

Jilin family preserves ancient knotting art

Xu Xiaoxue, an inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage in the province, keen to pass on the skill to more people

By **LIU MINGTAI** in Changchun
and **ZHOU HUIYING**

Xu Xiaoxue said she requires nothing but a single thread to connect the world with China and its intangible cultural heritage. Her skillful hands can create exquisite Chinese knots by meticulously intertwining a single thread and some beads, exhibiting a rare display of intangible cultural heritage to the world.

Hailing from Jilin province, Xu, 41, said: "I will never forget the words of my mother-in-law. When I started learning the knotting skills, she told me that knotting embodies people's hopes for life."

Her husband's family is in the business of making the decorative art that dates back to ancient times when people tied knots to record events. According to her, the tradition of the family's skills in knot tying can be traced back to the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Xu started to learn the craft of creating Chinese knots from her mother-in-law, Yu Hongyan, in 2005. As a third-generation inheritor of the provincial intangible cultural heritage of knotting in Jilin, Yu was proficient in various folk crafts such as knot tying, straw weaving and willow weaving and had her own unique understanding of knotting art.

Under Yu's guidance, Xu gradually mastered various techniques such as flower knotting, rope knotting and straw weaving, becoming the fourth generation inheritor.

To rejuvenate the traditional art, Xu constantly explored innovative techniques. She continued to innovate and create hand-knotted rope products that cater to contemporary aesthetic demands.

"Artistic innovation knows no bounds," she said. "As knotting craftsmanship has entered a new era, I hope to actively develop new products that not only showcase exquisite traditional folk craftsmanship but are also accepted and recognized by the market."

Building upon her mastery of over 500 traditional flower knotting art, she has rediscovered over 50 ancient techniques and developed more than 30 new ones.

Xu has also made innovations in the selection of materials and color combinations, making her rope knotting handicrafts more dynamic



Clockwise from top: Xu Xiaoxue (right) poses with three visitors while attending a fair to promote Chinese knots she made in Changchun, Jilin province. Xu works on one of her knotting works at her studio in Changchun. Xu introduces her works to some visitors at a promotion event in Changchun. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



and vibrant. "Traditional Chinese knotting primarily uses materials such as hemp, cotton and polyester cotton threads," she said.

"In addition to these traditional materials, I have developed some new environmentally friendly materials suitable for contemporary trends."

Furthermore, Xu has integrated jewelry, jade, precious metals, wood carvings and other handcrafted items into the ropes, transforming the form of knots from flat to three-dimensional, designing them uniquely into exquisite handicrafts.

In terms of color combinations, Xu has gone beyond the bright red and

yellow colors of traditional Chinese knots, conducting color tone comparisons among thousands of colors to design color schemes suitable for different age groups, presenting this ancient art of Chinese knotting in a completely new light.

Since Xu founded her own brand *Rope Search For* in 2009, she has

taken it upon herself to inherit the art of knotting and promote knotting culture.

She actively pursues creative inheritance and innovative development, driving the protection and inheritance of the intangible cultural heritage of knotting in Jilin.

"The inheritance and develop-

ment of intangible cultural heritage rely on systematic protection in terms of learning, teaching, application, production and research," said Xu. "And the key lies in the people."

Therefore, while building her own business, she took on apprentices to pass on her skills and conducted public welfare training courses.

So far, she has conducted nearly 200 knotting art training sessions in primary and secondary schools, universities and communities.

She has taken on over 700 apprentices at home and abroad, helping more than 100 apprentices of them establish their own stores or studios in over 50 cities nationwide.

In order to involve more people in the inheritance of knotting skills and to allow the knotting project to help more individuals, she has assisted women in mountainous regions in starting their own businesses.

"I provided them threads and patterns bearing the brand name and told them the required craftsmanship specifications," she said.

"After collecting their finished products, I sold them collectively to help them improve their income."

To bring the art of knotting to more people, Xu also published short videos via platforms such as Douyin and Weibo, continuously expanding the influence and dissemination of knotting art, especially among young people.

She has also established stores in cities such as Changchun in Jilin, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Dongguan in Guangdong province, and Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Through simultaneous promotion on online platforms and offline entities, Xu received over 100,000 customers annually.

During the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, Xu represented her skills at the Winter Olympics site, demonstrating the unique knotting techniques and works from Jilin to more than 1,700 visitors across the world.

"I felt that the thread in my hand was even more powerful when I was able to connect the intangible heritage projects of Jilin, Chinese traditional culture, and the world with a single thread," she said. "It filled me with the power to help more people understand intangible cultural heritage."

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Support from Suzhou benefits Xinjiang students

By **ZHENG CAIXIONG**
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Ning Lianfeng, headmaster of Artux Kunshan Yucai School, is proud to see how the school has evolved during her time in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Before Ning left the city of Artux for home, a "future classroom" had been built, connecting it with educational resources in Kunshan city, which is under the administration of Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

"Students in the 'future classroom' in Xinjiang can now attend classes taught by renowned teachers in Suzhou," she said.

Meanwhile, renowned teachers from Suzhou can also be invited to give special lectures for students in Artux, she added.

Ning, who is originally from Suzhou, reluctantly bade farewell to teachers and students on campus when her time in Xinjiang ended in early July.

Xie Xiaogang, deputy headmaster of Artux Kunshan Yucai School, traveled to all high schools in Artux during his four and a half years in Xinjiang to establish a joint team for junior high school Chinese language teaching.

Xie also taught more than 20 local Chinese language teachers. According to authorities, Suzhou has sent 111 officials and 840 skilled professionals to aid Xinjiang's development and has established nearly 800 projects in the northwestern Chinese region since 2010.

The officials and professionals from Suzhou have drawn on the wisdom and experience of Suzhou's development, focusing on practicality and innovation, and working

together with their Xinjiang counterparts on the path of high-quality development, authorities said.

In addition to educational aid to Xinjiang, Suzhou has invested in science and technology, new energy, culture, new materials, medical and agricultural projects in its targeted aid to cities and counties in Xinjiang, including Horgos and Artux cities and Gongliu county.

Horgos is an important window for China to open to the West and a "golden port" connecting Asian and European continents. Its foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce and related industries have developed rapidly in recent years.

To meet the growing demand, Horgos Technical School, which was built by Suzhou's Xinjiang-Aid Working Group, closely follows the local situation and has opened 10 program majors including international trade, e-commerce and modern logistics.

The school, which officially started operation in 2020, now has more than 1,400 students.

In Artux, a Kunshan medical team has conducted a mentorship program to guide and train local medical staff and has promoted the construction of a comprehensive medical technology building, while carrying out major cancer and pre-delivery screening for local obstetrics and pregnant women.

Since the establishment of a digital angiography operating room in Gongliu, more than 200 cardiac surgeries have been carried out, while in Horgos, doctors from Suzhou have promoted the establishment of the city's first emergency and intensive care medicine unit.

According to authorities, the new



A student reads at the library of Artux Kunshan Yucai School in Artux, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

campus of Artux People's Hospital is fully funded by Kunshan.

Suzhou authorities said the city has contributed a total of 6.98 billion yuan (\$983 million) in aid to Xinjiang. They said the city will seek common development with Xinjiang, comprehensively strengthen two-way cooperation and deepen integration to promote the high-quality development of aid to the region.

Yu Mingsheng, vice-chairman of Xinjiang Federation of Industry and Commerce, said he hoped to construct an exchange and cooperation platform for enterprise between Xinjiang and Suzhou to promote high-quality socioeconomic development.

Yu said Xinjiang expects to deepen industrial synergy in new energy, new materials and related sectors and expand cooperation in trade logistics, foreign investment, trade facilitation, cultural tourism, and agricultural and related industries in the months to come. In early August Yu led an inspection delegation to visit Suzhou and held meetings with officials and entrepreneurs to expand cooperation.

Redesigning *hanfu* in the post-2000 era

JINAN — At a *hanfu* or traditional Chinese dress workshop in Caoxian county, East China's Shandong province, dressmakers are cutting creamy white silk and sewing a dress with golden silk thread.

Li Zhen, who runs the company, said that traditional *hanfu* are mostly long dresses, making summer the off-season for buying them. However, the company has designed shorter versions this summer, featuring half-skirts and midi skirts, to meet the needs of customers during the warm weather.

"We consulted with the designers online, and the designs of our products were adjusted several times to our satisfaction," Li said.

As a small county famous for e-commerce and *hanfu*, Caoxian is actively exploring new consumer trends to turn summer from off-season into peak season.

The willingness of consumers to buy speaks for itself. In the exhibition hall of Youai Yuncang, a *hanfu* center, a simple and elegant dress attracts much attention. "This is our new product for the season, but it doesn't have a name, because it sold out as soon as it hit the shelf," said Li Zilei, head of the center, adding that the dress is made of acetate imitation fabric. Compared with the traditional horse-faced skirt, it has no folds, and is thinner and more of a drape, suitable as daily wear for female consumers of all ages.

"I like to wear a horse-faced skirt like this with light fabrics in summer. It's cool and beautiful," said Hu Xinyue, a *hanfu* fan.

With the increasing exposure of traditional Chinese clothing such as *hanfu* and the horse-faced

skirts, the neo-Chinese style, a mixture of classical attire and everyday clothes, has become a fashionable item for today's young generation.

During the graduation season this year, Gao Yanjun, who runs a *hanfu* business, worked with a number of universities to integrate elements of *hanfu* and school characteristics into the uniforms of students.

"I like traditional Chinese culture," said Xu Qian from Shanghai. "The neo-Chinese style clothing features traditional Chinese cultural attributes and is suitable for daily wear. When I visit historical and cultural tourist attractions with it on and take photos, I feel I'm a protagonist in a beautiful painting."

Kong Fanxing, director of the culture and tourism department of Caoxian, believes that the young generation will provide the impetus for the development of *hanfu* and traditional culture, and thus form a virtuous circle of sustainable development.

Hanfu designers of the post-00s generation are injecting vitality into the industry. Zhang Zichen, a new graduate majoring in fashion design, participated in a *hanfu* experience activity last October and was attracted by traditional Chinese culture. She decided to return to her hometown to design *hanfu*. She has successfully signed a contract with a company.

"The summer fashion boom is a testament to market approval of us, designers of the post-00s generation," she said.

According to data from e-commerce platforms, 1,200 of the top 2,000 online *hanfu* stores in China are from Caoxian. At present, nearly 100,000 people are participating in the business.

The entire process, from dyeing and cutting to sewing the clothes can be completed here within 5 kilometers, forming a complete industrial chain and brand incubation system.

XINHUA



Yao Chixing (right), a manager of a *hanfu* workshop, introduces its products to a customer in Caoxian county, Shandong province. LIANG BEN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE