

# Methods of Innovative Application of Miao Costume Elements in Modern Costume\*

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**Abstract**—By researching the representative costume works with innovative application of Miao costume elements in the recent years, analyzing the methods of innovative application of traditional costume patterns, accessories and fabrics of Miao nationality in modern costume and summarizing the characters and key points of different design methods, this paper expounds the method of combining traditional national culture and modern aesthetic consciousness. The aim is to accommodate the modern works enriched with traditional national culture and cultural spirit to modern people's aesthetic direction and spirituality. This will contribute to the inheritance and spread of traditional national art and culture in modern society.

**Keywords**—Miao costume; traditional elements; modern costume design

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing cultural exchange among different countries and the continuous development of modern costume industry, consumers have more freedom to choose their costume; the limit of region, culture and environment becomes vague gradually. In this case, the method of inheriting and spreading traditional costume culture of China will be an issue to be researched continuously.

There are various minorities in China. Their diversified historical background, dwelling environment, living habits, conventions and festivals reflect their abundant cultural patterns. Each nationality has its own method of recording cultural tradition to inherit quintessence of the nationality from generation to generation. As for Miao nationality that developed from ancient time and migrated constantly in history, its culture change and custom inheritance following time is like a "history book" that tells its cultural characteristics and the whole process of forming national tradition. At the same time, it reflects the staged social change and environmental development in China from side. Therefore, it has great research value. Miao does not have its own characters. Besides its fairy tales and historical legends word-of-mouth, costume art rose in response to the proper time and replaced characters to record life. The costume art was born in the long history and developed in the evolution of culture, environment and society. The population size of

Miao ranks the fifth among that of minorities in China. There are more than 200 costume patters. In costume art, the absolutely fabulous color matching, various patterns and traditional handicraft inherited from generation to generation become the treasures in traditional national culture and attract Chinese and foreign scholars and costume designers to study and research.

In the latest years, more and more Chinese and foreign costume designers focus on adding traditional elements in modern costume and putting traditional national elements in the daily life of modern people. By researching the representative costume works with innovative application of Miao elements in the latest years, this paper analyzes and summarizes the methods of innovative application of the traditional costume elements of Miao nationality in the three perspectives of Miao costume pattern, costume accessory and fabric craftsmanship.

## II. THE INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF MIAO COSTUME PATTERNS

The costume pattern art of minorities is the product of their folk culture. Its remarkable achievements in the history of national culture and art have surpassed its functions as a common tool in specific time. The costume patterns actively promote the cultural connotation of modern costume design and supply abundant artistic nutrition for our reference and innovation [1].

The history of Miao nationality is long and its costume culture has great research value. The costume patters of Miao are the typical visual symbols binding the artistic and cultural characters of national costume. It is regarded as the epitome of Miao's particular culture.

The costume patterns of Miao nationality involve wide fields. They come from people's daily life of the nationality, including the scenery, animals, plants and the touching legends & fairy tales told from their childhood. "Fig. 1" shows the representative traditional costume pattern of Miao nationality — bird pattern. In the fairy tales of Miao told from generation to generation, god bird and butterfly created the world and brought welfare to the people. Therefore, the people of Miao nationality regard bird and butterfly as their ancestors and adore them. Later, it evolved to be totem worship. "Bird costume" is seen as "sacred garment" in some regions of Miao. In some sacrifice activities and

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significant festivals, people may wear it. In daily life and production, bird pattern can be often seen on silver ornament, costume, embroidery and wax printing artwork. Butterfly pattern is also the typical pattern of Miao and it can be seen on jewelry and costume of Miao. The Miao people reverently call butterfly “butterfly mum”. In pattern modeling, “butterfly mum” is put in the middle of pattern, which is most typical; the patterns of bird, dragon and maple surround it. The entirety of pattern is radiate or centripetal. This pattern can be often seen on the baby carrier of Miao female to imply ancestor’s protection given to child and pray for healthy growth of child [2].

Besides bird pattern and butterfly pattern, the representative traditional patterns of Miao nationality include dragon pattern, fish pattern, sun pattern, bronze drum pattern, flower pattern and geometrical pattern. Each pattern has its special symbolic meaning, reflecting Miao people’s religious idea of gold worship and totem worship and their praise to and yearning for happy life. As the treasures of Miao nationality inherited from generation to generation, the traditional patterns are seen as symbols of the nationality. If the traditional patterns are applied using proper method innovatively in modern costume design, the traditional national culture and art can be inherited and carried forward; besides, this will enrich and expand the contemporary thought of fashion design. The modern methods of applying traditional costume patterns can be direct application method and improved application method.



Fig. 1. Traditional bird pattern of Miao.



Fig. 2. The application of Miao traditional pattern on modern formal dress.



Fig. 3. The improved application of Miao traditional pattern.



Fig. 4. Dries Van Noten’s innovative application of Miao silver ornament.

#### A. Direct Application of Patterns

In direct application of patterns, the traditional costume patterns of minority are copied for use. The traditional patterns are maintained and directly presented on costume by using traditional handicraft or modern handicraft. To use the method, you are suggested to clearly know artistic connotation and symbolic meaning of the pattern on national costume, feel the cultural deposit of elements and design in four aspects of pattern combination, decorated parts, color

matching and the overall matching between patterns and costume style.

The work of designer Sun Xuefei was shown in 2017 spring & summer fashion week of China (as can be seen in "Fig. 2"). The pattern combination, decorated parts, color matching and style matching were designed deliberately. The traditional patterns of Miao nationality, such as bird pattern, sun pattern, dragon pattern etc., were designed from collar to the bottom on the front of the formal dress symmetrically. The combined patterns at waist gave people the visual feeling of natural waist shrink. There was sharp contrast between the navy blue patterns and saffron yellow color of formal dress. The formal dress was tailored in western style. With decoration of traditional patterns, Chinese national charm is filled in the dress.

In the process of directly applying traditional patterns in modern costumes, the key point is the visual relation between patterns and the entire costume. "Direct placement" of patterns is not enough. In this case, the original appearance of traditional patterns can be maintained. Besides, new visual effect can be modeled in case of no change of patterns.

### B. Improved Application of Patterns

In this method, the structure and color features of traditional costume patterns shall be analyzed firstly. Then multiple methods can be used to improve the traditional patterns in the rules of modern form beauty. In this way, the traditional patterns will be tendentious to modern costume patterns and accord with modern aesthetics. Proper craftsmanship is then used to present the patterns.

Many methods can be used for modern innovative improved application of traditional national patterns. The structure of costume patterns is complex and multi-layered. It includes the structure of the patterns and the layout of patterns on costume (the decorative layout of costume patterns) [3]. In the process of using the method and redesigning traditional patterns for modern use, the visual structure formed by improved patterns and the entire costume shall be considered. As for modern design products, the commercial effect of finished products designed shall be considered at the same time. "Fig. 3" shows the graduation work of a student of Minzu University of China in 2016. The designer simplified and summarized traditional patterns of Miao nationality, such as bird patterns, fish patterns etc., used colorful embroidery threads at high saturation and embroidered dotted patterns on the dress in modern style. With geometrical embroidered patterns, the design gave people enough sense of fun, catering the "youth" and "peculiarity" fashion of modern young people.

The improved application of patterns is an indirect use of traditional patterns. The indirect use is the extended use of national culture and to capture the "quintessence" on the basis of absorbing cultural connotation. It is to seek new formal language and artistic language from traditional patterns which accord with modern fashion aesthetics [4]. If we give priority to pattern symbols for reference, apply the particular language of national patterns, simplify or

exaggerate them locally, or scatter, decompose and recombine them, the works being different from and related to the original materials can be created. If we give priority to colors for reference, the intense particular colors of national patterns can be used for modern design. Some other aspects in design, such as structure, dermatoglyphic pattern and pattern of manifestation, are created to generate the works with both modern sense and national style [4].

### III. INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF MIAO COSTUME ACCESSORIES

The traditional costume accessories of Miao nationality include headwear, hand ornament, foot ornament, waist ornament, plastron, neck ornament etc. on different part of body. If they are classified according to function, there are some accessories only used for decoration, such as silver phoenix coronet, silver bonnet etc.; some costume accessories are both pragmatic and decorative, such as loincloth, sewing kit and baby carrier.

As the most famous costume accessory of Miao nationality, silver ornament has a long history of manufacturing skills and abundant cultural connotation. Its pattern design, pattern structure and silver-making technology are at high cultural level and have great research value. The craftsmanship and styles of Miao silver ornaments are inherited continuously, develop, get rid of the stale and bring forth the fresh. It is regarded as one of the symbols of Miao nationality's social evolution.

Silver cap is the splendid headwear of Miao nationality and ranks the first in the whole series of silver ornaments. The craftsmanship is complex. Silver cap is comprised of many silver flowers, small silver animal ornaments and silver bells, leaving the impression of gorgeousness and nobleness to people. Wizard designer Alexander McQueen used traditional silver cap of Miao nationality as prototype, designed a silver headwear that covered half face and showed it in 2008 spring & summer show. Matching a high-grade customized black beading dress, the entirety was noble, elegant and slightly mysterious.



Fig. 5. A Miao female of Guizhou, 2005.





Fig. 6. The work of SHIATZY CHEN, 2019.

Dries Van Noten once added the traditional silver ornament of Miao nationality into modern man's wear design (as can be seen in "Fig. 4"). The layout of silver ornament was formed in modern design of point, line and plane. The modern woolen coat was decorated by silver ornaments in large area. Or the silver ornaments of square continuous pattern were designed at the border of shorts. Or the patterns of silver ornament were transferred to be knitted patterns and completely new technique was used to form the visual effect of silver ornament.

In "Fig. 5", the costume accessory on the back of a mother of Miao nationality is the traditional baby carrier of Miao nationality. As one of the representative costume accessories of Miao nationality that is both pragmatic and decorative, it agglomerates the deep love of Miao people to their next generation. Traditional Miao baby carrier is comprised of several parts. Firstly, a long and wide cloth is used to wrap up the back of baby and hold up the buttocks from crotch; both belts twine from shoulder to chest, intersect and twine to the back of baby from axillary of mother, then intersect to hold up the buttocks and legs of baby, twine to the chest of mother and tie at waist. In this way, a simplest "cradle" is formed. In daily labor life of mother, the carrier firmly ties baby with mother. The females of Miao nationality tend to embroider propitious patterns, inlay silver ornaments, hanging sachet, copper cash or other ornaments on the carrier to express their ardent expectation and love to their children.

The show of SHIATZY CHEN in 2019 Paris Autumn & Winter Fashion Week used "inlay" as the theme. The inspiration came from the baby carrier of Miao nationality (as shown in "Fig. 6"). The typical patterns of Miao nationality were printed on the black loose coat, including dragon pattern, fish pattern, bird pattern, sun pattern and "butterfly mum" pattern. With braces, the coat could be on back after being taken off. The braces could be fixed in front of waist or chest in different forms. Metal buttons and some other decorative accessories were matched to make it be a fashionable item with modern sense, giving people the feeling of freshness.

#### IV. INNOVATIVE APPLICATION OF MIAO FABRIC CRAFT

The main traditional fabrics of Miao nationality are natural fiber fabrics like cotton, fiber, silk and hair. The frequently-used fabric manufacture technologies are printing

and dyeing, pattern weaving, shirring and knitting. Fabric element is one of the three elements of costume design. Therefore, innovative processing of fabric is very important to modern costume design. In this way, new vitality can be created on the basis of traditional fabrics and technologies. Shaping of fabric is also called secondary design of fabric. It is to recreate fabric and operate the secondary technology processing to finished fabric for new artistic effect as needed in design. Combining the thinking model of fabric shaping, the methods of innovative application of traditional fabrics and technologies of Miao nationality can be classified to be addition processing, reduction processing and comprehensive processing.

##### A. Addition Processing

Addition processing is to use single or multiple materials and the technological means of collage, stack and embroidery on the basis of existing fabrics to form multi-layered design effect.

Embroidery is one of the frequently-used technologies in addition processing. As the main ornament means of Miao costume and one of the representatives of Miao workwoman culture, embroidery can be made of abundant characteristic materials. Miao embroidery is based on daily life but higher than life. The patterns of Miao embroidery reflect the spiritual emotion and national culture deposits of Miao people. By observing the nature and imagining realistic matters, Miao females exaggerate, abstract and associate objective plants and animals in artistic means to express the thought of harmony between the nation and nature and inherit the characteristic historical culture and spiritual civilization of Miao nationality [5]. Miao embroidery is beautiful in colors and patterns are lifelike. Embroidery designer confirms pattern structure and selects the most suitable stitch according to design intention. Typical Miao embroidery patterns are those of dragon, bird, fish, bronze drum, flower and butterfly. In addition, there are some embroidery patterns which reflect the daily life and festival scene of Miao nationality.

The pattern structure, technique selection and material selection in Modern embroidery are more flexible than before. Unique modern innovative works can be created by combining embroidery skills of different countries, using embroidery threads, paillette, bead string and some other materials and adding unconventional decorative materials according to the creativity.

##### B. Reduction Processing

Reduction processing is to damage or process the surface of fabric to make the fabric incomplete and irregular, including the processing methods of drawn fabric, hollowing, burnt-out, tearing, water washing, sand washing etc. As for the reduction processing of traditional fabric, purely handmade method can be used to create random incomplete status. For example, the method of drawn fabric and tearing can be used to the surface of traditional fabrics, such as cotton and fiber, to generate the effect of oldness; mechanical equipment, such as laser cutting machine, can be used to hollow out fabric for design purpose; the fabric or

skin under the layer can be seen from the hollow part, which enriches the sense of layering of fabric.

### *C. Comprehensive Processing*

The comprehensive processing technology of fabric can be classified to be plane technology and three-dimensional technology according to their structural space and existence form. Plane technology includes two main technologies of printing & dyeing and pattern weaving; three-dimensional technology includes stack, pleating, shirring and knitting. The comprehensive processing of fabric is not limited to only one method. Several methods can be combined to interact and create completely new effect of fabric.

At present, the increasing development of modern industrial technologies contributes to the innovative application of fabric and technologies. For example, digital printing technology has been applied widely thanks to the convenience, flexibility and replicability of its technological operation. Patterns are decorative, technological and dependent. In other words, patterns are attached to costume. Technical skills are needed to present the final integrated effect. Both technology selection and pattern design shall be considered. Innovative visual effects can be created to cater modern people's fashion preference by combining above modern method of using traditional national patterns, transferring traditional patterns of minorities to be in modern aesthetics and making patterns in modern technologies.

## V. CONCLUSION

By using multiple innovative techniques in modern costume design to perform the traditional costume elements of Miao nationality, the traditional art treasures of Miao nationality not only exist in museum, books, materials, fairy tales told from generation to generation, the plants in villages, traditional festivals, custom and culture but also exist in the daily costume of modern people who have accepted them in pleasure. In this case, traditional national culture and artistic elements can be spread in more channels. People are attracted to be interested in them, be willing to trace to the source and research, explore and inherit traditional national culture deeply.

There are many minorities in China. The characteristic traditional costume patterns, costume accessories and fabric technologies of different nationalities are in an art treasury. They bring abundant inspirations for modern fashion design, expand the design thought of modern designers, and combine ancient, contemporary, traditional and modern artistic characteristics for recreation. This is to protect, spread and inherit traditional culture and endow traditional culture with new vitality.

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