

YOUTH

Art to dye for

Ancient craft is given a new lease of life by a critically-acclaimed designer who marries imagination with tradition, **Xing Wen** reports.

Inside a two-story studio in the prosperous, bustling Lidu business district in northeastern Beijing, artist Lin Fanglu sharpens her skill in the time-consuming process of tie-dyeing.

The techniques involved in this ancient art take time to master. To tie-dye, fabric must be manipulated by folding or twisting or pleating using needles and threads before the dye is applied.

The designer Lin, 31, learned the traditional way of tie-dyeing six years ago from a group of farmer-housewives living in a remote, tranquil village of the Dali Bai autonomous prefecture, Southwest China's Yunnan province, when she toured as a postgraduate student of the Central Academy of Fine Arts.

Her reputation is synonymous with the craft. In February, she was shortlisted as one of the 30 finalists for the Craft Prize 2020 organized by the Loewe Foundation and her large installation work, entitled *She*, has been shipped to Paris, ready to be exhibited sometime next year at the Musee des Arts Decoratifs. If not for the COVID-19 outbreak, her work, together with those of the other shortlisted finalists, was to be exhibited from May to July this year.

With a design in her mind, Lin would pinch, crimp, fold, roll and squeeze a piece of white cotton cloth, or white mixed cotton-flax cloth, to form certain shapes and fix them by stitching and binding.

Then knots would be strategically applied.

After being washed with clean water, the knots would be put into a vat in which crushed *Radix Isatidis* roots, a Chinese medicinal herb, served as the dyeing agent.

Parts that are fully immersed and exposed to the dye would appear to be dark blue but those parts that had been tightly stitched would appear in a lighter hue.

Combined, they present a variety of exquisite, decorative patterns.

The tie-dyed fabric is less likely to fade than that which has been through a chemical process, according to Lin.

As a time-honored traditional technique of the Bai ethnic group, which can be traced back to more than 1,000 years ago, tie-dyeing was listed as a national-level intangible cultural heritage in May 2006.

When Lin first saw several Bai women conduct the tying and dyeing in a yard in Zhoucheng village of Dali Bai autonomous prefecture in 2014, she was immediately captivated by the complex textured shapes created by the women's artistic needlework.

The then postgraduate major in household product design at the Central Academy of Fine Arts simply marveled at the exquisite beauty of the handicraft.

"It's full of primitive power," recalls Lin.

"I was impressed that with only



Designer Lin Fanglu in 2016 sitting on a chair she made at her studio in Beijing, with her installation work, *She*, hanging on the wall behind her. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Top: Lin is picking *Radix Isatidis* roots, a typical Chinese medicinal herb, a key dyeing agent, in Yunnan province.

Middle: She puts tied cloth into a vat full of the herb to dye.

Above: A chair she designed and made from tie-dyed cloth.

needles and threads, they could turn a piece of soft cloth into different shapes, which are also varied in texture and tension.

"As an art student, I saw the possi-

bility of using the technique for self-expression."

She then decided to stay in the village for a few months and learn from the Bai women how to proceed with drawing patterns in a series of steps, including knotting, soaking, dyeing, heating, drying, string-removal and clothing-drying.

"These rural women, mostly in their 50s, usually help with the farm work in the fields, do the household chores and take care of their children. In their 'leisure time', they make money to support the family by making tie-dyed fabrics," says Lin.

"I was touched by their tenacity." Inspired by the spirit of those Bai women, Lin has used the stitching techniques of tie-dyeing to create the installation artwork, *She*.

With various, complicated, bold shapes of stitched thick cloth with intricate patterns fixed on wooden frames, it is 6 meters long and 3 meters wide. If viewed from a distance, it resembles a cloud.

She spent three months performing repetitive, scrupulous work, "knotting, stitching, folding and pleating" the white cotton cloth, and the artwork is her tribute to the Bai women and their persistent application of the labor-intensive 1,000-year-old technique.

Lin says that if the viewer gets closer to appreciate the piece, the various folds, detailed knots and complex textures "may tug your heartstrings".

The work provides a metaphor for the Bai women's struggle for change to the status quo, after she made friends with them and sensed their yearning.

"All in all, the big piece, hanging

on the wall, also symbolizes their determination to grow and soar," says Lin.

Over the past six years, she has also used tie-dyeing to make stylish furniture, such as sofas and chairs, to bring the traditional technique into modern households.

"I try to add a modern, artistic touch to the age-old traditions of tie-dyeing, hoping that the installation artworks, pieces of the soft sculpture and furniture that I've designed could help the public get a new appreciation of the craftsmanship of the Bai ethnic group," says Lin.

She plans to learn batik techniques at some ethnic villages in Guizhou province and continue to take in the primitive power of folk craftsmanship.

She has signed with the Art Plus Shanghai Gallery, where many of her artworks are displayed.

Ana Gonzalez, the gallery's partner from Spain, says that the traditional technique Lin employs, coupled with the vision of a young, talented and hard-working artist, "gives birth to compelling, visually intriguing contemporary works of art".

"I've seen her desire to experiment with, learn and implement, in her future work, the knowledge about the world's ancient crafts," comments Gonzalez.

"She seems to tap even deeper into Chinese ancient crafts to make it an exciting and promising step for the development of her artistic career. It's also an important contribution to the world of art, craft and design."

Contact the writer at xingwen@chinadaily.com.cn



Residents at a community center in Yangpu district, Shanghai, are energetically led by a fitness expert in their physical exercise class. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Shanghai project puts health on the agenda

By **HE QI** in Shanghai
heqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Sporting greats Wang Liqin, one of the most successful table tennis players in history, and Zou Kai, a five-time gymnastics Olympic champion, were among experts present at the June 10 launch of the new social service project aimed at helping citizens manage their physical and mental health.

Launched by the Yangpu District Committee in conjunction with the Party Committee of Shanghai University of Sport, the project kicked off at the former site of the Minghua Sugar Storehouse in Shanghai's Yangpu district.

Athletes, physical and mental health consultants and students from the Shanghai University of Sport were on site to offer psychological counseling as well as guidance on matters such as sports nutrition, fitness and injury prevention.

Following the launch, these services will be made available to residents for six weeks at grassroots community service stations in 12 neighborhoods in the district.

The initiative will also feature 13 themed courses catered to different age groups in the community. They include martial arts exercises, rehabilitation activities for the elderly, dance classes, as well as physical and mental health courses. All courses are free.

"Many residents, especially the elderly, neglect their health and do not like to go to the hospital for physical examinations unless they are sick, when in fact their body functions are deteriorating," says Yang Yang, 25, a master's student majoring in sports psychology at the Shanghai University of Sport.

Yang points out that many elderly residents also suffer from mild depression, but most think it is unnecessary to seek help from a hospital. The cause of this depression, he adds, is loneliness.

"When I was at the event, an old woman said that she was lonely as she lives by herself and her children are always busy. To deal with this, she had to find someone to talk to at the neighborhood committee," Yang says.

Shen Wei, secretary of the Party

There will be a great demand from the community for health consultants, because people care more about the quality of life now compared with a decade ago."

Gao Binghong, director of the School of Physical Education and Sports Training, Shanghai University of Sport

Committee of the Shanghai Education Commission, says that there is an urgent need to establish a system that can prevent noncommunicable physical and mental diseases in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concept of introducing sport and health consultants to the communities came up during the pandemic when many people were stuck at home and unable to exercise, says Gao Binghong, director of the School of Physical Education and Sports Training at the university.

"Some modern health conditions like fatty liver are caused by a sedentary lifestyle and a lack of exercise, and this was exactly the case during the pandemic. This is why we had the idea to help the public through specific exercises," says Gao.

"After the viral outbreak, the district government of Yangpu decided to cooperate with us and set up the sport and health consultancy project as a way of improving public health by guiding residents how to eat, exercise and practice disease prevention."

As the demand for sport and health talent is on the rise, the university is planning to introduce a new major to train professional health consultants, Gao says.

"There will be a great demand from the community for health consultants, because people care more about the quality of life now compared with a decade ago," he says.

International Education Column

If you are interested in this, please contact: education@chinadaily.com.cn

40th in the international THE Young University Ranking "351 under 50" 2019

UNIVERSITÄT BAYREUTH

Become a part of the Bayreuth community by enrolling in our new master's programme of Food Quality and Safety.

Excellence, made in Bavaria!

The University of Bayreuth has long-standing partnerships with universities in China and offers 13,500 students from all over the world the ideal place to launch their career. We're happy to announce the grand opening of our new Faculty of Life Sciences: Food, Nutrition and Health and our second campus, located in the nearby town of Kulmbach. Our new faculty will complement and strengthen the already existing food cluster in Kulmbach, consisting of recognized research institutes, leading authorities and companies. Our interdisciplinary, English-taught degree programmes are trendsetters, focusing on key topics of the future. Come and discover your new home away from home and see what you get studying at the unique University of Bayreuth.

Contact: studyservice-kulmbach@uni-bayreuth.de www.f7.uni-bayreuth.de

DREAM CREATE INNOVATE

USV is an innovative and complex public university, which provides a wide range of bachelor, master, doctoral and post-doctoral study programs and conducts scientific research in the following fields: Economics, Technical Sciences, Engineering and IT, Natural Sciences, Humanities and Health.

Study in one of the top Eastern European universities! Choose a safe, compact and modern campus! Broaden your perspective, make new friends, shape your future in a warm academic environment!

www.usv.ro

Stefan cel Mare University of Suceava
Romania

JOIN

KAUNAS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Established in 1922
65 study programmes in English
All fields of study

No. 53 in Eastern and Central Europe and Asia*

*QS World University Rankings by Region 2020

Learn more at: admissions.ktu.edu

- Almost 100 years of history
- Officially recognized by the Ministry of Education of the PRC
- Exchange programmes, internships, community of startups, sports, student clubs
- Kaunas is the 2nd largest city of Lithuania, the very centre of Europe
- Of the 40,000 students in Kaunas, 10% of them are international
- Part of ECIU University, established under the European Universities Initiative

kaunas university of technology

ECIU university

QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS RANKED 2020