

# Important Academic Achievements in the Research on Chinese Traditional Women's Wear

Comment on "Culture and Crafts of the Three Major Fisher Girl Costumes in Fujian"\*

Bo'er Xie

Xiamen Academy of Arts and Design  
Fuzhou University  
Xiamen, China 361021

**Abstract**—Professor Lu Xinyan's book "Culture and Crafts of the three Fisher Girl costumes in Fujian" is an important academic achievement in the research on traditional Chinese women's wear. This book, based on marine culture, with history as the main axis, contains a comprehensive study of the three major fisher girl costumes. It has diverse significance to the study of Chinese traditional women's wear and the research and protection of intangible cultural heritage.

**Keywords**—Fujian fisher girl costumes; intangible cultural heritage; marine culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous improvement of the social economy and culture, people are paying more and more attention to the protection and development of "intangible cultural heritage" when vigorously developing economic construction. In recent years, the national government and the private sector have invested a lot of energy and funds to include various traditional practices, performances, handicrafts, and cultural sites in different levels of inheritance protection.



Fig. 1. Cover of the work.

Fujian has three major fisher girl costumes: Hui'an women, Xun Pu women and Meizhou women's clothing.

\*Fund Project: National Social Science Fund Art Project (2015FG04022).

CLC number: TS 941.7 Document code: A

Among them, Hui'an women's costume is listed in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage, and Xun Pu women's costume is ranked in the second batch. The book "Culture and Crafts of the three major Fisher Girl costumes in Fujian" published by China Textile & Apparel Press in June 2014 as the result of the seven Intangible Cultural Heritage Research and Protection Fund Project of Center for Arts and Sciences in Tsinghua University. (See "Fig. 1") The author Lu Xinyan has obtaining a large amount of first-hand information through field survey for many years, and made systematic combing and summary of the style, characteristics and crafts of the three major fisher girl costumes, which has active promoting effect in many aspects of the inheritance and development of traditional Chinese women's wear in the future. It is an important academic achievement in the study on traditional Chinese women's wear.

After carefully reading the work of more than 200,000 words, the author has the thoughts in the following aspects.

## II. ABOUT THE INFORMATION

"Academic research is not an invention, but a search for truth. For the pursuit of truth, we must respect the facts, be objective and fair with the scientific spirit and attitude. Pursuing truth in academy, pursuing kindness in character, pursuing beauty in art, moving from science to art, and from art to academics is a process of climbing academic highs." Professor Lu Xinyan wrote this book in such spirit and philosophy.

This work takes the three major fisher girl costumes of Hui'an women in Hui'an County on the southeast coast of Fujian, the Xun Pu women of Xun Pu Village in Quanzhou and the Meizhou women from Weizhou Island as the object to systematically comb and summarize its historical development, cultural connotation, style appearance and technological methods through the combination of archaeology, literature and physical investigation.

After consulting, there are a few studies on the traditional costume culture of the three major fisher girls in the existing literature, and there is few related to their production techniques. Among the few publications, *Fengwu Hui'an: Hui'an women's costume* published by Haichao Photography

Art Publishing House in August 2003, written by Quanzhou Huidong Women's Apparel Research Group is a representative one. The author of this book studies the color, artistic image, pattern and inheritance of Huidong women's clothing from the perspective of art, which fills the gap of current Huidong folk culture research. However, most of them are introductory texts, and there is less data on textual research. The "Culture and Crafts of the three major Fisher Girl costumes in Fujian" uses marine culture as the main line of three different fisher girl's costumes running through them and lists their respective cultures and characteristics. Through field investigations conducted by the research team personally led by the author for many years, they take pictures, draw pictures, and find traditional craftsmen to obtain a large amount of first-hand information, trying to restore their production process to the greatest extent, and explain the history, culture and customs, and production techniques of the three major fisher girl costumes. These laid a solid foundation for the reliability and persuasiveness of the content of the book.

In the field investigation, it was found that the craftsmanship of the fisher girl costumes was mostly passed down by family. Most craftsmen are old, living in fishing villages with inconvenient transportation. The younger generation of the family mostly went out for living, without realizing the importance of traditional handicrafts, and the urgency of inheritance, so they were not willing to learn and inherit, leading to the loss of skills. Traditional handicrafts are often passed down by family and master, and the existing texts and pictures are scarce. The skilled craftsmen, limited by the cultural level, can't express clearly, resulting in the difficulty in communication, and most of them can only speak local dialects, which greatly increases the difficulty of research. With the help of leaders and experts of relevant local department, the author of the book translated and commented the dialect, which laid a solid foundation for subsequent field research and had extremely high literature value and credibility. For example, "'Jinzai' is the household headwear of a married woman, of which the basic form is similar to a big bun." Such expressions as "Zhuizai" and "Jinzai" are close to the local dialect. The most commendable thing is that the production process of these exquisite traditional costumes that are on the verge of loss are recorded in a multi-dimensional way through hand-painting, videography and photography. On this basis, the author of the book has repeatedly visited libraries, museums, folk museums, etc., and consulted relevant experts. Combining with existing literature and history materials, he finally formed the data base of the work, which provides a reliable basis for the study of traditional costume culture in the future.

### III. ABOUT THE STRUCTURE

#### A. *Combining Graphics and Texts, It Is Beautiful and Colorful*

For visual art, a picture is often better than a thousand words. The book is a combination of pictures and texts, which is beautiful and colorful. In addition to detailed text

introductions, it is supplemented by a large number of pictures. According to preliminary statistics, the book uses nearly 800 examples, most of which are taken by the author himself. The fisher girl's costumes are pretty in color and rich in pattern. Subject to conditions, the intelligent fisher girls use natural plant dyes to dye the soil cloth, making it show a special maroon color. With large color blocks such as black and blue, it is stable and interesting. [1] In terms of details, the pattern of red, yellow, green, white and other colors is decorated as a bright spot, which is called a beautiful landscape on the fisher girls' costumes. The contents of the pattern are all-encompassing. There are flowers, insects, marine fish and shrimps that express respect for nature as well as ordinary but interesting records of life, such as fishing scenes and costume figures. The composition is beautiful and the form is easy and varied. The types of pictures are very diverse, and they are displayed from various angles. There are pictures, physical maps, costume structure drawings, style drawings, and process flow charts of clothing and hairstyles displayed by real people. With text descriptions, it is lively and interesting, and it also more intuitive for the reader to read. What is more valuable is that these pictures are mostly taken by the author in person, which greatly improves the reliability and reference of the data foundation of the book.

#### B. *Costume Culture and Dual Perspective*

The picture costume and the culture are inseparable. Each of the characteristics of the three fisher girl costumes maps their respective cultural backgrounds. The hairpin hairstyle of Xun Pu women is a typical example (See "Fig. 2"). In Xun Pu, women using "spiral bun" method to wear hair can be seen everywhere. They use ivory chopsticks to fix the hair, and decorate it with flowers. For the above phenomenon, the author made several speculations: imitating the wear of Yang Bajie in the Song Dynasty; influenced by the dress of Arab women due to the frequent port trade in the Song and Yuan Dynasties; when the officers and men suppressed them, the Xun Pu women fixed their bun in a panic with hard branches. Later, they improved it to ivory chopsticks or plastic chopsticks; the custom of "hairpin" has been traced from the Han Dynasty. On this basis, the author also made a few speculations: (1) is it related to the love for bustle of southern Fujian so that they think the lush is beautiful? People in Southern Fujian like bustle by nature, and they like playing finger guessing game and rolling a dice on the wine table in leisure time. Because of the ancestral idea, "welcoming the ancestors" and "passing the furnace" is also the manifestation of the love for bustle of the people in southern Fujian. The headwear with rich multicolored decorations is so pleasant to watch. (2) "A girl will doll herself up for him who loves her". It is the nature of women to love beauty. Taking the advantage of frequent port trades, they decorate themselves with a lot of flowers, which is economic and affordable. (3) Is it related to faith so that people in the Southern Fujian believes in "Mazu" (she is known as the goddess of sailing who blesses the safety of fisherman)? In addition to making the husband who went out to fish happy to see the flowers after coming back, flowers also have the symbol of praying for peace.



Fig. 2. The Hairpin headwear of Xun Pu women.

### C. Prominent Focus and Clear Structure

"Culture and Crafts of the three major Fisher Girl costumes in Fujian" is divided into six chapters, and its structure can be summarized as: "two priorities and one overview." "One overview" refers that the book summarizes the three Han nationality fisher girl's costumes, from the intangible culture, through the geographical, religious, and ethnic aspects into "three major fisher girl's costumes in Fujian", and describes their appearance respectively, which all paves the way for the cultural penetration in several chapters in the book. The "two key points" are: clothing research and decoration research. The shape and characteristics of clothing research are mainly expounded in the third chapter of the book. Taking time as the main line, it lists the appearances of Hui'an fisher girl, Xun Pu fisher girl and Meizhou fisher girl's costumes, and records the changes in clothing style from the late Qing Dynasty to the 1960s. These changes have been affected by social background, aesthetics, living habits, fashion trends, etc. to varying degrees, and have evolved to this day. Whether it is from life experience or influenced by works of art, the classic image of Hui'an women described as "feudal Head, democratic abdomen, thrifty shirt, and extravagant pants" is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people (see "Fig. 3"). In addition to Hui'an women's head scarves, they also wear a yellow bamboo hat and blue blouse on the upper body, in order to expose the silver belt, under which they wear wide black trousers. But this is not the original image of Hui'an woman. The change can be seen from the name of the tops. From the end of the Qing Dynasty to the 1920s, Hui'an women in Chongwu and Shanxia wore "joint-sleeve shirts". As the name suggests, they connect another piece to a shorter sleeve for coverage. Considering the need to work, the sleeves can be rolled up and fixed with buttons after marriage. In the 1930s and 1950s, it involves to "Zhuizuoshan", the style of which is based on the "joint-sleeve shirts". Two pieces of square silk is stitched on the both sides of the center line under collar, which plays a certain decorative role and is therefore named. After the 1950s, due to the social morality of advocating women's equality, in order to facilitate women's participation in production labor, we have the "thrifty shirt" that is closest to what we now see. The other is about structure and process. The sixth chapter of the book uses the illustrated method to record the production methods of the three major fisher girl's costumes in detail. The picture

of real products and the clothing structure drawing are referenced one-to-one, and detailed dimensional data is included, even including the front and back side of structure diagram and the complete cut pieces are displayed one by one. The introduction of the craft method is infiltrated into the text, interspersed with the narration of cultural customs, which adds a lot of fun on the basis of rigorous academics. In addition, the sequence of the structure and craftsmanship of the three major fisher girl's costumes analyzed in this chapter is consistent to the order of introduction to the clothing and apparel modeling in the first half of the book, emphasizing the systemic nature of the book. All of the above aspects reflect the academic research value of the work.



Fig. 3. Hui'an women's costume.

### IV. ABOUT THOUGHT

Interdisciplinarity is a major feature of the work. The book not only has a straightforward description of things, but also is interspersed with statement of aesthetics, religion, semiotics, traditional customs and other perspectives, allowing readers to understand the soul of the fisher girl's costumes from multiple dimensions. For example, the typical feature of upper wear of Xun Pu women is the misplaced stitching. The color of the front center line is misplaced jointed with the gray fabric. The left side is 2cm higher than the right side. The locals explain that it is from the custom of male is represented by left while female is represented by right, and the male is higher than female, which also follows the status of men and women in Han culture." [1] This passage in the book reflects that the traditional Chinese costume culture also reflects the family relationship between the male and the female. Taking Hui'an women as an example, in the families of the eastern Fujian, men and women are different and have different division of labor. Man is in charge of the outside affairs while females in charge of the house affairs. Men go out to fish and carve stones; women stay at home. They not only have to bear the heavy burden of housework and raising children, but also join the ranks of agricultural production and natural disasters resistance. Over time, Hui'an females' image of hardworking, brave, simple, and bearing hardship is gradually gaining

popularity. Hui'an Women Reservoir was built to solve the problem of water resources and get rid of the local poverty image, which is a true portrayal of Hui'an women's hardworking image.

There is a description of Xun Pu women's costume in the book: "The clothes are usually connected with 6 cloth buttons, which has the auspicious meaning of being in pairs, and everything will go well smoothly." [1] The Chinese have a strong emotional coloring on the numbers, so they like to take homonyms in the numbers to hope for auspiciousness." For example: "6" means "six-six Dashun"; "8" is the same as "fa", which means rich and developed; "9" is read as "jiu", representing a long-time relationship, and so on. The mystery of numbers is also hidden in the costume culture. Since the early years of the Republic of China, the Chinese tunic suit has been popular in China. The new-democratic revolution has made the "Zhongshan suit" more revolutionary and people-oriented, and it has been popularized to the largest extent in the "Cultural Revolution." Therefore, both the style and detail design of the Chinese tunic suit reveals the imprint of political thought: the four pockets of the tops represent the meanings of the four major contents of Chinese traditional culture, including rite, righteousness, honesty and shame; the five buttons are the embodiment of the political system "five power division" (different from the separation of the three powers: the administrative, legislative, and judicial powers of the Western countries, it increases the content of examinations and supervision); the three buckles on each side of the sleeves represent the concept "Three Principles of the People" in the dominant thought of the Republic of China" (i.e., of the people, by the people, for the people). [2]

Professor Lu Xinyan has been engaged in costume arts for more than 20 years, focusing on fashion design and costume culture research. She has published more than 20 papers in professional journals and presided over more than 10 provincial-level projects. The underway 2015 National Social Science Fund: "project of Research on Fujian Fisher girl's Clothing from the Perspective of Silk Culture" also continues the direction of the "Three Major Fisher Girl's Clothing Culture and Crafts" of the Tsinghua University's Center for the Study and Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage to make more profound academic research. Professor Lu Xinyan has held important positions in the Fujian Image Designers Association and the Fujian Provincial Fashion Designers Association. He is also a leader in the research and protection of intangible cultural heritage in Fujian Province and even in the country with extensive exposure to both theoretical research and practical techniques. Therefore, such a valuable historical work that incorporates a broad academic vision and micro-level professional thinking was born.

## V. ABOUT MEANING

In an important speech at the Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in September 2013 and the Indonesian Parliament in October, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the construction of the "New Economic Belt along Silk Road" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" strategic vision. In ancient China, the ports leading to the

Maritime Silk Road mainly include ports such as Guangzhou, Xiamen, Quanzhou, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai. As early as in the Tang Dynasty, Quanzhou Citong port was one of the four major foreign trade ports in China, which was also the starting point for the "Maritime Silk Road" to the world. Xun Pu village was near it. Since the opening of the Qin and Han Dynasties, the Maritime Silk Road has not only been the main sea passage between China and foreign trade, but also become the main bridge for exchanges with Western culture. Tea, silk, porcelain, etc. were the main goods traded at the time on the Maritime Silk Road. With these goods, the Chinese and Western lifestyles also had a great degree of mutual penetration, and clothing was one of the important carriers. For example, the Zhunge'er women's coat is a women's dress that combines the traditional elements of China and Turkey. The frock takes silk as the main fabric, decorated with Chinese-style embroidery patterns. At the same time, it is woven in the traditional Turkish weaving method on the back of the garment to form a women's dress with a unique exotic style. [3]

China is known for its long history, as a "state of etiquette" and a "big country of apparel". As a carrier of the development of human civilization, clothing, to a certain extent, reflects changes in social culture, art, history, and politics. Southern Fujian is across the sea from Taiwan. There is the Eastern largest port in the ancient, which is the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road. The three major representative fisher girls come from there: Hui'an women in Hui'an County, Xun Pu women in Quanzhou Xun Pu Village and Meizhou women in Meizhou Island. The style of clothing is unique, as a representative Chinese traditional women's wear under the background of marine culture. At present, the published National Intangible Cultural Heritage List includes three batches. The traditional costumes belong to the folklore category, with a total of 17 items, including 14 minority costumes and 3 Han costumes. In the Han costumes, Fujian fisher girl's costumes accounted for two, which are Hui'an women's costume and Xun Pu women customs respectively. The Hui'an women's costumes entered into the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage list, and the Xun Pu women customs were recorded in the second batch of "intangible cultural heritage" lists. [6] Its style is compatible with the characteristics of Han costumes and regional ethnic characteristics, as well as a large number of Southeast Asian marine cultures. Located in the coastal area of Fujian, Fujian women's clothing not only infiltrates the Central Plains culture brought by the immigrants of the Central Plains, but also preserves the Southeast Asian marine culture brought about by the customs of the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties, and the Xun Pu women's "hairpin" and the "clam shell" in the Xun Pu village are the best proof of marine culture. The wise fishermen in Xun Pu make use of local materials, dress themselves up with flowers, and decorate their homes with clam shells, which have become a unique part of the marine culture of southern Fujian. In addition, the names of many places in Quanzhou are full of strong Central Plain culture, such as Jinjiang District, Luojiang District and Luoyang Bridge. There are also folk customs of making a living in Nanyang. Especially after Zheng He's voyages to the West, there are a large

number of immigrants, the marine culture return to the Central Plains culture. Under such a marine culture background, Han traditional women's clothing with a unique style has been formed.

At present, women's wear in the Bo Hai Coastal Region and the southeastern coastal areas is developing rapidly nationwide. Whether it is judged from the concentration of the brand or the purchasing power of consumers, it can be used as a guide for the Chinese women's wear market. "Only the nationality is the world", the UNESCO World Cultural Diversity Declaration states: "All forms of cultural heritage should be protected, exploited and passed down from generation to generation as witnesses to human experience and expectations, to support various creations and to establish a true dialogue between cultures." In recent years, from the local women's wear brand in Fujian, to European and American luxury design, Chinese national elements are popular among them. Even many domestic women's wear brands have infiltrated the design of traditional Chinese elements and left impression to people on the stage of the international fashion week. Looking back on the study of traditional costumes, and re-examining and defining the traditional culture of traditional culture, designers extract elements from the patterns, styles and techniques of traditional costumes, to internalize and reconstruct, and let the soul and modernity of national culture better combined with the modern style of women's wear organically, presenting a new style of modern women's clothing with traditional Chinese elements, and making it retain in the long history. As one of the most representative traditional costumes on the southeast coast, Fujian's three major fisher girl costumes have established the research value of "intangible cultural heritage". From a new perspective, not only does it reflect the new brilliance of traditional Chinese costume culture, but it is also the protection and continuation of the marine costume culture and the distinctive components of the Haisi culture.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Professor Lu Xinyan has a unique research perspective and academic wisdom on the study of national and folk costume culture. "Fujian's Three Major Women's Clothing Cultures and Crafts" is a book based on the perspective of marine culture, which is deeply excavated by the traditional Chinese folk costumes with the unique "Haisi" background. This is especially true. It is hoped that in the results of the study of Chinese folk costume culture, there are more such great works, which will bring new brilliance to the study of Chinese traditional costume culture.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Lu Xinyan. Culture and Crafts of the three major Fisher Girl costumes in Fujian[M]. Beijing: China Textile Press, 2014:168. (in Chinese)
- [2] Hua Mei. Clothing Aesthetics [M], Beijing: China Textile Press, 2003: 192. (in Chinese)
- [3] Max Tilke. Oriental Costumes, Their Designs and Colors; Ernst Wasmuth LTD. U.S.A, 1922:40.