

Qingzhou to cash in on cultural treasures

By WANG QIAN
wangqian2@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shandong city of Qingzhou is drawing on its rich historical resources to boost the development of the cultural industry.

"Endowed with splendid historical and cultural legacies, Qingzhou plans to make its culture industry a new pillar for local growth," said Sun Zhongli, the city's Party chief.

At the center of Shandong province, Qingzhou had long been one of the political, economic and cultural centers of ancient China, especially from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Many renowned historical

figures once lived in the region, including Song Dynasty (960-1279) statesmen Fan Zhongyan and Ouyang Xiu as well as the famous female poet Li Qingzhao, of the same period. They left the city abundant cultural legacies and relics.

The city now has 135 intangible cultural heritage items. In addition, it has almost 900 sites of cultural relics, among which six sites are on the national list for protection.

It was approved as a national historical and cultural city by the State Council last year.

"The legacies give the city a unique advantage to develop its culture industry. We should try our best to transfer the historical and cultural wealth into economic benefits," Sun said.

For this purpose, the government of Qingzhou has invested more than 10 million yuan (\$1.63 million) annually into the cultural industry over the past few years. It also unveiled a range of favorable policies for major cultural projects, including tax cuts, preferential loans and incentives in land use.

Thanks to these efforts, more than 710 culture-related enterprises have settled in the city, covering such sectors as painting, calligraphy, publication, news media, entertainment, animation and tourism.

Revenues from these enterprises accounted for more than 5 percent of local GDP last year, according to the city government.

Gao Lingyun, head of the



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Liu Dawei, chairman of China Artists Association, works on a painting during the third Chinese Painting Festival, held in April 2013.

city's publicity department, said about 30 cultural projects are under construction in the city backed by a total investment of 50 billion yuan.

The largest one is the 76-square-kilometer Yunmen Mountains Eco-Friendly Creativity Park.

With a total investment of 15 billion yuan, it will be a site for film and video production, tourism, performances and

exhibition. Set to be complete by 2015, it is expected to attract 3.5 million visitors annually.

Gao said the city has a good cultural ambience. It is now home to more than 500 art galleries, which hold over 100 exhibitions of paintings, calligraphy works and other artworks annually.

He said the city is a trading hub for paintings and calligraphy works in North China. Nine art markets have been established in Qingzhou, and they generated combined revenue totaling 10 billion yuan last year.

The city's authorities also want to use its culture and history to add more appeal to local tourism.

The government has allocated a total of 2 million yuan to invite inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to perform in major scenic spots since 2012.

"It is a good way to attract tourists and protect our ancient arts and traditions, most of which are endangered in the modern era," said Zhao Shihua, director of Qingzhou cultural industry development office.

Last year, the city received 8.48 million tourists from China and abroad, up 73.1 percent from 2012. Tourism revenue amounted to 7.3 billion yuan, increasing 63.4 percent.

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Officials restoring ancient city relics

By ZHANG XIAOMIN
zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn

The city of Qingzhou has launched a campaign to restore and preserve local historical and cultural heritage sites, laying a firm foundation for its strategy to revive local tourism, officials said.

Qingzhou had been the capital for one of the nine *zhous* — or province-level administrative regions — in ancient China for more than 1,600 years.

The city is still home to a number of old buildings and communities that bear silent witness to the architectural achievements and styles of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Last year, the local government launched an ongoing program for preserving and utilizing the historical sites, including ancient city relics and the Wannian Bridge of Song Dynasty (960-1279), the Nanyang Moat and the Dongmen Street of Ming Dynasty, as well as the Ouyuan Street of Qing Dynasty, in a bid to develop them into tourism attractions.

"The ancient heritage is one of the invaluable assets of Qingzhou. We should cherish it and let it play a greater role in local growth," said Han Xingfu, mayor of Qingzhou.

He said the city has employed the National Research Center of Historical Cities at Shanghai's Tongji University to draft an overall plan for protecting, renovating and rebuilding Qingzhou's ancient remains.

According to the plan, some 12 square kilometers in the city center have been set aside as a protective zone for architectural relics.

Traditional houses and landmark buildings will be under full protection and some damaged ancient buildings will be repaired. These include former residences of renowned historical figures, old streets and structures, the ancient government office — the *yamen* — as well as time-honored brands.

More than 100 such sites have been identified and included in the list for full preservation.

To date, the city has invested 200 million yuan (\$35.8 million) in the old buildings. Ancient streets like Ouyuan, Beimen and Dongmen have been renovated. Structures such as the Kuixing Tower, Fucai Gate and the ancient city walls have been restored. And 232 ancient houses were repaired.

The government has also made efforts to rescue endangered intangible cultural heritage practices such as the traditional game of *kongzhu*, clay sculpture, shuttlecock making, and the ancient music instrument of the *cuoqin*. Masters and inheritors of such arts are organized to perform in public, giving locals and tourists opportunities to learn.

The local government is now applying for a 5A status — the nation's top grade for scenic areas — for its major attractions including the Qingzhou Ancient City Scenic Area, Qingzhou Museum and the Yuntuo Scenic Area.



Local artists play the ancient music instrument *cuoqin* for residents and tourists at a park.

JU CHUANJIANG / CHINA DAILY