

Improving citizen's cultural access

Strategic, city-wide innovation brings residents better community activities and broadens resource availability

By REN XIAOJIN
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The local government of Dongying, Shandong province, has promised greater resources to enhance civil cultural services in both urban and rural areas.

In recent years, the city government has been continuously emphasizing the development of such services, which are an important part of its infrastructure. Rural areas have especially benefited from the progress.

To support its different civil cultural services, the city government has invested 2 billion yuan (\$287.7 million) in infrastructure development, including a number of theaters, libraries, art exhibition centers, sport centers and museums.

Increasing digital culture squares is one program that the Dongying government has been working on. Digital culture squares are a public functional space with free access for every resident, equipped with free Wi-Fi coverage, performance stages, LED screens, exhibition spaces and workout facilities.

"We can do a bit of exercise here during the day and use this as a public dance hall at night," said Zhao Xincui, a local resident. "There are many entertaining events happening here and we can use the Wi-Fi here too."

The city government aimed to build 100 digital culture squares in the city's urban district by the end of this year, all with free Wi-Fi access.

"To help more people have access to the internet, this year the government has brought Wi-Fi services to 100 open squares," said Zhu Bingwei, an officer at the culture service office of the Dongying district of the city.

But free internet is not the urban area's privilege alone. The city's government has vowed to make sure everyone has free access to Wi-Fi. Therefore, there will be free internet coverage at 200 countryside theaters by 2017.

"With the free Wi-Fi, our residents can read six daily newspapers for free. We will also provide free access to information such as public transportation, tourism and education," said Liu Tongshun, the section chief of the bureau of culture, broadcasting, television, press and publications in the city.

Accessible and efficient

The local government began providing "culture cards" in September, which grant cardholders special discounts at more than 80 places, including bookshops, theaters, internet bars and cinemas. The cards are provided to citizens for free.

"We are planning to issue 10,000 cards to citizens as our first users. Among them, 2,000 will be provided to people with disabilities," said Guo Shumei, Guo Shumei, an officer at the bureau of culture, broadcasting, television, press and publications in the city. "We



People do morning exercises in a square in Dongying, Shandong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“We want our citizens to have access to cultural services and activities at affordable prices.”

Guo Shumei, an officer at the bureau of culture, broadcasting, television, press and publications of Dongying

2 billion yuan has been allocated to cultural facilities, including theaters, libraries, art exhibition centers, sport centers and museums



Students learn about traditional Chinese culture at a primary school in Kenli county, Dongying. WANG QIAN / CHINA DAILY



Children read books in a new library in Dongying.



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In another innovative move, the city government has experimented with a new library system to solve the shortage of library resources in rural areas. Established in 2016, the system makes the books in the city's open library accessible for the residents in the countryside.

It also connects bookstores to public libraries, helping libraries identify demand for new books and transmit purchase decisions to the bookstores much more quickly.

To improve its civil cultural services is not a new mission for the city government. For the past six years, the city government has been working ceaselessly to increase the reach of local culture and to provide more entertaining activities for citizens.

Since 2011, the city has organized nearly 20 public shows, three dancing competitions and three culture and art festivals.

Wetland protects rare birds

By REN XIAOJIN

When winter arrives and no birds can be found in the city, leaving the urban streets a somehow lonely and lifeless place, the wetland of the Yellow River Delta offers a completely different atmosphere, even on the coldest days.

From October to March, the Yellow River Delta wetland becomes a migratory pit stop for countless birds of varied kinds on their winter journey to and from the south, making the nature reserve a fascinating place for bird watchers.

The Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying, Shandong province, comprises the largest and youngest wetland ecosystem in China. It provides a temporary but crucial shelter for the migratory birds in Northeast Asia and the West Pacific ring. It is also China's largest river delta nature reserve, occupying an area of 1,530 square kilometers.

In 1992, the State Council established the natural reserve for the wetland ecosystem and its rare animal species. The delta wetland has played a key role in the protection of these rare species ever since.

So far, 368 kinds of wild birds have been identified in the reserve, among which more than 63 kinds are under the national protected animals list, including the red-crowned crane, the whooper swan and the oriental stork. Earlier this year, 196 baby oriental storks were hatched in the reserve.

"This year, the number of newborn oriental storks broke the previous record. Since the reserve was built, we have hatched 937 baby birds in total," said Zhao Yajie, a researcher at the Yellow River Delta National Reserve in a previous interview with China News. "The reserve has made a big difference in the protection of rare species."

According to Bu Naibin, a staff member at the natural reserve, black-headed gulls, also called "the elf of the wetland", also nest in the reserve.

"Black-headed gulls are very picky about their reproduction environment," said Bu. "Even slight pollution will cause the eggs to fail to hatch."

In 2010, the reserve started a protection project for the black-headed gulls. The project has seen effective progress, as 3,593 nests were found in the reserve and about 7,200 black-headed gulls were hatched in Dongying in 2016.

Besides wild birds, the delta also has a stunning natural landscape, including the largest locust forest on the North China Plain. The wetland has been ranked as one of the six most beautiful wetlands in China by the Chinese National Geography magazine.

The abundant natural resources have also made the Yellow River Delta a popular travel destination. Benefiting from stunning views of the delta, the wetland and the wilderness, the area has attracted a great number of tourists, bringing billions of yuan in profit to Dongying.

To further boost the tourism industry and preserve the environment, the city government has allocated 1.5 billion yuan (\$215.9 million) to develop the tourism area and brand the city as "the Yellow River town". In the natural reserve, a number of bird-watching pavilions, wetland parks and tourism centers have been established to help meet this goal.

Last year, the city hosted more than 13 million tourists, generating 12.5 billion yuan in revenue.



The Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve in Dongying is the largest in China, occupying 1,530 square kilometers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lyuju Opera program sees revitalization efforts pay off

By REN XIAOJIN and WANG QIAN

In a training center in Dongying, Shandong province, two primary school students rehearsed their performance of Lyuju Opera, a very unique genre of the Chinese art form, which is indigenous to the province.

In keeping with the traditional performance art, the training was part of the "bringing Lyuju into the classroom" program that the Dongying city government has been promoting.

Benefiting from the program, two kids from the local school who had previously heard very little about the traditional opera, eventually performed for a national TV channel.

"People are the key to keeping the centuries-old traditional art of Lyuju going," said Wang Lingling, the tutor in the program and a Lyuju performer. "It

is important to cultivate the future inheritors from an early age and promote the tradition from the classroom."

Lyuju, a regional opera originating from Shandong, is an indispensable component of Chinese performing arts. It developed in Dongying hundreds of years ago and was mainly performed in the region's dialect. It was once very popular across China and was rated one of the eight most-loved opera genres in the country during the 1950s and 1960s.

However, since the 1990s, the TV and film industry has become more and more popular in people's daily entertainment, while traditional opera has declined. Not only did the audience lose interest in the traditional storytelling form, the theaters and performing groups were also less prepared for the fast-changing market. Audiences decreased dramatically



Students rehearse their performance of Lyuju Opera at a training center in Dongying, Shandong province. WANG QIAN / CHINA DAILY

and Lyuju was in danger of dying out.

Since 1997, the Dongying city government started to gradually build up its Lyuju education system, which included training courses in elementary and junior schools and public workshops.

In qualified schools,

Lyuju has been part of the school's compulsory course, to make sure every student is able to learn at least one song.

"As a Lyuju inheritor, I feel obligated to do my best to pass on the torch," said Wang.

Throughout the past decade, she has taught Lyu-

ju for more than 200 hours in four different schools, educating about 1,000 students.

"At first the kids were not interested in the class and had no idea about opera. But through lectures on the opera's history and features, they slowly grew a fondness for it," she said. "Now, many

“It is important to cultivate the future inheritors from an early age and promote the tradition from the classroom.”

Wang Lingling, tutor in the program and a Lyuju performer

students have signed up for Lyuju workshops after school and they are doing really well when performing."

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