

# Study on the Demonstration Role of Bai Folk Artists, Variation of Silver Ornaments and Multicultural Integration Based on the Development of Yunnan Silver Handicraft

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**Abstract**—This paper analyzes the historical background, use value, manufacturing technology and features of "silver ornaments", a folk handicraft of the Bai nationality in Yunnan, which is booming in the contemporary era, and interprets the importance of folk artists in the inheritance and development of Yunnan silver crafts and their demonstration role in tandem with its traditional function and modern economic and cultural value.

**Keywords:** *Yunnan, silver ornaments phenomenon of Bai nationality, Cunfabiao, inheritance and development, demonstration role*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Yunnan boasts a long history in making metal handicraft, especially gold and silver ware. According to literature records, the development of silver ware in Yunnan began in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Although less archaeological discoveries during this period were made, its development momentum continued to expand in depth from the Tang, Song, and Ming to the Qing dynasties. At the same time, the silver wares, silver ornaments and traditional crafts in Yunnan are various, and its market distribution is also extremely extensive. Up to now, the demand of the majority of minority women for the production and variety of silver handicraft has been more and more vigorous. Even facing the fierce impact of today's foreign culture, silver handicraft in Yunnan and various shops selling silver handicraft are still proudly expanding and advancing to tourist resorts and metropolises. What's more, the peddlers selling silver handicrafts in small plates can be seen everywhere in Lijiang, Dali, Kunming, Tengchong, Jinghong, Ruili, Jianshui, Wenshan and other tourist attractions and streets.

As a relatively obscure category in gardens of numerous ethnic and folk handicrafts in Yunnan, silver ware and silver handicraft can actually survive in the major tourist areas and urban competition, and then effectively carry on the self-inheritance and development. Given its ubiquity and

economic momentum, it seems likely to surpass or displace the market for gold products.

## II. HISTORY

As early as more than one thousand years ago in Nanzhao-Dali Kingdom, silver ware and its products have been a symbol of the status of the royal family. They were not only an important material for the royal family to show off their wealth, but also the currency equivalent of the time. Silver wares and silver handicraft were also one of the main tributes to the royal court in Nanzhao-Dali Kingdom. What's more, the burial etiquette at that time also stipulated that special silver jars must be used for the urns of the nobles. The urns of lower-ranking officials can be stored only in special copper cans. It can be seen that in the Nanzhao-Dali Kingdom, gold, silver and its products have represented power and status in the slave society and the feudal society, and have had special social value and cultural symbolic significance.

According to incomplete investigations, in the following thousands of years, silver handicraft and their traditional craftsmanship have been widely spread to many ethnic groups in the vast area of Yunnan. All kinds of silver handicrafts have been enjoying a high reputation in Yunnan. More than 20 prefectures, cities, counties and towns and rural areas have a larger market share, including Kunming, Dali, Lijiang, Chuxiong, Tonghai, Jianshui, Midu, Weishan, Xiangyun, Mengzi, and so on. Those famous folk artists who make silver handicraft in various places are from Han, Bai, Yi, Hui, Naxi, Achang, Hani, and Dai, Tibetan, Zhuang, Miao ... These ethnic groups and their artists used to each have a large number of specific products, customer groups and strong and stable markets. This market positioning and marketing pattern of silver handicraft and their traditional craftsmanship lasted for hundreds or even thousands of years in Yunnan.

### III. DEVELOPMENT STATUS

However, for a long time before the reform and opening up, due to various social and historical reasons, such pattern almost died, and suffered a lot. Fortunately, the silver handicraft, traditional manufacturing techniques and market in Yunnan have undergone rapid changes over the past decade. The market positioning and marketing pattern of silver handicraft, and traditional manufacturing techniques, which lasted for more than a thousand years, have witnessed a sudden and dramatic change. Nowadays, the silver handicraft and market in Yunnan have almost been dominated by the brand of Xinhua Village of Bai nationality or Cunfabiao.

According to the author's investigation, there are now thousands of shops in Yunnan, of all sizes, dealing in silver crafts, the vast majority of them employ the brand of Xinhua Village, Bai silver ware, or Cunfabiao of a folk craftsman and used it to attract customers. What's more, as long as people open the webpage and type in "Xinhua Village", "Bai silver ware", "Cunfabiao by folk craftsman", etc., they will see as many as 10,000 pieces of relevant information. There were more than 4,600 related texts or pictures reported by just clicking on Cunfabiao.

Recently, the author discovers when investigating, even people from other province who run the silver business in Guandu ancient town, Kunming, also employed the brand of the Xinhua Village of the Bai Nationality in Heqing.

Nowadays, Xinhua Village has become one of the largest export distribution centers of tourist goods in Southeast Asia, which mainly focuses on ethnic handicrafts such as silver and bronze ware. The author holds that the necessary interpretation and in-depth study of such development trends, important experiences and laws of silver handicraft in Yunnan will help guide and promote the effective self-inheritance and development of other ethnic folk crafts, and then make them form and expand local ethnic crafts and cultural industries. Yunnan's advantages in folk arts and crafts resources will be transformed into operational advantages to realize the transfer of rural labor force of ethnic minorities, so as to continuously accumulate capital of local ethnic arts and culture industry, and effectively improve and enhance the living standards of ethnic minorities.

Why do the thousands of shops of all sizes across Yunnan dealing in silver handicraft fall over each other to use the brand of Xinhua Village, Bai nationality or Cunfabiao? How does the situation that Bai silver handicraft dominates the whole Yunnan today come into being? The author believes that careful consideration and comprehensive analysis of the internal and external causes of the "silver ornaments phenomenon of Bai nationality" will have inspiration and reference significance for solving the development bottleneck of traditional handicrafts of Bai and other nationalities and that of other nationalities in Yunnan. At the same time, it will also seek a more effective mode and approach for how to effectively protect, inherit, develop and innovate the intangible cultural heritage of Yunnan

minorities, and make it produce better social and economic benefits.

First of all, compared with gold and jade crafts, all aspects of the production and marketing of silver handicraft have many favorable objective factors, such as small risk, low cost, cheap price, depreciate-proof, big market demand, easy craftsmanship, various varieties and styles, strong local national characteristics, guaranteed supply of raw materials, easy to collect and so on. It is these favorable objective factors that have contributed to the irreplaceable market share of silver handicraft in the Yunnan tourism market.

On the other hand, the development of such brands as "Xinhua Village of Bai Nationality", "Silver Handicraft of Bai Nationality" and "Cunfabiao by Folk Craftsman" cannot be separated from the recommendation of cultural and educational departments, the hype of public opinion and media, and the strong support of the competent government departments. Since its development and construction, Shizhaizi, Xinhua Village, Heqing, has received support and commendations from provincial and municipal governments at all levels. More than 60 central government leaders came to for inspection and guidance. In 2000, it was named as "Home of Chinese Folk Art" and "China Folk Culture Villages" by the former State Ministry of Culture and China Association for the Promotion of Village Development. In 2006, Xinhua Village of Heqing County won the title of "Top Ten Famous Towns in Yunnan". In 2008, Xinhua Village's Shizhaizi Silverware and Xinhua Shizhaizi Emerald were also rated as "Chinese Famous Brands". In order to fully develop and integrate the folk tourism and handicraft human resources, the government of Heqing County in 2003 fully transferred the right to develop and operate tourism resources to enterprises. At present, Shizhaizi Square in Xinhua Village has become the largest production and trading base of ethnic handicrafts in Southeast Asia, and the main gathering place for various tourism products on the Tea-horse Ancient Road in northwestern Yunnan. In 2005, China's first silverware museum was completed in Xinhua Village, Heqing, which houses more than 4,000 silverware treasures from the Tang Dynasty to the present. The completion of the museum has enriched and enhanced the cultural connotation of silverware crafts of Dali Heqing. Thanks to the museum, a large number of silversmiths from Xinhua Village also began to travel to Tibet. Xinhua Village is also famous for its handmade gold, silver and bronze products. There are more than 1,100 households in Xinhua Village currently, of which more than 800 are engaged in handicrafts.

Thirdly, the establishment of the brand of Bai silver handicraft in Xinhua Village benefited from the personality charm, courage and sagacity of representative artist Cun Fabiao.

Cun Fabiao, born in 1962, is of the Bai nationality. He is the sixth generation of silver-making descendants in the family. Since the age of 16, he has followed his father to learn silver-making skills. They two traveled to minority areas in Yunnan, Tibet, Ningxia, Guizhou, Guangxi, Gansu,

and Shaanxi. In 1987, he adventured to Lhasa. During the 8 years in Lhasa, he met the Tibetan religious elite and visited the 17th living Buddha, Karmapa, many times. He made friends with the Living Buddha and Dalai Lama to understand their special needs for various kinds of silver products, relevant taboos, and the trend of such people's demand for various kinds of silver products, which have strong consumption guidance among the Tibetan people. He went on to develop new products and expand production capacity. On the other hand, he carefully observed and learned the excellent traditional culture and arts of Tibet, such as murals, reliefs, statues, Thangkas, rituals, and donations kept in Tibetan Buddhist temples. He also boldly incorporated strong Tibetan cultural elements into his silver wares, and is known for his exquisite craftsmanship and originality in Tibetan areas. In 1989, Cun Fabiao, a tinker of Bai nationality, successfully designed and produced the bronze relief "the Potala Palace", which was selected by the delegation of Tibet autonomous region to the US as a gift to the US side. As a result, he became a news figure in the *Tibet Daily*. On November 18, 1992, *China Daily* featured a story about him helping Tibetan metal artisans develop their national craft in Lhasa, Tibet autonomous region. On January 22, 1994, the *China Daily* reported on the reasons for his success in Tibet under the headline *Secrets to Success*. In June 1999, he was named as the first batch of "Senior Folk Artists of Yunnan Province" by Yunnan Provincial Department of Culture. In 2004, UNESCO awarded him the honor of "Master of Folk Arts and Crafts" and only 20 people in China have achieved this honor. In June 2018, China National Light Industry Council awarded him the title of "Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts" and "Talent Award for Revitalizing Yunnan". His name has almost become a synonym of Yunnan folk craft industry. At the same time, the representative work of Cun Fabiao, the Silver Kowloon kettle, was awarded a national patent in 1998. On this basis, his series of products came out one after another.

Since then, on the basis of market demand, Cun Fabiao developed and produced a series of wine sets, such as wine set with eight scenes of Heyang on the surface, water filter pitcher, silver-wrapped high-quality wooden bowls and so on, with pure silver, white copper, red copper and other raw materials.



Fig. 1. A large silver carving screen The Chinese nation is one family working together to build the Chinese dream is being made by Cun Fabiao (collected by Yunnan Nationalities Museum).



Fig. 2. Part of the large silver carving screen: The Chinese nation is one family working together to build the Chinese dream (made by Cun Fabiao).

Cun Fabiao is a Bai artist who has the courage to innovate, so he can continuously innovate refreshing special silver crafts. Its scope of application includes all kinds of silver ornaments and utensils of the Yi, Tibetan, Yao, Dai, Hani, and Miao nationality... In addition, a number of works have been collected by the Yunnan Provincial Museum and Yunnan Nationalities Museum (see "Fig. 1", "Fig. 2")

The silverware crafts he produced were sold to Guizhou, Guangxi, Tibet, Ningxia, Gansu, Shaanxi and other provinces, and some were also selected for visiting foreign heads of state and distinguished guests, which make his reputation spread across the world. During Jin Yong's visit to Dali, at the invitation of the People's Government of Dali City, he also specially created a golden key that was gifted to Jin Yong titled "Honorary Dali citizen".

Fourth, Zhou Wenzhong of the "US-China Art Exchange Center" visited his workshop many times, praising him as "the darling of China's ethnic minorities". The former Secretary of Yunnan Provincial Party: Dan Zeng visited his home several times and highly appreciated his superb ethnic craftsmanship and encouraged him to make more contributions to the promotion of national culture. Ding Guangen, Minister of Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China, Peng Peiyun, Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and President of the All-China Women's Federation, Vice Chairman of the CPPCC national committee, Director of State Physical Culture and Sports Commission, etc. have all visited his workshop and gave high evaluation and encouragement.

In 1998, he was appointed as a visiting professor by the Department of Ethnic Arts of Yunnan Minzu University and awarded the certificate of honor. He unreservedly imparts his exquisite skills and unique designs to teachers and students of all nationalities. In 2000, during the international cultural exchange between College of Arts, Yunnan University of Nationalities Arts College, "The Ford Foundation" and "US-

China Art Exchange Center", former Deputy Secretary of State Barney Cohen, president and vice president of Ford Foundation of the United States unanimously praised his high-level national craftsmanship. It is reported that 14 students majoring jewelry design of Central Academy of Fine Arts arrived at the base for a three-week study. The students said that they should be the messengers of inheriting the folk carved flower crafts (see "Fig. 3").



Fig. 3. Selected works of the 2016 China contemporary arts and crafts biennale: Silver pot symbolizing prosperity (made by Cun Fabiao).

#### IV. INNOVATION

Since Xinhua Village was listed as a provincial-level ethnic tourist village, with the active promotion and influence of the Cun Fabiao, some folk artists returned to the village to study new craftsmanship with him. The "tinkers" who used to wander from village to village have now become leaders who make their fortunes through hard work and traditional folk techniques. It is reported that there are currently 803 households engaged in the processing of ethnic handicrafts in Xinhua, with 1,270 employees. Some media reports said that in 2001 the village's income from ethnic tourism crafts was close to 150 million yuan. With the rapid development of handicraft industry, Xinhua Village has become the first state-level well-off demonstration village and provincial civilization demonstration village in the county.

In addition, Cun Xihuai is also a well-known craftsman in Xinhua Village. He has a family tradition of making metal Buddha statues and is the fifth generation heir in the family. Since the 1980s, he has been specializing in making statues of Sakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, KWAN-YIN, and guardian in Tibetan areas such as Shangri-La, Yunnan, and Yushu City, Qinghai. He has a high reputation in all Tibetan areas. He used to make bronze Buddha that was six to eight meters high. In 1992, Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet asked him to make a large copper Buddha statue, 13 meters high and weighing about 7 tons, which was a big challenge for him. To accomplish this task, he carefully inspected the large

Buddha statues in the major temples in Tibet. These bronze Buddha are cast either in whole or in part, with pieces of copper spliced together and nailed together. He breaks the rules and boldly innovates. Instead of casting molds or nails, tens of thousands of copper pieces are beaten into the shape of each part, and the steel frame is used to support it. As a whole, no nail can be seen. The finished bronze Buddha statue, with a single ear measuring more than a meter long, a head 3.5 meters long and a palm 1.5 meters long, has been praised by Tibetan monks.

The craftsmen in Xinhua village have their own special skills: silver bracelets, necklaces, earrings and other jewelry favored by Bai women; dharma symbols, scripture changers, Buddha boxes and other Tibetan Buddhist instruments; Dai girl's silver belt; Yi girl's neckwear, earrings and other accessories; Jingpo's gown and pendent; Zodiac ornaments; articles for daily use including copper pots, copper bowls, copper ladles, copper basins, and so on. Some of them are made according to the drawings and copied as is, while others are made according to the requirements of customers to make a full range of folk handicrafts. There are more than a thousand kinds of handicrafts processed and produced in the village. In terms of materials, it can be gold, silver, white copper, brass, copper, can also be made of copper or gold-plated or silver-plated as required to meet the various needs of people of different nationalities and levels. In order to further promote the development of handicraft processing industry in Xinhua Village, in 2001, he invested 10 million yuan together with the chairman of the "Shengxing Group" (closed due to other reasons) to establish Yunnan Xinhua Travelling Commodities Development Co., Ltd. The company manages the 892 family workshops and 12,265 craftsmen in the village in a centralized mode, and implements the integration of production, supply and marketing, so as to promote the handicrafts produced by the single-family workshop to a broader market of domestic and foreign tourism commodities.

Soon, the metal arts and crafts practice base of the jewelry design major of Central Academy of Fine Arts was listed in the home of Cun Fabiao, Xinhua Village. In recent years, the achievements of Xinhua Village in the inheritance, innovation and development of folk handicraft, and the establishment of silver handicraft brand require the promotion of multiple interactive mechanisms in modern society. Xinhua Village is a provincial and national tourism boutique project. From 2004 to 2008, 7.67 million tourists visited the scenic area. It has been named as "Home of Chinese Folk Art", "China Folk Culture Villages" and "Top Ten Famous Towns in Yunnan" by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The important experience of Cun Fabiao are as follows: Get to know the Tibetan religious elite, make friends with the living Buddha and Dalai Lama, collect a large number of Buddhist articles, learn about their special needs for various kinds of silver products and related taboos. The demand of such people for various types of silver products has strong consumption guidance among Tibetans. On the other hand, he actively participated in exhibitions of various scales, such

as "China Import & Exxport Fair Kunming", "World Exposition", and frequently attacked regardless of cost, and actively set up booths to expand the impact. He took advantage of every opportunity to build the brand of Xinhua Village of the Bai nationality of Heqing, and the famous brand of the Bai nationality and Cunfabiao. This is not the work of a day, of a man, of a moment. It is accumulated over a long period of time and acquired by chance.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Above all, the traditional silver craft of the Bai nationality is a culture based on the worship of the owner that integrates the glorious culture of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and other religious thoughts, a folk activity and silver crafts that takes the culture of the Bai nationality as core and integrating ,the culture of Han, Dai and Hani and other nationality, and an extensive culture that inherits the maternal culture of Bai nationality in Dali, absorbs and accommodates other ethnic cultures to enrich and develop its own. It is obvious that such traditional silver craft with diversified cultures has multiple competitiveness, economic value and cultural significance in the development of economy and culture and social progress.

The silver craftsmanship reflects the agricultural production of the Bai people and expresses their desire for good weather and good harvest. Such silver crafts imply Bai people's yearning for a better future. They integrate spiritual culture with material and cultural needs, promote people's solidarity and cooperation, develop production, and ultimately promote economic and cultural development and social progress. In the process of developing its traditional silver jewelry technology, in addition to adapting it to modern aesthetic needs, it should also absorb and select favorable factors and methods suitable for the national culture and development. Only in this way can a flourishing and fruitful new culture be cultivated.

The integration of traditional Bai culture and distinctive culture can promote the development of local tourism culture to a certain extent, stimulate the development of local ethnic economy in some ways, and promote the cultural exchange and integration of various ethnic groups. Holding such festivals is a good way to pass on the culture. However, it is undeniable that there are some examples in today's real society that emphasize economic development over cultural construction. And some of the practice of quick success accelerated the disappearance of many intangible cultural heritages, including the traditional silver jewelry technology. Without paying attention to negative impacts, neglecting supervision, and quality reduction, the hard-earned brand of Heqing Xinhua Silverware is bound to be ruined. Therefore, it's a must to draw lessons from the past and make long-term and short-term plans for economic, cultural, political, solidarity, prosperity, and development from the long-term consideration of the social, economic, and cultural development of the Bai people and their unity and common prosperity with all ethnic groups. It should also be recognized that the collision and mutual absorption of multi-ethnic folk culture and art and various traditional religious

arts in the historical trend is one of the important reasons for the preservation and inheritance of a considerable part of Chinese national dance culture. Only in this way can the traditional silver jewelry crafts of the Bai nationality keep up with the spirit of the national culture and its cultural personality while keeping up with the progress of society.

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