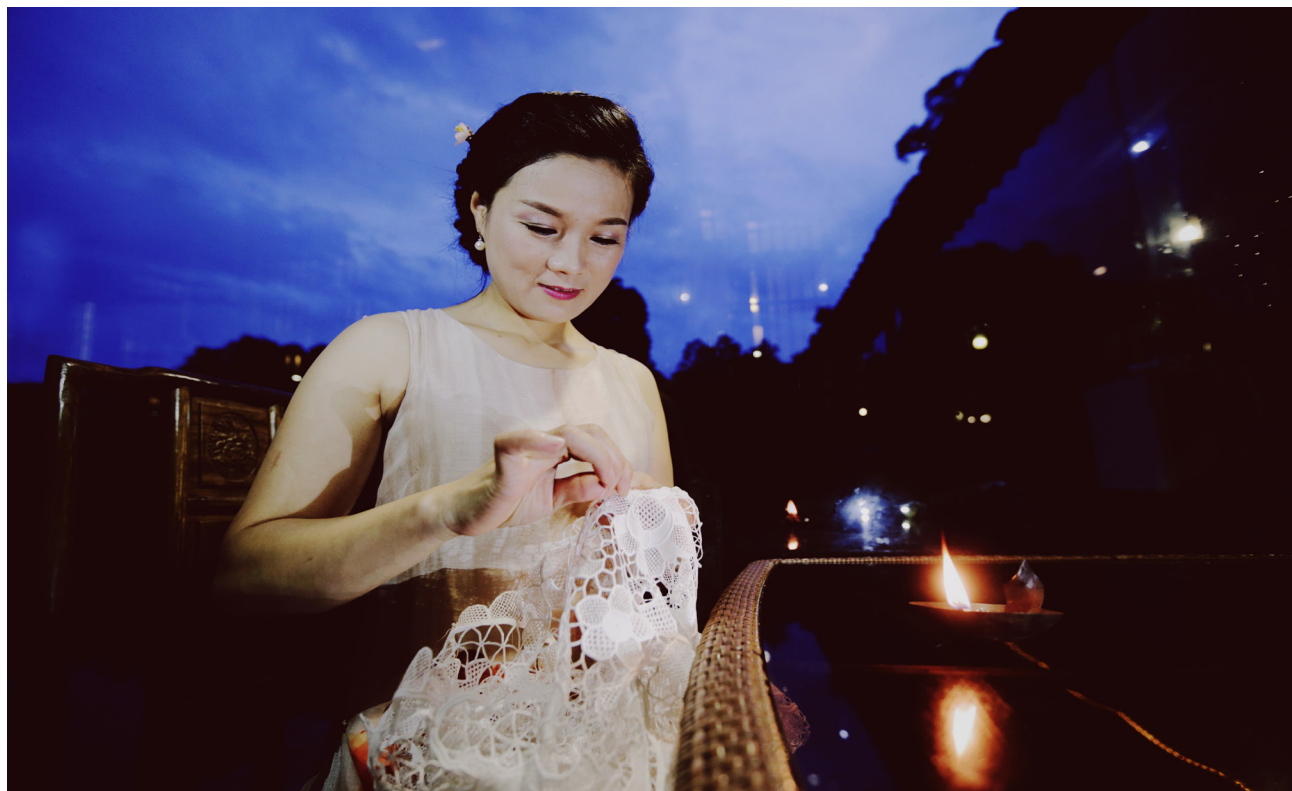


CULTURE & ARTS

# Vanishing Treasure

-----HANDMADE LACES-----



PHOTO/JIEPENG JIN

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The Successors

**Modernization wipes out  
handmade laces,  
techniques die out**



Lihua Wang, the inheritor of Xiaoshan Laces, is preparing needles and fabrics for knitting laces. Behind her is a young apprentice. PHOTO/GAVIN

**H**idden in the darkness, a woman is embroidering a piece of art. She always keeps her head down as if a single stitch would go wrong. It is Xiaoshan Laces that the woman is meticulously making. A beam of light shines through the willow window above her head, reflecting the gorgeousness and delicateness of that handkerchief-like lace. Her hands, white yet wrinkled, literally never stop sewing. With the modernization, some techniques are on the verge of dying out. The story is about one of them.

## The prosperity of Xiaoshan Laces

**I**n the year of 1919, Italian missionaries brought this lace-making technique to Xiaoshan, China, because there were a lot of clever women who were good at knitting. The large labor force was also taken into consideration at that time. Having existed for almost a century, people have witnessed the boom of Xiaoshan Laces, and such Lace-making skill has become a localized and traditional technique among rural women in Xiaoshan nowadays. In their heyday, that is, the late 1970s, there were more than 200,000 people knitting them to make a living. According to China Industrial Records, over 30 factories for making laces

in which 20,000 women worked were opening and operating on a regular basis during the period of the Republic of China. Therefore, the production scale of laces in Xiaoshan was expanding at a staggering rate, becoming a brand new and profitable industry. Until now, handmade laces have developed into way more patterns than they used to.



**In late 1970s, there were more than 200,000 people knitting them to make a living.**



**T**he history of Xiaoshan laces is still vivid in its locals' mind. Lihua, who was still a kid at that time, is one of them. Now, she is one of the few inheritors of Xiaoshan Handmade Laces, Zhejiang's intangible cultural heritage. In the interview, she still feels excited when mentioning this memorable history. She says nostalgically, "In my early memory, I had always nestled up to my parents helping them thread needles, and being influenced by what I constantly saw and heard. I had this keen interest of knitting Xiaoshan Laces. After furthering my study in academy of fine arts in, I became an apprentice to a master of arts and crafts Xixiang Zhao, which officially turned me into a inheritor of Xiaoshan Laces.



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**These handmade laces are largely replaced by mechanization productions that are less time-consuming and require relatively low cost in seek of more profits.**

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## The rise of Embroidery machines

**T**he prosperity of Xiaoshan Laces, which more than 200,000 workers knitting together, does not exist anymore. On the other hand, a new upsurge in using machines to embroider gradually replaces the role of manual lace-making techniques. After basking in the sunshine, laces, unfortunately, have to undergo a period of rain and storm. Should people choose a complete industrialized way, or should they continue to knit laces despite a decreasing number of successors? Using delicate details and various pattern is one of the hallmarks of handmade laces. They are commonly applied to home textiles, curtains, cushions, coasters, clothes, and other kinds of decorations. However, with the development of technology, mechanization productions that are less time-consuming and require relatively low cost in seek of more profits become preferable.

**L**ihua, still remains confident and proud of handmade laces. Granted, this trend do occur with the modernization, but Xiaoshan Laces have irreplaceable characteristics. Then,

she shows a lot of laces that she has made to us, and we are truly impressed and amazed, especially by the stark contrast between machine-made and handmade laces. Manual laces are of pure beauty as if they were engraved in a marvellous piece of ivory- subtle and refined.

**C**ompared to the industrialized laces, she says, “even laymen can clearly distinguish that machine-made laces are too plane, that is, lack aesthetic perception of layers.” She adds, “during the process of knitting, workers usually use threads of different thickness and more than 30 types of stitches, so manual laces are well-controlled and of three dimensional appeal. In addition, a palm-size lace will take about 10 days to complete, which contains a designer’s both inspiration and affection. From the perspective of arts, “Xiaoshan Laces are warm and have a sense of spirituality to me.” She says softly.

Authentic handmade Laces with Bowers on it. It usually takes 10 days to complete.PHOTO/GAVIN



## Difficulties of inheriting Xiaoshan Laces

**F**rom 200,000 people engaging in knitting Xiaoshan Laces to only fewer than 200 people that can actually master the lace-making skills, Xiaoshan Laces are on the verge of dying out. These few craftsmen remained like Lihua Wang and her master Xixiang Zhao are exerting themselves to save Xiaoshan Laces and pass this technique on.

**X**ixiang is almost 80 years old, but he still provides sources of how to knit Xiaoshan Laces for future generations. For example, he spent half a year recording all the stitches and fabrication process into one single project, extra heavy thousand-string counterpane with borders on each side, which won a gold medal on the West Lake Exposition in the year of 2000.

**A**fter performing a great feat, Xixiang and his apprentice Lihua realized, the key to inheriting Xiaoshan Laces is to find the right inheritors instead of simply creating projects or books. But the problem is: who will be the next successor after Lihua? “The main way to inherit this technique now is through teaching step by step,” she says in the interview, “I am recruiting apprentices, but the problem is that most of them are like butterflies; they are not able to concentrate for a long time. The essence of making good laces is to buckle down and work on the subtlest detail.

**“The key to inheriting Xiaoshan Laces is to find the right inheritors.”**



The museum where Lihua and other masters work. Each of them has a studio. PHOTO/GAVIN

“If you can’t find the inner peace, I’m sorry but you had better not waste your time on learning how to knit Xiaoshan Laces.” She says with a rarely serious tone.

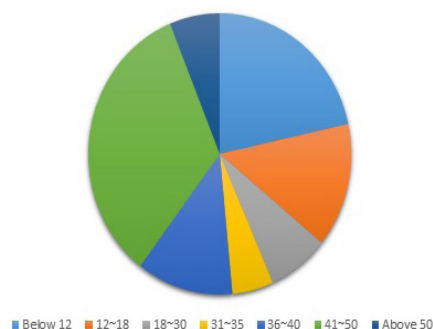
**L**ihua also organizes some activities from time to time: teach students in middle schools and high schools, elaborate the fabrication process of Xiaoshan Laces to senior citizens in communities. There is only one goal of her acts: encourage more people to inherit this technique. At the end of the interview, she calls on more people who are interested in knitting Xiaoshan Laces to join her, and save this vanishing cultural heritage.

# Seeing the BIG PICTURE

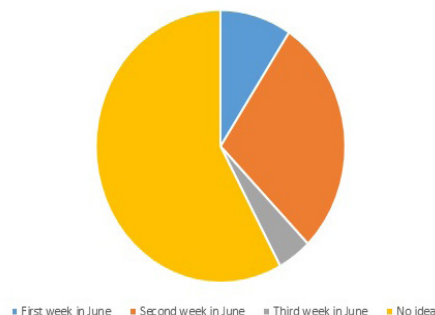
After finding out the status quo of one specific intangible cultural heritage, we conduct questionnaires about the big picture of intangible cultural heritage online. Until July 24th, there have been 454 people participating in the survey and have given their own advice. Over 76% of people have no idea what the date of World Heritage Day is, and 17% of people do not even know anything about intangible cultural heritage. Speaking of the biggest challenge for inheriting intangible cultural heritage, 70% of people attribute to the general public's unawareness of protection. Therefore, teaching lessons about intangible cultural heritage in schools and communities, as Lihua proposes, is absolutely right.

Similarly, the problem of inheritors that Lihua brought up is reflected on the result as well. 80% of people think that youngsters' unwillingness or lack of interests directly causes the disappearances of some techniques. Some suggest that using the VR technology offers people more visual experience; some propose that making the past serve the present can be useful because innovations have to be made to extend the ancient culture; others advise that the government should assist intangible cultural heritage by offering financial support, while a few point out that using the internet and other means of communication can imperceptibly influence and thus allowing people to realize the importance of inheriting intangible cultural heritage like Xiaoshan Laces.

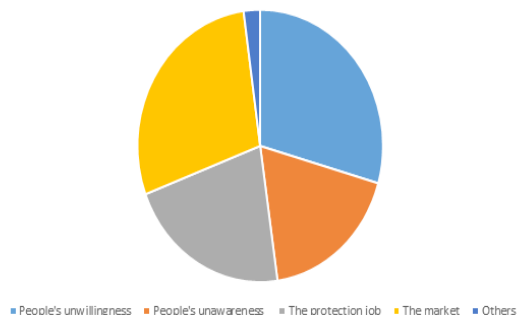
Subject Number



When is the World Heritage Day



Why some heritage is lost



How should government offer protection

