LIFE

Woven heritage for today

Tubu cloth is being upgraded into art and lifestyle pieces, **Wang Xin** reports in Shanghai.



Being an iconic traditional stringed instrument, the *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) is renowned for producing charming melodies. Yet, a cluster of *pipa*, devoid of any strings, has been stealing the spotlight recently at exhibitions across China and beyond. How can a stringless *pipa* captivate audiences so profoundly? The answer lies in its ingenious fusion of age-old craftsmanship.

Stringless *pipa* feature fronts wrapped in *tubu*, a type of handwoven cotton cloth with deep roots in Shanghai, and backs adorned with intricate hand-painted motifs. Bathed in various checkered patterns and a sophisticated palette dominated by varying shades of elegant blue and accented with other complementary hues, each piece emerges as a striking work of art that marries cultural heritage with aesthetic innovation.

According to Liu Hui, the leader of the design team behind these creations, the innovative application of handwoven cotton cloth and its refined patterns has unlocked a world of unexpected functionality. When mounted on walls, these *pipa* transform into decorative pieces, infusing spaces with a touch of traditional Chinese elegance. Placed on desks, they can serve as unique pen holders, merging practicality with artistic flair. Some even feature a cleverly designed mechanism, allowing them to double as jewelry boxes.

Liu, who is a professor at the College of Fashion and Design at Donghua University in Shanghai, has been leading her team to research, collect and revitalize Jiangnan (referring to the southern regions of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River) *tubu* since 2022. It is one of the traditional Chinese handwoven cloths featuring diverse and eye-catching checked patterns. With bold color combinations of red, green and blue, it vibrantly reflects the long-lasting vitality and confidence of traditional folk aesthetics in the Yangtze River Delta region.

Over the years, the team has collected more than 2,000 sets of field data across Shanghai, and identified about 580 representative motifs, including a wide variety of checked patterns.

Liu says that such cotton cloth is not only delicate and beautiful, but also natural, healthy and comfortable to wear. Spun from cotton, the yarn is usually dyed with Chinese medicinal herbs or minerals, which make the cloth moth-proof, soft and skin-friendly. Thus, it is regarded as the perfect option for underwear and bed sheets.





Top: Some checked patterns of the Jiangnan *tubu* cloth that Liu Hui's team collects in Shanghai since 2022. **Left:** Liu, professor from the College of Fashion and Design at Donghua University. **Right:** Liu's team showcases their innovative design with *tubu* in Slovenia in 2025. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Jiangnan *tubu* is far more than just a fabric. It carries centuries of local memories, lived experiences and aesthetic traditions from across the region. You can see the weaver's personality, wisdom, and even their passion for life and perspective on the world through each piece of cloth," says Liu.

Bearing such ideas in mind, the team launched a range of design experiments, which translated the "outdated" fabric into modern fashion and art pieces.

One of their early attempts was a deck of cards inspired by these patterns, which combined the warp-and-weft imagery with elements from Chinese mythology in a modern visual product. As the team delved deeper into traditional and modern integration, they made a colorful variety of clothes and accessories, including brooches, earrings, necklaces and bracelets, weaving Jiangnan *tubu* patterns into daily life.

The unique *pipa* and the team's other creative designs have taken many nations by storm over the past three years. Their exhibitions and pop-up showcases have appeared in more than 10 countries, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Japan, Thailand and Singapore, attracting visitors from across Europe and Asia. They are also ready to wow audiences in Australia and New Zealand in May.

"Some Spanish visitors even traveled for hours by train to our show, and we could see the curiosity and light in their eyes," recalls Liu with a big smile.

Guo Ziwei, a postgraduate student on the team, agrees with Liu that the most valuable quality of *tubu* lies not only in the delicate patterns, but also in the handmade texture and living warmth that machines cannot fully replace.

In addition to introducing China's intangible cultural heritage to the world, Liu's team is actively exploring digitization and sustainability, as well as engaging in international exchanges.

Last year, the team was invited to the UK for exhibitions and a cross-cultural dialogue between Jiangnan *tubu* and Scottish tartan, which have similarities in their checked patterns. The team also carried out fieldwork research in Thailand to learn about local textile techniques.

Eventually, they hope to bring Chinese heritage like *tubu* out of museums and into people's daily lives across the world.

"Design is no longer just decorative, but a way of cultural translation. It allows the world to see that Chinese heritage is still a living source of creativity, emotional memory and cultural confidence," says Liu.

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Silence Wang brings Mandarin songs to audiences across world

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Chinese singer-songwriter Wang Sulong, also known as Silence Wang, recently concluded his monthlong *Rise of Romance* world tour, marking a milestone in both his personal career and the growth of original Mandopop (Mandarin popular music).

Wang, born in Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province, graduated from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music. The 36-year-old, with 12 albums under his belt, has demonstrated extraordinary stamina by juggling multiple creative projects. January marked the conclusion of his concert series *One Hundred Thousand Volts 2.0*, while May will see the launch of his next tour, *Age of Romance*.

The addition of *Rise of Romance* to his calendar made 2026 a year unlike any other, with Wang achieving the rare feat of having three concert tours within a single year. These tours each have distinct themes, requiring different sets of stage designs, setlists and choreography.

In 2025, Wang was named one of "12 Artists Helping Mandopop Become the Next Global Genre" by grammy.com, alongside artists such as Jay Chou, G.E.M., JJ Lin and Jolin Tsai. Wang is also among the top Mandopop artists on Spotify, averaging nearly 2 million monthly listeners on the platform as of Monday.

Spanning 31 days across five cities in Asia, North America and Oceania, the *Rise of Romance* tour attracted more than 100,000 attendees with 11 sold-out performances. The tour debuted on Feb 27 at the Galaxy Arena in China's Macao Special Administrative Region. Wang performed three consecutive shows featuring innovative stage designs, including a custom-built roller coaster and a giant pink umbrella.

The production company invested heavily in these large-scale installations, knowing they wouldn't be reused for overseas venues, to ensure that each performance was a unique experience. With Macao setting the tone, Wang ventured across hemispheres, bringing Mandarin music to some of the world's most iconic arenas.





Above: Chinese singer-songwriter Wang Sulong, also known as Silence Wang, performs at the Rod Laver Arena in Melbourne on March 22 as part of the *Rise of Romance* world tour. **Right:** Wang at the Barclays Center in New York on March 7 wearing a traditional Chinese-style outfit featuring a peacock-feather motif. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In New York, Wang performed two back-to-back shows at the Barclays Center on March 7 and 8, becoming the first Chinese mainland singer to do this at the venue, according to his company. Due to high demand during ticket presales, organizers added a second show, with both concerts attracting more than 20,000 attendees.

Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena hosted Wang on March 21 and 22. During ticket presales, the number of people queuing online to purchase reached 140,000. The proportion of non-Chinese attendees saw an increase and Wang became the first Chinese mainland singer to hold two consecutive concerts at this venue, according to his company. The concert featured the global debut of his new album track, *My Answer*, fostering an emotional connection that transcended cultural boundaries.

The journey concluded with three consecutive nights at Singapore Indoor Stadium from March 27 to 29, making it the only overseas stop on the tour to feature three consecutive shows.

The *Rise of Romance* tour was not a replication of Wang's domestic concerts but a new production tailored for international audiences. As an independent narrative inspired by the concept of a "Romance City", the tour presented Mandarin music through storytelling and artistic exploration.

The setlists included hits such as *Ring of Time*, *Soul of the Sword*, *Legends of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dragon Hidden in the Mirror*, featuring traditional Chinese instruments. Songs including *Moli*, *Her Story*, *Just Want* and *How Can Love Be Wrong* were performed in collaboration with local musicians, complemented by adaptations that incorporated elements of local culture, delivering a surprise to the audience.

This attention to detail extended beyond the music. Wang's wardrobe also reflected his mission to promote Chinese culture and aesthetics internationally. During his debut in New York, he donned a traditional Chinese-style outfit crafted by Chinese designer Lan Yu. It featured an intricate peacock-feather motif, brought to life through the delicate art of Suzhou embroidery. As one of the four major Chinese silk embroidery styles, Suzhou embroidery is a nationally protected intangible cultural heritage. Under the glow of the stage lights, the patterns seemed to flow and shift with his every movement.

Throughout the tour, Wang managed to punctuate his performances with personal milestones, elevating the experience for fans. The Seattle performance on March 14 marked Wang's 100th concert. Enthusiastic audiences attended despite the area being affected by a snowstorm. As a gesture of gratitude to his fans, he performed an additional song, *Fine*, and shared stories about how his fans braved the elements to see him live.

Wang's achievements with *Rise of Romance* signal a step forward for Mandarin music's journey abroad. Wang believes that "good music knows no time difference". Whether through mesmerizing stage designs, culturally rich performances or creative adaptations of his music, Wang proved that exceptional artistry has the power to transcend borders, languages and time, leaving echoes of its beauty wherever it touches.

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