

# The Application of Li Brocade Patterns in Jewelry Design

Qiuyu Lu<sup>1</sup>, Chao Zhang<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Art College, Guizhou University, Guiyang, China

## Email Address

464922741@qq.com (Chao Zhang)

\*Correspondence: 464922741@qq.com

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## Abstract:

Li Brocade is a folk brocade from Hainan. The history of it is around 3,000 years. It has unique patterns and various types and includes rich culture connotations. In order to inherit the traditional culture and art of the Li nationality, the author combined its patterns with modern jewelry to explore the great development space and application value of the visual art elements of patterns of Li Brocade in the design of modern jewelry and other products. By doing that, the traditional culture of Li Brocade can be fully transformed to apply in the modern society.

## Keywords:

Li-Brocade, Patterns, Jewelry

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## 1. Introduction

Because of the status quo of lacking of innovations, Li Brocade, same as some other distinctive types of art of ethnic minorities in China, though most of them having a long term of history and being pregnant with bountiful wise of ancestors, have to face the fate of underdevelopment.

Caused by the complexity of the old brocade processing which needs the makers who are senior handicraftsmen inheriting the technique from their last generation by hands, most of them speaking ethnic language, lacking of communication with the external world and thinking how to get the heritage innovated and developed basing on the basis of traditional culture of the brocade, unable to fit themselves to the modern sales ways, to pay lots of time and tremendous energy to finish an artifact usually resulting in an unaffordable price to be consumed by people and the unwillingness of the local young generation to inherit the technique as their parents, Li Brocade is facing to the severe challenge of lacking of innovation, inheritors and standing at the verge of being apart from modern society.

The glamour of a design bred by the essentials of the traditions and the evolvement of cultures, which always causes people a sense of being reverence, will be destined to bloom. [1] The ideas, activities and skills of designing the patterns of Li brocade which not only recorded with all aspects of laboring and living of local people but also combined with various of lives of nature, reflecting the good aspirations and expectations of local laboring people, have incredible values of social culture and

aesthetics. [2] The brocade' features of bright colors, complex distinctive patterns and various of elements make a sharp contrast to the feature of minimalism of most designing styles of jewelry which are popular currently. Applying the patterns of Li brocade, exploiting the traditions, and then innovating based on inherits to make it meet the demands of modern society, into the designing of modern jewelry is one of effective methods of protecting and propagating the cultures of Li Brocade. The combination of the patterns and the designs of jewelry not only implements the correlation of inherits and innovation but also endows jewelries with rich essence and makes a good example of how to promote the spirits of local ethnic people. The impacts to the currently popular style of jewelry also are imagined as well.

## **2. Patterns of Li Nationality and Li Brocade**

### ***2.1. The Li Ethnic Minority***

The Li, an ancient ethnic minority who have been living in Hainan Island since more than 3,000 years ago, is the earliest aborigine of Hainan Island. What's more, their cultural traditions with distinctive regional characteristics, one of the most important expressions of Hainan local cultures, has deeply exploiting values.

Studying on some relevant literatures of linguistics, archaeology and ethnology etc. it turns out the Li-nationality was evolved from the Luo-Yue people, a branch of Bai-Yue, an ancient ethnic group. [1] Out of the benefits of studying, based on the differences of dialect, living environment, religion and cultural characteristics between them, which also have impacts of a certain extent on the development of its internal arts and crafts, Li has been divided into different dialect areas such as "Ha", "Qi", "Run", "Sai", "Mei Fu", etc. in some literatures. Despite weaving and dyeing, as well as tattooing and braiding being a universal industry involved by almost all local Li people, weaving is still the most prominent echo of its arts and crafts, reflecting the outstanding creativity of the Li people. [3]

### ***2.2. Li brocade's Pattern***

Li brocade, called as the "living fossil" of the history of Chinese textile, was officially recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2006 because of its extremely high values of art, history, and academic research. Those patterns of Li-brocade having over 160 types of patterns, created due to many factors such as the changing of times, society, lifestyle and the different kinds of family structure, actually are symbols and indicators representing different meanings for Li-people, through which reflecting aspects of labor, hunting, life, faith, marriage, identity, image and myths and legend etc. since Li has never formed its own unique linguistic system. The main categories are anthropomorphic patterns, animal patterns, plant patterns, scene patterns, geometric patterns, tool patterns, and text patterns. [4] According to the divisions of the five dialect areas of "Ha", "Qi", "Run", "Sai" and "Mei Fu", the pattern of Li brocade varies. And in some areas, Li people use a specific animal or plant as a distinguishing symbol for a bloodline group. Some usual patterns will be selectively analyzed and applied to the designs, and the detailed processes of application are included here as well.

#### ***2.1.1. Animal Patterns***

There are many varying types of animal patterns commonly including frog patterns, fish patterns, bat patterns, and Gan-Gong bird patterns.

Frog considered being beneficial to the growth and harvest of crops has been an auspicious object in the minds of local working people who mainly relying on farming since ancient times. To a time when a strong workforce generally means thriving family, being with a strong capacity of reproduction has been another reason for frog being favorite to those idolizing reproduction. Li-people are keen to use the frog pattern (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Frog pattern.*



*Figure 2. Fish pattern*

Whether ceremonies or worships where fish has never been missed, the passion of Li people for fish, reflecting not only on the patterns but also invented unique food namely 'fish tea', owe to the impacts of the special geographic surroundings of being the sea on all sides. The fish-pattern embroiled on Li brocade express local's good wish of being plentiful, harmonious, and prosperous every year. [5]

The Bat is a symbol of happiness in the mind of the Li people, the meaning of bat pattern on the brocade is representing "blessing in front of you" in the Li ethnic. In addition, the bat pattern (Figure 3) is often combined with the "卍" pattern, which means a lot of good fortune.

A symbol of love and luck is the gang-gong-bird (Figure 4), attributing to a legend about gang-gong-bird, a lovely story of a heroine, E-gang, and her lover, Bai-he, both falling in love each other bounded to life and death, passed down from generation to generation.



*Figure 3. Bat pattern.*



*Figure 4. Gan Gong pattern.*

### **2.2.2. Other Patterns**

Plant patterns, scene patterns, geometric patterns, tool patterns, and text patterns are also often viewed in Li-brocade. The patterns of plant patterns (Figure 5), five dialect regions have different interpretations of the tree patterns, are originated from local flowers and trees; The tool patterns (Figure 6), shaping by abstractly schematizing everyday laboring tools of production and living, such as houses, hoes, etc., are the most telling tokens being pregnant with the understanding of life and expressing the features of the daily-life of Li-people. Geometric patterns are basically figured out by smoothly concise lines in a simplifying way such as watering patterns, crossing shape patterns. Based on Han-characters, Literal patterns which uniquely figured out by mixing some other shapes, showing deep impacts to Li-cultures imposed by Han-cultures, are the fruits of their interactions. Such as using "囍" and "卍" to form unique patterns (Figure 7).



**Figure 5.** *Plant pattern.*



**Figure 6.** *Tool pattern.*



**Figure 7.** *Text pattern.*

### **2.2.3. The characteristics of Li people's patterns**

Viewing it from the prospective of morphology, the patterns are mostly constructed by simple plain geometric shapes. Attributing to continuous circulation of lines, parallels, rectangles, rhombuses, or triangles, patterns being with richly dynamic senses and harmonious rhythms and with implied additional beautiful meanings which passed down by generations shape out Li-brocade of bountifully having features of Li-ethnics.

In terms of the use of color, the typical application of bright and flamboyant colors having a sharp contrast may be the best way for portraying Li-people's personality of enthusiasm, liberality, spirituality, and flexibility. Despite Li has yet evolved to have their own exclusive linguistic literal system, those colors basically being implied plentiful meanings, typically indicating wishes or things, or a special emblem, were enabled to be used as a tool for their better communication.

With the period of all-states-in-scuffle and contention-of-thoughts-of-hundreds-schools, the pluralistic tendency emerged in the changes of traditional concept of colors in China towards self-knowledge and gradually forming the idea of advocating colors. [6]

Influenced by Han-culture, there are some similarities between the Li ethnic's accredited color system and the traditional China colors. Black, yellow, red, green, and white, respectively representing water, soil, fire, wood, and gold, typically are considered as formal colors in Han-culture. For example, black traditionally is a revered color from the society of primitive clans to the Great Dynasty of Qin, while representing majesty and stability, often used as the main color of formal attire in Li-ethnics-culture. Typically, yellow not only connected with royalty but also symbolized the color of earth, dressing in this color to civilians officially forbidden in Han-cultures, while it was considered as a symbol of male vitality, sturdiness and fitness but a symbol of wealth, often used to weave or embroider dragon patterns and male clothing in Li-ethnics-cultures; red is an auspicious and festive color in traditional Chinese cultures, while in Li-cultures, it is a color used by the people to express reverence, and is often used to weave and embroider ancestral and human figures; The so-called color of 'Qin' actually means blue in ancient Chinese society, and is a symbol of perseverance, simplicity and energy of life. But it is used by the Li-people to express their eagerness of vigorous vitality, and is also often used to express the beautiful face, tenacious vitality, and excellent reproduction ability of women.

## **3. Jewelry**

### **3.1. The Basic Types of Jewelry**

In Chinese interpretation, the first mean of jewelry is precious valuables, then ornaments of people. That shows that most people thinking jewelry in a narrow way, typically connecting it with gems or precious materials, evaluating a piece of jewelry tends to its materials.

However, the original concept of jewelry can be traced back to the Stone Age. According to the researches made by archaeologists, *Sinanthropus pekinensis* living in hundred thousand years ago had customarily collected and strung beast's leftovers such like teeth, shells, paws, or bones together, which dying with red, for wearing in order to show their powers. While the word 'jewelry' appeared in the period of Ming-Qing in China, it meant head ornaments firstly, and then extended to the ornaments of head, hands, arm, foot, and chest. With the changes of times, under the rigid feudal hierocracy of ancient society jewelries became exclusive emblems of ruling class, and then with the prevalence of trades and commercial exchanges, to be symbols of being wealthy and noble status, till now, precious rare materials have been accredited to show owner's plausible high quality of their lives by more and more people, jewelry also evolved to a variety of styles reflecting the backgrounds of different times. But the tendency to aesthetic and innovativeness, some synthetic materials gradually protruding from designing of jewelry, expensiveness or inexpensiveness of material slowly having less impacts to artful value of a piece of jewelry, has emerged in the development of modern jewelry. As a piece of outstanding contemporary jewelry, to a certain extent bearing the feelings of its owner, not only the function of ornament but also the function of delivering the living tastes has been desired.

### ***3.2. Aesthetics and Basic Requirements of Jewelry***

Four elements, balancing shape, appropriately matching, properly using materials, and harmoniously applying colors, are basically locked with the requirements of designing jewelry.

Firstly, viewing from the perspective of shape, visual beauty of appearance, especially the extents of smoothing of its contours and the senses of harmonious stability of its whole body, is the headline during creating. It asks the creator not only significantly differ the individuals to turns their respective characters out, also make several basic elements belonging to a same genre together harmoniously to form a sense of commonality, meanwhile, proportion, appropriate proportion always highlights the beauty of a piece of jewelry, is another focusing point.

Secondly, matching is also a perspective of beauty. Jewelry is not only a carrier of the creator's emotion, but also an external reflection of a wearer's characters being with different personalities, ages, temperaments and professions which to be factors necessarily investigated and analyzed during creating process for fitting the aesthetic interests of wearers.

Thirdly, Currently, jewelry is neither an ornament simply piled by some precious materials nor a symbol purely for touting wearer's economic ability or social status, the materials applied to jewelry unable to be a sole factor of defining its aesthetic values, so that which materials could be appropriate to outstand the sense really pursued by itself should be considered seriously during creating.

Finally, making hues which have great impacts on people's emotional effects appropriate and harmonious is significant to practice designing as well. Color matching on jewelry designing should vary with the difference of their age, nationality, gender, residential location of customers so that it is necessary to apply fitting colors to jewelry for meeting the different tastes of kinds of people.

## **4. The Innovative Research of Li Brocade Pattern in Jewelry Design**

#### **4.1. The Status Quo of Li Brocade Application in Jewelry Designing**

In terms of designs, most current applications of Li-brocade in jewelry designing still rely on piling elements and techniques, lack the idea of fitting the sense of modern designing, dis-adapt themselves to the aesthetic tastes of popular, misfit to associate with contemporary fashions, restrict the demands of consuming. Meanwhile, see it from the view point of commercial development, lacking of the effects of independent brand, still relying on hawkers alongside the road around local tourist attractions, typically having a sense of cheapness and inferior restrict consuming further. So, people always marvel at the skills of craftsmen but stop before actually consuming.

As shown in Figure 8, despite the elements and traditional motifs of Li-brocade get better preserved in it, because this style counting against current fashion trends, the actual applicability has a narrower path. The purpose of most buying is for collecting out of customer's curiosity.



**Figure 8.** *Li brocade themed.*



**Figure 9.** *"Li Love" of design.*

Some steps are necessary to expend the market of jewelry themed with elements of Li-brocade. Firstly, improving its design, getting the tastes of modern aesthetics merged into traditional processing techniques to make it acceptable and preferable to more people.

Secondly, expanding formal sale channels, having its price standardized and rationalized.

Finally, strengthening cultural outputs, using the packages and the explanation tags to make a telling narrative of long and deep connotations of the Li-ethnics cultures, which not only endows the work a deeply cultural background, but also caters the needs of modern consumers being eager to gain spiritual satisfaction, meanwhile, having certain impacts on protecting and propagating Li-brocade cultures.

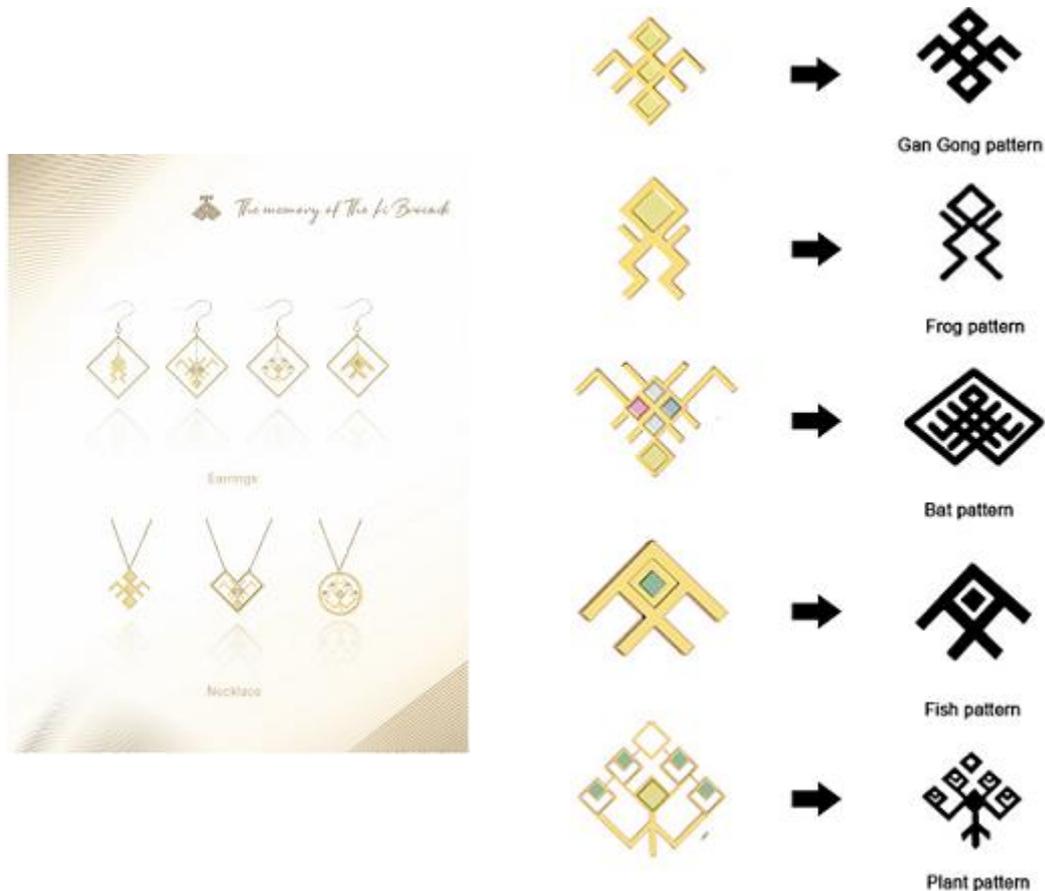
As shown in Figure 9, the design transforms the language of traditional Li culture into a contemporary expression of something traditional based on the design principles of the rich connotations Li traditional culture. This work is based on the famous Li mythology "The Legend of the Gan Gong Bird". The overall image is extracted from the design of the Gan Gong Bird on the Li brocade, absorbing the basic language of the Li brocade pattern, and making breakthrough innovations in style and materials, as well as incorporating the designer's own emotions and contemporary design elements into the work, so that the whole work blends tradition and modernity. The design, although it could be strengthened, can be borrowed from a wide range of designers in terms of its modern transformation alone.

#### **4.2. Application of Li Brocade Pattern in Jewelry Design**

The color contrast between warp and weft makes based on the Li brocade pattern the pattern of Li brocade various and colorful, and it is more visually striking and

expressive than the pattern of the same or neighboring colors. [3] But in the design of modern jewelry, the heavy use of saturated colors will seriously destroy the aesthetic harmony of modern people, in order to match the overall harmonious beauty of modern clothing, I have reduced the brightness and saturation of colors in the design, in order to create a fresh feeling.

At the same time, Li brocade's different colors have different meanings, the reasonable extraction and use of different colors can enhance the traditional sentiment of jewelry, and give consumers more humanistic care and spiritual comfort, and meet the spiritual needs of the wearer. As shown in Figure 10, I designed earrings and necklaces based on the Li brocade pattern and its color connotation, which are extracted from the Li brocade pattern of Gan Gong bird, bat, frog, fish and plant.



**Figure 10.** Jewelry set design based on the Li brocade pattern.

**Figure 11.** Design elements.

As shown in Figure 11, in terms of the refinement of the patterns, five patterns have been selected as the basic elements of the jewelry series, and in order to ensure the inheritance and promotion of the traditional Li pattern, and to maximize the original beauty of the Li brocade pattern, I have modernized the pattern without changing its outline.

In terms of material, the pattern is embroidered, and most of the jewelry used in the design of the pattern is still inseparable from the craft of embroidery. However, the combination of traditional weaving techniques and metal materials is not only not easy to clean, but it is also limited in its use in daily wear. On the other hand, jewelry

made of metal with gloss, and texture and color can give people a modern sense of fashion, but also easier to integrate into modern clothing to play a good decorative role, at the same time, the pattern of jewelry in the form of Li brocade has been preserved to a greater extent, so that the traditional things can be elaborated in a modern way, with modern people are glad to accept the way to spread the traditional art of Li brocade connotation. Therefore, the material used for this jewelry set is 925 colored silver.

At first, this article elaborates the history and origination of Li ethnic minority, analyzes the respectively different implied meanings of patterns on the impact of the five major dialects of Li ethnic namely "Ha", "Qi", "Run", "Sai" and "Mei fu", explains the applications and connotations of frequently-used patterns of Li brocade, and analyze the characteristics of forms and colors. Furthermore, the basic types of jewelry were set forth and the criterion of aesthetics to modern jewelry were analyzed here. At last, the article reflects the status quo and shortness of application of Li-brocade-in-jewelry by enumerating some examples. Some benefits which got from my analyzing have applied to my own designs carried with corresponding explanations of the applications of patterns, colors, materials.

## 5. Conclusions

China has a long history being pregnant with multiple cultures of ethnic minorities having their own respective characteristics. How to create works fitting for the times based on inherits of traditions and innovation of form is a big task faced by Chinese designers. Creating the products which either meet the demands of modern life or being applied with the elements of ethnics is an effective way to protect and record traditional cultures and is also a trial of new paths for protecting and inheriting China distinctive traditional cultures of ethnic minorities.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

## Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Z.C.; Methodology: Z.C.; Software: L.Q.Y.; Validation: Z.C.; Formal analysis: L.Q.Y.; Investigation: L.Q.Y.; Resources: L.Q.Y.; Data Curation: L.Q.Y.; Writing – original draft preparation: L.Q.Y.; Writing – review and editing: Z.C.; Visualization: L.Q.Y.; Supervision: Z.C.; Project administration: Z.C.; Funding acquisition: Z.C.

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