

Pinning hopes on needlework

A Miao woman, a deputy to the 13th National People's Congress, uses embroidery to empower her people, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports in Beijing and **Yang Jun** in Guiyang.

For the past decade, Shi Liping has devoted herself to Miao embroidery, something that not only preserves the local people's cultural inheritance, but also contributes greatly to poverty alleviation efforts.

This is because works featuring the Miao embroidery of Songtao county, which was once hidden deep in the mountains, are now among the gifts presented by the United Nations and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Shi, who was born in 1966 in the Songtao Miao autonomous county of Guizhou province, was exposed to Miao embroidery from an early age, like every other Miao girl.

According to Shi, traditionally Miao girls learn how to embroider from female family members from as early as the age of 5. And they start embroidering full-time from 12, making clothes, shoes and bed linen for their dowry when they get married.

But Shi says with the development of society and the economy, a growing number of young people are leaving their villages to find work in the cities, and hence the craft is slowly dying out.

So, with the aim of promoting Miao embroidery, Shi visited almost all of the Miao villages, recorded their local embroidery techniques, and traveled around the country to learn other embroidery styles.

Then, after eight years of preparation, Shi founded a company, Fanjingshan Miao Culture Tourism Product Development, in 2008.

"At the start, the company had only three needleworkers," says Shi. "And as all of our products are handmade, a single product could take us as long as two months."

Now, the company has a team of approximately 260 professional needleworkers, and Shi works with art universities and fashion companies to innovate.

Shi also includes elements from Guizhou culture into her embroidery collections — from flowers and landscapes to dance and folklore — making products both for everyday use and ornamental purposes.

Speaking about her scented sachets, Shi says: "We not only used Miao embroidery techniques, but also Guizhou's Yazhou pottery for the beads, and Miao herbal medicine for the filling. The flower embroidered is camellia, known in our region as the flower of happiness".

In 2011, her "flower drum" collection, which depicts Miao folk dancing, was selected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an official gift.



Clockwise from top: Shi Liping is elected as a deputy to the 13th National People's Congress for promoting Miao embroidery; Shi works on a piece of Miao embroidery; a piece of scarf woven by Shi bears colorful patterns; Shi (second from left) instructs women attending her training courses in Miao embroidery; a piece from her "dove flower" collection which is selected as an official gift by the United Nations.

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And her "dove flower" collection was selected as an official gift by the United Nations in 2013.

Also, after continued efforts by Shi, "Songtao Miao Embroidery" was accredited with a geographical indication in 2015, marking this regional craft as a representative of Guizhou culture.

Shi's employees mainly comprise laid-off workers, rural Miao women and migrant workers, selected from her training programs, which more than 10,000 people have attended.

Through the training courses, Shi not only popularizes Miao embroidery, but also offers local women the chance to learn professional skills that can help them make a living.

Shi says to date, her company has lifted more than 130 low-income people out of poverty and provided over 4,000 women, aged between 18 and 97, opportunities to work from home.

"When tackling poverty, women can have the same influence as men," says Shi.

Yang Yueming, one of the younger generation who started learning Miao embroidery from scratch after joining Shi's company, says: "She is a person who, once she sets a goal, will work hard and persevere to achieve it."

"She is also very visionary. When developing products, she will always think about both the cultural heritage and the future of the industry."

In acknowledgment of her accomplishments, Shi was elected in 2018

as a deputy to the 13th National People's Congress.

Shi continues to take pride in her origins and the craft, and wears her own handmade Miao traditional costumes to meetings and events.

"The clothes I wear demonstrate the techniques we have inherited and my cultural confidence. I promote our culture wherever I go," she says.

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Film reintroduces Freddie Mercury, Queen to China

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The legendary British band Queen is rocking moviegoers in China, particularly late frontman Freddie Mercury.

As of Friday, the film *Bohemian Rhapsody*, inspired by the life of the singer, had raked in around 63 million yuan (\$9.4 million) in China, the world's second-largest movie market.

The film has won four Oscars, earned \$890 million around the world and is the highest-grossing musical biopic of all time, according to the tracking site Box Office Mojo.

The film also marks a success for China's Arthouse Films Screening Alliance — a chain launched in 2016 to provide more space for highbrow titles and festival winners.

Sun Xianghui, alliance chief and director of the China Film Archive, says the film held 600 test screenings in 128 cities around China on March 16 and 17, making it the largest release of an arthouse film distributed by the alliance yet. On March 22, the film's official release was upped to 3,100 member theaters.



Bohemian Rhapsody helps ordinary audience members learn more about rock music and the lives of the performers.

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Starring American actor Rami Malek in an uncanny performance as Freddie Mercury, the film charts the extraordinary story of the singer and the band — from their roots as bright London college students to the dazzling heights of international stardom. The flamboyant singer, whose birth name was Farrokh Bulsara, was born in colonial Africa to Parsi parents from India.

Spanning 15 minutes toward the end of the film, one standout scene re-creates Queen's legendary 1985 performance at Live Aid, a concert watched by 1.9 billion people globally and raised funds for a famine in Ethiopia. Even for Chinese audiences, who have limited knowledge of the singer or the band, most say they were touched by the film's storyline.

On review aggregator Douban

and box-office tracker Maoyan, both seen as barometers of popularity in Chinese entertainment, many moviegoers rated the film 8.7 and 9.5 points out of 10 respectively.

Aside from regular versions for theatrical release, a special karaoke version has been imported to China, allowing fans to sing along with the classic songs as the lyrics roll out at the bottom of the big screen. This is also the first time a film has been released in such a format in China.

"China has seen few feature films depicting the lives of musicians. The best thing brought out by *Bohemian Rhapsody* is that it prompts the ordinary audience members to learn more about rock music and the lives of the performers," says Hao Yun, an award-winning singer and composer, during a Beijing premiere on March 20.

His sentiment was echoed online.

A web user writes on Douban: "Even though I was born too late to get a chance to see their shows live, to rock with Mercury and his band fellows, the 1985 performance created again on the big screen still brought tears to my eyes."

Freddie Mercury died of pneumonia caused by AIDS in 1991, at the age of 45.

