Classification of Li(黎族) traditional brocade patterns of Chinese textile and its application for modern fashion product design

Shunai Zhang† and Simin Wu
Institute of Fashion & Art Design, Donghua University, Shanghai, China


Abstract

There are various kinds of patterns on Li brocade textile of Hainan province in China. Those patterns are rich and colorful. Li (黎族) traditional brocade is an ancient exquisite craftsmanship and a world cultural heritage. This study analyzed and categorized Li brocade pattern of traditional Chinese textiles. Li (黎族) traditional brocade is an ancient exquisite craftsmanship. Based on the research of classifications of Li brocade patterns, expound the application of women’s costume. The patterns of Li brocade textile of Hainan province analyzed through three levels: design transforming, meaning prolongation, and refining spirit. The patterns were explored the feasibility way to inherit the patterns of Li brocade for the modern fashion product design. The results showed that Li brocade textile pattern of Hainan province were images sourced from local environment and geographical terrain. They contained the nation’s history memory, religion, hope for life of the Li nationality. Those patterns can be categorized as human figure pattern, animal pattern, geometric pattern, appliance or architecture pattern, and Chinese character pattern.

Keywords: Li brocade, Chinese ancient textile, pattern, fashion application

I. Introduction

Li (黎族) traditional brocade is the unique world cultural heritage of Hainan island. It is an ancient exquisite craftsmanship of the Li nationality living in Hainan province (海南岛). As a part of the national culture, it shows the special way of life that the nation relies for the existence and development, life wisdom, mode of thinking, imagination and cultural awareness (Zhang, 2010). It is a rich resource and rare capital of national treasure of civilization. How should we protect and inherit it? It is the issue that a worth while and serious development thinks and studies really.

There are various kinds of patterns on Li brocade which are rich and colorful. They contain the nation’s history memory, religion, hope for life of the Li nationality. Express values of Li brocade intuitively and vividly. The Li nationality includes five dialectical systems of Ha, Qi, Run, Sai, Meifu (哈, 杞, 赛, 润, 美孚). Li brocade patterns, especially mascot, are widely used in women’s wear, brocade wall hanging, dragon brocade quilt, brocade bags and various kinds of decorations. A number of different types are involved, more than 160. Also, each pattern within different dialects presents different forms. This study analyzed the patterns of Li brocade. By field investigation, firstly, analyze The Li traditional brocade pattern’s feature, diversity of origin and meaning of

* 교신저자 E-mail : shunai_zhang@qq.com
colors. According to the different themes, the patterns of Li brocade are separately carried on the classification. It can help us to analyze the history, national culture values of Hainan province in China behind the pattern. Summarize the beauty in composition and form, and then expound the modern application of Li brocade. This study analyzed the patterns through three levels: design transforming, meaning prolongation and refining spirit.

The Li nationality traditional brocade is regard as the world cultural heritage. Inheriting and exploitation become the most important means of protection. Reinterpreting tradition with fashion design concept, combine the techniques of modern design and inherited resources of Li traditional culture. Create a new fashion and modern products, enrich the culture and march into the world market (Wen & Zhang, 2006).

II. Review of Literature – Characteristic of Li Brocade Pattern

Li brocade pattern has become the identification of a dialectal area (Fig. 1). According to the previous research, the designs in Li brocade were images sourced from local environment and geographical terrain, further produced by some modifying, spreading from plain to mountainous area (Wang, 2004). Brocade patterns in different dialects reflect various aspects of social activities. Such as production, culture, love and marriage, religious belief and other matters like legendary mascots. Human being connected to animal, plants, natural spots and some other conventional things frequently show in Li brocade’s design. They are fairly adored by ladies, which is a special feature in the process of art figure.

Colors in Li brocade are different in dialectical areas and have distinguished characters. But black and blue are the major colors, alternating between colors like red, yellow, blue, green, and white, assisted with auxiliary colors like purple, brown and pink. Dark and light colors are used for contrasting and coordinating. Many colors are all involved. And each color implies a profound meaning of combination among Li people. Because of the short length of this article, the character, forming causes, colors’ implication of Li pattern will not be concerned. We will give a category by theme.
1. Li brocade pattern's category

The Li nationality has no its own character, and Li brocade becomes a symbol like epic that tells Li history on woven fabrics. Li brocade pattern is a mirror of the life of Li people, reflecting their spiritual and material world. By different themes, Li brocade pattern can be divided into six kinds as bellow:

1) Human figure pattern

Human figure patterns, adored by ladies, are widely used in Run dialect and have become the most classic ones. Human figures are outline simplified but remained the dominated features. The patterns in Figure 2, “the man and woman” (Fig. 2, left) tells the differences between man and woman vividly. There are many Hercules patterns in double-faced embroidery in Run dialect (Fig. 2, right).

2) Animal pattern

The image of animal frequently shows in Li brocade and they are much diversified in shape. A use of special method of technological processing adds to more charm and flavor through animal design’s transforming in many ways. Animal pattern in Li brocade includes dragon, snake, frog, cow, deer, horse, sheep, chook, bear, cat, dog, fish, turtle, bird, beer, butterfly, dove, turtledove, magpie, shrimp, crab, spider, bat and so on (Fig. 3).

3) Plant pattern

Plant pattern in Li brocade includes flourishing flowers and nonobjective plant (Fig. 4). Mostly they are used as decorations.

4) Appliance and architecture pattern

Li women also like to use appliance and producing tool as brocade patterns. They are house, boat, car, cradle, hoes, coin, tower, and so on (Figs 5 &

---

(Fig. 2) Human figure pattern- man and woman (left), Hercules pattern (right) (Note: Photos from Li brocade Museum in Hainan province)

(Fig. 3) Gangong bird pattern (left), turtle pattern (middle), sheep pattern (right) (Note: Photos from Li Brocade Treasure Clothes Art Totem Atlas (left & middle) and Betel nut valley in Hainan (right))

(Fig. 4) Flower pattern on Sai tight skirt (left) and plant pattern in hunting (right) (Note: Photos are from Tradition Brocade in Li nationality)
5) Geometry pattern

As a primitive design, geometry pattern came very early and was often used as edging in the past dynasties. It goes to primary positions in tubular shape skirt. Geometry patterns have a number of designs as cross, fylfot pa, saw tooth, water wave, cloud, thunder, round-circle, well and other geometric objects, etc. (Fig. 7). These patterns are simple and generally appear in seriously formal occasions. They are welcomed by women for the simplicity. Geometry patterns assemble point, line, planes and highlight the effect through changing elemental orders in a whole composition. They are doing a very necessary job in Li brocade. We are easy to grasp a charm and beauty from such designs.

6) Chinese character pattern

Chinese characters can be used as leading actor only or supporting roles in Li brocade. Li women agree

6). Brocade patterns can represent the local living standard and social customs in a way.

(Fig. 5) Pavilion and cradle pattern in Meifu dialect

(Fig. 6) Man in a boat and Man in a house pattern in Ha dialect (Note: Photos are from Li Brocade Treasure Clothes Art Totem Atlas)

(Fig. 7) Geometry pattern in Qi dialect’s costume (left) and fylfot pattern (right) (Note: Photos are from Li Brocade Treasure Clothes Art Totem Atlas)

(Fig. 8) Chinese character patterns: Ha women’s headband (left), brocade wall hanging (middle), and run dialect’s wedding dress (right) (Note: Photos are from Li brocade Museum in Hainan province (left), Betel nut valley in Hainan (middle), Li Nationality in China (right))
that these patterns help to express their emotions and gain good luck (Fig. 8).

2. The beauty of composition and form in Li brocade pattern

The pattern we are discussing is confined to Li brocade application. Workmanship in Li brocade is to weave yarns between warp and weft in a specific order to form a design. The shape basically presents a square or multi-corner form. The technical method involves system of horizontal visibility or integration balance in which single, double or quadruple even infinite consecution is applied for instance. Not only objects imitated from nature scenes, but also are fictitious images adopted from life experience among Li women. Those images are from life, further produced by filtering and intensifying. The Li nationality has no its own character, so that Li brocade becomes their epic woven on fabrics. Most of them imply some meanings that describe Li people’s life, work, their hopes or wishes. A prominent theme is selected and will be put into the noticeably large place while other subordinate parts fill the remaining space. A discipline and ration is fairly considered in structure. The importance and unimportance, the fullness and vacancy, the thickness and thinness are arranged perfectly. This format of structure is applied appropriately in Li brocade. There are different combinations in different places, proving such format.

III. Case Studies – Application of Li Brocade Patterns for Development of Fashion Products

1. Case study 1 – Transforming of shape

It is mostly common to see design’s transformation in fashion field. Three ways of transformation are direct borrowing, little twisting and complete inventing. These changes bring more interests and flavors into Li brocade. Then we are going to give an example to demonstrate how the design’s transforming works. First, we choose a frog design from Meifu dialect area as the original subject. At the beginning outline is grasped, and then follow to twist a bit. Adding some elements finally develops a vectored design (Fig. 9). Then reorder the vectored design and create
160 Classification of Li(黎族) traditional brocade patterns of Chinese textile and … 복식문화연구

Fig. 11 Application of the pattern for the dress design (Drafted by author)

2. Case study 2 - Meaning prolongation

As to meaning prolongation in Li brocade, its original purpose is to invent a wholly new meaning out of itself. It is the concealing meaning behind these signs that appeal to people so much. Therefore, the best way to advertise and improve Li brocade patterns is to promote its spiritual using like the pursuit of happy life or worship of good luck or praying to keep away from devil. The inspiration comes from the pursuit of harmony between nature and human, being happily together in the mutual world (Fig. 12, left). In modern designing way, the couple is arranged together with Gangong birds, which means those birds from nature, are singing for the merry match. This picture expresses a brisk, happy moment between human being and animals. Then through the section jointing and color matching, we are able to design a kind of fabric (Fig. 12, right). According to its own features, it is used in fashion design carefully, together in needs of markets and trends (Fig. 13).

3. Case study 3 - Refining the spirit

In modern design, spirit in traditional works are highly observed and praised for it represents the basic truth and quality. It is Chinese traditional spirit contained in Li brocade that keeps it going far and successful. We should promote such use in more modern works so that fashion would be more diversified, connotative and colorful. In figure 14, it's a good demonstration of spirit refining finished for
IV. Conclusion

To sum up, Li brocade pattern includes six patterns: human pattern, animal pattern, plant pattern, appliance and architecture pattern, geometry pattern, and Chinese character pattern. Due to the limit of workmanship of weaving technology, these patterns present in a square shape. Three steps of design process were studied with case studies: transforming, meaning prolonging, and spirit refining. The case studies show that the traditional Li brocade patterns can be widely use with modern concept of design and presents its culture to the world. In future research we will further discuss other features of Li brocade. Such as causes, color implication, and using methods in different dialectal areas.

References