



The carpenter who wouldn't retire

Visitors spellbound by 83-year-old's exquisite miniature handicrafts
迷你工藝 精彩奪「木」



Eighty-three year-old carpenter Liu Hsin-hsiang in Hsinchu County keeps busy in his retirement, and although he suffers from presbyopia, a condition that causes blurred vision among the elderly, he makes models of traditional furniture, farm tools and items for daily use at a scale of 10:1. Though small, these models are all functional. Liu does not sell his work, which is intended to be left to posterity as a memento of Taiwan's traditional farm life.

Liu, who retired at 55, could not leave the handicraft that he had spent half a century working on. In the beginning, he only made some pretty small art works to please himself and others, but then he realized that fewer and fewer people were engaged in traditional agriculture and that traditional farming tools began to disappear. He therefore started to make miniature wooden farming tools, and he became more interested the more he did. He soon became "The carpenter who doesn't retire" with everyone in Guansi Township in Hsinchu County.

Whether he is making millstones, ploughs or rakes, they are all fully functional. He doesn't feel that his products are beautiful decorations, but really wants to pass them onto the next generation. That's why, though small, every piece has all the functions it should have.

After gaining new insights from making these farming tools, Liu, who wants to preserve Hakka culture, turned to making traditional Hakka furniture and items for daily use. Using his handicraft, he has made functional traditional Hakka furniture such as wardrobes, cabinets for plates and pots, chairs and knife racks. The doors of cabinets and wardrobes can be opened, and pot cabinet doors have net doors made of real nets to improve air circulation.

Many people cannot believe that these wooden handicraft articles that require such detail and concentration are made by someone so old, but apart from his presbyopia, Liu is still nimble. He feels an urgency to what he does and refuses to give in to old age. His pieces get smaller and more delicate, and his effort can be seen in the carvings on the cabinet doors.

Some people have offered large sums of money because they want to collect Liu's pieces, but Liu, who

thinks they should be left for the next generation, hasn't sold a single piece. The small living room in his home is full of these miniature works of art and often takes visitors by surprise.

(LIBERTY TIMES, TRANSLATED BY PERRY SVENSSON)

新竹縣八十三歲老木工劉信祥退而不休，已經老花眼的他專做十分之一迷你比例的老式家具、農具、生活用品，這些作品雖小但都能使用，而且全都不賣，他要為台灣早期農業生活留下歷史見證。

本來在五十五歲已經退休的劉信祥，放不下自己做了半世紀的木工手藝，手癢的他起初只是做些漂亮的小工藝品自娛娛人，後來他發現從事傳統農業的人越來越少，傳統農具即將失傳，乾脆改做迷你版的木製農具，而且越做越有興趣，成了新竹縣關西鎮人人都知道的「老不休木工」。

劉信祥做這些迷你版的農具，不論是磨盤、犁、耙，都跟真的一樣可以用；他認為，自己做的不是好看的裝飾品，而是真的要留給後代子孫看的實物，所以東西雖然小，卻不能假，該有的功能一樣都不能缺。

做農具做出心得後，同樣心繫客家文化保存的劉信祥，轉到傳統客家家庭的家具和生活用品上；靠著純熟的手藝，他做出古早客家家庭常見可用的衣櫥、碗櫥、書桌椅、菜刀架，而且櫥門都是可以開關的，碗櫥為了通風防蠅用的紗窗，也是真正用紗網下去做的。

很多人不相信這些需要十分專注才能做好的迷你木工藝品，是出自一個高齡老人之手，但其實劉信祥除了眼睛有些老花外，手腳都還很靈活，而且求好心切的他越老越不服老，東西越做越精緻，從衣櫥門上的雕花就可以看出他有多用心。

有人獲悉後想出高價收購典藏，但劉信祥認為這些東西是要給後代子孫的，所以一件都沒賣，他家的小小客廳擺滿了這些迷你木工藝品，常讓登門的客人大開眼界。（自由時報記者蔡孟尚攝）

Undated photos taken at the home of 83-year-old carpenter Liu Hsin-hsiang in Hsinchu County show drawings for one of his pieces, inset top, a miniature food steamer with a net of braided bamboo to let steam through, inset bottom, and Liu demonstrating a fully functioning miniature millstone, left.

PHOTOS: TSAI MENG-SHANG, LIBERTY TIMES

在新竹縣八十三歲木工劉信祥家中拍攝的這些未註名日期照片分別是：劉信祥某作品的設計草圖（嵌圖上）；內有竹編透氣網架的迷你蒸籠（嵌圖下）；劉信祥示範真能轉動碾穀的迷你土磨（左圖）。

照片：自由時報記者蔡孟尚攝