

# YOUTH

# Ancient tales of the unexpected

Young boy shows the power of ethnic group's oral heritage, inspiring a man's recording cause, **Xing Wen** reports.

This is a story of storytellers and the power of word of mouth passed down through generations. Traditional? Yes, but with a relevance and resonance for the modern day. It starts, like all good stories, with an audience. The villagers settle down, as they have done for centuries, to hear their wisest members impart sage advice, disseminate knowledge and paint history in colorful stories.

The orators enthral the crowd. The epic stories tell of wisdom prevailing over a period spanning nearly 2,000 years and entertain the people of China's Yi ethnic group.

The rap-like debate, named *kezhi* ("prevailing wisdom"), delivers oral literature in a poetic style centering on the history of the Yi people. Mainly performed during weddings and other celebrations, the fixed patterns, rhymed riffs and metaphors, antithesis, hyperbole and other figures of speech cover a wide range of subjects like astronomy, geography, philosophy and ancient customs.

As a charged hush descends on the group in anticipation of the first of the orators, a voice breaks the silence. It is not hoarse with age, nor weighed down with authority and gravitas. It is young, a little squeaky but loud enough for everyone to hear.

This method of storytelling may be rooted in culture and tradition but it has gained new admirers through technology. In October a short video, in which a cheerful

young orator delivers his tale in fluent *kezhi*, went viral on WeChat and Yi people living in Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Sichuan province were able to witness their culture on the most modern of media platforms.

Lili Daha, 25, who worked for a local intangible cultural heritage conservation center, was captured, at first sight, by the infectious enthusiasm of the young boy and immediately decided to film his story.

"I was so impressed to see the 7-year-old do it so well. Usually, it is middle-aged Yi people who, having a wide knowledge of literature and history, would be adept at practicing *kezhi*," says the director. He drove more than six hours with a production team from Liangshan's Xichang city to the remote village where the family of the talented boy, Jize Erqu, reside. The documentary was premiered in a recent exhibition on intangible cultural heritage held in Xiangshan, East China's Zhejiang province.

As shown in the documentary, Erqu's interest in the traditional literary style was ignited when he witnessed Yi people speaking *kezhi* at various events, including a spectacular wedding party.

However, concerned that learning *kezhi* would interfere with his schoolwork, his mother tried to stop him.

The documentary shows how the parents gradually realized the



**Above:** Director Lili Daha (left) from a local intangible cultural heritage conservation center in Liangshan Yi autonomous prefecture of Southwest China's Sichuan province meets a senior intellectual who practices medicine and organizes rituals of the Yi people's community. **Below left, middle and right:** Scenes from the documentary directed by Lili, which depicts the growth of a talented boy, Jize Erqu (far left), on the road pursuing the wisdom of *kezhi*, a rap-like debate of the Yi tradition. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

importance of passing down the tradition and they soon started to fully support Erqu in his quest.

"The contradiction between Erqu and his mother is common among Yi communities, as parents today give priority to school grades," says Lili. "I hope these parents could also pay more attention to cultural heritage."

The documentary allows the audience to learn about the traditional lifestyle of the Yi people, who live among pristine countryside and grow up without mobile devices or other modern gizmos.

"I want to focus on the fact that, although they are poor in material possessions compared to city dwellers, they have a colorful spiritual world," says Lili.

To Lili, whose father is a Bimo, an intellectual who often practices medicine and organizes rituals within the community, some ancient customs of the ethnic group are close to disappearing.

"I didn't realize how precious these cultural treasures are. During my childhood I often attended religious ceremonies with my father and witnessed noisy weddings where people would loudly sing traditional songs and speak in *kezhi*," he recalls.

However, last year, at a relative's wedding, he found the guests were bashful and reluctant to sing and perform *kezhi*.

This showed him that heritage, without being consciously con-

served, might gradually be forgotten as time goes on.

"I was determined to film more documentaries displaying the ways, the stories and the folklore of the Yi people, to preserve their diverse and profound culture," he says. "Through exploring the culture of my own people, I hope to know more about myself, too."

His documentary made an impact at the exhibition, organized by the Center for Ethnic and Folk Literature and Art Development under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which ran from June 7 to 10.

The exhibition screened 30 documentary films, all related to China's intangible cultural heritage.

"Today, photography and film play an important role in recording various forms of cultural heritage," says Wang Jing, vice-director of the event's organizers. "The exhibition aims to show the charms of these traditions to more people and increase their awareness of the preservation of such culture."

Zhu Jingjiang, director of the Center for Visual Anthropology at Minzu University of China, suggests that to better pass down cultural heritage, we should not only record it via traditional tools and modern technology, but also build up systematic training courses in schools and universities.

Contact the writer at [xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn)



# Growing plants: The natural evolution of petrochemical centers

TIANJIN — Deer, peacocks and ostriches bask in the warmth of the sun and wander outside their wooden houses, against the backdrop of a surrounding rocky, fishing pond and large green vegetation.

At first glance, one might be tempted to think it is a park, but it is actually a petrochemical plant of Sinopec Group, the country's leading petroleum refiner and oil products producer, which is operating on the site in northern China's Tianjin municipality.

Hundreds of pipelines are set up to connect various towers and refining equipment, which are busy produc-

ing oil and chemical products.

"We did follow the extensive growth model before," says Tong Wei, head of the production department of the group's petrochemical plant in Tianjin.

The company, however, gradually shifted to an intensive one and stuck to building an ecological plant with the state-of-art technology.

In 2000, the plant welcomed a herd of deer as new family members, but more importantly to serve as the "environmental monitors".

"At the very beginning, we were worried that they would not adapt, since they are more sensitive to the

living environment," Tong says, adding that the workers recorded data every day and paid a lot of attention to controlling the emission of wastewater and gas.

Day in and day out, the deer grew healthily under the care of the staff, who say they feel like they are working in an ecological park rather than a petrochemical plant, and have become accustomed to working alongside the animals.

To better monitor the environment, the plant also launched an intelligent "environment map" to release real-time data, save historical data and analyze development

trends of its water emissions, as well as the volume, color and concentration of gas.

Dong Feng, director of a workshop in the refining department, says frequent checks were required for monitoring the environment in the past, but the current real-time monitoring can be realized by a smartphone, greatly reducing the front-line work intensity and improving management efficiency.

This garden-like petrochemical plant stands in contrast to people's memories of the roaring machinery and wastewater- and gas-producing sites of the past, and it has attracted

nearly 70 social groups and over 5,000 visitors in the last two years.

What is occurring in Tianjin mirrors the ecological transformation of other petrochemical companies across China.

The Sinopec Beijing Yanshan Petrochemical Co Ltd, located in Fangshan district, created a wetland park inside its plant. The wetland water consisted of the plant's reclaimed industrial wastewater and recycled domestic sewage from surrounding residences, and it has since become a scenic spot.

Jiujiang Petrochemical Company in East China's Jiangxi province also

built an artificial pool as a way to monitor the quality of treated industrial sewage. Flowers and fish can be nurtured in the pool, says a local employee.

Zhang Minhua, a professor at the School of Chemical Engineering and Technology in Tianjin University, says that ecological transformation, technology innovation and intelligent monitoring will be future trends followed by petrochemical plants, which will show the transformation and upgrading of traditional Chinese enterprises.

XINHUA

**International Education Column**      *If you are interested in this, please contact: [i.education@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:i.education@chinadaily.com.cn)*



**Trinity Western University's Great Wall MBA program**

STEP INTO THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE AS A LEADER

Study in China or Canada and equip yourself for strategic leadership, take part in forward-thinking conversations and learn real-world solutions for business in a rapidly changing world.

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

- This program is offered in partnership with Tianjin University of Finance and Economics (TUFE)
- Graduate in as little as 18 months
- Study in China and/or Canada
- Engage in a global classroom with other business leaders
- Expert faculty and instructors

Visit our website to learn more [TWU.CA/GREATWALLMBA](http://TWU.CA/GREATWALLMBA)



**#1 MASTER'S IN MANAGEMENT**

Globalize your degree by choosing from one of 16 concentrations. **YOUR DEGREE. YOUR WAY.**

Thunderbird's Master of Global Management degree delivers cutting-edge classroom instruction complemented with hands-on, real-world training around the globe. You'll broaden your mindset and marketability by pairing your deep-dive in leadership training with a transdisciplinary focus through our innovative concentration areas and foreign language options.

Global Business

Global Entrepreneurship

Global Affairs

Global Digital Transformation

Development & Innovation

Legal Studies

Creative Industries & Design Thinking

Healthcare Delivery

Sustainability Solutions

Public Policy

Nonprofit Leadership & Management

Sustainable Tourism

Public Administration

Integrated Healthcare

Digital Audience Strategy

Design Your Own Concentration

Learn more at [thunderbird.asu.edu/mgm](http://thunderbird.asu.edu/mgm)

**Study . Explore . Enjoy**

- ✓ Regional University;
- ✓ 14 campuses across 12 Pacific Island Countries;
- ✓ Programmes at the certificate, diploma, bachelor's, master's and PhD levels;
- ✓ Advanced Research;
- ✓ Tropical Climate and Diverse Cultures;
- ✓ 26,000+ students & 30+ nationalities; and
- ✓ Affordable

**Intensive English Programme (IEP) available for those wishing to learn or improve their English.**

**Term 3 begins on July 8, 2019 (fees due July 1, 2019).**

Applications for Semester 1, 2020 closes October 30, 2019.



Phone: +679 3232916  
Email: [international@usp.ac.fj](mailto:international@usp.ac.fj)  
Web: <https://international.usp.ac.fj/>