

Research on Frog Pattern in Li Brocade

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Abstract

Frog or toad is an animal adoration of ancient ancestors in ethnic minorities in South China, in Li tribe tradition, frog is not only a symbol of avoiding evil and the expression of maternal love, but also the decoration of missing the ancestors. This article has discussed the origin of frog pattern, summarized the frog pattern's forms in Li brocade. At last also discussed the common frog pattern in Li tribe.

Key words : frog pattern in Li brocade, origin, form, using.

I. Introduction about Li Brocade

Li tribe that generations living in Hainan is one part of ancient Baiyue nation, and it is one of Chinese minority which has a large population of more than 120 million now. Because of the natural environment and geographical distribution of living is different, They form their own unique history and culture. In living habits, costumes, language and so on all have the distinction, according to Li language, separate into Ha dialect, Qi dialect, Run dialect, Sai dialect, and Meifu dialect.

Li tribe doesn't have their own characters, so the traditional Li brocade becomes the national historical poem. More than three thousand years, Li brocade is known as the cultural history of China surviving "living fossil". Li brocade is not only the common name of spinning, dyeing, weaving and embroidering, but also refers the cotton textiles produced by the four process. Types, including the Li hanging scroll screen(黎幕), Li bedding(黎草), Li accessories(黎饰), Yazhou dragon quilt(崖州龙被) and other large, as well

as ornaments, apron, bag, chest hanging, flowers ribbon, hat, skirts and other small pieces. Since ancient times, Li brocade was well known as its beautiful patterns, colorful, meticulous workmanship, and had been listed the tribute as early as Han dynasty, the ancients said "The radiance of Li brocade was as gorgeous as the cloud".

II. The Patterns in Li Brocade

Li brocade patterns can be divided into two categories: one prominently shown in a variety of women's clothing patterns, such as human beings, animals, plants, tools and several geometric shape patterns. The other is reflected in the dragon quilt, brocade wall hangings, brocade bags, and many kinds of ornament patterns, and the patterns are main mascots. There are over 160 kinds of patterns reflected in the fabric, and they also have different features in Li's five dialects. To sum up, patterns can be divided into six types: natural patterns, human form patterns, animal patterns, plant patterns, tool production and living patterns and Chinese characters patterns.

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Li people respect people and nature, respected nature and human beings live in harmony, patterns' feature reflects their love and praise of nature and life. Li patterns using straight lines, parallel lines, square, triangle, diamond compose geometry graphics, showing a diamond keynote. Patterns in Li brocade are mostly black or dark blue as the basic colors, red, yellow, green, and white, purple, brown, pink, coffee for the auxiliary color, with dark but also light, with contrasting or harmonious colors.

III. Frog Pattern in Li Brocade

Frog or toad is an animal adoration of ancient ancestors in ethnic minorities in South China, in Li tribe tradition, the frog is not only a symbol of avoiding evil and the expression of maternal love, but also the decoration of missing the ancestors (Fig. 1). According to archaeological materials provided substantial in-kinds, painted pottery in the Yangshao period, there were already a large number of frog patterns.

1. Historical Origin of Frog Pattern

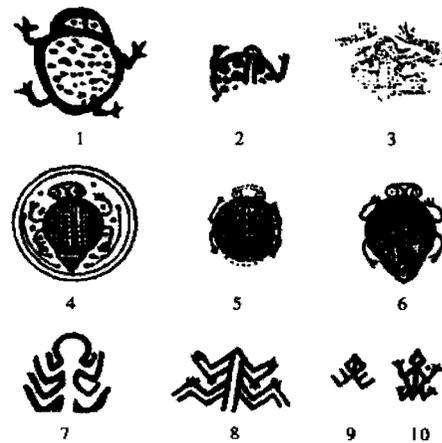
Scholars have done so many research on substantial in-kinds and Folk legends, and concluded that frog adoration was mainly based on the following three reasons.

1) Procreation Adoration

Matriarchal period, human do not understand



<Fig. 1> Frog Pattern of Li Brocade (Fu, 2005).



<Fig. 2> Frog Pattern in Painted Pottery in the Yangshao Period.

women reproduction, so that the adoration of the female genitalia. Frog's belly is around, like pregnant belly shape. Frog spawning so much, has a strong ability to reproduce. Therefore, frog is a symbol of procreation adoration. With frog patterns appear in both frogs or around, a lot of dot patterns, representing the frog's egg, it is the worship of many eggs as well as a longing for more children (Fig. 2).

2) Worship Frog Pray for Rain

Frog is very sensitive to weather changes, though frog's voice changes can predict whether the thunderstorm is approaching, or the weather is severe drought and so on. This certainly raises the ancestors of the imagination, that the change of weather is caused by frogs, and then had a cult of the frog. Worship Frog Pray for Rain is a more ancient ritual custom.

3) Moon Adoration

The changes of phrase of the moon, the laws of nature in ancient people's view, just like frog (toad) as the stomach can reduce swelling, so they think there is a moon god frog (toad), is due to God's frog stomach expansion caused the phrase of the moon changes (Wu, 2010). This point can be found the examples "A Polychrome Painting on Silk Unearthed from Han Tomb No.1 at Mawangdui



〈Fig. 3〉 A Polychrome Painting on Silk Unearthed from Han Tomb No.1 at Mawangdui, Changsha (Part).

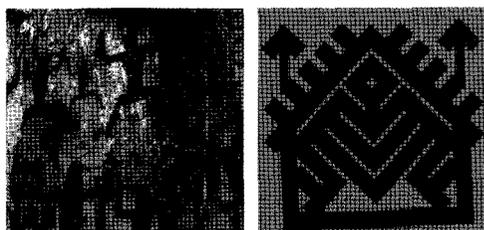


〈Fig. 4〉 Line Issued of A Polychrome Painting on Silk Unearthed from Han Tomb No.1 at Mawangdui, Changsha (Part).

(馬王堆) in Changsha”, as shown in 〈Fig. 3〉 and 〈Fig. 4〉, the upper left corner of the moon frog (toad).

4) Historical Origin of Frog Pattern in Li Brocade

The people image of Huashan Rock Paintings, their postures mostly are the arms expand to the left and right, knees squat, so like the frog's posture (Fig. 5). Some scholars believe that this is ancient Baiyue nation's festival for dance movements imitate the image of the frog, it is a form of worship of the ancient frog (Zhong & Fan, 2006). Li tribe is one part of ancient Baiyue nation, there are a large number of frog or similar patterns in Li brocades, folklore said that frog is a symbol of avoiding evil, in the legend that the God frog is a valiant man, the pattern omitted foreleg. Exaggerated back, image is very simple (Zhong & Fan, 2006) (Fig. 6), this should be a relationship



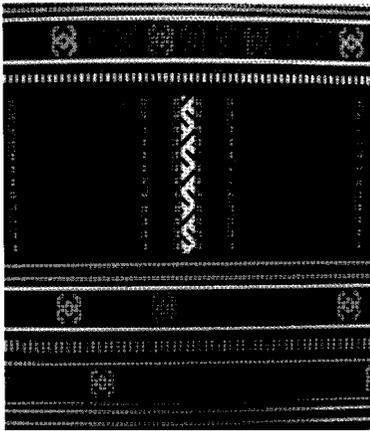
〈Fig. 5〉 Huashan Rock Paintings.

〈Fig. 6〉 Frog Pattern on Skirt of Li Tribe (Zhong & Fan, 2006).

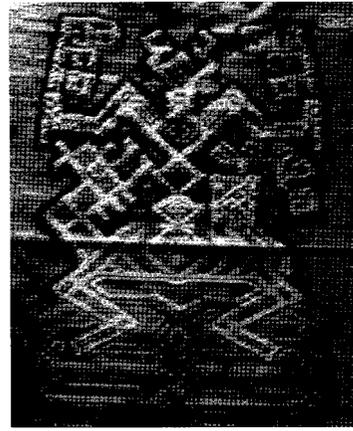
with the origin of frog adoration by ancient Baiyue nation.

Yucun Li in Qing Dynasty wrote in 〈Nanyue Notes〉 said that: “There are no the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth) in farmhouse, water or drought can be judged from the frog's voice.” Based on the natural environment of Hainan island and geographical conditions, floods are major threatening the safety of Li ancestors' lives and property. As the ancient ancestors could not understand the catastrophic natural phenomena, but also unable to resist, so they put their hope of survival entirely on the mysterious supernatural forces, They attempted to worship prayer activities, seek the gods of protection, which is thought to forecast weather on the natural disaster of the frog has become their preferred targets (Qi & Ma, 2005). Song Dynasty Chengda Fan has a poem said: “Frog's voice sounds from dusk to night, rice must be harvest this autumn.” This poem describes the frogs have a feeling and spirit trillion, frog noise alarms drop of rain, the earth is full of vigor recovery, the louder frog sounds the better omen, indicating that good weather, bumper harvest (Fu, 2005). Li tribe's farming dependence on rainfall, making them treat the frog as a prophet of the season and the drought, thus gradually regarded as totems by a number of the Li clan and tribe (Fig. 7). This coincided with the previously mentioned “Worship Frog Pray for Rain”.

It can be said Li's frog worship is the type of natural environment and economy and culture, and frog pattern of Li brocade of cultural symbolism is from the nature adoration and the memory remains of ancestor ancient totem symbol adoration.



<Fig. 7> Frog Pattern on Skirt of Qi Dialect.



<Fig. 8> Concrete Frog Pattern on Li Tapestry.

2. The Express Form of Frog Pattern in Li Brocade

The frog pattern in Li brocade mainly use geometric patterns, combine with the basic form of frogs. It is a continuous pattern structure of two-party, completely with a geometric pattern of abstract expressionism. The style is concise, vivid and highly general. It is used for Li skirts decorative pattern, which uses an abstract of expression, vivid and exaggerated. It is said that "frog-pattern" reflects the maternal love and can avoid the outbreak. Frog pattern in Li tribe often expressed in frogman pattern, reflecting the Li frog worship.

According to their characteristics the frog pattern of Li brocade can be divided into the following categories:

1) Concrete Frog Pattern

This frog pattern has head, abdomen and four legs (Fig. 8), or omits the front legs, exaggerates hind legs; or exaggerates front legs, omits hind legs. Whatever the shape, it is all lifelike and vivid. Design idea is bold, with simple shapes, it has a unique national style, and is popular in Baoting, Sanya, Lingshui and Fingers mountain area.

2) Line-type Frog Pattern



<Fig. 9> Line-type Frog Pattern on Li Skirt.

After a bold exaggeration, distortion and simplification, a realistic pattern is abstracted, summarized, provided to geometric figure which is highly decorative and artistic. This is the basic characteristics of this type (Fig. 9).

3) Frogman Pattern

The image characteristics of frog are obviously and prominently expressed on the human form. This pattern is confusing because it seems like frogs and people. It is a "fit pattern" with a semi-animal and half human. This pattern is divided into frogman fit pattern and frog posture humanoid pattern.

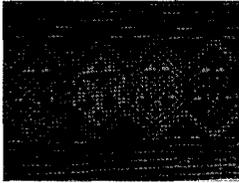
The frogman fit pattern's main features is with the human's body and frog's pose, that means the overall contour is the image of people standing, head, body, limbs, but the same



<Fig. 10> Frogman Fit Pattern on Li Tapestry.



<Fig. 11> Frogman Fit Pattern on Li Skirt.



<Fig. 12> Frog Posture Humanoid Pattern (Fu, 2005).



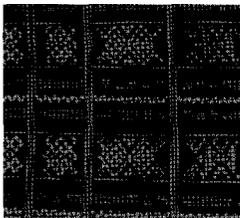
<Fig. 13> Frog Posture Humanoid Pattern on Li Accessories.

position just like the frog with exaggerated hand or foot. The shape is “frog webbed”, this is a prominent feature of this pattern, which can accurately determine that the pattern is not a “person”, but a “frogman” (Fig. 10, 11).

Frog posture humanoid pattern is with human form and frog posture. Flat or holding arms, legs are curve and rhombus, symmetrical, concise model. But “frog webbed” disappear result from the evolution of “frogman fit pattern”, so called “Frogman”(Fig. 12, 13).

4) Geometric Patterned Frogs Deformation Pattern

Geometric patterned frogs deformation pattern has features of rhombus, and the prototype of a frog which reflected in the graphics (Fig. 14, 15).



<Fig. 14> Geometric Patterned Frogs Deformation Pattern Manu Script.

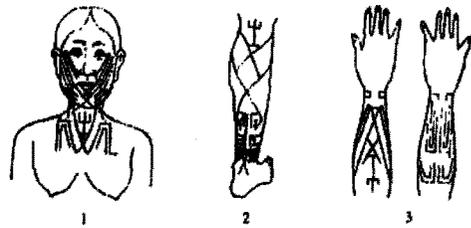


<Fig. 15> Geometric Patterned Frogs Deformation Pattern on Li Bedding.

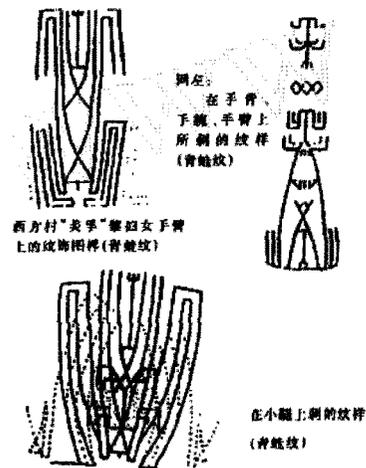
3 Widespread Frog Pattern in Li Tribe

In women’s tattoo patterns of Li tribe, image of a bionic frog pattern appears most frequently. Not only that, “in all the branches of Li skirts, bronze and leather drums and many kinds of everyday utensils, all painted with a variety of frog patterns, there must be a big frogs ear drum in Li each village. Li people think that the frog has a mysterious performance, it can do anything they want, to ensure the grain harvest, is the object of worship for Li family, therefore, can not catch frogs eat.” (Fu, 1993). Each performance of arts and culture in Li tribe, only the frog be throughout all the areas, Such as brocade, tattoos, embroidery, bronze drum (gong), and even water tanks, rice container and other pottery.

Frog tattoo patterns are popular in the long-term practices in “Meifu dialect” and “local dia-



<Fig. 16> Frog Tattoo Patterns of Li Tribe (Book Editorial of National Institute of South China, 1992).



<Fig. 17> Frog Tattoo Patterns of Li Tribe (Book Editorial of National Institute of South China, 1992).



〈Fig. 18〉 Repaired Bronze Drum with Frogs on the Surface in Han Dynasty (Hainan Provincial People's Government Network).

lect” these two branches. This pattern firstly used in the face, gradually extended to the neck, chest, hands, legs (Fig. 16). After this custom has disappeared, even when dead encasing tattoo according to old habits, with the ink painted frog pattern on the bodies. This is said in order to be recognized by the ancestors, otherwise it will degenerate into a “wild spirit”, “wild ghosts.”

Bronze drum is actually the deformation of frog's belly, and be the village treasure in many ethnic minorities in South East. Li Village also has collected many leather or bronze drum which painted frog patterns. Just as 〈Fig. 18〉 shows, it is a repaired bronze drum from Han Dynasty which unearthed in Hainan, drum diameter is 60cm, remaining height is 24 to 28cm. According to one of the best preserved frog to copy, restored the six three-legged frog on the drum surface. Bronze drum and gong are considered the best treasure in the world by Li people, there is a saying frog is the “Spirit of the bronze drum” in ancient times.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, there are a lot of frog pattern exists in Li brocade, partly because Li is a part of ancient Baiyue nation, based on ancestors left traces of totem worship for the frog's reproductive that symbolized motherly love; the other hand is Li tribe living in the natural environment influenced by the rain disaster, which is

thought to forecast weather on the natural disaster of the frog certainly became the symbol of nature worship.

In Li brocade, the expression of frog pattern had various forms, mainly used geometric patterns, combined with the basic form of frogs, two side continuous pattern structure, complete with a geometric pattern of abstract expressionism. Concise style, vivid, extremely broad, multi-pattern for the Li brocade skirt decorated, it uses abstract expression means, vivid exaggeration. And the Performance characteristics of frog pattern in Li brocade, I will do further research in the future.

Frog is throughout all the areas in each performance of arts and culture in Li tribe, such as brocade, tattoos, embroidery, bronze drum (gong), and even water tanks, rice container and other pottery, the using of frog totem worship is very wide.

Till now, Li people's totem worship awareness is gradually fading, but the people still loved the totem pattern handed down, and therefore it as an apparel pattern be preserved.

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