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International guests participate in the memorial ceremony for Confucius in Qufu, Shandong province, on Sept 28.
YANG GUOQING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shandong: Confucian wisdom still shines

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Since roughly the 5th century BC, the school of thought Confucius founded and the philosophy of Confucianism that developed from it have inspired and guided individuals across multiple generations.

Yet, while most young people learn about Confucius in school, they're not sure about his current influence in fast-moving modern China. While almost every one of them can quote a handful of sayings from the *Analects of Confucius*, do they really see value in applying Confucian thought to nurturing their views on life and the world?

Shandong, the birthplace of Confucius, has been hosting a series of events to provide opportunities for people from China and overseas, to gain a deeper understanding of Confucian thought and some answers to this question.

Understanding deepened

Maria Uriarte Huang, a 22-year-old student from the United States who attends Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong province, has been learning the teachings of Confucius since she was a child. She traveled to Qufu in September for the China International Confucius Cultural Festival, which enhanced her understanding of the sage's philosophy.

"This event epitomized an exquisite fusion between education and entertainment, not only broadening my understanding regarding Chinese heritage, but also igniting within me newfound curiosity," she said.

Uriarte Huang has long been impressed by Confucian thought such as education without discrimination, and teaching students in accordance with their aptitude. "And his caring thought of the benevolent loving others deeply resonates with me," she said.

Under the influence of Confucian thought, Uriarte Huang embarked on an internship at the Guangdong Provincial Museum in 2023, where she guided students on educational tours.

"I often saw the children standing in front of the glass windows, gazing intently at the cultural relics from around the world. These relics form a shared history that binds us all as inhabitants of this planet," she said.

Observing the curiosity in the eyes of the children, Uriarte Huang conceived an idea — to take the knowledge safeguarded in the museum to rural children.

In December 2023, she volunteered to teach in the mountain village of Xiaojia in Leizhou town, Guangdong, where she



A student volunteer provides guide services to visitors at the Confucius Museum in Qufu. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Maria Uriarte Huang from the US visits the Confucius Museum.



A foreigner tries traditional embroidery during the Confucius Cultural Festival.



Young people from overseas practice calligraphy during the Confucius Cultural Festival.

drew from her museum internship experience to create an educational program with lessons on intangible cultural heritage, biology, geography and history.

"Students in the remote mountainous areas need diverse knowledge. There should be no distinction of classes as Confucius says," said Uriarte Huang.

Through the field studies in Qufu, she was able to expand her understanding of Confucian culture.

"At the festival venue, the hall's courtyard, eaves, and gate, with the characteristics of their time, evoked a sense of wonder as I realized what I had learned about ancient Chinese history had come to life," she said.

Looking at a huge sculpture of Confucius, Uriarte Huang reflected

on her studies of the *Analects of Confucius*.

"I recalled his assertion that education should transcend origins, regardless of race or ethnicity, everyone deserves access to learning opportunities," she said.

This educational philosophy has surmounted challenges and restrictions over millennia, akin to flowing water quietly permeating all facets of life while nurturing future generations.

"It embodies profound life wisdom that inspires individuals to steadfastly pursue their goals and ideals. I really want to dismantle economic, regional, cultural and especially linguistic barriers in education," Uriarte Huang said.

For Salma Elhouari from Morocco, who is studying at Beijing Lan-

guage and Culture University, Confucius no longer belongs to China, but also the world.

Her uncle, an Arab author, often told her that civilized people around the world, regardless of their education level, all know Confucius. This sparked her love for Confucian thought and Chinese culture.

She has pursued her passion and made Confucius the main theme of her doctoral research.

"I hope to promote the exchange of literature and culture among countries through cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparisons," she said during a field study in Qufu in September.

Engaging activities

Shandong has played a leading role in promoting Confucian cul-

ture, which is valued as an important aspect of the excellence of Chinese traditional culture.

During the Confucius Cultural Festival, the Shandong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism launched more than 150 activities including cultural performances, exhibitions and tourism projects, with most of them tailored to young people from home and abroad.

One of the activities saw 176 students hailing from 46 different countries and regions converge on Qufu to immerse themselves in the teachings of Confucius and participate in traditional Chinese cultural activities, such as tea-making.

"This event made me deeply realize that cultural diversity is the world's wealth, and cultural exchanges are a crucial pathway to achieving world peace and progress," said Cheng Shaojun, a student from North Minzu University in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

"Against the backdrop of globalization, the ideals of love and harmony advocated by Confucius still hold practical significance, offering valuable wisdom to tackle the complex issues of today's world," he said.

The Confucius Museum in Qufu has staged memorable exhibitions and diverse immersive activities such as woodblock printing, rubbings and paper-cutting, to foster a deeper connection with Confucian culture.

"The museum is a good place to study the evolution of Confucian culture; and its digital presentation of Confucius and his teachings attract young people," said Uriarte Huang.

"From the age of bamboo and wooden slips to the era of artificial intelligence, we have been fortunate witnesses along this transformative journey," Uriarte Huang added.

During the National Day holiday from Oct 1 to 7, the museum welcomed an impressive 120,500 visitors, with the third day witnessing a record attendance of 23,000 visitors, the biggest since it opened in 2018.

"Traditional Chinese culture exemplified by Confucian culture is appealing to young people because it embodies the ideological core of the Chinese people, creating spiritual resonance with them," said Yang Chaoming, a professor at the Advanced Institute for Confucian Studies of Shandong University.

"The frequent 'going viral' of traditional Chinese culture among young people indicates that it is inspiring young minds to be innovative in the new era," Yang added.



People learn about traditional weaving procedures at the Confucius Museum. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY