

Research on the Culture of Frog Patterns in Li Brocade

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ABSTRACT. Frog patterns in Li brocade and their inside culture have been explored through the collection and analysis of a variety of frog patterns in this paper, and measures like classification and comparison have been used in this study. This paper mainly includes three parts, first is the study on the background of the existence of frog pattern culture of China; the next section is the evolution of frog patterns; and the last section is to illustrate the beauty formal of the frog patterns. Based on the evolution of the frog pattern of Li, we can better understand the frog pattern both of North and South China and explore its mysteries. Besides on the rich in style, the frog patterns have permeated the culture in all aspects, especially in Li's culture and represented their unique characteristics.

KEYWORDS: Li brocade, Frog Patterns, Culture Study

1. Introduction

The colorful art and culture of Li nationality is based on its special geographic location. Hainan is located in the southernmost of China, which is separated by the Qiongzhou strait from the mainland. Hainan is next to many countries of South Asia, like Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, Philippine and so on. Thus, the combination of different countries and different people has formed its own unique culture and art. The pattern and picture are the representation of Li's culture and history, especially the images in the building, painting and brocade. These valuable patterns and culture deserve to study.

In the long historical evolution of Li nationality, the patterns have been closely related to the local society, history and culture, and also have a profound influence on the survival and development of the local people. To study the cultural connotation of the pattern is to help our understanding of the Li's culture. In the past decades, great achievements have been achieved in the study of island culture by some domestic experts, but most of them are the introduction or the overall analysis of Li culture [1-3]. Although these studies can be of great help to our understanding of its culture, they are just the tip of iceberg on the frog patterns. Further studies are

needed to understand the frog patterns of Li Brocade, and we believe this study can supply some main point to the future study.

Li brocade patterns not only reflect women's aesthetic consciousness, life style, cultural customs, religious beliefs and artistic accumulation of culture, its content is mainly reflected Li's social production, life, love, marriage, religious activities and the legendary lucky or wonderful things, see Figure 1. The patterns mainly include wedding, dancing, youth happiness, One Hundred People, harvest joy, prosperous, grazing, peace and prosperity. It represented people in that time chasing for more sons, fruitful and prosperous life. The Li women used exaggeration and deform technology to make the people's life and production scene reflect in the fabric, thus making the pattern more visible and artistic.

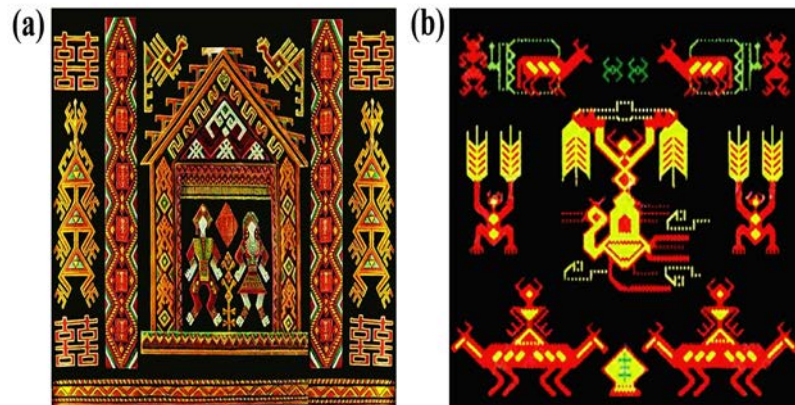


Figure.1 Patterns in Li brocade represent (a) marriage and (b) harvest.

Most of the papers about Li Brocade are published in domestic journals, and the outside world know little about it. In the last few years, some articles about Li Brocade were published in the international conference journals to make more people know more about Li Brocade as well as the culture of Hainan [4-5].

2. Origination of Frog Patterns

Mankind is one part of nature, and all human life activities are closely related to nature. Patterns are the products of relations between human and nature, and especially in the early stages of nature patterns are more common. In primitive ages, man almost had no ability to take advantage of nature, let alone change and conquer it. Therefore, people in that ages were awed of nature, thus various religious beliefs came up. One of the most common form is totem worship, and these totems are the earliest patterns in the history, like Figure 2 in Qin and Shang dynasty.



Figure.2 Frog totem in different era, (a) totem in the tile of Qin dynasty and (b) totem in the jade of Shang dynasty

According to the archaeology, historical literature, folklore and anthropology investigation data, the frog images and grain is most common in the upper and middle regions of the Yellow River. These patterns were mostly appeared in painted pottery in decorative arts, and with kinds of images. In the long history, the culture experienced Banpo, Miaodigou, Majiayao, Banshan, and Qijia culture, see Figure 3. The earliest frog patterns were found in Jiangzhai site in Lintong, Shaanxi province, which is an unearthened pottery decorated with black-paint frogs and can be dated back to the Banpo Period. The frog patterns with such characteristics, semi-crescent head, two dots eyes, round body, decorative pattern, four vivid foot shape. The black dot in the frog is different in size (in Figure,3a), which is based on realism. In the later Miaodigou and Majiayao period, the description of frog changed from realism to abstract and represented in a variety of objects. The frequently appearance of these frog pattern strongly suggests the prevalence of frogs worship in this period.

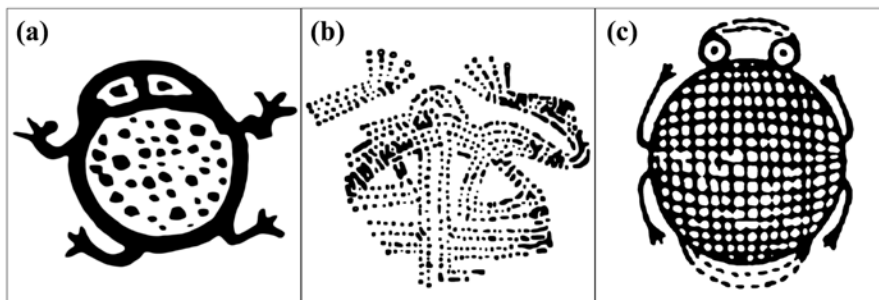


Figure. 3 Frog patterns in different periods, (a), (b), and (c) comes from Banpo, Miaodigou and Majiayao period, respectively

In the southwestern region of China, the specific worship pattern of Zhuang nationality is frog. The frog worship religious beliefs and customs had existed or retained in the ancient Chinese people, like Zhuang, Li, Tu, Naxi and other ethnic groups. They lived on the natural environment, and they need water to irrigate their crop and expect good production. At the same time people linked the frog with thunder god. So, the frog represented fertility and prolific and was worshipped by people. There are many myths about frog among the Zhuang people, and also people preserved relatively completed frog totem ritual and art. During the lunar new year of China, the Han and most other minorities have the biggest annual festival of a year, while the Zhuang group holds a series of frog memorial ceremonies and activities. All in all, the worship of frog is prevalent in both North and South of China.

3. Evolution of the Frog Pattern in Li Brocade

3.1 History of the Pattern

Patterns related religious also play an important role in Li's culture and art. In fact, in the history of human civilization, religion ruled the art for a long period of time, and art was used to serve religion. Even in nowadays, this condition still remains unchanged in some regions. The symbolism of the pattern is almost always filled with the art and culture, especially in the totem legends of some minorities the relics of the worship of frog totem is easy to discover.

The Li ethnic group entered the agriculture time very early. It was about in the late Neolithic age, they began to plant early rice and changed to late rice later. With the development of agriculture, people regarded frogs as the prophets of seasons and droughts because of their dependence on the rain. And this form gradually became the totem of among many different Li tribes. In short, in the context of the agricultural civilization of southern China, especially the rice culture, the ancestors of the Li nationality took the frog as a totem is reasonable.

3.2 Frog Pattern in Realism and Abstract

The costume decorated with frog pattern presented from realism to free hand, complication to simplification, see Figure 4. Not only rich in variety but also has its own sequence. The frog pattern is one of the most important images of in the costume in the evolution of the history.

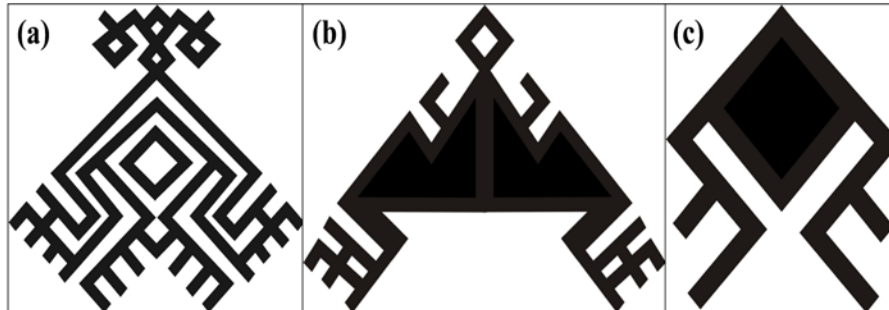


Figure. 4 Frog patterns of (a) realism, (b) transition, and (c) abstract

3.2.1 Frog patterns in realism

Early frog patterns present the basic characteristics of the frog in detail, the modelling of frog is more noticeable. Most of the patterns present small head and big body, and the body expand gradually from the neck to the flank, thus exhibit short upper limb and stretch upwards; strong lower limb and push off the ground. Frog web is clear, and the overall image vividly presented insect-catching figure. The main characteristic is strong and dynamic. It reflects the frog image in the people's mind at that time, which is the result of people's aesthetic consciousness in that period.

3.2.2 Transition frog patterns from realism to abstract

This type of frog patterns has several characteristics. Some of them are based on the rhombus shape of the frog, and showing the external characteristics through all kinds of exaggerated and distorted ways; or highlighting the eyes, jumping figures and the characteristics of hugging in life. Representing the frog images with an abstract way. People extracted the images of frogs continually in the frog transition process from realism to abstract. But the head of the frog remains "triangle", and using the "Z" represents the prone figure. These characteristics always remain the frog's webbing feet. These patterns in that period reflect another enhancement in the art technique in realistic style.

3.2.3. Abstract frog pattern

Based on the deformation frog images, people changed the patterns further. People demonstrated the basic shapes and jumping figures with extremely simple lines in a very simplified way. These images mainly emphasize on diamond-type lattice and diversification, and possess some features of geometric patterns. The main point of these figures is just remaining the diamond-type of the frog with a

strong abstract sense. Frog patterns in Li brocade form a diamond-type finally. This simplified frog pattern is more flexible in combination and permutation. The images in this style not only enrich the imagination but also improve the spinning efficiency on Li brocade. There are a plenty of abstract frog pattern about everyday life, and more than 70 percent frog patterns occupy the Li brocade.

4. The Charm of Abstract Li Brocade

Li brocade costume is one of the traditional techniques. Its beauty lies in many aspects such as the various patterns and the bright color. According to the different dialects, the language can be divided into five dialect, including Ruin, Ha, Qi, Sai and Mobil. Although there are some differences in custom, its cultural characteristics are basically identical. They all have their own cultural characteristics, especially in costume, see Figure 5. The applications of the pattern are variety in costume, not only including some animal and plant images, but also refer to some religious patterns. The pattern of the costume has a long history in folklore, and people chose the archetype of the natural world to depict the pattern. The patterns have also been changing with the development of the world, the emergence of the new patterns and the combination of new and old textures have been adding a lot of colors to Li's costume culture. Local people believe in the magic of the patterns deeply and these patterns are also the products that have been refined for a long time.

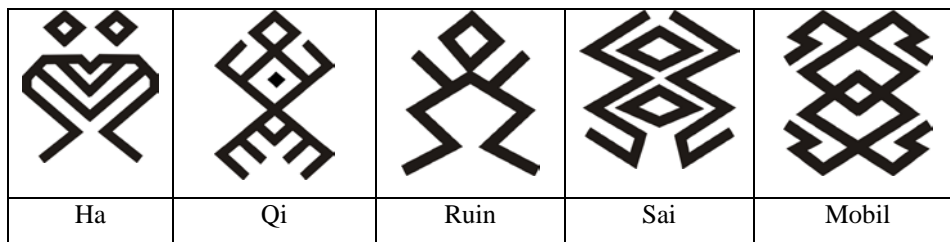


Figure. 5 frog patterns in different dialect region in Li group

4.1 The Beauty of Line

The lines are the basis of the composition of the picture, and the combination of curve, straight, long and short line with some color would form various vivid patterns. The rhombic line is an important element in the pattern of the frog pattern, and this characteristic usually appears in many different twist angles and powerful patterns.

4.2 The Beauty of Image

The length and wide of the image depend on the different pattern. The frog patterns of Li brocade represent in single texture or consecutive double-square. The

designer of the pattern fabric thoughtfully according to application, content and manifestation. Using a single frog pattern as a unit, repeated in two directions, up and down, or left and right, making a graceful and rhythmic parallel or vertical ribbon pattern. Such type of frog patterns is often used as fillers in the vicinity of the Li brocade, or as a dividing line between a series of picture.

4.3 The Beauty of Composing

Texture structural principle often includes consecutive double-square and four-square principles. Various patterns different in size can be designed according to the different texture or graphs. The textures are always combined in series with double-square and rarely appeared in single. These textures distribute in Li brocade with parallel or vertical arrangement, see Figure 6, which are corresponding to the main pattern.

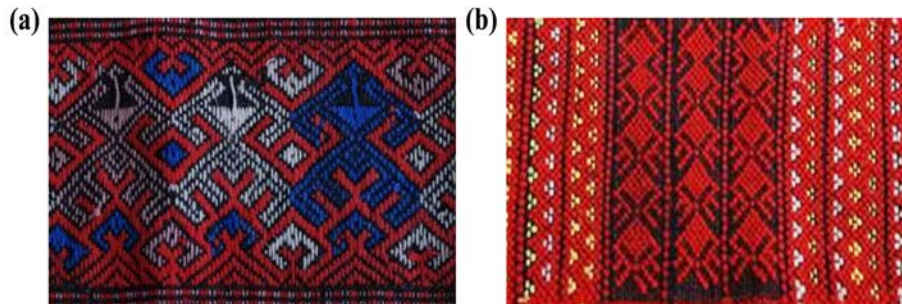


Figure. 6 Parallel (a) and (b) vertical arrangement

4.4 The Beauty of Color

Li brocade is commonly knitted by many kinds of colored cotton, mainly includes red, black, yellow, green and blue five color. In order to make these designs gorgeous and coordinated, they usually use black as secondary color to buffer the bright color with strong visual shock. Generally, following these rules: using contrast color or similar color to match the pattern, maintaining fixed distance, highlighting the key line, thus making the pattern more saturated.

5. Conclusions

Few young people are engaged in textile fabric with the development of science and technology. Many classic patterns have been lost as time goes by, and it is difficult to find them because some of them were destroyed. As one of masterpieces among Chinese material culture, the Li brocade successfully entered non-material cultural heritage list in 2009. Here we wish more people could know more about the

meaning of frog patterns in Li brocade, and more and more people from all over the world could share the Li culture with us.

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