

Veins of civilization: Resonance of Confucian thought across the globe

By FAN ZITONG

The name Confucius has transcended the confines of history books to become a frequent reference in global education, philosophy, and even management.

When Western philosophers strive to understand the golden rule of “Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself”, and when modern business leaders explore the wisdom in benevolent governance and rule by virtue, people from around the world are realizing that the teachings of this ancient Chinese sage are a valuable cornerstone for building global ethical and cultural consensus.

Starting from Qufu, Shandong province, where Confucius was born during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), Confucian culture spread across the nation and the world, interacting with and influencing local cultures to form diverse regional expressions.

“It is often said that customs differ every 10 miles, and styles change every hundred miles. The manifestations of Confucianism vary in different regions, primarily influenced by local culture and prominent figures,” said Wei Yanhua, vice-president of the Confucius Research Institute of China.

Globally, Confucian culture has spread along two main paths. One is the East Asian cultural sphere, where countries like Japan, South Korea and Vietnam have integrated Confucian thought with their local cultures.

The other is extending the influence of Confucian thought to the Western world through the active dissemination by missionaries, scholars, and overseas Chinese.

Additionally, Wei believes that with the opening of economic channels, the transmission of Confucian culture has become smoother, promoting multicultural exchanges, mutual learning, and integration. Countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative have shown growing interest in Chinese Confucian culture, making Confucius studies a global topic. Notably, in conversations, many national leaders take pride in quoting Confucius.

The Qilu Visiting and Research Residency Program is a contemporary practice of this dissemination strategy. This program recruits visiting scholars globally and has attracted applications from 29 scholars in 15 countries.

Eight Sinologists from countries such as Croatia, South Korea, Greece and Russia have come to the Confucius Research Institute for residency and research in 2025, engaging in academic exchanges through lectures, seminars and other activities.

At the crossroads of human civilization's development, Confucian culture offers unique resources for constructing global ethics. Its worldview of Tianxia (all under heaven) aligns closely with the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind. The idea of harmony without uniformity provides a methodology for civilizational dialogue, while the concept of benevolence offers a foundational value for global ethics. “In the exchange and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations, Confucian culture acts like a sage traversing millennia, sowing the seeds of Confucian wisdom wherever it goes,” Wei said.

As the hometown of Confucius, Shandong capitalizing on a wealth of cultural heritage and exploring a sustainable path to preservation and promotion of ancient wisdom that inspires contemporary practices, fostering international dialogue and engaging younger generations in philosophical traditions beyond their historical origins

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As the hometown of Confucian culture, Shandong has witnessed the formation and development of Confucianism, which is the cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture, as well as a complete ideological system created by Confucius.

During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), today's Shandong was home to the then major states of Qi and Lu.

Back then, education was monopolized by the aristocracy, yet during the sixth century BC, a quiet intellectual revolution was unfolding along the banks of the Sishui River, which ran through the Qi and Lu states.

Surrounded by the chaos and disintegration of social order, Confucius established China's first private educational institution in Qufu, which was

his hometown within the Lu state.

The new school was open to students from various social classes, including nobles, merchants and commoners. The move reflected Confucius' education philosophy of “you jiao wu lei” (education for all without discrimination) and expanded the reach of education from the aristocracy to common people.

It was there, in the shade of apricot trees, that he and his students engaged in profound discussions, compiling the “six classics” — *The Book of Songs, The Book of History, The Book of Rites, The Book of Music, The Book of Changes* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, and laying the foundation of Confucianism centered on *ren* (benevolence).

Because of Confucius' practice, educational sites and even the education community are referred to as the Apricot Altar.

The Confucian philosophy, with *ren* as its core, *li* (ritual) as its norm, and *he* (harmony) as its ideal,

CONFUCIANISM ROOTS & SHOOTS

formed a comprehensive system of personal and social ethics. The moral self-awareness of “*ren zhe ai ren*” (benevolent love for others), the empathetic principle of “do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself”, and the wisdom of “harmony without uniformity” collectively form the foundation of Confucian thought.

Confucius' travels and establishment of private education in the land of Qi and Lu laid the groundwork for Confucian doctrine.

Mencius' advocacy of benevolent governance and Xunzi's theories of ritual governance gradually integrated into and perfected the Confucian system.

During the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), with the support from Emperor Liu Che, Confucianism was established as the official orthodox ideology, becoming the mainstream of traditional culture.

Confucian culture rose from local knowledge to national ideology, permeating every layer of society through education and the imperial examination system.

Beneath the millennia-old cypress trees of the Qufu Confucian Temple, Confucian culture evolved from local knowledge into the backbone of Chinese civilization. The openness and inclusivity of Qi cul-

ture, combined with the ritualistic conservatism of Lu culture, fostered the dialectical thinking of Confucian “moderation”.

For more than two millennia, the lineage of Confucius in Qufu has been preserved, with the Confucian Temple, Mansion, and Cemetery standing as significant symbols of Confucian civilization.

The Fengshan Ceremony at Mount Tai of imperial sacrifices integrated Confucian rituals with imperial governance, making Shandong a key arena for the practice of Confucian ceremonial culture.

Today, Shandong continues to shoulder the mission of inheriting and promoting Confucian culture, and it is passing on such culture through innovative methods.

Each year around Sept 28, the birthday of Confucius, the International Confucius Cultural Festival is held in Qufu.

The festival was established in 1989 with the aim of commemorating Confucius, promoting traditional Chinese culture, and fostering global dialogue among civilizations. It attracts guests from various countries and regions, enhancing friendships among people worldwide.

Additionally, the festival focuses on the experiences of Generation Z. Through activities such as the online “Confucius in My Eyes” global Gen Z photo and short video contest, as well as offline events like Dialogues with Confucius and Confucius Culture Enters Campus, a festive occasion rich in Confucian cultural elements was created for young people around the world during the 2024 event.

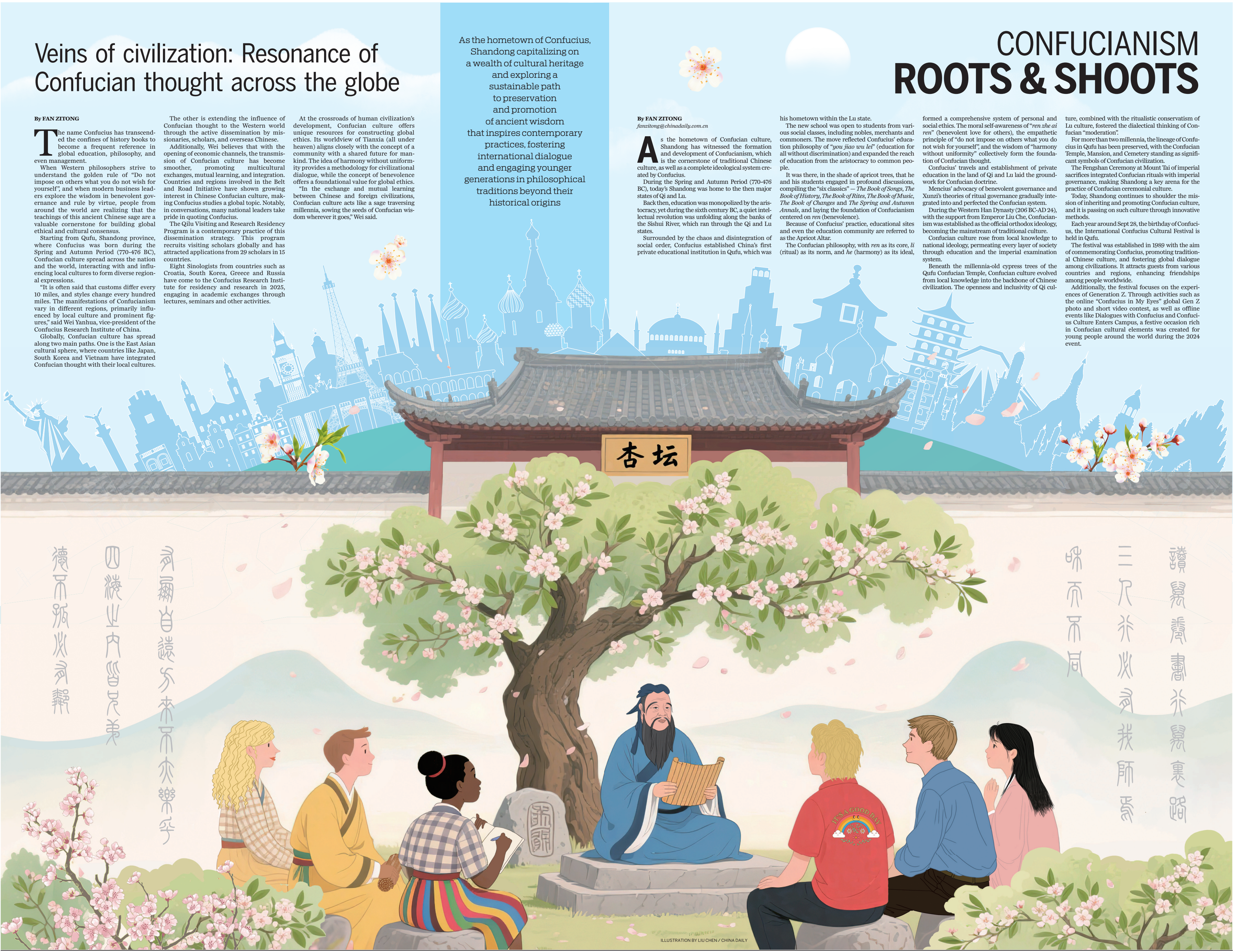


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