Yin.

"The discovery has not only turned the history of the Qin Dynasty's governance system in Qingdao from texts in historical books into physical evidence, but sketched a vivid historical picture of Langya as a regional administrative center, with its dignified burial relics and intricately arranged handicraft remnants," he adds.