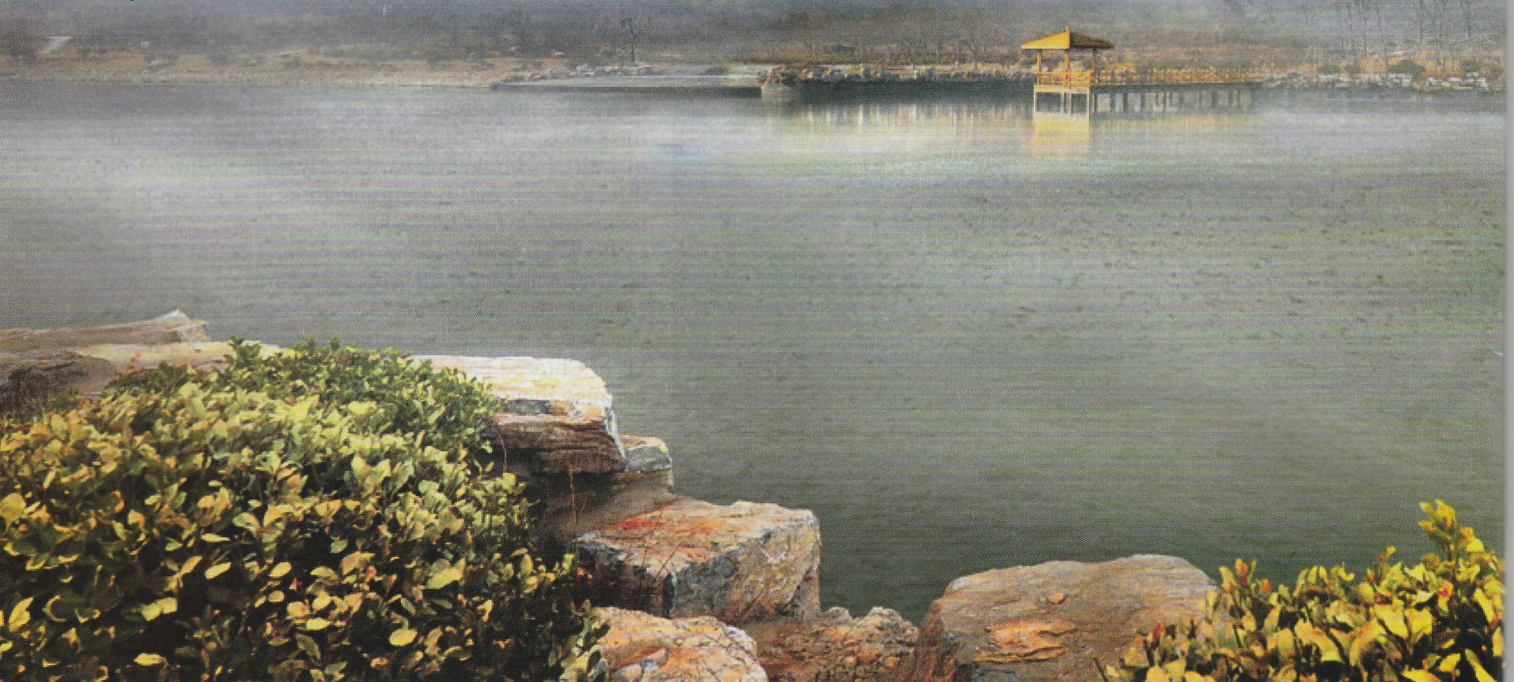


Xuzhou

– the “Athens of the Orient”

By staff reporter **HOU RUIJI**

LOCATED at the junction where north meets south and between Beijing and Shanghai, Xuzhou City boasts a long history, rich culture and gorgeous landscape. Its reputation as a famous Chinese historical and cultural city attracts tourists from far and wide.



The wondrous scenery of Dongshan Scenic Area.

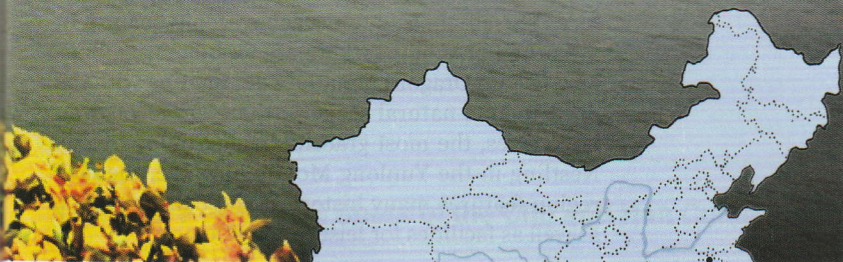
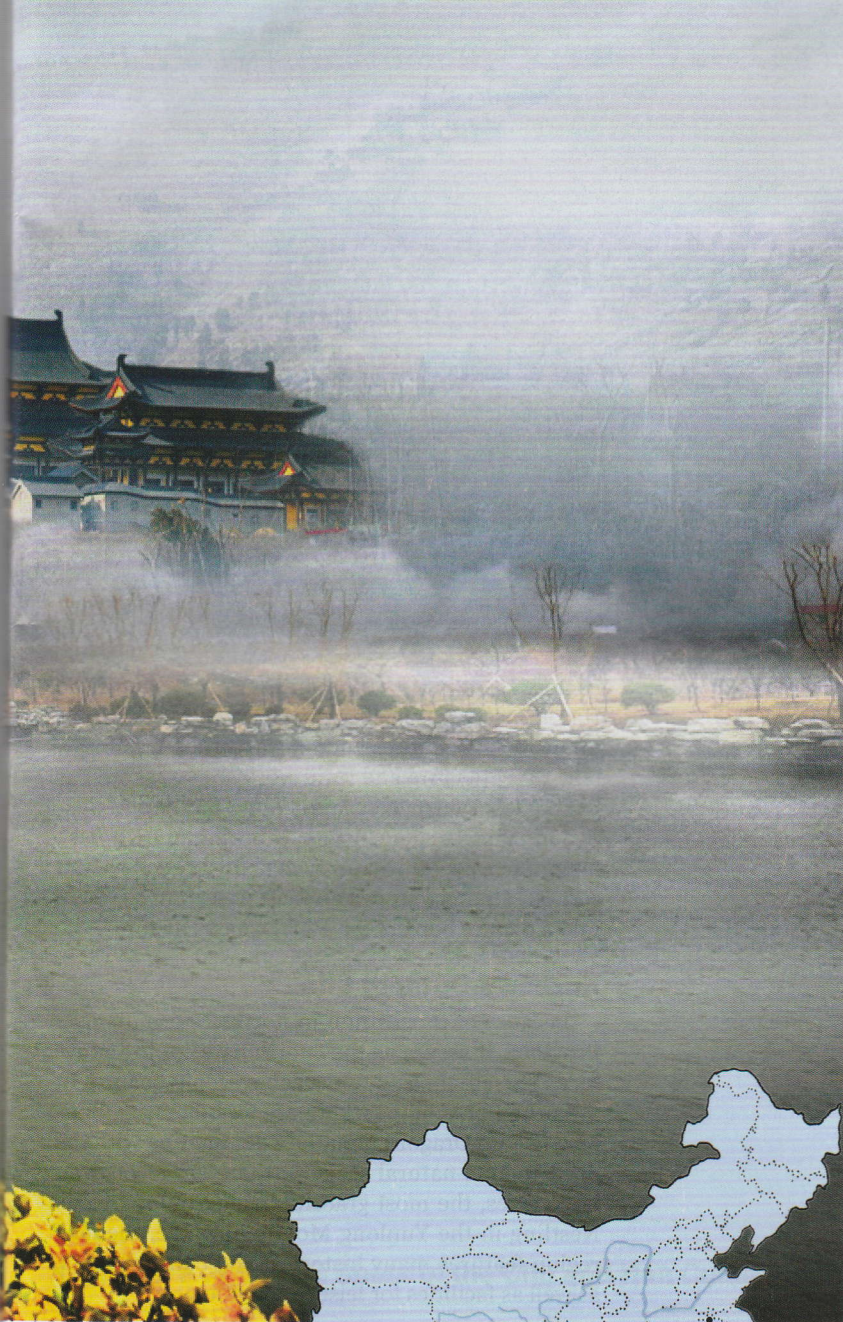
Wondrous Culture of the Chu and Han Dynasties

Xuzhou has a history of over 6,000 years and was established as a city about 2,600 years ago. It is the hometown of Peng Zu, legendary figure in Chinese history, the place where Liu Bang, first emperor of the Han Dynasty, was born and the former capital designated by Xiang Yu when he proclaimed himself Overlord of Western Chu. Xuzhou can, therefore, be described as the birthplace of Han culture. The city's scenic beauty and deep historical roots earn it the reputation of the “Athens of the Orient.”

Because of Xuzhou's strategic location, the city has witnessed over 400 battles throughout history, the most famous being the Chu-Han Contention between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu at the end of the Qin

Dynasty. The battle played out on Jiuli Mountain in northwestern Xuzhou. It was hardly a fair fight: Xiang Yu was 27 years old and a student of strict military training, whereas Liu Bang, a peasant's son, was over 50 years old. However, Xiang Yu was defeated, while Liu Bang went on to unify China and found the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

Liu Bang's rule forms an abundant part of Xuzhou's tangible cultural heritage today, including scenic spots such as the platform to sing the *Song of the Great Wind* (Gefeng Tai), the Sishui Pavilion, Drawing Sword Spring (Bajian Quan) and Maba Spring. Liu Bang also left intangible cultural heritage. According to Han expert Ma Peifeng, Liu Bang's legacy includes the Chinese language and Chinese characters, as well as the model of “one country, two systems,” an emphasis on Confucian-



ism, developing agriculture and exempting certain groups from tax. Liu Bang's establishment of the Han culture roused the whole nation's consciousness and self-respect for its cultural value.

At that time Xiang Yu declared Xuzhou to be the state capital. Xiang was born in today's Suqian City, over 100 kilometers from Xuzhou. In fact, Suqian was formerly part of Xuzhou. The places of interest in Xuzhou that are related to Xiang Yu include Xima Tai (a horse racing viewing terrace). According to Luo Yongxin, director of Xuzhou Tourism Bureau, although historical records show that Xiang Yu was defeated by Liu Bang, both Liu Bang and Xiang Yu are equally admired and respected by locals. The Chu Garden, which was built to commemorate



The Han terracotta army.

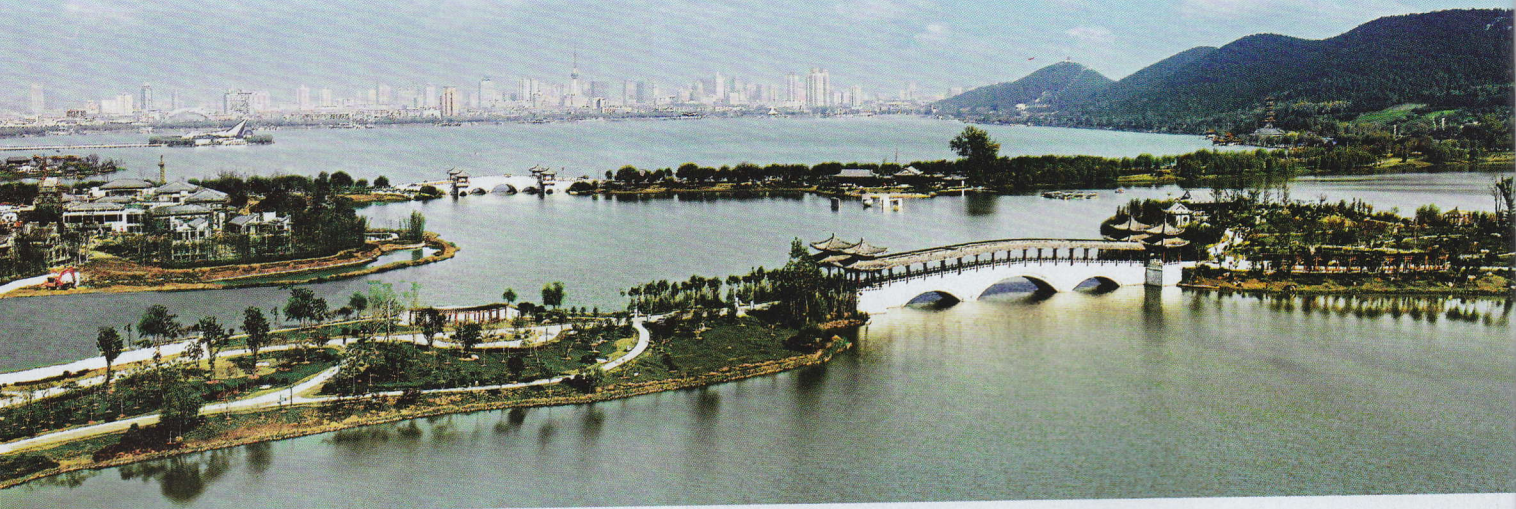
Xiang Yu, opened earlier this year.

Because of its geographic location and the changing course of the Yellow River, Xuzhou suffered persistent flooding in the past. Therefore, a large number of Han Dynasty relics are thought to be buried there. Since the 1980s, with the development of urbanization, many cultural relics have been excavated. Among them, the most representative are tombs, stone carvings and the terracotta army of the Han Dynasty.

There are 300 to 400 Han tombs in Xuzhou. To date, only two are open to visitors – the Guishan (Turtle Mountain) Tomb and Shizi (Lion) Mountain Tomb. They were built for princes during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC - AD 24). The former features a delicate construction, the latter, exquisite unearthed cultural relics.

The Guishan Mountain Tomb is composed of two connecting, parallel tombs. The southern one is the resting place of Liu Zhu, Prince Xiang of Chu. His wife is interred in the northern one. The couple's tomb was built inside the mountain. It has been described as an "oriental pyramid" because of its imposing manner and exquisite craftsmanship. Many mysteries surrounding the tomb remain unsolved today.

The Shizi Mountain Tomb is a short 10-minute drive east of Pengcheng Square in the center of the city. This is the mausoleum of Liu Wu, the third-generation Prince of Chu during the early Western Han Dynasty. About 4,000 terracotta figures were found here in 1984. Ten years later the prince's coffin chamber was discovered. Built deep inside the mountain, the huge coffin chamber extended about 100 meters deep. The number of various precious cultural relics unearthed exceeded 2,000 pieces of gold, silver, copper, iron, jade, stone and ceramics. The magnificent mausoleum housed some exceptionally beautiful artifacts, some of which were the first of their kind to be found in the history of Chi-



Panoramic views over Yunlong Lake.

nese archaeology. The most precious find was the osseous remains of the prince, which have enabled modern scientists to recreate his physical appearance 2,100 years after he lived.

In the Han Dynasty, it was popular to worship ancestors and promote filial piety as taught by Confucius. People believed the soul would be eternal; therefore, they formed an idea that the deceased would continue to live, as living people do, but in a different realm. When designing and building tombs they aimed to include all the commodities and tools that living people would use in everyday life.

In 1984 when workers of a brick factory were digging earth on the western slope of Shizi Mountain, they uncovered the terracotta army of the Han Dynasty. Archaeologists believe that compared to the terracotta army of the Qin Dynasty (in Xi'an), the Han terracotta army better reveals the warriors' inner world. At the museum of the Han terracotta army, visitors can see figurines with various facial expressions: Some of them appear charmingly naive, some grave, some with hollow eyes and some look to be deep in thought.

Another wonder of the Han culture in Xuzhou is the Han stone carvings. In fact, this refers to stone engravings in the underground tombs and ancestral halls, as well as those erected in front of temples and mausoleums of the Han Dynasty. The Han Dynasty stone carving tradition is one of China's greatest creations. The Han Dynasty ruled at the same time as the Romans in the West. Just as the ancient Romans did, the Chinese people in the Han Dynasty liked recording social and economic life in carved images, which depicted various aspects of the politics, economy, culture and religion of the Han Dynasty and are a valuable primary source in the study of Chinese history. The craftsmanship of the carvings represents the highest level of Chinese carving art at that time.

At the Han Stone Engravings Gallery, it is hard not to feel awe of the grandeur of historical sce-

nanos. Here is a window into the real life of the Han Dynasty – traveling carriages, competitions in military skills, dances and music, acrobatics, hospitality, architecture and rural work scenes, as well as figures from fairy tales and a large number of auspicious images. Jian Bozan, a prominent Chinese historian, said, "If we can systematically collect and sort out all those stone carvings, we can make them into a picture book of the Han Dynasty history."

Xuzhou's Outdoor Life

Because of its position in northwestern Jiangsu Province, it serves as the "north gate" of the province. The city boasts remarkable scenic beauty. In the urban area alone, there are 72 hills, with Yunlong (Cloud Dragon) Mountain dominating with the most unique natural scenery; there are also seven large lakes, the most graceful being Yunlong Lake. Nestling in the Yunlong Mountain range, the lake region features many historical and cultural spots, as well as facilities for leisure activities.

Yaowan Ancient Town.





Qiandao (Thousand Islands) Wetlands Scenic Area.

Pan'an Lake in Jiawang District in northeastern Xuzhou is named after a handsome literary hero of ancient China. Jiawang District was inhabited by humans even before the Shang and Zhou dynasties (1600-771 BC). The area was vastly mined for coal over a period of around 130 years and was once an energy base of eastern China. However, Jiawang District is suffering from serious subsidence because of the exhausted coal resources.

With support from the central government and Jiangsu Province, Jiawang District is being transformed. The planned Jiawang Tourist Area covers 300 square kilometers, including Pan'an Lake. It will include a number of centers catering to different activities such as religious worship, outdoor pursuits, rest and recreation, and scientific exploration.

A journey through Xuzhou's green mountains and winding rivers would be incomplete without sampling local delicacies developed by Peng Zu. It is said that during Emperor Yao's reign, Peng Zu, a health expert and a gastronome, was rewarded with the territory of Xuzhou because he cured the emperor of typhoid fever. He was granted the further honor of having the city named after him, Pengcheng.

Peng Zu supposedly lived for 800 years. He passed on to future generations his unique cooking methods and special dishes for health preservation. Among them, two dishes are still popular today – Zhi Geng (pheasant soup) and Yang Fang Cang Yu (fish hidden in mutton cubes). Zhi Geng is a braised mixture of pheasant and broomcorn millet fruit (later, barley seeds were used). The soup is especially good for enriching the blood and vital energy known in TCM as *Qi*. It is said Emperor Qianlong once tasted the soup on his tour of south. He commended it as the best soup on earth. Yang Fang Cang Yu is steamed or braised chunks of mutton filled with fish. The Chinese ancients believed this mixture embodied the most fresh and delicious food and was a perfect combination.

Today, you can still sample authentic Zhi Geng and Yang Fang Cang Yu in Xuzhou. You can pay your respects to Peng Zu's 46-meter-high statue in the downtown area, and learn more about this legendary figure by visiting the ancestral hall, temple and tomb of Peng Zu. According to Director Luo, Xuzhou is planning to construct a Peng Zu Health Preservation Cultural Park to commemorate this influential character and study and share his healthy living ideas, which are pertinent to modern society. ■