

Study on the Factors Affecting the Embroidery Pattern Style of Miao in Leishan

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Abstract

In response to the factor that affects the evolution of Leishan Miao embroidery style, this paper, based on field inspections and consulting related county chronicles, characterizes its style from two aspects: pattern composition and content, and tries to characterize its style from the perspectives of craftsmanship and the social role of embroidery women. By reviewing the angles of change, and analyzing the reasons for the evolution of embroidery styles, this research has found that the style of Miao embroidery can be summarized as the proper use of continuous and separate patterns, as well as the fusion of reality and illusion in the subject matter. The study holds that the comprehensive application of stitching is the technical guarantee for the evolution of styles. At the same time, the transformation of embroidery women's social roles from “women weavers” to “women farmers” and then to “businesswomen” is the potential motivation for the evolution of embroidery styles.

Keywords: Leishan Miao, embroidery style, social roles, stitching reform

1. Introduction

Leishan Miao traditional embroidery is a unique skill of Chinese minority Miao and was ranked as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006. The style, skills and cultural characteristics of Miao embroidery have important research value, and are inseparable from the local dyeing and weaving skills. Firstly, Miao embroidery contains numerous local knowledge, from the materials used in embroidery, such as earth cloth and yarn, to the processing of embroidery, such as broken thread embroidery, tin embroidery and braided embroidery, and then to the patterns used in embroidery, such as butterfly pattern, dragon pattern and maple pattern, which reflects the profound emotional and cultural identity given by Miao people to Miao embroidery. It reflects the history of the Miao ethnic minority's planting and use of cotton as well as line dyeing, and has obvious local process characteristics. Secondly, compared with Suzhou embroidery and Hangzhou embroidery, the decorative patterns of Miao embroidery generally have a sense of purity, elegance and kindness. Compared with the magnificent decorative style of weaving gold and silver in Guangdong embroidery, Miao embroidery reflects the natural and simple folk art style.

Miao embroidery has always been a hot topic of research. From the comprehensive research of Torii Ryuzo at the beginning of last century to the special research of Tomoko Torimaru and Sadae Torimaru, Japanese scholars have never stopped their field investigation of Miao embroidery and have collected a large number of first-hand materials such as images and pictures. However, the research conducted by foreign scholars, including Japanese scholars, has not yet formed a scale on the specific technology and rheology of Miao embroidery. At present, the domestic research on Miao embroidery mainly focuses on the application of some elements of Miao embroidery skills in clothing design (He, 2010) and art design (Xie, 2017), and pays attention to the arrangement and description of Miao embroidery stitches, although some scholars consider that there is a connection between Miao embroidery style and Chu culture (Liu, 2012), and have demonstrated it from the pattern composition and aesthetic characteristics. This research holds that the study of the evolution of Leishan Miao embroidery style should not only focus on the external environmental factors, but also pay more attention to the main body of embroidery and the important role of Miao women played in this process. In fact, studying the evolution of Miao embroidery style can not only deepen the understanding of Miao history and culture, but also reveal the changes of Miao women's social roles in different times.




2. Characterization of Miao Embroidery Style

This paper holds that the embroidery style of Miao Nationality in Leishan can be analyzed from two aspects: the organizational form of embroidery patterns and the theme of embroidery patterns. From the perspective of modeling, Leishan Miao embroidery is the appropriate application of continuous patterns and individual patterns. From the perspective of theme, Leishan Miao embroidery is a smart integration of realistic habitat and totem worship.

2.1 Appropriate Use of Continuous and Individual Patterns in the Shape

There are many kinds of Miao embroidery in Leishan. According to the organizational form, it can be summarized into two categories: continuous pattern and individual pattern. The so-called continuous pattern refers to an embroidery pattern that repeats on the central axis or the center point of the basic unit, which is a common pattern organization form. The structural bones of continuous patterns are mostly geometric shapes, such as rectangles, diamonds, and rings. Rectangular and rhombic skeletons can create cyclically arranged and rhythmic strip patterns through the regular changes of the basic units. The ring-shaped bone structure is arranged through the combination of similar-sized rings to form a pattern with good ductility. The decorative pattern in the blank space of the ring-shaped skeleton changes regularly, reflecting the sense of rhythm. The continuous pattern modeling is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The embodiment of continuous pattern modeling in Leishan Miao embroidery

name	pattern	name	pattern
Rectangular skeleton		Annular skeleton	
Rhombic skeleton		Tangled skeleton	

A single pattern refers to a decorative pattern that can be processed and used freely without external contour and skeleton restrictions, which has relative integrity and can be used for decoration alone. The organization of this pattern is not directly related to Zhou and other patterns, but care must be taken to keep an intact shape intact and a rigorous structure to avoid looseness and disorder. The individual patterns widely used in Leishan Miao embroidery do not only make a distinction between the primary and secondary images, but also have prominent themes. Its structure can be roughly summarized into two types: symmetrical pattern and balanced pattern.

Symmetrical pattern is one of the most common ways of pattern formation, but there is an expression characterized by “sharing” in the individual patterns of Leishan Miao embroidery. This kind of “sharing” usually takes dragon patterns as the main body and the trunk or head as the common pattern. The object reflects the aesthetic taste and modeling concept of local Miao women. The balanced pattern is the development of the symmetrical pattern in form, from the symmetry of the shape to the symmetry of the force (Tian, 2006, p. 49), reflecting a sense of balance. The individual patterns are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Embodiment of individual patterns in Leishan Miao embroidery

	graphical	graphical
Symmetrical single pattern		
Balanced individual pattern		

2.2 The Fusion of Realistic and Illusory Patterns on the Subject Matter

The embroidery patterns of the Miao ethnic group have their own characteristics, that is, the worship of natural totems, the pursuit of conformity to the idea of the unity of nature and man, and the worship of ancestors and fertility. According to the Miao embroidery patterns collected by the local Leishan museum, the author roughly divides Leishan Miao embroidery into three categories: real world patterns, mythological world patterns, and complex geometric patterns, as shown in Table 3. In the fieldwork, the author found that Leishan Miao women, driven by the pursuit of beautiful meanings, gave the patterns beautiful meanings, and they were widely used. For example, to express their worship of life, embroidery women often use vigorous and reproductive images of animals and plants, such as fish patterns, pomegranate patterns, and frog patterns; to express their worship of ancestors, they often use patterns such as butterflies and maple trees; and to express emotions, they often use pairs of flying birds, swimming fish, entwined branches, etc.

Table 3. Common patterns of Miao embroidery

Real world animal and plant patterns	Mythological animal and plant patterns	Complex geometric pattern
Tigers, cattle, fish, frogs, crabs, bats, pomegranates, ferns, rolled grass, sunflowers, etc.	Butterflies, dragons, phoenixes, maples, stars	Vortex pattern, zigzag pattern, octagonal pattern, water wave pattern, thunder pattern, etc.

It can be seen from the above table that the subject of Miao embroidery involves a large number of natural creatures, which is greatly related to their geographical environment. As we all know, art comes from life, and in ancient societies where information spread slowly, people couldn’t create images that surpass self-cognition. All creation and imagination need to be based on what they see and hear as well as their own life scenes (Rodin, 1963, p. 32). In this research, the author found that some scholars included lions as traditional animal images

when interpreting Leishan's traditional Miao embroidery (Tomoko, 2011, p. 147). However, by literature review and field investigations, this paper holds that there was once a lion in Leishan area. First of all, China has not produced lions since ancient times. People's contact with this extraterritorial creature can be traced back to Zhang Qian's opening of the Silk Road, and Wu Ge Shan li country to pay tribute to Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty (Fan, 1965, p. 1580); The county annals found a record of the existence of tigers in the area. "On January 17, 1957, Li Daizhen, a villager of Lotus Village, captured a large colorful tiger weighing 78.5 kg in Gaoyan Mountain" (Leishan, 1992, p. 24), indicating that tigers have lived here for a long time. Therefore, a series of illusory animal patterns expressing power and majesty should be based on tigers as prototypes and evolved instead of lions.

3. Analysis of the Reasons for the Evolution of Miao Embroidery Style

It will be monotonous to separate any art form from human existence. The reason why human existence is so important is that people have different personalities and often have different social roles in different social periods. This paper holds that with the development of society, embroidered women have played more and more diverse social roles, at the same time, with rich needlework, the embroidery style interpreted is more changeable.

3.1 *The Abundance of Stitches Is the Technical Guarantee for the Evolution of Styles*

According to the research of related scholars, the ancestors of the Miao people used the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and the Poyang Lake area as their habitats (Wu, 1959), and these areas have been influenced by the Chu culture for a long time. Therefore, the ancestors of the Miao people living in this area are bound to be inextricably linked with Chu culture. Judging from the embroidery relics of Chu tombs unearthed in Changsha, Jinzhou and other places, the patterns are mostly birds, flowers, beads, dragons, and phoenixes. Among them, the patterns of a hundred birds and phoenixes and double dragons and beads are still very common in Miao embroidery. The embroidery thread track is clear and regular as a whole, and the thread feet are regular to follow, which has the characteristics of multi-thread embroidery. Therefore, it is believed that count-yarn embroidery has a wide influence and occupies an important position in ancient embroidery stitches, and the ancestors of the Miao people living here are influenced, as they are more likely to use count-yarn embroidery stitches such as flat pick and cross pick. The ancestors of the Miao people who were forced to migrate with the war will inevitably inherit and spread this learned skill among the ethnic groups. According to Zhang Peng's record in the Jiaqing period of the Qing Dynasty: "Embroidered patterns include hibiscus, peonies, sunflowers, etc. There are dozens of kinds and some are named after birds and beasts (Zhang, 1936, p. 41)." According to the author's field investigation, most of the embroidered women in Leishan area use non-thread embroidery techniques such as needle-wound embroidery, seed embroidery, crepe embroidery, and braid embroidery when embroidering the above-mentioned patterns. From this, the author speculates that the use of stitches of the Miao women in Leishan area has experienced a process from multiple yarn embroidery stitches to multiple stitches alternately, and the transformation of this stitching reaction is rigorous in style, and lively and natural in transformation.

3.2 *The Change of Embroidery Women's Social Roles Is a Potential Cause of the Evolution of Embroidery Styles*

Embroidery is an art form that is mostly carried out by women, and this feature is more prominent for ethnic minorities, because the content, themes and expressions presented by embroidery are subjectively mapped to the inner world of embroidery women, and the objective vision of embroidery women. There are also interactions between the embroidery women and the embroidery styles, and this improvement of vision is often accompanied by changes in identity and social roles. Therefore, this study considers that in order to clarify the reasons for the evolution of Leishan Miao embroidery style, the main body of embroidery art creation must be taken into consideration, and the internal reasons for its evolution must be analyzed from the perspective of embroidery women.

3.2.1 *The Traditional Role Positioning of "Men Do Farm Work and Women Weave" Limits the Embroidery Creation of Embroidery Women*

This period was about from the traditional society to the establishment of New China, and the overall embroidery style was simple, primitive and regular. Restricted by the self-sufficient small-scale peasant economic system, "men do farm work and women weave" became the main production and lifestyle at that time. The narrow living space and limited production scale shackled farmers in the honeycomb of the family economy, and agriculture and handicrafts were tightly squeezed. "Men do farm work and women weave" became a typical portrayal of this economic structure (Hu, 1979, p. 100). This is especially true for Miao women in the mountains. According to relevant oral records (Zhang, 2000), the "weaving" of the Leishan Miao is not a narrow sense of weaving, but involves the entire process of weaving, printing, dyeing, and embroidery from planting indigo,

cotton and other raw materials to processing garments. This process of directly facing nature gives Miao women a hardworking and simple character, but it is also this single work that limits their sight to the mountains of their lives, so when they pick up the needle and thread, the scenes of life and the natural things that they see every day appear in their minds, and the tentative answers about “God” and the universe are presented with the help of embroidery. On the one hand, the patterns of common animals and plants, such as flying birds, swimming fish, frogs, ferns, and flowers, have been passed down from generation to generation as samples of connecting embroidery workers; on the other hand, those patterns that contain life thinking were given special features by their mothers. The meaning was passed on by generations and given new thinking and connotations. Therefore, this paper considers that the simple style of Miao embroidery has continued with the limited role of “women weave”, and the flower picking skills inherited from the ancestors have added a sense of solemnity to the simple and vivid embroidery.

3.2.2 The Change of Identity from “Women Weavers” to “Women Farmers” Enriches the Embroidery Style

This period was about from the founding of New China to the reform and opening up. The embroidery style experienced a lot of changes. Under the call of the country that women can hold up half of the sky, Leishan women gradually began to work on the land they were allocated. The social division of labor “The male lead outside, the female lead inside” were loosened, and field work was no longer considered “unspeakable”. The restriction of “women weave” was weakened through labor, and more labor opportunities brought new life skills, which not only broadened their horizon but also deepened their thinking. As a result, more and more “women weavers” gradually accepted the social role of “women farmers”, and this multiple identities also exerted a subtle influence on the relationship between women and embroidery, embroidery was no longer a supplement to life. Patchwork embroidery and applique embroidery other than cross-pattern embroidery were gradually used in large quantities. On the one hand, patch embroidery consumes less energy than cross-patterning, which can save rest time. On the other hand, the multi-layer patchwork is more durable than the high embroidered pattern, which can make full use of resources in the era of scarce materials. And this change from a single to multiple identities subtly affected the embroidery women’s choice of embroidery stitches, and the scenes of working in the field were more reacted, resulting in a gradual change in embroidery style from rigorous to vivid life style.

3.2.3 The Identity Change from “Women Farmers” to “Businesswomen” Has Promoted Embroidery to Present Inclusive Styles

This period is about the reform and opening up to the present, and the embroidery style can be described as eclectic. With the convenience of transportation and the popularization of the Internet, more and more rural women embroiderers have left the land to open shops in counties and towns, realizing the transformation of their roles from “women weavers” to “women farmers” and then to “businesswomen”. Their thinking is more flexible and their horizon is broader, the traditional restriction has become weak, the brand of the times has become clear, and the choice of the market has begun to play an important role in it. To cater to customers, “businesswomen” realized that it is important to find a delicate balance between the traditional skills of Miao embroidery and the aesthetics of modern society. The process of delicate balance has invisibly promoted the evolution of Miao embroidery style. As the largest Miao gathering place in China, the Qianhu Miao Village in Xijiang, Leishan attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists every year. For example, the embroidery workshop opened by Ayou Guests request to embroider realistic-style peony pictures, peacock pictures and other patterns. Niangying Embroidery Shop also sells cheongsams and dresses with ethnic embroidery. This study holds that it is the interaction between the customer and the “businesswomen” that has created the current Leishan Miao embroidery style that focuses on decoration.

4. Conclusion

As one of the intangible cultural heritages of Guizhou Province, Leishan Miao embroidery has distinctive artistic characteristics and unique artistic styles, which is of great significance to the study of the origin of embroidery styles. Leishan Miao embroidery pursues the appropriate use of continuous and individual patterns in modeling, and focuses on depicting natural sceneries and mythological totems in content. The unique creative technique gives local Miao embroidery rich cultural connotations, rather than the simple function as an ornament. It is the interaction among modeling, subject matter, and content that produces the vivid artistic style of Leishan Miao embroidery. The subject matter from nature and totem affects the form of expression of content, and this symmetrical and continuous form of expression is also very suitable for the reflection of natural style content.

By investigating the reasons for its style, the study holds that the change from yarn-counting embroidery to non-counting-yarn embroidery in stitches provides technical support for the transformation of embroidery style, and the change in the social role of embroidery women has caused embroidery to change from a small household

goods to a kind of special merchandise, so in a sense, the social role change of embroidery women is a potential factor leading to the evolution of embroidery style, and eventually the eclectic style of Miao embroidery is formed.

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