

Traditional Chinese Jewelry Art: Loss, Rediscovery and Reconstruction

Take Headwear as an Example

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Abstract—Traditional Chinese ornaments are particular about balance and unity for subtly objectifying emotions, implying extensive and profound Chinese traditional culture, so researches on the system and characteristics of traditional ornaments are of practical significance to inherit and carry forward Chinese traditional culture. This article, take headwear as an example, discusses the glory and decline of ancient headwear, proceeding with its varieties, artistic characteristics and development tracks to find resonance with the progress of modern Chinese headwear, further to raise methods and approaches for reconstruction Chinese headwear artistic system.

Keywords—headwear; loss; rediscovery; reconstruction

I. INTRODUCTION

Having experienced evolvement and development for several thousand years, from osseous pins adorned by Upper Cave Men in the rudimentary stage of ornaments to luxury jewelries by this stage, from fresh and elegant artistic beauty to bold and fashion creative practice, ornaments astonished the world with remarkable changes in both functions and forms. Since produced from labor, the practicability of primitive ornaments overwhelms its decorative role, and simple forms serve labor activities. As the productive forces developed, ornaments were gradually distinguished from utilities to turn to thorough decorations with increasingly complicated forms and exquisite techniques. Intensified decoration also brought its social symbolic functions regarding wealth, status, identity and hierarchy, etc. Therefore, to study the types, functions and techniques of traditional Chinese ornaments not only refer to the inherence and imitation of classic arts but provide new thoughts and development orientation for the modern ornament design. This article, take headwear as an example, tracks the types, techniques, symbols and social functions, etc. of traditional headwear to straighten out its development sequence and come up with methods and approaches to reconstructing the traditional headwear artistic system.

II. LOSS

Lots of classification ways are applicable for ornaments. Different classification forms correspond to different jewelry concepts and scope, in general, the definition of jewelry

there are three. One is a broad concept of jewelry, refers to the use of a variety of materials for personal decoration and its related environment decorative jewelry. The second is a narrow concept of jewelry, refers to the use of typical jewelry materials produced by the fine craftsmanship and personal decoration as the main purpose, carry jewelry. The third is the traditional definition of jewelry, jewelry that is worn on the head of the decorations, ancient head, and this concept is now not commonly used.

The former two adopts the concept of modern ornaments. The major distinction between the broad and narrow senses lies in the decorative range and fabricated materials of jewelries; the narrow concept defines ornaments closely relative to the application of precious metals (gold, silver, platinum and palladium, etc.) and natural gems in a strict and exquisite grading. What are called as top-grade gems only includes diamond, jade, ruby & sapphire, emerald, chrysoberyl and pearl; lots of types of gems are incorporated into the mid-grade list, such as aquamarine, amethyst, garnet, kallaite and cat's eyes other than chrysoberyl, ordinary jade and organic gemstones (amber, coral, cultured pearl and hawksbill). The definition of ornaments in a narrow sense also limits the application for personal adornment. On the other hand, the board sense extends the scope of ornament fabricating materials, besides traditional precious metals and natural gemstones, also including various alloy materials, artificially synthetic stones and PMMA, ivory, ox bone, shell, plastic, resin, ceramics, bamboo, feather and other new comprehensive materials, and the decorative scope in the broad sense includes environmental ornaments such as lighters and clocks, etc. in addition to personal ornaments.

The third concept of headwear is "head-ornaments" (Tou Mian); originally it refers to the ornaments people wear on the head; "Tou Mian" means head and face and implies charm and beauty. In the old times, it refers to jewelry or local prestigious characters. The Song Dynasty's Meng Yuanlao wrote Beautiful Dream to Tokyo · January, which mentions: "decorated tent marquees are erected until the South area, to sell crowns, combs, beads, head ornaments, clothing, flowers, collar wipes, shoes, toys, and the like". In *The Circle of Chalk* written by Li Xingdao of Yuan dynasty, the first chapter says: "It is I who do not allow him to wear clothes and wear head and face." The Chapter VIII of *The*

Records of Officialdom Exposure mentions: "ask no money, but a pair of pearls." In Tian Han's *The Death of the Famous*, the second act says: "Let's go to the garden first. Headwear and clothes are there." Thus, people in ancient times call ornaments as "headwear". A set of headwear generally includes three hair combs, a pair of hairpins and step shakes respectively. In the Tang Dynasty it also includes frontlet, and the wearing requirements for the rich and the poor vary in different times.

Chinese traditional jewelry has multiple types, including the headwear (Ji, Zan, Chai, step shake, Dian, Huasheng, crown, Zhi, Shu, Bi, Pianfang, etc.), neckwear (necklace, neck board and court beads), ear ornaments (ear stud, eardrop, earring and ear clip, etc.), hand ornaments (bracelet, bangle, ring, etc.), plastron (brooch, badge), and so on, but the headwear is defined as "head ornaments", which confirms the pivotal role of headwear among the ancient jewelry ornaments. However, with the change of times, people's clothing and hairstyles are greatly different from the ancients', and the ancient headwear once in full flourish has more and more subtle position in today's jewelry design.

III. REDISCOVERY

The ancients, especially women, had complex hair styles, developing wide varieties of headwear and it plays a much more important role in the ornaments for ancient women than mordent females. The evolvement of headwear is closely bound up with fashionable hair styles and changes of dynasties. Ancient headwear mainly includes Ji, Zan, Chai(hairpins) Buyao (step shake), Dian (flower ornament), Huasheng (ornate headwear), Guan (Crown), Zhi, Shu and Bi (combs), etc. Diverse headwear varies in the adorning manner, style design, texture, process and function, etc.

A. Analysis of Wearing Manner

From the wearing manner, Ji, Zan, Chai, Zhi, Shu and Bi are inserted into hair; Dian and Huasheng are used for adorning hairpins, or independently worn behind chest as an ornament. Dian appeared as a kind of headwear at the early phase, but then was converted to a skill of adorning other ornaments, for example, adorn headwear with mother-of-pearl inlays. Buyao, precisely speaking, refers to a kind of drop ornament and is used jointly as the decorative fittings of hairpins. A Guan (crown) is worn as same as a hat, directly putting on head.

B. Analysis of Style & Design

Ji, Zan and Chai are designed with similar styles consisting of two parts, a head and a handle; all the heads are commonly provided with decorations, and the difference is a Chai has a double-strand handle while a Bi or Zan has a single-strand handle. Buyao, Dian and Huasheng have more gorgeous styles; the natural world elements (flowers, birds, fish) and dermatoglyphic patterns are incorporated into decorative design. Buyao is a kind of pendent with more exquisite and unique style design to "shake" step by step and realize the decorative effects. Styles of Zhi, Shu and Bi are relatively fixed and allow ornaments on the comb back

generally. Until the later period of feudal society, influenced by the ancients' modeling language of "any pictures are endowed with propitious symbols" the headwear design modeling has strong implied meanings.

C. Analysis of Material & Process

The materials and processes of ancient headwear are gradually evolved with the era development. The early Ji, Zan, Chai, Zhi, Shu and Bi are produced by bamboo with simple processes. In Shang and Zhou dynasties, bronze technology developed and a variety of metal technologies were also used to the jewelry production, when the headwear was mainly made of gold and silver; jade headwear also became popular. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the production process of headwear and the preciousness of the materials reached the development peak of the ancient headwear; gold, silver and jade were the main materials of the first ornament. In addition to the conventional metal production technology, the filament mosaic, mother-of-pearl inlay, enamel and other processes have been skillfully used.

D. Analysis of Functions

Ancient headwear produced from the ancients of the beam hair needs, so main functions of the early Ji, Zan, Chai, Zhi, Shu and Bi are combing/ bounding hair, fixing hat or other useful features. But with the advance of history, besides practicality, the ancients' demand for decorative features of headwear is getting higher and higher, followed by pure headwear ornaments - step shake, Dian and Huasheng. These three is strictly not practical but create the status/wealth symbolic function of the ancient headwear, since only the rich can afford to buy these gorgeous shaped, timber particular headwear. Phoenix coronet, in addition to highlighting the wearer's wealth and status, is also a symbol of social class and usually wore by the emperor's concubines; its shape and timber have strict level requirements.

There is a great variety of ancient headwear; Ji, Zan, Chai, step shake and crown are the main ornaments of the ancients. Ancient headwear plays a decisive role in the history of jewelry development; the phoenix coronet set in the Ming and Qing Dynasties integrates the highest jewelry art and technology and represents on the peak state of jewelry design.

Ancient headwear derives from the demand for bounding hair and through the evolution and development of history, accounts for a deceasing proportion in today's jewelry design, leaving the majority focusing on ornaments of hand, neck, wrist and ear, brooches and other jewelry types. Headwear, once occupying an important position in the ancient's ornaments, seriously fell behind the development of other types of jewelry. To study the function, design and craft of the ancient headwear is not only beneficial to the development and popularization of the headwear, but also can provide new opportunities for the contemporary jewelry design.

IV. RECONSTRUCTION

The reconstruction of the headwear design system can be explored in two forms: to directly use the types of ancient headwear and to figure out functions and meanings of ancient headwear to enlighten contemporary jewelry design through inheriting or innovating.

A. Application of Ancient Headwear in Modern Ornaments

1) Direct use of ancient headwear

The direct use of ancient headwear refers to directly using Ji, Zan, Chai, step shake, Huasheng, phoenix coronet and other ancient ornaments, which is commonly applied in theaters and stages to restore the ancient clothing culture. Ancient headwear not only is widely used in the stage of costume dramas, but steps into the people's daily life resorting in the important wedding ceremony. Chinese wedding ornaments almost cover all types of ancient headwear, both elegant and auspicious festive, and the two kinds of ancient headwear application is the most direct and complete. The design followed and restored the shape of the ancient headwear, timber close to the ancient, but mainly applied gold and silver to abandon today's popular platinum, palladium, diamond and other white jewelry materials. Sometimes it also used some traditional jewelry skills of this country. Adding traditional styles of headwear to the modern design elements can make the ancient headwear present a fresh vigor and vitality. "Fig. 1" shows Chow Tai Fook Jewelry launched two Yulan hairpin models made of diamonds, rubies, garnet, tourmaline, and nephrite and other materials and combined with modern jewelry production process and design elements in the "Palace Cultural Jewelry" series for the National Palace Museum 90th anniversary, to pay tribute to the traditional aesthetics and perfectly combine the ancient jewelry with modern fashion. This combination is not only the direct use of the ancient headwear, but also an innovative application, in line with the development trend of the times.



Fig. 1. Yulan hairpin

2) Application of exquisite skills of ancient headwear

The production of ancient headwear contains lots of traditional skills that are rarely used in today's jewelry design and the protection of these traditional handcraft skills is more than the inheritance of national culture, but can provide new bright ideas for today's jewelry design.

Traditional skills in the ancient headwear include filament mosaic and Diancui.

Filament mosaic is divided into "filament" and "mosaic" two parts. Filaments adopt gold, silver and copper as raw materials and use pinching, filling, assembling, welding, weaving, heaping and other traditional techniques for bending molding; mosaic means using sheet metals to make brackets embedded with pearls, precious stones and so on. Filament mosaic techniques are still in use in today's jewelry design and production, and the jewelries produced with this technique basically are relatively traditional due to following the ancient jewelry styles. By applying filament mosaic in the jewelry design or innovating of the traditional skills, it can maintain the forms of ancient skills and combine with the contemporary jewelry design styles and types to design contemporary art jewelries with a strong sense of the times. As shown in "Fig. 2", Guizhou Normal University Zhang Yuewei's work - *Landscape Guizhou - Concept Silverware* adopts Guizhou's intangible cultural heritage - Miao embroidery and combines with modern filament craft and handmade silver forging process. The work not only contains the strong feelings of old artists to traditional culture, but represents new prominent designers to show respects for more ancient art craft.



Fig. 2. Landscape Guizhou - Concept Silverware

Diancui means using the kingfisher feathers to decorate in the surface of metal jewelry; due to colorful Kingfisher feather and uneasily faded, the headwear produced by the use of Diancui techniques is welcomed by the ancient elite class. Using traditional Diancui techniques in contemporary jewelry design requires designers to adopt alternative processes because Kingfisher has become a national protected animal, and it is no longer possible to reproduce the traditional process. However, innovative applications can achieve unexpected results. "Fig. 3" shows some jewelry produced by using enamel crafts, and colorful enamel glaze can enhance the color tension of jewelries. At the same time the use of animal feathers in Diancui process also reminds us, all kinds of feathers and other soft materials can extend the material range of jewelry. As shown in "Fig. 4", they are some feathers of Dior jewelry combined fiber and metal, with strong color and pure luster.



Fig. 3. Enamel ring



Fig. 4. Dior jewelry made of comprehensive materials

B. Inspiration of Ancient Headwear Research to Contemporary Jewelry Design

1) The practicability should be enhanced in contemporary jewelry design

The status of ancient headwear in ancient life is probably unmatched by any kind of modern jewelry and decorations and the reason is that ancient headwear has a strong practical function. In view of modern jewelry design, commercial jewelry pay attention to the application of precious metals, jewelry and jade and other roles beyond decorative function put emphasis on the holding value function and symbolic function of wealth and status of jewelry. The artistic jewelry pay attention to the comprehensive utilization of the materials, emphasize the artistic grade and idea of design and represent the latest design idea and trend of thought of the jewelry. The decorative function of jewelry occupies the leading role of function and the practicality of ancient headwear is hard to find in modern jewelry. In addition to the decorative function and part of symbolic function, the most extensive decorations in daily life, such as ring, hand chain, bracelet, necklace, earring pendant, and earring and so on basically have no practical function. To strengthen the practicality of jewelry, it can stimulate people's demand for jewelry to a large extent and combine practicality with decorative function, and jewelry can become really indispensable in our daily life. Take smart jewelry for example, it is a kind of jewelry category which combines microelectronics technology with the jewelry. As shown in "Fig. 5", there are some Ringly smart tings, and these rings equip with hidden wireless equipment named "CullLinc" and can send the alarms and notifications to smart phones with the help of Bluetooth. CuffLinc also has some other functions, including the automatic alarm when the wearer is attacked, the user with heart disease to send alarm to family number in the special case and keeping contact with the lover by using the system simply. These designs not only have beautiful presentation but also have the grafting of science and technology, and the combination of jewelry and technology greatly enhances the practicality of jewelry.

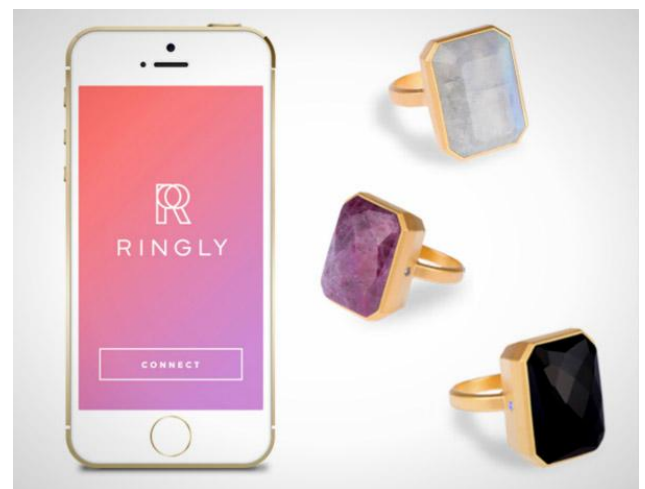


Fig. 5. Ringly smart rings

2) *The inspiration of traditional morals of ancient headwear to contemporary jewelry design*

Ancient headwear contains a lot of traditional auspicious culture, and auspicious culture reflects people's awareness of seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages and expresses the pursuit and yearn for auspiciousness, happiness, harmony and satisfactory of people. To explore the application of auspicious culture in ancient headwear, we should not only stay in the utilization of traditional patterns and decorative patterns, but also further explore the contained spiritual connotation of Chinese philosophy and traditional aesthetic ideal. The expression of ancient headwear to the theme of auspicious moral is often intuitive and concrete, and these images are presented in the most intuitive form, such as dragon and phoenix patterns, pomegranates, cicadas, butterflies and mandarin ducks. As shown in "Fig. 6", this is the "golden cicada jade leaf" hairpin of Ming Dynasty now possessed by Nanjing Museum. Cicada is also named "zhiliao" and the homonym of "zhi" is "branch", so "golden cicada jade leaf" also means "descendants of royal families", which represents the high praise to women in ancient China. In the process of drawing on the experience of auspicious moral of ancient headwear, contemporary jewelry designers not only need to understand and know well the expressions of these morals, but also need to combine with the aesthetic habits of modern people. "Fig. 7" is Su Mang's work, "Tree and Horse". The work is inspired by two trees and skillfully forms the shape of golden horse, which symbolizes that all things are alike and all depend on each other for existence and represents the good moral that love and life flow on and never stop. The expression of auspicious morals in "Tree and Horse" combines Chinese traditional philosophy with modern aesthetics whose forms are gentle and concise and contents are profound and rich.



Fig. 6. "Golden Cicada jade leaf" of Ming Dynasty



Fig. 7. Tree and Horse

V. CONCLUSION

In the history of Chinese jewelry, the previous brilliant status of ancient headwear cannot be surpassed by any modern jewelry category, whose gorgeous modeling and exquisite craftsmanship of have represented the highest level of jewelry at that time. Jewelry design has developed to today's level and the development of headwear cannot be ignored, and we cannot allow headwear descend to this position which is equal to the cheap knitting wool and headwear flower. Although complex ancient headwear cannot adapt to the daily hairstyle decoration of contemporary people, some hairpins and headwear flowers and so on with simple modeling and sense of design can still arouse the admiration of people to traditional culture. These headweares can be adopted as multifunctional jewelry form, and a piece of jewelry has many different uses, which can not only be used as headwear, but also be used as brooch, earring and so on. Contemporary jewelry design should find a unique entry point from the design and manufacture of ancient headwear, pay attention to the application and innovation of traditional culture and traditional skills, pay attention to multidisciplinary intersection and enhance the practical performance of jewelry. A modern interpretation to traditional morals and exquisite craftsmanship of the ancient headwear can make the ancient culture and skills radiate new vitality in the modern jewelry design.

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