

## AROUND NANJING

# ‘Business card of the city’

The ancient art of Yunjin remains popular throughout China and influenced the design of the Games medals

By XU JINGXI

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**N**anjing Yunjin brocade can be seen everywhere at the Nanjing Youth Olympic Games. A large loom has been placed in the main press center for reporters from around the globe to have a try at the craftsmanship that was placed by UNESCO in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Professional weavers will also use the big machine to make two pieces by the end of the Nanjing YOG — one will feature the Olympic rings and the other a lion, an auspicious beast in traditional Chinese culture.

The popular brocade cloud pattern has been incorporated into the designs of the Games medals and the uniforms of volunteers and venue staff. Merchandise made of tapestry should prove to be very popular in souvenir shops.

“Nanjing Yunjin has become a business card for the city,” said Wang Baolin, curator of Nanjing Yunjin Museum and chairman of Nanjing Yunjin Research Institute.

“Jacques Rogge, then president of the International Olympic Committee, visited the museum in 2010 and was wowed by the beauty of Yunjin. He said that athletes and sports officials from all over the world should visit the museum when they come to Nanjing to attend the YOG.”

The Nanjing government awarded the museum a certificate of commendation for its efforts in helping the city win the right to host the YOG.

The story of Chinese-Norwegian Guo Yaxiang and her Norwegian husband, Arild Hagen, is a perfect illustration of how much Nanjing Yunjin impresses foreigners.

Hagen, then an anchorman of the Norway National Broadcast TV station, had been fascinated by Chinese silk before he



came to Nanjing with his wife in 1998, looking for an ancient wooden loom for a documentary about China.

The Norwegian cried out excitedly “That’s it!” when he saw the big Jacquard loom in the Nanjing Yunjin Research Institute. During filming, the couple were enchanted by the weavers’ skills and the splendor of the fabrics.

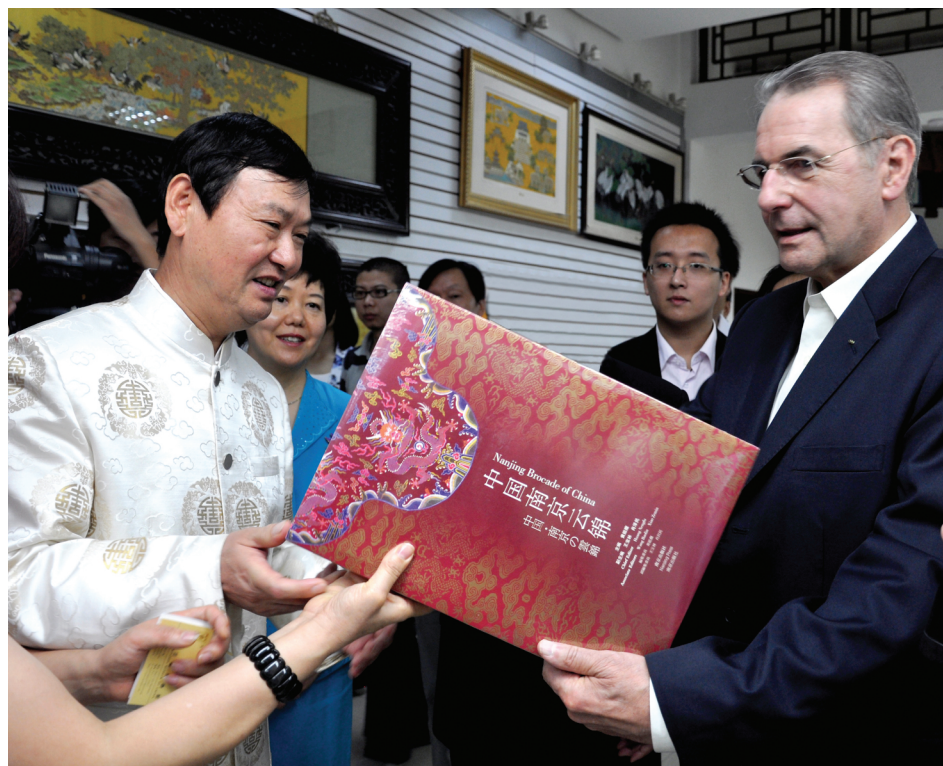
So were Norwegian audiences when they saw the documentary in 2001. Long lines formed at the entrance to the exhibition hall at the University of Oslo to see the loom, which also included Queen Sonja of Norway.

Guo kept the loom after the three-month exhibition, hoping that one day she could display it in a showroom in Norway highlighting Nanjing Yunjin.

Her dream came true in 2009 after



A worker shows journalists and reporters how to use traditional looms to produce Nanjing Yunjin at the Media Press Center of the Youth Olympic Games. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY



Wang Baolin (left), curator of Nanjing Yunjin Museum, shows a book of the local art to then IOC president Jacques Rogge in 2010. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

she and her husband quit their jobs and opened a showroom in a manor 100 kilometers away from Oslo.

Besides the giant loom, the Nanjing Yunjin Research Institute has also provided brocade textiles for display, including a dragon robe.

“We send weavers to the showroom in Norway to show off their skills to audiences every year. We are going to send our staff to Norway in September to exchange techniques with their local wool-spinning professionals,” said Wang.

“Nanjing Yunjin has shown its strong vitality, having survived dynastic subrogation. It’s our duty to pass the craftsmanship along,” he said.

The guild of Nanjing Yunjin has established partnerships with local universities and colleges to organize Yunjin design competitions in pursuit of innovative ideas from young people.

“On the one hand, it helps pass along Nanjing Yunjin craftsmanship; on the other, it benefits the development of new products,” Wang said.

The guild was established in December 2013 with the purpose of regulating the Yunjin market, where “there are too many fake and low-quality products now,” said Wang.

“The guild will regulate the quality of Nanjing Yunjin in the market with national standards and issue a trademark to certify the quality,” he said.

## IF YOU GO

8 am-5:30 pm, **Nanjing Yunjin Museum**, 240 Chating East Street, 025-86563710.

## A rich history of complex looming

Nanjing Yunjin tapestry dates back almost 1,600 years. The traditional Jacquard silk patterns are as various and as beautiful as the clouds in the sky, hence the name “Yunjin”, which means “cloud-pattern brocade” in Chinese.

Yunjin is the only silk textile still handmade and its production cannot be replaced with modern machines, according to Wang Baolin, curator of Nanjing Yunjin Museum and chairman of the Nanjing Yunjin Research Institute.

The Chinese tradition of weaving Nanjing Yunjin requires two craftspeople to operate the upper and lower parts of a complicated loom 5.6 meters long, 1.4m wide and 4m high. They incorporate luxurious materials such as gold, silk and peacock feather yarn.

Preserved in Nanjing, in East China’s Jiangsu province, the method comprises more than 100 procedures, including drafting patterns, creating Jacquard cards for programming weaving patterns, dressing the loom and many stages of weaving itself.

Weavers sing ballads that remind them of the techniques while they pass the warp and split the weft, enhancing a cooperative and artistic atmosphere at the loom.

“It shows Chinese people’s craftsmanship in that they can produce such exquisite Yunjin with a primitive machine,” Wang said.

The brocade had been produced only for the royal family before late in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), when the products were also sold to common citizens. Today, it is primarily sold as high-end attire and souvenirs.

— XU JINGXI