

BEIJING

北京

Telling Beijing's
Stories

Issue September 2025

Published Monthly
on the 25th Day

Postal Subscription
Code 82-777

**Beijing's Ancient Villages:
Poetic Charm, Enduring Identity**

ISSN 2095-736X



9 772095 736256



北京
(BEIJING)

Issue 9, 2025 (Vol. 579)

Supervision

Publicity Department of the CPC Beijing Municipal Committee

Sponsors

Information Office of the People's Government of

Beijing Municipality

Beijing International Communication Center

The Beijing News

Publisher

The Beijing News

Editor in Chief

Ru Tao

Executive Editors in Chief

An Dun, Xiao Mingyan

Editors

Wang Wei

[United States] Brad Green, [United States] Anne Ruisi

Photo Editors

Zhang Xin, Tong Tianyi

Art Editor

Zhao Lei

Service of Translation

Wang Wei, Zhang Hongpeng

Photos Courtesy of

Xinhua News Agency; veg.com; 58pic.com;

IC photo; tuchong.com

Distribution

The Beijing News

Address

F1, Building 10, Fahuayanli, Tiyyuan Lu,

Dongcheng District, Beijing

Tel

+86 10 6715 2380

Fax

+86 10 6715 2381

Printing

Xiaosen Printing (Beijing) Co., Ltd.

Postal Subscription Code

82-777

Publishing Date

September 25, 2025

Price

38 yuan

International Standard Serial Number

ISSN 2095-736X

China National Standard Serial Number

CN10-1908/G0

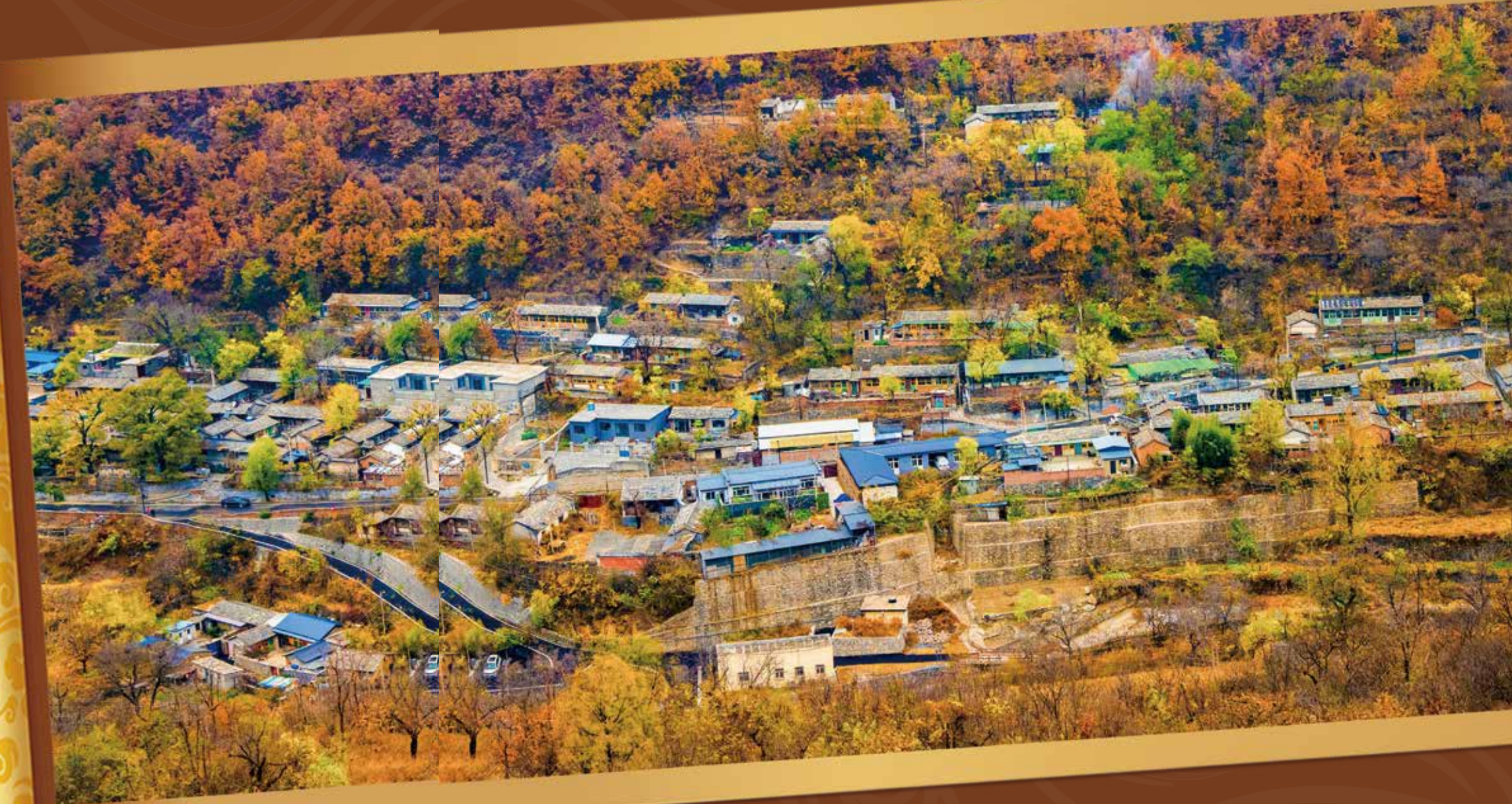
E-mail

Beijingydx@btmbeijing.net

Contents Photo by

Wu Hui

Contents



4

Beijing's
Ancient Villages:
Poetic Charm,
Enduring Identity

10

The Enduring
Heritage of the
Millennial Canal

23

The Great Wall
Witnesses the
Passage of Time

34

Epic of Western
Beijing: Tracing
Memories of
Ancient Villages

48

Culture Express

Beijing's Ancient Villages: Poetic Charm, Enduring Identity

Text by Gao Yuan | Photos by Qin Shiming, Zhao Shuhua, Wu Hui, Li Xiaoyin

The territory of Beijing is defined by three magnificent cultural belts: the Western Hills and Yongding River Cultural Belt, the Great Wall Cultural Belt and the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. The first forms a deep indigo barrier along Beijing's western edge, the second coils like an azure dragon around the city's northern border and the third traces the lifelines of canal transport in fine ink strokes.

Amid Beijing's verdant mountains and clear waters, ancient villages are scattered like glistening pearls. These settlements, preserving the depth of history while sustaining a vibrant present, have borne witness to trade exchanges, border conflicts and the rise of canal transport in antiquity, together shaping a rural landscape that has endured for over a thousand years.

Preserving the Treasures Revitalises Ancient Villages

Traditional villages form the social bedrock of China and stand as vital custodians of its cultural heritage. Among the 8,155 Traditional Chinese Villages recognised across 6 successive groups by ministries, including the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Finance, 26 are located in Beijing. These villages, integral to the city's identity as a historical and cultural capital, preserve invaluable historical resources, cultural landscapes and enduring legacies of Beijing's civilisation.

Mentougou District, in Beijing's western region, is commonly known as Jingxi, or western Beijing, by senior residents of the city. It forms a distinctive part of the Western Hills and Yongding River Cultural Belt, characterised by rolling mountain ranges, flowing rivers and scenic landscapes. Beijing's agricultural legacy, stretching back over 10,000 years, can be traced to this area. The city's enduring history of more than 3,000 years and its 800 years as a capital remain deeply felt among the inhabitants of this mountainous region. Historically, the district was a vital hub for transporting resources to Beijing, serving as a western defence line for the capital and a crucial link with the northwestern provinces. The Ancient Road of Western Beijing, winding through the mountains, stands as a lasting testament to the cultural exchanges and interactions between the northern and southern regions.

Cuandixia Village in Mentougou District resembles a living museum of northern residential architecture. Nearly 100 mountain quadrangle courtyards from the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, built along the slopes, have withstood centuries of wind and rain while preserving their original styles. Once a vital section of the Ancient Road of Western Beijing, the village features tiered buildings arranged along the terrain and maze-like, stone-paved alleys adorned with refined brick, wood and stone carvings. On some courtyard walls, ancient



▲ Tongyun Bridge in Zhangjiawan

poems remain, reflecting the village's former cultural prosperity.

Situated at the mountain outlet of the Yongding River, Sanjiadian Village enjoys a strategic location. It was the starting point of the Jingxi Road, a trade route leading to Shanxi, Shaanxi and Inner Mongolia in the Ming and Qing dynasties, and the site of the largest ferry along the Ancient Road of Western Beijing. Historically, the village bustled with merchants, shops and constant foot traffic. Recent initiatives in cultural heritage protection and rural revitalisation have restored traditional buildings and landmarks, including the Temple of the Dragon King, the Temple of Erlang, the Shanxi Guild Hall and Yin's Courtyard of the Qing Dynasty, once a coal yard. These restorations have drawn increasing numbers of visitors, giving the ancient village of western Beijing a renewed vitality in the modern era.

With a history spanning more than four centuries, Jian'gou Village in Miaofengshan Town has preserved the tradition of its temple fair. The Miaofeng Mountain Temple Fair, one of Beijing's most renowned and best-preserved folk events, is included in China's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Each year in the fourth lunar month, performers set out from the village, following the ancient



▲ A stele reading "Ancient Road of Western Beijing"



▲ Cuandixia Village, Mentougou District

pilgrim path to the summit while staging a variety of cultural activities that transform folk beliefs into enduring heritage. In recent years, the Miaofeng Mountain Temple Fair has continually infused fresh vitality while maintaining its traditional character, attracting growing numbers of young people and international tourists who come to enjoy the festivities, climb the mountain and immerse themselves in Chinese folk customs.

Each ancient village in Beijing serves as a rich repository of culture, carrying a profound history. Every one of them preserves distinctive traditions, architectural forms and

spatial layouts, safeguarding the memories of original residents and sustaining deep cultural roots. Their natural surroundings, local legends, historic buildings and folk practices are priceless treasures that deserve careful protection and preservation.

Modern development is reviving historical heritage, transforming it into a new driving force for rural progress. Shuiyuzui Village, shifting from mining to cultural industries, now draws on the cultural legacies of the Ancient Road of Western Beijing. It has established a new industrial framework and cultivated a fresh image of a thriving

countryside. Across the mountains, Jiuyuan Village in Wangping Town—an important historic site along the Ancient Road of Western Beijing—is the birthplace of Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) verse master Ma Zhiyuan (1250–1321). His line, "An old road, wind out of the west, an emaciated horse," originated here, and the village's rich cultural legacy continues to inject vital energy into regional development.

Combining Culture and Tourism Brings Prosperity to Ancient Villages

Traditional villages, steeped in historical and cultural legacies, preserve the spatial memory of harmony between humans and nature. They are "living cultural relics, history in motion" and invaluable resources for rural revitalisation. In the suburbs of Beijing, ancient villages with distinctive character, set amid green mountains and clear waters, are undergoing rural transformation, offering a vivid response to the capital's comprehensive countryside revitalisation.

From Shixia Village's Stone Light Hotel of the Great Wall to Jieshi Village's Beijing Design Week sub-venue and Liugou Village's inviting hot pot aroma, the traditional villages in the suburbs of Beijing are each exploring their own distinctive culture. By showcasing their strengths, they are embarking on a path of rural revitalisation that seamlessly weaves together culture and tourism.

Shixia Village, nestled between the Badaling and Shixia Pass sections of the Great Wall, is encircled on three sides by the Wall. The very texture and form of its brickwork recount the village's past as a garrison. Today, visitors follow age-old bluestone paths that open onto sweeping panoramas of the Great Wall stretching to the horizon. In the courtyard of a rural inn, guests can gaze at the star-filled sky through a glass ceiling. The presence of the Great Wall permeates every corner of Shixia Village, drawing visitors in a steady stream. A once-abandoned courtyard has been reborn as the Stone Light Hotel of the Great Wall, offering a collection of comfortable

boutique rooms. The designer, sensitive to the setting, employed local materials to integrate the Great Wall elements seamlessly into each stone and tile. The village also offers a distinctive Great Wall banquet, prepared on heated rocks. Celebrated by travellers and widely shared online, this singular dish has become a culinary attraction. Gradually, the once-quiet Shixia Village has welcomed more and more visitors, where enjoying delicacies cooked on hot pebbles and spending the night stargazing in a courtyard beside the Great Wall has become a cherished escape from urban Beijing.

With the fall of night, Liugou Village in Yanqing District takes on an even livelier atmosphere. Recently recognised as a Demonstration Village in Beijing's "Hundred-Thousand Project," this ancient settlement now greets visitors from all directions with a renewed appearance. The "Rural Outlet" Commercial Street glows with lights and activity, while Phoenix Book Garden offers a distinctive setting to enjoy barbecue and a quiet drink. Along the city wall, the Tofu Doll Cultural and Creative Store draws in tourists to browse its wares. Visitors can also sample three-coloured tofu served in a hot pot, its enticing aroma filling the air. This seamless blend of tradition and modernity presents a vivid picture of rural revitalisation.

Building on the momentum of demonstration village development, Liugou

Village has restored historic landmarks such as the barbican and the Temple of the City God. These efforts have laid the foundation for an immersive role-playing experience. Visitors can don traditional Chinese attire, stroll along the city walls and immerse themselves in history and culture while exploring the hidden stories of border defence. By blending business models—offering immersive games by day and a bustling market by night—the village has greatly extended visitor stays and enriched their overall experience.

At Mugwort Hall on the eastern side of the village, visitors can pick fresh mugwort and craft health-preserving sachets. At the Parent-Child Farm in the west, families can grind soy milk together and enjoy strawberry picking, experiencing the simple joys of country life. These diverse activities together compose a "symphony" of rural revitalisation, breathing new vitality into this ancient village.

In 2024, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism, together with the Beijing Municipal Cultural Heritage Bureau, announced the first 15 "Families along the Great Wall" designated as countryside inns. Among them were the Stone Light Hotel of the Great Wall in Shixia Village and the Countryside Inn in Liugou Village, both exemplifying how Great Wall culture can be seamlessly

integrated into homestay development.

Known as the "No. 1 Village of Well Water for Health Maintenance in Western Beijing," Jieshi Village in Mentougou District is home to numerous well-preserved residential courtyards dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties, exuding a strong sense of history and continuity. The village rose to prominence as a social media hotspot after serving as a sub-venue of Beijing Design Week some years ago, bringing renewed attention to its distinctive cultural and natural assets. Among these are its ancient wells, centuries-old trees, traditional residences and remarkable rock formations, all of which have been carefully woven into visual symbols that express its cultural legacy. Visitors wandering through the tranquil mountain settlement can explore signboards inspired by the village's age and geological heritage, along with hand-drawn maps connecting its cultural attractions, which together reflect a universal human longing for a home deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. To further enrich the experience, Jieshi Village has initiated a series of cultural activities. The Ancient Village Gathering immerses participants in a Zen-like rhythm of Chinese life, where one can savour tea, appreciate incense and practise calligraphy and painting. The Photography Exhibition for Humanistic and Geographic Images captures the unique features of the Yongding River

and Daxi Mountain, employing traditional daguerreotype techniques to document both geography and human history. Equally significant is the focus on intangible cultural heritage, particularly the nationally recognised Coloured Glaze Firing Technique of Mentougou. Building on this tradition, the "Rebirth of Coloured Glaze Project" has created an innovative exhibition, producing cultural and creative works that merge time-honoured craftsmanship with contemporary design. By integrating heritage into daily life in this way, the project ensures the continuation of cultural memory in new forms. Today, Jieshi Village stands not only as a traditional settlement but also as a vibrant open-air museum, reviving memories through design, transmitting legacy through technology and breathing fresh vitality into the culture of the Yongding River in the present era.

Preserving the Heritage Ensures the Local Charm Will Endure

Across Beijing, rural history museums have been established to safeguard elements that embody the enduring affection of original residents for their hometowns. These include towering ancient trees, humble grinding mills, timeworn temples, old water wells, weathered stages, traditional farm tools, grains drying in the sunlit courtyards and scenes of elderly villagers sitting idly. Together, these preserved artefacts act as vital windows into the past and as spiritual anchors, capturing the essence of local sentiment and charm while ensuring the continuity and transmission of cultural heritage.

Scattered across the city's ancient villages, these rural museums present local culture and history from multiple perspectives. They employ diverse elements and methods, ranging from cultural relics and historical documents to multimedia displays and interactive experiences. For instance, the Rural History Exhibition Hall in Zhangjiawan, Tongzhou District, showcases



▲ Liuzhuanghu Village, Shunyi District

the rich cultural legacy of Zhangjiawan Ancient Town through exhibits such as Qing Dynasty vessels that once sailed the Grand Canal, valuable stone tablets and rubbings, and traditional rural artefacts.

The Rural History Exhibition Room in Liuzhuanghu Village, Longwantun Town, Shunyi District, showcases old items such as the Liu family genealogy and Qing Dynasty land deeds. Each cultural relic on display reveals a fragment of the village's long and profound history. Meanwhile, the Rural History Exhibition Room in Hebei Village, Nancai Town, has been integrated with its Folk Custom Park, forming a combined attraction. This integration has created a distinctive scenic destination for those seeking a suburban escape from Beijing.

Liuliqu Village in Mentougou District, famed as the "Hometown of Imperial Coloured Glaze," began producing this material for the imperial family in the Yuan Dynasty. The village's Sanguan Pavilion, an elevated structure, is the only surviving Qing Dynasty civilian building in Beijing crowned with a yellow glazed roof, testifying to the artistry and ingenuity of coloured glaze craftsmen. A wall stretching more than 100 metres illustrates the culture of coloured glaze, incorporating motifs of blue dragons and white tigers to interpret the history of Chinese civilisation. Meanwhile, the restored dragon-like statue

from the Forbidden City's Wuying Hall, now displayed in the rural history museum, forges a tangible link between imperial craftsmanship and local heritage.

These museums provide not only emotional sustenance for elderly villagers but also vital spaces for younger generations to learn their village's history and carry cultural memories forward.

Beijing's ancient villages serve as a living encyclopaedia. In every brick and tile, every blade of grass and tree, visitors can trace the culture and history of ancient garrisons along the Great Wall and the legends of caravans on the Ancient Road of Western Beijing. They can hear the morning bells and evening drums of old temples, as well as the northern and southern melodies from ageing stages. These villages enable visitors to experience the depth and continuity of culture tied to the Great Wall, merchant traditions and canal transport.

In preserving and passing down ancient cultural heritage while contributing to rural revitalisation, these traditional villages, infused with the essence of their time, recount Beijing's story of mountains and waters, and its villages' history and cultures. Visiting them is akin to experiencing the intricate fabric of the city's culture and past. Safeguarding these villages is vital to sustaining the enduring spirit and cultural lineage of this distinguished city.

▼ Shixia Pass Section of the Great Wall



The Enduring Heritage of the Millennial Canal

Text by Ma Kai Photos by Zhang Xin, [Russia] Alexander Dymnikov, Feng Yongguo, Zhao Shuhua, Li Xiaoyin

Like a brocade belt softened by time, the Beijing section of the Beijing–Hangzhou Grand Canal slowly unfurls from the southern foot of the Yanshan Mountains. The shimmering waves of the Tonghui River and the gurgling of the North Canal once set the rhythm of the canal transport era, sustaining the villages that grew along its course. Some villages awaken with the spring, while others thrive amid the bustle of the piers. Some remain hidden in the shadows of trees, while others blend seamlessly into the fields. Each, guided by the canal's gentle ripples, tells its own story of living alongside the water, at its own pace.



▲ Baifu Spring Ruins Park, Changping District

Clear and Graceful Spring Water

The Beijing–Hangzhou Grand Canal, China's great north–south artery, shines as a brilliant pearl in the history of world canals, noted for its vast length, ambitious engineering and centuries of continuous use. As people trace the origins of this golden waterway, a compelling question emerges: how did its first source come into being, and what stories are carried in the flowing waters of a village at its origin?

Amid the mountains and waters of Beijing's northern Changping District lies Baifu Village, a place uniquely favoured by both time and flowing water. To the east, the Dongsha River winds through, its clear, shallow waters sustaining the settlement throughout the year. To the north, at the foot of the mountains,

dozens of springs gush from bluish-grey stone crevices, converging into a crystalline pool. This is Baifu Spring—the source of the Tonghui River, the northernmost end of the Grand Canal and the vital “first breath” of the Yuan Dynasty's Dadu (Grand Capital) canal transport system.

Prior to the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), canal transport to Dadu faced obstacles at Tongzhou. Goods like grain and silk from the south reached Tongzhou but couldn't continue northward, requiring carriage transport. This caused losses and delays on muddy roads. In 1292, during the Zhiyuan period (1264–1294), the scientist Guo Shoujing (1231–1316) identified a crucial site north of the capital. He noted Baifu Spring's higher elevation compared to Dadu's Jishuitan, or Jishui Pond, ideal for water channelling. Guo oversaw the construction of the 30-kilometre (km)

Baifu Weir, diverting spring water to Wengshan Lake (now Kunming Lake) and Jishui Pond. This water then flowed into the newly built Tonghui River at Tongzhou, facilitating seamless canal transport to the capital. The spectacle of Jishui Pond that was filled with boats showcased Baifu Spring's vital role in enabling direct vessel access to Dadu.

With its long history and plentiful water resources, Baifu Village is steeped in rich cultural heritage. To the north of the village, Longshan Hill and Fengshan Hill face each other across the distance, together shaping the village's distinctive landscape. Longshan Hill, rising just over 100 metres (m) above sea level, may not appear grand or imposing, yet the springs that gush from its slopes give it a natural grace and vitality. The hill is also widely known for the Capital-Grade Dragon King Temple at its summit.

This temple is no ordinary site; it



▲ Plaque of Baifu Spring

was the only Dragon King Temple in Beijing to be granted the title “Capital-Grade” by imperial decree. Facing south, the temple with its red walls and black tiles has quietly withstood the passage of time. Screen walls catch the morning light, the mountain gate greets visitors from afar, and the upturned eaves of the bell and drum towers frame the rhythms of dawn and dusk. Between the columns of the main and side halls, the echoes of ancient prayers still seem

to linger. The plaque inscribed with the temple's name lies half veiled in incense smoke, while inside, statues of the Dragon King and other deities, their robes appearing to flutter, silently guard the land's peace.

During the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, Baifu Spring was renowned for rain prayers in the capital. Over the centuries, it fostered a distinctive spiritual tradition alongside the lively culture of the Longshan Hill Temple Fair. Locals gathered at the Capital-Grade Dragon King Temple during droughts to perform sacrificial rites and pray for timely rain. Participants, dressed as turtle commanders and shrimp generals, paraded around the spring during ceremonies. At Jiulongkou, people tied a porcelain vase with a red string and lowered it into a stone hole at the spring's source, measuring the water's depth with their fingers, known as “some fingers of rain.” If the water seemed shallow, they whispered petitions to the Dragon King before returning the bottle. This act of piety and persistence amidst the gentle water sounds held great significance during these ceremonies.

In addition to praying for rain, the Longshan Hill Temple Fair stood as a vivid tradition etched into the memories

of locals. Each year, from the 11th to the 13th day of the 6th lunar month, Longshan Hill was transformed into a lively spectacle. The residents of Baifu Village, nestled at its side, faithfully attended the fair as they had for generations. Crowds streamed toward the temple, stretching from the foot of the hill to its midway slopes, their laughter and cheer mingling with the birdsong in the woods.

The old Longshan Hill Temple Fair was not only a traditional folk festival but also a bustling gathering full of character. Recalling those days, a villager in his eighties still has a sparkle in the eyes. “There were all kinds of performances—kung fu displays, stilt walking and folk dances with model carts or boats as props. Vendors crowded the hill from its foot to the summit, selling everything from daily necessities, clothes, shoes and hats to pastries and snacks.”

In 1989, to mark the 700th anniversary of Guo Shoujing's diversion of Baifu Spring for canal transport, the Beijing Institute of Ancient Architecture carefully planned and skilfully restored the Capital-Grade Dragon King Temple. They rebuilt the Nine-Dragon Pond, reviving the ancient spectacle of “water gushing from the

▼ Capital-Grade Dragon King Temple, Changping District





dragon mouths." Centred on the pond, the garden landscape also features a simple yet elegant Yuan Dynasty-style stele pavilion. On the stele's front, bold Chinese characters proclaim "Ruins of Baifu Spring," while the reverse bears the "Record of the Renovation of Baifu Spring Ruins," written by the scholar Hou Renzhi (1911–2013) and inscribed by the calligrapher Liu Bingsen (1937–2005). The brushwork reflects a profound reverence for the Grand Canal's source, enriching the site's cultural legacy.

In the spring of 2023, the Grand Canal Source Ruins Park was completed and opened to the public to great anticipation. For more than two years, it has been a popular social media destination, attracting visitors eager to explore the canal's origin. Within the park, the historic landscape of Baifu Spring from the Yuan and Ming dynasties has been carefully recreated. Pavilions and terraces encircle the spring, while winding paths lead to secluded corners that eloquently reflect the source's rich cultural heritage and historical significance. Standing by the spring, visitors can watch the clear water gurgle into the river channel, carrying with it the hopes and vigilance of generations in Baifu Village. It flows onward to the distant, winding canal and toward the future of transmitting civilisation.

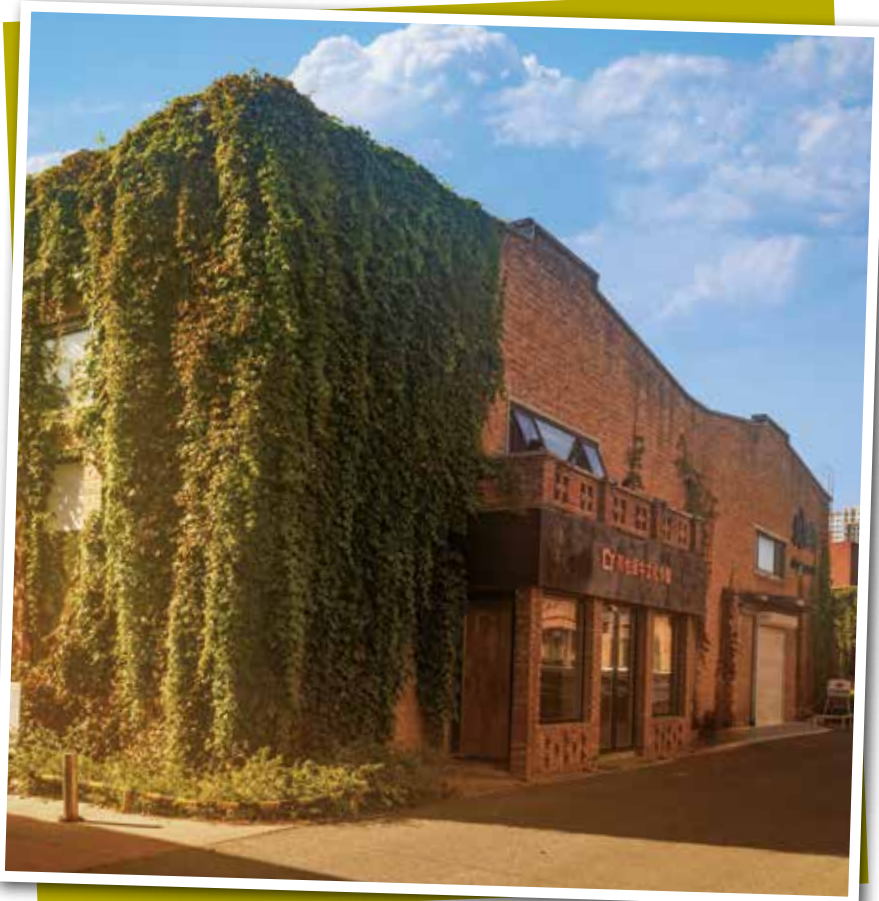
The Revival of an Ancient Ferry

Situated along the central course of the Tonghui River, Gaobeidian resembles an ancient ledger steeped in water, each page recording the prosperity of the Grand Canal's transport era. At the village entrance stands a Ming Dynasty stele inscribed "Gaobeidian Wharf along the Tonghui River," its characters now worn by centuries of wind and rain. Yet the blue-brick, grey-tile buildings along the banks still carry the fragrance of southern goods and the free-spirited vitality of the north. Today, with the

rise of cultural venues and stylish parks, Gaobeidian composes a new symphony that blends tradition with modernity.

During the Yongle period (1403–1424) of the Ming Dynasty, Beijing became the imperial capital. Grain, silk, tea and porcelain from the south travelled the north via the Tonghui River, and Gaobeidian, strategically located between the capital and Tongzhou, emerged as a vital transfer hub for canal transport. At that time, its pier stretched for 1.5 km, with shops lining both banks. Gaobeidian bustled with merchants and trade, earning the title of eastern Beijing's premier wharf. By day, the clatter of carts, the jingle of caravan bells and the cries of vendors filled the air; by night, lanterns shone like stars as taverns and teahouses echoed with storytelling and song. Even the moonlight seemed to reflect the marketplace's prosperity.

Gaobeidian Village stretched in a narrow strip along the canal. On either side of its main road, Caoyun Street—



▲ Giri International Art Zone

▼ The dock of Gaobeidian Village, Chaoyang District





▲ Bodhi Tree Park in Gaobeidian

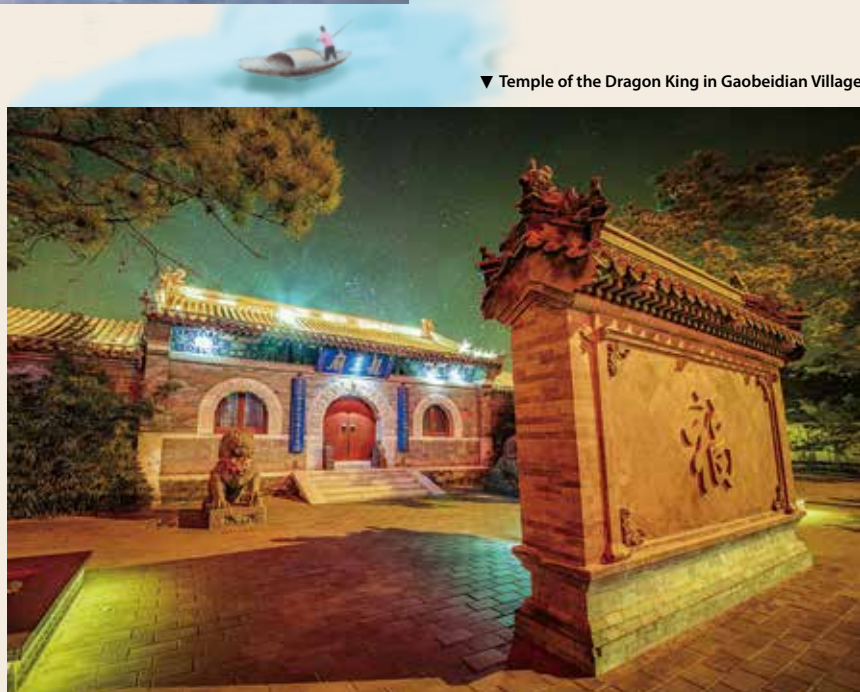
or Canal Transport Street—stood not only shops but also guild halls built by merchants from across the country. These halls provided lodgings, venues for meetings and places for exchanging knowledge between north and south. Shanxi merchants introduced early models of Chinese banking, Zhejiang traders shared silk-dyeing skills and Anhui merchants taught locals the craft of Huizhou ink. Villagers, in turn, hosted their guests with northern grains and paired southern rice with Beijing-style pickles. Over time, even their speech came to carry a blend of northern and southern accents.

For centuries, the Tonghui River has borne witness to the cultural legacy of Gaobeidian Village, its enduring vitality and its bright future. Today, the artistic spirit of an oil painting institute, the fashionable energy of FunsTown and the historic ambience of Giri International Art Zone, together with the tranquil riverside nights, weave a fresh tableau where tradition and modernity coexist in harmony.

Walking along the shaded path beside the Tonghui River, visitors glimpse Gaobeidian Village, nestled by the water and stretching its textured presence amid the greenery. The architectural complex of the Institute of Oil Painting under the Chinese National Academy of Arts imparts the village's most subtle

hall of the Institute of Oil Painting. Inside, its column-free, high-ceilinged space, framed by clean geometric lines, draws many visitors eager to take photographs and share them on social media.

The Institute of Oil Painting's Museum, a vintage red brick building, exudes quiet magnificence at the path's end. Its solid walls hold the grandeur of an old factory frame, concealing refined art space details. Visitors are captivated by its brickwork elegance before entering. Inside, dynamic steps lead to staggered tiers, while arched doors and windows create a rhythmic flow. Sunlight filters through glass, casting light and shadow



▼ Temple of the Dragon King in Gaobeidian Village

artistic charm. Here, the clamour of the city fades, giving way to the quiet grace of pigments and canvas. Even time itself seems to ease its pace.

Within the complex, the most striking structure is a white, exotically styled building reminiscent of Santorini in Greece. Its main body follows a vertically symmetrical design, with a central spire that, though not as tall as a Gothic church, rises in a graceful taper. The pale beige walls, when touched, carry the rough grain of time. This building is in fact the academic lecture

across the hallway. The museum houses an impressive collection of modern and contemporary Chinese oil paintings, enveloping visitors in a shifting interplay of light as they admire the artwork.

FunsTown, a cultural and creative park, represents the most vibrant artistic presence in Gaobeidian Village. Every corner of its creative spaces holds traces of time, while its interiors reveal a vivid dialogue between tradition and modernity.

The cultural and creative park is dotted with charming buildings, giving

the impression of stepping into another country. Stone-paved paths at times give way to the cement floors of old warehouses. Now and then, the distant rumble of a train can be heard, softened by the jazz drifting from cafes and the rhythmic tapping from handicraft workshops. In these moments, past and present strike a perfect balance.

If the rows of former warehouses form the skeletal framework of the park's memory, then the cafes, bakeries, designer boutiques and film studios nestled among them are its fresh lifeblood. Together, they allow the old railway warehouse cluster not only to preserve its historic character but also to offer the pleasures of fine food, a flow of aesthetic inspiration and a touch of artistic glamour.

The cultural and creative park is more than a renovation of old buildings; it breathes new life into dormant spaces through imagination. Here, every wall seems to exhale and every corner offers a surprise. It shows that as the city's growth moves beyond haste, forgotten eras can be rekindled with fresh light, illuminating the path ahead.

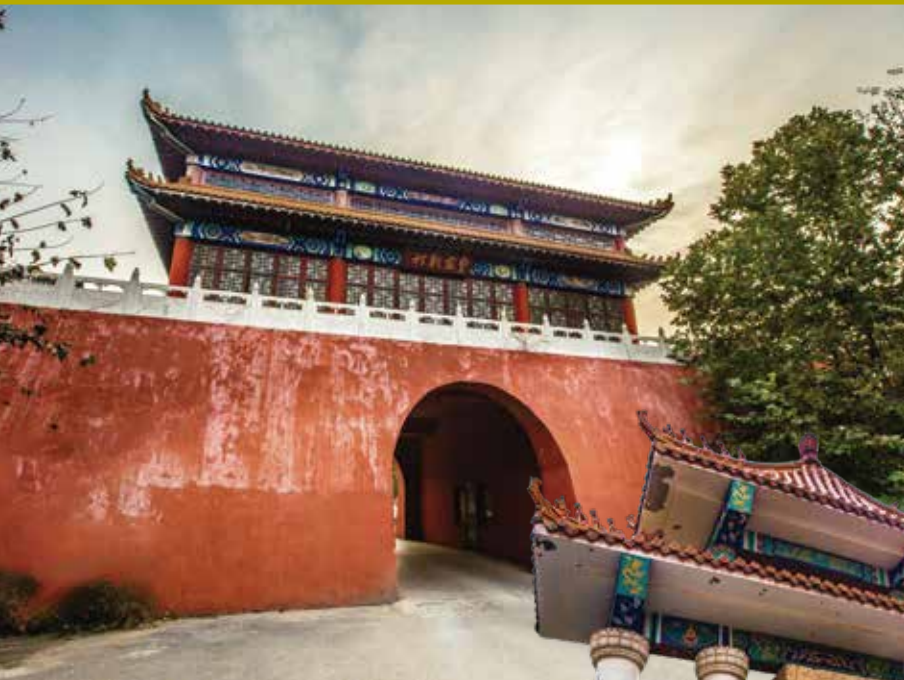
Heading east along the railway line, visitors come to the Giri International Art Zone, now interwoven with the industrial memory of Gaobeidian Village. Once the symbols of its large factories, the red brick houses and steel structures today shelter an artistic spirit while still preserving the village's past.

Stepping into the art zone unveils a dialogue between eras and spaces. Old factory buildings, now quiet, display weathered red brick walls softened by vines. This creative maze surprises with a warehouse door transformed into a gallery entrance, revealing a carnival of light, shadow and colour. A former workshop turned cafe exudes the aroma of hand-brewed coffee and lively art salon conversations. Musicians gather in the open-air square on weekends, their guitar strings vibrating in the breeze, blending with the scent of grass and trees. Here, industry's cold hardness harmonises with art's gentle warmth, creating moments of quiet delight.

At dusk, the Tonghui River is draped in a blue veil as the lights of Gaobeidian Village and the art zone flicker to life. A bridge in the distance, adorned with landscape lighting, blends with the riverside glow, illuminating night scenes eagerly captured on young people's phones. In their frames, the silhouette of the old Gaobeidian pier merges with the light and shadow of new leisure boats, echoing the river and village's enduring story—ever evolving, yet rooted in heritage.

▼ The Institute of Oil Painting's Museum under the Chinese National Academy of Arts





▲ The entrance of Huangmunchang Village in Zhangjiawan, Tongzhou District

Silent Ancient Timbers

The name Huangmunchang Village, or the Village of the Imperial Timber Yard, carries a distinctive air. On arrival, visitors are greeted by a striking stele inscribed in Chinese characters: “New Imperial Village.” This immediately arouses curiosity—how could an ordinary village bear a name tied to the imperial family? The answer lies in Huangmunchang’s rich historical legacy.

Huangmunchang Village began as a timber storage yard for imperial construction during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The gilded columns of the Forbidden City, the beams of the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests at the Temple of Heaven and the pillars of the Summer Palace’s corridors were once kept here. Within the growth rings of each massive tree lay an epic of transport spanning thousands of *li* (one *li* equals 0.5 km).

During the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty, large-scale palace construction began in Beijing, with timber mainly sourced from the remote mountains and forests of Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Yunnan and other regions. These colossal trees, called “imperial timbers,”



▲ A stele reading “New Imperial Village”

were often centuries-old *nanmu* (*Phoebe zhennan*) and fir, so thick that several adults holding hands could barely encircle a trunk. Transporting them was a formidable task. Workers first laid planks in the mountains, then hauled the logs to the riverbank with hemp ropes and rolling timbers. From there, the great trunks were floated along the Yangtze River and the Beijing–Hangzhou Grand Canal. On reaching Tongzhou, they were stored together in an open yard, giving rise to Huangmunchang.

At that time, Huangmunchang followed strict imperial standards. At its centre lay a vast yard enclosed by walls more than three m high, with watchtowers at each corner manned by soldiers—entry without authorisation was forbidden. The storage ground was

divided by timber type: *nanmu*, prized for its fragrance, was the first choice for palace beams and columns; pine, with its straight grain, was used for purlins; and fir, valued for its resistance to damp and decay, was favoured for granaries. Each log bore a lacquer stamp recording its origin, dimensions and year of felling, like a modern “ID card.” The yard’s floor was paved with large bluestone slabs, fitted with drainage gaps and crisscrossed by ditches that kept the area free from standing water even in heavy rain. The air was thick with the scent of timber and tung oil, as artisans regularly coated the logs to preserve them and prevent mould.

Over time, Huangmunchang Village came to resemble a hidden pearl, resting quietly within the embrace of the old Tonghui River and Grand Canal channels. This distinctive setting offered an ideal location. At that time, Zhangjiawan was cleverly divided into three piers—upper, middle and lower—according to its terrain and functions. Huangmunchang lay in the strategic middle position, bearing witness to a scene of countless vessels on the river and the bustling convergence of merchants.

Today, on the eastern side of Huangmunchang Village, visitors



▲ Huangmunchang Village

encounter an inscribed stele depicting the grand scene of canal vessels stretching for thousands of *li*, stem to stern. Behind it lies a tranquil pond with a smooth, clear surface—what remains of the ancient Grand Canal course.

Over time, the bustling canal dock transformed into a modern village where residents coexist harmoniously with nature and history, leading carefree lives. Huangmunchang Village’s imperial timber yard past is now a distant memory, but the ancient Chinese scholar tree remains, a silent witness to the village’s culture and history. Standing tall with a diameter of nearly two m and a height exceeding 10 m, the tree has bark that resembles aged hands. Planted by a Ming Dynasty official, it’s known as “the treasure of the yard” among villagers. This enduring tree symbolises Huangmunchang’s integrity and resilience, inspiring all to stay true to their purpose and bravely navigate the passage of time.

Southern and Northern Huangmunchang

Huangmunchang, a site preserving the Grand Canal’s ancient history, is not unique to Tongzhou. The Huangmunchang in Zhangjiawan, known as Southern Huangmunchang, and another in Yongshun Town, Northern Huangmunchang, have different historical timelines. During the Ming Dynasty’s Jiajing period (1522–1566), the Tonghui River was renovated, shifting its estuary from Zhangjiawan to Tongzhou for timber transport. This shift led to the creation of Northern Huangmunchang. By the Qing Dynasty, water transport on the North Canal ceased, leading to the settlement around Northern Huangmunchang. Urban development has changed the landscape, but the site’s history lives on in its name, seen in a road and bus stop in Tongzhou named Huangmunchang.

Families along the Banks of the Grand Canal

In Yulinzhuang, or Yulin Village, daily life moves to the steady rhythm of the Grand Canal. The villagers’ greatest pride is that this seemingly ordinary canalside settlement holds a glorious link to Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796) of the Qing Dynasty, earning it the title of “China’s First Canal Village.”

Yulin Village’s name originates from a local legend dating back to 1751. When Emperor Qianlong travelled south along the Grand Canal, he was impressed by the elm and willow trees near the Tonghui River, the shimmering canal water, and the picturesque villages. Upon learning that the village had no official name, he named it Yulin Village (Village of Elms) due to the abundance of elms. He praised the village for its orderly farming and fishing practices and the simplicity and integrity

▼ The ruins of the old Grand Canal channel in Huangmunchang Village



of its people, calling it the “First Village of the Canal.” Although not officially recorded, this story has been passed down through generations. A stele once marked the imperial naming, but it has been lost. Today, a stele inscribed with “Emperor Qianlong’s Enjoying Elms” stands as a cultural landmark by the canal, connecting the village to its illustrious past and the Grand Canal’s history.

Standing out along the Grand Canal, Yulin Village is embraced by water on three sides. It is recognised as the first water-friendly village within the embankment at the canal’s northern end, like a precious pearl gently cradled by the current. Adding to its charm is the Beijing–Tanggu Road, a national first-class highway linking Beijing, Tianjin and Tanggu. This road winds gracefully through the village, resembling a flowing jade belt and lending modern convenience and vitality to this historically rich settlement.

The Village History Museum is undoubtedly the most rewarding attraction in Yulin Village. Nestled within a modest yet charming rural courtyard, it greets visitors with a plaque of finely crafted elm wood above the entrance, bearing the inscription: “The First Village of the Canal in China.”

▼ “The Name Yulin Village Bestowed by the Emperor”



The museum’s exhibition is arranged in a thoughtful and orderly manner. Inside, three exquisite traditional Chinese paintings are displayed. They vividly and intuitively depict the intricate, interwoven connections between Yulin Village, the Grand Canal, imperial culture, local customs and canal worship traditions.

Beyond these, the museum also houses other valuable exhibits designed to captivate visitors. A weathered yet historic anchor and a small vessel with simple, timeworn designs evoke the distinctive charm of the period, together composing a rich and layered historical panorama.

Bridges of varied forms span the Tongzhou section of the Grand Canal, gracefully linking this naturally picturesque waterway. Among its many water conservancy works, the three water gates at Gantang, Yulin Village and Yangwa stand out as the most distinctive and important. In recent years, their operation has marked a new era of navigation on the Tongzhou section of the canal.

Walking about 300 m along the canal bank east of Yulin Village, visitors come upon the imposing Yulin Village Water Gate spanning both banks.

On a landscaped islet beyond the water gate, three pale yellow, sail-shaped

sculptures stand out strikingly. Created with deep respect and affection for the history and culture of canal transport, they serve as historical envoys, vividly evoking the once-prosperous sight of countless sailing vessels crowding the canal. At the same time, they act as a distinctive emblem, rising above the water to form a highly recognisable landmark of the Yulin Village Water Gate.

The canal’s waters nourish this fertile land, producing an abundance of crops. Yulin Village’s cuisine is both varied and distinctive in flavour, with *yuqian*, or elm samaras, regarded as the finest delicacy. In bright April sunshine, the branches grow heavy with samaras, their fresh green scattering through the village as a seasonal adornment that immerses Yulin in vibrant springtime colour. Beyond enriching the village’s beauty and charm, the elm trees have also become a strong foundation for the growth of rural tourism.

Each year, the Spring Elm Samara Food Festival arrives as expected, drawing countless food lovers eager to sample its unique offerings. Specialities include “peach mountain” elm samaras, five-nut cakes with elm samaras, rice with elm samaras recalling childhood memories and simple steamed buns filled with elm samaras. At



Yulin Village Water Gate and surrounding sail-shaped sculptures



▲ Yuqian (elm samaras)

this culinary celebration, an astonishing range of carefully prepared dishes features elm samaras as the star ingredient. Among the highlights is a plate of cakes filled with roasted elm samaras, their glossy sheen and cheese-like hue tempting visitors to pause and taste. Elm samaras have an exceptionally short ripening season. To preserve their peak flavour—defined by freshness, fragrance and tenderness—villagers devote great care, beginning preparations two months in advance.

The Grand Canal also serves as a generous provider, offering the village a wealth of aquatic resources. The flesh of fish such as crucian carp and common carp is tender and fresh.

In addition to its culinary offerings, Yulin Village boasts a rich tapestry of folk culture. Each year, the village hosts traditional celebrations such as the Spring



▲ Yulin Village History Museum

Festival temple fair, the Lantern Festival and the Dragon Boat Race during the Dragon Boat Festival.

In recent years, as tourism has flourished, the village’s cuisine and culture have crossed beyond local boundaries into a wider world. Increasing numbers of visitors now come to savour its delicacies, experience its folk customs and enjoy the distinctive charm of life along the Grand Canal.

The villages along the historic banks of the Grand Canal continue to thrive. The canal gave them sustenance and channels for growth, while they, in turn, endowed the man-made river with warmth and soul

through their unique histories, cultures and traditions. Even as the bustle of canal traffic faded, these villages endured, continuing to grow and to carry forward the canal’s heritage.

The canal is more than a river; it is a living cultural artery, with the villages as its most vital points. These settlements preserve the past while linking to the future, ensuring that the canal’s stories are continually told and its spirit endlessly carried forward. Within the rhythm of its tides, the villages’ tales endure, and the thousand-year bond with the canal will remain eternal.

A wide-angle photograph taken from a high vantage point, looking through a large, irregular stone archway. The archway is made of rough, weathered stone blocks. Through the arch, a valley opens up. In the foreground, a dense cluster of traditional Chinese village houses with grey tiled roofs is visible. A river or stream flows through the middle ground. In the background, a range of rugged, mountainous peaks stretches across the horizon under a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds. The Great Wall of China is visible winding along the ridges of the mountains in the distance.

The Great Wall Witnesses the Passage of Time

Text by Zhang Yan, Gao Yuan Photos by Tong Tianyi, Zhang Xin, Li Xiaoyin, Cao Bing, He Rong, Gong Yuexian, Bu Xiangdong, Zhao Guichun

The Great Wall winds like a giant dragon through the lofty peaks of the Yanshan Mountains, etched with the collective memory of the Chinese nation. At its foot, ancient villages nestled against the mountains stand as silent sentinels. They once shielded both the border garrisons and the homely life of local residents, bearing witness to the course of history and the rhythms of ordinary existence.

The land along the Great Wall embodies not only a profound chapter of history but also today's most vibrant rural scenery. The villages that line it have endured the vicissitudes of time and are now experiencing a revival. They belong equally to the past, the present and the future.

Sentinels at the Foot of the Great Wall

Changyucheng Village, located in Liucun Town, Changping District, lies deep in the mountains of northwest Beijing at an altitude of more than 880 metres (m). Nestled in a valley between two peaks, the village has long served as a natural military stronghold.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), this area functioned as a security outpost for Beijing. Since northern invaders frequently entered the city along this route, fortifying the location was crucial. Historical records note that Changyucheng, within the present-day village, was originally built as a military fortress during the Ming era. It stood resilient for more than 120 years through the turbulent late Ming period, witnessing the dynasty's shift from prosperity to decline, and formed part of the capital's northwestern defence system. After the founding of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the Great Wall's defence network remained in use, but over time the mountain strongholds were converted into residential areas. Castle walls, training grounds and other military facilities were gradually repurposed by the garrisoned troops, eventually developing into the village that exists today.

Changyucheng Village was first established in 1520, during the 15th year of the Zhengde era (1506–1521) of the Ming Dynasty. The village has two sections—one known as the Old Town and the other as the New Town. The Old Town

lies to the north and the New Town to the south, also referred to as North City and South City. When recounting the village's origins, elderly residents often begin with a tale about the generals of the Yang family. According to legend, during the Song (AD 960–1279) and Liao (AD 916–1125) dynasties, a bandit gang headed by Wang Baiwan occupied the mountains south of Changyucheng, wreaking havoc on surrounding villages. Hearing of this, the imperial court dispatched Yang Liulang, one of the renowned Yang generals, to eliminate it. When Yang and his troops arrived, they found the bandits not only numerous but also entrenched in a naturally defensible mountain stronghold. He therefore ordered his officers to set up barracks directly opposite the hill held by Wang. This site later became known among villagers as Liulang City. Another story about its origins also remains popular in Changyucheng Village.

During Yang's campaign against the bandits, Wang's favourite hunting dog fell into a valley and died. Stricken with grief, he attempted to flee on horseback, only to find his escape route blocked by a blazing "wall of fire."

▼ A traditional folk opera performance in Changyucheng Village, Changping District



▼ Yongxing Temple in Changyucheng Village



▲ Baima Pass Section of the Great Wall

In reality, this fiery barrier was a wall built by Yang's soldiers from stacked coal, specially designed to cut off the enemy's retreat. The structure later became known as Lanma Wall (Barrier-to-Horse Wall). Although only a folk legend handed down orally, it vividly reflects how Changyucheng Village's centuries-old role as a strategic stronghold has left an enduring imprint of armour and warfare in its local lore.

In Changyucheng Village, one can still witness the traditional folk opera *shexi*, preserved since the Ming Dynasty. According to Luo Shimin, veteran leader of the Changyucheng opera troupe, the early military settlers from Shanxi and Shaanxi brought *bangzi* opera to the area, which, through local adaptation, gradually evolved into *shan bangzi* performed by the village troupe today. The local opera has become a living piece of history. Each Chinese Lunar New Year, the ancient stage comes alive as veteran performers don their costumes and take to the boards, attracting visitors from afar to enjoy the village's theatrical tradition.

Classic plays such as *Ascending the Hall*, *The Map of Bianliang* and *The Broken Bridge* are still performed and handed

down. In 2020, *shan bangzi* was inscribed as intangible cultural heritage of Changping District. Opera is considered the soul of Changyucheng Village. Generations have grown up watching performances, and the tales of heroes and heroines in *shan bangzi* embody the character and enduring spirit of Changyucheng as an ancient frontier fortress.

When it comes to passes and fortresses, one cannot overlook Baima Pass Village, located in the mountainous northwest of Miyun District. Strategically positioned, Baima Pass has long been a vital stronghold and a key route linking Miyun to the northern frontier beyond the Great Wall. As for the origin of its name, two stories are told. One claims that during the early Ming Dynasty, while the Great Wall was under construction, a fierce white wild horse from Yemachuan in the northeast broke through and was eventually captured by the wall-building soldiers. The pass was then named Baima Pass (White Horse Pass), the river became known as Baima Pass River, and the village that later emerged took its name from the pass.

The second legend is also linked to

Yang Liulang. Not far from Baima Pass lies Fanzipai Village, with a river running to its west. It is said that while passing through on a military campaign, Yang spotted a wild horse frolicking in the river. Instantly recognising it as a fine steed, he tamed it to serve as his mount. As the horse was first found in the water, he named it White Dragon Horse (the white dragon being a legendary water creature), and the nearby pass subsequently became known as Baima Pass (White Horse Pass).

These two tales about the village's origin are, of course, only legends. The Baima Pass fortress was built during the Ming Dynasty, long after the era of Yang Liulang in the Song Dynasty. Yet the heroic and loyal spirit of the Yang generals, famed for their courage and devotion to defending the nation, won enduring admiration among the people. Over generations, local villagers have sought to link their village's name with these revered figures.

Within these beautiful legends lies the ancient and picturesque Baima Pass Village. Comprising four natural hamlets, the village is traversed by the Baima Pass River. At its centre stands a centuries-old fortress, silently



▲ Chadao Village, Yanqing District

bearing witness to the passage of time. Historical records note that, beginning in the first year of the Hongwu era (1368–1398) of the Ming Dynasty, the Great Wall was built along the northern border of North China to secure the frontier, and fortresses were gradually established at strategic locations. As a key frontier stronghold, Baima Pass was naturally incorporated into this defensive network. During the Yongle era (1403–1424), a small, rudimentary fortress was first constructed at Baima Pass. It was later rebuilt during the Jiajing era (1522–1566), with reinforced, heightened and thickened walls, added battlements, subsidiary walls, and newly erected watchtowers and defensive structures. The upgraded fortress became far more formidable, capable of both defence and offence, ensuring near-total security. On a solitary hill south of the fortress, a beacon tower was built, maintaining visual contact with the fortress and ready to relay warnings at a moment's notice.

The main structure of Baima Pass Fortress remains well preserved to this day. Rectangular in shape, it has a perimeter of more than 400 m and features a single southern gate. Above the gate arch hangs a stone lintel plaque, two m long and one m wide, inscribed with the four large characters *bai ma guan bao* (Baima Pass Fortress).

Like Baima Pass Fortress, the nearby stretches of the Great Wall and its watchtowers—traditionally known as *loulou* (guard rooms)—have borne silent witness to centuries of conflict, serving as steadfast sentinels through turbulent times. In the early 21st century, a group of Great Wall enthusiasts visited the area near Baimahe Village to conduct surveys and take photographs. By chance, they uncovered a remarkably well-preserved *loulou* atop one of the watchtowers. The term "*loulou*" is an ancient Chinese military designation for an open-top watchtower, typically erected on city walls, warships or border fortifications.

From these elevated platforms, soldiers could observe enemy movements, signal warnings and maintain vigilance over vast territories. Within the Beijing region, intact Ming Dynasty *loulou* are extremely rare, with only a handful still surviving. The discovery of a well-preserved example at Baima Pass therefore represents a cultural treasure of exceptional historical significance.

After the discovery of the *loulou*, several cultural heritage protection agencies in Beijing launched emergency conservation efforts to preserve the dilapidated *loulou* and watchtowers—not only Laoyugou Watchtower at Baima Pass, but also the Fengjiayu and Dongtuogu *loulou* nearby. The few remaining Ming Dynasty *loulou* structures in Beijing were all reinforced and restored. The Great Wall enthusiasts affectionately named these three restored watchtowers the Perfect Towers. Standing since the Ming Dynasty, they have endured centuries of wind, frost, rain and snow, with

any signs of damage promptly detected and repaired.

Located in the town of Badaling, Chadao Village is another ancient settlement with a long history. The village is divided into three sections—Dongguan, Chadao Ancient City and Xiguan—forming a rectangular layout that stretches east to west along the valley. Positioned at a bend near the mouth of a valley where the Badaling section of the Great Wall passes, the village was built to follow the natural contours of the terrain, with its northern wall rising halfway up the mountainside. Historically, this was Chadao Fortress, a strategically vital military stronghold also known as Three-Pronged Pass. The term "*chadao*" (meaning "forked path") derives from its location on the ancient road through Juyong Pass, where the village marked the route's second critical junction. During the late Ming Dynasty, Li Zicheng's (1606–1645) rebel army failed to capture Chadao Fortress, forcing a detour through Shixia Pass to take Juyong Pass. Chadao Fortress thus served as the undisputed

military outpost for both Juyong Pass and the Badaling section.

Chadao Fortress has long held renown, not only for its strategic location but also for the emperors and luminaries who stayed there, leaving behind poems and writings that further enhanced its fame.

Although Emperor Xuande Zhu Zhanji

(1399–1435) was known for his diligent governance, he also had a keen interest in hunting. He led hunting expeditions to the Chadao area several times, notably in 1430 and 1434. In the winter of the fifth year of the Xuande era (1426–1435), he passed through Juyong Pass with his entourage to hunt around Chadao and Huailai. He stayed

▼ Gubeikou Village, Miyun District



▼ The ancient imperial route in Gubeikou Village



twice in Chadao and even sent venison back to the capital as an offering to the empress dowager.

In stark contrast to the grandeur of former emperors, Emperor Guangxu (reign: 1875–1908) and Empress Dowager Cixi's (1835–1908) stay at Chadao Fortress in 1900 was marked by panic and despair. After Beijing was captured, the two fled in haste, disguised as commoners, travelling westward through Juyong Pass and Yanqing. Because of the sudden flight, they carried no food or warm clothing, leaving their entourage starving and freezing. When they reached Chadao Fortress, the town had already been stripped bare. In the end, they could only take shelter for one night in the Guandi Temple within West Wengcheng (a barbican entrance to the fortress)—a moment that stands as one of history's most poignant ironies.

Beyond its military history and notable figures, Chadao Fortress is also celebrated for its distinctive natural scenery. "Chadao Autumn Wind" was listed among the Eight Famous Scenic Highlights of Yanqing during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Each golden autumn, the rolling mountains blaze with

fiery red leaves beneath the clear, lofty skies.

Today, though Chadao Village is no longer as vibrant as it once was, it remains a vital link between history and the present. As an important chapter in the story of China's modern capital, Chadao stands in quiet dignity, bearing witness to the passage of time.

Codes for Ancient Villages in Cultural Fusion

Gubeikou Village in the town of Gubeikou is not only well known in Miyun District but also enjoys a prominent reputation throughout Beijing and across the country. Situated on the border of Miyun and Luanping, Gubeikou has long been a strategically important military site. During the Qing Dynasty, it became an essential part of the imperial route used by emperors travelling to and from the Chengde Mountain Resort. Gubeikou has historically been a gathering place for prominent figures. The defence of the Great Wall made the village a national focal point, while its

scattered temples and historical sites have made it a renowned tourist destination in the Beijing region.

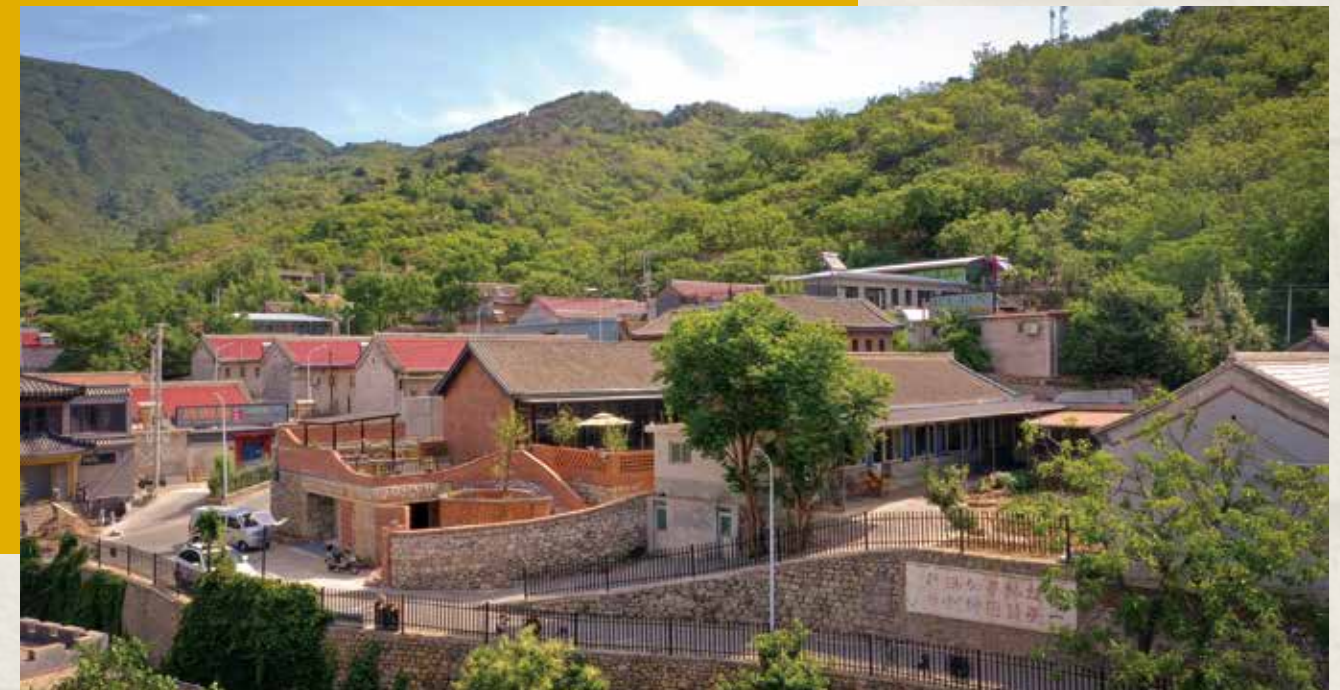
Gubeikou's cultural heritage is exceptionally rich, bearing witness to more than 2,000 years of Chinese history and blending Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist traditions. Wandering through the area, one can sense the grandeur of Buddhism in stele forests and temples, the spirit of Taoism in monasteries and sacred sites, and the enduring influence of Confucianism in libraries, lecture halls and the Confucian temple.

Legend holds that during Yu the Great's (years of birth and death unknown) flood-control campaign, he moored his boats on the Baoqiu River (present-day Chaohe River). Revered in Confucian tradition as a sage king, Yu's footsteps were later retraced by generations of scholars. Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072), one of the Eight Great Prose Masters of the Tang (AD 618–907) and Song dynasties, departed from Bianjing (today's Kaifeng, Henan Province) in 1060, the fifth year of the Jiayou era (1056–1063) of the Song Dynasty, travelling day and night to reach

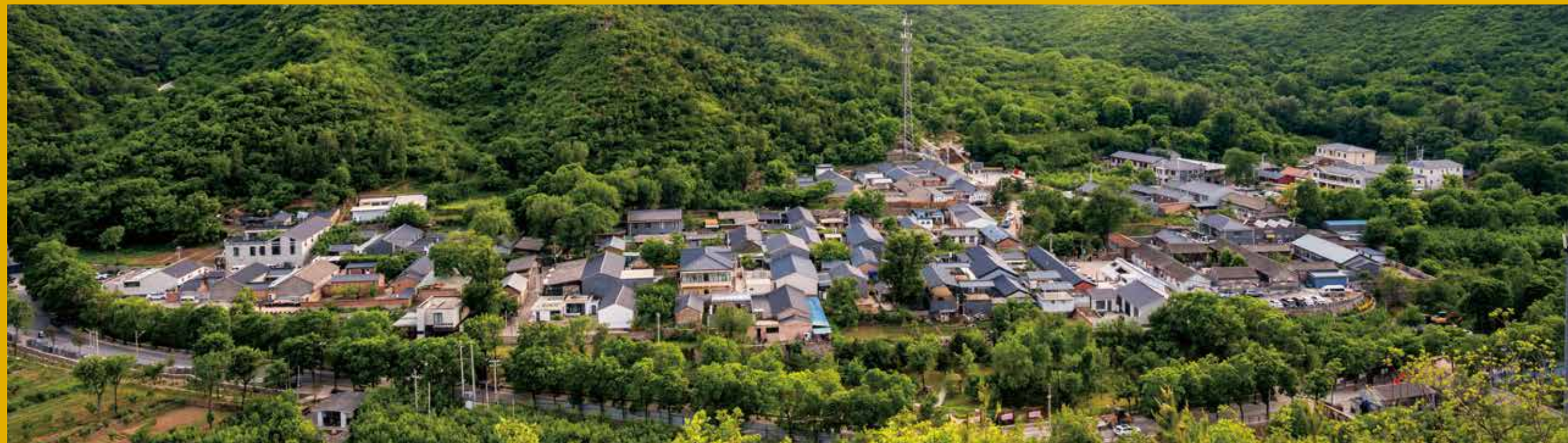
Gubeikou. From that time onwards, a steady stream of literati and scholars visited the area, ushering Gubeikou's culture into a "golden age of brilliant stars." Northern Song (AD 960–1127) figures such as Shen Kuo (1032–1096) and Su Zhe (1039–1112), Ming dramatist Tang Xianzu (1550–1616), and Qing grand secretary Liu Yong

(1720–1805) all composed poetry and essays here. The Qing playwright Li Yu (circa 1591–1671) even drew on Gubeikou's "Mo Huaigu" tale to create the play *A Handful of Snow*, with the act "The Interrogation and Assassination of Tang" later included in Peking Opera textbooks, becoming a classic of the tradition.

Since ancient times, renowned mountains have been dotted with Buddhist and Taoist temples, and Gubeikou is no exception. These temples once flourished and were immensely popular. Elderly residents recall that at its height, Gubeikou had as many as 108 temples. Historical records show that even in the early Republic



▲ Beigou Village, Huairou District



of China period (1912–1949), more than 40 temples of varying sizes still stood in the area. Today, the construction dates can be traced: Yang Linggong Temple, founded in the Song Dynasty; Yaowang Temple, built in 1378, the 11th year of the Hongwu era of the Ming Dynasty; and more than a dozen others. Both Yaowang Temple and Wenshen Temple still preserve intact opera stages, where faded graffiti and ink stains on the walls not only attest to the prosperity and continuity of Gubeikou's culture but also record the joys, sorrows and daily lives of generations of performers.

Unlike the religious and cultural diversity of Gubeikou, Beigou Village, at the foot of the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall, is renowned for its spirit of international cultural integration. Little



1. Kangling Village, Changping District 2. A screen wall in Kangling Village 3. Zhengde Spring Pancake Feast in Kangling Village

more than a decade ago, it remained a remote mountain hamlet. With the support of national agricultural assistance and rural development policies, Beigou gradually enhanced its environment, constructing a village loop road, mountain trails, a digital cinema, a library and even a chess and card room, transforming itself into a distinctive garden-style mountain settlement.

While improving its environment, the village has also placed strong emphasis on cultivating civic virtue. Regular courses are offered on traditional classics such as *The Rules for Students*, *The Three Character Classic*, *The Analects* and *Zhuangzi*, with professors from Beijing Normal University invited to lecture. Over time, the 80-seat digital cinema has often been filled to capacity, with villagers even standing to listen. The village also invested two million yuan (US\$281,690) in creating a cultural square, its walls engraved with famous quotations and historical tales

such as “Standing in the Snow at Cheng’s Door,” “The Friendship of Guan Zhong and Bao Shuya” and “Sima Guang Smashing a Water Vat,” fostering an atmosphere that honours culture and virtue.

All these initiatives have drawn a growing number of international visitors eager to study traditional Chinese culture. With their arrival, folk tourism in Beigou Village has thrived. Local residents have incorporated international elements into house designs, upgrading guesthouses, diversifying tourism offerings and increasing household incomes. Today, more than 10 families from countries including the United States, the Netherlands and Germany have settled in the village, contributing to its development. The distinctive courtyards rented by these international residents harmonise with the green mountains, clear waters and the majestic Great Wall, marking Beigou’s transformation from an obscure

hamlet into an international art village.

In 2010, Chinese-American entrepreneur Tang Liang invested in the Brickyard hotel in the village. The hotel, once a derelict glazed tile factory, was meticulously redesigned by Tang and her husband into an art-filled countryside retreat. In the years that followed, the Brickyard Art Gallery and several distinctive cafes were opened, transforming Beigou into an international village and a popular internet-famous destination. Today, visitors from around the world flock here to enjoy a unique experience of “wandering among the mountains, staying in the countryside.”

Like Beigou Village, Shixia Village has embraced tourism integration, pursuing a path of “new life from ancient charm” rooted in Great Wall culture. Situated at the foot of the wall in Yanqing District, Shixia once served as a strategic northern pass of Juyong and was famed as a gateway. Today,

the village still retains the architectural character of its ancient dwellings while developing new attractions, radiating vitality and renewed energy.

The year 2015 marked the arrival of boutique guesthouses in Yanqing District. At the foot of the Shixia Pass section of the Great Wall, Shi Guang Great Wall Boutique Guesthouse—Yanqing’s first premium rural hotel—opened in Shixia Village. Since then, the hospitality industry in the village has flourished, ushering in a new chapter of development. The rapid growth of guesthouses has not only raised villagers’ incomes but also boosted local tourism, transforming this small settlement beneath the Great Wall into a lively destination. Villagers have also expanded into speciality crops such as skullcaps, crabapples, hazelnuts and walnuts, providing both local products for visitors and fresh supplies for the village’s boutique guesthouses.

Villages Standing Sentinel to Imperial Tombs

Nestled among evergreen pine and cypress groves on the southern slope of Tianshou Mountain in northern Changping District lies the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Ming Tombs—the burial complex of 13 Ming emperors. This land, which has borne witness to centuries of imperial court history, is dotted with traditional villages where families have lived for generations as guardians of the imperial tombs. Many of these villages carry the Chinese character *ling* (meaning “tomb”) in their names. The villagers, descendants of the original guardians, have long preserved distinctive ancestral rituals and sacrificial traditions, even as they embrace the new era of rural revitalisation.

Among these ancient settlements, Kangling Village is perhaps the most renowned and frequented. During holidays, the village bustles with tourists, and every farmhouse brims with activity. Many visitors travel long distances for one purpose above all others—to savour the celebrated

“Zhengde Spring Pancake Feast.”

Zhengde was the reign title of Emperor Wuzong, the 10th ruler of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Houzhao (1491–1521), whose burial site is Kangling Tomb. In Kangling Village, folk tales about this emperor have been handed down through generations. Gathered and recorded by historians, these stories have been brought to life by villagers in the form of a culinary tradition, shaping a distinctive cultural landscape upon the dining table.

Legend has it that Emperor Zhengde was especially fond of amusements. On one southern journey, he became so absorbed in fishing that he refused to leave his rod even for meals. To accommodate him, his attendants prepared thin pancakes filled with Huaiyang-style dishes. On tasting them, the emperor found the flavours memorable and lavishly praised the creation, bringing the idea back to the capital—thus giving rise to the earliest form of “imperial fast food.”

With a history of several centuries, spring pancakes have evolved from an imperial delicacy of the Zhengde era (1506–1521) of the Ming Dynasty into a beloved folk dish. In Kangling Village, the pancakes are still prepared using traditional imperial methods, made from hot-water dough and cooked with skill until as thin as cicada wings yet tender and resilient. When served, they are wrapped around an array of fillings such as

bean sprouts, cucumber strips and braised meat—so translucent that the stuffing can reportedly be seen through the pancake.

Kangling Village is also home to three legendary old trees—two Chinese scholar trees and a ginkgo. At the village entrance stand two ancient pagoda trees, each more than 500 years old. At the centre of the village rises a towering ginkgo, revered by locals as the Emperor Tree. A local saying goes, “First came the Emperor Tree, then Kangling Palace and after that, Kangling Supervisory Office.” This suggests that the Emperor Tree and the pagoda trees long predate both the construction of Kangling Tomb and the founding of Kangling Village itself.

Precisely because of its long history, this village—gradually shaped by the descendants of tomb guardians—has folded a wealth of flavour, memory and culture into a single spring pancake.

The Ming Tombs area is dotted with ancient villages, many of which still preserve the ruins of the Ming Dynasty’s Shengongjian (Divine Palace Supervisory Office). Among them, Deling Village boasts the most complete remains, proudly known to locals as the Great Ming Ancient Fortress.

The Ming Dynasty established three administrative systems—supervisory offices (*jian*), guards (*wei*) and bureaus (*shu*)—to manage the imperial tombs. The supervisory

▼ An old courtyard’s wall in Deling Village, Changping District



offices oversaw daily affairs, the guards provided military defence, and the bureaus handled sacrificial rituals and supply management. Of the 13 tombs, all except Siling, the resting place of Emperor Chongzhen (reign: 1627–1644), the last ruler of the fallen dynasty, had a supervisory office. During the Qing Dynasty, as these institutions were abolished, their sites gradually evolved into natural villages. Deling Village endures as a living testament to this historical transformation.

The supervisory offices were typically situated close to the imperial tombs, each consisting of an independent rectangular courtyard, resembling an ancient fortress without watchtowers. Once home to numerous buildings, most have vanished over time, leaving only the surrounding walls and gate towers. The interior spaces have gradually been filled with residential houses, transforming their original appearance.

The ancient walls encircling Deling Village, though weathered by more than 300 years of wind, frost, rain and snow, still preserve much of their original form. Built in the Ming Dynasty, these thick, solid blue-brick walls feature a single gate in the northern wall. According to tradition, the bricks were bound with a mixture of lime, rice gruel and pig blood, giving the structure extraordinary strength. These fortified walls enabled the village to withstand wars and upheavals, allowing them to endure to the present day.

In recent years, with the rise of folk and rural tourism, picturesque Deling Village has become a favourite destination

▼ Ancient cypresses in Maoling Village, Changping District



for tourists and cycling enthusiasts alike. Reflecting on the Ming Dynasty's 270-year history, Emperor Xianzong Zhu Jianshen (1447–1487) is remembered by later generations for his extraordinary romance with Noble Consort Wan Zhen'er, who was 17 years his senior. His affection for her was so enduring that he came to be hailed as the "most devoted lover in Ming history." Their legendary story of love has been preserved through generations in Maoling Village and Wanniangfen Village, lending a poignant layer of historical richness to the ancient settlements at the foot of Tianshou Mountain.

Emperor Xianzong, the eighth emperor of the Ming Dynasty, reigned under the era name Chenghua for 23 years. After his death, he was laid to rest in Maoling Tomb. Noble Consort Wan, his most cherished companion, was also interred within the imperial burial grounds. Her tomb is located in Wanniangfen Village, five kilometres (km) from Maoling Tomb.

Viewed from above, Maoling Village—separated from Maoling Tomb by only a road—still preserves the square layout of a Ming Dynasty tomb supervisory office. Originally established to serve the Ming imperial burial system, the office gradually evolved over centuries into a village, becoming part of the historic landscape. Thick, ancient walls enclose the settlement, their outer stones resembling great smooth cobblestones—worn like whetstones, irregular in form yet set in a strikingly harmonious pattern.

Several centuries-old oriental arborvitae still rise within the village, standing as silent guardians while welcoming visitors. Beneath these ancient trees, villagers often gather to talk about daily life and share stories. Here, locals take comfort in the tranquility of their ancestral home and the lasting legacy handed down by their forebears.

Several km from Maoling Village lies Wanniangfen Village, which grew around the tomb of an imperial concubine. It stands apart among the tomb-guarding villages as the only one in the Ming Tombs area established by the burial of a single imperial consort.

In 1487, the 23rd year of the Chenghua era (1465–1487) of the Ming Dynasty, Noble Consort Wan died of illness. Emperor Chenghua was heartbroken, suspending morning audiences for seven days in open grief. Defying his officials' objections and disregarding long-standing

▼ Mao Ling Cun (Maoling Village)



ancestral rules, he insisted on granting her a grand burial within the Tianshou Mountain imperial grounds. Before the Chenghua era, only emperors and empresses were interred there, while consorts were buried in the western suburbs of the capital. The emperor's decision to build a dedicated tomb complex for Noble Consort Wan demonstrates how deeply favoured and highly esteemed she remained throughout her life. Emperor Xianzong also appointed guards to protect her tomb, and their descendants settled permanently, generation after generation, eventually giving rise to the village now known as Wanniangfen Village.

Noble Consort Wan's tomb has now stood for more than 500 years. In Chinese history, it is perhaps without parallel for the resting place of a favoured consort to be guarded so faithfully across the centuries and even to give rise to an entire village of her caretakers.

Today, the ancient village named after Noble Consort Wan's tomb has embraced rural tourism, drawing on its imperial burial heritage alongside its cherry and walnut orchards for fruit picking and farming. By skilfully weaving together cultural tradition and innovative tourism, the village is writing a vivid new chapter in the story of rural revitalisation.

In the early morning at Wanniangfen Village, a soft light filters through the wooden lattice windows of the Huazhu Yiguangnian Courtyard Guesthouse. Here, staff guide guests in grinding soybeans, the steady rhythm of the millstone embodying the essence of urban–rural integration. Across the village, at the internet-famous restaurant Lucky Meeting–Small Hotpot–Coffee, the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee mingles with the crisp morning air.

Building on the momentum of China's booming rural folk tourism, Wanniangfen Village has repurposed idle courtyards into a variety of boutique guesthouses and speciality shops. Each is designed with its own distinctive style, infused with imperial cultural motifs, to satisfy the diverse accommodation needs of visitors. To deepen the cultural experience, the village has also opened a local exhibition hall that documents its historical connection to Noble Consort Wan's tomb and traces its gradual transformation over



1. Ancient trees in Wanniangfen Village, Changping District
2. A countryside inn in Wanniangfen Village
3. Lucky Meeting–Small Hotpot–Coffee Restaurant in Wanniangfen Village

the centuries. Nestled amid verdant woods, Wanniangfen has further created Changping District's first forest-based economy experience park, which integrates outdoor adventure, ecological education, family activities and hands-on farming. Together, these initiatives have shaped an ecological tourism model distinguished by the saying: "one forest, one view; one season, one colour."

From ancient tomb-guarding settlements beside imperial mausoleums to today's model of rural revitalisation where heritage and modern life meet, the historic villages at the foot of the Ming Tombs are flourishing once more. By drawing on local resources and adopting a distinctive development model of "imperial burial

culture plus rural tourism," they are breathing new vitality into their land. These villages are steadily transforming into cherished homelands where people can "see mountains, see water and feel nostalgia."

Today, as people walk the lands along the Great Wall, they encounter not only the weathered ruins of ancient ramparts but also vibrant villages and living cultural traditions. The fortresses that once defended the homeland now stand as pillars of rural revitalisation, while the temple bells and literary verses of centuries past resound on modern stages. Stretching for thousands of miles, the Great Wall endows every stretch of earth beneath it with a distinct historical memory and cultural resonance.



Epic of Western Beijing: Tracing Memories of Ancient Villages

Text by Zhang Jian Photos courtesy of the Publicity Department of the CPC Beijing Fangshan District Committee and by Zhang Xin, Wu Hui, [Belarus] Vialitchanka Yury, Cao Bing, Li Xiaoyin, Jiang Litian, Zhao Shuhua

To the southwest of Beijing, the Western Hills rise majestically while the Yongding River surges past, together forming the distinctive and captivating Western Hills and Yongding River Cultural Belt. This region functions not only as a corridor of mountains and rivers but also as an axis of civilisation, connecting numerous ancient villages nestled within its valleys. Like pearls set into the cultural belt, these villages are built in harmony with the surrounding landscape, their stone walls, blue tiles, temples and streets reflecting a unique chapter of Beijing's history and culture.

Together, they embody deep historical memory and stand as enduring witnesses to the civilisation of Beijing's ancient villages.

Enduring Architectural Legacies

Among the ancient villages of western Beijing, Cuandixia Village shines like a rare pearl.

Dating back to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the village contains over 70 traditional Chinese courtyard houses in the mountainous style of the Ming and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, making it the best-preserved of its kind in northern China to date.

The observation platform on Jinchan Mountain, opposite Cuandixia Village, offers the finest view of the village below. From this vantage point, the village appears like a stone fortress tucked into the hollow of the mountain. The houses are neatly arranged, alleys intersect and winding paths divide the village into upper and lower areas.

Rising above the village is Huangcaoliang Mountain, which faces Lingshan, Baihua and Miaofeng mountains in the distance. For centuries, the nearby Ancient Road of Western

Beijing bustled with trade caravans.

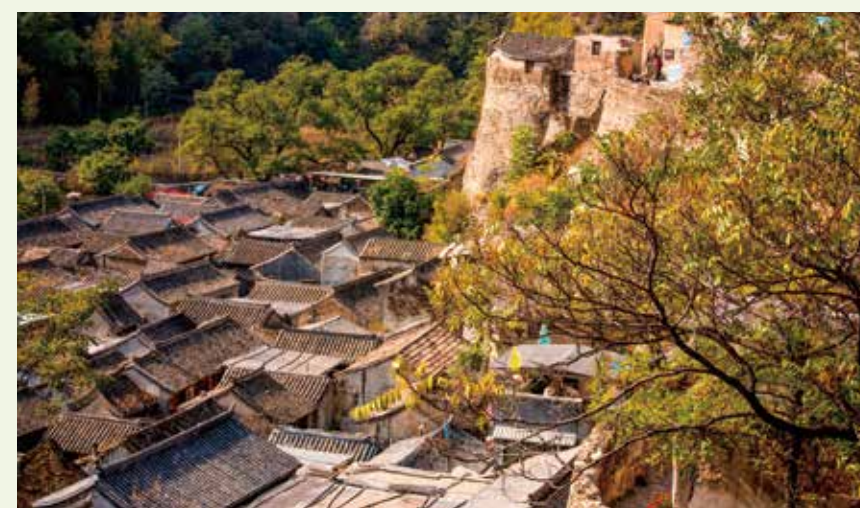
Unlike the uniform quadrangle courtyards of the plains, the village's courtyards are built in harmony with the mountain terrain, rising layer upon layer along the slope. This mountainous style retains the traditional northern courtyard layout while creating a sense of depth and space shaped by the landscape. The village as a whole resembles a natural mountain city, combining defensive purpose with everyday wisdom. Blue stone and brick are the primary building materials, while the roofs are typically covered with grey tiles. Their restrained colours blend seamlessly with the surrounding mountains, rocks, grass and trees.

The Guangliang, Shuangdian and Shiyongju courtyards are the most representative examples of the village's ancient residences. In 1998, the People's Government of Mentougou District designated them as the fourth group of cultural relic protection units.

Situated at the peak of the village's central axis, Guangliang Courtyard is the best-preserved and most prestigious residence in the village. Built during the Qing Dynasty, this spacious compound comprises 3 relatively independent smaller courtyards, arranged with 2 north–south divisions and 3 east–west sections, totalling 45 rooms.

The gatehouse of Guangliang Courtyard is a medium-sized *ruyi* style with seven steps. Its door cover is adorned with openwork peony wood carvings, while the hip eaves display brick carvings of floral motifs. On the western wall, delicate stone carvings depict “magpies climbing plum blossoms.” Although some carvings have been damaged, the courtyard still reflects remarkable craftsmanship. Renovations in the late Qing Dynasty and during the Republic of China period (1912–1949) preserved the main structure, making it a model for studying the village's ancient dwellings.

Beside an old path, Shuangdian Courtyard stands as a typical Qing Dynasty



▲ Local buildings of Cuandixia Village

commercial inn. A screen wall faces the gate, flanked by horse-tethering posts. The courtyard is divided into 2 sections, comprising 6 interconnected yards of varying sizes, with a total of 36 rooms and 7 gatehouses. Its ingenious gatehouse design includes separate passages for people and for livestock, fully meeting the needs of trade caravans. Most buildings have straight inclined roofs, covered with curved tiles laid in an interlaced upward-and-downward pattern, reflecting a style that is both solemn and practical. Behind the second section rises an 18-m-high flood-control wall, inlaid with raised stone slabs and fitted with a stone staircase. The courtyard once served as a resting place for merchants and now stands as a witness to the prosperity of the Ancient Road of Western Beijing.

Shiyongju Courtyard, consisting of 3 small yards and 22 rooms, is modest in scale

yet refined in appearance. The northern room, set against a tall artificial stone wall, stands on a high platform, while the lower east and west wings provide a striking contrast. The ground is paved with blue bricks, and the roofs are covered with small blue tiles. The overall design is marked by a strict, compact layout. The gatehouse brickwork shows precise alignment, and its finely inlaid wooden frame is decorated with carvings bearing auspicious Chinese inscriptions.

The residential buildings in Cuandixia are notable not only for their layout but also for their fine craftsmanship, especially in carving. Intricate brick and stone carvings on the gatehouses, together with detailed woodwork beneath the eaves, reflect the artisans' meticulous attention to life and their pursuit of beauty.

With its distinctive architecture and rich cultural heritage, Cuandixia has

TIPS

Cuandixia Village lies amid the mountains, spanning 5.33 square kilometres at an altitude of 650 metres (m). It forms part of the Taihang Mountains and the Qingshui River basin, with a temperate monsoon climate. The natural vegetation is remarkable, with lush pines and cypresses offering shade and evoking a sense of “paradise beyond the world.” Surrounding the village are abundant natural and cultural landmarks, including the Thin Strip of Sky, Couching Tiger Ridge, Pen Rack Mountain, Golden Toad Gazing at the Moon, Hooves of Divine Steeds and the ruins of the Ancient Road of Western Beijing, all of which are well worth exploring.

become a favoured filming site for television dramas and movies. Productions such as *Swordswoman: Sister Thirteen*, *Empress Dowager Cixi's Westbound Journey*, *Tai Chi Master* and *Cell Phone* have all been shot here.

Today, with the rise of rural tourism, Cuandixia has become one of the ancient capital's leading destinations for exploring historic sites. Across the changing seasons, the village reveals an ever-shifting array of charms.

▼ Cuandixia Village in Mentougou District is built along the mountain terrain





1. Lingshui Village, Mentougou District
2. Sculptures in Lingshui Village
3. Colourful decorations seen on walls in Lingshui Village

The Ancient Cultural Atmosphere Remains

While Cuandixia Village reflects the grandeur of its ancient castle-like remains, nearby Lingshui Village brings a different character to the Western Hills and the Yongding River, shaped by its enduring traditions of farming and culture.

The people of Lingshui have long valued culture and education. Since ancient times, they have upheld the belief that “those who excel in their studies can serve as officials,” recognising the profound importance of changing one’s fate through the imperial examination system. As a result, the village fostered a strong scholarly atmosphere and an enduring pursuit of official careers. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Lingshui consistently produced successful candidates, including 2 *jinshi* (successful candidates in the highest imperial examinations), 22 *juren* (successful candidates in provincial-level imperial examinations) and over 10 students who studied at the Imperial College, the foremost educational institution of the time. This legacy earned it the name “Lingshui *Juren* Village.”

Successful scholars from Lingshui often returned to their hometown to build residences, a practice that contributed to the village’s development and preservation. These houses

became locally known as “*Juren* Courtyards.” Among them, the residence of Liu Maoheng stands out as one of the most striking homes of *juren* in Lingshui Village.

Born in 1631, the fourth year of Emperor Chongzhen’s reign (1627–1644) during the Ming Dynasty, Liu Maoheng earned his *xiucai* title (successful candidates in the imperial examination at the county level) at 13 and became *juren* 3 years later, displaying early brilliance. According

Autumn Congee Festival

The famine relief efforts of Liu Yingquan and his son Liu Maoheng inspired Liu Zengguang, *juren* of the late Qing Dynasty, to establish the Autumn Congee Festival. This annual event, held on the day marking the Start of Autumn, honours their virtue. Villagers gather spontaneously, each bringing rice, beans, cookware or firewood. Together, they prepare large pots of congee, shared among them, fostering a strong sense of community. Today, the festival endures as Lingshui Village’s most distinctive cultural spectacle. Locals and visitors share Lingshui’s warmth and generosity when enjoying congee aromas and joyful laughter.

▲ The Memorial Archway of Lingshui Village

to legend, Emperor Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) of the Qing Dynasty praised Liu’s political philosophy of “revering heaven and serving the people.” Liu was later appointed magistrate of Fenzhou Prefecture in Shanxi.

As an upright official, Liu Maoheng used his salary to provide famine relief in Shanxi and opened his own granary to aid fellow villagers in Zhaitang. These virtuous deeds left a lasting legacy, shaping the cultural identity of Lingshui Village.

Out of gratitude to Liu Maoheng, the residence where he once lived has been carefully preserved and today stands as the well-known *Juren* Courtyard of Lingshui Village. Positioned on the village’s middle street, its foundation, laid in the Ming Dynasty, remains solid after centuries. The courtyard is composed of three small yards. In the front yard, a row of rooms opens towards the inner yard, accompanied by east and west wing rooms. The eastern wing is notable for its traditional Chinese screen wall. Following the central axis northwards, visitors can pass through a festoon gate, behind which the inner quarters and another yard are revealed.

Liu Maoheng’s legacy extends beyond his residence; he also left behind a stele entitled “Inscription on the Reconstruction of Lingyue Temple,” which records his benevolent act of financing the temple’s renovation. The inscription remains clearly visible today, serving as an important source for understanding the gentry culture of Lingshui.

The village’s ancient residences are impressive in scale, comprising a total of 162 courtyards. Among them, 6 date back to the Ming Dynasty, containing 22 rooms, while more than 120 were built during the Qing Dynasty.

Beyond Liu Maoheng’s *Juren* Courtyard, the village is also renowned for the legend of the “Five *Juren* within One Family.” During the reign of Emperor Yongzheng (1722–1735) of the Qing Dynasty, the wealthy merchant Liu Mingzheng had five sons, each exceptionally gifted. One after another, they passed the provincial

▲ Courtyard No. 4, an old dwelling in Lingshui Village

Festoon Gate

The festoon gate, connecting inner and outer yards, is known as the second gate. Old sayings hold that an unmarried young woman would never pass through both the main gate and the second gate. The rooms with doors facing the inner yards, together with the halls and spaces outside the festoon gate, formed the area for receiving guests. The main hall and wing rooms within the gate are part of the inner quarters, reserved for the family’s daily life. Outsiders were generally not permitted free entry or exit.

examinations and became *juren*, earning the family this celebrated title. In recognition of their remarkable achievements and the village’s strong literary tradition, the government later renovated the Wenchang Pavilion.

The imperial examination system provided not only a path to government service but also the promise of honour and prosperity for their families. The prominent households established within the *juren* courtyards embodied wealth while outwardly expressing their cultural identity.

The residence of the five brothers was once known as Jiqing Hall, with the Zhongyi Gate inside used to house imperial edicts. Today, the core structure of this residence remains intact. Following renovation, Courtyard No. 87, commemorating the “Five *Juren* within One Family,” has become a major tourist attraction in Lingshui Village.

Visitors strolling through the village’s streets and alleys can still experience a profound sense of composure and dignity. Amidst the towering walls and expansive courtyards, they can discern the deep yearning and unwavering commitment of ancient scholars towards self-cultivation, maintaining a harmonious family and governing the state to ensure national peace.



▲ The Memorial Archway of Shuiyu Village, Fangshan District



▲ A dwelling in Shuiyu Village



▲ An archway building in Shuiyu Village

Pervading Old Charms

The scholarly spirit of Lingshui Village still lingers in the minds of visitors. Along an ancient path lies Shuiyu Village, a settlement that has witnessed the shift from traditional farming to the rise of mining.

Shuiyu Village is divided into eastern and western sections by a north-south road. The eastern section dates back to the Ming Dynasty. At its entrance stands an ancient archway building, bearing a plaque inscribed with Chinese characters meaning “peaceful water,” which hangs prominently on the facade.

The western section of the village dates back to the mid-Qing Dynasty. Unlike the eastern section with its rugged mountains, this area is characterised by gentler terrain and a denser cluster of houses. The residences line the hillside in a row, stretching from south to north in a staggered yet orderly fashion.

The most prominent family in the western section is the Wang family. Its ancestors, brothers Wang Gao and Wang Zhao, originally came from Hancheng in Shaanxi Province. During the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796) of the Qing Dynasty, they moved to western Beijing. Wang Gao settled in Qingshui Town in Mentougou District, while Wang

Zhao established himself in Shuiyu Village and founded a family line that has since flourished. This lineage has continued unbroken for 14 generations to the present day.

Grounded in farming and scholarship, the Wang family placed strong emphasis on education and maintained a strict family tradition. By the late Qing Dynasty, the family had produced four widely respected brothers. Villagers addressed them with deference as “teacher,” and together these four men became a lasting source of pride for the people of Shuiyu.

The eldest brother, Wang Shumin, born in 1874, was among the last scholars to earn the *xiucai* title in the late Qing Dynasty. In 1904, he entered Baoding Junior Normal School, and after graduation taught Chinese, history and geography at Luhe High School in Tongxin County (today’s Tongzhou District). He later rose to become a normal school’s supervisor. Renowned for his profound knowledge and upright character, he was deeply respected by his students as both an excellent teacher and a dear friend.

In the early years of the Republic of China, the four brothers each built residences in the central western part of Shuiyu Village, naming them “Zhushu Hall,” “Sanhuai Hall,” “Yihe Hall” and “Yinshun Hall.” These spacious courtyards are carefully structured and elegantly designed. Their gatehouses follow the

style of *guangliang* (literally “spacious and bright”), giving them an imposing presence. The high steps before the main rooms not only convey dignity but also symbolise the family’s prosperity. Today, an inscription of the “Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion” remains on the inner wall of Yihe Hall’s gate. Wang Shumin himself inscribed it there, in high spirits after drinking to celebrate the completion of his new residence.

At the mouth of the south ditch in the village’s eastern section stands a grand compound, widely known as the Yang Family’s Private School Courtyard. This impressive residence faces north and consists of 4 courtyards with 36 rooms, making it the largest and most imposing dwelling in the village.

The courtyard was first constructed during the late reign (1861–1875) of Emperor Tongzhi and the early reign (1875–1908) of Emperor Guangxu during the Qing Dynasty by its owners, Yang Yutang and his son. In the beginning, the Yang family, like most villagers, relied on farming for their livelihood. With the Qing court’s Westernisation Movement, however, the demand for coal in modern industry rose sharply. Seizing this chance, Yang Yutang and his son boldly sold their farmland and invested in coal mines, quickly amassing great wealth. They later demolished the southern courtyard of their home and expanded

it into a large compound known as the “Private School Courtyard.”

The first two courtyards constructed stood at the centre of the compound, their layout reflecting that of typical Shuiyu residences. The front yard was a variation on the traditional style, marked by four neat steps before the gatehouse. The plinths were fashioned from white marble quarried in Fangshan, Beijing. The courtyard walls were decorated with brick carvings of peony motifs. The main hall consisted of five interconnected rooms, flanked on either side by east and west wings of three bays each. A screen wall stood in the rear yard, where the main hall also had five rooms and the side wings three bays apiece. The entire complex

! Millstones

Shuiyu Village is celebrated not only for its ancient residences but also for its millstones. In 2008, villagers gathered and restored 128 scattered millstones, an extraordinary undertaking. These millstones stand as valuable historical records, reflecting Shuiyu’s dietary traditions, production techniques and everyday customs. Round and broad in form, the millstones symbolically suggest the gathering of grains from all directions. This preservation effort established Shuiyu as a “Village Demonstrating the Culture of 100 Millstones.” Certified by Shanghai China Records as possessing the largest collection of millstones, the village earned renown as the “Hometown of Millstones.” Its heritage is now vividly embodied in these carefully restored relics.



displayed a design both strict and elegant.

When the Private School Courtyard was first completed, the Yang family’s coal deliveries still depended mainly on mules and horses, which often had to halt during winter and summer. In 1906, mine owners in Fangshan, together with the Tianjin Chamber of Commerce, established the Highline Railway Company. Drawing on German technology, the company built China’s first steam-powered cable car dedicated to coal transport. The line began operating in 1911, marking the full transition of the Fangshan coal industry into the age of industrialisation.

With the convenience of the highline railway, the Yang family’s coal mines expanded to eight, bringing their wealth to its peak. This prosperity enabled them to enlarge their residence by adding one courtyard at the front and another at the back, creating the grand four-courtyard compound that stands today.

The expanded residence was even more elaborate. In the third courtyard, the central section of the main hall opened to the left and right, forming a corridor space, while the backyard was built on higher ground. The main hall there, reached by seven steps, contained five rooms and

featured an exterior hallway with wide eaves. Carved plum blossoms and bamboo leaves adorned the brackets, and the door and window latticework displayed lantern and floral patterns. The eastern gable wall bore brick carvings of plum blossoms, orchids and sheep, while the western wall was decorated with bamboo, chrysanthemums and golden roosters. The roof was covered with stone slabs and finished with tube tiles. The courtyard’s main gate, constructed last, was built to the highest specifications, comprising three bays (the central bay serving as the entrance) and resembling the gate of a prince’s mansion in the capital.

Spanning a century, the Yang family’s rise from a modest courtyard dwelling to a grand, imposing residence reflects the broader history of Shuiyu, illustrating its shift from an agricultural base to an era defined by industry and mining.

Today, Shuiyu Village still preserves Ming and Qing Dynasty residences that stand quietly among the mountains, while millstones are scattered through its streets and alleys. Together, these features embody the development and transformations experienced by villages in western Beijing.

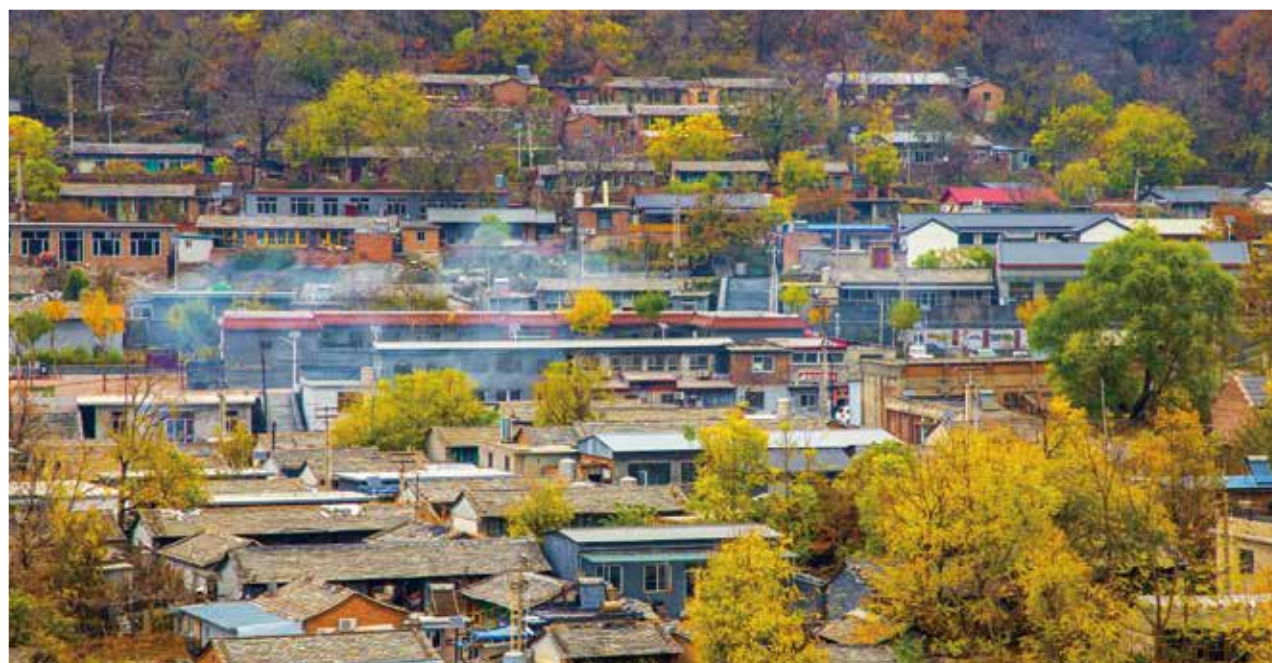
▼ Aerial view of Shuiyu Village



A Thriving Ancient Trading Post

While Shuiyu Village underwent both agricultural and industrial transformations, Nanjiao Village flourished through trade. Once a key trading post along the ancient route, Nanjiao bustled with merchants and boasted the most vibrant commercial scene in western Beijing. Its prosperity derived from the Nanling Ancient Trade Road and rich coal resources, establishing it as one of Fangshan's four ancient market towns. The Nanling Ancient Trade Road passed westward through the village, and for centuries, endless camel caravans made it the busiest station in western Beijing.

▼ Nanjiao Village, Fangshan District



lined its old main street in orderly fashion.

During the reign of Emperor Guangxu, coal mining in Dafangshan elevated Nanjiao to new heights of prosperity. The coal, prized for its excellent quality, had a high ignition point and low sulphur and phosphorus content, making it the most sought-after fuel for hundreds of kilometres around. This thriving trade drew a steady influx of people and gradually transformed

Nanjiao is thought to have been inhabited as early as the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220) dynasties. By the Jin (1115–1234) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, its location on key thoroughfares enabled it to grow steadily into a trading and commercial hub. Its true development accelerated in the early Ming Dynasty, when large-scale migrations from Shanxi brought advanced farming techniques and a diligent family tradition. These settlers cleared land for cultivation, planted trees, and constructed temples and shrines, actions that not only revitalised the land but also gave the village a stable population and a rich, diverse culture.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Nanjiao entered a period of prosperity. Shops such as Yihexiang and Beidalou

Nanjiao from an ordinary village into a flourishing commercial town.

The prosperity brought by the coal economy created immense material wealth for Nanjiao. To this day, the courtyards of once-affluent families can still be seen throughout its streets and alleys. Their lofty gatehouses and finely carved decorations serve as testaments to its former glory.

The most renowned residence is Guo's Courtyard, once owned by the wealthy Guo Shuming. Situated east of Back Street, its foundation rises more than one m high, giving the compound an imposing, layered appearance. At the entrance stand two ancient, flourishing Chinese scholar trees, like guardians watching over the gate. A screen wall at the front bears Chinese characters meaning "enjoying



▲ Scenic view of Nanjiao Village

high prestige and commanding universal respect," a reflection of the family's ambition and standing. The courtyard as a whole remains a striking testament to their wealth and influence.

This courtyard consists of three yards. The solemn main gate of the first yard faces south, with seven steps and four pairs of finely carved bearing stones. Inside, the entrance leads to a festoon gate, its lintels decorated with wood carvings of plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo, chrysanthemums, cranes and mythical beasts. The second and third courtyards are meticulously arranged, their northern halls with seven steps and symmetrical side rooms creating a scholarly air. A side gate of the eastern yard bears couplets reading: "Honesty and integrity will be an enduring family tradition; poetry and books will continue for generations," reflecting Nanjiao's cultural legacy. Besides Guo's, the courtyards of the Yang and Li families are also well known.

Nanjiao's former prosperity is also

reflected in its distinctive defence and management structures. Two archway buildings stood at the village's eastern and western entrances, providing strong defensive positions. Built of large bluestone with solid arches, they contained Buddhist halls on the second floor with double doors, where incense smoke once drifted continuously. The deities enshrined inside, encircled by corridors, served both religious and watchtower purposes.

The archway buildings served both religious practice and the administration of taxes. In the late Qing Dynasty, square holes were cut for crossbeams to stop camel caravans from evading inspection. Though weathered by time, these remains still reflect Nanjiao's historical importance as both an administrative centre and a hub of commercial prosperity.

The abundance of material wealth fostered a rich cultural life. Nanjiao became well known for its entertainment traditions, with the Silver Sound Festival

and the Lion Dance Festival standing out as the most celebrated events.

The Silver Sound Festival, which began in the Ming Dynasty, takes its name from the costly silver gongs used in the performances. It features two main forms: lively street parades, with musical processions winding through the village, and staged performances at fixed sites. The music combines percussion, including silver gongs and large drums, with wind instruments such as flutes and the *sheng*, a traditional reed pipe.

The Lion Dance Festival has been celebrated since the late Ming Dynasty. In the performances, two "old lions"—one yellow and one blue—move with lifelike gestures, scratching their ears, leaping over streams and burrowing through holes. Unlike the common northern style, the Nanjiao lion dance is marked by a simple yet refined local character. During festivals and holidays, the sound of silver instruments paired with vigorous lion dances fills the village with a festive spirit.



Splendid Ancient Coloured Glaze

▲ Glazed tile dragon and phoenix wall in Liuliqu Village, Mentougou District

While Nanjiao Village was still little known deep in the mountains, Liuliqu Village had already risen to prominence as an imperial kiln. For more than seven centuries, its kiln fires have burned without interruption, earning it the title of the “Hometown of *Liuli* (Coloured Glaze).”

Historical records note that a kiln was founded in Liuliqu Village during the mid-Yuan Dynasty to produce coloured glaze components for imperial buildings. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, it had grown into one of the country’s leading centres of coloured glaze production. The brilliant roofs of the Forbidden City, with their yellow glazed tiles, and the blue tiles crowning the Hall of Prayer for Good Harvests in the Temple of Heaven all trace their origins to this small village. For centuries, fire and clay have secured its reputation as the “Hometown of Coloured Glaze.”

The coloured glazed components adorning palaces and temples served not only as decoration but also as symbols of order and hierarchy. Yellow glazed tiles

were reserved exclusively for imperial buildings, while green, blue and other shades were used for princes’ mansions and temples. Every tile was tied to the strict hierarchy and had to be crafted with absolute precision, leaving no margin for error. This placed a heavy responsibility on the artisans of Liuliqu, who were required to display the highest skill and care to ensure the flawless quality of each piece.

The coloured glaze firing craft in Liuliqu has a history of over seven centuries. The first step in the process is the careful selection of clay. The village’s distinctive mountain soil, known for its fine texture, flexibility and excellent malleability, provides an ideal raw material for producing high-quality coloured glaze. Artisans refine and blend different formulas according to the soil’s moisture and composition, ensuring that the finished products possess both durability and a brilliant sheen.

Forming the clay base is itself an art. The body is shaped through methods such as throwing and carving, after which

artisans carefully incise patterns of flowers, dragons, phoenixes and auspicious clouds onto the surface. These designs have become Liuliqu’s most distinctive hallmarks. Glazing is crucial in determining the colour of the finished product. The glaze’s thickness and density must be judged by the artisan through sight and touch alone, leaving no room for even the slightest error.

The final firing is the stage that most tests an artisan’s skill and experience. Kiln temperatures rise to over 1,000 degrees Celsius, and controlling the heat depends almost entirely on the artisan’s instinct for the flame. Fire is alive, shifting with the wind and changing with the wood. As artisans often say, “The character of fire is guided by humans.” Such mastery of fire requires knowledge passed down and refined through generations.

For generations, the artisans of Liuliqu have mastered the use of fire, yet they have always abided by its rules. In earlier times, even with the skill to produce splendid coloured glaze bricks and tiles, they never



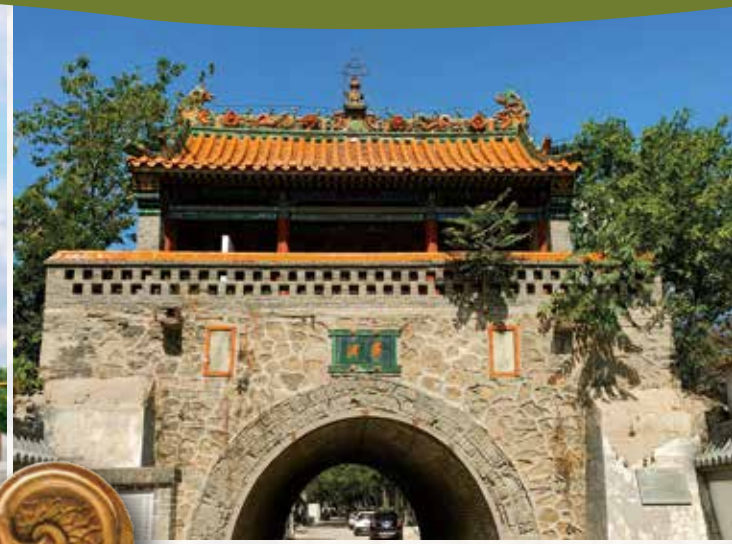
▲ Coloured Glaze Cultural and Creative Park in Liuliqu Village

placed a single one upon their own roofs. Imperial tiles were reserved solely for palace buildings, a rule deeply embedded in their cultural identity. This restraint reflected not only respect for imperial law and etiquette but also a form of self-identification for the artisans themselves.

Today, Liuliqu numerous historical sites linked to coloured glaze, including the former kiln site, the residences of artisans and merchants, an archway building, the Temple of Emperor Guan and Wanyuantongshan Tea House. Each of these stands as a witness to the village’s former glory.

The most distinctive of these is the archway building at the east entrance of the front street, resembling a city gate. In the past, the Temple of the Three Great Emperor-Officials and Emperor Wenchang were enshrined upstairs. Each year, on the 15th day of the first lunar month, the upper floor was decorated with colourful lanterns, filling the entire area with brilliant light.

The architecture of the Temple of the Three Great Emperor-Officials is highly elaborate. The main ridge of its roof is crowned with a central elephant carrying a treasure vase, symbolising that “all is at peace.” On either side, dragons are carved as if soaring through clouds. Along the flying eaves stand five auspicious beasts, while four azure dragons exhale mist and inhale clouds, together invoking blessings and good fortune for all under heaven.



▲ The Temple of the Three Great Emperor-Officials sits atop an archway building in Liuliqu Village

“Hometown of Coloured Glaze” and “Auspiciousness Fills the Mountains and Rivers,” marking the village’s enduring legacy in a new era.

The Coloured Glaze Sculpture Park serves as a modern venue for showcasing the craft. It displays fine replicas, including the dragon-like auspicious beast from Tian’anmen Gate, the Yuejiang Tower ornament in Nanjing and the Nine-Dragon Wall. The wall, built from 270 glazed bricks, stands as the park’s most striking feature.

Furthermore, completed in 2006, the 100-m-long wall highlights coloured glaze culture. Made with over 7,000 glazed pieces, it reflects China’s 5,000 years of heritage. Azure dragons, white tigers, pine, bamboo, plum blossoms, lotus, the round sky and square earth, and religious motifs all symbolise auspiciousness and wisdom, breathing renewed life into this ancient craft.

Liuliqu’s traditional firing craft has been listed as National Intangible Cultural Heritage. At the same time, its cultural and creative park draws growing numbers of young people. Here, they study and experiment, blending the ancient art of coloured glaze with modern design to create ornaments and cultural goods, bringing this tradition into everyday life.

Upon entering Liuliqu, visitors discover that coloured glaze is not a cold handicraft, but it is a warm, living entity. It represents the dedication of its artisans, echoes the splendour of ancient dynasties and narrates the story of a village’s perseverance and renewal, bridging past and present.



Though Liuliqu’s service to the imperial family has long ended, its villagers have preserved the craft. In 2001, a grand coloured glaze memorial archway was erected at the village entrance. Standing 9.4 m high, it features four towering pillars and five stately roofs. Yellow glazed tiles gleam above, while carvings of auspicious beasts adorn its surfaces. At the centre, golden Chinese characters proclaim,



▲ The parade of the Gathering of Flags between Qianjuntai and Zhuanghu villages



▲ Lion dance performance



▲ A traditional Chinese opera show

Brilliant Ancient Flags

An ancient tradition endures at Qianjuntai and Zhuanghu villages in western Beijing's Mentougou District: the Gathering of Flags. With a history of over four centuries, this ceremony conveys local hopes and joy through the vibrant display of towering flagpoles and the colourful flags that dance and ripple in the wind.

Originally called the "Auspicious Gathering of Heaven and Humankind," the Gathering of Flags symbolises harmony between the celestial and the earthly. It preserves ancient deity worship while incorporating lively entertainment such as *yangko* dances and acrobatics. The deity-inviting ritual is solemn, but the following parade bursts with colour, festive energy.

Since 1574, during the reign (1572–1620) of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, the Gathering of Flags has endured as a living tradition of Chinese New Year in Beijing's suburbs. The celebration spans three days, beginning with the "inviting of the gods," or "inviting the big list," on the evening of the 14th day of the first lunar month. Names of deities are written on yellow paper, placed in a box and honoured with incense before being ceremonially welcomed into the village.

On the 15th, Qianjuntai, as the host village, receives Zhuanghu, the guest village. On the 16th, roles reverse, with Zhuanghu hosting Qianjuntai. The celebration ends that evening with the solemn send-off of the deities, returning them to the heavens.

After the ritual of inviting the deities, the Gathering of Flags reaches its climax in a grand parade. Participants assemble early in the large courtyard at Zhuanghu Village's entrance, where towering, colourful flags stand lined against the wall, poised for a grand procession. The route to Qianjuntai extends about 500 m, passing through a small hollow, and the parade begins at 2:30 p.m. Flags are raised high to the sound of resounding music. The order of the parade follows ancient Taoist temple practice: flags of lesser deities lead, followed by those of higher-ranking gods, each reflecting local beliefs and daily life. As western Beijing was long a coal-producing area, the flag of the mining god is central, while the Dragon King's flag is indispensable. Most revered is the flag of Goddess Bixia Yuanjun, escorted by an honour guard marking her status as the principal deity of Miaofeng Mountain. Each village flag, weighing over 50 kilograms, differs from urban Beijing's Tianqiao flags. Along mountain roads, one bearer holds the flag, while two steady it with ropes.

Zhuanghu's parade team reaches

Qianjuntai at 3 p.m., greeted at the entrance by Qianjuntai's head for the event, who carries the host village's flag. The two leaders exchange formal courtesies. Qianjuntai then unveils two revered flags: one honouring Emperor Guan and the other the Great Emperor Zhenwu, both deities believed to descend to the mortal realm. Each flag is mounted on a sturdy bamboo frame nearly seven m tall, crowned with pine branches symbolising blessings and protection. Beneath a silk canopy of red, green, white, yellow and pink hangs a five-m-long embroidered flag bearing the deity's image and name.

At the entrance of Qianjuntai, the two teams converge, opening the Gathering of Flags with a joint display of their flags. This is followed by the "meeting of deities and Buddhas" and musical tributes in their honour. The leaders then raise their flags together, marking the ceremony's start with blasts of bugles and the clash of gongs. After this solemn opening, the celebration turns lively. Members parade through Qianjuntai, even its narrowest alleys, carrying diverse flags. Along the route, households set out tables with tea, cigarettes, sweets and dim sum, reflecting villagers' generosity. The parade also features more than 10 performing arts, from *yangko* dances to wind instruments and drumming, with over 300 participants

filling the alleys in festive splendour.

The Gathering of Flags in western Beijing, which began in the late Ming Dynasty, has continued for 17 generations. Its most important element is the ancient flag music, a living treasure of folk tradition handed down through the centuries. Some compositions are more than 1,000 years old, representing an endangered yet invaluable part of China's folk heritage. Of the 30 pieces still preserved, 11 are performed during parades, while 19 accompany sacrificial rites and deity invitations. The percussion work *Prince Qin Wears a Jade Belt*, once played by Tang Dynasty armies in battle, embodies this long history. Other notable pieces include *Banquet of Lord Liu*, which depicts Lord Liu hosting Confucius, and *Weeping for Yan Hui*, composed by Confucius in memory of his disciple. Both were already recognised as ancient music during the Ming Dynasty. These traditions have been sustained solely through oral transmission, ensuring their survival to the present day.

An unwritten rule in both villages requires that anyone away during the Spring Festival return for the two days of the flag parade. Each Lantern Festival, villagers and visitors alike gather in the two villages, eagerly taking part in the Gathering of Flags. It is a moment of especially warm reunions, as neighbours,

friends and relatives reconnect, catching up on stories of life while walking together amid the vibrant festivities.

The historic Gathering of Flags is central to the cultural identity of families and villages in Qianjuntai and Zhuanghu. It embodies traditional values, reverence for ancestors and hopes for the future. The annual temple fair remains a vibrant celebration, linking people to history while inspiring optimism. Recognised on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List, it now draws growing numbers of tourists and scholars eager to study and experience this ancient folk tradition.

The Western Hills and Yongding River together shaped western Beijing's landscape, nurturing villages in the valleys. These landmarks have witnessed shifts from farming to trade, and from imperial use to mining and industry. This ongoing transformation has formed the enduring Western Hills and Yongding River Cultural Belt.

Though Beijing's villages have evolved, their stone walls and blue tiles remain enduring symbols of history. Temples and winding streets radiate the warmth of human culture. To walk through these villages is to explore the city's cultural heritage directly, offering an immediate and tangible connection to its long past.

Gathering of Flags

Originating in the late Ming Dynasty and flourishing in the Qing Dynasty, the Gathering of Flags has become a central feature of the Spring Festival temple fair. It combines solemn sacrifice with lively entertainment. The name comes from the towering "flagpoles," some rising over 10 m, draped with thick colourful flags, intricately embroidered with auspicious motifs, each linked to a specific deity. The flag performances themselves are elaborate, requiring intricate procedures and skilled coordination.

First performed to honour ancestors and deities, the Gathering of Flags gradually became an essential part of temple fairs. It shifted from a strictly religious rite into a festival embraced by the entire village. During each temple fair, villagers raise towering flagpoles in the square for grand performances. Everyone—men, women, old and young—assumes a role, from flag bearers to drummers, each contributing to the communal celebration.



Culture Express

话剧《雷雨》

2025年9月24日-10月7日北京国际戏剧中心-曹禺剧场上演经典话剧《雷雨》。本部话剧的诞生不仅奠定了曹禺在中国戏剧史上的地位,同时标志着话剧这一舶来艺术在中国有了民族的品牌。如今,这部作品早已超越了时代、国家、语言的界限,成为舞台艺术经典之作。此版《雷雨》搭建起来的演员班底较之前有较大变动,濮存昕从曾经饰演过的大少爷周萍“升级”为老爷周朴园,龚丽君从观众心目中的经典繁漪变身为鲁妈,白荟则由四风改为饰演繁漪,李洪涛饰演鲁贵,其他角色起用的是北京人艺青年演员。此版《雷雨》强调舞台上的诗意表达。剧中不仅会通过浪漫写意的舞美设计呈现出周公馆的家庭场景,更用虚实结合的手法让现实人物与回忆中的人物穿插出现,在时空交错间完成戏剧舞台特有的叙事。

The Drama *Thunderstorm*

The new version of the classic drama *Thunderstorm* was staged at the Cao Yu Theatre of the Beijing International Theatre Centre on September 24, 2025, and will continue until October 7. The creation of this play not only consolidated the status of playwright Cao Yu (1910-1996) in the history of Chinese theatre but also demonstrated that the art form, though it was imported from the West, had already developed distinctly Chinese characteristics. This production features a significantly revised cast compared with previous versions. The staging highlights a strong sense of poetic expression, depicting the domestic world of the Zhou mansion through romantic and evocative scenic design, while skilfully combining the real with the imagined to merge living characters with figures from memory, thereby achieving a distinctive theatrical narrative shaped through the interweaving of time and space.



话剧《鼓楼那些事儿》

2025年10月15-18日国家大剧院-戏剧场上演由林熙越执导,刘端端、夏力薪等主演的话剧《鼓楼那些事儿》。该剧是全国首部以“社区巡回法官”为主角的现实主义力作,入选文化和旅游部“新时代现实题材创作工程”,生动诠释新时代“法治中国”的基层实践。话剧以“鼓楼苑”社区为舞台,呈现了“背包法官”赵晓海走街串巷的故事,展现传统人情与现代法治的碰撞融合。除了能了解真实的“背包法官”们的日常细节,比如说话方式、习惯性的肢体动作等,剧中还呈现了发生在我身边、充满司法温度的微观瞬间,记录着广大人民群众积极参与基层治理、共同助力法治中国建设的时代音符。

The Drama *Those Things about the Drum Tower*

The Theatre of the National Centre for the Performing Arts will present the drama *Those Things about the Drum Tower* from October 15 to 18, 2025, directed by Lin Xiyue and starring Liu Duanduan and Xia Lixin. Recognised as China's first realistic drama centred on the community circuit trial system, it has been selected for the "Realistic Theme Creation Project in the New Era" launched by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China. The play vividly interprets the grassroots practice of the rule of law in contemporary China. Set in Gulouyuan, or the Drum Tower Garden Community, it follows the story of Zhao Xiaohai, a "Backpack Judge." Through moments of judicial warmth enacted in public spaces, the drama captures how ordinary people actively participate in community governance and contribute to the ongoing development of a law-based governance China.

