

# Words and music fit sartorial theme

Songwriter who became an ambassador for Han traditional clothing sees it as his duty to promote Chinese cultural confidence

By XING WEN

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**S**un Yi reckons that nostalgia runs in his blood, one of his fortes being composing soppy long songs and songs about lost youth.

"I like listening to traditional folk songs and classical music, which has affected my works to a large extent," said Sun, 44.

When he was a student at Sichuan University in Southwest China in the 1990s, he said, he tended to express his emotions through melodies and lyrics after he taught himself how to play the guitar.

So who better to be an ambassador for that ultimate walk down memory lane, the *hanfu* movement?

Sun is well known among *tongpao*, aficionados of Han traditional clothing, for having produced a series of *hanfu*-themed songs and being a pioneer in opening physical stores selling *hanfu* in China.

However, 15 years ago he was a little more in the mainstream, coming to wide public notice by composing and singing *Xiao San He Xian* ("Minor triad"), a song that became popular online in China, and then landing a contract with a record company.

Though the reserved young man often seemed self-conscious in pub-



Sun Yi, 44, has produced a series of *hanfu*-themed songs, and he is a pioneer in opening stores selling *hanfu* in China.

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lic, he found it easy to be in the public eye, he said. His first songs, performed in talent shows, had won him popularity at university, and he used to sing part-time in bars.

After he graduated, he landed what many would have regarded as a highly desirable job with a State-owned company, but he threw that in a couple of years later to devote himself to singing and composing.

In 2004, after his success with *Xiao San He Xian* and signing the recording contract, he came across discussions about Han clothing on the online forum *hanchc.com*.

At the time, there was debate in China about the need for a traditional garment embodying the uniqueness and antiquity of Chinese culture in the same way that the *kimono* does in Japan and the *hanbok* does in Korea.

People started to use the term *hanfu* to distinguish the traditional clothes of Han from other ethnic groups and discuss online the history and cultural connotation of *hanfu*.

"It sparked my interest in the traditional stuff," Sun said. "As Han people I felt we had responsibility to restore it."

One day he saw a poem by a forum participant that impressed him and

he adapted it into lyrics and composed a *hanfu*-themed song.

For *hanfu* aficionados, that song, *Chong Hui Han Tang* ("Dating back to the Han and Tang dynasties"), a paean to their culture, became a hit.

Later he composed a series of songs related to *hanfu* that also struck a responsive chord with *hanfu* lovers.

Sun now insists on dressing in *hanfu* when he performs onstage, saying the attire bears the spirit and civilization of Han, and thus Chinese, people.

His wife Lyu Xiaowei has also become a *tongpao* (*hanfu* lover), and they opened a *hanfu* shop called *Chong Hui Han Tang* in Chengdu, Sichuan's capital, in 2006. It is believed to have been the first physical *hanfu* store in China.

Playing music is now a hobby, he said, while developing *hanfu* is "my inescapable duty".

The couple now own 18 physical stores across China and an online store on *tmall.com*, and last year the value of sales of 10 *hanfu* stores on the online shopping platform *Taobao* totaled 100 million yuan (\$15.8 million), Sun said.

"I am very happy to have seen these changes over the past 10 years. As the government highlights the need for China to bolster its confidence in its culture and traditions, now is a good time to further develop *hanfu*."

## Adapting tradition to modern living

*Hanfu* fashion aficionados have made it their mission to give the style a higher profile and wider influence

By XING WEN

For at least three connoisseurs of Han attire, wearing *hanyuansu*, a kind of modern dress featuring *hanfu* style, is an acceptable choice for daily life.

The *hanyuansu* dress was designed to adapt the traditional *hanfu* to modern living by applying the main characteristics of *hanfu* in the design of vogue clothes, which has raised the profile of *hanfu* and expanded its influence.

"For me, dressing up in a traditional *hanfu* outfit with wide sleeves is not that practical or comfortable," said Liu Yinhong, founder of the website *hanfuhui.cn*. However, he said he insists on wearing standard *hanfu* on formal occasions, such as the celebration of traditional festivals and weddings.

"*Hanyuansu* is a more practical and fashionable choice for casual wear."

Wang Tianjiao of East China's Shandong province, who is an afi-



Models dressed in *hanfu* for the brand Han Ke Si Lu.

cionado of *hanfu*, and Chen Suyue, who has produced a comic book that has its characters dressed in *hanfu*, largely share Liu's view.

Xu Hui, founder of the *hanfu* brand Han Ke Si Lu, is well known among *hanfu* lovers for making exquisite clothes that were prevalent during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Choosing *hanfu* as wedding garb has become popular among *hanfu* lovers, so the best-sellers in his shop on *Taobao.com* are red.

Xu, 41, graduated from East China's Zhejiang Institute of Silk Textile, now known as Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, and has run his own business in the textile industry for nearly 20 years.

His love for *hanfu* comes from his passion for analyzing traditional textile techniques, he said.

In university he specialized in textile materials and design, and he became engrossed in archaeological reports of the tombs of emperors and nobles in ancient China, especially the Ming Tombs.

"I was captivated by the fineness of the brocade in the Ming Dynasty. What I wanted to do was to try to get closer to the beauty of our national dress."

As he had jacquard making machines in his workshop, he tried to restore Ming Dynasty *hanfu*, and started his own brand.

The pattern designs on the fabrics of *hanfu* during the Ming Dynasty varied among different social classes, he said, and he strictly follows the pattern designs in the replicas he makes.

"However, it's hard to weave a garment exactly the same as the relics, because the machines we use today are different to the ancient ones."

His business is both a driver and beneficiary of the rise of *hanfu* fashion.

Chu Yan, chief costume designer for leaders at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum leaders' meeting in Beijing in 2014, studied traditional culture for many years and has created stylish clothes with a fusion of characteristics of traditional Chinese costume.

"Costume is one of the carriers of our culture, especially on some international occasions," she said.

In the context of consolidating Chinese people's cultural confidence, Han people are seeking an identity for their culture, and the public is trying to find a visible cultural symbol to show the country's uniqueness, she said. That could partly explain the *hanfu* renaissance.

"The elegance and beauty embodied in the fabrics, pattern designs and colors of *hanfu* cannot be replaced by fast fashion. We should take advantage of it instead of just following Western fashion trends."