

Learning to serve the people

Residents of village where president worked as a young man recall his efforts to improve their lives

By HUO YAN and LI YANG

Liangjiahe village is a community of 120 homes, scattered along a dry riverbed on the Loess Plateau in Yan'an, in Northwest China's Shaanxi province. It looks no different from the other hamlets in the region, except for the visitors waiting to board electric minibuses to visit its cave dwellings and crofts.

From 1969 to 1975, President Xi Jinping lived and worked in the village as an educated youth during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76) when he was aged 16 to 23.

It was in this village that Xi, who heads the Communist Party of China, joined the world's largest political party.

In 1974, he was elected Party chief of the village committee — the start of his public career. Xi was still a resident when he was recommended as a suitable candidate to become a student at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Last year, Liangjiahe received 900,000 visitors, and the number is expected to hit 1.3 million this year.

The village is small, and the usual tourist itinerary follows a set order along a meandering mountain path: The village museum, a farm, a blacksmith's shop, a biogas digester, a well, a grinder powered by a diesel generator, a grocery store and the cave dwellings.

Apart from the museum and the cave dwellings, the other items are regarded as the heritage left by Xi in the 1970s.

Xi, who learned about biogas technology in Mianyang in Southwest China's Sichuan province during a government-led campaign, built the province's first-ever biogas digester with other educated youths and the villagers.

He also led local farmers in laying five strips of farmland in the riverbed, as the river, which was once wide, narrowed to a channel, albeit still sufficient to irrigate the land.

The small stream was the only source of water in Liangjiahe. But the water was sandy. To solve the problem, Xi led the villagers in digging a well. Many seniors remember how he was the first person to jump into the hole, and how he worked the longest shifts in the numbing mixture of ice, water and mud.

Before the grocery store opened, it took hours for Liangjiahe's farmers to travel to the shop in Wen'anyi, a nearby town, to buy necessities.

Xi suggested that the village committee should buy daily goods from the shop in Wen'anyi and sell them to the villagers in Liangjiahe at the price at which they had been purchased.

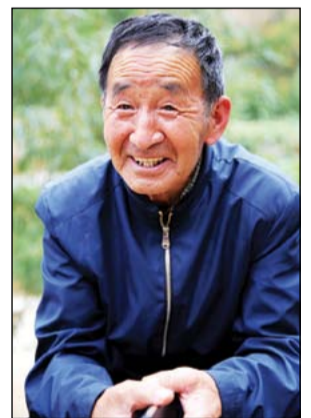
Xi also exchanged a motorcycle he



Tourists visit a cave dwelling in Liangjiahe, Yan'an, Northwest China's Shaanxi province, in May. A number of educated youths from Beijing, including Xi Jinping, worked and lived in Liangjiahe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. GUO JUNFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



From left: Liang Yuqian, 70, at work in the blacksmith's workshop in Liangjiahe that Xi proposed setting up in 1974; Liu Jinlian, 67, in her cave dwelling. Liu was the landlady of six educated youths from Beijing, including Xi, when they arrived in the village in 1969; Zhang Weipang, 70, was Xi's friend when the president lived in Liangjiahe. PHOTOS BY HUO YAN / CHINA DAILY



had been given by the county government as a reward for his performance for the diesel generator and grinder to help the villagers.

Liang Yuqian, 62, a blacksmith who made farm implements during Xi's time, still runs the same workshop, which opened in 1974 after Xi invited him to move from his home village nearby to work in Liangjiahe.

"At first I just wanted to move from village to village. But Xi persuaded me to stay. He talked about

his plan cordially with me, saying my plan would bring more personal profit, but that working in one place would mean I served more people," he recalled.

When Xi revisited Liangjiahe, in February 2015, he recognized Liang immediately.

Liang Yuming, 75, who Xi replaced as village committee Party chief in 1974, said the heritage items represent just a small part of Xi's contribution to Liangjiahe because he also

did many other things, such as teaching the villagers to read and write.

Liang Yuming said Xi was the youngest of the six educated youths from Beijing who were assigned to Liangjiahe, and he was the one who most loved reading books.

Lei Pingsheng, who was Xi's roommate and is now a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, said Xi's passion for knowledge was impressive. "When we woke up late at night, we often

found him still reading in the dim light of an oil lamp surrounded by darkness and quiet."

Xi likes reading about history, politics, economics, philosophy and literature, and comparing notes with people who share the same interests, according to Lei.

What made Xi stand out was that he was always ready to put what he had learned into practice to serve the people.

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