"Cradle of Civilization Tour #1: Destination Shanxi"
May 29 – June 5, 2026
Tour Summary for GSS
June 12, 2026

Over the course of eight unforgettable days, Chinese Ancestry Research (CAR) and the Genealogy Society Singapore (GSS) journeyed deep into Shanxi 山西 — a province often overlooked by casual travelers, yet one that occupies a uniquely important place in the story of Chinese civilization.

What we discovered was far more than a collection of historical sites. We discovered a province that serves as a living classroom of Chinese history — a province where ancient states were born, dynasties rose and fell, religions flourished, merchants built empires, families migrated, and traditions endured across millennia.

Our journey began at Jìncí 晉祠, where we stood at the birthplace of the ancient State of Jìn 晉國. Here, the story of one of the most influential states of the Spring and Autumn Period 春秋時期 unfolded before us. From Jìn would eventually emerge Hán 韓國, Zhào 趙國, and Wèi 魏國, helping usher in the Warring States Period 戰國時期. Standing there, we were reminded that the history of China is not merely the story of emperors and wars, but also the foundation upon which countless family histories would later be built.



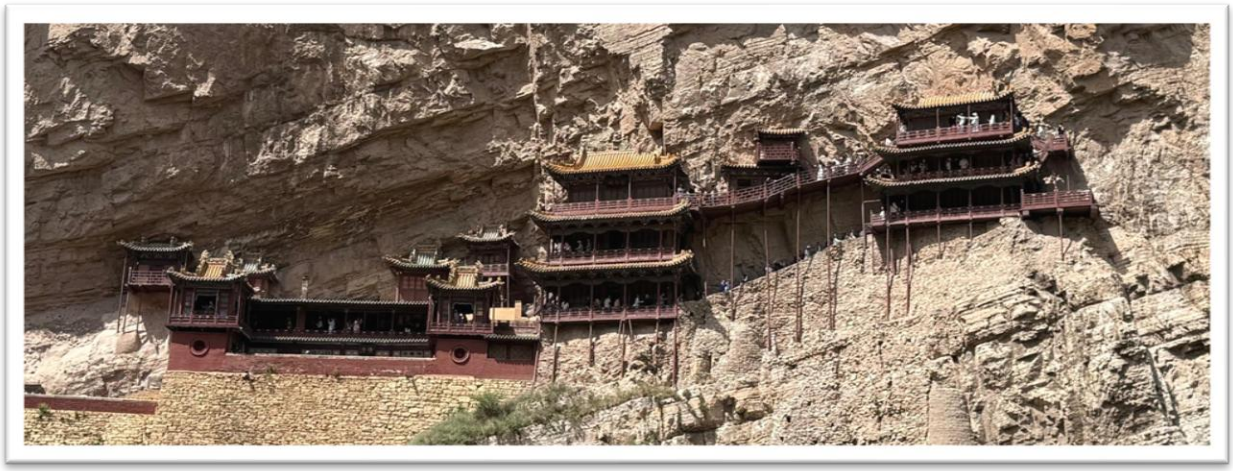
From there, we encountered some of China's greatest architectural and artistic achievements. The Yìngxiàn Wooden Pagoda 應縣木塔 demonstrated the remarkable ingenuity of ancient craftsmen, while the Yúngāng Grottoes 雲岡石窟 revealed the extraordinary devotion and artistic skill that transformed mountainsides into masterpieces of Buddhist art. Together, they testified to the creativity, perseverance, and technical brilliance of earlier generations.

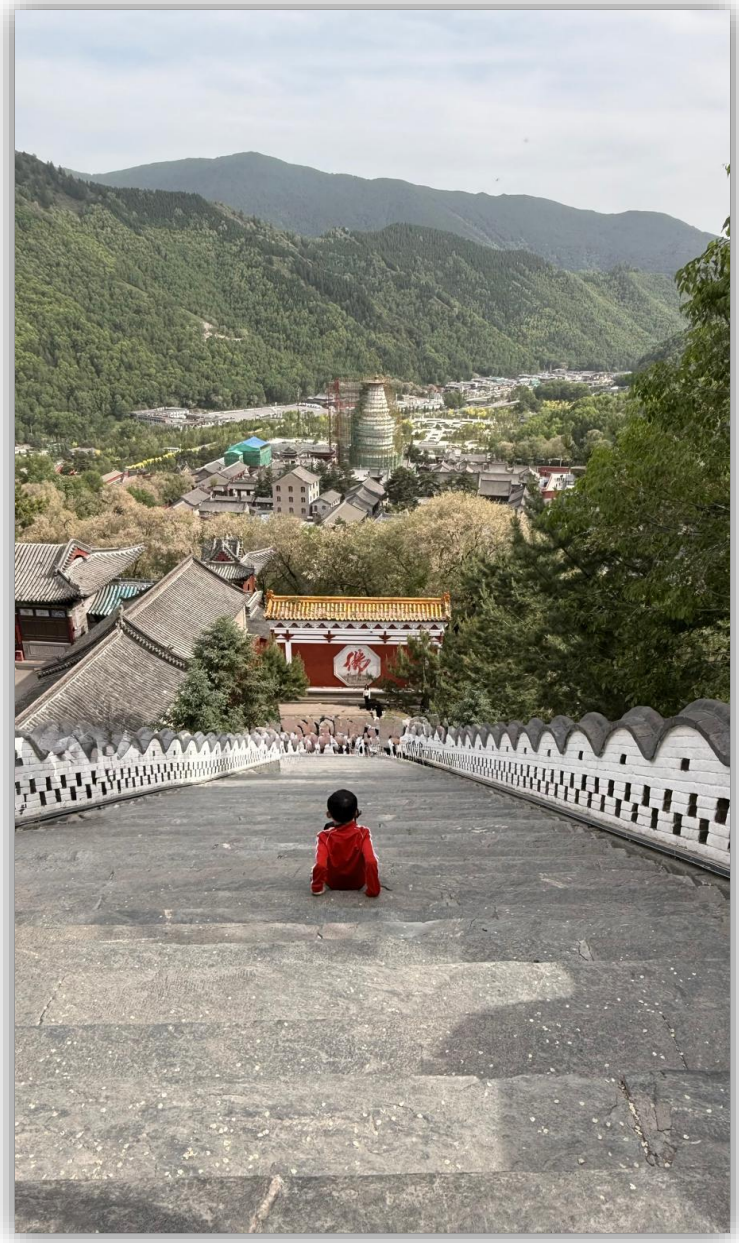

天下寺观
释迦塔
天宫高耸
百尺莲开
万古观瞻



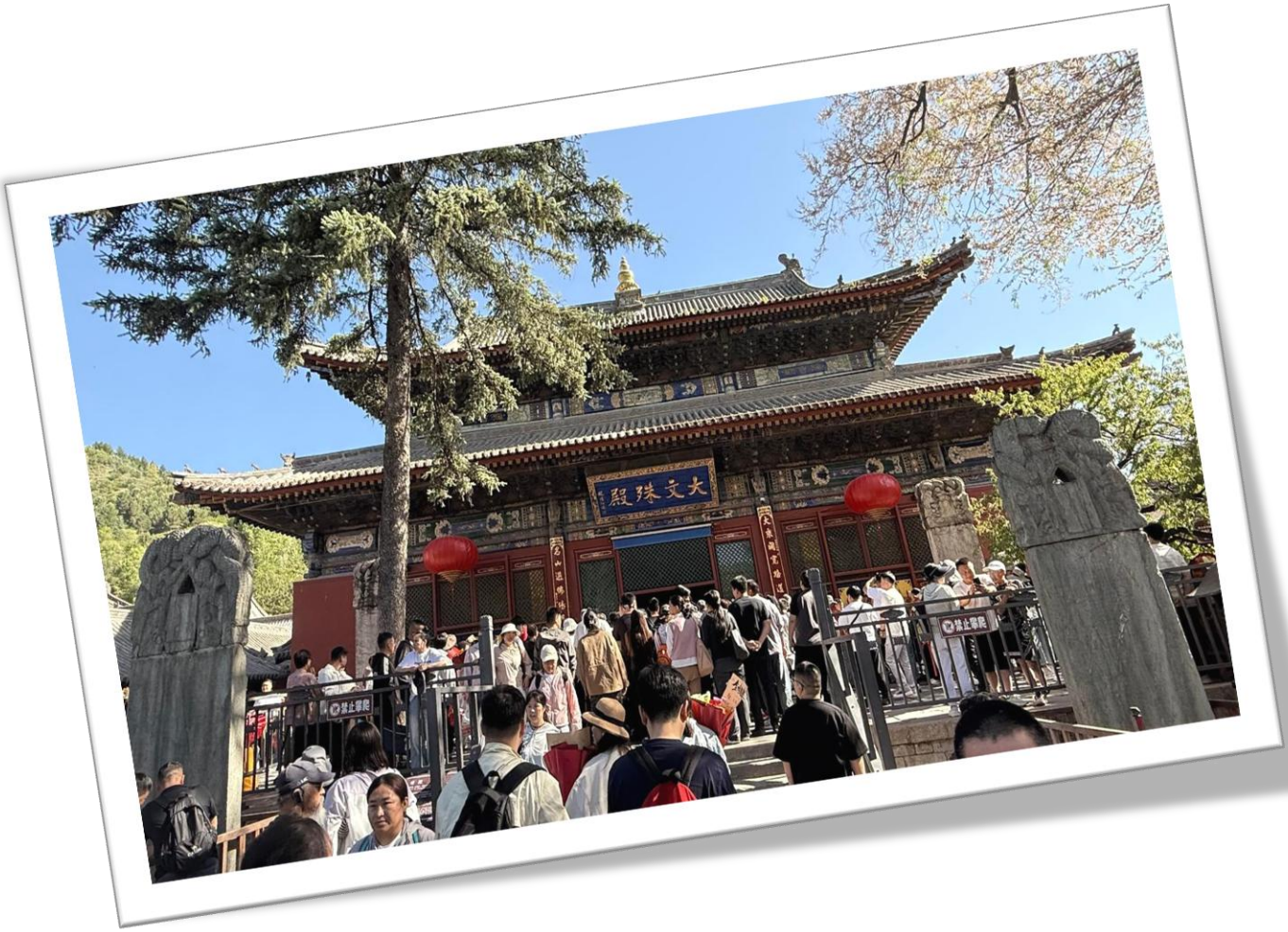
Our journey then took us to the famous Hanging Temple 懸空寺 and Mount Wǔtái 五臺山, one of China's Four Great Buddhist Sacred Mountains. Here, amid ancient monasteries, sacred halls, and centuries-old traditions, we explored the spiritual dimension of Chinese civilization. For generations, emperors, monks, scholars, merchants, and ordinary families had travelled these same roads in search of wisdom and meaning.







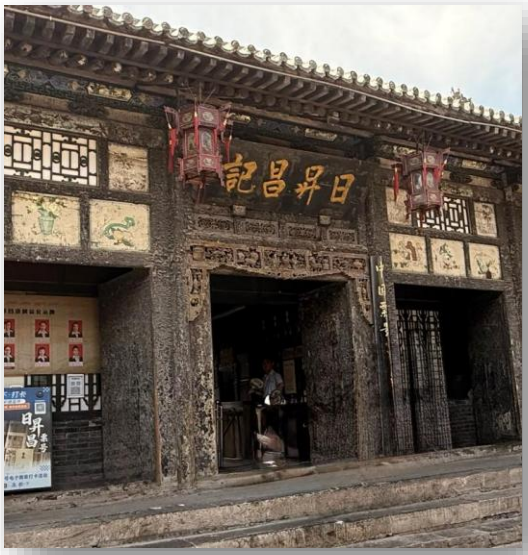



大文殊殿



Yet Shanxi is not only a land of temples and mountains.

It is also the homeland of the legendary Shanxi merchants 晉商, whose influence extended throughout the empire.



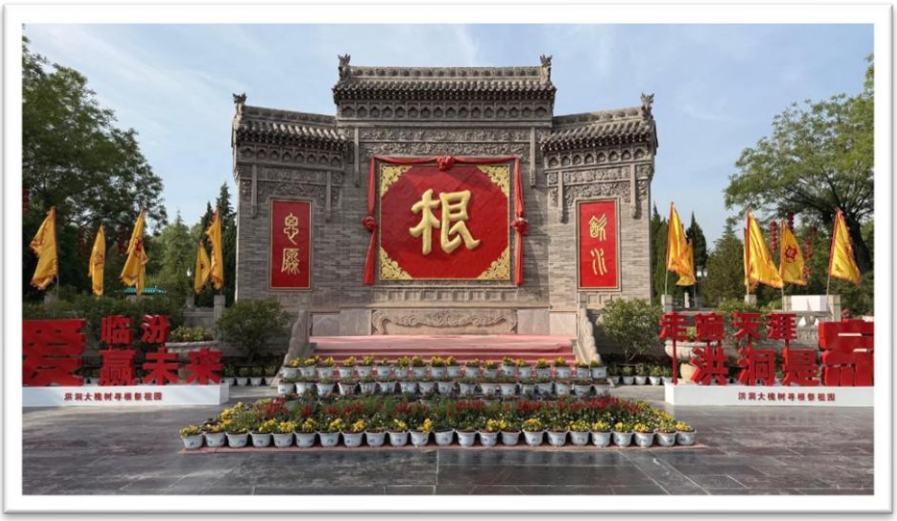
At the Qiao Family Compound 喬家大院, the Wang Family Courtyard 王家大院, and the historic city of Píngyáo 平遙, we encountered a world where commerce, family, education, and social responsibility were deeply intertwined. These grand estates reminded us that the success of traditional Chinese families was often measured not merely by wealth, but by what each generation left behind for the next.





For those of us involved in genealogy, one of the most meaningful stops of the entire tour was the Great Pagoda Tree 大槐樹 in Hóngdòng 洪洞. Few places better symbolize the movement of people across China. Here, we reflected upon the countless families who departed Shanxi centuries ago to begin new lives elsewhere, creating migration stories that would eventually shape the ancestry of millions. For many visitors, this site represented a powerful reminder that every family journey begins somewhere.

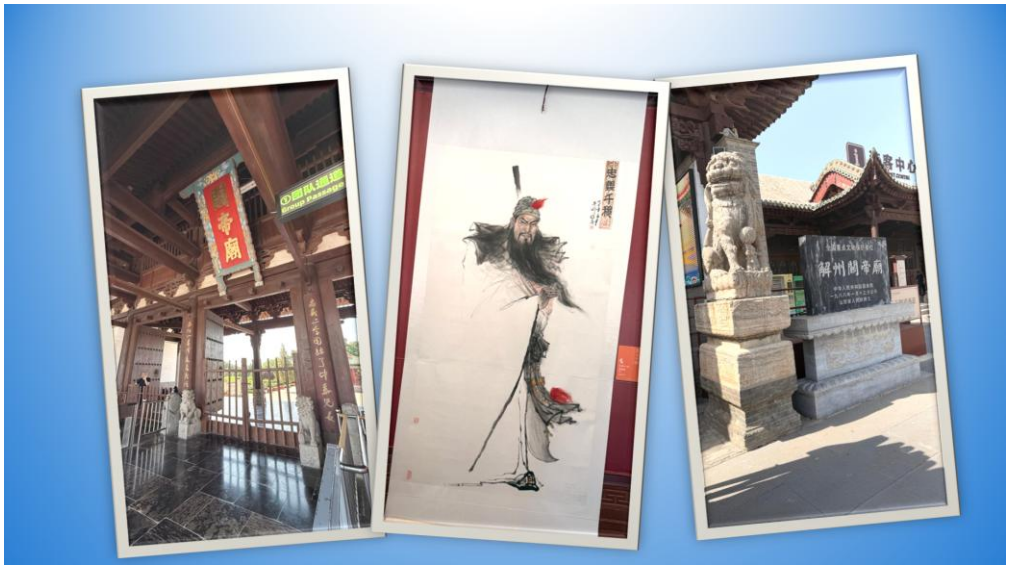




We also stood before one of the most iconic natural landmarks in China — Húkǒu 壺口瀑布 on the Yellow River 黃河. Watching the mighty river thunder through the narrow gorge, it was impossible not to reflect upon the role the Yellow River has played in nurturing Chinese civilization for thousands of years. Long before clans, surnames, and genealogies, there was the river. Its waters sustained some of the earliest communities from which Chinese civilization emerged.



Equally memorable was our visit to the Guān Dì Temple 關帝廟 in Yùnchéng 運城. Dedicated to Guān Yǔ 關羽, one of the most revered figures in Chinese history, the temple reminded us that Chinese civilization has always valued more than material success. Loyalty, integrity, righteousness, and trustworthiness remain ideals that continue to resonate across generations and throughout the Chinese diaspora.



As our journey drew to a close, the Shanxi Museum 山西博物院 helped bring everything together. The exhibits connected the themes we had encountered throughout the week: ancient states, Buddhist culture, merchant traditions, migration history, archaeology, and family heritage. It served as a fitting conclusion, allowing us to view Shanxi not as a collection of individual attractions, but as an interconnected story spanning thousands of years.



And then, as if to remind us that travel rarely follows a perfectly planned path, an airline disruption unexpectedly granted part of our group an additional adventure in Yunnan 雲南, where the famous Stone Forest 石林 provided a final reminder of China's astonishing geographic and cultural diversity.



Looking back, the greatest lesson of the tour may be this:

Shanxi is not merely a province. It is a microcosm of Chinese civilization.

Within its borders can be found the origins of states, the rise of religions, the genius of merchants, the movement of peoples, the values that shaped society, and the landscapes that nurtured one of the world's oldest continuous civilizations.

For genealogists, ancestry researchers, and anyone seeking a deeper understanding of Chinese history, Shanxi offers something rare. It provides not only historical knowledge, but historical context. It helps explain how families, communities, traditions, and identities were shaped across the centuries.

Most importantly, it reminds us that genealogy is about far more than names on a family tree.

It is about understanding the larger story into which our ancestors were born.

And in Shanxi, that story is everywhere.