

# Pingyao

**Pingyao**, officially **Pingyao Ancient City**,<sup>[1]</sup> is a walled city in central Shanxi, China, famed for its importance in Chinese economic history and for its well-preserved Ming and Qing urban planning and architecture. Administratively, it comprises the town of **Gutao** in Pingyao County, Jinzhong. According to the seventh Chinese census data, the permanent resident population of the county is 450,697. Compared with the 502,712 people in the sixth national census in 2010, it has decreased by 52,015 people in ten years, a decrease of 10.35%, and the average annual growth rate is -1.09%.<sup>[2]</sup>

The town was founded in the 14th century C.E. and has been the seat of local government since at least the Qin. By the 16th century, it was a regional financial hub; some consider it to have been the financial centre of the Qing Empire in the late 19th century. It is a AAAAA-rated tourist attraction, and the settlement and the outlying Zhenguo Temple and Shuanglin Temple became a World Heritage Site in 1997.<sup>[3]</sup>

## History

There was already a settlement in place at Pingyao by the reign of the Xuan King (r. c. 827 – c. 782 BC), when the Zhou raised earthen ramparts around the site.<sup>[4]</sup>

In the Spring and Autumn period, the county belonged to the kingdom of Jin. It was part of the kingdom of Zhao in the Warring States period. Under the Qin, it was known as Pingtao. During the Han dynasty, it was known as the seat of Zhongdu County.

Pingyao served as the financial center of the region from the 16th century and of the entire Qing Empire during the late 19th century.<sup>[4]</sup> During those times, there were more than 20 financial institutions within the city,<sup>[5]</sup> comprising more than half of the total in the whole country. Rishengchang was the first and largest, controlling almost half of China's silver trade under the late Qing before going bankrupt in 1914 in the aftermath of the Xinhai Revolution.

Organized restorations have been undertaken periodically since the 15th century, the most recent phase beginning in 1979.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1986, China designated Pingyao as one of the Chinese Historical

Pingyao Ancient City

平遥古城

Town



Location in Shanxi  
Coordinates: 37°12′N 112°9′E

<b>Country</b>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> China
<b>Province</b>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Shanxi
<b>Prefecture</b>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Jinzhong
<b>County</b>	<span><span><span></span></span><span> </span></span> Pingyao
<b>Time zone</b>	UTC+8 (China Standard)
<b>Postal code</b>	031100
<b>Area code</b>	0354
<b>Website</b>	<span>www.pingyao.gov.cn (http://www.pingyao.gov.cn/)</span>

UNESCO World Heritage Site

and Cultural Cities. In 2004, part of the southern walls collapsed; they have since been reconstructed. In 2015, Pingyao ancient city became a national 5A-class tourist attraction.

## Geography

Pingyao is located on the east bank of the Fen River near the southwestern edge of the Taiyuan Basin. It is approximately 100 km (62 mi) south of central Taiyuan and 715 km (444 mi) southwest of Beijing, the national capital. Pingyao County is adjacent to Qi County, whose seat is also a protected historical and cultural city.

## Climate

The climate of Pingyao is temperate. It is cold in winter, often having northwestern winds with little snow and severe fog. In the spring, the temperature varies greatly between day and night, with a little rain and some winds. Summertime is often hot, humid and rainy. Autumn days have falling temperatures with little rain and are cool and clear with abundant sunshine.

<b>Official name</b>	Ancient City of Ping Yao
<b>Type</b>	Cultural
<b>Criteria</b>	ii, iii, iv
<b>Designated</b>	1997 (21st session)
<b>Reference no.</b>	812 ( <a href="https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/812">https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/812</a> )
<b>Region</b>	Asia-Pacific
<b>Extensions</b>	2000; 2001

**Pingyao**

平遥

平遥

Traditional Chinese	平遙
Simplified Chinese	平遥
Literal meaning	remote plain
<b>Transcriptions</b>	
<b>Standard Mandarin</b>	
Hanyu Pinyin	Píngyáo
Wade–Giles	P'ing-yao
IPA	[pʰĩŋ.jǎʊ]
<b>Yue: Cantonese</b>	
Yale Romanization	Pìhng-yìuh
Jyutping	Ping4-jiu4
<b>Southern Min</b>	
Tâi-lô	Pîng-iâu
<b>Alternative Chinese name</b>	
Simplified Chinese	平遥古城
Literal meaning	Pingyao Ancient City
<b>Transcriptions</b>	
<b>Standard Mandarin</b>	
Hanyu Pinyin	Píngyáo Gǔchéng

Climate data for Pingyao, elevation 780 m (2,560 ft), (1991–2020 normals, extremes 1981–2010)													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °C (°F)	13.6 (56.5)	22.2 (72.0)	29.3 (84.7)	37.3 (99.1)	38.0 (100.4)	41.1 (106.0)	39.6 (103.3)	37.7 (99.9)	37.5 (99.5)	30.3 (86.5)	24.3 (75.7)	17.5 (63.5)	41.1 (106.0)
Mean daily maximum °C (°F)	2.8 (37.0)	7.3 (45.1)	14.0 (57.2)	21.4 (70.5)	26.9 (80.4)	30.4 (86.7)	31.0 (87.8)	29.1 (84.4)	24.5 (76.1)	18.5 (65.3)	10.7 (51.3)	3.9 (39.0)	18.4 (65.1)
Daily mean °C (°F)	−4.4 (24.1)	−0.5 (31.1)	6.3 (43.3)	13.5 (56.3)	19.3 (66.7)	23.2 (73.8)	24.7 (76.5)	22.8 (73.0)	17.5 (63.5)	11.0 (51.8)	3.6 (38.5)	−2.6 (27.3)	11.2 (52.2)
Mean daily minimum °C (°F)	−9.9 (14.2)	−6.4 (20.5)	−0.3 (31.5)	6.0 (42.8)	11.5 (52.7)	16.2 (61.2)	19.2 (66.6)	17.6 (63.7)	12.0 (53.6)	5.3 (41.5)	−1.7 (28.9)	−7.6 (18.3)	5.2 (41.3)
Record low °C (°F)	−22.4 (−8.3)	−24.1 (−11.4)	−13.2 (8.2)	−8.5 (16.7)	−1.9 (28.6)	5.3 (41.5)	11.3 (52.3)	8.3 (46.9)	−0.7 (30.7)	−8.0 (17.6)	−21.9 (−7.4)	−22.1 (−7.8)	−24.1 (−11.4)
Average precipitation mm (inches)	2.2 (0.09)	4.3 (0.17)	9.3 (0.37)	26.1 (1.03)	30.2 (1.19)	42.4 (1.67)	97.6 (3.84)	90.9 (3.58)	58.5 (2.30)	32.4 (1.28)	11.8 (0.46)	2.4 (0.09)	408.1 (16.07)
Average precipitation days <span>(≥ 0.1 mm)</span>	2.3	2.6	3.6	5.3	6.2	9.1	11.3	10.2	8.1	6.2	3.7	1.6	70.2
Average snowy days	3.0	3.6	2.1	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	1.9	2.7	14
Average relative humidity (%)	52	49	46	47	47	55	68	73	72	67	60	53	57
Mean monthly sunshine hours	149.2	166.8	201.9	226.0	248.3	224.9	213.0	199.7	177.3	180.4	161.3	150.5	2,299.3
Percent possible sunshine	48	54	54	57	56	51	48	48	48	53	53	51	52
Source: <span>China Meteorological Administration</span> <sup><span>[</span>6<span>]</span><span>[</span>7<span>]</span></sup>													

Architecture

Pingyao still retains its urban layout from the Ming and Qing dynasties,<sup>[4]</sup> conforming to a typical ba gua pattern. More than 300 sites in or near the city have ancient ruins. The city has over a hundred streets and lanes, lined with close to 4,000 17th–19th century shops and residences.<sup>[3]</sup> The streets and storefronts still largely retain their historical appearance.

The city walls of Pingyao were constructed in 1370,<sup>[4]</sup> the 3rd year of the Hongwu Emperor of the Ming. They enclose an area of about 2.25 km<sup>2</sup> (0.87 sq mi).<sup>[4]</sup> The town is accessed by six barbican gates, one each on the north and south walls and two each on the east and west walls. This pattern is similar to that of a turtle (the head, tail and four legs), earning Pingyao the moniker "Turtle City." The walls measure about 12 m (39 ft) high, with a perimeter of 6,163 m (20,220 ft). A 4 m wide and 4 m (13 ft) deep moat can be found just outside the walls. Aside

from the four structured towers at the four corners, there are also 72 watchtowers and more than 3,000 battlements. The number of defensive works supposedly represents the number of Confucius's disciples and other students.<sup>[5]</sup> The walls are considered among the best-preserved ancient city walls on this scale.

## Demographics

As of 2009, Pingyao had a population of 48,531 people living in 16,634 households. 12,132 residents held local hukous and 36,399 were from other parts of China.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Governments

Pingyao Ancient City and its environs are organized as the town of "Gutao", the seat of Pingyao County. Gutao directly oversees 10 administrative villages.<sup>[9]</sup>

Villages				
Name	Simp.	Trad.	Pinyin	Meaning
Dongcheng	东城村	東城村	Dōngchéngcūn	East City Village
Xicheng	西城村	西城村	Xīchéngcūn	West City Village
Nancheng	南城村	南城村	Nánchéngcūn	South City Village
Beicheng	北城村	北城村	Běichéngcūn	North City Village
Gankeng	干坑村	干坑村	Gānkēngcūn	
Shijiujie	十九街村	十九街村	Shíjiǔjiē Cūn	19-Street Village
Chengnanbao	城南堡村	城南堡村	Chéngnánbǎo Cūn	Southern Rampart Village
Xinnanbao	新南堡村	新南堡村	Xīnnánbǎo Cūn	New Southern Rampart Village
Xinzhuang	新庄村	新莊村	Xīnzhuāngcūn	
Yanbi	闫壁村	閭壁村	Yánbìcūn	

## Economy

As of 2009, the town had a labour pool of 19,059 people. 3,811 farmers worked 9977 mu (613 ha or 1,510 acres) of arable land, producing 33.7m RMB of crops, livestock, and other goods. The local focus is on increased mechanization and working the available land intensively.<sup>[8]</sup> The area is well known for its beef<sup>[10]</sup> and also produces grain and cotton. The rest of the workforce is divided between industry and the service sector,

particularly tourism. Industry produced 840m RMB and was focused on improving the energy efficiency of its practices.<sup>[8]</sup> A local specialty is lacquerware. The service sector, including tourism, produced less income than industry—790m RMB—but was growing rapidly and marked for special focus by local government.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Tourism



Aerial panorama of the town

Increases in tourism have put pressure on Pingyao. During China's Golden Weeks, the number of visitors to the city has sometimes been as high as 2½ times its planned maximum capacity. During the single week around May Day in 2007, the town made about 94.5m RMB from visiting tourists.<sup>[11]</sup>

Since that high point in 2007, the government has reduced the number and length of China's "golden weeks", spreading domestic tourism more equitably throughout the year. The Global Heritage Fund has also worked with the Pingyao County People's Government to protect the town against overdevelopment and damage from its high volume of visitors. The stated goal for their Pingyao Cultural Heritage Development Program is improved preservation of local vernacular architecture and traditional arts through improved planning and increased conservation efforts.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Culture

Local specialties include Pingyao beef (平遥牛肉, *Píngyáo niúròu*) and wantuo (平遥碗托, *Píngyáo wǎntuō*), a favourite of the Empress Dowager Cixi.<sup>[10]</sup> Other local products are Changshengyuan rice wine (长升源黄酒), bean flour minjian (豆面抿尖), and Jiupian (揪片).

The silver merchants of Pingyao in the early 20th century were the subject of the 2009 film *Empire of Silver*.

## Gallery



Market Tower,  
constructed in 14th  
century



Pingyao's Confucius  
Temple



A statue inside the  
Shuanglin Temple in  
Pingyao



A street in Pingyao



City walls of Pingyao



A door in a courtyard  
with red Chinese  
lanterns



Roof architecture

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## External links

- Official website of Pingyao County Government (<https://web.archive.org/web/20090917080811/http://www.pingyao.gov.cn/>) (in Chinese)
- Pingyao preservation project summary ([https://web.archive.org/web/20101209070952/http://globalheritagefund.org/what\\_we\\_do/overview/current\\_projects/pingyao\\_china/](https://web.archive.org/web/20101209070952/http://globalheritagefund.org/what_we_do/overview/current_projects/pingyao_china/)) at Global Heritage Fund
- Explore Pingyao with Google Earth (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150427124831/http://ghn.globalheritagefund.org/?id=9>) on Global Heritage Network
- UN World Heritage - Pingyao ([https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id\\_site=812](https://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=812))
- Well illustrated guide to Pingyao (<http://www.ancientchina.org.uk/pingyao>)



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