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Batik Culture of Bailing Miao in Danzhai, Guizhou Province

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Abstract

Bailing Miao batik from Danzhai, Guizhou Province, functions as both practical clothing ornamentation and a carrier of cultural meaning. This paper begins by examining the distinctive clothing characteristics of Bailing Miao men and women, situating batik within the broader ethnic cultural system. It then analyses the artistic features of batik patterns in terms of motif types, structural organisation, and colour schemes. Embedded cultural customs, cosmology, and religious beliefs are interpreted through batik imagery. The refined patterns adorning garments demonstrate the aesthetic sensibility, technical mastery, and creative agency of Bailing Miao women, highlighting batik as cultural heritage in today's China.

Keywords: Batik; Cultural Connotation; Bailing Miao; Danzhai.

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1.0 Introduction

Batik is a widely practiced textile art across several Asian countries, most notably Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, where it holds deep cultural, historical, and artistic significance. However, sharing the common technique of wax-resist dyeing, batik in each country has evolved with distinct aesthetic styles, symbolic meanings, and production methods shaped by local traditions, beliefs, and environments (Legino et al., 2016; Legino, 2017). Together, these regional traditions demonstrate how batik has been continuously adapted across Southeast Asia, functioning not only as a textile craft but also as a medium for cultural expression, identity, and artistic innovation. In China, while folk batik in Han regions has largely disappeared under modernisation, it has been relatively well preserved in ethnic minority areas of southwest China, particularly in Guizhou Province. Among these traditions, Miao batik stands out for its diverse styles and rich pattern repertoire, becoming a representative form of living batik heritage in China. Danzhai County, characterised by mountainous terrain and historical isolation, has retained comparatively intact batik practices. The Bailing Miao, a branch of the Miao nationality, are noted for garments dominated by white batik patterns, with batik serving as the primary decorative element. Their refined techniques embody significant artistic, cultural, and intangible heritage value.

2.0 Literature Review

Batik has been extensively reviewed in the literature as a significant textile tradition in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, where it functions as a cultural marker, artistic practice, and economic craft. Although united by the wax-resist dyeing technique, batik in these

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countries demonstrates clear regional distinctions shaped by history, belief systems, and social structures (Samin et al., 2017). Danzhai County is a multi-ethnic, mountainous area with the Miao as the main ethnic group. In a relatively independent geographic environment, the Bailing Miao have developed a unique clothing culture. Bailing Miao women often wear a bright cloth with a left lapel on festivals, Its characteristics are as follows: the length of the coat is as high as the waist; The neckline is trapezoidal and inlaid with a flat embroidery pattern of flowers and birds with a dark red bottom; The neckline is lined with embroidered cards with flowers and birds on a red background; The placket is decorated with a geometric flower-and-bird pattern on a red background about 5-7cm wide, and is embroidered with several yarns; Embroidery plates are decorated on both sides of the shoulders and back waist, and there are often tassels on the waist embroidery plates; There is a semi-circular batik pattern on the back of the collar. The sleeves are also overlaid with four layers of cotton cloth (Yu, 2020). There is also a rectangular batik pattern in the middle, shown in Fig. 1. Bailing Miao women usually wear a blouse with a large front and a right lapel. Its features are as follows: the hem and cuffs of the dress are inlaid with two continuous patterns of embroidery decoration; The lower garment is straight trousers; it has a trapezoidal belly pocket outside; The belly pocket pattern is auspicious individual patterns such as flowers and birds; The scarf is decorated with a rectangular batik pattern(Wang,2005). Traditional daily clothes are made of purple-black cloth, mostly worn by the elderly; middle-aged people mostly wear yellow-green-blue cotton or colourful satin, and young girls often wear batik cloth as jackets (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Bailing Miao Women's Festival and Clothing
(Source: Photo by Su Si)



Fig. 2: Bailing Miao women's daily clothes
(Source: Photo by Su Si)

Bailing Miao men's daily clothing has been very modern. The characteristics of men's clothing include a large bun, a double-breasted, slanted, or wide-breasted jacket, and baggy trousers. Wear a silver collar, necklace, headband, bracelet, etc., and straw shoes, cloth shoes, wooden shoes, etc. On major occasions, such as festivals or sacrifices, the older adults wear black or indigo slanted robes and trousers. Some older people still wear black handkerchiefs and silver collars; middle-aged and young men wear black cloth or brightly coloured cloth with a double-breasted stand-up collar and black trousers, without a headband or silver ornaments (Sun, 2006). Today is Bailing Miao traditional men's wear uses no batik fabric, and only a few men's batik garments are products of modern fashion. The artistic characteristics of Bailing Miao batik: Guizhou batik has a history of more than 2000 years and still retains its primitive simplicity. Guizhou Miao batik is widely distributed across a large area and is relatively complete compared with other Miao areas in China. It is also markedly different in terms of technology and pattern styles across geographical divisions (Lin, 2021).

Bailing Miao batik is mainly distributed in Danzhai County and Sandu County. The batik patterns in this area are rich and most complete. The white-collar Miao batik style created by this generation is unrestrained, with long screen lengths, varied techniques and compositions, and high artistic value. The batik pattern is primarily used to decorate shoulders, sleeves, quilts, bed sheets, and door curtains. Danzhai Miao batik was designated as China's national intangible cultural heritage in 2006, and its cultural and artistic value is undeniable (Wu, 2012). Bailing Miao batik patterns are divided into natural and geometric patterns. Natural patterns often feature flowers, birds, fish, and insects; common themes include butterfly, bird, fish, centipede, dragon, pear flower, bronze drum, and nest patterns (Wang, 2016). Natural patterns are rich in materials and have few restrictions. People can conceive and create as they like when making

batiks. Geometric patterns are composed of geometric patterns, among which the bronze drum pattern represented by a circle is the oldest, and the bronze drum pattern means the memory of ancestors. The most distinctive geometric pattern is the thread pattern. It is often found on the shoulders and sleeves of men's and women's clothing (Li, 2016). This kind of decoration is the "Wotuo" pattern. Wotuo is a Miao language meaning "batik-flowered clothes," symbolising the migration history of Miao ancestors.

The composition of Danzhai Bailing Miao batik is full, the patterns are organically organised, and the rhythm is full of changes, symmetrical and balanced. It has a planar form; some are symmetrical from top to bottom, while others are symmetrical from left to right. The pattern resembles today's graphic composition painting, which seeks change through unity and unity in change, so that the various components of the batik pattern are both distinct and intrinsically linked (Huang, 2014). Baling Miao batik is an art form applied to cloth. It is not limited by time or space, nor does it need to convey a stereoscopic sense of the objects in the picture. It is all based on people's years of drawing experience and spiritual feeling. China's traditional working people always advocate perfection. This is fully reflected in the composition of batik art. The patterns on the canvas are very symmetrical and balanced. Although the subject matter is rich, the pattern is full and dense, and the gap is small, it is not messy at all. It fully reflects the picture's overall formal beauty. Therefore, the composition of Bailing Miao batik is always harmonious and full. In the processing of composition details, modern composition design has been fully applied, including the relationship between primary and secondary virtual and real patterns, contrast in line thickness, and the rhythmic relationship among points, lines, and planes (Chen, 2014). From the composition form of Bailing Miao batik art, we can intuitively feel the psychological characteristics of ethnic minorities in pursuit of perfection and the traditional aesthetic needs of the public. What it shows is more full, full of pictures, rich, and simple in aesthetic psychology.

Danzhai Bailing Miao batik advocates blue and white. This reflects the simple aesthetic characteristics of local women. In batik, the proportion of blue and white is often used to distinguish between white-collar and non-white-collar Miao women, and white-collar Miao women are often able to handle it well, avoiding a jumpy look from excessive white areas (Li, 2016). It will not appear dull because of too much blue area. This application of blue and white is like the positive and negative forms in graphic design. As a negative shape, the area of blue is usually larger than that of white. In addition, this kind of blue, close to dark black, can give people a quiet, calm visual feeling. This is also more conducive to highlighting the beauty of white patterns. White conveys a sense of purity and elegance. However, the use of a dark blue background to set off white in Bailing Miao batik adds a sense of liveliness (Wang, 2016). The different wavelengths of blue and white often create a visual illusion of white forward and blue backward, giving batik a three-dimensional visual experience.

3.0 Methodology

A collection of relevant ancient and modern literature, works, and theoretical research can provide sufficient and necessary historical data from a wide range of materials on Miao batik, traditional arts and crafts, Miao culture, clothing design, and other areas. As the main body of this study is Danzhai Miao batik, in-depth field research among Guizhou Danzhai production groups and consumers can help understand the most real development status of Danzhai Miao batik, which is an important way to supplement the lack of literature and enrich the content of the article, and also one of the key methods of writing this paper. For example, by investigating traditional batik art, folk batik daily necessities, and Danzhai Miao batik art boutiques displayed in museums and private collections, as well as those sold in stores, the author can acquire a large number of valuable materials and cases. In addition to gaining more intuitive knowledge than book knowledge, the author can better understand professional content that may not be apparent from the literature alone, such as the specific drawing method used in the Danzhai Miao batik pattern.

4.0 Findings

Historically, the ancestors of the Miao nationality constantly migrated, and the process was difficult and bumpy. They used patterns as a faith to support them through difficult times. These patterns have been passed down to this day by subsequent clans to remember their ancestors' sufferings. It contains important cultural and spiritual values. The following is discussed from the perspective of pattern theme modeling, with the connotations of pattern, modeling characteristics, and totem worship contained in each pattern presented in Table 1.

4.1 Animal Pattern

The bird pattern, which is central to the Bailing Miao people in Danzhai, represents the protection of their national reproduction. Birds are their gods. Their production and life are inseparable from the worship of birds. The batik, embroidery, and silver ornaments on the body all illustrate the importance of birds to the Miao culture in Danzhai. The bird patterns in Danzhai Bailing Miao batik are very rich, and most depict caragana. The common feature is sharp feathers; the body gives the impression of one side and one eye. The ancestors of the Bailing Miao used the bird as their totem. Birds are closely linked to Miao legends about the origins of human beings and grain. In Miao culture, birds are considered kin to humans. In the primitive farming society of the Miao people, all work depends on the workforce. So it is important for reproduction. As an egg-laying animal, the butterfly has a strong ability to reproduce. Its image became the object of worship of the Miao people. Therefore, the butterfly pattern embodies the characteristics of ancestor worship and reproductive worship among the Miao people. From the pattern modeling, see the butterfly pattern: a common motif used to decorate elements. Reflect the reproductive implications of eggs. The form is mainly one of expansion. The insect or fish body is combined with the petals and leaves.

The fish pattern relates to life through observation; the Miao people know that fish lay many eggs and give birth to many offspring. They all want their ethnic groups to be larger, stronger, and more prosperous. The cult of fertility was elevated to the point of deification.

Fish have rich roe. There are also two fish connected by the belly or head. Goldfish and silver carp patterns also appear in Danzhai batik patterns. These images all represent the Bailing Miao people's hope that they can develop a strong reproductive ability like fish, so that the race can flourish. It is also a symbol of reproductive worship. The dragon pattern, where the dragon has the ability to drive away the fog and adjust the wind to the rain. It symbolizes peace and auspiciousness. The dragon has supernatural power in the Miao ideology. It can not only reduce wind and rain but also manage mountains and rivers and protect homes and villages. The dragon pattern under the batik knife of the Bailing Miao people in Danzhai is ever-changing, not fixed. Dragon patterns can be combined with various animals or plants. The Miao dragon also lacks the color of feudal imperial power. The image of the Miao dragon is not possessed by anyone, nor attached to any power. This also fully demonstrated the Miao people's strong commitment to civilian life.

Table 1. Animal Pattern

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Bird pattern |  |
| Butterfly pattern |  |
| Fish pattern |  |
| Dragon pattern |  |

(Source: <https://image.baidu.com>)

4.2 Plant Pattern

Plant patterns in Danzhai batik patterns are quite rich. Most of them appear in the picture as auxiliary graphics. Because of the environments in which they lived, these plant patterns were often based on the original plants and flowers common in the mountain fields listed in Table 2. The pear flower pattern is the most common plant pattern in Danzhai. During their long migration, they found pear flowers blossoming all over the mountain. The pear flowers, full of vitality, gave them spiritual inspiration. Therefore, in the Miao people's understanding, the pear flower pattern symbolizes hope and expresses worship of nature. So, Bailing Miao women often paint pear flower patterns on children's clothes. There is also a saying that the pear pattern is an auspicious pattern for Miao dolls. Children who wear batik clothes with a pear pattern can grow up safely and healthily.

Table 2. Plant Pattern

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Pear flower pattern |  |
| Pomegranate pattern |  |

(Source: <https://image.baidu.com>)

Pomegranate pattern: Because of the unique appearance of the pomegranate, there are hundreds of seeds in the skin, and crystal grains. The abundance of pomegranates coincides with the Miao people's reproductive worship. It is often regarded as a good representative of children and grandchildren, family prosperity, and harmony. The pomegranate pattern of modeling form is rich. You

can see it on the batik dress of the Miao people. Pomegranate grain to the strong wrapped branch type pattern. Lush foliage, composition large, full, symmetrical, dense size arrangement. Rich colors, fine details, simple and vivid patterns. It reflects the Miao people's expectation of having more children in Danzhai and embodies a worship of reproduction.

4.3 Geometric Pattern

The geometric patterns in Miao batik in Danzhai are all based on real-life themes. It differs from other Danzhai batik patterns in its randomness. It embodies an aesthetic sense of order in Table 3. The ancestors of the Miao people used bronze drums to signal advances and retreats during battles. Now it is mainly used as a religious instrument in the sacrificial activities. The drum pattern is usually composed of several different patterns into a complete circle. The bronze drum is a symbol of Miao culture. The bronze drum pattern is also often used in Miao batik to express memory and worship of ancestors. The pattern of the bronze drum is rich in changes across its historical inheritance, especially in its evolution. Early geometric patterns gave a sense of strict order, but now there are more flowers, birds, and dragons. This reflects the life changes of the Bailing Miao people, from the days of war to their present comfortable life.

Horseshoe pattern, as the name comes from the shape of a horse's hoof. Most scholars interpret the horse's hoof lines as symbolizing the footprints left by the Miao people's ancestors as they traveled through mountains and rivers. This pattern was recorded to show their worship for the toil of their ancestors. The horseshoe pattern features a fan-shaped interior with geometric lines. Usually combined in four directions. It is often combined with bracken or tree leaf patterns. Bailing Miao people use this pattern to draw batik. Bailing Miao People believe that a combination of horse hooves and bracken patterns can lead the deceased to heaven without getting lost.

Spiral pattern, there are many kinds of spiral patterns in Danzhai batik. Among them, the Bailing Miao women's dress in Danzhai is the most typical in its back and middle-sleeve decoration. It consists of a single double-spiral pattern after symmetry, followed by a continuous quadrilateral pattern to show the Miao dress's back and sleeves. The locals call it "Wo Tuo". In the past, colorful batik was used to make flowers. The circular spiral pattern was dark blue as the main color, with thick yellow lines painted outside and thin vermilion lines added. Due to the complexity of the color-adding process, it is now mostly monochrome and presented as double loops on the dressed-up model. Batik, as part of the Bailing Miao daily life in Danzhai, Guizhou Province, is deeply rooted in their souls, a record of their ancestors and a carrier of their worship and belief. Bailing Miao is as devoted to it as she is to her own ethnic lineage.

Table 3. Geometric Pattern

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Bronze drum pattern |  |
| Horseshoe pattern |  |
| Spiral pattern |  |

(Source: <https://www.xiaohongshu.com>)

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Bailing Miao batik, although the main colors are blue and white. However, by using various painting wax techniques, combining point, line, and surface, striving for a reasonable layout, rigorous structure, and appropriate movement, and by overcoming the limitations of monochrome, the work reveals rich levels. Make the pattern the main expression of Bailing Miao batik, conveying their myths, beliefs, and totem worship. The Baling Miao dress is an important carrier of its culture, with batik as a core component. Over its long history, batik has acquired rich cultural significance. It is a record of Bailing Miao ancestors, bearing their worship and belief, and their yearning for a better life. It plays an important role in its material and spiritual life.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This study fills a gap in Danzhai Miao batik theory by classifying and summarising batik patterns and offering a new perspective for subsequent research.

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