

Shijiazhuang still shining

► Historic revolutionary city ramps up growth, environmental efforts

By WANG YI

Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province, has a glorious name closely connected with the birth of New China.

Xibaipo about 90 km from urban Shijiazhuang was before a little-known village, but it has become a revolutionary shrine, the site where headquarters of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was established after it moved from northwest Shaanxi province in 1948.

The village was home to the CPC's top leaders, though for less than one year and witnessed momentous days in contemporary Chinese history.

After the People's Liberation Army swept across China, a historic Party conference was held at Xibaipo before founders of the New China set off for Beijing.

Shijiazhuang was also the site of other firsts in New China.

The city hosted the inception of modern China's financial system as the birthplace of the currency renminbi. The People's Bank of China, the nation's central bank, was also begun there.

Instead of resting on its historic laurels, Shijiazhuang has made marked progress in economic growth and city con-

struction in recent years.

Its gross domestic product (GDP) hit 239.3 billion yuan in 2007 for a per capita GDP standing of 25,144 yuan. Foreign trade volume reached \$5.1 billion last year.

The booming economy has fueled the city's construction.

Local authorities have strengthened infrastructure construction and expanded green coverage, seeking to create a friendly environment.

Situated on the rim of the Bohai Bay and neighboring Beijing and Tianjin, the capital of Hebei province has a location of strategic significance and is growing into a key transportation center.

It has a widespread road network, air service to more than 20 domestic cities and 10 international cargo routes and one of China's three biggest cargo railway stations.

To further enhance its appeal to visitors and improve the living environment for locals, the city government has mounted a series of projects to improve its appearance and ecology.

After years of effort, it has new green areas and a recently restored 57-km section of river with 22 parks.

A number of landmarks, public facilities and residential communities developed in recent years have also contributed



Today's shrine at Xibaipo marking momentous days in contemporary Chinese history

to rejuvenating the city.

The efforts won the city an award presented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development last year.

Another asset is the city's pool of human resources. It is home to 67 research institutes and 34 universities and colleges, including seven experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In addition to intellectual

support, Shijiazhuang is also proud of its role in contribution to elevating the performance of Chinese national table tennis team.

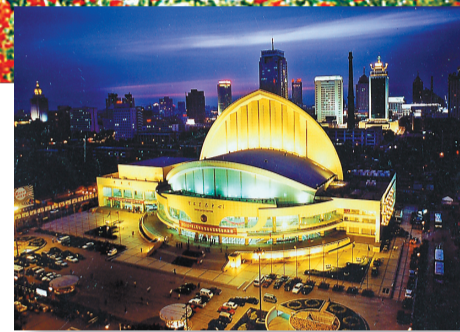
As a national ping-pong training center, the city has hosted intense training and international competitions.

National teams from Germany, Japan, France, Italy and Australia are among those training at the site

Shijiazhuang has now



Ancient temple

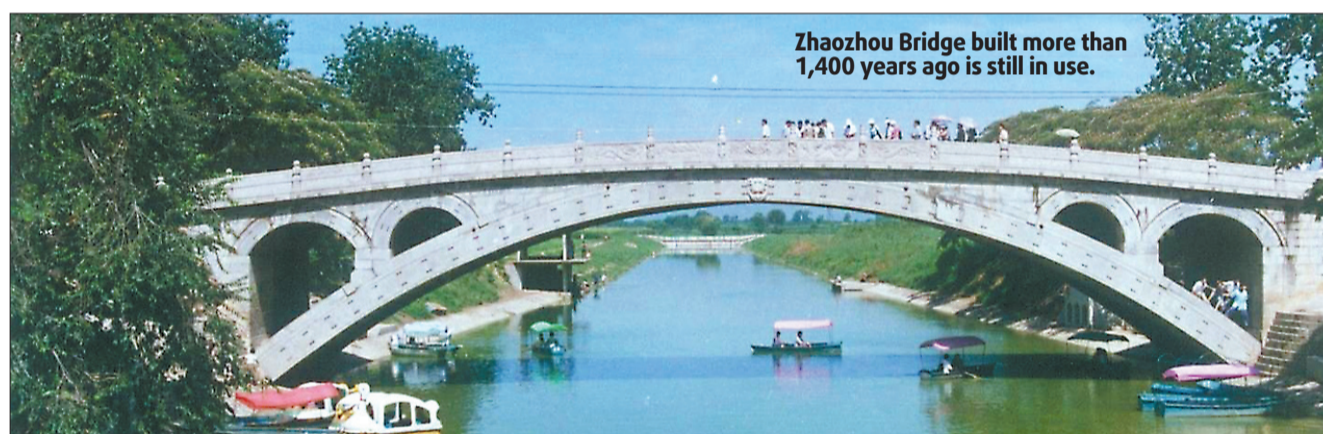


Art center

forged relationships with more than 20 foreign cities and exchanged cooperation

in economics, technology and culture with 192 countries and regions.

Thirteen Fortune 500 companies have made investments in the city.



Zhaozhou Bridge built more than 1,400 years ago is still in use.

Traveling in time to ancient Hebei

By BIAN JI

Shijiazhuang in Hebei province has yielded a string of archeological discoveries that leads visitors back in time to its ancient civilization.

Warring States

Zhongshan, a prosperous state during Warring States Period (475-221 BC), seems a riddle, with its name mentioned in a few historical records, yet details are sparse.

When dozens of ancient tombs were discovered in Shijiazhuang in the winter of 1973, a veil was lifted on the vanished civilization.

Among tens of thousands of unearthed cultural relics, a 32 kg copper map of a king's tomb is the earliest copper-made architecture plan discovered in the world to date.

Zhongshan had high-quality alcohol-making techniques. One story in an ancient Chinese mythology says a drinker heard of its reputation for alcohol making and went there for a drink.

After he drank one cup, he fell to sleep. The story says he didn't awake for three years. The tale has continued to modern times.

Liquor in two bronze containers discovered in ancient Zhongshan tombs — reportedly the oldest alcohol ever discovered — still gives off aroma after more than 2,300 years.

Historic battle

Jingjing, a county of Shijiazhuang, was the site of a battle between the Han and Chu armies in 206 BC.

Both were major military forces competing to rule the entire country at the end of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC)

A Han army led by General Han Xin defeated its Chu rivals at the battle, despite a smaller army.

In contrast to advantageous locations for troop deployment described in classic military books — which advocate easy withdrawal, mountain ambushes or natural obstacles to enemies — Han deployed part of his army in front of a river to divert attention.

When the decoy troop pretended to retreat towards the river, the enemy gave chase.

The Han troops ran until they encountered the river. The desperate soldiers had no choice but to turn back and fight hard.

Due to the Han army's plucky performance, the Chu troops in turn began to retreat, and were intercepted by other wing of General Han's army. Attacked front and rear, the Chu army was eventually defeated.

An account of the battle, recorded in the Book of History written during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), created a well-known idiom — fighting with a river behind, indicating a life-or-death battle.

Stone bridge

Zhaozhou Bridge, built more than 1,400 years ago, is the world's oldest open-span stone segmented arch bridge. It was dedicated as an international historic civil engineering landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1991.

The 64-m-long bridge with a central span of 37 m has sur-

vived at least 10 major floods, eight wars and numerous earthquakes, and is still in use.

Cultural town

Zhengding, a town about 15 km from urban Shijiazhuang, is a State-level cultural reservation. The town boasts a 22.28-m-high copper Buddha statue from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), well-preserved ancient buildings and many legends.

It has grown into one of the major tourist destinations in Shijiazhuang.

Mural art

Murals painted on 130 sq m of Pilu Temple in the 14th century are seen as ancient artistic jewels.

The paintings depict wise tales from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism as well as ancient Chinese myths.

Because of its paintings, the temple was listed as a protected national cultural site in 1996.

In addition to the historical attractions, Shijiazhuang is also rich in folk culture, such as paper cutting and wood carving.

Boosting industrial growth

By TE KAN

Shijiazhuang will aid the further development of industries ranging from bio-tech, chemicals, information technology, machinery manufacturing and textiles, according to recent plans from the city government.

A modern industrial layout has now taken shape in the city, with pharmaceuticals, textiles, chemicals, electronics, food and construction materials its key sectors.

Local firms North China Pharmaceutical Group Corp, Shijiazhuang Pharmaceutical Group and dairy producer Sanlu Group are among six based in the city on the list of the top 500 Chinese companies.

The local government's moves come in response to both increasing competitiveness and the potential for greater growth.

Pharmaceuticals

Shijiazhuang enjoys distinct advantages in the pharmaceutical industry.

The city has more than 290 medicine makers, accounting for 15 percent of the country's total, and at least 600 companies involved in medicine sales.

As six Shijiazhuang-based firms rank among the most profitable Chinese medicine makers and a number of local brands are becoming household names.

Chemicals

Extending the industrial chain and building a recy-

cling economy is highlighted in plans for the city's chemical sector.

A model chemicals site now under construction will use an integrated energy supply system and optimize the use of petroleum, coal and chlorine alkali, which are closely related in industrial chain.

The 6 sq km, 16 billion yuan site is projected to realize 4 billion yuan in revenues by the end of 2010.

Science and research

With a cluster of research institutes and centers of higher learning, the city has strong capability for innovation, especially in aviation and space, semiconductors, satellite communications, measurement and control technologies, and modern agriculture.

Nearly 80 software firms have operations in the city, accounting for 33 percent of the provincial total.

The city's electronic information sector generated 5.33 billion yuan in revenue in the first half of this year, increasing 17.6 percent year-on-year.

Vehicles and machinery

Expanding production of airplanes, automobiles, auto parts, and mechanical and electrical products is a main goal in the city's industrial development, according to the city government.

The first China-made proprietary light multi-purpose plane, which came off the production line in Shijiazhuang, marked a milestone in the city's

manufacturing history.

Textiles and garments have long been important to the city's economy.

At its peak, the sector had 1 million spindles and 100,000 workers. At present, 53 companies are involved in the industry.

Among them, Shijiazhuang Changshan Textile Group is listed one of the 50 key textile companies in the country and among the 30 top enterprises in the province.

Agriculture is also an important part of local economy. Sprawling across the north China plain, Shijiazhuang has been termed "the barn in the region".

Its fertile soil, distinct seasons and ample rain and sunshine provide the needed natural conditions for intensive farming

Wheat, corn, vegetables, pears, dates, eggs, dairy products and pork are the major produce of Shijiazhuang's counties. Its annual output of eggs accounts for about one-tenth of the country's total.

The city is also a regional commercial hub. More than 150,000 commercial operations are housed in its 120 department stores and trade centers and 29 shopping arcades.

Among them, 34 companies have more than 100 million yuan in annual sales.

The city's markets for leather, cloth and timber provide a boon to locals and spur the growth of both the local and regional economy.



Green city center in Shijiazhuang