

Patterns, Culture and Characteristics: A Study of Ancient Shu Brocade Patterns

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Abstract: *Shu brocade is an outstanding example of ancient Chinese textile techniques and a material cultural carrier that embodies the spiritual world, religious beliefs and social structure of the ancient Shu people. This study, in combination with unearthed reports and existing cultural relics, conducts the collection and organization of Shu brocade pattern images, the analysis of form details, the sorting out of internal relationships, as well as the textual interpretation of related techniques and historical culture. It focuses on analyzing the artistic characteristics of Shu brocade patterns, colors, and other aspects, using specific cases to sort them out and study the cultural customs and aesthetic tastes involved. It analyzes the form and cultural connotation of typical patterns from different levels, the relationships between different patterns, and conducts horizontal and vertical image comparisons. Through multidisciplinary research methods such as iconology, semiotics, and cultural anthropology, it aims to systematically sort out and deeply analyze the artistic system, cultural connotation, and unique style of ancient Shu brocade patterns.*

Keywords: *Shu Brocade Image; Pattern; Culture*

1. The history of Shu brocade

Shu brocade has a history of nearly two thousand years and originated in Sichuan. It is hailed as the top of the "Four Famous Brocades" in China. The earliest history can be traced back to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods. The sericulture and brocade weaving techniques in Sichuan developed relatively early, and there are also a large number of Warring States period brocades among the unearthed cultural relics. At this time, due to the limitations of weaving techniques, the patterns of Shu brocade were mostly geometric. They gradually evolved from simple geometric patterns to large and diverse ones. Compared with more complex figurative patterns, more regular geometric patterns were easier to weave. During the Han Dynasty, the "Jin Guan City" was established to exclusively manage weaving, and the Shu brocade industry flourished. In the Tang Dynasty, the technology was mature, and the patterns were influenced by various aspects, being magnificent and exquisite. In the Song Dynasty, the prosperity remained, and the patterns merged with the Jiangnan region, being delicate and magnificent. However, due to wars, it declined. In the Qing Dynasty, it was rebuilt and flourished again.

2. Patterns and classification of Shu brocade

Shu brocade has a long history, and in this process, various patterns and designs have been produced. The entire pattern system is vast and rigorous. From the themes and composition of patterns and designs, it can be divided into seven categories: geometric patterns, natural phenomenon patterns, animal patterns, plant patterns, human and story patterns, artifact patterns, and textual patterns.

2.1 Geometric patterns

The geometric patterns in Shu brocade appeared more before the Qin and Han dynasties and after the Song dynasty. Linear geometric patterns, as the most fundamental pattern, not only appeared in textiles in the early days, but also in art categories such as bronze ware and pottery. They are a fundamental way for humans to understand and express the world. Because early technology was not yet fully developed and mature, geometric patterns of straight lines were also easier to manipulate in terms of technique for textiles. For example, the small diamond patterned brocade unearthed from Baoshan, Hubei, the large composite diamond patterned brocade unearthed from Mashan No.1 Chu

Tomb in Jiangling, Hubei, the Hui patterned brocade overlay unearthed from Niya Site, the scattered geometric patterned brocade and the dragon phoenix patterned brocade unearthed from the Warring States Chu Tomb in Zuojiatang, Changsha, Hunan. Small diamond patterned brocade is relatively simple, with a simple and rustic style in its early days. In large composite diamond patterned brocade and scattered geometric patterned brocade, various geometric shapes intersect and combine with each other to form very complex patterns. Although there are animal patterns during this period, due to weaving techniques, they present relatively rigid linear geometric patterns, like mosaics. In the Song Dynasty, the geometric patterns that appeared were very magnificent. At this time, weaving technology had already been very mature, and choosing this geometric pattern was a pursuit of abstract technical beauty, such as the Song Dynasty's Ba Da Huan brocade, Fang Sheng pattern, and Pan Tie pattern.

2.2 Natural patterns

Some patterns in Shu brocade represent the early humans' observation and reverence for nature. These natural phenomena are presented in textile patterns through artistic reproductions, such as water ripples and the cloud and air patterns of the Han Dynasty. For instance, the "Shi Wu Ji Jin Yi Er Qin Chuan Zi Sun" brocade mainly features water ripples, imitating the waves of rivers, lakes and seas. The lines are soft and full of rhythmic beauty. The cloud pattern of the Han Dynasty was quite popular. It not only appeared on textiles but also in various art forms such as bronze wares, pottery and sculpture. Among the Han Dynasty Shu brocade, there are many cloud-like patterns. They use flowing and curling lines to outline wind, clouds and related celestial phenomena. The patterns are full of changes and dynamics, as if they were flowing.

2.3 Animal pattern

The animal patterns in Shu brocade can be divided into two categories: one is animals in reality; Another is mythical animals. In Shu brocade, animal patterns include tigers, fish, butterflies, deer, lions, horses, camels, cranes, bats, ducks, rabbits, wild boars, peacocks, etc; The animal patterns in myths and legends include dragons, phoenixes, heavenly horses, and Qilins. These animal patterns often represent the expectation of royal power, status, and auspicious wealth. Animal patterns are relatively complex, and this complex technique is generally used for the powerful, whether it is for daily necessities or burial objects. The animal patterns of the Han Dynasty are full of dynamism and streamline; Animal patterns in the Tang Dynasty often had symmetrical structures and were more realistic.

2.4 Plant patterns

Common plant patterns in Shu brocade include dogwood, peony, lotus, plum, orchid, bamboo, chrysanthemum, pomegranate, grape, scroll grass pattern or entwined branch pattern, etc. The plant patterns are often composed of curved lines arranged in combination, making the entire textile pattern multifarious and magnificent, with a full composition and a decorative effect. These plants often come from what people see in their daily lives and have beautiful meanings. For instance, the Dogwood Meanders Pattern brocade unearthed from the Niya Site features the dogwood as its pattern.

2.5 Character stories

People use Shu brocade to pray for blessings or express their beliefs and culture in order to express beautiful meanings, forming images of character stories such as "Hundred Descendants", "Hunting", "Drinking", "Riding a Horse", and "Guo Ziyi Celebrating Birthday". For example, the Medallion Linked-beads Drinking and Sitting patterned brocade collected by the China Silk Museum depicts two men raising their glasses in a symmetrical composition, with a wine pot in the middle; The Linked-beads Hunting Pattern Brocade hidden in the Masakura Temple in Japan features a vivid image of a rider pulling open a bow and arrow while hunting a tiger in the center of the linked-beads pattern^[1]; In the Ming Dynasty, each row of the "Red Earth Hundred Sons" painting depicts different children playing with different content and postures, expressing people's hope for having children.

2.6 Artifacts patterns

The patterns of Shu brocade also include some designs on utensils, such as vases, jades, tripods, and ancient patterns on calligraphy and paintings, symbolizing erudition and the noble character of scholars. The gourds, fans, flower baskets and other magical implements of the immortals in the story of "The

"Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea" represent blessings and the protection of the immortals. There are also patterns composed of coins, beads, square coins, lanterns, etc., representing the beautiful expectations for wealth, prosperity and peace. For instance, the eight auspicious patterns in brocade include those of objects.

2.7 Chinese characters pattern

In order to express their expectations more clearly, some patterns of Shu brocade directly appeared in the Chinese characters, such as "Fu Shou Xi", "Yongchang", "Changleming", "Five Stars Out of the East for the Benefit of China", "Suitable for Descendants", "Conquering the Southern Qiang", "Yang", "An Le Ru Yi", "Longevity Endless", "Long Live for Thousands of Years", "Suitable for Descendants", and so on. The texts on these Shu brocades clearly express their wishes for longevity, having many children and grandchildren, as well as their prayers for the country and victory in war. These words are separated and interspersed among various other patterns, often not arranged consecutively.

3. The characteristics and connotations of ancient Shu brocade patterns in different periods

The patterns of Shu brocade contain different patterns, and the development of patterns is not fixed. The same pattern will also have different compositions and aesthetic styles in different times. And in different dynasties, some patterns have significant differences. Various patterns must be placed in the environment of the time in order to better understand the reasons and cultural connotations behind their formation. From the history of Shu brocade, it can be roughly divided into four periods: Qin and Han Dynasties and before, Wei and Jin Dynasties to Sui and Tang Dynasties, Song and Yuan Dynasties, and Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the Song Dynasty, Shu brocade further integrated with various weaving patterns in the Central Plains, but gradually declined. In the Yuan Dynasty, the wars in Sichuan had a huge impact on the textile industry in Shu area, and Shu brocade skills gradually disappeared in the era. After the Qing Dynasty, the authorities organized textile workers in Jiangnan to restore the weaving of Sichuan brocade. Later, the redeveloped Sichuan brocade integrated the styles of Jiangnan, such as Fangfang brocade, Huanhua brocade, Yushi brocade, Sanhua brocade, ethnic brocade, etc. Although the styles were diverse, they were already very different from traditional ancient Sichuan brocade. Shu brocade after the Song Dynasty is temporarily not studied as ancient Shu brocade.

3.1 Shu brocade from the Qin and Han dynasties and before

There are many varieties and colors of Shu brocade before the Qin and Han dynasties, some of which are relatively primitive geometric patterns, such as Hui character patterns and diamond patterns. The other type is a typical cloud pattern. There are certain differences in the places and functions where the two types appear. The cloud pattern imitates the flowing and undulating cloud and mist scenery, extending the undulating mountains, rivers, and clouds horizontally in an abstract way, in a continuous cycle, between which are dynamic auspicious animals such as birds, dragons, phoenixes, tigers, and leopards. The animal pattern is overall abstract and highly dynamic. This artistic aesthetic has a certain relationship with the immortal culture of Shu. Not only that, there are clear words woven between these dynamic abstract patterns, which are expectations for longevity and descendants, wishes for immortality and the pursuit of immortality, as well as blessings for historical events and social prosperity. The famous "Five Stars in the East Benefit China" brocade arm guard, unearthed from a tomb, has a blue base color and patterns of white, yellow, red, and green curved clouds, mountains, and dogwood stripes that vary and embellish each other. The cloud patterns are complemented by tigers, qilins, divine birds, and cranes. In the gaps between auspicious beasts and cloud patterns, there is also an inscription "Five Stars in the East Benefit China", which means that the simultaneous appearance of the five major planets in the eastern sky is a favorable celestial phenomenon for the Central Plains dynasties.^[2] It is considered the most auspicious thing, indicating that the king has the way and achieved military victory. Its graphics and text reflect the unique features of astrology, politics, military, and culture in the Han Dynasty.

3.2 Shu Brocade from the Wei, Jin, Sui and Tang Dynasties

During the Wei, Jin, Northern and Southern Dynasties, society was in turmoil. Many ethnic groups migrated to the Central Plains. The culture of the Western Regions merged with the original local culture. The patterns of the Western Regions were more inclined to depict animals and plants and

became more realistic, changing the relatively abstract and exaggerated modeling style of the Han Dynasty. In terms of patterns, new patterns such as the linked-beads pattern, the grape pattern, the honeysuckle pattern, the lotus pattern, the tree of life pattern, the lion, the portrait, the winged horse, the bird with a ribbon, and the camel were introduced. These patterns were often related to the foreign religious belief culture and the inheritance of the monarchy. In terms of composition, new artistic structures such as symmetry and four cluster have emerged. For example, the pair of sheep, bird, and tree patterned brocade unearthed in Astana, Turpan, has a symmetrical composition. Birds, sheep, and other animals are also symmetrically composed, and a new pattern of tree pattern has emerged. The entire painting is based on green, with red, white, and yellow as the pattern colors, with bright colors and strong contrast. Among all the patterns, the most typical one is the linked-bead pattern, which is a circular decorative structure with a circular interior theme pattern surrounded by dots. The Lingyang Duke of Shu combined these foreign forms with Chinese themes, changing the central theme from flying horses, wild boars, birds, etc. to Chinese traditional themes such as chicken, fighting sheep, phoenixes. The outer circles were replaced with Chinese style floral patterns, known as the "Lingyang Style". For example, the Coiled Grass Phoenix brocade collected in the Masakura Palace in Japan has a red background and yellow pattern, with a circular pattern of coiled flowers and leaves around and a single phoenix pattern on the inside, reflecting the integration of Chinese local and foreign cultures.

3.3 Shu brocade from the Song and Yuan Dynasties

The aesthetic of Shu brocade in the Song Dynasty tended to be reserved and elegant. Some patterns still inherited the colors and designs of the earlier period, but also incorporated more styles of other textiles from the Jiangnan region and other areas. Overall, the patterns and designs of Shu brocade are more life-like and realistic. In terms of composition, it began to break away from the clustered structure of the Tang Dynasty and shift towards natural and scattered natural patterns. The more typical patterns of the Song Dynasty include Ba da yun, lantern brocade and seasonal flowers. The Ba da yun are composed of eight patterns and two or three color halos. The overall shape is a cross-shaped structure, with geometric frames at the intersection points and auspicious geometric shapes added^[3]. The Lantern brocade is an innovation of this period, with lanterns as the theme and decorated with ears of grain, bees, etc., symbolizing a bountiful harvest of five grains. These patterns were all passed down during the subsequent Ming and Qing dynasties.

The Shu Brocade Catalogue was written by Fei of the Yuan Dynasty, which recorded the products and patterns of Shu brocade produced in Chengdu during the Song Dynasty, as well as the organization, management, and other related content. Among them, one type is used by dedication and officials, and the best one is Badayun brocade. Another type is the horse changing brocade, with colors including True Red Brocade, Dake Lion Brocade, Dake Horse Big Ball Brocade, True Red Snowflake Dew Brocade, True Red Cherry Brocade, Two Color Great Hundred Flowers Peacock Brocade and so on. The different uses resulted in different patterns and colors of Shu brocade. When brocade was used for the government, it was woven according to the strict bureaucratic hierarchy system at that time. Official positions have different ranks, colors, and patterns. For example, the Eight Tailed Halo, Tianxia Le, Emerald Lion, and Cluster Four Plate Carving are all relatively high ranking official positions. The horse changing brocade, on the other hand, is woven based on the cultural aesthetics of the southwestern region, with the locally preferred color of true red and peacock patterns.

4. Conclusion

The patterns and designs of Shu brocade are numerous. This parallel classification method is not conducive to people's understanding of the specific culture and history in which the patterns were formed. Moreover, many textiles that are believed to be Shu brocade lack direct evidence and can only be said to possibly be Shu brocade. In this case, to have a comprehensive understanding of the entire pattern system of Shu brocade, one can only make a relatively preliminary judgment. At present, the sources of knowledge about Shu brocade patterns are mainly tombs. Therefore, it is more specific and clear to conduct research on textiles based on the study of the contemporary tomb culture in a single region. Secondly, there are related ancient documents. The history of Shu brocade recorded in these documents, including the styles of official uniforms, horse-changing brocade (favored in the southwest region), and plain brocade for currency, gradually presents the history of textiles. Because of their different functions and recipients, the patterns and designs of Shu brocade vary greatly. Due to the differences in cultural values such as views on life and death, the composition forms of patterns will also be completely different. Overall, the current systematic research on Shu brocade is still insufficient.

Only by integrating the complete history and culture into the patterns and designs and seeking their characteristics can innovative ideas and design inspirations be provided for the redesign of Shu brocade, the design of new Chinese-style clothing, and related cultural industries, promoting the modern transformation and application of traditional culture. Only in this way can the international popularity and influence of Shu brocade be enhanced, cultural confidence be strengthened, and Chinese culture be promoted to the world.

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