

Graveyard of the bikes: China's failed share-cycle scheme from above

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Damaged or abandoned low-cost shared bikes in China often end up in 'graveyards' like this one

Handlebars tight in snaking rows of colour, thousands of abandoned bicycles line an open field outside the city of Shenyang, relics of a

shared bike mania that has overwhelmed China's cities.

The turquoise, blue and yellow bicycles, arranged in long lines, some piled on top of each other, bear the logos of the companies that dominate China's bike-sharing sector—HelloBike, Didi and Meituan.

Low cost-shared bikes, which users can unlock using apps and park virtually anywhere, burst onto Chinese streets in the middle of the last decade with investors rushing to fund bike startups like the now-defunct Ofo and Mobike.

But the two-wheelers soon took over pavements and spilled over into bike lanes and streets, parked haphazardly by users who sometimes simply tossed the bikes into shrubbery, creating a headache for urban authorities and pedestrians.

Many bikes suffered damage or were stolen, while some were even repurposed into makeshift barricades when Covid-19 broke out last year.

The problem is a familiar one to cities around the world battling to round up stray bikes, from metro stations in Washington DC to the bottom of Melbourne's river.

Aerial photographs from the suburbs of Shenyang, Liaoning province, show a bicycle graveyard, one of many which began appearing as early as 2018 as tech start-up darling Ofo imploded, defaulting on debts as its users claimed back rental deposits.



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Mountains of damaged bikes belonging to other companies have also been discarded rather than repaired, in contrast to the "green" image usually associated with urban cycling.

The bikes now jostle for space on Chinese streets with hordes of shared electronic scooters, which have also made their appearance elsewhere in the world including Paris and California.

Chinese cities have vowed to curb the chaotic fleets of bikes, with Beijing saying it will remove 44,000 bikes from the city centre this year in order to cap bike numbers at under 800,000, according to state media.

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