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**REVIVING THE ANCIENT
GRAND CANAL**



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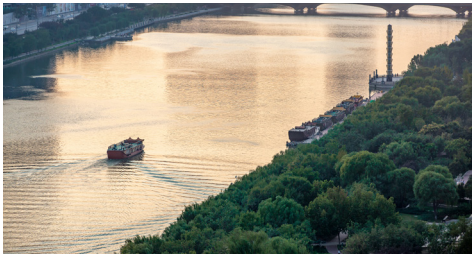
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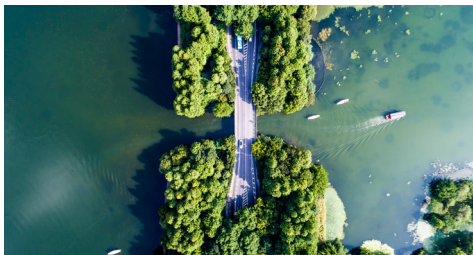
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REVIVING THE ANCIENT GRAND CANAL

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Gao Wei, Wang Zicheng

The Grand Canal, excavated during different periods in ancient China, still runs from Hangzhou in the south to Beijing in the north, stretching for over 3,000 kilometres (km) and linking dozens of cities. The culture nurtured by the canal's rich history has not only witnessed the struggle and prosperity of the Chinese nation, but has also become a living relic in the history of human civilisation. Today, the canal is considered a flowing cultural monument.

Nowadays, the Grand Canal has changed its identity. As a symbol of Chinese civilisation, the man-made river was inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List* in 2014. The canal's cultural renaissance is an important subject for developing a socialist modern nation in an all-round way. In accordance with protection and development laws enacted for the canal and under the joint efforts of the cities along it, the canal is reviving and showing great developmental momentum. The upcoming 2023 Beijing–Hangzhou Dialogue on the Grand Canal Cultural Belt provides a good opportunity for the public to rediscover the ancient man-made river.



STORIES ABOUT THE GRAND CANAL

The Grand Canal played a significant role in ancient China. The over 2,500-year-old canal, with its beautiful landscapes, still resembles an epic achievement, drawing numerous people to explore and rediscover it.

Linking the South and North

Most rivers throughout China run from west to east, and few rivers flow south to north. Due to this, economic exchanges between China's south and north in ancient times were quite difficult. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the state economic centre began to shift from northern to eastern and southern China, but these dynasties still chose to establish their capitals in the north. Excavating a waterway to link the south with the north became urgent.

In AD 605, Emperor Yang (reign: AD 604–618) of the Sui Dynasty (AD 581–618) mobilised the resources of nearly the entire country to excavate a major waterway connecting the south and north. Over the following six years, with the successive opening of the Tongji Canal, Yongji Canal and Jiangnan Canal, a super project with a total length of over 2,000 km centred on the capital of Luoyang was completed. From then on, fish, salt, rice, silk, cotton and other items produced in the Yangtze River Delta were transported to Luoyang, the centre

of the Sui Dynasty, and the Guanzhong Plain along the Grand Canal.

In order to bypass Luoyang, the run of the Grand Canal generally took on a "z" shape in the excavation during the Sui and Tang dynasties. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), as Dadu (today's Beijing) served as the political centre of the nation, the destination of the Grand Canal in the north was transferred from Luoyang to Beijing. In order to straighten the waterway of the Grand Canal dug during the Sui and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties and shorten the shipping

distance, the Yuan Dynasty spent 10 years digging several canals to transform the Grand Canal into a transport water system that directly links the Yangtze River Delta in the south with Beijing in the north. The new Grand Canal running almost straight from the south to the north had 10 sections, including the Tongji Canal, the Weihe River, the Huaiyang Canal, the Jiangnan Canal, the Zhedong Canal, the Tonghui River and the North Canal.

The navigation of the Grand Canal improved the unbalanced resources between the south and north, greatly promoted economic exchange and development, provided a continuous impetus for the rise of cities along the canal and made great contributions to the economic and cultural prosperity of ancient China. Once, along the south-north transport lifeline in China, numerous vessels carrying businesspeople and goods went back and forth. As time has gone by, those stories and legends about the canal have quietly infiltrated

Today, the Grand Canal and its history and culture have not only been preserved in heritage sites and museums, but also exist in real life.

the lives of ordinary people living along the man-made river.

Welcoming a Promising Future

With the publication of relative development plans for the Grand Canal cultural belt, the ancient canal began to welcome its revival.

Sitting at the north end of the Grand Canal, Beijing's Tongzhou has received water from the south for hundreds of years. Because of this, a profound canal culture has formed since ancient times. Sightseeing along the Grand Canal has become popular in the capital city. In

addition to the opening of Central Green Forest Park and Grand Canal Forest Park, Dipankara Pagoda and its surrounding ancient buildings have been restored according to their original layouts. On June 24, 2022, an opening ceremony for the re-navigation of the Grand Canal's Beijing–Hebei section took place in Tongzhou District, Beijing, and Xianghe, Hebei Province. Pleasure boats heading for Tongzhou and Xianghe simultaneously corresponding navigation in both directions marked the re-opening of the Beijing–Hebei section of the canal.

Municipalities and cities along the Grand Canal, including Beijing, have jointly participated in the development of the canal's cultural, ecological and tourism belts, making sights along the canal shine with brilliance once again. They include Canal Cultural and Art Park in Hangzhou, the Ten Sights of the Grand Canal in Suzhou, the China Grand Canal Museum at Sanwan Park in Yangzhou and Dongguang Xiejiaba Hydraulic Wisdom Exhibition Hall in Cangzhou.





INSCRIPTION ON UNESCO's WORLD HERITAGE LIST

On June 22, 2014, China's Grand Canal, which had been prepared for UNESCO World Heritage status for eight years, was inscribed on the *World Heritage List* at the 38th World Heritage Committee Session in Doha, Qatar. With this news, people who had been concerned about the canal's fate were thrilled. The ancient canal, which had been silent for more than 100 years, would usher in a once-in-a-lifetime return to prosperity.

A Symbol of Chinese Civilisation

The prosperity of the Grand Canal began to decline in the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) at the beginning of the 20th century. Due to domestic turmoil and foreign aggression, the Qing government was in jeopardy. With the exception of the Jiangnan Canal, Huaiyang Canal, Zhedong Canal, Hui-tong River and Zhonghe River sections, other sections of the canal were silted up and abandoned. In 1904, the Qing government abolished the position of Governor of Canal Transport. With the development of railways and the use of

seagoing vessels, the Grand Canal was gradually abandoned and became part of China's history together with the fall of the ancient feudal monarchy. Although the canal was still famous, its fame was limited to memories of the past.

The Grand Canal did not return to public focus until the beginning of the new century. In 2002, the canal was included as part of the South-to-North Water Division Project, becoming one of the project's key links and channels. Water in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River flows north to Shandong and Hebei provinces via the Grand Canal's waterways. The ancient super engineering

project was transformed into part of the outstanding project in the new era. Since then, the public has begun to realise that the Grand Canal is a living cultural heritage. It is not only a man-made river, but also a cultural symbol and witness to the great integration of the Chinese nation. The canal has long been part of China's cultural history.

As a monumental project invested and managed by ancient dynasties, the Grand Canal is a symbol of China's outstanding water conservancy and transport projects before the Industrial Revolution, served as a lifeline for ancient Chinese and has become part

of world civilisation. In June 2006, the Grand Canal was announced as a key cultural relic protected at the national level. In December of that year, it was included in *China's UNESCO World Heritage Status Preparatory List*. In April 2009, under the guidance of the State Council, 13 ministries and committees, as well as 8 provinces and municipalities, established a consultation group on the protection of the canal and the preparation for its UNESCO World Heritage status, making the application become a national point of action.

The Grand Canal is regarded as a main artery of ancient China because it exerted a subtle influence on population migration, economy, trade, technological exchanges, production and way of life, playing a role in promoting national development. In January 2013, the document for the Grand Canal to apply for UNESCO World Heritage status was completed. The document selects the canal's

typical sections and key heritage sites of each section. It covers 27 sections of the canal, and 58 hydraulic and other related relics at 31 heritage areas in 8 provinces and municipalities.

The Grand Canal has had a tremendous and far-reaching impact on the history of China and even the world.

After being inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*, the development of the Grand Canal cultural belt was put forward for the first time in 2017. In 2019, the *Plan of Grand Canal Heritage Protection and Sustainable Development* was published. Cities and towns that once lost their charm due to the decline of the canal began to rediscover the man-made river and ushered their developmental opportunities in the new era.

Reappearance of the Canal's Charm

Located at Dongsishitiao in Beijing, Nanxincang is almost the same age as the Forbidden City. As an imperial granary during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties, Nanxincang was once closely related to the water transport of the Grand Canal, becoming a witness to the nation's warehouse system and technology in ancient times.

With the completion of the Tonghui River's excavation, large granaries began to be built in the capital city during the Yuan Dynasty, including Beitaicang. After Ming Dynasty Emperor Chengzu (reign: 1402–1424) moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing, the new capital city developed rapidly and its demand for grain supply grew day by day. It was necessary to rely on grain produced in the Yangtze River Delta. Thus, the importance of constructing granaries became more prominent. The Ming government began



▲ Fuyicang (Fuyi Granary), Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province



▲ Nanxincang (Nanxin Granary), Beijing



▲ The Tongzhou section of the Grand Canal, Beijing



▲ A boundary marker for the Grand Canal Heritage Zone, Beijing

to build granaries based on the Yuan Dynasty granaries. In 1409, Beitaicang was expanded and renamed Nanxincang, and served as the central granary with eight sub-granaries. During the Qing Dynasty, Nanxincang was further expanded. According to historical records, storage spaces in Nanxincang increased from 46 during the early Qing Dynasty to 76 during the reign of Emperor Xuantong (1909–1912).

Today, Nanxincang has preserved seven old storage spaces. As a heritage site that is related to the Grand Canal, Nanxincang has been transformed into part of a popular leisure and culture street.

In addition, the site of Fuyicang, located at Gongshu District in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, has also welcomed its revival due to the Grand Canal's inscription on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*. In the late Qing Dynasty, grain to be supplied to the capital city was transported from Fuyicang along the canal. The granary was founded in 1880 during the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1875–1908), and its name means wealth and benevolence. At that time, Fuyicang had about 60 storage spaces.

When the roars of engines replaced the whistles of boatmen, Fuyicang faded away. Thanks to its status as a heritage site related to the Grand Canal, the granary has been restored and transformed into an artist exhibition centre. Restored Fuyicang has become one of Hangzhou's new cultural landmarks and gathering places for its residents' cultural and artistic lives.

As a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Grand Canal has changed its way of nourishing the lives of people living on both sides.

From the granaries of the ancients to the spiritual granaries of modern people, Nanxincang and Fuyicang have changed magnificently together with the Grand Canal.

The canal's waterways, together with the related docks, ship locks, bridges, embankments, ancient government office buildings, guild halls, temples and post stations, as well as related literature, arts, dramas, calligraphy and paintings, acrobatics and music have ushered in the same transformation. The reopening of heritage sites related to the canal has launched their revival. These sites, which had lost their cultural statuses for a long time, have become the highlight of the canal's sightseeing routes.

Over the past nine years after the canal's inscription on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*, cities along the canal sides have been continuously injected with vitality and power. The magnificent and brilliant canal radiates more charm in the new era. People not only rediscover the scenery, but have also begun to understand and cherish its historical value and cultural significance.



Grand Canal Park, Tongzhou, Beijing

A VITALISED DIALOGUE ON THE GRAND CANAL

The Chinese characters for *yunhe* (canal) first appeared in *New Book of Tang* written during the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279). Prior to this, man-made rivers of this type were known as *gou*, *du* and *qu*. The Grand Canal, linking many water systems from south to north, was not the original name. However, after its formation, no matter how its waterways changed, its starting and terminal points have always been near present-day Hangzhou and Beijing.

In recent years, many related parties began to participate in the joint actions of protecting and utilising the canal, advance the development of the Grand Canal cultural belt and enhance its international influence. In 2019, the Information Office of the People's Government of Beijing Municipality, the Information Office of the People's Government of Zhejiang Province, the People's Government of Hangzhou City and China News Service entered into the *Framework Agreement on the Cooperation Mechanism of Beijing–Hangzhou Dialogue on the Grand Canal Cultural Belt*, specifying that the dialogue is to be hosted by Beijing and Hangzhou every year in turn.

The Beijing–Hangzhou Dialogue is a key platform for telling the story of the canal together by the two sides and for spreading the canal culture to the world.



Opening ceremony of the 2021 Beijing–Hangzhou Dialogue on China's Grand Canal Cultural Belt



▲ Opening ceremony of the Charming Beijing and Hangzhou Week during the 2021 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue on China's Grand Canal Cultural Belt

Reviewing the Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue

In December 2019, the First Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue kicked off in Hangzhou. Participants from the two cities offered advice and suggestions for the development of the Grand Canal cultural belt in terms of topics, including Beijing's Practice for the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, and the Grand Canal Culture and Hangzhou. In addition, the two sides also jointly launched the Grand Canal Impression Exhibition in Beijing and Hangzhou, and the Photography Competition on the Grand Canal for Media Organisations based in Beijing and Hangzhou. Xu Hejian, deputy director of the Publicity Department of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee and the director of the Information Office of the People's Government of Beijing Municipality, pointed out that the 2019 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue achieved four major results in terms of protecting, passing down and utilising the canal cultural heritage: taking new actions, carrying out a new cooperation mechanism, exploring a new type of communication and establishing a new platform, which were of great significance to the development of

the Grand Canal cultural belt.

In 2020, the second Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, taking place in Beijing, gave full play to the leadership of the capital city. The organisers from Beijing mobilised various parties to launch nearly 20 activities around the Dialogue on the Canal to Build and Share a New Future, achieving five major results: expanding partners, reaching consensus, showing brilliant culture, implementing industrial development and spreading new highlights.

During the preparatory stage of the 2020 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, the organisers encouraged the World Historic and Cultural Canal Cities Cooperation Organisation (WCCO) to have joined the dialogue, expanding it into a five-party cooperation mechanism. By hosting a series of activities, the 2020 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue demonstrated the cooperation consensus on the protection, passing down and utilisation of the canal cultural heritage, and enhanced the influence of the event once again.

At the Second Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, experts and scholars from various fields contributed their wisdom

to the development of the Grand Canal cultural belt. A variety of colourful activities took place, including Talks between Grand Canal Cultural Luminaries, Chinese and Foreign Media Seminar on the Grand Canal, Digital Grand Canal: Special Forum on Cultural Heritage Value Interpretation and Display, and China Grand Canal Think Tank Forum. Many research results were published, such as The Development Trend of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt from the Perspective of National Strategy, Policy Coordination in Developing the Grand Canal National Cultural Park, and Prospect of the Development of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025). In 2020, *Initiative for Jointly Developing and Sharing the Grand Canal Culture* was published, which calls for strengthening the protection of the canal, passing down of the canal culture, making good use of the canal's resources, promoting international exchanges and encouraging public participation.

In addition, during the 2020 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, a series of themed exhibitions featured selected pictures, books, documents and cultural relics related to the canal. Artists from

Beijing, Hangzhou and Yangzhou highlighted the charm of the canal culture through various art forms, such as calligraphy, painting, dance and traditional Chinese operas along the canal.

In 2020, Beijing played a radiating and driving role in promoting the implementation of related industrial development. The Bank of Beijing and the Bank of Hangzhou jointly presented two cultural and financial products. Related governmental bodies from Beijing and Zhejiang entered into *Cooperation Framework Agreement on Cultural Tourism High Quality Development between Beijing and Zhejiang*, injecting new vitality into the canal's cultural development.

Linking the South and North for Better Cooperation

The 2021 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue took place in Hangzhou. There, Beijing showcased the developmental results of the capital city and the Grand Canal cultural belt in the new era. With a distinctive organisational mode, "China's Canal • World's Canal: Charming Beijing Week in Zhejiang" kicked off in Gongchenqiao, Hangzhou. The mode referred to an opening ceremony and a series of themed activities, presenting Beijing's representative culture, arts and the way of urban life to Hangzhou residents, allowing them to better learn about and

rediscover the capital city.

As a key part of the 2021 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, the Grand Canal during the New Era of Achieving Common Prosperity for All opened in Grand Canal Music Park in Hangzhou. The cultural exhibition consisted of six sections: Beijing Theme; Emperor Qianlong and the Grand Canal: Calligraphy and Seals Exhibition; Hangzhou Arts and Crafts Cultural Creation Exhibition; Books on the Grand Canal from Hangzhou; Traditional Chinese Paintings from Dynasties; and Ancient Canal Journey: Chinese and Foreign Journalists' Works Exhibition.

Many cultural forms and heritage gather along the Grand Canal. During the 2021 Charming Beijing Week in Zhejiang, Western Beijing shadow puppetry was staged at the Old Happy Teahouse in Hangzhou, presenting the charm of this type of Chinese intangible cultural heritage. Books on the Grand Canal from Beijing and cultural and creative products of "Beijing Gifts" were displayed in Xiaofeng Bookstore along with Hangzhou characteristics products to create a strong cultural atmosphere of the canal.

During the 2021 event, *guqin* (a seven-stringed plucked instrument) artists from Beijing and Hangzhou played together. *The Grand Canal of the Capital City*, a creative performing artwork combining Peking Opera and symphony, was staged in Hangzhou Grand Theatre. This play is the first stage artwork focusing on the Beijing section of the Grand Canal to

explore and hail the history and culture of the canal. Six winners of the Plum Blossom Awards, including Du Zhenjie and Li Hongtu, performed together on stage to present the legendary canal, drawing widespread attention from all walks of life.

At Ronghua Theatre, a century-old ancient stage in Hangzhou, Fan Di'an, president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and Chen Zhenlian, vice-president of the Xiling Seal Engraver's Society, were invited to participate in the Dialogue between Cultural Luminaries from the North and South Ends of the Grand Canal. Famous performers Wang Ping from the China Pingju Theatre, Weng Jiahui from the North Kunqu Opera Theatre, Yang Kun from the Zhejiang Jingkun Art Centre and Zhou Yujun from the Hangzhou Yue Opera Theatre gathered to promote cultural exchanges between Beijing and Hangzhou along the canal.

The Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue, which has been held for three consecutive years, is a key platform for telling the story of the canal together by the two sides and for spreading the canal culture to the world.

The capital city will host the 2023 Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue. The event will continue to focus on the canal and launch a series of activities, including the opening ceremony and main forum, the Beijing Theatrical Performance Season and the Academic Conference on the Development of the Grand Canal National Cultural Park.



IMPROVING THE ANCIENT WATERWAYS

Thanks to its entire length of waterways being refilled with water in April 2022, the Grand Canal will also serve as a river for improving ecological environment, providing water transport and passing down distinctive cultural heritage.

The Grand Canal has begun a new chapter. On April 28, 2022, located in Tianjin's Jinghai District, the Jiuxuan Water Gate opened, enabling water from the south to converge with local water through the South Grand Canal. Before that, water from the North Grand Canal has mixed with local water in Tianjin.

Water began to converge with Tianjin's local water, marking this as the first time in a century that the entire waterway of the Grand Canal was refilled with water.

The flowing water began to inject vitality into Ancient Canal Street in Dezhou, Shandong Province, moisten the dried-up waterways in Cangzhou, Hebei Province, bring back canal chants in Tianjin and nourish the beautiful scenery on both sides of the canal in Beijing.

New Life of the Canal

Thanks to water supplies from the Yangtze River and the Yellow River, the entire Grand Canal began to flow once again. The north section of the canal was refilled with water of a total volume of 515 million cubic metres (cu.m). If West Lake in Hangzhou, one of China's famous tourist attractions, has a water storage capacity of 14 million cu.m, the total amount of water replenished to the north section of the canal is equivalent to about that of 37 West Lakes.

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the entire length of waterways of the canal will be ensured to contain enough water throughout the year. With

the progress of water replenishment, the canal will play a more prominent role in flood control and drainage, water supply, inland navigation and ecological landscapes. The scene of gathering boats along the canal in ancient times cannot be replicated, but today, the Grand Canal has the opportunity to rearrange its status. Thanks to its entire length of the Grand Canal's waterways being refilled with water in April 2022, the canal will also serve as a river for improving the

ecological environment, providing water transport and passing down distinctive cultural heritage.

Improving the Canal's Ecological Environment

The improvement of the Grand Canal's ecological environment has contributed to its re-navigation. In recent years, protecting the environment of the Grand Canal has become a focus. Cultural heritage is the soul of the Grand Canal.



Thanks to the entire Grand Canal having been refilled with water, the man-made river's charm will be revived.

Beijing is located at the north end of the Grand Canal. Many heritage sites dot both sides of the canal in the capital city, becoming a key part of the canal culture. With the development of the Beijing section of the Grand Canal cultural belt, cultural heritage sites, such as ruins in parks and ancient buildings,

have become popular tourist attractions.

With the development of more than 10 sightseeing routes along the canal by the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, the canal culture has become more diverse. Today, in the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre by the canal, the new arched Beiguan River Water Gate, magnificent Daguang Tower and ancient Dipankara Pagoda are combined with the surrounding modern buildings. The inverted reflections of the administrative centre's beautiful skyline in the water, along with the integration of the canal scenery and cultural history, present a spectacular panorama.

Hangzhou is the southern starting point of the Grand Canal, which runs through the city. Located in Gongshu District, Hangzhou, Gongchen Bridge spans the Grand Canal, marking its starting point. Next to the bridge stands the Grand Canal Museum, where a variety of exhibits, such as pictures, maps and sculptures, highlight the past and present of the canal.

The development of the Grand Canal National Cultural Park and cultural belt is accelerating. Focusing on scientific heritage protection, from Nanxun in

In addition, new cultural facilities along the Grand Canal, such as libraries and theatres, will soon open to the public, adding more vitality to the canal.

Zhejiang to Yangliuqing in Tianjin, historic towns along the canal are vibrant and shining. The restored canal injects strong momentum into the development of cities on both sides. In the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre, the Canal Business District with beautiful environment has taken shape, drawing more financial, technological and innovative enterprises, as well as business providers to settle down along the canal. In Dezhou, Shandong Province, cultural and creative industrial parks and ecological corridors dot both sides of the Grand Canal, becoming a highlight of the city's high-quality development.

The revived ancient man-made river is destined to be another brilliant sight and its cultural legacy will be passed down from generation to generation.



A low-angle photograph of a traditional Chinese building with a tiled roof and a large bronze dragon sculpture in the foreground. The dragon is intricately detailed with scales and a long, flowing mane. The building's roof is covered in dark tiles with colorful decorative elements. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with some light clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with the sun visible in the upper left corner, creating a lens flare effect.

REDISCOVERING THE GRAND CANAL

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi
Photos by Wang Jianing, Shikhei Goh (Indonesia)

Today, there are more than 1,200 heritage sites and tangible cultural heritage items, as well as 450 intangible cultural heritage items along the Grand Canal, including pagodas, bridges, canal culture and poetry in Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Shandong and Hebei provinces, along with the municipalities of Tianjin and Beijing. People today can explore these heritage sites and items to feel the canal's profound history and to appreciate its new look in cities and towns along the south-to-north man-made river.

Different sections of the Grand Canal have different features. Along the canal's Hangzhou and Suzhou sections, sightseers can experience the lives of locals in an elegant atmosphere. In Yangzhou, they can see beautiful petals of spring flowers falling in the breeze. Along the Huai'an Water Interchange and the Suqian Middle Canal, they come to Yaowan Ancient Town at the junction of the Xuzhou section of the Grand Canal and the Luoma River, where courtyards with buildings made of blue bricks and tiles are filled with the aroma of authentic local soy sauce. Heading north along the canal, they can continue to explore its legendary stories at Daicun Dam in Shandong, Baiyangdian in Hebei, Sancha River in Tianjin and Baifu Spring in Beijing.

BEIJING SECTION

The Grand Canal has nourished Beijing for over 1,000 years, playing a key role in the history of the city's development. The canal runs through Changping, Haidian, Xicheng, Dongcheng and Chaoyang districts, as well as the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre in Tongzhou District. Beijing has also focused on preserving the canal over the years. Thanks to thorough investigations, improvements and renovations, more than 50 heritage sites have become showcases for the history and culture of the canal, the capital city and the nation.

Located in Baifu Village, Changping District, Baifu Spring was the northernmost end of the Grand Canal. During the Yuan Dynasty, after a field survey, Guo Shoujing (1231–1316) from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) decided to utilise Baifu Spring as the water source at the north end of the canal to improve the water transport of grain from the Yangtze River Delta to be supplied to Dadu (today's Beijing). A pond was

constructed for Baifu Spring and was named Nine-Dragon Pond, as there were nine blue stone dragon heads engraved around the pond's water outlet. Spring water erupted from the outlet and flowed into Kunming Lake at today's Summer Palace along the southwest waterways of the canal.

Kunming Lake, with a total area of two square kilometres (sq.km), makes up roughly three-quarters of the Summer Palace. During the Yuan Dynasty, the lake served as the water source for the Beijing section of the canal. The water of Kunming Lake was first replenished with the water from Baifu Spring. Later, the lake converged with Yuquan Spring water and the North Changhe River to flow out from its eastern part to enter Jishui Pond (Shichahai) via the South Changhe River, to the Changhe River at Zizhuyuan and past Gaoliang Bridge.

During the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234), Shichahai was excavated and expanded into a lake, also known as Jishui Pond.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Guo Shoujing dug an outlet in the west of the pond to divert its water to flow east for the formation of what would later be the Tonghui River. In so doing, grain was transported from the Yangtze River Delta in the south along the Grand Canal to Tongzhou via the Tonghui River and then directly to the urban areas of Dadu. Shichahai includes Qianhai, Houhai and Xihai lakes. The existing area is about 0.34 sq.km. The westernmost point of Qianhai is the intake of the Tonghui River.

In ancient times, located at the southeast end of the city walls of Beijing, Dongbianmen, or Dongbian Gate, was also a hustling and bustling area. During the Yuan Dynasty's construction of the city of Dadu, Guo Shoujing presided over the dredging of the Tonghui River from Dadu's urban areas to Tongzhou to solve the issue of water transport. In this way, vessels from the Yangtze River Delta in the south could sail to the inside of the capital city along the Grand Canal via the

Tonghui River. However, the terrain of Beijing was high in the west and low in the east, with a drop of up to 20 metres (m). Water transport proved difficult as a result of this difference in elevation. To solve this, Guo built a total of 24 water gates along the Tonghui River. Outside Dongbianmen, Datong Gate was the first one of the 24 gates. Back then, the Gaoliang River flowed into the Tonghui River at Dongbianmen. As a result, Dongbianmen and the vicinity of Datong Bridge became the hub of the capital city's urban water networks during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties. It linked the Tonghui River in the east and the city's moat in the north, south and west. As a major linking point, it was a busy place where goods were unloaded, and passengers disembarked to be transported elsewhere or to enter into the city's urban areas.

In ancient times, Tongzhou had densely distributed docks on both sides of the North Canal and the Tonghui River. Among the numerous docks, Zhangjiawan Dock was the busiest. The name Zhangjiawan originated from the Yuan Dynasty. Located five kilometres (km) from the urban areas of Tongzhou, Zhangjiawan became a major town and material distribution centre in West Beijing thanks to the canal transport.

Zhangjiawan witnessed the remarkable scene of numerous vessels sailing back and forth along the Grand Canal. The city walls of Zhangjiawan and Tongyun Bridge, built during the Ming Dynasty, still stand, becoming the symbols of the town's past glory.

Today, walking in the shade of Chinese parasol trees and ginkgo trees along both sides of the canal in Tongzhou, people can enjoy the beautiful,

With its position along the Grand Canal, Tongzhou played a key role in warehousing and water transport.

inverted reflections of modern high-rise buildings and the high-speed railway running on bridges over the canal. The harmonious blending of ancient and modern features creates a magnificent scene along the canal.



TIANJIN SECTION



▲ Heavenly Empress Palace, Tianjin



▲ Hustling and bustling Mazu Cultural Tourism Festival at the Heavenly Empress Palace, Tianjin

Water from the Tongzhou section of the Grand Canal, which flows through Yangwa Water Gate, the boundary point of the North Canal between Beijing and Hebei Province, runs into Xianghe County in Hebei. The water meanders south for over 20 km in Hebei before entering Tianjin. This municipality, which began to thrive due to water transport, has 27 immovable physical heritage sites, such as the mouth of the Sancha River, Yangliuqing Town, Jiuxuan Water Gate, Dulu Wooden Bridge, Tianhou (the Heavenly Empress) Palace and the Shi's Courtyard, as well as a large number of intangible cultural heritage items. These legacies contain many interesting stories.

In ancient times, the Heavenly Empress was also called Mazu, or the Goddess of the Sea. Legend has it that Mazu was Lin Mo from Fujian and often sailed to rescue people from shipwrecks. During the Yuan Dynasty, grain needed to be transported from the Yangtze River Delta in the south to Beijing in the north every year. Cargo was first transported to Tianjin by sea and then transferred to the capital city via the Grand Canal. Seagoing vessels were large, and could carry a hefty amount of cargo, but sea transport was dangerous. According to *History of the Yuan Dynasty*, grain ships often sank in distress on the way to Tianjin. In order to seek maritime safety, the Yuan court honoured Mazu as the Heavenly Empress and built dedicated buildings in coastal cities to enshrine the deity. Heavenly Empress Palace in Tianjin was first built in 1326.

Located near the old mouth of the Sancha River, Heavenly Empress Palace was once the most hustling and bustling spot in all of Tianjin. In ancient times, every year on the Heavenly Empress's birthday, with the palace as the centre, a large ceremony for worshipping the deity took place, gathering boatmen, followers and businesspeople from all over the



▲ Panoramic view of Yangliuqing Ancient Town, Tianjin

nation. Later, the area around the palace formed into Tianjin's most famous business street—Gongnangong North Street (today's Ancient Cultural Street).

Since the introduction of the Heavenly Empress to Tianjin during the Yuan Dynasty, belief in the importance of the empress continued to grow in the city. By integrating with its local culture, the Mazu belief and customs evolved, gathering a variety of folk literary and artistic forms since the establishment of Tianjin, which also become part of the Grand Canal culture.

Jiuxuan Water Gate is the earliest existing facility of this type in Tianjin and the last water gate of the Grand Canal that flows out of the city. In addition to discharging flood water of the South Canal, Jiuxuan Water Gate once played a role in solving Tianjin's water shortage. As a key water conservancy engineering project along the Grand Canal, Jiuxuan Water Gate is not only a representative achievement of modern China's water conservancy technology, but also has certain heritage value. Since the Grand Canal's successful inscription on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*, the water conservancy engineering has been further protected and has become a popular tourist attraction.

Due to the Grand Canal flowing

through Tianjin, Yangliuqing began to thrive, becoming a famous town along the canal. Located in the centre of Yangliuqing, the Shi's Courtyard was the former residence of Shi Yuanshi (1849–1919), one of the eight major luminaries in Tianjin during the late Qing Dynasty. The ancestors of Shi were natives of Shandong Province and made a fortune on water transport along the canal. Later, the Shi family settled down in Yangliuqing during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736–1796).

In 1823, the Shi family's property was divided by later generations and four building complexes were built. Today's Shi's Courtyard, also known as Zunmei Hall, founded in 1875, was one of them, and covers an area of more than 6,000 sq.m, including four smaller courtyards. Each courtyard is enclosed by walls, and the buildings feature carved beams and painted rafters. Most of the courtyards' main doors are designed with unique craftsmanship. The brick, wood and stone carvings of the entire complex are not only exquisitely decorated, but also have extremely rich connotations.

The Shi's Courtyard features a traditional Chinese layout and architectural style, reflecting the culture and folk customs of the late Qing Dynasty. Located in the centre of the courtyard, its opera

tower, the highest building in the entire complex, is the most intact and largest of this type in northern China. The tower is made of bricks and timber, with a floor area of 410 sq.m, a height of 9 m and 54 columns. Under the crossbeam are traditional Chinese-style lamp decorations, and wooden carvings are embedded between the beams and columns. On the middle section of each of the 12 columns are hung 12 lamps. The upper part of each column features a round shape and its lower part is square, symbolising the round sky and square earth. These columns support a circle of corridors, where servants stood in the old days. Above the corridors are spacious windows allowing sunlight to illuminate the space without directly shining on the people below. Many famous Peking Opera artists performed on the stage of the opera tower.

Jiuxuan Water Gate is the earliest existing facility of this type in Tianjin and the last water gate of the Grand Canal that flows out of the city.

HEBEI SECTION

The Grand Canal in Hebei Province not only witnessed great changes, but has also nurtured a profound canal culture. Martial arts, acrobatics and heritage sites have been passed down on both sides of the canal, becoming the pride of Hebei people.

During the Yuan Dynasty, the Grand Canal began to run through the entire territory of Hebei's Wuqiao. The total length of the waterways of the canal within Wuqiao is 34.8 km. Its zigzagging waterways have become the most beautiful among all the canal's sections north of the Yangtze River.

Wuqiao's acrobatics originated from the Spring and Autumn Period (770–446 BC) and developed from Jiaodi opera. Over thousands of years, Wuqiao's acrobatics have flourished thanks to the development of the canal. Many acrobatic programmes from Wuqiao still retain the characteristics of locals' work, lives and games along the canal. The canal served as a means of transport that acrobats in Wuqiao relied on for survival. Along the canal, generation after generation of acrobats from Wuqiao travelled north or south. As cultural ambassadors for acrobatic exchanges and artistic integration, they have played a key role in promoting the artform throughout the world. Even today, there is a saying that claims 9 out of 10 acrobats are natives of Wuqiao.

Many famous acrobatic artists emerged in Wuqiao, such as Sun Fuyou, Sun Fengshan, Shi Dejun and Zhao Fengqi. They acquired outstanding acrobatic techniques in Wuqiao and went global from there, contributing to the acrobatic exchanges between China and the rest of the world.

In addition to Wuqiao acrobatics, which gained fame along the Grand Canal, Cangzhou boasted its martial arts due to the navigation of the canal.

Cangzhou borders the Bohai Sea to the east, Shandong Province to the south, and Beijing and Tianjin to the north. In addition, two of the five imperial roads during the Ming and Qing dynasties passed through Cangzhou, and the Grand Canal has also run through Cangzhou since ancient times. Cangzhou was not only a strategic spot, but also a gathering place for businesspeople from near and far. Thus, many natives of Cangzhou practiced martial arts to protect their homes and their various pursuits. The unique geographical environment and specific historical conditions created a martial arts atmosphere in Cangzhou.

Natives of Cangzhou have had a tradition of practicing martial arts and respecting their teachers since ancient times. Thanks to many local martial arts masters who were highly respected in Cangzhou in the past, they decided to teach their techniques to later generations. According to statistics, nearly 2,000 natives of Cangzhou were winners of the imperial martial arts examination during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As a cultural landmark with Cangzhou characteristics and an intangible cultural heritage item, Cangzhou's martial arts have coexisted and grown together with the Grand Canal. Today, martial arts are continuing to present wonderful stories along the Cangzhou section of the canal in the new era.

The reason why Hebei is famous for its martial arts and acrobatics is not only due to artists and masters who have continued to improve the practice, but also thanks to the smooth operation of the Grand Canal in Hebei. The canal's Hebei section is 600 km in length, running through Langfang, Cangzhou, Hengshui, Xingtai and Handan, making the section a relatively complete waterway and dike system. In order to ensure the smooth operation of the canal, ancient Chinese demonstrated their extraordinary wis-

dom. Located on the left bank of the South Canal in Hengshui, Huajiakou rammed earth is the crystallisation of the extraordinary wisdom of the ancients.

Many sections of the Grand Canal were excavated from natural rivers. The problem of water level elevation drops was solved by extending the length of the canal's waterways. However, the excessive impact of the flow of water on bends could easily cause dike breaches. Huajiakou has been a vulnerable section with such bends since ancient times. According to historical records, the section where Huajiakou is located was excavated in AD 608. Until the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the section had served transport for over 1,300 years.

In 1911, the Huajiakou rammed earth project began. The project had a total length of 255 m and was trapezoi-

dal in shape, with a top width of 13 m in a north-south direction. The elevation of the entire section ranged from 5.8 m to 6.7 m. The inner slopes of the dikes facing the water were rammed to form dam walls, which were covered with loess, lime and glutinous rice slurry. The average thickness of the dam walls was about 18 centimetres. The base of the dam walls was constructed with slide-resistant timber piles. The outer slopes of the dikes and its top were built of rammed earth. The curvilinear shape of the project conformed to the principle of fluid mechanics. As a result, water erosion was alleviated to the maximum extent.

Huajiakou's rammed earth project is known as "a glutinous rice dike" because it was built using the technique of mixing glutinous rice slurry with lime in accordance with the workmanship of traditional Chinese construction. The

Huajiakou rammed earth project is considered a typical representative of the advanced water conservancy technology of the ancients. Since the completion of the project, the Huajiakou section of the Grand Canal has not breached its dikes.

Huajiakou's rammed earth project is known as "a glutinous rice dike" because it was built using the technique of mixing glutinous rice slurry with lime in accordance with the workmanship of traditional Chinese construction.



In addition to Wuqiao acrobatics, which gained fame along the Grand Canal, Cangzhou boasted its martial arts due to the navigation of the canal.



Children practicing acrobatics in Wuqiao, Hebei Province

SHANDONG SECTION

Cities along the Shandong section of the Grand Canal boast profound heritage. Over nearly 1,000 years, the Grand Canal has left a variety of legacies, such as Lijian Water Gate, Nanwang Dragon King Temple Ruins and Wenshang Canal Brick Dikes, as well as Shandong clapper ballad and Shandong Bangzi Opera in Dezhou, Liaocheng, Tai'an, Jining and Zaozhuang in the province.

Dezhou was not only a centre for north-south transport and economic and cultural exchanges in ancient China, but still preserves the tomb of a foreign king—the Sultan of Sulu Paduka Batara (or Paduka Pahala)—watched over by his descendants to this day.

According to historical records, the Sultanate of Sulu, a Muslim state, ruled some islands of the Sulu Sea in the southern Philippines. In 1417, three sultans from the islands, including Paduka Batara, led a friendly delegation of over 340 members to visit China and received a grand reception from Emperor Chengzu (reign: 1402–1424) of the Ming Dynasty. Unfortunately, on the way back home from Beijing along the Grand Canal, Sultan Paduka Batara died of illness at Dezhou in Shandong Province. Emperor Chengzu issued an imperial edict on burying him in Dezhou, with formalities fit for a Chinese king, and personally wrote an inscription to honour him. The late sultan's eldest son led his people to return to ascend the throne. One of the late sultan's wives and his two sons settled down in Dezhou to guard the tomb. In 1731, descendants of the late sultan became naturalised Chinese citizens under the surnames Wen and An. To this day, the 22nd generation of their descendants remains in China.

Over the course of more than 600 years, the Sultan of Sulu Paduka Batara's Tomb has not only witnessed the integration of the friendship between China and the Philippines thanks the Grand Ca-

nal, but has also become one of the key relics left by ancient China's Maritime Silk Road and the Grand Canal for political, economic and cultural exchanges.



▲ Linqing Pagoda, Shandong Province

Located on the east bank of the Wei Canal, Linqing Pagoda is the only structure of this type that was built during the Ming Dynasty in Shandong Province. The pagoda was first built in 1611, with nine storeys connected by flights of staircases inside. The top floor is a good vantage point for overlooking its surrounding sights, including the towering Mount Tai.

Today, the ancient pagoda, together with Dipankara Pagoda in Tongzhou, Beijing, Wenfeng Pagoda in Yangzhou and Liuhe Pagoda in Hangzhou, are known as the "Four Famous Pagodas along the Grand Canal." They not only witnessed the prosperity of the cities along the canal during the Ming and Qing dynasties, but have also become outstanding representatives of ancient Chinese architectural art.

Located in Mashi Street, Linqing, Canal Chaoguan is China's only extant ancient governmental office building of this type along the Grand Canal. In 1429, silver was not allowed to be traded directly, including for taxes, which could only be paid in paper money. Thus, Chaoguan was established as an agency to oversee the taxation of canal transport. At that time, there were seven offices of this type in Hangzhou, Hushu, Yangzhou, Huai'an, Linqing, Hexiwu and Chongwenmen from south to north along the canal. In 1435, the imperial court elevated the office in Linqing to a higher-level taxation authority. Back then, the office covered an area of over 40,000 sq.m, and included halls and warehouses. By the time of the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573–1620), the office in Linqing ranked first among all offices of this type.

Every stone tablet and brick in the site of Linqing Chaoguan is extremely precious. The site is a key cultural relic regarding the research of the economy of the Ming and Qing dynasties, the formation and development of cities along

the canal, and taxation in ancient China.

The reason why the Grand Canal has become a world-famous project is its exquisite functional design. The Shandong section of the canal still gathers many water gates and dams with complex engineering workmanship, representing the highest achievements of ancient Chinese water conservancy technology. Daicun Dam in Tai'an is one of the representatives. During the Yuan Dynasty, a dam for water diversion was set up in the city of Jining, but the city was not the highest point of the canal, making this section difficult for navigation. During the Ming Dynasty, the situation changed.

A new dam was built on the Dawen River in Daicun, which featured higher terrain than that of the dam in Jining. Only by building a dam there to store water and divert it into Nanwang could the entire section be navigable. After its completion, Daicun Dam's three sections could store water step by step, ensuring an appropriate volume of water entering the canal.

Nowadays, a museum has been built next to the dam, with a simple and lively architectural style and strong modern elements. Exhibits, including cultural relics and models, showcase the dam's construction process, history and function.

Dezhou was not only a centre for north-south transport and economic and cultural exchanges in ancient China, but still preserves the tomb of a foreign king—the Sultan of Sulu Paduka Batara (or Paduka Pahala)—remains watched over by his descendants to this day.



Daicun Dam, Tai'an, Shandong Province

JIANGSU SECTION



Guazhou Ancient Ferry Park, Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province

As the home to a famous ancient ferry, Guazhou once gathered numerous vessels sailing back and forth. Many poets who visited there created famous works depicting its scenic views.

A blueprint regarding the Jiangsu section of the Grand Canal shows a canal cultural heritage belt running from the north to south of the province, stretching 683 km and passing through Xuzhou, Suqian, Huai'an, Yangzhou, Zhenjiang, Changzhou, Wuxi and Suzhou. The belt covers numerous heritage sites, such as Suzhou Ancient City, Guazhou Ancient Ferry, Slender West Lake, Wenfeng Pagoda, Beigu Hill, Huishan Ancient Town and Qingming Bridge, focusing on Wu culture, Huaiyang culture, Chu-Han culture and Jinling culture. For over 2,500 years, the canal has nurtured Jiangsu, and stories about the man-made river still spread throughout the land.

Yangzhou in Jiangsu Province once served as the origin of the ancient Grand Canal. In 486 BC, King Fuchai of the State of Wu ordered the construction of Han'gou Canal, aiming to connect the Yangtze River and Huaihe River to conquer the Central Plains via waterways. Although the run of the Grand Canal changed several times, Yangzhou has always been a transport hub on the man-made river. Thanks to canal transport, Yangzhou has been a prosperous city since ancient times.

Poems written in ancient times tell of the heritage sites and cultural changes at the intersection of the Grand Canal, the Yangtze River and the Yellow River.

Guazhou was a small island in the Yangtze River, located at the junction of the branch of the Grand Canal and the Yangtze River. The island's name originated from its shape resembling a watermelon.

As an ancient ferry with a unique geographical location, Guazhou was also a battleground for military strategists. In 1161, King Hailing (reign: 1149–1161) of the Jin Dynasty led a strong army to attack the Southern Dynasty in the Yangtze River Delta. On the way south, he learned that Wanyan Yong (later Emperor Shizong, reign: 1161–1189), one of his elder male cousins, took the opportunity to rebel and claim the title of emperor. However, King Hailing was unwilling to return without success and decided to cross the Yangtze River to defeat the Southern Song Dynasty. Under the command of Yu Yunwen (1110–1174), the Southern Song army repelled the enemy at Caishiji, burning all their warships. This was the famous Battle of Caishiji. King Hailing was forced to remain stationed in Guazhou to prevent his troops from retreating and deciding to cross the river again. Unexpectedly, King Hailing was killed in the outbreak of mutiny. Lu You (1125–1210), a poet from the Song Dynasty, recounted the historical event

in one of his poems.

Later, due to changes of the Yangtze River waterways, Guazhou Island subsided year by year, and in the late Qing Dynasty, the entire island sank into the river. In the reconstructed Guazhou Town, there is scenic area called Guazhou Ancient Ferry Park. One can walk all the way to the shore of the Yangtze River through attractions such as the Silver Bell Tower and Jinchun Garden in the park. On the bank is a towering memorial archway, with Chinese characters inscribed on its lintel to praise the scenic views of Guazhou. The solemn and dignified building resembles a patron saint, watching over the intersection of the Grand Canal and the Yangtze River. Not far from the archway is a small hill with an observation pavilion built upon it. In front of the pavilion stands a stone tablet with an inscription reading, "Guazhou Ancient Ferry." In ancient times, Guazhou Ferry was located nearby here to welcome vessels travelling south and north along the Grand Canal, witnessing the hustling and bustling canal.

In ancient China, ensuring the smooth operation of the Grand Canal was not an easy task. In order to solve the problems of terrain elevation difference, water source control, water depth control, flood control and disaster reduction that appeared during the construc-

tion of the canal, the ancients developed many outstanding water conservancy projects on the waterway.

In 1194, the Yellow River burst and rushed into the waterways of the Huaihe River, flowing to the sea. After the regulation of the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the confluence of the Yellow River, the Huaihe River and the Grand Canal formed at Qingkou in Huai'an. However, the Yellow River has the highest water level, which was prone to flowing back into the waterways of the Huaihe River and the canal, resulting in their siltation. To ensure the canal's smooth navigation, Pan Jixun (1521–1595) built a weir at the confluence of the three rivers, using the accumulated Hongze Lake water to reduce the rivers' siltation. During the Qing Dynasty, thanks to the water conservancy facility, the Yellow River estuary was further dredged, making the rivers flow smoothly once again. The water conservancy facility at Qingkou in Huai'an has always been considered one of the most advanced in ancient Chinese water control history.

The water conservancy facility at Qingkou in Huai'an has become one of the major heritage sites along the Grand Canal. To show the hydraulic achievements in the canal's operation, China Hydraulic Science and Technology Museum is to stand near the facility.

For over 2,500 years, the Grand Canal has nurtured Jiangsu, and stories about the man-made river still spread throughout the land.



An ancient stone bridge over the Grand Canal

ZHEJIANG SECTION

Heading south along the Grand Canal sightseers will enter Zhejiang Province, where the canal culture dots many of its cities. In Jiaxing, houses on both sides of the canal appear in front of sightseers. Locals go shopping via a bridge over the canal outside their front doors, wash vegetables in the canal outside their back doors, stand by their windows to hang clothes, or simply play chess and drink tea on the banks. Walking among the traditional houses featuring Yangtze River Delta style with pink walls and black tiles in the shade of leafy trees, sightseers feel that they have returned to ancient times.

For thousands of years, the Grand Canal has passed through the town of Wangjiangjing in Jiaxing. Sightseers can berth their boats and explore the town along the canal, where they discover that

time seems to slow. Located in Xiuzhou District, Wangjiangjing, which borders Jiaxing's urban areas to the south and Wujiang in Jiangsu Province to the north, is a gateway from northern Zhejiang to southern Jiangsu. The old town's former name was Wenchuan, and was later renamed after residents surnamed Wang and Jiang.

Located in the east of Wangjiangjing, Changhong Bridge, with three arches, spans the canal and is a remarkable attraction of the Jiaxing section of the Canal. Built during the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, the bridge, with a total length of 72.8 m, is the largest stone arch bridge built on the plain of northern Zhejiang, and is also known as the "First Bridge of the Canal in Zhejiang." In addition, Liansidang Park in the east of the town is also worth vis-

The Three Pagodas of Jiaxing are not only key navigation marks of the Grand Canal, but also symbols of the ancient city.

iting. Behind the park is a vast expanse of fertile farmlands, and in front of it is a more than 600,000-sq.m fishpond, creating a picturesque scene of milk and honey in the Yangtze River Delta.

Standing outside the west gate of Jiaxing along the canal, the Three Pago-



▲ The Three Pagodas of Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province

Wuzhen, located on the east side of the Grand Canal, is known as "The Last Water Town in China."

das of Jiaxing are not only key navigation marks of the canal, but also symbols of the ancient city. First built during the Tang Dynasty, these three pagodas are brick structures in traditional Chinese architectural style. In those days, boatmen who saw the three pagodas facing the city on the waterside would sail cautiously. In actuality, the three pagodas served as navigation marks.

After the Grand Canal was completed, Jiaxing was only accessible by water. Vessels would berth by the Three Pagodas. In ancient times, the area around them was prosperous. Later, the three pagodas were destroyed in the flames of war. After the reconstruction of the Three Pagodas on their original site in 1999, a park emerged around them. In addition to the three pagodas, stone archways, pavilions and other attractions have been basically rebuilt according to their original appearances.

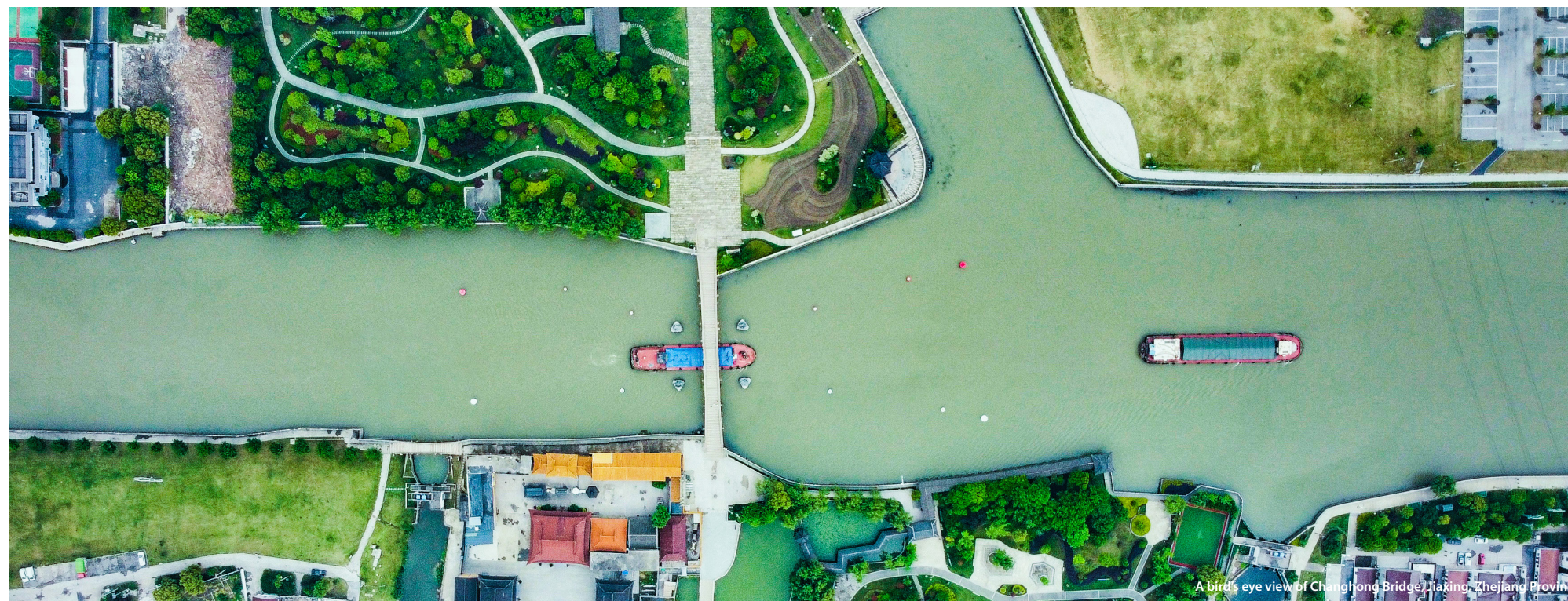
Located in Huzhou City, Nanxun was once a well-known silk town in the Yangtze River Delta. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Nanxun developed and prospered due to silkworm breeding and manual silk reeling, in addition to the convenient water transport along the Ditang Canal, a branch of the Grand Canal. The river network in the town is still roughly in the shape of a cross,

consisting of the Nanshi, Dongshi, Xishi and Baoshan rivers, with many smaller waterways crisscrossing between them. Streets and residential buildings are distributed along these waterways. Residential buildings, business facilities and gardens built along the rivers present a representative atmosphere of the Yangtze River Delta.

Located on the east side of the Grand Canal in Jiaxing, Wuzhen, a famous historical and cultural town, has a civilisation history of over 7,000 years and a town history of 1,300 years. It is a typical ancient town in the Yangtze River Delta. The Grand Canal runs through the entire town, with water as "its streets" and banks "as the city." Buildings on both sides face the river, forming charming scenery of a water town.

Heading south from Huzhou is Hangzhou, the starting point of the Grand Canal. The Hangzhou section of the canal is its southernmost point. The canal flows into Hangzhou through Tangqi and then into the Qiantang River at Sanbao Shiplock via Gongshu, Xia-cheng and Jianggan districts. Throughout its thousands of years of history, the canal has enabled the city to integrate special products, food, garments and customs from around the nation, leaving many heritage sites behind. Most of these legacies have been preserved to this day. Hangzhou has been nourished by the flowing water of the canal, and its daily life features distinctive colours. Not only does it preserve the elegance and classicality of history, but it also highlights the vitality of modernity, attracting attention from all directions.

Since ancient times, the Grand Canal and the cities along it have been closely linked, forming an important system in the history of China's canal civilisation and urban development.



A bird's eye view of Changhong Bridge, Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province

CHARMING CITIES ALONG THE GRAND CANAL

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Over the past thousands of years, the Grand Canal has run from China's south to north. With the passing of time and the changes in society, the canal no longer serves a role as China's economic artery as it did in ancient times. However, the legacies left behind by the canal remain a vibrant part of the country's history and culture.

Since the excavation of the Grand Canal, the cities along it have been closely linked, forming a key system in the history of China's canal civilisation and urban development. As the water began to replenish the entire distance of the canal in recent years and its Beijing-Hebei section opened again for navigation, the profound cultural heritage of the cities along the canal and the prosperous modern urban growth have become more deeply integrated. Ancient and modern civilisations meet along the canal, giving rise to a more brilliant future for the cities on its banks.



TONGZHOU: AN EXCEPTIONAL SCENE BY THE GRAND CANAL

On June 24, 2022, to the chanting of a work song, navigation along the Grand Canal's Beijing-Hebei section reopened. The loud and clear chant brought with it a vivid memory, as if the past hundreds of years have remained the same over time. In ancient times, to this same chant, the canal and the city of Tongzhou began their busy day.

Dipankara Pagoda

After the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) established Dadu (today's Beijing) as its capital, the transport of grains from China's south to north played a significant role in governing the nation. After 20 years of reconstructing and dredging the Grand Canal excavated during the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, the man-made river connecting the south and north was finally completed. At the beginning of spring each year, the 42-kilometre-long section of the Grand Canal in Tongzhou saw the gathering of all types of vessels from the Yangtze River Delta, creating the magnificent scene of a long fleet moving along the canal.

Today, when taking a boat to move north from dock No. 1 of the Tongzhou section, after some

time, sightseers will see the towering Dipankara Pagoda. The ancient pagoda, together with the Buddhist Relic Pagoda in Linqing, Wenfeng Pagoda in Yangzhou and Liuhe Pagoda in Hangzhou, are known as the "Four Famous Pagodas along the Grand Canal." First built some 1,300 years ago, Dipankara Pagoda stands only hundreds of metres (m) from the Grand Canal and its reflection can be clearly seen on the surface of the water. In ancient times, people who came to Beijing from thousands of kilometres (km) to the south would cheer when they saw the pagoda from a distance, as it was a sign that they would soon safely arrive in Tong-

zhou after such a long and arduous journey along the waterway. Thus, it has been the most famous landmark building at the north end of the canal in Tongzhou since ancient times.

An observation tower, located on the

bank of Hulu Lake, is the best vantage point to see Dipankara Pagoda. Standing on the observation tower, sightseers will see the pagoda with its traditional Chinese architectural style, such as *dougong* brackets, overhanging eaves and brick carvings. In the breeze, bells that are hung on the pagoda's eaves make pleasant sounds.

Yongtong Bridge

Yongtong Bridge is also a landmark at the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre in Tongzhou. Over the Tonghui River, one of the Grand Canal's branches, the bridge connecting the roads on both sides is no different from an

ordinary bridge. However, it has a long history and has played a great role since ancient times.

Yongtong Bridge was also called Bali Bridge in ancient times, and was originally constructed using wooden materials. Navigation along the Tonghui River was sometimes suspended for various reasons. Transporting grain and other goods from Zhangjiawan at the north end of the Grand Canal in Tongzhou to Chaoyang Gate in urban Beijing relied on carriages drawn by animals moving over the bridge, which eventually could not bear the heavy loads. In 1446, Emperor Yingzong (reigns: 1435–1449, 1457–1464) of the Ming Dynasty approved the building of a stone bridge to replace the original wooden one and renamed it "Yongtong" ("Forever Smooth Transport"). The stone bridge had three arches. Its middle arch is 8.5 m high and 6.7 m wide. The large difference between the heights of the arches is due to the requirements of water transport in ancient times.

At the end of 2019, the new Yongtong Bridge was completed and opened to traffic. Located 152 m west of the old one, the new

bridge is ivory white and resembles a crescent over the river. The old and new Yongtong bridges have become a pair of tourist attractions and cultural sites in Tongzhou District.

Three Major Buildings in Urban Forest Park

The Grand Canal once witnessed the prosperity of Tongzhou. Today, a new milestone comes to the banks of the canal—the rapid development of the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre.

The administrative centre's core area is an 11.2 sq.km Central Green Forest Park. In the western section of the park are the remnants of a 2.5-km-long section of the canal. North of the remnants of the canal's waterway are the forest park's three major buildings: the administrative centre's museum, library and theatre. Like a boat on the canal, the museum is embedded in the urban forest. The library has many distinctive features, such as its exterior, which resembles a red stamp. The theatre, made up of three individual buildings, is praised as the "granary of culture."

Thanks to the natural scenery and cultural heritage along the canal, the charms of both ancient and modern features meet in the administrative centre in Tongzhou, creating a truly exceptional scene before the eyes of people.

Dipankara Pagoda is known as one of the "Four Famous Pagodas along the Grand Canal."

The old and new Yongtong Bridges echo each other, becoming a pair of attractions in Tongzhou.

TIANJIN: A THRIVING CITY IN HARMONY WITH THE SMOOTH CANAL

The city of Tianjin and the Grand Canal are dependent on and beneficial to each other. In the past, the canal was bustling with merchant ships and boats, which led to the city flourishing. Today, after several years of rapid development, Tianjin has become a metropolis, and although the canal has lost its role in water transportation, it remains a scenic highlight of the cityscape. The city and the canal together continue to write the history of the region.

Sancha River Estuary

Jin'gang Bridge, a double-leaf beam-type steel bridge, resembles a rainbow spanning the Haihe River. The red arched steel frames link the two layers of the bridge in a clever way. Not far from the bridge, the South and North canals merge, and then join the Haihe River under the bridge. The junction of three rivers takes the shape of Y at the well-known Sancha River Estuary. This place was the site of Tianjin's oldest settlement, Zhigu Village, which is dubbed "the cradle of Tianjin." According to historical documents, after the Grand Canal was built, it became an important transfer station for the shipment of tribute grain. Therefore, many sailboats and ships were berthed there. The estuary has played an important role in Tianjin's

developmental history.

In the 18th century, the estuary was full of ships and sailboats, which slowly floated along the river or berthed on its banks. As soon as the vessels laid their anchors, boatmen and sailors immediately went ashore. They rushed to their favourite destinations, including Badacheng Restaurant, Goubuli Steamed Buns Shop, Sixuan Teahouse, and Deshengyuan and Xieshengyuan theatres. These locations were hotspots and bustled with customers.

The prosperity of the Sancha River Estuary was the epitome of Tianjin's development for several hundred years. Today, Tianjin locals who grew up by the Grand Canal usually recommend an itinerary to their friends who want to travel to the city. Tourists should first

go to admire the waterscape near the Sancha River Estuary, next, take a photograph with Wanghailou Church and then visit the nearby Italian Style Street. The relaxed and leisurely local lifestyle is a far cry from the past bustling scenes of gathered vessels at the estuary.

Time-honoured Brands along Old Streets

The Grand Canal has not only witnessed Tianjin's development but also nourishes the city's commerce and culture.

During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, the imperial court ordered the suspension of marine transportation, but allowed the operations of river transport. As a result, Tianjin became northern China's water transportation hub and distribution

centre for various goods. In those days, ships and sailboats that transported tribute grain to Beijing often berthed in Tianjin for several months. As many merchants and boatmen stayed there, some streets near the banks of the canal were flourishing and became vibrant commercial streets, including Houjiahou, Guyi Street, Zhugan Lane, Zhenshi Street and Guodian Street. The canal culture has been ingrained into the genes of Tianjin locals since then. At that time, after hard work, people relaxed by listening to cross-talk for leisure, or bought some ear-hole dried cakes or deep-fried dough sticks rolled in a thin pancake as snacks.

As the most famous old street in Tianjin, Guyi Street has earned a global reputation.

In the past, Guyi Street was the busiest area in Tianjin. The 800-metre-long street is lined with shops and local time-honoured brands, including Qian Xiang Yi, Rui Fu Xiang, Rui Sheng Xiang, Yuanlong, Laohu Kaiwen and Lao Mao Sheng. Shops are established in courtyards. Each shop has two floors, both of which are equipped with counters. These old buildings and decorations reflect the past prosperity.

An Old Town Known for Woodblock Prints

Yangliuqing in Tianjin is a famous town along the Grand Canal. Qing Dynasty poet Zhao Zhixin (1662–1744) wrote an article to depict the beautiful scenery of the town. According to historical records, the town was packed with merchants during the Ming and Qing dynasties, as it had an important wharf along the canal. In those days, numerous sailboats and ships berthed there. The local thriving economy brought throngs of people and cultural exchanges between the northern and southern regions of the country. The town also features some



Urban views on both sides of the Haihe River, Tianjin

folk forms of art, such as Yangliuqing woodblock printing and paper cutting.

Woodblock prints from Yangliuqing are famous nationwide. Woodblock printing refers to engraving lines of designs on woodblocks, printing the designs on paper and using brushes to add colours to motifs. Legendarily, during the late Yuan (1271–1368) and early Ming dynasties, an artisan came to Yangliuqing and sold woodblock prints on festive occasions. As his woodblock prints were very popular with residents, local craftsmen began to learn from him how to make their own woodblock prints. Afterwards, paper and watercolours were introduced from southern China to the town, leading to the maturity of local woodblock printing. In the craft's heyday, many people were skilled in making woodblock prints and there were over 300 woodblock printing studios in the town.

In addition to woodblock printing, Yangliuqing's paper cutting is also very famous. During the Chinese New Year, all residents of Tianjin like to paste woodblock prints on the doors and windows of their homes in celebration.

Today, Yangliuqing woodblock printing and paper cutting have become recognised the world over. When foreigners come to Tianjin, they often choose woodblock prints and or paper-cut crafts as gifts for their families and friends. Videos about Yangliuqing

woodblock printing and paper cutting are frequently posted on overseas social media platforms. These famous arts have become Tianjin's cultural icons.

Waterfront of the Grand Canal

The North and South canals (a section of the Grand Canal) run about 180 kilometres in Tianjin, connecting many scenic spots and cultural monuments, like a string of bright pearls.

To protect these pearls, Tianjin has issued various plans since 2019, including *Tianjin's Plan on the Protection, Transmission and Utilisation of the Grand Canal Culture* and *Tianjin's Plan on Construction and Protection of the National Grand Canal Culture Park*. These plans are being strictly implemented. Tianjin has established and opened a group of canal-themed parks and scenic areas, such as Wuqing District North Canal Suburban Park, Hongqiao District Peach Blossom Causeway, South Canal Imperial Ferry Pier and Xiqing District Imperial Waterscape. The scenic spots have distinct characteristics and have become popular destinations.

Currently, Tianjin, a city along the Grand Canal, is passing on the history and culture of the canal while pursuing modern civilisation. In the future, the city will further promote modern canal culture in a new manner.



Jinwan Plaza by the Haihe River, Tianjin

CANGZHOU: A CITY BUILT FOR WATER TRANSPORTATION



Nanhu Park, Cangzhou, Hebei Province

When talking about the Grand Canal, people often first think of the cities of Beijing and Hangzhou. However, among the more than 10 cities touched by the 1,794-kilometre canal, Cangzhou has the longest stretch of the famous waterway. The city's rise and decline over time have been closely connected to the canal. The city is not only a water transportation hub, but also a birthplace of acrobatics and martial arts in China. In actuality, the city's past glory and present-day reputation all arise from the canal.

During the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the canal's transportation role was taken over by the Tianjin–Pukou Railway. After the Revolution of 1911, the transport of grain via the canal came to an end. In the 1970s, due to the shortage of water, the section of the Grand Canal in Cangzhou lost its water transportation capability. Today, the transportation role of the canal seems to have disappeared.



Langyin Tower, Cangzhou, Hebei Province

The Grand Canal's History in Cangzhou

Documents on the Cangzhou section of the Grand Canal date back to the late Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220). After Cao Cao (AD 155–220), a well-known warlord and statesman, won the Battle of Guandu, which took place between Cao and Yuan Shao (AD 152–202, a military general and warlord)

in AD 200, Cao planned to build the Baigou River and the Pinglu Ditch within the territory of Cangzhou. He wanted to use the two rivers to transport strategic supplies. Several years later, the two rivers were integrated into a canal in Cangzhou.

Over the following centuries, rulers of dynasties connected various river systems in northern and southern China in an attempt to achieve balanced development of the northern and southern regions. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), the Grand Canal took shape, connecting the capital with southern China. Cangzhou, a city along the canal, began to undergo historic changes from then on.

The completion of the canal brought great developmental opportunities to Cangzhou. According to locals, the city was built to accommodate water transportation along the canal. After the canal came into being, it helped establish a 215-kilometre-long economic belt, and Cangzhou soon began to thrive. Many merchants flocked to Cangzhou, where there were several ports and wharves. Overseas goods were transported there from the south-eastern coastal regions. The goods were later transferred to Beijing or Tianjin, or they were unloaded at Cangzhou and then distributed to other regions in northern Beijing. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, about 377,600 tons of grain were shipped annually to Beijing from Cangzhou via the canal. The busy transactions and shipments led to Cangzhou becoming unprecedentedly vibrant. Until the Tianjin–Pukou Railway was put into operation during the late Qing Dynasty, Cangzhou's transportation role was of vital importance.

Currently, the Grand Canal has been integrated with the South-to-North Water Diversion Project. In recent years, the landscapes of the Cangzhou section of the Grand Canal have been gradually revived.

In September 2022, boat tourism opened in the central area of Cangzhou. This was the first revival of water transportation on the Grand Canal since the 1970s. Today, people can take boats to tour Wangxilu Sluice House, Qingfeng Tower, Nanchuan Tower and Langyin Tower. They can also stroll along the banks of the canal to admire the waterscape views as the reeds dance in the wind.

The Canal-supported Prosperity in Cangzhou

According to historical documents, folk martial arts emerged during the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) in Cangzhou. After the Sui Dynasty, water transportation became thriving along the Grand Canal, which went through the entire territory of Cangzhou. Important wharves, such as

Lianzhen, Botou, Xingji and Qingxian, became transfer stations or destinations for goods. At that time, armed escorts with outstanding martial arts skills were in demand, as they could protect merchants and goods. During the late Ming Dynasty and early Qing Dynasty, martial arts flourished in Cangzhou. Cangzhou became known as the "hometown of martial arts." The ancestral home of Huo Yuanjia (1868–1910), a legendary martial artist in Shanghai, was in Cangzhou.

In addition to martial arts, Cangzhou is known for another world-famous and unique activity—Wuqiao acrobatics. Wuqiao is the first county that the Grand Canal runs through in Cangzhou. The economic development driven by

the canal made acrobatics thrive in Wuqiao. In past centuries, Wuqiao acrobats went along the canal to perform acrobatics. They were parents and children or teachers and students, and they gave performances everywhere they arrived. Sometimes, they rode ships to southern China to give performances; some of them even went overseas to perform their acrobatics.

In 2006, Wuqiao acrobatics were included in the first list of the national intangible cultural heritage of China. Today, people can see students practising acrobatics at Wuqiao Grand Canal Park. They skilfully manipulate large ceramic vats with their heads, hands, feet and backs. Every day, numerous people visit Wuqiao Acrobatics Big World on the western bank of the Grand Canal to appreciate the performances of world-famous Wuqiao acrobatics.

The rise and decline of the Grand Canal over the centuries represents the changes of Cangzhou. In addition to the Grand Canal, the city has 116 kilometres of coastline. The Port of Huanghua in Cangzhou is one of the 10 largest ports in China. As the port is the nearest port for coal produced in Shanxi Province, it has become an important port for inland resources. Cangzhou also boasts a sophisticated railway network. Therefore, it has been a valuable transport hub for Hebei and Shandong provinces.

Today, Cangzhou, which arose due to the waterway and pursues further development based on the sea, is a bright pearl along the Grand Canal. Like the Iron Lion (a landmark of the city) in Shicheng Park, Cangzhou will remain unshakable and become even stronger as time goes by.

The Grand Canal was an important channel to boost economic development and cultural exchanges of different regions in the country. Cangzhou became a cultural hub between northern and southern China. As a result, it had unique cultural characteristics.

JINING: A MILLENNIUM-OLD CITY BY THE GRAND CANAL

In the urban area of Jining, Shandong Province, the famous Grand Canal can be seen in the distance, resembling a blue belt passing through the city. Jining, an important hub along the canal, has been a must-visit destination for travellers along the historical water transportation route. The city's prosperity and development are inseparable from the canal. In the old city, tradition and modernity have been well blended, presenting an amazing sight to all visitors.

Origin of Jining

During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, there were many teahouses in Jining, which were bustling with customers. In those days, Jining residents loved drinking tea, and teahouses thrived there. At any teahouse in the city, the cultural integration resulting from the Grand Canal would be on full display. The canal helped turn Jining from an unknown small town into a prosperous city. Thanks to the canal, the city became the largest trading hub of tea in south-western Shandong Province. Jining residents' love for tea is the epitome of the Grand Canal's culture in the region.

In history, the government office of the governor-chief of the Grand Canal was established in Jining. During the Qing Dynasty, the office was the only office for upper-grade rank-two officials outside Beijing. Chinese political philosopher Lin Zexu (1785–1850) was one of the governor-chiefs. Nowadays, the canal is not as prosperous as in the past, however, numerous historical monuments and ruins can still be found along its banks. Such monuments and ruins are part of Jining's culture. Gushouying and Dongchayuan streets were connected with the former government office for the governor-chief of the Grand Canal.

Cultural Monuments and Ruins

Jining has a long history of building canals. During the Sui (AD 581–618) and



Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, the canal found in Jining today began to take shape. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), the government officially constructed the Jizhou River, which made great contributions to the completion of the Grand Canal. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Jining section of the Grand Canal reached its heyday and became the trade centre and political hub on the middle reaches of the Grand Canal. In modern times, the Jining section gradually lost its influence due to the development of marine transportation and railways.

Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) wrote a poem to describe his experiences of ascending Taibai Tower. The tower was connected with Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai (AD 701–762). When Li Bai travelled in Jining, he frequented a local tower to drink liquor and write poetry. Afterwards, the tower was named Taibai Tower in honour of Li Bai, as Li's courtesy name was Taibai. Currently, the tower has become a popular destination in the city. While admiring the view in the distance from the tower, people may recall Li Bai's past experiences in Jining.

For more than 1,000 years, the Grand Canal has left many cultural monuments to

Jining. The Nanwang Water Division Hub is an important part of the Grand Canal, and is dubbed the heart of the waterway. The hub is at the highest point of the canal. The project was designed by water conservancy expert Bai Ying (1363–1419) and implemented under the leadership of Minister of Works Song Li (1358–1422) during the Ming Dynasty. It took eight years to complete the construction. The project is a landmark in the history of Chinese water conservancy. It can control water channelled into the Grand Canal and has sluices to help the canal store water. The project connects the southern section of the canal with its northern section. Therefore, it facilitated the shipment of food and materials between Beijing and southern China. Moreover, it drove the local economic and cultural development.

To commemorate Song and Bai's feats, Fenshui Longwang Temple was built in Nanwang. After many years of development, the temple was expanded to a building complex, which covered an area of about 56,100 square metres. In addition to memorial halls for Song Li and Bai Ying, the temple had over 10 courtyards, including Guanyin Tower, Locust Temple and the Hall of Yu the Great. Shrines in the temple reflected local residents' beliefs and daily lives. Today, only some ruins of the temple remain, providing only a glimpse of the previous majestic buildings.

Waterscapes along the Canal

Jinyuan Garden in Jining features pavilions, towers, terraces, bridges and streams. The garden also has many flower-



Nanyang Ancient Town by the Grand Canal, Jining, Shandong Province

ing trees, which are capped with blossoms in spring. Jining has a total of 38 famous gardens. Jinyuan tops others of its kind, and is dubbed an "earthly paradise." The garden's decorations and structures are the combinations of the artistic styles from both southern and northern China. The gardening culture makes Jining stand out from other cities in northern China. Thanks to its exquisite and beautiful gardens, the city is acclaimed as the "little Suzhou in northern China." Suzhou is world-renowned for its amazing gardens. Jining's architectural styles were borrowed from southern China as a result of the Grand Canal.

These architectural styles can be found on ordinary structures in the city. Zhugan Lane is known for the largest bamboo product market in Shandong. Storefronts along the lane are traditional buildings with the characteristics of southern China. They simultaneously serve as residences, production workshops and storefronts. It is a must-visit destination in Jining. In recent years, it has been developed as a distinct cultural street, where tradition and modernity are well blended.

Mutual Benefits for the City and the Canal

In 2014, the Grand Canal was inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*. As part of the canal, the Jining section is also under heritage protection. For several years, Jining has continued to protect and pass on the Grand Canal culture. It not only repaired and restored the old building complexes, but the city also invested in the construction of museums to house cultural relics and artefacts related to the canal. In addition, many cultural works have been created to promote the canal culture, including the play *Weishan Lake*.

The city also uses the cultural and tourist resources of the canal to build iconic tourist destinations and develop boat tourism on the canal. It has made efforts to improve the natural environment of the canal. The Grand Canal culture has been upgraded into the precious cultural property to drive the city's development.

The millennium-old city has been revitalised. The city and the Grand Canal are mutually beneficial, joining hands to create a promising future.

Today, walking in the ancient town of Nanyang in Jining, visitors can relive the past prosperity of the area. They can imagine the merchants bargaining with boatmen, fishermen busy unloading their catch, peddlers hawking snacks, sailboats moving along the canal and banners flying in the air. This is the No. 1 ancient town along the canal.

SUZHOU: POETIC SIGHTS IN THE YANGTZE RIVER DELTA

The Grand Canal served as the backbone of ancient China, nourishing numerous ancient capitals and cities, including Suzhou in eastern China's Jiangsu Province, known as one of the Garden Capitals. Suzhou and the Grand Canal have always complemented each other. The Grand Canal gives Suzhou vitality, while the city returns a brilliant reputation to the Grand Canal. Among the many cities along the Grand Canal, Suzhou is one of the brightest stars.

A Legendary Crescent-Shaped Bridge

"The moon goes down and crows caw in the frosty sky, / Dimly-lit fishing boats' neath maples sadly lie. / Beyond the Suzhou walls the Temple of Cold Hill / Rings bells which reach my boat, breaking the midnight still." This is the representative poem of Zhang Ji from the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), praising Fengqiao (Maple Bridge), one of Suzhou's tourist attractions. Fengqiao, a stone arch bridge, resembles a crescent moon over the Tanghe River, a branch of the Grand Canal. The Shangtang River connects with the main channel of the Grand Canal in the Yangtze River Delta and flows in the north of the ancient city of Suzhou. It is a major branch of the Grand Canal, and also serves as one of the main routes of water transport in

urban Suzhou. Since ancient times, the Shangtang River has been a vital waterway for business. Along its banks are beautiful views.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), there were many bustling and busy fairs around the bridge. Businesspeople traded all night long under bright lights.

Rebuilt during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), today's Fengqiao combines cultural heritage and natural scenery. When sightseeing around the bridge, people can try some local authentic snacks praised by Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) of the Qing Dynasty and explore Longchi Scenic Area.

Origin of the Grand Canal

Suzhou is the birthplace of ancient China's excavation of canals. As early as

the Spring and Autumn Period (770–446 BC), the prototype of a canal waterway appeared. During the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang dynasties, the Grand Canal began to connect north to south, adding lustre to Suzhou and making it more prominent. During the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279), Suzhou became the nation's economic centre and granary. The city featured a crisscrossed water network and fertile farmlands. The Grand Canal provided convenient transport for the grain produced in Suzhou. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Suzhou's extremely prosperous economy provided abundant financial revenue to the feudal dynasties. Numerous boats carrying Suzhou's abundant goods and materials moved north along the Grand Canal, presenting breath-taking and magnificent scenery.

The bustling and busy scene in Panmen along the Grand Canal stimulated the creativity of poet Fan Chengda (1126–1193) from the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), who wrote a poem on the busy Panmen. Panmen was not only a prosperous business area, but also a hub for land and water transport, and played a functional role of urban defence in ancient times. As a city gate of Suzhou for water and land transport, and one of the great water conservancy works in ancient China, it still connects the old city with the Grand Canal.

Merging of Ancient and Modern Civilisations

Today, stories of the Grand Canal and Suzhou continue to be created and told. As a canal city, in recent years, Suzhou has been committed to protecting, spreading and developing the heritage of the Grand Canal, such as strengthening the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. Suzhou has completed a project on preserving Yunyan Temple Pagoda on Huqiu ("Tiger Hill"), making this historic building more stable. One of the five ancient pagodas in the ancient city of Suzhou, Yunyan Temple Pagoda, is one of the best examples of China's buildings of this type, and still stands on the top of the hill.

In order to better develop the resources of the Grand Canal, Suzhou is promoting the Top 10 Grand Canal Sights, including rediscovering a series of cultural landscapes along the canal. The Five Embankments of Shihu Lake is one of them. Emperor Qianlong wrote that Shihu Lake was the "Best Scenery under the Heaven" in one of his poems. In recent years, Suzhou has strengthened the environmental governance and beautification of its scenic areas, such as promoting the Yujia Village tourism project to integrate culture, sightseeing and leisure.

In the new era, Suzhou is rediscovering the charm of the Grand Canal culture and plans new developmental blueprints to highlight its urban charm.



A pleasure boat on the Grand Canal



A scenic area along the Grand Canal

HANGZHOU: THE EPITOME OF EASTERN CHARM ALONG THE GRAND CANAL

In Hangzhou, walking along the banks of the Grand Canal, people will be enchanted by the picturesque waterscape. At night, the canal's banks are well-lit, and the beautiful lamplight is reflected in the water. The millennium-old canal has witnessed the historical development of the city. Many tour boats shuttle along the canal every day, captivating passengers with charming waterscapes. Currently, the waterfront of the canal endows Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful and gorgeous cities in the world, with new styles and features.

One End of the Grand Canal

Hangzhou, sitting at the southern end of the Grand Canal, has been known for its beautiful scenery since ancient times. It has also been a key hub for trade and cultural exchanges between southern and northern China. Since Emperor Yang of Sui (reign: 604–618) ordered the construction of the sections of the Grand Canal in southern China, the city's economy and culture have seen rapid development.

Gongchen Bridge sits at the terminus of the Hangzhou section of the Grand Canal. The 98-metre-long three-arch stone bridge takes the shape of a rainbow. The bridge has one large and two small semi-circular arches. The road on the bridge is very wide, accommodating pedestrians. The bridge's name means that all people pledge allegiance to a benevolent ruler. During the late Qing Dynasty, the area around the bridge was the first to open to the outside world. Today, the area retains its original landscapes, including flowing water, the original bridge, sailboats and bustling pedestrians.



Leifeng Pagoda by West Lake, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province

On the western side of the bridge is Qiaoxizhi Street. At dawn, fishermen go to catch fish by boat and neighbours visit with each other. They start a new day by drinking a cup of tea along the street. At twilight, the street is bustling with hawkers and customers, who create a warm and appealing environment there. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, the street had many vibrant shops and businesses. Later, it became home to various national industries. Currently, walking along the street, people can feel the past hustle and bustle of the old shops.

West Lake

When making Dongpo Pork, a famous dish in Hangzhou, pork belly is steamed with a mixture of water and wine. It is an authentic Hangzhou-style dish. Although it gained fame in Hangzhou, it was not originally created in the city. It was first created by a famous scholar-official of the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), Su Dongpo (1037–1101). According to legend, when Su worked in Hangzhou, he led people in dredging West Lake. Local residents felt grateful to him and sent pork to him as gifts. Su cooked the pork in his unique style and

The vast West Lake's most famous spring view is of Su Causeway and the six bridges shrouded in mist. In ancient times, numerous scholars and writers ranked the view as the top one among the 10 most famous scenic highlights of West Lake.

then distributed the cooked meat to people. As a result, Dongpo Pork gained popularity throughout the city.

Su Causeway was also connected with Su Dongpo's efforts to dredge West Lake. In those days, West Lake was full of silt, hindering the flow of water in the Grand Canal. Su submitted a report to the imperial court to ask for financial support for dredging the lake. Then, he led the locals to dredge the lake and remove waterweed. Afterwards, he built a causeway in the middle of the lake to control the silt. To express their gratitude to Su, local residents named the causeway Su Causeway.

A New Appearance for Hangzhou

The Grand Canal has nourished the cities and people along it for over 1,000 years. To protect this World Cultural Heritage site, Hangzhou has created and issued related documents, such as *Hangzhou's Plan on the National Cultural Park of the Grand Canal*, aiming to build a model for national cultural parks along the Grand Canal.

The Hangzhou National Cultural Park is meant to display the millennium-old canal's historical value and charm. Currently, Hangzhou has implemented a series of projects. The projects not only work to protect the canal's historical appearance and cultural characteristics, but also to revitalise the canal by adding modern elements.

Witnessing vast changes over time, the south-north canal has many stories to tell. In a gentle evening breeze, visitors along the canal will see well-lit ships scattered about the water and hear happy laughter and cheerful voices on its banks. This pleasurable scene can make one's troubles drift away. Hangzhou, a city at the southern end of the Grand Canal, often displays its charm based on the time-honoured canal culture.




A tourist by West Lake, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province



GOURMET FOOD ALONG THE GRAND CANAL

Translated by Li Shasha Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi



The Grand Canal is a monumental achievement made possible by the labour of ancient Chinese workers, and it carries the rich tapestry of culture, scenery and gourmet food today.

In the past, the vibrant water transportation on the Grand Canal propelled the development of cities, and the delectable cuisine along the canal reflected the blended characteristics of the North and South. For instance, Peking duck and braised Nanjing duck share a close relationship, and Beijing *gezhihe* (deep-fried creaking rolls) and Hangzhou *xianglingjuan* (deep-fried bean-curd skin rolls) have similar recipes. Savouring the canal foods not only tantalises the taste buds, but also offers insights into the stories behind them.

BEIJING: CAPITAL OF DELICACIES

As early as 700 years ago, Shichahai was a bustling water transportation hub on the Grand Canal section in Beijing. *History of Yuan* uses the term “zhulu bishui” to describe the thriving scenes at that time. Shichahai is divided into Qianhai, Houhai and Xihai lakes. Yinding Bridge spans the narrow waterway connecting Qianhai and Houhai. In the past, people could stand on Yinding Bridge and admire the Western Hills in the distance, making it one of the Eight Great Sights of Yanjing (today's Beijing): “Mountain Viewing from Yinding Bridge.” People used to believe that when visiting Yinding Bridge, they must enjoy three things: the beautiful view of the Western Hills, the sight of lotus flowers and delicious grilled meat. Old Beijing's grilled meat was cooked on a “zhizi,” a type of brazier that includes an iron tray with gaps between its bars. As the meat cooked on the tray, its melting fat would drip down onto the hot charcoal below, creating a distinctive sizzling sound and enhancing the flavour of the barbecue.



People have two options to enjoy Old Beijing-style barbecue around Yinding Bridge. They can either sit back while enjoying the more courteous way of eating, called “wenchi,” or they can grill the meat themselves and devour it in a rougher way, known as “wuchi.” Some prefer to stand by the zhizi with a foot on the bench and a towel on the shoulder to wipe away the sweat. To recreate the traditional “wuchi” way of eating, Kaorouji Restaurant by Yinding Bridge has set aside a scenic room for guests to try their hand at self-grilling, while also enjoying the picturesque views of Yinding Bridge and the Drum Tower.

The culture of the Grand Canal has also left its mark on Peking duck. Legend has it that Bianyifang Restaurant's roasted duck technique, which uses a closed oven (known as the *menlu*), was introduced thanks to the canal. The technique is over 600 years old. The opening of the Grand Canal allowed merchants and boatmen who transported grain to bring with them from the South the habit of eating duck. As a result, cooking techniques were improved and innovated, with the integration of green onions from Shandong Province and pasta from the North into the manner of eating Peking duck.



Beijing boasts a range of delectable dishes that have close ties with the Grand Canal. These include fried sauce noodles, Daoxiangcun pastes, preserved fruits, Donglaishun hot-pot, Duyichu *shaomai* (steamed dumplings), Huguosi snacks and many others. These delicacies have contributed to the city's memories and stories, fostering a spirit of openness and inclusiveness for integration and mutual growth, making Beijing an even warmer and more memorable city.



TIANJIN: LOCAL DELICACIES WITH THE RISE OF THE GRAND CANAL

Tianjin is known as “the city carried by the Grand Canal” because of its close association with the famous waterway. The canal gave rise to a plethora of renowned local delicacies, including the famed Goubuli *baozi* (steamed buns), *jianbing guozi* (pancakes filled with deep-fried dough sticks), Erduoyan *zhagao* (fried rice cakes) and *gabacai* (pancake salad). Moreover, the city's coastal location has contributed to the popularity of seafood dishes among Tianjin residents, resulting in the creation of delectable offerings like *zengbeng liyu* (deep-fried carp in sweet-sour sauce).



When it comes to Tianjin cuisine, one cannot help but think of Goubuli steamed buns. The buns are renowned for their broth, filling and semi-leavened dough, and are often praised for their “flavourful taste, appealing appearance and firm texture,” as well as for having “thin skin with 18 pleats and ample fillings.”

Water transportation not only brought people and commerce to Tianjin, but also introduced local delicacies to the city thanks to the canal. These delicacies include *jianbing guozi* and *gabacai* strong connection to the canal.



The saying “Yangcheng Lake in the South, and Qilihai Lake in the North” refers to the origin of the best river crabs in Tianjin, which are found in Qilihai Town. These crabs are a type of Chinese mitten crabs that are favoured by locals for their tender meat, red roe and delicious flavour. Qilihai river crabs are often used to make river crab noodles. This delicacy has become a symbolic dish for the city.

To prepare river crab noodles, it is essential to boil crab meat and shells to make a soup base for boiling noodles. Additionally, crab roe must be fried until it is fragrant and added to the finished noodles. When eaten, the combination of noodles and soup provides a delightful experience of rich crab flavour and delectable soup.



HEBEI: A FOOD PARADISE



The serene and ancient Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal meanders through the Yanzhao region (now Hebei Province) and has enriched the cities along its route since ancient times, and a food paradise is one of the various resulting factors. Strolling along the canal, one can relish a piping hot bowl of sheep intestine soup (*yangchang tang*) and a savoury donkey burger (*lürou huoshao*) in the morning, providing energy for the day. In the evening, a pot of Cangzhou hot pot chicken or a slice of Xianghe meatloaf can be enjoyed to satiate one's hunger. The traditional flavours found along the Grand Canal tantalise the taste buds, and tell the tales of the cities along the famed waterway.

Cangzhou boasts the longest stretch of the Grand Canal in the province, which not only adds to the city's

pleasing scenery but also contributes to the notoriety of various local delicacies. As the sun rises in Cangzhou, many locals start their day with a bowl of sheep intestine soup. This popular snack originated along with the development of canal transportation, as it was a favourite among boatmen and dockers. Sheep intestine soup, often paired with sesame seed cakes, pancakes or steamed bread, was a way to restore energy and alleviate fatigue. The most representative version of this soup can be found in Xingji Town, Cangzhou. Nowadays, many elderly residents of Cangzhou make a special trip to Xingji for a steaming bowl of soup, followed by a walk along the Grand Canal to appreciate the beautiful scenery.



A popular folk saying goes, "The taste of donkey meat on earth rivals that of dragon meat in the heavens." The history of Hejian's famous donkey burger can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907). A local proverb confirms the snack's popularity, stating that one can always find a donkey burger vendor at the market. Nowadays, donkey burgers can be found across China, as the combination of tender donkey meat and crispy baked buns has made this folk delicacy a Cangzhou staple known throughout the country. Hejian City has earned the title of "the homeland of Chinese donkey burgers."

The Hebei section of the Grand Canal is home to several local delicacies such as Wu's sesame seed cakes and Nangong smoked meat in Xingtai City. These scrumptious dishes are not only delicious, but also create a lasting impression of the city in people's minds.



SHANDONG: A TREAT FOR ANY TONGUE



for its crispy and tender texture and is considered to be the finest chicken dish in the world. To prepare authentic Dezhou Braised Chicken, there are 11 steps, including slaughtering, shaping, colouring and boiling, and 16 types of medicinal herbs are added to enhance its flavour.

In ancient times, the popularity of Dezhou Braised Chicken was largely due to the rapid development of transportation along the canal, and the dish quickly spread to other regions along the waterway. As land transportation, such as railways, developed, this snack gained even more nationwide fame and became a symbol of Dezhou cuisine and an important part of Shandong culinary culture.

In Shandong Province, the Grand Canal is connected to numerous lakes and is rich in fish resources. Local people have developed various ways of cooking fish, resulting in the famous local delicacy known as the "Weihu Fish Feast." Weishan Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the province and is an important source of freshwater fish nationwide. Due to its natural geographical advantages, Weishan Lake is abundant in more than 200 species of aquatic life, including shrimp, soft-shelled turtles, crabs, snails and mussels, as well as dozens of aquatic plants such as lotus root, water chestnut and cattail.

According to legend, during the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) went on a boat tour along the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and was served 64 fish dishes made from various types of carp, loaches and other fish from Weishan Lake. The emperor was highly impressed and grateful for the meal, which soon became known as the "Weihu Fish Feast," and was reserved exclusively for the imperial family.

As time has passed, the "Weihu Fish Feast" has evolved and diversified. Nowadays, in addition to its traditional dishes, the feast also includes new additions such as Roasted White Eel, Smoked Fish, Multi-coloured Preserved Eel, Spiced Salt Fish Bone and Braised Tonic Soft-shelled Turtle Soup. The feast has become a major attraction for tourists visiting Weishan Lake.

The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal passes through several regions in Shandong Province, including Dezhou, Linqing, Liaocheng and Jining. During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, canal transport was prosperous, with an influx of people driving economic growth. This led to the popularity and recognition of many local snacks and dishes in areas along the canal, some of which are now considered intangible cultural heritage, such as Dezhou Braised Chicken, Zaozhuang Spicy Chicken and the Weihu Fish Feast.

During the Qing Dynasty, in the early years of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1736–1796), Dezhou Braised Chicken was recognised as a tribute from Shandong Province to the imperial court due to its delicious taste. This dish is known

The abundant resources of the area have contributed to the creation of the local delicacy known as the "Weihu Fish Feast."

JIANGSU: A DISTINCT CUISINE UNDER HEAVEN



The cities of Jiangsu Province have long been nourished by the lengthy Grand Canal, which connects various rivers, lakes and seas in the southern region of the Yangtze River. This canal has also witnessed the blending of different sources of water and different cultures of southern cities, contributing to their prosperity. The blending of cultures is never more apparent than in the food. As canal transport grew in popularity, people in Suzhou incorporated various cooking techniques from the North and South, creating a distinct Huaiyang cuisine.

Many food enthusiasts particularly appreciate the minced crab meat and pork ball, which was recognised as one of the four renowned dishes in Yangzhou during the Sui Dynasty (AD 581–618). Originally known as *kuihua dazhanrou*, it was primarily composed of pork, water chestnuts and eggs, resulting in a soft and aromatic flavour.

Ruandou eel is another well-known dish that represents Huaiyang cuisine. The eel, which is a unique local ingredient, is the star of the dish. Chefs only use the freshest live eels to achieve a soft, tender and extremely fresh taste.

The southern regions of Jiangsu Province are abundant in water bodies that contain a variety of freshwater species, with the most renowned being hairy crabs.

Yangcheng Lake in the city of Suzhou is renowned for producing the most famous hairy crabs, which are large and plump, with golden claws and yellow hair. They are known for their delicate and delicious taste. In the cities of Huai'an and Suqian, the hairy crabs from Hongze Lake are large with a green shell and white belly, and are known for their tender and delicious meat. Hairy crabs from other lakes in Jiangsu, like Gucheng and Gaoyou, are also famous and popular domestically and internationally.



ZHEJIANG: NOTABLE DISHES

For centuries, the areas located south of the Yangtze River have been famous for their rich resources, especially their abundance of fish and shrimp. The hilly regions in the south have a thriving agriculture industry, which has contributed to the development of a diverse and refined cuisine in Zhejiang Province. These culinary delights have gained international recognition thanks to the Grand Canal, and have become the stuff of legends.

Hangzhou, a city famous for its lakes, is also known for its thriving river systems. Thanks to canal transport, the cuisine of Hangzhou has been influenced by Northern cooking methods. Utilising quick-fry, stir-fry, braising and deep-fry techniques, Hangzhou has developed a unique culinary style that features dishes like braised Dongpo pork and beggar's chicken.

Braised Dongpo pork is a well-known dish named after Su Dongpo (1037–1101), a famous Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) poet. It is made by stewing half-fat and half-lean pork with various ingredients. The final product has a soft texture resembling agate, and is fatty but not greasy.

Beggar's Chicken is another famous Hangzhou dish. It is made in a unique way: fill the chicken belly with shredded meat cooked with a variety of seasonings, then wrap it with fresh lotus leaves; wrap

the outermost layer with wine jar mud, and simmer for three to four hours over a fire until the bone-free meat is crispy.

Jiaxing, Zhejiang, owes its prosperity to the Grand Canal. This water town features distinctive painted pleasure boats. *Zongzi* is an essential part of Jiaxing cuisine, which is made with fresh meat and is known as "the king of rice dumplings." The cooked *zongzi* is sticky but not mushy, fatty but not greasy, with a balanced combination of salty and sweet flavors.

Huzhou, a city that the canal runs through, is well-known for a popular snack known as "big wonton." Huzhou's big wontons are made from pork leg meat, bamboo shoots, sesame seeds, minced green onions and Shaoxing wine. The soup is made from meat and bone broth, and diners can detect the aroma of the broth even before tasting it.

When it comes to Zhejiang snacks, nearly everyone thinks first of Hangzhou *xiaolongbao*. The origin of *xiaolongbao* can be traced back to Kaifeng City in Henan Province during the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127). It became popular in the southern areas of the Yangtze River, particularly in Hangzhou, where it evolved into the *xiaolongbao* that is loved by many today. Hangzhou people often enjoy *xiaolongbao* for breakfast. The skin of *xiaolongbao* is thin, and the filling broth is rich, making it soft, chewy and delicious.





GRAND BRIDGES OVER THE GRAND CANAL

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi

Since ancient times, the Grand Canal has wound its way through the landscape of China like a giant dragon. As one of the world's oldest and longest man-made waterways, it has not only linked the country's north and south, but also promoted the development and economic and cultural exchanges between cities along it.

The canal, linking the south and north, has countless beautiful sights along it and numerous famous bridges over it. Ancient stone arch bridges or modern reinforced concrete bridges—all have witnessed the development of the Chinese nation, adding colours and shapes to the canal. Some bridges experienced the prosperity of the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties; some witnessed the ups and downs of the country from the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) to the time prior to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949; and some have been erected after 1949. These bridges have different stories and styles as historical monuments, and they each showcase the brilliance of Chinese civilisation in their own way.

ERSHISI BRIDGE IN YANGZHOU

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, Yangzhou in today's Jiangsu Province emerged with the opening of the Grand Canal.

In the canal city, there is Slender West Lake, which ranks first in the “Top Twelve Sights of the Grand Canal.” Over Slender West Lake was the famous Ershisi (“Twenty-Four”) Bridge.

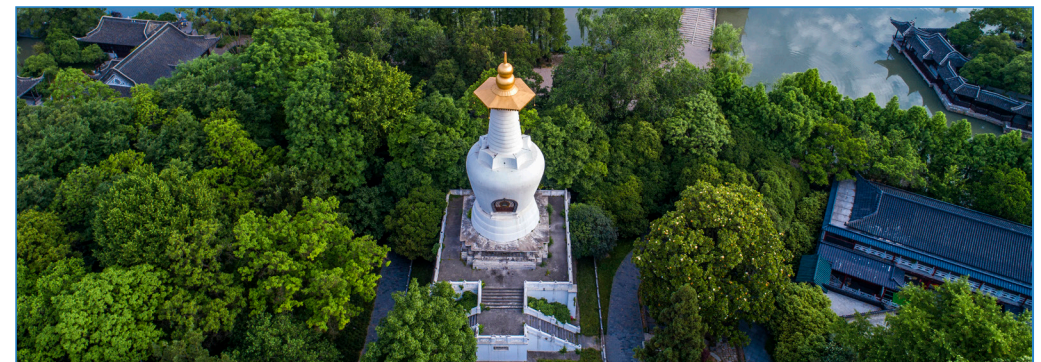
The original bridge has long since been gone. Located between the Yangtze and Huaihe rivers, the bridge was known as a famous attraction at that time. Today's Ershisi Bridge was reconstructed in the 1980s. The bridge has been a highlight of Yangzhou culture since ancient times, as its reputation is closely related to Du Mu (AD 803–852), a poet from the Tang Dynasty. In one of his poems, Du wrote: “Green mountains loom afar and streams off flow; / Fall's gone but grasses in South still well grow. / When the moon shines on the Twenty-Four Bridge (Ershisi Bridge) bright, / Where are you teaching flute-blowing tonight?” His poem enabled its reputation to spread over time.

Standing at a location in the north, Du thought of the scenery of Yangzhou and wrote the poem that has been passed down for generations. During the Tang Dynasty, thanks to transport along the Grand Canal, Yangzhou became one of the most prosperous areas where talents and wealth came together. Yangzhou received numerous businesspeople from all over the nation, had a variety of goods, boasted rich wines and delicious dishes, and presented wonderful

singing and dancing programmes. In a poem, Zhang Hu (AD 785–849) wrote: “Along 10-li-long Street, shops and markets are adjacent in Yangzhou, where it is one of best places for people to sleep their long sleep.”

In 1986, Ershisi Bridge was rebuilt based on historical documents, such as *Record of Yangzhou Pleasure Boats*. The railings on the bridge are made of beautiful white marble. Standing on the bridge, people will see hazy mountains in the distance as if they blend with the sky and clouds. The original location of the bridge in ancient times is still an unsolved mystery, but this does not affect how people of today appreciate the attraction as described by poets in the old days. The bridge shines brightly in poetry, embodying the poets' emotions and intentions. In one of his poems, Jiang Kui (1155–1221) wrote: “Still Ershisi Bridges is there, / ripples and waves under the bridge in the breeze, / everywhere is silent in the cold moonlight.”

The bright moon shines on Ershisi Bridge and reflects on the surface of the water. Thanks to the bridge, this scenery has been a remarkable sight along the Grand Canal for more than 1,000 years.



WANNING BRIDGE IN BEIJING

In scorching summers during the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), Wanning Bridge was a good place for the public to watch elephants bathing. These elephants came from Southeast Asian countries as a tribute paid to the dynasty. The elephant houses were located near Wanning Bridge. The elephants would be dragged into the riverside under the bridge to stay cool on hot days. They were happy while washing in the water and mud, spraying with their trunks, and swaying their heads and tails. Watching the interesting scene, people standing on the bridge or both sides of the river also felt refreshed.



Gradually, the area around Wanning Bridge gathered shops, restaurants and entertainment venues, becoming one of the busiest business districts in Dadu (today's Beijing).

In 1285 during the reign of Emperor Shizu (1260–1294) of the Yuan Dynasty, a beautiful wooden arch bridge was erected over the Tonghui River, a section of the Grand Canal. This was the predecessor of Wanning Bridge. During the Ming Dynasty, the wooden bridge was replaced with a firm stone structure, becoming an outstanding representative of ancient Chinese bridge architecture. On the east and west sides of the arch bridge are legendary stone beasts for calming the water, guarding the bridge and the canal's waterways. The height of their legs and tails could be used to monitor the water level.

Wanning Bridge, also known as the "First Bridge along Beijing's Central Axis," served as the terminus of Grand Canal water transport during the Yuan Dynasty. Vessels from the Yangtze River in the south sailing along the canal to the north

would pass through the bridge and reach Jishui Pond Dock to unload grain and other goods. The area around the bridge became one of the busiest business districts throughout Dadu (today's Beijing). Under the bridge, vessels endlessly sailed back and forth, creating a beautiful scenic view within the capital city. These business activities were the pulse of the city, and a demonstration of its opportunity and vitality.

In June 2014, Wanning Bridge, part of the Grand Canal, was inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*, becoming a key representative of the culture and history of the Grand Canal. The bridge, the crystallisation of the wisdom of ancient artisans and engineers, witnessed the significant role of canal water transport in the capital city's economic development and prosperity during the Yuan Dynasty.



GUANGJI BRIDGE IN HANGZHOU

At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Zhang Shicheng (1321–1367), leader of an insurrectionary army, expanded the Guantang Canal, a section of the Grand Canal, making it a key transport artery. Thanks to the canal, Tangqi Town in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, began to boom.

Tangqi Town has a stone bridge, Guangji Bridge, the only seven-arch bridge over the Grand Canal.

With a total length of 78.7 metres (m), the bridge links the north and south sides, each of which with a flight of 80 steps. First built in 1489 during the Ming Dynasty, the bridge was later renovated many times. The reason it was erected over the Tangqi section was because it was wide enough to meet the needs of water transport. Tangqi was located on the main channel of the Grand Canal, with a width of 50 m. With the smooth operation of the canal, Tangqi gradually became a booming town for the gathering of people and goods in the Yangtze River Delta.

Walking along the steps, sightseers can find marks of the ages on the bridge deck. The stone bridge spanning the Guantang section has been closely related to the lives of residents on both sides. In the old days, streams of people walked back and forth on the bridge. Under the bridge, vessels with goods from all directions carrying grains, fruits and flowers sailed south and north. Along both sides of the bridge were hustling and

bustling business streets with numerous shops selling different kinds of goods, including loquats, sugarcane, water chestnuts and fresh fish.

The area around the bridge gathered not only businesspeople, but also scholars and poets. Due to its abundant resources and well-off communities, rich people and families of luminaries were happy to settle down in the area around the bridge. These people advocated culture, giving Tangqi a strong atmosphere of the love of reading. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were a large number of poets in Tangqi, each with their own distinctive style who created many works. Thanks to their contributions, traditional Chinese opera with the Yangtze River Delta saw its heyday in Tangqi. *Selected Works of Xiling Ci* included the works of dozens of poets in Tangqi.

Today, standing on the bridge, sightseers can enjoy the beautiful scenery around the bridge and the distant mountains, as if they are in a landscape painting of a Yangtze River Delta town.

HUJU BRIDGE IN ZHENJIANG



Walking along Nanmen Bridge in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, sightseers can see the Grand Canal flowing through the city. The bridge spans the man-made river like a tiger leaping over the waterway.

According to historical records, Huju Bridge has been rebuilt and renovated many times. This bridge was named for its location outside Huju Gate in Zhenjiang City during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. Because Huju Gate served as the old south gate of the ancient city of Zhenjiang, the bridge has another name—Old South Gate Bridge.

Huju Bridge is not only an old bridge, but also a historical and cultural icon of Zhenjiang, having witnessed its ups and downs over time.

Zhenjiang is located at the north end of the Grand Canal's Yangtze River Delta section, and is a major gateway for the canal to the Yangtze River. Zhenjiang lies at the intersection of the Yangtze River and the canal, and its rise and prosperity was inseparable from the canal in ancient times. During his southern inspection tours, Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1736–1796) of the Qing Dynasty stayed and visited Zhenjiang many times. This was not only because of the beauty of mountains and rivers, as well as the colourful local traditions in Zhenjiang, but also because of its important role in canal transport.

Vessels loaded with grain sailed from the Yangtze River Delta via Huju Bridge. Every night, lights from residential buildings on both sides dotted the area around the bridge. The reflections of the bridge and buildings, as well as the starry night sky in the water highlighted the prosperity brought by the canal transport. If people of today could travel back the Qing Dynasty, they would see the magnificent scenery and feel the

depiction by Zha Shenxing (1650–1720) in one of his poems about the views at night near the bridge over the canal.

The city's prosperous business development was in its heyday during the Qing Dynasty. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, silk produced in Zhenjiang was popular throughout the country and exported to Russia, Persia and countries in Southeast Asia. At that time, the textile industry in Zhenjiang was greatly developed, with large and small workshops spreading throughout the city, thousands of looms and numerous personnel who were engaged in the industry. The Grand Canal advanced the development of the silk industry, creating the prosperity of Zhenjiang.

Nowadays, the section of the canal near Huju Bridge is no longer busy with water transport, but simply a peaceful scene. Only the old bridge is reflected in the calm man-made river. The past glorious years of the canal have been integrated into the bridge.

BAODAI BRIDGE IN SUZHOU

Today, the Grand Canal no longer plays a crucial role, such as its past role in grain transport. Many of the old bridges on the canal are no longer busy. In the new era, the canal and its bridges have begun to serve a broader purpose. For example, Baodai Bridge in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, has become a landmark along the canal with its both ancient and modern features.

The magnificent Baodai Bridge, known as the “First Bridge in Suzhou,” stretches like a ribbon at the junction of Dantai Lake and the Grand Canal. In ancient times, the bridge was one not to be missed by travellers.

Baodai Bridge was first built during the Tang Dynasty and reconstructed during the Song, Ming and Qing dynasties. The bridge is wide and flat, like a stone path spanning the canal, allowing people to smoothly walk along it or vessels to sail under it. Wang Chong (1494–1533), a scholar from the Ming Dynasty, praised the bridge as a long rainbow over the water. Today, the bridge is still not only an outstanding structure, but also a tourist attraction.

Baodai Bridge is a microcosm of the Grand Canal culture and a symbol of Suzhou culture, demonstrating the wisdom of ancient artisans and the charm of Chinese water conservancy. In recent years, Suzhou has focused on the protection and improvement of the bridge, including investing a large amount of funds to carry out its repairs and renovations. For example, to maintain the original

style and structure of Baodai Bridge, Suzhou has taken measures, such as adding illumination and green vegetation, to improve the surrounding environment and landscapes. At the same time, technological means have been utilised to intelligently manage and monitor the bridge, enhancing its security and convenience. Nowadays, the bridge not only retains its ancient charm, but also has certain modern features.

Old bridges over the Grand Canal have become part of the canal's long history and rich culture, as have the changes in the colourful lives of the people on both banks of the waterway. Around the bridges, generations of people have lived, multiplied and created a brilliant canal civilisation, giving rich and colourful heritage to the history of the Chinese nation.



The Grand Canal is one of the cradles of ancient China's business development. Docks were products of canal water transport, gradually developing from simple mooring points to hubs for trade, or even major towns, becoming an indispensable part of the canal's culture and history. Today, some of the docks are still not only intersections of the canal and land, but also serve as starting points for sightseers to explore the cultural and historical scenery of cities or towns along the riverside.

The canal's docks that once flourished are no longer busy with canal transport, but they have not been forgotten. As a special part of the landscape, they still draw sightseers to experience local culture and customs.

MAJOR DOCKS ALONG THE GRAND CANAL

Translated by Wang Wei Edited by Brad Green, Anne Ruisi Photos by Wang Zicheng

ZHANGJIAWAN DOCK IN BEIJING



When exploring the once prosperous docks along the south-north Grand Canal, sightseers can begin from Zhangjiawan Dock in Tongzhou District, Beijing. Located in the southeast of Tongzhou, Zhangjiawan Dock was one of the busiest docks along the canal in its transport days. According to *Brief History of Tongzhou* published during the reign of Emperor Jiajing (1522–1566) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), “Zhangjiawan was a place linking water and land transport from the Yangtze River Delta in the south to the capital city in the north, with a dense population and a diverse gathering of goods from all directions.”

As early as the Liao Dynasty (AD 907–1125), Zhangjiawan became a canal dock for the transport of grain and other goods. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), it was named for General Zhang Xuan (died in 1302). As the terminal of the canal in the north, Zhang-

jiawan served as a hub for goods from all directions. In order to strengthen defence and improve transport during the Ming Dynasty, the city of Zhangjiawan and Tongyun Bridge were constructed. During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), due to the diversion of the Grand Canal, Zhangjiawan gradually declined, but still retained some business and passenger docks.

Zhangjiawan Dock was mainly responsible for transporting grain, timber, stone and other goods to support the development of the capital city. Today, the old streets and bridges in Zhangjiawan still retain the culture and history of the canal era.

In ancient times, goods from all directions promoted the city's economy and enabled Zhangjiawan to develop into an unparalleled prosperous town. At that time, Zhangjiawan was busy day and night. Vessels shuttled back and forth, goods were piled high and

people were crowded everywhere. The dock gathered people from all walks of life, including businesspeople, travellers and envoys from afar. Various sounds, such as work songs from boatmen, hawking from vendors and music from artists, blended in Zhangjiawan, making it a melting pot of different cultures and customs.

Zhangjiawan was a place linking water and land transport from the Yangtze River Delta in the south to the capital city in the north, with a dense population and a diverse gathering of goods from all directions, becoming the largest dock in the eastern part of Beijing.

TAI'ERZHUANG DOCK IN LAOZHUANG

Heading from Zhangjiawan Dock and sailing south along the canal, sightseers will arrive in Tai'erzhuang, the junction of Shandong and Jiangsu provinces. Tai'erzhuang was known as "the first town under heaven" in ancient China according to a pair of couplets on a memorial archway on Dayamen Street in Tai'erzhuang Ancient Town Scenic Area.

The history of Tai'erzhuang Dock dates back to the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty. At that time, the flood water of the Yellow River breached its embankments many times, causing mud to fill the waterways of the Grand Canal, limiting canal transport from the south to north. In order to restore water transport, the imperial court dispatched Minister of Works Shu Yinglong (died in 1615) to be responsible for excavating a new waterway for the canal at the east entrance of

Weishan Lake, diverting the water from the lake into the natural Zhouhe River in Jiangsu Province. The canal was called the Jiahe River, which is today's Tai'erzhuang Canal. It is the only section of the entire Grand Canal that flows completely from east to west. After the opening of this section of the canal, trade along the waterways became increasingly prosperous and Tai'erzhuang Dock appeared and developed significantly.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, as a hub for land and water transport, Tai'erzhuang had lively markets at night. Nearly 10,000 vessels loaded with grain sailed from the south to the north along the canal via the Tai'erzhuang section every year. Structures with a variety of types, including stone dwellings featuring southern Shandong style, Hui-style mansions and bridges in the style of Yangtze River Delta towns, stood in the

area near Tai'erzhuang Dock. These structures reflected the cultural identities left by businesspeople from different regions in Tai'erzhuang, giving the canal culture here diverse and inclusive features, becoming a model of communication and integration of different regions.

In the 2010s, the ancient town of Tai'erzhuang was restored, including a section of the old waterway of the Grand Canal and a dock. The ancient town has become a famous tourist attraction with its authentic canal culture.

In ancient times, the canal culture in Tai'erzhuang had diverse and inclusive features, becoming a model of communication and integration of different regions.



DONGGUAN ANCIENT DOCK IN YANGZHOU



Continuing to sail south along the canal, sightseers will reach an ancient dock in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province. On the dock is a simple and elegant archway, with an inscription of Chinese characters, reading, "Dongguan Ancient Dock."

On the dock under the memorial archway is a red copper mural depicting a magnificent scene when Emperor Yang (reign: AD 604–618) of the Sui Dynasty visited Yangzhou via dragon boat. In the mural, the emperor's fleet is like a dragon soaring in the sea, with overwhelming momentum. This dock is located in Yangzhou, a famous city at the junction of the Yangtze River and the Grand Canal. After Emperor Yang completed the canal, Yangzhou gradually gained renown as the nation's first commercial port.

The emergence of the dock along the canal brought prosperity to the market around Yangzhou. Vessels trans-

ported grain from the Yangtze River Delta in the south to cities in the north, and returned with supplies and wealth from the north along the canal. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Yangzhou boasted unparalleled prosperity, making it one of the richest cities in the country. During the period, Dongguan Ancient Dock was also extremely busy. Year after year, vessels from all over the country gathered there, carrying goods and people sailing back and forth on the canal. The hustling and bustling dock and crowded vessels created a unique canal landscape. During the Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279), the Yangzhou section of the canal was rebuilt, and during the Ming Dynasty, a new city with seven gates was developed on the east side of its old city. The east gate was called Lijin Gate, also known as Dongguan.

Along the riverbank from the dock, an ancient street extends, flanked by

signs of Yangzhou's time-honoured brands, each of which has been passed down from ancient times. This is Dongguan Street. As a cluster of Yangzhou's crafts industry, the street gathers a variety of amazing products, such as exquisite bamboo wares, delicate lacquer wares and crystal jade wares, drawing sightseers and collectors from all over the world. In one of his poems, Du Mu (AD 803–852) depicted Dongguan Street: "On Yangzhou Road for three miles in the breeze."

As a tourist attraction in Yangzhou, Dongguan Ancient Dock maintains its rich cultural charm to this day. Along both sides of the canal are a variety of traditional Chinese buildings. Sightseers can not only enjoy the scenery along the canal, but also experience the distinctive canal cultural heritage. In addition, delicious authentic local snacks around the dock are worth trying.



CHANGMEN DOCK IN SUZHOU

The last stop of the journey exploring the docks along the Grand Canal is Changmen, also known as Pochu Gate in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. Changmen served as the western gate of the ancient city of Suzhou. In ancient China, Suzhou, also called Gusu, was one of the nation's richest cities. Changmen, known as the "number one dock under heaven," played a major role in the old days. In one of his poems, Tang Yin (1470–1523) from the Ming Dynasty depicted the prosperity of Changmen, saying: "The paradise of the world is Suzhou, where Changmen rules the roost."

Changmen served as the city's hub of land and water transport in ancient times. There were three passes and

six docks in Changmen in the old days, including the South Dock, North Dock, Taiping Dock and Shengze Dock. A street from Changmen to Fengqiao along the canal, with about a total length of five kilometres, was the most hustling and bustling area in Suzhou and one of the nation's trade centres during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The magnificent scene featuring numerous shops and crowds on both sides of the street and a variety of vessels on the canal around Changmen was depicted in old paintings, such as "The Prosperity of Suzhou" by Xu Yang who was active during the reign of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty. In 2004, Suzhou confirmed a restoration plan for the gate tower of

Changmen. From September 2011 to September 2012, protection and restoration projects for three sections of the ancient city of Suzhou, including Changmen North Dock, were successfully implemented. Around the dock today is a street featuring the culture and history of old Suzhou.

Nowadays, cities along the canal have continued to develop and thrive. Extending from docks in these cities are hustling and bustling streets and markets, representing the distinctive canal cultural heritage. These are poetic sights that fascinate sightseers. These docks have witnessed the stories of China from the south to the north, adding more vibrancy to the canal's rich culture and long history.



