

CHINA

'Dutiful son' finds fame as devoted teacher

Former student who took mentally disturbed mother to university classes recognized for aiding poor pupils in Guizhou

By YANG JUN in Guiyang and LI HONGYANG

Twelve years ago, Liu Xiuxiang made headlines nationwide as the dutiful university student from a single-parent family who took his mentally disturbed mother to classes.

Recently he was in the spotlight again, recognized for the devotion he has shown to his students at a rural school in the mountains of Guizhou province.

Since graduating from Linyi University in Linyi, Shandong province, in 2012, he has taught in his hometown in Wangmo county, Qianxinan Buyi and Miao autonomous prefecture, and helped dropouts return to school.

Last month, he was awarded the title of "most beautiful teacher", along with 10 other educators, by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the Ministry of Education. "I want to wake up parents and children who consider education useless. Education changed my destiny and I believe it will change theirs as well," he said.

Liu, 32, is a vice-principal and history teacher at Wangmo Experimental High School. He sometimes takes his students to see the house he lived in as a child.

"In the beginning, I didn't want to talk about my past with others, which brought back miserable days and reopened old wounds. However, I later realized my story can inspire them," said Liu, who still takes care of his mother.

When Liu was 4, his father died of an illness. His mother slipped into depression and developed other mental health problems.

By the time he was 10, his then 17-year-old brother, and two sisters, 13 and 19, had left home to work odd jobs. He has not seen them since.



Teacher Liu Xiuxiang (right) talks with Tang Yan, a manager with a company in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, about grants to Wangmo Experimental High School students in Wangmo county, Guizhou province, on Sept 14. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The young boy survived on grain handed out by the local government because his mother couldn't take care of herself, let alone her son. When her mental condition worsened, she started throwing rocks at people's houses.

Liu said he was bullied by children who sometimes threw cow dung at him, but "at least I had a home and someone to care for."

Glimmer of hope

At middle school Liu was exempted from tuition fees because of his

excellent academic performance. He earned about 20 yuan a week collecting trash, which was enough to cover basic expenses.

He later attended high school in Anlong county, about two hours' drive from Wangmo. Liu rented a disused pigsty for him and his mother to live in for 200 yuan a year, and insulated the walls with woven bags.

During summer vacations, he worked 18 hours a day at a hydro-power station to earn tuition fees.

In 2007, Liu failed the *gaokao* national college entrance examina-

tion, due, he said, to illness caused by overwork. "Fate was so unfair to me," he said. "I hated my father for bringing me into his world and not raising me. It was easy for others to prepare for the exam for another year, but I needed to support myself."

He found a job in a bathhouse scrubbing customers' skin, but after working there for about 50 days decided he wanted to continue studying. "From conversations with my customers, I learned getting ahead in life can only be achieved by getting an education," he said.



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Liu Xiuxiang, vice-principal and history teacher at Wangmo Experimental High School

Liu had no money and begged the principal of a private high school to let him study for free. "I was refused four times. But the last time, I knelt down and he was touched by my request and approved my admission," he said.

Back to school

In 2008, after finally passing the *gaokao*, Liu was admitted to Linyi University where he studied history. He became a media celebrity as the "dutiful son" who took his mother to school with him. Liu didn't want other students to know his story, and naively spent a few hundred yuan buying all the newspapers on campus.

When he graduated, a Beijing company offered him a job as a salesman with an annual salary of 500,000 yuan, but he refused. "I didn't want people hiring me because I was the boy who took his mother to school," he said, adding he wanted respect, not pity.

Wangmo county shed its impoverished status this month. In 2012, about 46,000 residents had an education level of primary school or below, according to the local government. Liu said he worried about the

situation at his school as some students smoked and many were only interested in dating and surfing the internet.

He got through to his students by cooking for them and talking to them like a friend. Liu also rode a motorcycle to the students' homes to try to persuade their parents about the value of a good education and played them audiotapes of stories of his own struggles.

Sponsorship

A gifted orator, Liu told his story at schools all over the country and encouraged sponsorship of students from poor families. Since 2012, his efforts have resulted in more than 1,900 students being sponsored.

Wang Meikui, 17, attends Wangmo Experimental High School thanks to Liu. Her father is dead, and her mother takes care of her younger brother and sick grandmother.

The teenager wants to become a designer, but cannot afford school tuition fees.

However, Liu found a female engineer in Beijing, who gives 7,000 yuan (\$1,047) a year for Wang's education. "It makes a big difference if I can give a student a hand," Liu said.

Sixty-three percent of high school students in Wangmo county passed the *gaokao* this year, compared with 12 percent five years ago, according to the local government.

Liu said he hopes more teachers choose to work in remote mountainous areas to improve the quality of education. "They need to understand that children in mountainous areas can also make contributions. They're not inferior to the children in big cities," he said.

Wang Jin contributed to this story.

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Aroma of coffee is the sweet smell of success for villagers

LANZHOU — Geru Tashi, a 57-year-old former Tibetan herdsman, is the first person in his village to learn how to make coffee.

He lives in Kasho village, Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Gansu province, where he runs a homestay.

Having drunk traditional butter tea for most of his life, Geru Tashi has added the aroma of roasted coffee beans to the smells of the village. His coffee-making skills attract many tourists, including foreigners on road trips, who like to sip coffee and relax on the grassland.

"Our village is getting more beautiful, with more tourists. In just two or three years, I have changed from a herdsman to a small businessman who benefits from tourism. I had a net income of 30,000 yuan (\$4,500) in 2019," he said.

Kasho received 800,000 visits last year, with more than 300 villagers working in the tourism sector. A total of 52 homestays earned more than 30,000 yuan each that year.

"It feels totally different this time, compared to when I traveled

here five years ago," said Wang Ning, a tourist from Shanghai, as he sampled some Tibetan food.

"I cannot see any rubbish and the gorgeous scenery really lingers in my heart."

The village grew out of a need to find homes for herdsman exposed to harsh weather and afflicted with poor health. In the early days of its establishment, yak and sheep dung were often visible on the roads. Many people lived with livestock and piled up rubbish at their front doors.

The unattractiveness of the village deterred tourists from stopping to enjoy the grassland and scenery surrounding Kasho.

Changes began with the "environmental revolution" launched by the Gannan government in 2015, along with ongoing projects to boost tourism. Since then, the government has concentrated on cleaning up the environmental problems that were hampering the village's economic development.

With the government's support and heightened awareness among

the herdsman, the village has been transformed into a scenic spot. The dirt road has been paved with stone slabs and the water supply, drainage and public toilets have all been upgraded.

The village now provides comfortable hotel accommodations along with cultural experiences and folk custom activities for tourists, while maintaining its rustic charm.

These days, tourists visiting the prefecture, which covers 45,000 square kilometers, will rarely see any rubbish.

With more herdsman accepting the changes to their traditional lifestyles, there has also been a general improvement in the health of the local population.

The prevalence of echinococcosis, a potentially fatal disease caused by tapeworm infections, has greatly decreased, and the life expectancy of Gannan residents has risen to 66 years, from just 34 years seven decades ago.

XINHUA



Villagers relax near a flower garden in Yazha village, Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Gansu province, on Sept 14. CHEN BIN / XINHUA

Air Liquide China ready to enhance innovation in next opening-up phase

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With more than three decades of development in China, Air Liquide China is one of many foreign-funded businesses to follow the reform and opening-up of the Chinese market, said Nicolas Poirot, president and CEO of the company.

As a world leader in gases, technologies and services for industry and health, the France-headquartered conglomerate reentered the Chinese market in 1989 through Shanghai.

"Shanghai is the strategic pivot for Air Liquide to develop and expand its business in China."

"It can be said that the development of our business has followed that of the city," Poirot said.

The company's development in China started from its first plant in Shanghai, beginning operations in 1991. Air Liquide has a strong presence in China, where it operates plants in more than 40 cities across the country including Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong provinces, with around 5,000 staff members.

"China is one of the top three markets for Air Liquide, with its contribution to the group in terms of revenue increasing for the past few years," the executive said.

"We aim to deliver innovative gas solutions and technologies to a variety of customers at every step of their production process, driving performance and helping them reduce their environmental effects."

"Meanwhile, we make sure our solutions are safe, reliable, cost-effective and sustainable," he said.

Besides its innovative personnel and facilities, the company has developed alternative energy sources.

In 2016, the company launched its innovation campus in Shanghai, which is a crucial base for developing technology in China and the Asia-Pacific region. To date, the campus has completed the development of technologies including high-efficiency syngas purification, sludge reduction and sedimentation improvement and oxy-fuel combustion of solid fuel in a glass kiln.



Air Liquide increases its medical oxygen supply to the Shanghai Public Health Clinical Center at the beginning of the outbreak of COVID-19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Air Liquide is more than willing to participate in the next round of high-level opening-up, from the perspectives of innovation, healthcare, energy-saving and environmental protection solutions."

Nicolas Poirot, president and CEO of Air Liquide China

In addition, Air Liquide has also played its part in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak.

For example, its plants in Wuhan and other cities increased their daily capacity to fill more cylinders of medical oxygen, an essential supply in the fight against COVID-19, according to Poirot.

Appointed as the president and CEO of Air Liquide China in 2019, Poirot presided over the group's operation and management businesses in west and south Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia and South Africa for more than 20 years.

China is also the largest manufacturer of industrial products and the largest single consumer market, which endows the country with unique advantages that other markets don't have, Poirot said.

"This presents us with a quite favorable market environment," he said.

"Air Liquide is more than willing to participate in the next round of high-level opening-up, from the perspectives of innovation, healthcare, energy-saving and environmental protection solutions," Poirot added.

The group will continue to work with customers and local partners on innovative solutions and to contribute to green and sustainable development in China, he said.

This section is sponsored by Air Liquide China.