

Turning ruins into recreation areas

19 archaeological sites gain national-level park designation

By WANG RU
wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

With its long history and prosperous culture, China has a rich cultural heritage, including historical villages, time-honored brands and, critically, ancient sites.

While many may not appear to be special on the surface, they can yield finds that are culturally significant as a result of archaeological excavation.

At a national conference on cultural heritage in Beijing on Jan 5, authorities announced that archaeologists had carried out 254 active excavations last year. An important question posed during the conference was how to protect and make use of the sites after excavation.

“They often cover a large area and can easily fall foul of construction or farming. Therefore, they require well-planned protection,” said He Yun’ao, a professor at the Department of Archaeology and Cultural Relics at Nanjing University in Jiangsu province. “Also, we need to make people understand the need for protection, to show the sites’ cultural connotations and value to the public.”

He also mentioned that in the past, sites were often backfilled after excavation, and the cultural artifacts unearthed were moved to storehouses or museums. But now, the idea of preserving the excavations and transforming archaeological ruins into parks is flourishing.

“Archaeological parks can help enrich cultural knowledge by displaying both the sites and their artifacts,” He said. “Building support facilities and adding landscaping can turn them into tourist attractions, so that the cultural heritage that had been sleeping underground is shared in modern times.”

In December, the National Cultural Heritage Administration announced its fourth list of national-level archaeological parks. Nineteen were added to the list, which was initially launched in 2010, bringing the total number to 55.

Those added to the new list include sites dating as far back as the Paleolithic era, and right up to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). They include ancient settlements, kilns, mines, tombs and temples, and can be found in city centers, suburbs, villages and the Gobi Desert.

“The 19 parks are all doing well in terms of management and operation, archaeological studies and protection efforts, and their displays of cultural artifacts and explanations,” the list said. “They each are protected and explored in ways suited to local conditions, are integrated into local development and stand out among their counterparts for their special situations and innovations.”

In particular, the Erlitou Archaeological Site Park in Yanshi district, Luoyang city, Henan province, has attracted a lot of attention since the National Cultural Heritage Administration announced new findings at the site in September. It is widely believed to have been the capital toward the end of the Xia Dynasty (c.21st century-16th century BC), the first dynasty in traditional Chinese historiography. Erlitou was among the parks added to the fourth list.

The site plays an important role in the study of early China and the culture of the Xia Dynasty. The latest studies suggest the people of the era built a grid city, with intersecting roads creating square divisions used for residential, commercial and other purposes. The roads provide important clues for studying the Xia economic system, their socioeconomic development and crafts, as well as rituals performed during the period.

According to Lin Yongwei, who is leading

development efforts at Erlitou, the first stage of construction around the core area was completed in 2019, and other projects, including landscape improvements, have received approval.

“Besides the museum, we have finished key projects that showcase the ancient course of the Luohe River, workshops that made turquoise and cast bronze, aristocratic tombs, crisscrossing roads and a market area,” Lin said.

Moreover, a management system has been implemented, legislative measures to protect the site were enacted last year and publicity for the site has been enhanced, according to Yu Jie, director of the Luoyang Cultural Heritage Administration.

Another highlight on the list is the Liao Shangjing ruins, which are the remains of the Shangjing (upper capital) city of the Liao Dynasty (916-1125) in Baarin Left Banner, a county-level administrative division in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

Established by the nomadic Khitan minority, the Liao dominated a vast swathe of northern China for over 200 years. As the imperial family maintained their

ancestral habit of moving according to the climate — a custom known as *nabo* — they built five capitals, and Shangjing served as the dynasty’s political, cultural and economic center.

Recent archaeological research has identified the city’s central east-west axis, revealed the location and scale of the residence of Liao emperors, and unearthed more than 20,000 precious cultural artifacts such as Buddhist statues and fragments of tablets inscribed in Khitan, according to Dong Xinlin, head of the Liao Shangjing archaeological team.

The Liao Shangjing Park now includes a museum, a tourist service center, an exhibition of the emperors’ residence, a Liao cultural display area and an archaeological discovery activity area that combines research, education and leisure.

“The local government attaches great importance to this project. Our archaeological work has laid a good foundation, and the site has been properly preserved,” Dong said. “I believe that the park’s addition to the list will improve protection, leading to the possibility of applying to

become a world cultural heritage site.”

The creation of archaeological parks has drawn hordes of tourists. The then 36 national-level archaeological ruins parks received about 40 million people per year on average during the period of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20).

He Yun’ao said there is no contradiction between protection and exploitation.

“The more progress scholars make, the more appealing cultural artifacts and sites are to tourists, and their visits bring in more income to better protect the sites,” He said. “In this way, local governments, archaeological researchers and local people all benefit. It’s a win-win solution.”

Last December, a further 32 archaeological parks were added to the project-approval list, which means they meet the basic conditions to become national-level parks but need further improvements before they can be added to the official list.

Additions to both lists are not necessarily permanent and improperly managed parks can also be removed.

Wang Kaihao contributed to this story.

Old Summer Palace archaeologists’ efforts connecting with public

By LI YINGXUE
liyingxue@chinadaily.com.cn

Beijing’s Yuanmingyuan Park is determined to play a positive role in the passing down of traditional culture and to meet the growing need for public cultural offerings.

Spread over 350 hectares, the park, which is also known as the Old Summer Palace, is the former resort of the imperial family during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It was one of the first national archaeological parks on the list issued by the National Cultural Heritage Administration in 2010.

According to Wang Meng, deputy director of Yuanmingyuan’s administration office, a great deal of work has been carried out at the site over the past decade, from the conservation of the ruins, archaeological excavations and the restoration of artifacts, to academic research and museum construction.

A month ago, an archaeological team announced the discovery of a structure known as the Danbo Ningjing. The foundation of the structure, which was used to conduct ceremonies before each farming season, is shaped like the Chinese character *tian*, which means farmland.

Zhang Zhonghua from the Beijing Archaeological Research Institute and lead archaeologist on the dig, said the structure suggests that the emperors also sought inner peace and a comfortable life for their people.

According to Zhang, archaeological work at Yuanmingyuan started in 1994. The team embarked on the third stage in 2013, using more advanced scientific methods to work on the Dagongmen Gate area.

“It was the main entrance to the Old Summer Palace, a ceremonial area that shows the protocols and order followed during ancient times,” Zhang said. “We have made important archaeological

achievements that provide a scientific basis for the conservation, display and use of the site. But there is still a lot of work to be done and plenty of things to discover in the ruins.”

He said the team’s goal is to show the public a relatively complete palace through a combination of archaeological work, technology and historical remains.

Since 2015, the team has conducted excavations in the open, so that visitors are able to observe them from up close.

Work at the Danbo Ningjing was broadcast live via short-video platform Kuaishou last month and attracted over 428,000 views. The audience was also able to interact with archaeologists during the broadcast.

“By broadcasting the dig, archaeologists got to practice turning the terminology they use into language most people were able to understand, which helped bring the cultural remains to life,” Zhang said, adding that answering viewers’ questions

benefits both sides as it can also help to broaden the way archaeologists think.

Visitors are able to gain greater appreciation for the team’s hard work and the importance of what they do by watching excavations, he said.

For the administrative team at Yuanmingyuan, restoration is a key task.

Since 2019, five lots of cultural artifacts including porcelains and colored glaze pottery have been restored successfully, and rubbings have been digitalized. Since 2016, a document outlining all the visible remains at Yuanmingyuan has been continually updated, with 86 locations recorded to date.

In addition, a research and study center was set up at the palace for children to take part in simulated archaeological activities and artifact restoration.

“We provide students with tools and teach them how to excavate following archaeological procedures,” said Wang,

Policy Digest

Measures to support people emerging from poverty

Authorities have rolled out a series of measures to urbanize the areas to which poor people from inhospitable regions have been relocated, as China pursues high-quality development.

The National Development and Reform Commission and 17 other central government departments have issued a guideline mandating efforts to urbanize the resettlement areas of relocated people.

The guideline, published on Saturday, also stressed the importance of helping formerly impoverished areas develop industries to create jobs for the relocated, building support facilities at resettlement sites and ensuring residents have equal access to basic public services.

Measures must be taken to ensure that those who have been resettled have the means to better themselves, thus laying a solid foundation for once-impoverished regions to modernize in a timely manner.

The guideline also stressed the importance of accelerating the orderly registration of the relocated as permanent urban residents, saying that their rights and interests should be properly protected.

Illegal fishing crackdown successful, police say

Police resolved more than 7,760 cases of illegal fishing last year amid a crackdown on the crime in the Yangtze River Basin.

According to a statement issued by the Ministry of Public Security on Jan 20, members of some 750 gangs suspected of catching 400,000 kilograms of fish illegally have been arrested, and 15,000 items of fishing equipment have been seized.

The ministry said that the numbers of police reports, criminal cases and tip-offs involving illegal fishing have declined continuously since September. In addition, the aquatic species that can be monitored in the Yangtze River Basin have significantly increased as the environment has improved.

R&D spending up 10 percent year-on-year, estimate shows

A preliminary estimate showed that total spending on research and development hit nearly 3.1 trillion yuan (\$450 billion) last year, a year-on-year increase of 10.4 percent, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Jan 20.

It was the seventh consecutive year that national R&D spending saw double-digit growth.

According to the bureau, R&D spending intensity, or the expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP, surged to a record 2.55 percent in 2022.

Li Yin, a statistician with the NBS, said that China’s R&D spending intensity now ranks 12th in the world, surpassing that of several countries known for innovation, including France (2.35 percent) and the Netherlands (2.32 percent).

Despite challenges, the steady growth of China’s R&D expenditure continues to inject vitality into national innovation and development, Li said.

China maintains security during Spring Festival holiday

Overall security across the country during the Lunar New Year holiday was calm and stable as of Jan 27, according to the Ministry of Emergency Management.

During the holiday, fire and rescue teams stationed in priority areas helped rescue and evacuate 4,425 people.

Meanwhile, specialized rescue teams provided services to 736 companies to help them prevent risks and maintain safety in production, the ministry said.

MO JINGXI



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY