

# The Application and Modern Design Ideas of Metal Decoration in Traditional Costumes of Miao Nationality

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**Abstract**—The application of metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality has a long history of development, with rich expression methods and national uniqueness, and is a precious traditional handicraft of the Miao nationality. This article discusses the specific application of metal decoration in traditional Miao costumes, analyzes its value from the perspective of craftsmanship, pattern, and cultural aesthetics, and seeks the possibility of adapting to modern design. From the expression of modern design language, the assistance of science and technology, and the humanistic value, it provides more innovative ideas for the modernization of metal decoration in traditional clothing, thereby promoting the better inheritance of Miao traditional handicrafts.

**Keywords**—Miao nationality; metal decoration; modern design;

## I. INTRODUCTION

Miao costumes are China's precious intangible cultural heritage, and a carrier for the concentrated expression of traditional Miao crafts. They usually incorporate many traditional handicrafts such as embroidery, batik, brocade, and silver forging. Among them, metal decoration generally appears in various crafts used to decorate Miao costumes. It is a distinctive feature of Miao traditional costumes and has extremely high aesthetic and cultural value. In recent years, with the call for the protection of traditional crafts, there has been a certain amount of research on the application of metal decorations in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality, but the research content is mainly concentrated on the Miao nationality silver jewelry. However, the content of Miao traditional metal decoration is far more than Miao silver jewelry. The rich expression and humanistic connotation of Miao traditional metal decoration have yet to be discovered and created. At the same time, the material properties of metal are in line with modern design trends and modern aesthetics, and there is a huge potential for development in modern design. Therefore, it is very necessary to analyze the application characteristics and value of metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality and explore modern development methods.

## II. THE APPLICATION OF METAL DECORATION THE TRADITIONAL CLOTHING OF THE MIAO NATIONALITY

### A. Application in clothing and accessories

The Miao people are particularly fond of using metal as decoration, and are especially good at making silver ornaments. There are many types of Miao silver ornaments. Silver ornaments usually appear on Miao costumes in the form of silver pieces, silver buckles and silver waist chains. Silver pieces are mostly carved with various exquisite patterns such as various gods, animals and plants, geometric figures, etc., which are usually fixed by stitching with the fabric and decorated on various parts of the clothing. As a clothing accessories, silver accessories include headwear, breast and neck accessories, hand accessories, back accessories, waist pendants, foot accessories and other types. Each type of clothing accessories contains a wealth of expressions [1]. In addition to silver ornaments, other metals are used for decoration in traditional Miao clothing and accessories, such as small copper pieces, small bronze mirrors, and some small sequins and beads with metallic luster. They often appear on some Miao coat, carrying baby's bag, child's hat. The application of metal decoration in the traditional clothing of the Miao nationality is also reflected in the combined use of various Miao handicrafts. Among them, the combination of embroidery technology is more abundant. The following content will be elaborated in detail.

### B. Application combined with embroidery technology

The metal decoration in the traditional embroidery process of the Miao nationality is mainly gold and silver thread and tin foil.

The use of gold and silver thread is mainly reflected in the Miao nationality's coiled embroidery craft. Similar to the coiled embroidery in Han embroidery, the gold and silver thread is wound on the fabric according to the outline of the pattern, and the embroidery thread is used to stitch it to form a three-dimensional decoration. It is often used with other traditional Miao embroidery. In addition to being used in clothing, this craft also appears in the decoration of shoes, hats, and carrying a child's bag, and is mostly used as a pattern's edge to emphasize the content of the pattern [2].

The application of tin foil is mainly embodied in the tin embroidery craftsmanship of the Miao nationality. Miao

nationality tin embroidery is a unique embroidery technique in Jianhe area, southeast Guizhou, China. Traditional Miao tin embroidery is commonly found in the front waist, back waist and back parts of Jianhe traditional women's clothing [3].The specific process is to first embroider a pattern frame on the fabric with a thread-picking technique, and then cut the tin foil into small strips and fix it on the fabric by buckling one by one on the embroidery thread to get patterns with different characteristics. In addition, some areas in southeastern Guizhou also use tin foil when making silkworm cotton waistbands [2].After being cut and folded, the tin foil often relies on its soft and easy to bend properties, forming a tooth-like occlusal decoration on the edge of the waist bottom cloth, and wrapping the waist bottom to form a decoration.In addition, the application of tin foil is also reflected in the Miao weaving style embroidery process, which refers to an embroidery technique that uses embroidery to interlace fabrics to produce a effect similar to that of weaving.In the weaving style embroidery of the Miao nationality, in addition to the use of silk threads for weaving and embroidery, the tin foil strips cut into thin silk are used as warps and silk threads are used as wefts for embroidery. This kind of weaving embroidery is often used to decorate the edges of regular clothing fabrics.

In addition, in some Miao stacked embroidery works, a kind of "golden paper" appears. Although "golden paper" is not metal, it also has the luster characteristics of metal foil in appearance, so it is also included here. Enter this category and list them together. In use, the "gold paper" is cut into thin strips, and then sewn on the base fabric, and finally used as a frame when stacking other fabrics later, with the effect of decorative edges.

### III. THE CHARACTERISTICS AND VALUE OF METAL DECORATION IN MIAO NATIONALITY'S TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

Metals generally have the characteristics of strong plasticity, firmness, and gloss. In use, they can be suitable for processing into various shapes, have good modeling capabilities, and give people a solid and heavy feeling psychologically, with a sense of strength. The performance is gorgeous, elegant, and cold. The characteristics and value of metal decoration in traditional Miao costumes are mainly presented in three aspects: craftsmanship, modeling patterns and cultural aesthetics.

#### A. Craft Characteristics

The metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality is unique in craftsmanship, purely handmade, and time-consuming and difficult.

Taking silver jewellery and tin embroidery as an example, the production of a Miao silver jewellery usually requires complicated steps such as silver shearing and drawing, stamping blanks, detail carving, stitching and welding ,and cleaning [4]. The production process does not rely on modern machines, but completely relies on silversmith's handwork, which involves filigree, knitting, engraving and other difficult crafts. The production process is complicated and difficult, and silversmiths need to use their skills flexibly in combination with experience.

As a unique embroidery technique that only exists in Jianhe area of Guizhou, China, Miao tin embroidery has been preserved through historical panning and has become irreplaceable in craftsmanship. It has extremely high value in the field of Chinese embroidery, and even the field of

embroidery in the world.A complete set of traditional tin embroidered clothing usually contains three pieces of tin embroidered pieces, and one piece of tin embroidered pieces is composed of thousands of small tin buttons.For the locals, the number and density of tin buttons in the same size of tin embroidery pieces are the evaluation criteria for the quality of Miao tin embroidery. The more embroidered and denser, the smaller the tin buttons per unit, then The better the quality of tin embroidery pieces, so the process of making tin embroidery often takes a lot of time.Generally speaking, from spinning to finished product, a skilled Miao woman needs at least 2 years to make a set of tin embroidery traditional garments, and most of the time spent on tin embroidery is [2].

#### B. Modeling and patterns characteristics

The different metal decorations in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality have their own characteristics. They have a wide range of themes and full of changes in the modeling patterns, with rich expressions and strong ethnic regional characteristics.

Taking Miao silver ornaments as an example, in terms of modeling characteristics, Miao silver ornaments are a good interpretation of Miao's aesthetic preference for "large" and "numerous". In terms of "large" aspects, it is mainly reflected in the volume and weight of Miao silver jewelry.A large silver horn in Leishan County, Guizhou is nearly half the height of a person, while the popular Miao twisted wire silver collar in Taijiang, Guizhou, each weighs 1 kilogram, and usually wears 1-3 when it is worn on festivals.In the embodiment of "numerous" , the "numerous" of Miao silver jewelry is often reflected in the wide variety of silver jewelry and the repeated wearing of similar silver jewelry, which has a rich level of appearance.At the same time, the "numerous" of Miao silver ornaments is also reflected in the complicated patterns of Miao silver ornaments. The Miao silver jewelry patterns have a wealth of expressive themes: animal-themed horn shapes, various butterflies, fish, and birds, generalized geometric sun patterns, triangle patterns, and twisted wire shapes, as well as various bodhisattva statues, even There are also modeling patterns that express the theme of Chinese characters.At the same time, the Miao silver jewelry is very delicate in the performance of the pattern details. Even the same subject matter, they often have different expressions. In terms of specific expression, it often combines the characteristics of concrete and abstract, which can not only depict realistic subjects vividly, but also add infinite imagination to them, combine different things to create various creative patterns.

For the Miao nationality tin embroidery, due to the particularity of the craft, the modeling patterns are all kinds of abstract figures composed of geometric figures. Commonly used in modern pattern design, the two-sided continuous and four-sided continuous composition techniques. It is symmetrical, full of rhythm, and full of modernity. Different from other common themes of traditional Miao crafts, such as flowers, birds, insects, and fish.The Miao tin embroidery pattern contains a large number of agricultural tools, living utensils and natural things, which have strong regional characteristics and symbolism.

Other applications of metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality often play an embellishment and prominent role in the overall shape of the costumes. Whether through weaving, inlaying or biting, these metal decorations have formed a strong contrast effect in the

collision with the unique fiber fabrics, embroidery, brocade and other crafts of the Miao nationality, enriching the texture of the fabric and making the fabric look better. It becomes more gorgeous and noble, making the Miao costume more dazzling and richer in overall shape.

#### C. Cultural aesthetic value

The Miao people have a long history of migration. In the process of development, because there is no written role in recording and promoting communication, it has promoted the diversification of other forms of expression. The totem worship, aesthetic preference, and emotional awareness of the Miao people are all in It can be materialized in other carriers, and traditional Miao costumes are one of the important carriers. The metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality also reflects the general psychological consciousness of the Miao nationality to a certain extent, and has symbolic significance.

The cultural phenomenon of the totem worship of the Miao nationality is an important manifestation of the general psychological consciousness of the Miao nationality, which is mainly expressed through the shapes and patterns of the metal decoration of the Miao nationality. The "Mother Butterfly" pattern in the silver jewelry of the Miao nationality is the protagonist of the legend of the creation of human beings. The use of the "Mother Butterfly" pattern is a manifestation of the Miao people's ancestor worship and respect. There are many horn-shaped headdresses in the Miao silver jewelry, which represents the worship of the Miao people for power in the ancient times when they were forced to constantly struggle with the harsh natural environment. It is the expression of the Miao people's desire to seek harmony with nature in the era of low productivity. [5]. At the same time, in the consciousness of the Miao people, metal decorations usually also have the function of exorcising evil spirits and protecting Miao people. Therefore, there are many metal decorations with various statues and bodhisattvas. This is also a manifestation of the Miao people's pursuit of physical sustenance in order to enhance their psychological security.

In terms of symbolism, the metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality has distinctive ethnic characteristics and is an important symbol of national identity. At the same time, the Miao nationality is a ethnic group with many branches, and the different use of metal decoration by the various branches of the Miao nationality also plays a role in distinguishing the branches. In addition, in the folk life of some Miao ethnic groups, metal decorations are often signs of marriage and love.

Culture is the soul of the traditional metal decoration of the Miao nationality. The metal decoration of the Miao nationality without cultural characteristics is like a firework, even if it is beautiful, it will be fleeting. The modern development of Miao traditional metal decoration needs the support of the culture behind it to survive for a long time.

### IV. MODERN DESIGN AND APPLICATION OF METAL DECORATION IN MIAO NATIONALITY'S TRADITIONAL CLOTHING

#### A. Expression of modern design languages

With the development of modern society, the mass market has higher and higher requirements for products. If you want the unique metal decorations in traditional Miao costumes to be better developed in the modern market environment and be

seen and loved by more people, then They need to adapt to the needs of modern life. One of the important ways to adapt to the needs of modern life is to express in modern design language. Specifically, the expression of modern design language mainly refers to the re-creation in line with modern aesthetics in terms of craftsmanship, patterns, colors, expression carriers, and expression forms. At the same time, due to the particularity of traditional handicrafts, the innovation of metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality is not blindly modernized, but selective retention and improvement.

1) *Technological innovation*: Most of the metal decorations in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality have the characteristics of hand-made craftsmanship, which makes the craft products unique. But this feature also restricts the development of metal decoration to a certain extent, limits the scale of production, and is not conducive to the conversion of handicrafts into commodities. Therefore, for the innovation of metal decoration technology, we can consider replacing some less manual works with machine processing, adding modern tools to assist, and sacrificing a small part of the uniqueness that may not be noticed within a controllable range. Therefore, the efficiency is improved and the cost is reduced, thereby promoting the commercialization of metal decoration. Secondly, materials are also an important factor affecting metal decoration. The optimization and replacement of materials can bring new vitality to traditional metal decoration. Most of the metal materials used at the beginning of the production of traditional metal decorations are based on specific characteristics of the times, specific social development conditions and cultural attributes. In modern times, many metal decorations still use the original materials. In the face of modern needs, the original materials are not necessarily the best choice. The introduction of new materials can optimize the production process. At the same time, in terms of materials, not only materials with the same metal properties can be selected, but also materials with completely different properties can be introduced to present the process itself. For example, the process of retaining the tin in the tin embroidery and replacing the material with leather is an attempt. It can not only make the product have the characteristics of tin embroidery technology, but also obtain completely different effects.

2) *Pattern innovation*: The metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality contains many unique traditional patterns. The innovation of patterns is mainly reflected in the extraction and reconstruction of patterns. In the extraction of patterns, after acquiring the original images, modern design software such as Photoshop, Illustrator, etc. can be used to extract and save the outline, color, and texture of the pattern, which is the basis for the filing and innovation of the pattern. In the reproduction of the pattern, it can be expressed by only selecting one or more elements of the pattern, such as retaining only the shape of the pattern, changing the color, texture, and performance style of the pattern, or changing only a certain design element of the pattern to perform the pattern. More complete inheritance. Such an innovative form can also retain part of

the traditional features of the pattern. In addition, it can be completely deconstructed and reorganized to create a new artistic expression of patterns. At the same time, culturality is also a major feature of Miao metal decorations. The cultural story behind its patterns is incorporated into the reconstruction of the patterns, which will enrich the connotation of the patterns.

*3) Innovation of performance carrier and form:* In terms of performance carriers, Miao metal decorations can be used in textile and apparel design, visual communication design, environmental design and other fields. In the field of textile and apparel design, you can try to combine metal decoration with more unconventional textile fabrics such as leather and silk. It can make full use of modern digital printing, cold pressing, metal coating, jacquard and other technologies to achieve different design effects. Since the field of visual communication design includes entity and non-physical, static and dynamic, plane and multi-dimensional and other forms that can be transformed into each other, it can provide packaging design, cultural and creative product development, UI design, animation, film and other development approaches. In the field of environmental design, Miao metal decoration can be used in architectural appearance, indoor soft decoration, exhibition display, etc. [6]. At the same time, cross-border combination is also an important way of modern design. Miao metal decoration can create more innovative and unique designs in the interaction with different art forms, different traditional handicrafts, and modern technology.

#### *B. Science and technology assistance*

In today's highly developed culture, art and science, Miao metal decoration cannot do without the aid of modern technology in the innovation of expression carriers and forms. 3D printing, holographic projection, immersive experience, artificial intelligence and other modern technologies can bring unlimited possibilities for the development of Miao metal decoration [7].

Since its development, modern design usually pays attention to the decoration of the foundation, but also pays much attention to the improvement of product function by design. In the field of modern metal decoration, a variety of different metal fibers, metal jacquard, metal coating, semi-solid metal, electronic metal foil and other processes have appeared, which have more functions such as radiation protection, low consumption, and environmental protection [8]. Their appearance is a good example of improving the functionality of traditional metal decorations, and has an important enlightening effect on the modernization of traditional metal decorations of the Miao nationality.

#### *C. The embodiment of humanistic value*

The material living conditions in modern society are relatively developed, and the public's pursuit of spiritual

quality of life is constantly improving. People are also paying more attention to the humanistic value behind the design on the basis of pursuing design practicability, aesthetics, and cost-effectiveness.

The combination of craftsmanship and technology brings more possibilities to design, and the combination of craftsmanship and culture brings more spiritual comfort to design.

The traditional metal decoration of the Miao nationality is handmade, historical and cultural. The Miao people will give their blessings to their families, their longing for a happy life, their earnestness and dedication to craftsmanship, their faith in doing things, and their optimistic attitude of singing and dancing often accompanied by the production process. With one stitch and one thread, one hammer and one chisel, they are integrated into handicrafts. And handicrafts can also convey this warmth and touch to the viewer. Therefore, how to integrate the stories behind these crafts, patterns, and shapes into design products through suitable carriers in modern design, and tell the Miao story well, will also be a topic worth exploring and valuable.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The development of modern design of metal decorations in traditional Miao costumes is a flowing process. It needs to be expressed in modern design language and adapted to the level of modern technology. It needs to tell good stories without losing the soul. The modern design incorporating traditional metal decorations presents a brand-new visual experience, then the traditional craftsmanship will be more in line with the needs of modern life. Such exploration will not only provide a source of inspiration for modern design innovation, but also help the inheritance and development of metal decoration in the traditional costumes of the Miao nationality in Guizhou.

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