

# Study on the “Activation” of Traditional Qi-Lu Folk Handicraft in Modern Design Art\*

Yuan Chen

Institute of Art & Design  
Shandong Women's University  
Jinan, China

**Abstract**—The issue of inheritance and development of traditional handicraft has always been concerned by the academic circle. At present, it is generally believed that traditional handicraft should be integrated into modern life to better serve the modern society. In the important period of the economic and cultural construction transformation of Shandong province, the traditional handicraft which highlights cultural self-confidence carries a great mission. From the perspective of design, this paper focuses on the development of traditional Qi-Lu folk handicrafts in modern design art. Firstly the possibility of integrating the traditional Qi-Lu folk handicrafts and modern design art is analyzed. After that on the basis of learning from the experience of other countries in the east and west, this paper further discusses the “activation” method of Qi-Lu traditional folk handicraft in modern design art. Finally, taking the modern design of Lu brocade as a case study, this paper explains the “activation” form of local traditional folk handicraft in modern design.

**Keywords**—traditional folk handicraft; modern design; Qi-Lu; “activation”

## I. INTRODUCTION

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory points out that people need to satisfy physiological needs before they pursue further emotional and belonging needs. Nowadays, people's material life has been greatly enriched, and the consumption level has been gradually improved. Busy work and fast pace of life make people living in the city expect to relax and contend their mind and body in handicrafts with warm feeling. This makes the traditional folk handicraft, which has been gradually forgotten before, pushed to the forefront again and ushered in unprecedented opportunities for development. Traditional folk handicrafts bear the diligence and wisdom of the ancients and have become valuable cultural property in the course of human history. With the advent of the industrial age, great changes have taken place in people's lifestyle and consumption structure. At present, traditional folk handicrafts are far more decorative than functional, and they are disjointed from modern consumption life and gradually lose their dominant position in society. While modern design, as a national cultural industry, not only

represents the country's cultural soft power, but also plays a positive role in promoting the change of China's economic structure. Therefore how to combine traditional folk handicraft with modern design art, innovate and burst out new forms and functions, and make it more close to people's life has always been the focus of many countries and regions in the east and west.

In recent years, China has issued the guiding opinions on promoting the development of the industrial culture, "Chinese traditional craft revitalization plan", "regulations on the protection of heritage crafts, these policies without exception are to encourage the revival of traditional arts and crafts and development, and also made a clear request on the main task of the development of traditional crafts and specific measures. In addition, Shandong proposed the policy of "switching between old and new drivers of growth" in early 2018. It further confirms the transformation of economic development mode from traditional backward extensive industry to new information technology-oriented fine industry and decided to implement the action plan of "Internet + Qi-Lu excellent traditional culture" to promote the development of cultural creativity and design services. Thus, the development of traditional Qi-Lu handicraft has ushered in a new historical opportunity. On the basis of attaching importance to protection and inheritance, it should be integrated with modern design art to better adapt to modern life. This can not only realize the revival of traditional folk handicraft, and further make it a "living" history, but also combine modern design to cultivate international brands with high added value, and make "China design" more recognizable and innovative in the international market, which can be said to as a double benefit.

## II. POSSIBILITY EXPLORATION OF COMBINING TRADITIONAL FOLK HANDICRAFT WITH MODERN DESIGN

### A. Similarities and Differences Between the Two

Traditional folk handicraft and modern design are the different existence of an organism in different historical stages. There are both connections and differences between them, but they are closely related and cannot be cut off or opposed at will. To be specific, they are both of the same origin and different current, and both of them are creative activities to satisfy people's material life in essence. There

\*Fund: This paper is the research result of the "activation" study of Qi-Lu traditional folk handicraft in modern design art", a key subject of Shandong Province Science of Art in 2017. Project number: 201706231

are still some differences between traditional folk handicraft and modern design in service object, production method, material selection and production style yet. From the perspective of service objects, under the influence of the strict hierarchy in ancient times, traditional handicrafts are divided into traditional folk handicraft, scholar-bureaucrat handicraft, religious handicraft and royal court handicraft. Different classes have different demands, styles, materials and production methods for handicrafts. Among them, the service objects of traditional folk handicrafts are ordinary people of low class, whose demands are mainly practical. On the other hand, the service object of modern design is the general public, and there is no hierarchy and hierarchy, so the service scope is broader. From the perspective of production methods, in traditional folk handicraft, handicrafts are designed and produced successively with independent single production; while in modern design, the design and production are separated with design as a single system and mass production. In terms of material selection, traditional folk handicrafts are made with natural materials, in which there are individual differences; while modern design works are mostly made from synthesis materials and uses the mechanization standardized production, so the product form is identical. From the perspective of production style, traditional folk handicraft is fresh and natural, with a human touch and warm feeling. And modern design is cold, rational with a pursuit of modern sense and sense of science and technology.

*B. Exploration of the Combination Value of the Two*

"Hermes", "LV", "Chanel"... all of the well-known world's top luxury brands without exception are keen on handmade products. These high-end goods are more like works of art. It is the handwork that endows them with more emotions and higher values. Chinese traditional folk handicrafts are rich in resources and various in types. If they are inherited only for practical purposes, they will be separated from modern life and gradually fade out of the stage of history. If starting from the perspective of fashion, combining regional culture and humanistic spirit, adopting the production method of folk handicraft and retaining the hand-feel quality to create a fashion brand of high quality, we will bring higher added value to the inheritors of handicraft and makes the traditional folk handicraft inherited for a longer time.

In addition, influenced by the invasion of western culture and modern design, China has made great progress in the development of design, but the blind pursuit of cold and rational modern design seriously assimilates the works of domestic designers. The monotonous design style makes Chinese design lack of recognition and creativity on the international design stage. To change this, designers need to draw nutrients from traditional culture. Traditional folk handicrafts that focus on culture, locality and originality may bring creative inspiration to local designers and revive Chinese design.

**III. THE EXISTING STATUS OF TRADITIONAL QI-LU FOLK HANDICRAFTS**

*A. Historical Origins and Types*

Originating in the pre-Qin period, "Qi-Lu", named after the state of Qi Where Jixia Academy was and the state of Lu where Confucius and Mencius lived, and now refers to Shandong province in China. The land of Qi-Lu has a long history and profound culture, and is one of the birthplaces of Chinese civilization. The terrain in this region is intersected by plains and mountains and hills. The unique geographical environment makes it very rich in natural resources, with agriculture, animal husbandry and handicraft as the most developed industries. Thanks to the unique natural conditions, the hard-working and intelligent people of Shandong have created a wide variety of economic and practical folk handicrafts with their own hands.

*B. Types of Folk Handicrafts*

As a famous province of history and culture, Shandong has a long history, splendid culture and superior natural conditions, giving birth to various forms of traditional folk handicrafts. Qi-Lu traditional folk handicraft is rooted in the folk society. It was the local folk practitioners including farmers, fishermen, herdsman and some craftsmen that use production and living tools to deal with or process various raw materials or semi-finished products in the form of manual production, so as to make them become handicrafts that reflect the thoughts, aesthetics and artistic tastes of local people. The content of folk handicraft in Shandong is very extensive, which can be divided into the categories of embroidery printing and dyeing, pottery, weaving and strapping, manual skill, printing and drawing, carving and shaping, etc. (see "Table I"). From the functional point of view it can be divided into two categories: one for practical life, such as Linyi wickerwork, Laizhou straw weaving, Juancheng Lu brocade, Zhangqiu black pottery, Linzi cuju, Weifang silver-inlaid lacquer, etc.; the other is for art appreciation, such as Gaomi puhui New Year paintings, Yangjiabu woodblock New Year paintings, Weifang kites, Caozhou dough figurine, Jinan dough figurine, Huimin clay figurine, Yantai paper cutting, Liaocheng crafted gourd, Qufu kai carving, etc.

TABLE I. MAIN TYPES AND REPRESENTATIVE ITEMS OF TRADITIONAL QI-LU FOLK HANDICRAFTS

<b>Main Types and Representative Items of Traditional Qi-Lu Folk Handicrafts</b>	
<i>Embroidery printing and dyeing</i>	Lu brocade weaving skills, Color printing cloth, blueprint cloth, Weifang embroidery, Wulian flower cutting technique
<i>Pottery</i>	Dezhou Black pottery firing technique, Zibo ceramics firing technique, Glass firing technology (Zibo, Xufu)
<i>Weaving and strapping</i>	Linyi wickerwork, Laizhou straw weaving, Weifang kites, Caoxian, paper offering

<b>Main Types and Representative Items of Traditional Qi-Lu Folk Handicrafts</b>	
<b>Manual skill</b>	Weifang silver-inlaid lacquer, Linqing tribute brick firing technology, Zhoucun baked-cake making craft, Tancheng wood whirligig, Juancheng brick sculpture
<b>Printing and drawing</b>	Gaomi puhui New Year paintings, Yangjiabu woodblock New Year paintings, Wulian paper cutting, Yuncheng playing cards themed on Water Margin, Yuncheng Woodblock printing technique, Lu-style inside-bottle painting
<b>Carving and shaping</b>	Caozhou dough figurine, Langzhuang dough sculpture, Niejiazhuang clay sculpture, Dongchang gourd carving, Qufu kai carving, Jiaxiang stone carving, Weifang fruit pit carving, Juancheng brick sculpture
<b>Other types</b>	Linzi cuju

**C. Existing Problems**

Traditional Qi-Lu folk handicrafts have been developing continuously in the historical course. However, with the improvement of industrialization, the backward production technology and low production efficiency no longer meet the needs of modern life, so they are gradually endangered.

Through in-depth research on folk handicrafts in Qi-Lu region, the author found the following problems:

First of all, the folk handicraft workers in this region are divorced from modern life, lacking in artistic literacy, and the handicrafts they make have a low degree of innovation. For a long period in Chinese history, it has been hold that the doctrine is much more important than utensil. Therefore craftsmen engaged in the production of artifacts have low social status and are usually in serious shortage. At present, most handicrafts-men are women and old people left behind in rural areas, who are engaged in this trade only to make a living or supplement their family expenses. They have not received good art education and have not really entered modern urban life. That's why although highly skilled, they have narrow vision and low aesthetic level, and the goods they produce have been divorced from modern life in terms of aesthetic appreciation, connotation, form and function.

Secondly, Shandong is located in the east China coast with heavy industries such as steel, coal and machinery as the dominance in its economy. Compared with the light industry and creative industry in the south, those in the north are relatively conservative and rigid, and lack the spirit of innovation. In Shandong province, traditional folk handicraft is generally carried out in the form of family workshop or OEM, which lacks the support of "industry" in production, with small scale and low industrialization degree.

In addition, handicraft practitioners and local enterprises also lack the understanding of the value of handicraft business model and branding. This leads to the "tepid" state of local folk handicrafts even when they occupy unique

resource advantages. Traditional folk handicraft is an important cultural heritage. Attaching importance to its inheritance and innovative development can not only enhance the cultural confidence of Qi-Lu, but also have important practical significance for serving local economy and culture.

From the analysis of the above problems, it can be concluded that the inheritance and development of folk handicrafts should not be the simple copying, protecting and collecting, but be the endowment of the "living" soul for these cultural heritages so that they can adapt to and serve the modern social and economic life. And only in this way can the traditional folk handicraft can maintain exuberant vitality.

**IV. DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE AND INSPIRATION OF TRADITIONAL HANDICRAFTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

How to combine traditional folk handicraft with modern design art, innovate and develop new forms and functions, and make it more close to the life of today's people has always been the focus of many countries and regions in the east and west.

In the process of the development of traditional handicraft, Japan attaches great importance to the construction of brand image. By manufacturing goods with high sensibility and high added value and combining with the constantly improvement of service image, Japan has created a good brand of goods. In Japan, folk handicrafts have trademarks and trade names, such as "OHGIYA" and "Inouye shoten", etc. It is necessary for folk handicrafts to register trademark, trade name and become a regular brand if they are to circulate legally in the market. The Japanese government also advocated the "one village, one product" campaign, so that the protection and development of traditional industries and handicrafts in the region as a whole were able to achieve good results. In addition, in Japanese industrial design master Toshiyuki Kita's book "Give design a soul — when contemporary design meets traditional craft", the author made delicate infusion of western modern design promotion and design concept and local traditional handicraft, creating a batch of folk handicraft integrating tradition and contemporary, craft and design, which has sparked a lot of echoes in this industry.

The west, represented by Europe, also attaches great importance to the combination of traditional handicraft and modern design. The high-quality goods of traditional handicraft are often associated with luxury goods, so as to realize the effective linkage between handicraft industry and fashion industry, digital industry, manufacturing industry and creative industry. Famous international luxury brands, such as the British Rolls-Royce, France's Hermes, Switzerland's "Patek Philippe", Italy's Versace, these expensive fashion luxury goods all continue the tradition of handmade products. And the reasons for the popularity of these products are the exquisite craftsmanship of the products, the advanced modern design concepts of the brands and the profound national cultural spirit of their countries.

Scandinavia is poor in natural resources due to its natural environment and cold climate. Nevertheless, under the concept of serving for daily life, local people make the best use of natural materials with exquisite design techniques, making up for the shortage of local resources and forming a distinctive design style. In Korea, the combination of traditional handicraft and modern life culture is emphasized. Such as the local traditional packaging cloth technology has been applied to modern clothing design, photography and other modern art forms. Taiwan, China, with the integration of the culture of southern Fujian, Hakka, South Island and other regional integration, is endowed with rich historical and cultural heritage and traditional handicraft resources. Based on this advantage, Taiwan's cultural and creative industry, relying on traditional handicrafts, has nurtured a batch of cultural and creative handicraft brands, such as Hakka-blue, Franz, National Palace Museum in Taipei, Colored glaze workshop and so on.

Throughout the domestic and foreign countries and regions of traditional handicraft modern inheritance and development experience, without exception, they are closely combined with modern design. Modern design involves people's clothing, food, housing, transportation and other aspects of life in that design can not only change the use function of the product, but also affect the user's aesthetic taste from the spiritual level. To further integrate traditional folk handicrafts into modern life, it is necessary for designers to bridge the gap between the handicraft and modern life. They need to fully explore the "technique" of craftsmen by making the craftsmen rooted in the countryside really integrated into modern life and get to know the aesthetic orientation and functional needs of today's society. In this way can the unity of handicraft technology and art be fundamentally achieved. Specifically, the following ways can be attempted: (1) Relying on branding, the traditional folk handicraft should pay attention to the brand image-building through regularized, specialized and industrialized development, and promote and market products by combining with various methods including multimedia and mobile terminals. (2) Traditional folk handicrafts should take "design + fashion" as the main line of creation, combine with the current fashion trend, develop towards high-end customization, luxury and niche, and improve product quality while paying attention to artistry, so as to obtain high added value. (3) Traditional folk handicrafts should take the regional and cultural characteristics as the design source, and fully tap the local valuable design elements, so as to form tourism cultural and creative products with good originality and innovation.

#### V. TRACING THE SINGLE CASE — "LU BROCADE HOMESPUN" INNOVATIVE DESIGN PRACTICE

With rich local flavor and distinct regional characteristics, Lu brocade has a long history and profound cultural accumulation, and is the crystallization of local people's wisdom. It carries the ancient textile technology, folk art and oral ballads of southwest Shandong. As an intangible cultural heritage, it is the "living fossil" of Qi-Lu culture. As a national intangible cultural heritage project, Lu brocade has

extremely high artistic value and complicated procedures as many as 72. During the weaving process, more than 2,000 colorful patterns are optional, which have rich connotations reflecting the local people's beautiful psychological vision. Taking the sesame pattern as an example, its grain pattern is composed by the horizontal grain and vertical grain symbolizing the sesame rod, as well as the dotted lines symbolizing the sesame seeds, representing "steadily high like sesame flowers bloom".

Through the conversation with the head of Juancheng Lu brocade research institute Lu Hanmin, the author found that many scholars have made researches on Lu brocade. Most of them study the weaving process and inheritance mode of Lu brocade from the perspectives of folklore and communication. Yet there are few studies on the practical application of Lu brocade's development and redesign to integrate into modern life from the perspective of design. Mr. Lu also said that they hope researchers pay attention to practical application research, to help Lu brocade open a wider market space.

Through investigation, the author found that there are some problems in the sales and design of Lu brocade in the current market. For example, the types of the products are too few; the shapes of the products are similar; products are not innovative enough; most of them lack brand support; they have a strong vulgar flavor. So they can't meet the demand of seeking fashion and innovation in modern society, causing the weak overall identification of Lu brocade products.

The practice projects "Lu brocade homespun" innovative designs are the graduation design works of two students in Shandong Women's University. These two projects respectively did a trial innovation practice on Lu brocade brand from the two directions of cultural and creative product design and packaging design.

The cultural and creative product design project "Lu brocade homespun" (see "Fig. 1") combines regionalism and traditional culture, and on the basis of retaining the traditional arts and crafts of Lu brocade, boldly renovates the patterns of Lu brocade. Four sets of illustrations were created based on the four most representative famous springs — Spouting Spring, Black Tiger Spring, Five Dragon Pool, Pearl Spring in the "spring city" Jinan. Combined with Lu brocade, these illustrations are adopted in tea mat, book cover, round fan, cloth bag, notebook, badge and other derivative products, forming a unique set of Lu brocade cultural and creative products. From the overall point of view, this program well reflects the regional characteristics of the "spring city" Jinan. And combined with modern life, some practical creative products are designed. The Lu brocade weaving pattern are improved, its product categories are also enriched. The downy and elegant match of colors appears elegant and delightful with classic simplicity, which can be a good choice present for friends and relatives or souvenirs.



Fig. 1. Cultural and creative product design of the "Lu brocade homespun". (picture source: the works of Wang Qianqian of Shandong Women's University)



<sup>a</sup>. Package Design of the "Lu brocade homespun". (picture source: the works of Liu Xiaoyu of Shandong Women's University)

The package design of the "Lu brocade homespun" (see "Fig. 2") breaks the traditional visual presentation form of Lu brocade. From the perspective of modern packaging design, bold innovation is made on the pattern, box type and related derivatives of Lu brocade. First, the project made an in-depth investigation and research, and extracted dozens of patterns from more than 2,000 kinds of traditional patterns of Lu brocade. Then, from the perspective of modern design, the traditional patterns are cut, decomposed and summarized, and the refined patterns of Lu brocade are transformed into modern semantic expressions by using the forms of points, lines and planes, so as to form a new pattern of Lu brocade with both sense of form and sense of design. Finally, different specifications and different types of carton structures are designed according to the existing product categories, forms and sales methods of Lu brocade, so as to present a new visual impression of the packaging of Lu brocade products, so as to optimize the brand image and promote the market sales of products.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The folk handicraft of Qi-Lu is the embodiment of the diligence and wisdom of the ancient laboring people in the long-term living practice, which manifests the exquisite skill level and profound cultural spirit and is worthy of our inheritance and development. However, with the development of history and the progress of the times, traditional handicrafts should also be "down to earth", instead of staying at the level of appreciation and collection.

To achieve long-term development, designers should explore the road of innovation. So, how to infuse "living" soul into Qi-Lu folk handicraft and provoke its new productivity? The author believes that this needs to be combined with modern design to give traditional folk handicraft a bright future. At the same time, the traditional handicraft with national cultural genes will contribute to the rebirth of Chinese modern design, too.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Wang Hongfei. Integrating modern design into traditional handicraft [J]. Academic Exploration, 2017 (03) (in Chinese)
- [2] Zhao Gang, contemporary value of traditional handicraft [J]. Handicraft, 2018 (Z1) (in Chinese)
- [3] Chen Jun, cultural inheritance of traditional handicraft and contemporary "redesign" [J]. Literature & Art Studies, 2012 (05) (in Chinese)
- [4] Tian Xiaohang, complete collection of Chinese traditional crafts. Folk handicrafts [M]. Zhengzhou, Elephant Press, 2007(02) (in Chinese)
- [5] Toshiyuki Kita (Japan), giving soul to design — contemporary design meets traditional craft, Beijing, Publishing House of Electronics Industry. 2012 (09) (in Chinese)
- [6] Yan Tingting, aesthetic link between traditional craft and modern design [J]. Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, 2015 (in Chinese)
- [7] List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage in Shandong Province: [http://k.sina.com.cn/article\\_3182698757\\_pbdb4210502700itvj.html](http://k.sina.com.cn/article_3182698757_pbdb4210502700itvj.html)