



Members of the Hus clan gather at a village in Jilin city, Jilin province, to renew their *jiapu* in 2012.

SUN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

The rebirth of Confucianism

By WANG KAIHAO in Sishui county, Shandong
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The first sound one hears in the morning after waking up at a traditional Chinese college in Shengshuiyu township is the loudspeaker broadcast of *Di Zi Gui*. The book, written in 17th century and based on the teachings of Confucius, emphasizes the basic requisites for being a good person and guidelines for living in harmony with others.

Visitors from large cities who are used to be honked at will be pleasantly surprised to find local drivers smiling patiently as they wait for pedestrians to cross the street. This tranquil mountainous township in Sishui county, southern Shandong province, is the birthplace of Confucius (551-479 BC).

Today, it is a hub for the revival of his teachings.

Mid-October is the busiest time for farming in Shandong, but a classroom at Nishan Shengyu-an (which literally means "origins of the sacred") College where Confucianism is being taught is full.

The Confucian lecture was first started on a trial basis in 2012. At the time, the classroom was half empty, and cellphones rang constantly, recalls Meng Shaofeng, head of the township.

"Though people in big cities have paid much more attention to Confucianism and the preservation of traditional culture, our villagers thought the philosophy was too remote from their lives. We had to use free gifts like towels or soap to get people to come."

But by the third day of the lecture, the atmosphere changed, and the villagers became quiet. Some even cried. "Many young people used to treat their parents badly," says local villager Chen Shoucai, 62. "It's a shame our generation had no chance to learn Confucianism when we were young, even though I live beside Confucius' birthplace."

Since last year, when Confucianism lectures were officially introduced into the township, "people have become aware of how important it is to be filial and courteous", Chen says. "My son, who works in a city, is away from home for half a year, and was detached from me. But now he cares about me much more."

"Villagers now show more concern about keeping the environment clean, thanks to the teachings of Confucius."

Six branches of the lecture series have been established across the township, covering its 60 villages. Confucian teachings were heavily criticized during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76). But recently, the country's top leaders have emphasized the importance of his teachings. In September, President Xi Jinping attended a ceremony in Beijing to celebrate Confucius' birthday.

"Many young and middle-aged people in the countryside go to the big cities to work, leaving their parents and children at home," says Qian Yuzhen, a retired teacher who delivers lectures on Confucianism.

"Our lectures even attract some Christian villagers. Though the beliefs are different, the emphasis on love, inner peace and courtesy is common. They find emotional resonance in the teachings."

Yan Binggang, deputy head of Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies at Shandong University, is behind the project to revive Confucianism in rural China. "The teachings must come out of the ivory tower to reach people in the countryside, who are often not educated," he says.

"Confucianism is always in Chinese people's blood, no matter how the social structures change. What we want to do is to awaken that essence hidden in everyone's heart."

Yan goes to the township twice a month to give lectures for free. His team, which is made up of about 10 people, includes college professors and school teachers. "We're starting everything from scratch. We cannot push too hard. We can only begin with those parts that are close to people's lives, like guiding them to be filial and caring. But our goal is far beyond that. We want a self-sufficient system after we leave."

Several other cities in Shandong have also adopted similar programs. The province's cultural department allocated 13 million yuan (\$2.12 million) this year to support the teaching of Confucianism.

Yan says some South Korean scholars have shown interest in starting similar projects in their country.



Children learn gestures to pay homage to Confucius in Sishui, Shandong province.

WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY

ANCESTOR HUNTER

A Dutch citizen eager to trace back his family history now helps many overseas Chinese do the same, Liu Zhihua reports.

Huihan Lie, a 36-year-old Dutch citizen, never expected he would someday make a profession out of helping fellow overseas Chinese find their roots through *jiapu* or "ancestry book", when he first visited China in 2004.

Jiapu, also called *xupu* in Chinese, are records that are kept by clans of their lineage and histories. Lie didn't know much about *jiapu* until he came to China.

He was born in Amsterdam, Netherlands, to a family that emigrated from Indonesia, with Chinese origins on both his parental sides. But no one in the family spoke Chinese.

In 2003, Lie decided to learn the language after he obtained a master's degree in international law at University of Amsterdam.

"We look Chinese but we speak Dutch, and that made me wonder about my family history," Lie says, adding that he had peppered his father and grandfather with questions about his family history since he was a teenager and was always interested in China.

After studying Mandarin at Beijing Language and Culture University for two months, Lie decided to stay longer and says he worked at international enterprises.

A few years later, he decided to pursue his interest in history and genealogy, to help others find their roots.

"Many overseas Chinese don't speak Chinese and cannot make good use of *jiapu* or other important files," Lie says.

In 2012, he founded My China Roots, which specializes in *jiapu* and Chinese ancestry.

With two colleagues, he starts each job by asking clients, mostly through Skype and e-mail, to gather what they already know and have — old pictures, passports and other documents.

Armed with those resources, Lie's small team acts like detectives to figure out where a client's original village is located.

Overseas Chinese affairs offices or associations at the country or city level, which are govern-



Seeking roots for an overseas Chinese is a combination of exploring history, culture and psychology."

HUIHAN LIE
FOUNDER OF MY CHINA ROOTS

ment-supported organizations, often help Lie's team, because they are able to tell where a clan of Wangs or Xies has probably lived for hundreds of years.

Then the researchers will visit the village, talk to locals and examine *jiapu* to make sure it is actually the ancestral village.

"Nothing is more important than *jiapu* in the whole root-seeking process," Lie declares.

Unlike in Europe and the United States, where governments and churches keep most records of births, marriages and deaths, in China, families have used *jiapu* as their own documentation of family history.

Such an ancestry book often stretches across centuries and sometimes can go back thousands of years.

It is also more than a family-tree record. The top 100 Chinese family names account for most of the Chinese population, and *jiapu* are critical in tracking the growth of a clan's members with the records of their political, military and academic achievements.

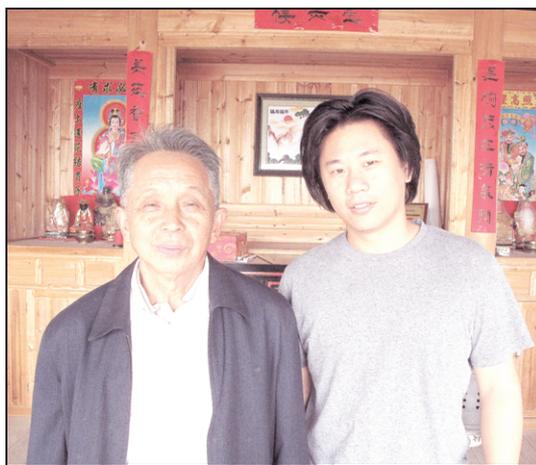
There are often biographies of prominent people, and *jiapu* also records important events that have happened to the clan, such as where and when the clan moved from one place to another, and why.

But because of the language gap and loss of information during translation, or because of the difference between a formal name that has been written down in *jiapu* and a nickname that is used in daily life, it is sometimes



Lu Hongman, a resident of Gushi county, Henan province, displays his family's *jiapu* with a history of 300 years.

XIANG MINGCHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



Huihan Lie (right) with a distant kin in Zhangzhou, Fujian province.

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very hard to identify a client's roots, Lie says.

Besides, many *jiapu* have been destroyed or lost during China's transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society, and during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76).

Lie always copies *jiapu* whenever possible, hoping to help preserve the *jiapu* legacy.

In 2008, Lie started digging into where his own ancestors were from, and soon traced his mother's roots to a village near

Zhangzhou, Fujian province, which the family left seven generations ago.

That was also the first time he saw a *jiapu*.

But tracing his father's family history required much more effort.

Finally, after finding the name of the original ancestral village written on his great-grandfather's tombstone in Indonesia, he narrowed down his paternal ancestors' origins to a village called Zhu Shan on Jinmen

island, which was once part of Fujian but is now administered by Taiwan, and found out his father's ancestors left six generations ago for Indonesia.

His investigation gained him a reputation among his friends, many of whom are overseas Chinese eager to know more about their Chinese roots.

"Seeking roots for an overseas Chinese is a combination of exploring history, culture and psychology. I make less money but I am happier," he says of his decision to quit a well-paid job with an international firm and launch his own company on genealogy research.

Earlier, Chinese people left their homeland mostly because of poverty, war or social unrest, and clients are often inspired by the personal stories of their forefathers written in *jiapu* and then feel a stronger bond with China, Lie says.

So far his company has unearthed the Chinese roots of more than 25 clients from the US, Europe, Australia, Central America and elsewhere.

"I'm moved by what you do. Great job and wish you all the best!" says one post on the company's Sina Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter.

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