

Xilankapu Art in the Context of Modern Markets

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ABSTRACT

Among the ethnic minorities in China, most Chinese Tujia people live in the Wuling Mountain area adjacent to Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing and Guizhou, and claim to be "Bizka". In the Bachu civilization, Tujia culture emerged at the right moment, forming a unique Tujia civilization and Tujia craftsmanship. Wherein, the Xilankapu folk art as an art form in Tujia culture, reflects the life style and customs, folklore, folk art style and character of Tujia people, and represents the crystallization of the wisdom and manual skills of Tujia women.

Keywords: Tujia brocade, traditional patterns, five normal colors

I. INTRODUCTION

Tujia brocade has a very long history. It can be traced back to the period of Ba state in the Xia and Shang dynasties in China the earliest. From the Xia and Shang dynasties more than 4,000 years ago to now, the name of the Tujia brocade varies in each period. In the period of Ba state, Tujia brocade was called "Yubo (玉帛)"; in the Qin and Han dynasties, it was called "Congbu (糞布)"; In the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, it was called "Tujin (土锦)"; in the Tang and Song dynasties, it was called "Xibu (溪布)"; in the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, it was called "Tujin (土锦)" or "Banbu (斑布)". These titles from ancient times to today also represent the history of Tujia brocade. Tujia brocade is not called Xilankapu (西兰卡普) until this day.

Among Tujia people, there is always a legend going around about Xilankapu that in Tujia there is a woman called Xilan is very good at weaving Xilankapu. She embroidered all kinds of beautiful flowers on Xilankapu. Someone told her that she embroidered so many beautiful flowers, but only ginkgo flower that bloomed at midnight were absent. Hearing this, the girl climbed on the ginkgo tree to observe at midnight in order to be able to embroider beautiful ginkgo flowers. But unexpectedly, she was found by her bad-hearted sister-in-law¹ who secretly told her father that Xilan misbehaved and went to the mountain to meet lover every midnight. Her father believed in the slanderous talk and ran to the mountain at midnight to see if it was true. As he knew, Xilan was really there. In anger, he cut the ginkgo tree with an axe, and Xilan fell off the tree and died. After that, to commemorate the girl, Tujia

people made and covered quilt made of the figured cloth woven by Xilan to indicate that they are together with Xilan². This practice also expresses Tujia people's missing of the girl Xilan.

II. SUBJECTS ON TUJIA BROCADE

Xilankapu patterns are simple and shaped with straight lines. Each pattern has its specific connotation. In ancient times, Tujia people used to express thinking, ideas and emotions by pictures. They would wove graphics on cloth, truly reflecting the customary life and ideological value orientation of Tujia people by virtue of Tujia brocade. The patterns of Xilankapu are simple and concise, abstracted from things in life into geometric patterns, arranged orderly in symmetrical arrangement method, forming into a two-square continuous stripe pattern, or the patterns are extended in an organized way, forming a square continuous pattern.

The patterns of Xilankapu vary. According to statistics, there are about 120 types of traditional Xilankapu patterns. In addition to modern innovative patterns, there are totally more than 200 kinds of Xilankapu patterns. Wherein, the patterns are generally divided into plants, flowers and animals, birds and beasts, natural horoscopes, folk customs, auspicious characters, production and life, historical myths.³ From these traditional patterns, we can deeply feel the customs of Tujia people.

¹ Zhangjiajie Legend Series 47 [OL].

² Yu Zhenrong. Study on the Artistic Symbols of Shui Ethnic Horsetail Embroidery [D]. Master's Thesis of Hubei Minzu University, 2019.

³ Pan Huaqing. Cultural connotation and modern value of auspicious patterns in furniture [D]. Master's thesis of Hubei University of Technology, 2011.

A. Taking plants and animals as the subject

Most of the Tujia people live in the Wuling Mountain area, and their lives have been accompanied by mountains for a long time. Therefore, flowers and plants are an important subject in their creations. For example, patterns such as large and small white plums, peony, lotus, rattan flowers, and rock wall and the like patterns that are common in life are used as the pattern material in their brocades, typically the rock wall pattern. Tujia people get stilted building constructed by mountains. Therefore, masonry wall is the expert work of Tujia people. In the process of building the rock wall, various patterns are incorporated into it. Tujia women was inspired by this practice and applied this pattern to the traditional Tujia brocade, created beautiful shape, just like a beautiful flower blossoming on the rock wall. ("Fig. 1")

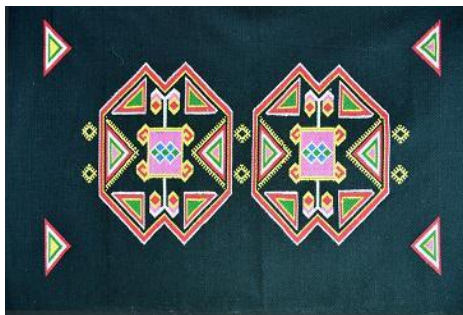


Fig. 1. Xilankapu with rock wall pattern.

Tujia ancestors with a long history have close contact with the nature. The primitive way of life made Tujia ancestors closely related to animals. They depicted the most typical forms of animals in life, and abstracted the form of animals into Xilankapu by refining, exaggeration and deformation methods. For example, little beast, cuckoo ("Fig. 2"), snake, pheasant, crab, monkey hand, tiger skin, monkey face and the like patterns are also used as Tujia brocade's

pattern material. Among them, the monkey hand pattern is most commonly used in Tujia brocade. Because of the mountainous region factor, monkey has a close relationship with the ancestors of Tujia people. People have integrated the image of monkey into Xilankapu, and monkey hand patterns are woven at the edge of Xilankapu for trimming in two-side continuing method.



Fig. 2. Xilankapu in cuckoo patterns.

B. Taking folk customs as the subject

The special folk customs is the most prominent feature of Tujia people. Based on the social conditions at the time and developed in accordance with the requirements of the times, Tujia people still retain some folk customs, such as dancing and waving hands, catching up with blind dates, traditional Tujia Girls' Festival, drinking sasanqua, eating community meals and other folk customs. Among them, the waving hand dance ("Fig. 3") is the oldest and most important way of celebration in the traditional culture of Tujia people. In every event of traditional festival or major sacrifice ceremony, Tujia people will perform a waving hand dance to celebrate before starting the activity. Brocade artists incorporated these folklore activities into the crafts of Xilankapu, showing Tujia people's objective and positive attitude.



Fig. 3. Xilankapu with waving hand dance pattern.

C. Taking auspicious patterns as the subject

The characteristics of Tujia brocade are also the characteristics of auspicious meaning. People look for inspiration of auspicious meaning from the natural world. In the traditional patterns, the auspicious pattern contains people's longing for a better life and gives people a beautiful blessing and special meaning. Common auspicious patterns include fish dance, golden phoenix wearing peony, dragon and phoenix, and auspicious clouds and dragon, such as the common Xilankapu pattern "dragon and phoenix" ("Fig. 4")⁴. The pattern shape is still abstracted plane-geometric figures collected symmetrically, forming into several groups of different patterns. For example, two opposite dragons are shaped into one group of pattern and two opposite birds are shaped into one group of pattern, surrounded by symmetrical trees and flower vines, showing an auspicious and peaceful scene.

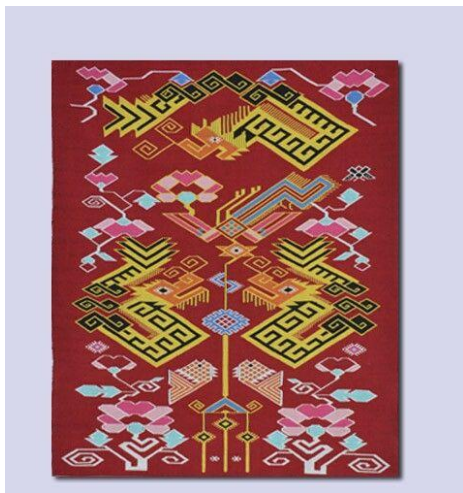


Fig. 4. Xilankapu with phoenix and dragon pattern.

D. Traditional patterns taking daily life as the subject

The ancestors of Tujia people were also full of interest in creation of various utensils in life. Tables, chairs, and weaving shelves in daily life are the source of inspiration for Tujia people's creations, which also highlights the mountainous flavor of Xilankapu. Among the patterns taking daily life as the subject, the common traditional patterns include flowers, tofu shelf, and the like patterns. Among them, the table pattern looks for being symmetrical and balanced in layout, and the pattern repeats continuously, forming a band.



Fig. 5. Xilankapu with table patterns.

E. Taking historical myths as the subject

In the development history of various nationalities, there are historical stories and myths of various periods. Tujia people gets the scene of those stories presented on the brocade, vividly demonstrates the historical histories and also records the development history of Tujia culture. For example, the common pattern materials include "Legend of Ginkgo Flower", "Mouse's Wedding", and "Picture of Marriage" ("Fig. 6"). The pattern of "Legend of Ginkgo Flower" depicts a legendary story of the girl Xilan who sacrificed herself in seeking embroidery of Ginkgo flower, and reflects the Tujia people's remembrance and admiration of the brocade goddess; the pattern of "Mouse's Wedding" ("Fig. 7") shows a lively and grand scene of mouse's wedding in a tiled and abstract way.



Fig. 6. Xilankapu with the pattern of marriage.

⁴ Shi Hongling. Research on Xilankapu's Multiple Value Evaluation and Protection & Inheritance [D]. Doctoral Dissertation of Central China Normal University, 2017.

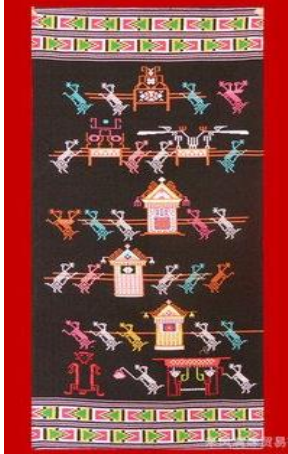


Fig. 7. Rats married couple pattern Xilankapu with the pattern of Mouse's Wedding.

III. RESEARCH ON THE COLORS OF XILANKAPU

Xilankapu uses bright colors. For example, according to the General History of Longshan County", "土锦绩五色为之,文采斑斓可爱,俗用以为被,或作裙,或作巾 (meaning: Tujia brocade is made of five colors, with colorful and aute style; it is commonly used for making quilt surface or skirt or towel).⁵ This color matching is Tujia people's subjective recombination and matching of the surrounding natural colors.

A. Color usage habit: avoiding white and advocating black and red

Tujia people have a habit of avoiding black and advocating black. This custom has been lasted for a long time. They think that white is an unlucky color. In Chinese tradition, white is mostly used in funeral ceremonies. They maintain that white represents disaster and death. Moreover, they always maintained an awe-inspiring attitude towards white tiger, as a popular saying "when you see a white tiger pass by your house, either disaster or misfortune will happen". White is rarely used in Xilankapu and will never be used as the base color of the brocade or be used in blocks in the pattern.

In opposite to this customs, Tujia people advocate black. They adore black because black is the color of integrity. For example, the traditional clothing of Tujia men is dominated by black from head to toe, and that of Tujia women is dominated by red and black or blue and black from head to toe.

⁵ Chen He. Research on the Traditional Xilankapu Patterns in Western Hunan and Its Application in Modern Fashion Design [D]. Master's Thesis of Guangxi Arts University, 2014.

In addition to advocating black, Tujia ancestors also admired red. They think that red represents life, and they have an awe-inspiring mentality toward life; and some Tujia people think that red represents the sun, a symbol of hope and vitality, and conveying the people's mood of victory and joy.

B. Usual usage of five normal colors and secondary colors

In the production process of Xilankapu, the use of five normal colors and secondary colors covers most of Xilankapu's color usage habits. The five normal colors refer to red, black, yellow, cyan and white; secondary colors refer to orange, purple, and brown. Among Tujia people, there is an oral rules going around about the color combinations in Tujia brocade: black with white, red with green, and blue with yellow. Based on this color combination method, the produced Xilankapu has bright colors. In the production of Tujia brocade, most of the colors are filled with flat colors while using contrasting colors and complementary colors. This color combination forms a strong visual impact and rich contrast in the picture color, has high purity and brightness in color usage, forming a huge difference between colors.

IV. THE APPLICATION OF XILANKAPU

The spread of culture lies in the innovation and development of culture. But due to topographical reasons and traffic blockages, Tujia brocade can only be used more in relatively remote areas; because the production process of Xilankapu is complicated, primitive Xilankapu cultural relics were destroyed over time, and the craftsmen who can make Xilankapu gradually passed away. So the protection and inheritance of Xilankapu becomes particularly important.

A. Application of Xilankapu in clothing accessories

In traditional Tujia culture, Xilankapu is an important representative of the traditional culture. It is a crystallization of special terrain, special aesthetics, and traditional customs. Xilankapu contains the wisdom of Tujia people. Xilankapu's aesthetic value is in traditional clothing and is derived and developed by taking accessories as the carrier. At the same time, many traditional ethnic elements have been added to modern clothing accessories.

In modern clothing accessories, most of them adopt simple design and emphasizes the functionality of the product. Therefore, the selection and use of materials is particularly critical in accessories. For example, in the design of accessories such as bags and hats, the parts of the bag surface ("Fig. 8"), the brim of hat, and the handle, etc., use Xilankapu design element, combine modern accessories with traditional ethnic elements.

This way not only adds the unique nature of the product but also carries forward Chinese traditional craftsmanship.



Fig. 8. Bag decorated with Xilankapu pattern.

B. Application of Xilankapu in modern clothing styles and patterns

Incorporating Xilankapu's art elements into people's daily modern clothing can meet the consumer's demand for simple life. Xilankapu's long history and culture, and its beautiful implied meaning, have gradually been loved by consumers in urban area. This kind of clothing design not only spreads the traditional culture of China, but also gives the design a cultural attribute and value significance. For example, Zhang Huimei used the tippet produced by Xilankapu as a decoration in the concert ("Fig. 9"), which combined modern stage clothing with national traditions. This design not only increased the highlights of the clothing, but also reflected the fashion and national character.



Fig. 9. Tippet made of Xilankapu.

V. CONCLUSION

Under the impact of modernization, the inheritance and development of traditional folk handicrafts have become a universal problem. The inheritors, experts and scholars, government and other relevant parties have made efforts to pass down and spread the crafts by

family inheritance, starting a relevant business, organizing relevant employment skills training, and establishing relevant teaching and research institutions and obtained good effect. However, the impact of modernization, the loss of the soil of inheritance, and the destruction of the ecosystem are not reversible simply by taking measures such as making apprenticeship innovation and providing related employment skills training. What is lost in the short and simple inheritance form is the rich connotation and implied meaning, which will eventually obscure the true flavor of Xilankapu and other crafts. In such circumstances, all parties concerned should take the initiative to further improve productive protection strategies, innovate technologies, and gradually cultivate market brands in order to attract more people to participate in the inheritance. Attention should be paid to the protection of the inheritors, actively exploring new forms of protection, and trying to maintain the unique functions of the inheritors in a natural state.

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