

Ancient arts leave their calling cards

China's handicrafts are being brought back from the brink of obscurity, Wang Hongyi reports.



Colorful embroidery created by craftspeople from China's Yunnan province adds a nice touch to the Expo, especially with their innovative use of a yak's skull.

Expo 2010 Shanghai provides a platform for China to showcase its rare and dying arts to the world, in addition to its exotic customs.

A range of religious and cultural folk arts took center stage this month during Qinghai Week, a celebration of the cultural melting pot that is the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

Qinghai is home to many ethnic groups and serves as a holy land for Tibetan Buddhists. People from diverse backgrounds combine to give its local arts a unique style.



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QIAO YINGJU
A BARBOLA CRAFTSWOMAN FROM QINGHAI

Of these, embossed embroidery works are a big draw, as they proved recently among visitors at the exhibition area of the Baosteel Stage inside the Expo Garden.

Also known as barbola, or *dui xiu* in Mandarin Chinese, this type of Tibetan brocade uses cutting and piling techniques to portray images on cloth. It has a history dating back more than 700 years and is often used together with other specialized arts like yak butter sculptures and Thangka silk painting. The latter forms a key part of Regong, an art genre that is commonly found in Tibetan Buddhism.

Local craftswoman Qiao Yingju has spent 20 years exploring and organizing training programs to promote rare folk arts in her native Qinghai.

"I appreciate the value of these handicrafts. They are a very important part of Chinese culture, and we should let more people know about them," said the 50-year old.

"I began learning embossed embroidery skills from my mother when I was a child. It takes a lot of time and effort to complete a good piece," she said.

The craftsperson must first sketch the outline of the objects they are presenting and then select the appropriate silks, satins and colors. The satins are cut into specific shapes, such as those of a human, animal, flower or bird, and then filled with cotton or wool to give them more of a cubic effect.

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