

Research on the Cross-stitch Patterns of the Qiang and the Miao Nationality in Sichuan Province Based on Comparative Study

Zifeng Meng, Yanrui Mu*

Sichuan Agricultural University, Chengdu, 611134, China

*Corresponding author

Keywords: Cross-stitch; the Miao nationality in southern Sichuan; the Qiang nationality in northern Sichuan; cross-stitch skills; cross-stitch patterning characteristics.

Abstract: Cross-stitch, a kind of embroidery, represents one of the essential embroidery skills and boasts a time-honored history in China. This paper analyzes the commonality and individuality of cross-stitch patterning characteristics of the Miao nationality in southern Sichuan and the Qiang nationality in northern Sichuan from the perspective of comparative study. The research shows that the commonality is mainly embodied in terms of skills and the way of patterning, and the individuality is reflected primarily on the color matching and patterning elements. This paper also analyzes the reasons for the existence of the commonality and individuality and looks to the future development of cross-stitch in southern Sichuan.

1. Introduction

There are abundant folk arts of great antiquity in Sichuan province since ancient times, and cross-stitch is one of them. Cross-stitch is an indispensable part of the splendid culture of two long-standing nationalities, namely, the Miao nationality in southern Sichuan province and the Qiang nationality in northern Sichuan province. Today, the protection and inheritance of cross-stitch of the Qiang nationality have achieved some success, yet that of the Miao nationality in southern Sichuan still has a long way to go, and in-depth exploration and innovation are still needed. In this paper, the author compares the characteristics of cross-stitch patterns between the Miao and the Qiang nationality through investigation on the spots to arouse people's attention on the inheritance and development of cross-stitch in southern Sichuan.

2. The Commonality of Cross-stitch Patterns between the Miao and Qiang Nationality

2.1. The same skills

There are many similarities in the skills of cross-stitch manufacturing between the Qiang and the Miao nationality. For instance, both of the cross-stitch works from those two nationalities are stitched according to the longitudes and latitudes of the cloth. There are three kinds of stitching skills as a whole. The first one is called counted cross-stitch. The second one is similar to jacquard, and the third method is worked by stitching single thread back and forth, which is known as double-sided cross-stitch. Cross-stitch craftsmen use the stitch skills as mentioned above to create countless magical and beautiful works which makes people never get tired of watching [1]. Among the three kinds of stitch skills, counted cross-stitch is the most-used one by the Qiang and the Miao nationality. It is just because the two nationalities adopt almost the same skills that their cross-stitch works are very similar in terms of patterning.

2.2. The same patterning approaches

There are also similarities in the patterning between the cross-stitch works of the Qiang nationality and the Miao nationality. In addition to applying the cluster flower pattern alone, other patterning methods such as using side pattern, corner pattern, serging pattern, and filler pattern can also be found to complete or improve the composition. The composition is subject to the principle

of symmetry, and the British “Union Jack”-shaped and Sudoku-shaped composition is used widely. The patterns echo from beginning to end with a clear distinction between the primary ones and secondary ones. Some patterns have no specific way of composition, which is entirely the result of the maker’s free creation, while others are made up of extremely regular geometric figures, and have a strong sense of order and regularity.

Figure 1 is the “Horn Flower Handkerchief” of the Qiang Nationality. The whole pattern is mainly composed of cluster flower patterns, side flower patterns, and corner flower patterns, which elaborates the Union-Jack-form composition. It is plump and full of the beauty of power due to the successful combination of round patterns and square patterns. The central cluster flower pattern is made based on the “flowers wrap flowers” patterning style. The wrapped octagonal flowers in the middle are rectangular, while the layout of the peripheral azaleas is a circle. Each unit is made through only a few dozen stitches. The patterns set each other beautifully, making the whole cluster flower pattern be of tremendous interest. The cluster flower patterns at the main body, together with the flower patterns on the sides, allow the entire design of the handkerchief to be rich and colorful.

Figure 2 is the “Octagonal Flower Cross-stitch Skirt” of the Miao nationality. The pattern can be divided into two parts: the sickle flower pattern in the middle and the octagonal flower pattern on both sides. The sickle flower pattern in the middle has three layers. The first layer is the colorful primary part of the sickle flower, and the “flowers wrap flowers” patterning style appears again. The white petals wrapped around the main body look like a square. The second layer is composed of two subordinate flowers with their color matching well with the core of the primary flower. The third layer is an azalea, and the fourth layer is composed of eight columns of hanging flower, which is bilaterally symmetrical, and the shape is like an inverted “V.” The octagonal flower pattern on both sides is less complicated than the primary part. It has only two layers. The first layer is composed of well-arranged octagonal flowers with a clear hierarchy. The second layer is formed of six columns of simplified hanging flowers. There is no priority during the process of stitching. Usually, the stitching will begin from the pattern on edge and then extend to various directions. The following step is to turn to the other side and stitch the same pattern again. Making mistakes is allowed, but the completeness of the pattern must be ensured.



Fig.1. Horn Flower Handkerchief, Cross-stitch Patterns of the Qiang Nationality, P12



Fig.2. Octagonal Flower Cross stitch Skirt, photographed by the author

2.3. Summary

The reasons for the similarities of the patterning characteristics between the two nationalities can be summarized into the following three points: first, cross-stitch is an art that develops through constant observation and accumulation and long-term creation of human beings. It's an act of constant creation over a long period of time. Given that both of the two nationalities are located in the mountain environment in Sichuan province, the similar climatic conditions and geographical factors lead to the appearances of same animals and plants, which determines that people there will see same species and have similar life experience. Therefore, they will use similar items as the materials for the creation of the cross-stitch. Second, the minority areas in Sichuan are more open to external information than other autonomous regions for ethnic minorities. The high mobility and dissemination of information made mutual learning possible, which results in the high similarities of skills and patterns. The third reason is the limitation of texture. Just like other kinds of grid patterns, the pattern on cross-stitch is composed of vertical lines, horizontal lines and broken lines because of the restriction of the way of stitching and longitude and latitude grid points. Therefore, the curves or oblique lines in the lattice are replaced by zigzag-shaped broken lines with the same diagonal angle. Due to this kind of restriction, most of the complex shapes stitched under this condition are formed through various combinations and changes of rectangle, ladder, and diamond. All in all, the restrictions of the longitudes and latitudes make the patterns similar.

3. Unparalleled Charm of Cross-stitch Patterns of the Qiang and the Miao Nationality

3.1. The comparison of color matching



Fig.3. Kerchief Lacework, photographed by the author



Fig.4. Patterns on the Cuff, photographed by the author

Cross-stitch can be classified into two groups based on color matching, namely, multi-color cross-stitch and single color cross-stitch. The Qiang nationality has a more substantial amount of single color cross-stitch than the Miao nationality, while the multi-color cross-stitch of Miao nationality is more abundant and diversified. As for multi-color cross-stitch, in most cases, the Qiang will apply cyan color as the background color and apply bright red, warm pink color as the main tone, coupled with lake blue and emerald green and other cold colors. Besides, white color can be used for decoration and yellow for embellishment [4]. In figure 3, the use of warm glow highlights the theme of the cross-stitch, while the dark background makes the whole work more

tranquil. However, the multi-color cross-stitch of the Miao nationality is slightly different: The undyed, white cloth is mainly used as the base, with emerald green, pink, black as the primary color, and blue and yellow as the embellishment color. In figure 4, the white background shows vigor and vitality, coupled with the blue embellishment part, making the whole picture flexible and giving people a feeling of relaxing and freedom.

3.2. The comparison of elements of patterning

The totem of the Qiang nationality is the most commonly used patterning element in its embroidery works. Since different clans within the Qiang nationality have their unique totems, the totem worship of the Qiang nationality is diversified. At the same time, the worship of sheep by the Qiang nationality is a common phenomenon. They believe that sheep not only plays a role in protecting against evil spirit and harm but also is the embodiment of beauty. In terms of the marriage culture of the Qiang nationality, the azalea is named “horn flowers” because of the myths and legends of “free horn-matching marriage” [2]. Thus, it is not only a symbol of exorcism but also people's yearning for a happy marriage. Figure 5, a cross-stitch work, gives full play to the elements of the horn flower, showing the Qiang nationality's worship of nature and their yearning for beautiful things.

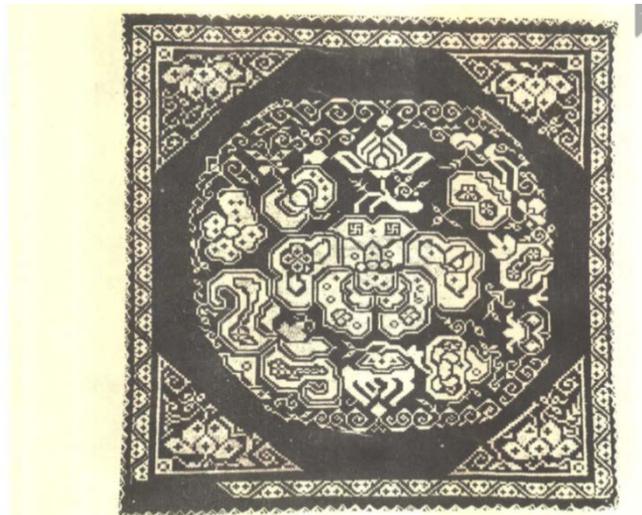


Fig.5. Pony of Good Fortune and Longevity, Folk Cross-stitch Patterns of Sichuan, P.24



Fig.6. Escorting the Bride to the Groom's Home, Folk Cross-stitch Patterns of Sichuan, P.74-75

Meanwhile, the craftsman is good at utilizing characters to create the work with a particular storyline. In picture 6, which is named “escorting the bride to the groom's home”, the craftsman flexibly uses the skills of cross stitch to depict characters and necessities very well. The combination of all the patterning elements makes the whole scene especially spectacular. On the other hand, the patterning elements used in cross-stitch works of the Miao nationality are very similar to that of totems of the Han nationality. Based on various data, we find that in the works of Miao nationality, there are no patterns such as “butterfly mother” and “Jiyu bird” worshipped by the

ancestors of the Miao nationality. Instead, more of them are simplified octagonal flowers, steel lines, and other patterns mixed with carp, phoenix, peony, and other totem symbols adored by the Han nationality. In figure 7, “Phoenixes chasing the wind,” phoenixes and peonies get close together. Phoenixes symbolize the Rich Hall, and peonies symbolize auspice. This embroidery expresses the Han nationality's wish for peace and reflects the tight integration between the Han and Miao nationalities.

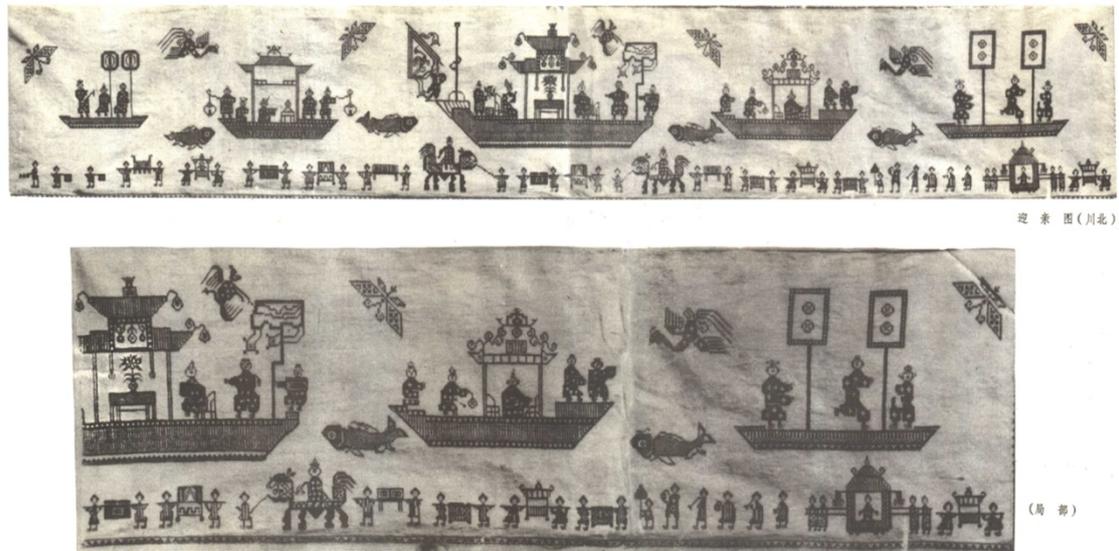


Fig.7. Phoenixes Chasing the Wind, Folk Cross-stitch Patterns of Sichuan, P.44

3.3 Summary

The personality differences between the Miao and Qiang nationality can be seen for the following three reasons: the first reason is that there are cultural differences between these two nationalities, from the love for things to the worship of nature, which undoubtedly leads to the different selections of the color matching, patterning element in the embroidery process. The second reason is that these two nationalities' social development and long-term acceptance of Sinicization are different. In the long process of intermarriage and cohabitation between the Han and Miao nationalities, due to the Han nationality's large population and strong inclusiveness, the Miao nationality is gradually Sinicized and begin to believe in and worship the totem of the Han nationality, while their ancestor's primitive totem is gradually lost. In comparison, the Qiang nationality still retains their own totem worship and some living habits in the process of Sinicization. The third reason is about the will of the nationality and the support of the government. Compared with the Qiang nationality, the talents of Miao nationality who are good at mastering cross-stitch and willing to inherit it are constantly losing. At the same time, the government's attention and support cannot be ignored.

4. Challenges and Inspirations during the Development of Cross-stitch in Modern Society

These two cross-stitches in two places face different problems in the process of social development. Due to the Wenchuan earthquake, northern Sichuan has received attention from all levels of society. Moreover, as a starting point for revitalizing the disaster-affected area, the cross-stitch of northern Sichuan has received strong support, and all walks of life have made efforts towards the revitalization of Qiang culture. Industrialization and product extension are continuously developing, and more and more relevant researches and scholars are emerging. The development of different industries continues to drive the development of cross-stitch of Qiang nationality. All of these industries show a rising trend. As for the Miao nationality in southern Sichuan, due to the cultural integration which is often a double-edged sword, excessive Sinicization brings a lot of

conveniences, however, the differences between national cultures are gradually narrowing. Many problems regarding the cross-stitch of the Miao nationality, including the loss of creative female craftsmen and old cross-stitch patterns, people's negative attitude towards its inheritance and development are particularly obvious. According to the above comparisons, there are still shortcomings in the inheritance and development of the Miao nationality. To speed up the pace of inheritance and development, we should put emphasis on the following points. Firstly, what is indispensable is the wide publicity of the industry, the strong support and protection of the government. Cross-stitch is an indispensable treasure in China's intangible cultural heritage, and it is worth our inheritance. Secondly, we should improve the educational system of traditional skills, develop innovative talents, enhance the quality of products, and continuously improve the internal and external cultural connotation of products within the Miao nationality. Thirdly, we should speed up the industrialization process of cross-stitch in southern Sichuan. As a result, the inheritance and protection of cross-stitch can be promoted in a better way.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above comparisons regarding the similarity and individuality between the cross-stitch patterns of the Miao nationality and the Qiang nationality, we can easily notice that due to the progress of society and the fast-paced life, these sophisticated clothes with cross-stitch skills are no longer sacred in people's hearts, and people who are willing to dress up are fewer and fewer, which is an essential manifestation of the rapid socio-economic development and cultural inheritance imbalance. The cultural value behind the Miao nationality's cross-stitch is losing accompanied by the continuous Sinicization. Nevertheless, it is the spirit and connotation behind these crafts that are worthy of our constant protection and inheritance.

Acknowledgements

Fund for Innovative Design and Industrialization of Folk Embroidery Products of the Miao Nationality in South Sichuan Province (Project No. 18SB0544).

References

- [1] Yu Deng. Folk Cross-stitch Patterns in Sichuan[M]. Chongqing: Chongqing Press, 1984.
- [2] Wenzhe Deng. The Qiang Nationality Folk Story Collection[M]. Beijing, Chinese Folk Art Press, 1988.
- [3] Cibing Luo, Zhengfen Liao. The Qiang Nationality Cross-stitch Patterns[M]. Sichuan Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Press, 1978.
- [4] Xiaoqun Yu. Cross-stitch Embroidery Studies of The Qiang Nationality's Clothes[J]. Grand Stage, 2015(9):234-235.