Huang Changping  
China  |  Metal Jewelry

Exceptionally crafted silver adornments and traditions continued

“Miao minority people are fond of silver wares and both men and women love to adorn themselves with silver accessories,” says master silversmith Huang Changping. As early as the Ming Dynasty, Miao people have been known for their silver adornments and the tradition continues with the creation of jewelry, belts, pipes, housewares, and even hats made of silver. In Miao society, young men learn silversmithing around 15 years of age and those who master the craft are greatly respected and admired. Huang learned the art of silversmithing from his father, Huang Guangwen, an award-winning craftsman who has now retired from the business.

Huang is considered among the top silversmiths in the Miao region and now runs the family workshop founded by his father. He notes that artists like himself, and the men in his family, are facing a crisis due to easy internet access to machine-made silver wares. “This is a huge challenge to traditional folk artists,” he says. Hand craftsmanship has become “a paradox—everyone knows it’s beautiful but they are not willing to support it.” He believes the expert craftsmanship of his wares shines through and people will again respect his devotion to the beauty of traditional Miao silver art.

The Miao silversmith buys 99.9%-silver bricks as raw material, and then recasts the silver according to its intended use. “White copper”, an alloy of copper with zinc and nickel added to give the appearance of silver, can also be used. Miao silversmiths make their artwork by hand in their traditional way, generally a nine-step process. “The patterns carved on the silver collars and bracelets are all made by hand, and each silversmith uses more than 200 different models of engravers,” explains Huang.