

A mountain that scales China's history

During a 3,000-year span, emperors, poets and scholars made pilgrimages to Mount Taishan to pray to the gods, leaving behind hundreds of inscriptions and stone tablets, **Zhao Ruixue** reports in Tai'an, Shandong province.

Tarzan, whose paradise is in the African jungle, might also feel at home on Mount Taishan in Shandong province. Not only does the mountain share the cartoon figure's namesake (Tarzan is translated as *Taishan* in Chinese) but it is lush with green vegetation that could make for a comfortable environment for the tree-slinger.

Vegetation covers nearly 80 percent of the mountain, which has 989 species of flora, including 462 species of medicinal plants, such as multiflower knotweed, Taishan ginseng and Chinese gromwell, that are indigenous to the region. The mountain also has more than 200 animal species and 122 bird species.

One could only guess if Tarzan would appreciate the temples and stone tablets that dot the mountain. After all, it would be difficult for him to understand them.

Described by UNESCO as "a world-renowned treasure house of history and culture", Mount Taishan is ideal for people who want to learn about Chinese history while enjoying beautiful landscapes.

Named *Dong Yue* (the sacred mountain of the East), Mount Taishan is located in Tai'an. Jining, Confucius' hometown, lies to the south and Jinan, the provincial capital, to the north.

"Among the mountains of China, Mount Taishan is the most intertwined with Chinese history. Cultural interests and natural landscapes are well integrated into the mountain," said Du Xiaofan, a member of UNESCO's Beijing office.

Mount Taishan, with its dense forests and ancient temples, has been the site for imperial pilgrimages for roughly 2,000 years, according to UNESCO, and the artistic masterpieces found throughout the mountain are in perfect harmony with the natural landscape.

Standing 1,545 meters above sea level, the mountain is by no means the tallest in China, but it is among the first to be blessed with the sunrise's golden hues because of its geographical location in East China. It was regarded in ancient times as the closest position to the sky.

Over 3,000 years, Chinese emperors have made pilgrimages to Mount Taishan to pray to the gods. Scholars and poets have marveled at the majesty of the mountain and composed poems and prose in honor of it, some inscribing them on the mountain.

Twelve emperors, beginning with Qin Shihuang, the first emperor that unified China in 221 BC, have paid homage in a ritual called "Fengshan Sacrifices" at Mount Taishan, said Lyu Jixiang, a researcher with Taishan's management committee.

"There are more than 2,000 rock inscriptions and stone tablets testifying to visits by emperors and scholars," said Lyu.

Lyu said more than 10,000 poems and works of prose have been found.



PHOTOS BY JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY

Among the mountains of China, Mount Taishan is the most intertwined with Chinese history, says UNESCO officer Du Xiaofan.

Located at the foot of the mountain, the Dai Temple is a must-see. Measuring 405 meters by 236 meters, Dai Temple is the largest and best-preserved structure on Taishan. Built in the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) as a site at which emperors paid their respects to the gods, the temple was expanded and renovated by rulers of the Tang (AD 618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties.

Han Emperor Liu Che (141-86 BC) visited Mount Taishan ten times. It is said the emperor planted 1,000 cypresses at the Dai Temple, thought only five survive today. Two of the five have had their barks stripped but surprisingly some of their branches are still greeting tourists with green leaves.

The Tiankuang Hall, the temple's main structure, houses a giant Taoist mural that is 3.3 meters high and 62 meters long and depicts the god of Taishan Mountain on an inspection tour. The mural details forests, palaces, bridges, riding beasts and 697 people and was painted during the Song Dynasty.

Parts of the mural have been damaged, though it is slated for repairs this year, said Zhao Peng, deputy director of Tai'an Museum.

The Dai Temple is also called "the forest of stone tablets" because it houses more than 300 stone tablets, Zhao said.

At the summit of the mountain is an address made during one of the "Fengshan Sacrifices" rites that was written by Emperor Li Longji (who

reigned from AD 712-756) during the Tang Dynasty.

Emperor Li took the rite seriously. He selected 1,000 horses and a massive army and began his journey to the temple from the then capital of Chang'an. Emperor Li carved his address in an entire cliff to show his achievements.

At the summit, you will also see several monuments marking Confucius' visits.

"The Platform for Viewing Lu Kingdom" is where Confucius scanned over the Chinese kingdom and where an upright slab of stone is inscribed with "Confucius finds the world small".

The Azure Cloud Temple at the summit has become a popular place for people to burn incense and pray for their health and happiness. To protect the environment, the management committee for the mountain has prohibited incenses longer than 50 cm.

Statistics from the local tourism administration shows 48.3 million tourists visited the city last year, generating 44.17 billion yuan (\$7.08 billion), which accounted for 15.8 percent of Tai'an's GDP.

In recent years, the local government has introduced several projects to enrich its tourism industry. Among them are performances to re-enact the "Fengshan Sacrifices" at Fanta Wild Adventure Park.

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A giant Taoist mural from the Song Dynasty (960-1279) depicts a grand inspection by the deities of Mount Taishan, which features forests, palaces, bridges and 697 people.

IF YOU GO

Travel tips

The popular eastern route is dubbed the "Imperial Way" because it was historically favored by emperors. Nearly 7,000 steps snake up the mountain and the route is dotted with sacred spots, carvings and inscriptions by China's famous literati and rulers.

- From the Red Gate, tourists will encounter such sites as the Middle Heaven's Gate, the Wudafu Pine, the 1,600-step 18 Bends and more than 300 inscribed cliffs.

- You can also take a tour bus for 30 yuan (\$4.80) at Tianwaicun vil-

lage to Middle Heaven's Gate.

- From Middle Heaven's Gate, take a cable car to South Heaven's Gate located at the top of the mountain for 80 yuan (\$12.80).

- From the South Heaven's Gate, tourists can hike to Jade Emperor Peak, the summit of the mountain. Southeast of the peak is a stone pagoda named Sun-Watching Peak because it is an ideal spot to watch the sunrise.

- Tourists can also take the ropeway from Peach Blossom Ravine at the western part of the mountain, which will take you directly to the South

Heaven's Gate.

- The temperature at the summit is usually seven degrees lower than at the foot of the mountain.

How to get there:

- High-speed trains run from Beijing and Shanghai to Tai'an every couple of hours.

- A ticket of admission for Mount Taishan is 127 yuan (\$20.36) from Feb 1 to Nov 30. It costs 110 yuan (\$17.63) from Dec 1 to Jan 31.

- ZHAO RUIXUE

Shanxi museum unveils little-known Jin Kingdom

By **ZHANG YUE**
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A museum for historical relics in Shanxi province will open its doors to the public on Chinese Cultural Heritage Day, which falls on June 14. The museum honors ancient China's Jin Kingdom and will be located in Qu'wo county in Linfen.

It is also the first museum in Shanxi to unveil the history of the Jin Kingdom during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC).

The Jin Kingdom dates back roughly 3,000 years ago, but questions remain about the kingdom's emergence. It was not until the late 20th century, when Qucun village relics were discovered, that the place was called the birthplace of the Jin Kingdom. Construction of the museum, which is located on the site where the relics were found, began in August 2009. It covers an area of 14.66 hectares, is supported by an investment of 198 million yuan (\$31.8 million) and is divided into three exhibition halls that feature the his-

tory of the Jin State, a chronology of the unearthing of the relics and details about how the relics are protected.

Archeologists began exploring the area in the 1950s when relics and graves related to the Jin Kingdom were discovered. Copper relics, burial accessories and sacrificial pits were discovered from the 1950s to the 1980s.

The museum is surrounded by farmland and provincial roads. Sun Yonghe, head of the museum and the former head of the county's culture relics and tourism bureau, said in the 1980s, as more people learned about the site where the relics were discovered, more and more raiders, most of them nearby farmers, began pilfering from the site. In 1992, grave robbers ignited bombs at the site in an attempt to uncover the treasures.

"Most of the rescue efforts for the site were started after the raiders bombed the site," said Ji Kunzhang, a researcher from the Shanxi Archaeology Institute.

Upon entering the museum are statues of chariots and horses, each 8 meters high. A statue of a monarch of

the Jin State is situated in the middle, with four statues of horses in carriages surrounding it.

Visitors will also see more than 1,000 relics from the Jin Kingdom. More than 500 people participated in the excavations of relics over half of a century, with more than 20 excavations carried out during that period.

In the center hall are nine preserved graves of nine Jin emperors. Eight of them were buried with their wives as a funerary object. The relic hall of the museum includes the largest chariot pit in Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-771BC), built 600 years ahead of the Terracotta Warriors.

"Chariot pits discovered here in Qu'wo county include all types of chariots from the Western Zhou Dynasty," said Ji, who participated in excavations during the 1970s. "It also included chariots that are designed for women and children, and it's surprisingly well preserved."

Sun Ruisheng contributed to this story.



A museum in Linfen, Shanxi province, will open to the public on June 14 and details the history of the Jin Kingdom during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC).

KUANG LINHUA / CHINA DAILY