

A Study on the Inheritance Issues of Zhuang Brocade Intangible Cultural Heritage from the Perspective of Upholding Tradition and Innovation

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Abstract: Eighteen years after Zhuang brocade was inscribed on the national intangible cultural heritage list, its protection, inheritance and innovative development have drawn widespread attention from all walks of life. Promoted jointly by academic research and industrial practice, the craftsmanship inheritance system of Zhuang brocade has been gradually improved and its industrial scale expanded steadily. Nevertheless, a prevalent tendency of valuing craftsmanship over culture still exists in inheritance practice. This paper sorts out the practical dilemma of “abundant craftsmanship but deficient cultural connotation” of Zhuang brocade, analyzes the practical experience of adhering to tradition and pursuing innovation in the Zhuang brocade industry of Binyang, Guangxi. Taking living inheritance as the core, it proposes constructing a collaborative inheritance mechanism between institutional and non-institutional education, cultivating inheritors’ cultural sentiments, and dialectically handling the relationship between inheritance and innovation. It provides theoretical reference and practical paths for the systematic protection and sustainable development of Zhuang brocade culture.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage; Zhuang Brocade Weaving; Living Inheritance; Binyang Zhuang Brocade; Upholding Tradition and Innovation

1. Introduction

In 2006, Zhuang brocade was included in the first batch of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List, and its inheritance and development immediately became a core topic in academic and industrial circles. A great number of scholars and ICH inheritors have conducted in-depth research in craftsmanship restoration,

digital protection of decorative patterns, and exploration of industrialization paths, laying a solid foundation for the preservation and popularization of Zhuang brocade techniques [1]. At present, however, the inheritance of Zhuang brocade is plagued by the core imbalance between craftsmanship inheritance and cultural inheritance, which is manifested as prioritizing craft over cultural connotation and production over spiritual essence — a key bottleneck restricting the long-term development of Zhuang brocade. Existing studies mainly focus on technical and market dimensions such as weaving technology, tourism commodity development and pattern spectrum collation, while research on inheriting the ethnic cultural spirit and value connotation embodied in Zhuang brocade remains insufficient.

Zhuang brocade is not only a carrier of traditional weaving techniques, but also embodies the Zhuang people’s cosmology, aesthetic concepts and outlook on life. Its inheritance is essentially the living continuation of cultural genes, rather than mere replication of craftsmanship. Against this background, representative industrial entities in Binyang County such as Xiangguang Brocade Workshop and Zhuang Brocade Impression have broken the development limitations of traditional handicraft processing, and explored an inheritance model that attaches equal importance to craftsmanship and culture, and integrates industrial development with public welfare undertakings. This model offers a replicable and promotable practical paradigm for the inheritance and innovative development of Zhuang brocade ICH. The protection and utilization of intangible cultural heritage must be advanced in accordance with the law so as to effectively empower the inheritance of regional culture. Based on the current inheritance status of Zhuang brocade and combined with Binyang’s practical experience, this paper discusses

feasible paths for the systematic inheritance of Zhuang brocade culture.

2. Current Situation of Upholding Tradition and Innovation in Binyang Zhuang Brocade Industry

To explore feasible paths for the inheritance of Zhuang brocade, this chapter takes Binyang as a case to summarize its practices in integrating tradition with innovation [2].

2.1 Balancing Industrial Development and Public Welfare Inheritance to Integrate Market and Social Values

The Zhuang brocade industry in Binyang has broken away from a single profit-making mode and realized the coordinated development of cultural industry and public welfare undertakings, giving consideration to both market demand and social and cultural needs.

In industrial development, it adopts a diversified business model integrating Zhuang brocade weaving, skill training, cultural and creative product development, and cultural tourism. It retains the traditional bamboo-cage handloom craftsmanship and appropriately introduces mechanized production to improve efficiency. It develops cultural and creative products including scarves, handbags, wall hangings and household supplies, which are sold well at home and abroad. A professional teacher training system has been established, with more than 1,000 trainees in total. Xiangguang Brocade Workshop has been rated as a National ICH Inheritance Base, and Zhuang Brocade Impression has won the national title of “Beautiful Workshop”.

In public welfare undertakings, seizing the opportunity of rural revitalization, Binyang cooperates with the government to build a cultural business card for Zhuang brocade and boost the social dissemination of ICH. Its works have repeatedly served as state gifts on international occasions, demonstrating cultural confidence. It has established cooperation with many colleges and universities represented by Nanning Polytechnic, set up Zhuang brocade courses, launched ICH campus activities, compiled technical textbooks and organized research and experience activities to popularize Zhuang brocade culture.

2.2 Constructing the Government-Industry-University-Research Quaternary Integrated Model for Efficient Resource Integration

Binyang Zhuang Brocade innovatively builds a four-party collaborative model involving government, enterprises, universities and research institutes to realize resource integration and value maximization.

In terms of government-industry collaboration, the government carries out in-depth cooperation with enterprises to undertake cultural projects at all levels. Binyang Disabled Persons’ Federation joins hands with Xiangguang Brocade Workshop to build a Sunshine Assistance Base, providing skill training and employment opportunities for the disabled and rural women. It constructs an ICH exhibition space integrating production, visiting and experience, and promotes the integration of industry, culture and tourism.

In terms of university-research integration, school-enterprise cooperation is deepened by setting up master studios and Zhuang Brocade Research Institute to carry out pattern sorting and technological research. Literature and history experts are invited to deliver lectures, cultivating professional teachers and designers of Zhuang brocade for universities, forming a closed loop of “education-research-practice” and providing talent and academic support for cultural inheritance.

2.3 Creating a Living Inheritance Pattern to Realize the Integration of Craftsmanship and Daily Life

Guided by cultural value and oriented to economic value, Binyang Zhuang Brocade is rooted in cultural venues such as Binzhou Ancient City. It integrates the open spirit of the century-old commercial port with the cultural connotation of Zhuang craftswomen, forming a living inheritance paradigm of “art into life and life embodied by art”.

In industrial operation, the cultural implication and aesthetic characteristics of Zhuang brocade are integrated into modern life. Traditional looms, indigo dyes and other cultural elements are organically combined with modern exhibition halls, e-commerce live streaming studios and cultural and creative stores, meeting the demands of cultural inheritance and contemporary life. Under the guidance of literature and history scholars and ICH masters, it adheres to the in-depth integration of weaving craftsmanship and traditional culture, transforming Zhuang brocade from “craft exhibits” into “life carriers”, and achieving the unity of living inheritance and poetic life.

Apart from physical venues, Binyang Zhuang brocade also expands its influence via online new media platforms. Short video clips, live streaming and social media posts showcase the whole weaving process, exquisite patterns and cultural stories behind the brocade, attracting numerous young audiences across the country. Meanwhile, local authorities and enterprises jointly launch cultural experience tours and research and study activities. Tourists and students can learn basic weaving skills, appreciate traditional dyeing techniques and listen to legends related to Zhuang ethnic groups during their visits. These interactive experiences break the estrangement between intangible cultural heritage and the public [3]. By combining offline immersive experience with online digital communication, Binyang Zhuang brocade has successfully stepped out of the narrow scope of traditional workshops. It not only retains the essence of ancient craftsmanship, but also keeps pace with modern lifestyles and aesthetic trends, making the time-honored ethnic craft glow with new vitality in contemporary society [4].

3. The Inheritance Dilemma of Zhuang Brocade: Abundant Craftsmanship but Deficient Cultural Connotation

Despite the continuous improvement of weaving skills and industrial scale, Zhuang brocade is trapped in a typical predicament where craft mastery stands in stark contrast to the loss of cultural essence. This section elaborates on the major challenges restricting its long-term inheritance and development [5].

3.1 Structural Changes of Inheritor Groups and Lack of Cultural Literacy and Sentiment

Traditional Zhuang brocade relies on maternal inheritance within families and oral teaching among villages, with inheritors being Zhuang rural women who are well-versed in Zhuang historical legends, totem beliefs and festival customs. Weaving craftsmanship is deeply integrated with ethnic culture as a spontaneous cultural practice.

With urbanization and the transformation of the traditional agricultural society, the composition of Zhuang brocade inheritors has undergone structural changes. According to a survey by the Guangxi Arts and Crafts Association, full-time brocade weavers account for less than 5% of practitioners in the Zhuang brocade and cultural

and creative industries, while a large number of young entrepreneurs and e-commerce operators switch from other industries. The industry presents a phenomenon that “many talk about brocade, but few can weave it”. Some practitioners have only superficial understanding of the cultural connotation of patterns, yet arbitrarily splice patterns in the name of “innovation”, resulting in scattered and disordered inheritance.

Practitioners can be divided into three categories: traditional brocade weavers, modern cultural and creative practitioners, and ordinary enthusiasts, among whom modern cultural and creative practitioners take the largest proportion. Though injecting modern vitality into Zhuang brocade, this group generally lacks in-depth understanding of cultural cores such as Zhuang totem worship and auspicious implications, leading to the gradual loss of cultural depth of Zhuang brocade. Ordinary enthusiasts pay more attention to its decorative and economic value while ignoring its cultural essence. The structural changes of inheritor groups directly cause the deviation of valuing craftsmanship over culture, and the lack of cultural literacy and sentiment among practitioners has become a core obstacle to the sustainable development of Zhuang brocade.

Nowadays, young generations have gradually become the main consumer group and potential inheritors of Zhuang brocade. However, most young people only regard it as a fashionable cultural product or handicraft, and lack the willingness to systematically learn traditional weaving skills. The aging of professional inheritors and the shortage of new blood have further worsened the inheritance dilemma. In addition, the gap between the income of brocade weavers and other industries also discourages young people from engaging in this profession. How to enhance young people’s cultural identity with Zhuang brocade, guide them to participate in inheritance work, and build a young inheritance team has become an urgent problem to be solved for the long-term development of this intangible cultural heritage.

3.2 Divergence in Inheritance Concepts and Imbalance between Craft and Cultural Attributes

Zhuang brocade has long been divided into daily-use brocade and ceremonial brocade in tradition, and divergence in inheritance concepts

is prominent in contemporary times. First, there is a conflict between production efficiency and the humanistic temperature of handicraftsmanship: some stakeholders pursue loom efficiency and large-scale production while neglecting the cultural temperature and experiential value of hand weaving. Second, the closed workshop inheritance mode runs counter to the demand for socialized and popularized inheritance of Zhuang brocade. Third, two extreme tendencies coexist: rigidly adhering to the original tradition and blindly pursuing modern renovation.

With its unique intermittent warp and weft weaving technique, gorgeous texture and profound totem connotation, Zhuang brocade surpasses ordinary textiles and becomes a symbolic cultural icon of the Zhuang nationality. At present, equating Zhuang brocade with ordinary jacquard fabrics, replacing manual pattern picking with digital printing, and blindly expanding production capacity have severed its cultural roots. On the contrary, rejecting technological improvement, ignoring weaving principles, and arbitrarily altering traditional colors and patterns violate the law of inheritance and dilute the cultural implication of Zhuang brocade. How to balance craftsmanship and culture, adherence and innovation has become the core challenge of Zhuang brocade inheritance.

3.3 Cultural Absence in Inheritance Modes and the Prevalent Phenomenon of Valuing Craftsmanship over Culture

Current Zhuang brocade inheritance mainly adopts three modes: factory production, institutional training and individual workshops. Individual workshops rely on oral inheritance and well preserve the cultural roots of Zhuang brocade yet with limited coverage. Factory production and institutional training enjoy wide coverage but generally suffer from the drawback of “valuing skill teaching over cultural inheritance”.

In college education, many art and design universities offer ethnic craft courses, yet students mostly learn Zhuang brocade only from the perspective of patterns and techniques without cultural interpretation [6]. Though their design works meet craft standards, they fail to convey the unique cultural artistic conception of Zhuang brocade, due to their shallow cognition

of the history and totem implication behind patterns.

In the training market, driven by economic interests, numerous institutions have flooded into Zhuang brocade training, leading to uneven teacher quality, short-term crash courses and arbitrary school categorization [7]. Some even pretend to be professional Zhuang brocade inheritors, making it hard to guarantee the quality of craftsmanship inheritance, let alone cultural inheritance. Overall, valuing craftsmanship over culture has become a common deficiency in the industry [8].

3.3 Countermeasures for Promoting Zhuang Brocade Cultural Inheritance via Upholding Tradition and Innovation

Based on the inheritance dilemmas analyzed above and the successful experience of Binyang Zhuang Brocade, this section puts forward targeted solutions from the perspectives of education mechanism, inheritor cultivation and the balance between inheritance and innovation, so as to realize the sustainable and living inheritance of Zhuang brocade culture.

4 Constructing a Collaborative Inheritance System between Institutional and Non-institutional Education

With unique cultural connotations, Zhuang brocade cannot be fully inherited merely through college education. It is necessary to establish a two-way collaborative inheritance mechanism with complementary advantages between institutional and non-institutional education.

At the institutional level, universities should adjust teaching objectives, incorporate cultural inheritance into the core teaching system, strengthen courses on pattern connotation and ethnic history, and change the teaching mode of prioritizing techniques over culture [9].

At the non-institutional level, relying on government policies, governments and enterprises jointly build inheritance bases. Supported by university traditional culture platforms, ICH inheritor training programs are implemented to carry out hierarchical training for senior practitioners, young and middle-aged inheritors and ordinary enthusiasts. Characteristic cultural spaces for Zhuang brocade are built to gather people via culture and pass on culture by people, forming a cultural circle integrating study, communication and experience [10]. Meanwhile, the talent

introduction, cultivation and retention mechanism should be improved to stabilize the inheritance team.

4.1 Cultivating Inheritors' Cultural Sentiment to Consolidate the Spiritual Foundation of Inheritance

The core of ICH inheritance lies in the inheritance of people. Awakening and cultivating inheritors' cultural sentiment is the key to the continuation of Zhuang brocade culture. Zhuang brocade carries traditional philosophy, moral norms and aesthetic connotations, and weaving is not only a productive skill but also a way of cultural expression and self-cultivation.

It is essential to standardize practitioners' qualifications to ensure the professionalism of craftsmanship inheritance, and strengthen the cultivation of their cultural literacy by in-depth learning of Zhuang history, folk customs and totem culture, so as to reshape their cultural values. Only by deeply understanding the cultural core can weaving and design achieve both technical precision and cultural depth, avoiding superficial inheritance without solid cultural foundation.

4.2 Dialectically Handling the Relationship between Inheritance and Innovation to Realize Living Development

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that we should effectively promote the systematic protection of intangible cultural heritage, better meet the people's growing spiritual and cultural needs, and enhance cultural confidence and self-improvement [11]. In the post-ICH era, Zhuang brocade inheritance must break away from the dilemma of valuing craftsmanship over culture, taking culture as the soul, craftsmanship as the framework and innovation as the driving force.

The practice of Binyang Zhuang Brocade proves that upholding tradition and pursuing innovation is the core path of ICH inheritance. Drawing on Binyang's experience, future inheritance should strengthen the collaboration between institutional and non-institutional education, cultivate inheritors' cultural sentiment, and dialectically handle the relationship between inheritance and innovation. While integrating into modern life, Zhuang brocade should stick to its ethnic cultural roots, realize the win-win of craftsmanship inheritance and cultural communication, and promote the sustainable

inheritance and development of Zhuang brocade ICH.

Acknowledgments

The research herein is funded by the project "Research on Brand Building and Communication Innovation of Guangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Zhuang Brocade" (Project No. 2025KY0753) under the 2025 Basic Research Ability Improvement Project for Young and Middle-aged Teachers of Guangxi Universities, as well as the 2025 University Students' Entrepreneurship Practice Project (No.: S202510609235S).

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