

# The Status Quo and Inheritance of the Traditional Handmade Silverware of the She Nationality in the Eastern Fujian Region

Jiayu Chen

College of Art and Design

Fuzhou University of International Studies and Trade  
Fuzhou, China

**Abstract**—The She people are mostly distributed in the southeast coast of China. They are an indispensable and important member of the multi-ethnic family in China. The long history of the nation has precipitated the unique internal and aesthetic taste of the She culture. She nationality in the eastern Fujian refer to the She people communities distributed in the northeastern part of Fujian, including the Fuzhou city and Ningde city. The two places' dialects belong to the eastern Fujian language family. With the rapid development of China's coastal areas, it has effects on the She nationality communities in eastern Fujian. As a symbol of the She culture, the She silver accessories, which are increasingly open and best reflects the local ethnic customs, have created new value in the new era. In view of the reality of the inheritance crisis of She nationality's silver jewelry crafts in eastern Fujian region, this paper tries to explore the cultural connotation of She silver jewelry and revitalize the new vitality of national intangible cultural heritage by exploring the development and application of She silver accessories.

**Keywords**—*She nationality; silver accessories; arts and crafts; eastern Fujian region*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The She nationality, as an ancient southern cultivating nation, migrated from the Fenghuang Mountain in Chaozhou City, Guangdong Province to Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Anhui and other provinces.<sup>1</sup> The She nationality spreads and multiplies, and the silver accessories crafts of the She people were also passed down from generation to generation, painting a beautiful picture that is colorful and has a long history. Along with the large number of She people living in Fujian, the She nationality's silver accessories in the eastern Fujian gradually entered the booming era of demand. And their production techniques were not limited to the transfer of skills within the nation, but also widely spread among folk artists. Only in Fu'an, according to the Ming Dynasty Wanli period "Fu'an County Annals", during the Xuande period in Ming Dynasty, there were sayings like "three thousand

visitors, 40,000 silver makers". The production of folk silver accessories was flourishing.

The people love the silver accessories, which not only symbolize the aspirations of good fortune, but also closely connect the relationship between She people and the silver accessories in the actual production and life of the people, the birth of the baby, the wedding and funeral, and the national festival. Especially in the She wedding ceremony, the girls wear silver accessories as indispensable dowries to marry. According to the "Fu'an She Ethnography", in the traditional wedding supplies of the family, "bride jewelry is 1 pair of silver earrings, 1 pair of silver bracelets, 4 silver rings, 1 silver enamel", which can be seen the worship for She nationality to the silver accessories. When referring to the She nationality in eastern Fujian, people who are familiar with it will first think of "Phoenix costume". As a symbol of the cultural characteristics of the She nationality, the most important thing in the Phoenix installation is the "ribbon" of silver accessories. The ribbon is not only a clothing silver accessory, but also an auspicious token containing rich folk customs, representing the most exquisite weaving process of the She nationality. Silver accessories are also indispensable accessories in the Phoenix, mainly including flat buckles, phoenix crown silver accessories, spiral earrings, circle bracelets, and arch-shaped rings with bells. The sleek and exquisite silver accessories occupy an important position in the daily life of the She people. They are the best reflection of the artistic talents of the She people. They are also the decorations most loved by the people of the nationality, and inseparable with the daily production and life of the local people, religious sacrifices, and marriage, housewarming and other life events.

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA OF THE TRADITIONAL CRAFTS OF SHE NATIONALITY SILVER ACCESSORIES IN EASTERN FUJIAN

### A. *The Development Process Is Interrupted, and the Traditional Craftsmanship Is Fading*

The She nationality's silver accessories are the product of the historical accumulation of the She people's long-term farming era lifestyle and production culture. As a living

<sup>1</sup> Lin Qinyu, An Analysis of the Cultural Connotation of the She Nationality's Silver Ornaments: A Case Study of Fu'an in East Fujian [J] Journal of Hunan Tax College, 2013 (06).

instrument with a very large demand, it is easily replaced by industrialized products in the process of industrialization in the era of handicraft industry, and becomes a memory and symbol of the historical culture of the exhibition. After being separated from practical use, most of the traditional handicrafts are transformed into indoor and outdoor furnishings or ornamental products. The price is high and faces a severe crisis of survival. The demise of the traditional craftsmanship is also inevitable.

#### B. *The Lack of "Modernity" of Handicraft Products in the Context of Modernization*

With the rapid development of technology and process technology, modern handicraft products focus on high production and high performance. There is a serious lack of "modernity" in the hand-made silverware of She nationality in eastern Fujian. More generally, most of their manual products are only in production during the modernization process. The way of the field has been revolutionized, using machines instead of manuals, reducing production costs and increasing production and efficiency. However, this is not a modern handicraft product that modern society needs. What most manufacturers do is to use machines to produce ancient-style handicraft products, which is not the modernization of handicraft products. The shapes and styles of all kinds of silver accessories of the She nationality in the eastern Fujian reflect the unique values and aesthetic tastes of the nation, and reflect the skills, culture and art of each period in the historical development process. From the agricultural society to the modern society, the survival skills and production methods have undergone tremendous changes. The aesthetic taste of modern people is also strongly demanding the design innovation of the She nationality hand-made silver ornaments in eastern Fujian. The innovative elements that incorporate the sense of the times are the energy and development direction of the hand-made silverware of the She nationality in eastern Fujian.

### III. THE HISTORICAL VALUE AND INHERITANCE OF SHE NATIONALITY SILVER ACCESSORIES

#### A. *Silver Accessories Types and Ribbon Patterns*

There are many kinds of silver accessories of She nationality in eastern Fujian, and the patterns are various.<sup>2</sup> They can be divided into headwear, face ornaments, chest and neck ornaments, hand ornaments, clothing, waist ornaments and foot ornaments. Most of the wearers are women and children. They will wear the accessories every grant folk festival, such as the February 2nd "Family Festival" and the March 3rd "Black Rice Festival". At that time, the She people dressed in costumes, singing and dancing, visiting relatives and friends, and indulging in happiness. According to the different patterns, the ribbons can be divided into three categories, including the pattern of the intentional way, such as the sawtooth wavy "rat tooth", which is metaphorized as invincible and tenacious; some of

the texture of Chinese characters is similar to the oracle characters' shape, such as "正", indicating the meaning of the beginning; geometric deformation of the texture, such as "𠂇", means the sun is running, meaning the respect of the sun.

#### B. *The Cultural Symbolic Meaning of Silver Accessories*

All kinds of silver accessories of the She people of eastern Fujian are a yearning for a better life, and they also carry a wishful and auspicious feeling. For example, when a child is at full moon, silver bells and silver bracelets are used as gifts, which means that children are expected to be sheltered and wish to grow up healthily; wearing silver accessories in adulthood symbolizes a lot of privileges; silver bracelets, silver rings, silver hairpins decorated during marriage indicate that the newly-married couples will have a good life; wearing silver accessories when doing the tomb symbolizes the prosperity of the family and welfare. Among them, the production process of the silver phoenix crown is full of the reverence of the She nationality in the eastern Fujian. The traditional silver phoenix crown is mainly composed of the phoenix image with wings flying high, and it is equipped with dozens of small silver ornaments. It is decorated with double dragons, butterflies, flowers, fish birds and other patterns that represent different meanings. The bride's microsteps make the silver bells ring, which means "the phoenix takes the boys and the grandsons", and the family is prosperous. The phoenix of the wings is adorned with a silver ring, and the silverfish is decorated underneath, which means that the sons and daughters are diligent and keep their homes, and there will be balance outstanding every year, passing down from generation to generation. The styling of silverware is ever-changing, and the patterns of silver ornaments are rich and varied. They all pinpoint the simple feelings of the She nationality in the eastern Fujian, and also endow the ethnic culture of the She silver accessories in the eastern Fujian. Because of the long-term residence between the mountains and forests, hunting life is the main productive labor for the She people to survive. In addition, poultry, livestock, etc. are also very familiar with the habits of these animals. The She people often use the sika deer, lion and other animals to represent the pure and strong quality of the people, and use birds like magpies, bats, butterflies and other birds to represent vivid and active. The graceful shape of the butterfly, the pattern of flying and dancing, is often used as a reproductive protection god and is embroidered on the female apron. The animals in the belief custom are mostly positive side, commonly using dogs, tigers, foxes, etc. Most of them are divine and mediumistic, meaning that they pray for peace. The combination of these animal patterns and plant flower patterns indicates the auspicious patterns such as "red phoenix in morning sun", "phoenix in the peony" and "the dear's fortune stretching long and unbroken". It can also be seen from various animal patterns that people not only want to tame animals in reality, but even in their interactions with ghosts and gods, they still keep a strong sense of control over the objective world, such as using paper tigers (such as white tigers) as the carrier of divine power, which reflects the original mentality of the She people. There are also patterns of dog teeth, zigzag, circle, water waves, etc. The main ornamentation of the She

<sup>2</sup> Ye Hua, Artistic Characteristic of Folk Arts of She Nationality in Jingning [J] Journal of Sichuan University of Science & Engineering: Social Sciences Edition, 2007 (04).

nationality silver accessories is often extracted. As a minority element with high recognition, it is used in various decorative designs. When used in various conceptual clothing designs, it usually takes the intimacy and worship to the natural creatures and natural phenomena such as the sun, the moon, the mountains and the giant rivers.

#### IV. DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION OF TRADITIONAL HANDMADE SILVER ACCESSORIES OF THE EASTERN FUJIAN SHE NATIONALITY IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

##### A. Modeling Patterns and Materials

The traditional crafts of She nationality in eastern Fujian mainly include weaving, embroidering and splicing. Combined with modern garment technology, it will enrich its craftsmanship, present more diversified effects, achieve continuous innovation and development, and adapt to modern aesthetic expression. In the design of modern clothing fabrics, it can be learned from the imitation of the She nationality's patterns, and apply the patterns of the eastern Fujian She nationality ethnic group to the clothing design through printing techniques such as direct printing, discharge printing and anti-dye printing. The materials are still mainly silk thread, cotton yarn and ramie thread. It can further express and inherit the original national characteristics of the She people.

##### B. Production Methods and Business Models

The craftsmanship of the eastern Fujian She nationality silver accessories is complex and exquisite. The whole process is made by more than 30 craftsmen. The craftsmanship is summarized as the five manual processes of "modeling, chiseling, shifting, carving and covering". The unique craftsmanship of engraving, embossing, round carving and hollow carvings are rich in style and delicate in craftsmanship. In the above-mentioned highly-characteristic five-character technique, "modeling" means shaping, that is, the process of inserting silver into the tin mold, melting the silver material, and then making the silver into the strip, sheet, wire and so on. "Chiseling" is a process of using a variety of metal chisels to deal with uneven and rest materials, drawing silver wire as well-balanced and delicately shaped. When silver or silver bars are prepared to a certain amount, according to the pattern, the craftsman further processes the strips, sheets, and wires to make them have the basic shape of the silver accessories' parts. The process of partially displacing the initially formed preliminary product from the formwork is called "shifting". Using various delicate tools to engrave the silver into pattern ornamentation and highlight the shape is called "carving". "Covering" is the draping, and decorating the silver is the process. First, it will be needed to point the glaze along with the wine on the key points, and fire it with a blowpipe blowing the fire. Whether the point and the burnt green and blue color are even and beautiful is mastered by the craftsman according to the experience. The skill level of the craftsman is displayed in this link, which is the process of the craftsman's artistic talent in the accessories.

Compared with the beauty of Miao silver, the silver accessories of the eastern Fujian She people are relatively simple, but the exquisite craftsmanship is no less than the former.<sup>3</sup> The superb craftsmanship made of silver and silver accessories have been selected into China's precious intangible cultural heritage. The silver-blue technique in the silver-making technology of the She people in eastern Fujian is a must, requiring the craftsmen to manually complete more than 30 procedures. The silversmiths melt the original materials by a high-temperature furnace, then pour the silver water into the model and press it into a rough product. They gradually carry out various processes to make the silver finely crafted. The manual operation is the main production method of the traditional eastern Fujian She nationality silverware craftsmanship. All of them show the national style of the eastern Fujian She nationality silverware craftsmanship and represent the highest processing level of its metal craft.

At present, the "Zhenhuatang", which inherits the silverware craftsmanship of the eastern Fujian She nationality, is well known in the commercial development. Its silver carving craftsmanship originated from the pulse of the great silversmith Zhu Bishan in the Yuan Dynasty. "Zhenhuatang" silverware, by controlling the purity of silver material and the thickness of silver base with modern technology, enhances the ductility of silver material. In the process, it pursues the inheritance and development of the pure and mysterious texture of the eastern Fujian She nationality culture. In terms of design and styling, combined with the aesthetic taste of contemporary people, it enhances the sense of style, fashion and decoration of silverware. In the preservation of silver jewelry, it uses modern technology to further polish and clean the surface of silverware. In the color performance of silver accessories, it partially uses the silver-blue technique of the eastern Fujian She nationality to maintain the natural color of the silverware, which plays a role in preventing oxidation and corrosion. The Zhenhuatang silverware, which inherits the superb skills, can be used to express the skill level of the metal forging of the She nationality in the eastern Fujian. It is listed by the Ministry of Culture in the "third national intangible cultural heritage list", especially the works of the She phoenix silver accessories. "Phoenix Crown" also represented the Chinese She silverware in the Shanghai World Expo and displayed the Chinese Arts and Crafts Museum.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The silver accessories of eastern Fujian She nationality are rich in cultural connotation, beautiful in meaning, and have a long history of manufacturing technique. In the current stage of development, the excavation of the deep connotation of the silver accessories of the eastern Fujian She nationality, and the use of pattern elements in the design of goods, can meet the current visual needs of the retro beauty of the oriental people with considerable commercial development value. In terms of inheritance and development,

<sup>3</sup> Chen Jimou, Ingenious Description, Natural Wit [J], Fujian Arts, 2009, (2): 32.

first of all, through the use of contemporary fashion media carriers, the use of increased exposure, innovative design of the She nationality silver accessories, bold restructuring of the color, it can make the silver accessories younger, more fashionable, combined with modern aesthetics to display in front of the public, so that more people can understand and love silver accessories. Secondly, it will integrate technology frontiers and open up new fields. Holographic 3D scanners and 3D printers will display the design and the products with barrier-free. It is efficient and in line with modern individual needs with the most advanced and cutting-edge integration, which will inject more vitality to the She nationality silver accessories in the eastern Fujian. Thirdly, in the development of the She nationality silver accessories industry in eastern Fujian, it is necessary to be supported by some government policies and fund to build a research and development base for the She nationality silver accessories in the eastern Fujian, support the establishment of the Intangible Cultural Heritage — the Eastern Fujian She Nationality Silver Jewelry Technology R&D Center and the cultural industry demonstration park integrating silver processing, exhibition, marketing and other projects, and create a cultural and creative industrial park integrating industrial tourism, creative design, display transactions and other tourism elements and forms. Finally, the leading enterprises of the eastern Fujian She nationality silver accessories should bear the burden of inheritance and development. Together with the local government departments, they need to contribute to the cultivation of the craftsmanship of the eastern Fujian She nationality silver accessories, and create a collaboration platform for mentoring and apprenticeship. Cultivating the learning with working, it is aimed at passing on this superb excellence in silversmithing skills and carrying forward the spirit of innovation. The above suggestions, while applying the development of the silver accessories in eastern Fujian, can pay attention to and protect the national intangible cultural heritage.

In summary, with the rise of the tourism project industry in the eastern Fujian, the She nationality silver accessories are increasingly regarded as a commodity with considerable cultural value. The situation of the blockade faced by the She silver accessories have gradually opened. In order to protect and develop the minority culture that is vulnerable to the impact of contemporary industry and commerce, it is necessary to develop its modern commercial value through the interpretation of the cultural connotation of the She nationality silver accessories. Only by making progress and achievements in the business, it can be required and recognized by the market. Further inheritance and innovation of its traditional craftsmanship can create goods that reflect the great historical heritage of the great She people and their unique values, aesthetics and the wisdom in the eastern Fujian. The She nationality silver accessories in the eastern Fujian will be the unique cultural gene of the She people, and it will be continuously passed down.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Lin Qinyu, An Analysis of the Cultural Connotation of the She Nationality's Silver Accessories: A Case Study of Fu'an in East Fujian [J] *Journal of Hunan Tax College*, 2013 (06). (in Chinese)
- [2] Ye Hua, Artistic Characteristic of Folk Arts of She Nationality in Jingning [J] *Journal of Sichuan University of Science & Engineering: Social Sciences Edition*, 2007 (04). (in Chinese)
- [3] Chen Jimou, Ingenious Description, Natural Wit [J] *Fujian Arts*, 2009, (2): 32. (in Chinese)