

# Characteristics of the Decorative Art on Saddle Chan in Mongolian Saddle Horse Culture

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## Abstract:

The Mongolian people originating from the nomadic people in northern China have a long history in making and using saddles. The saddle horse culture is one of the representative cultures of Mongolian nationality, and Saddle Chan is an important component of saddle. It is the crystallization of the wisdom and sweat of the grassland people and the continuation of the Mongolian traditional culture. This paper briefly describes the four aspects of the Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan, including the decorative content, decorative composition, decorative characteristics, and color application, and summarizes the outstanding features of Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan.

## Keywords:

Saddle Horse Culture, Saddle Chan, Mongolian People, Decorative Art

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## 1. Introduction

Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan is not only an important national handicraft, but also a witness to the exchange and integration between grassland people and the outside world, which can reflect the characteristics of the whole Mongolian decorative art in its decoration. In the process of its development, Mongolian traditional decoration for Saddle Chan has formed unique aesthetic artistic characteristics, which has pretty important significance in research and aesthetic value.

## 2. The Content of the Decorative Pattern of the Saddle Chan is Inclusive

The nomadic lifestyle of grassland determines the diversity of Mongolian traditional culture [1]. Throughout the origin and development history of Mongolian people, the Mongolian traditional culture with great inclusiveness has integrated many other national cultures in the long stream of time, so it has today's distinctive national characteristics. Especially influenced by the farming culture of the Central Plains, the Mongolian traditional culture is reflected in the decorative patterns of the Mongolian

people [2]. The same is true for the decorative patterns of Saddle Chan, such as the bat pattern influenced by the Han culture. The content of decorative pattern of Saddle Chan can be roughly divided into four categories: (1) geometric patterns, (2) animal patterns, (3) plant patterns, and (4) others.

## **2.1. Geometric Patterns**

The geometric patterns are decorative patterns presented in the form of a single or combination of squares, circles, or diamonds, appearing as early as 6,000 years ago in the period of Hongshan Culture [3]. In the decoration of edge for Saddle Chan, the geometric patterns often appear in the form of continuous combination.

### **2.1.1. Fretwork**

It is called “aluha pattern” in Mongolian. The fretwork common in the decoration of Saddle Chan is a square continuous pattern composed of horizontal and vertical lines. In the form of decorative Saddle Chan, it mostly appears in positive and negative continuous type, forming a contrast and adding artistic effect visually.

### **2.1.2. Swastika Pattern**

Swastika pattern is a pattern with religious implication. In the decoration of Saddle Chan, it often appears in three forms: (1) it appears mainly in the form of one or two swastika patterns or in the form of surrounding ornamentation. (2) When the edge of Saddle Chan is decorated, it appears in a continuous combination. (3) When swastika pattern appears as the bottom lining pattern of Saddle Chan, it appears mainly in a large-area continuous way.

### **2.1.3. The Coin Ground Pattern**

Also known as Jianlu pattern, it is a geometric pattern that is set or connected in a circle and unfolded continuously.

### **2.1.4. Fang-Sheng Pattern and Yuan-Sheng Pattern**

Fang-Sheng pattern is formed by overlapping two diamonds, while Yuan-Sheng pattern is formed by overlapping two circles.

## **2.2. Animal Patterns**

### **2.2.1. Dragon Pattern**

There is no “dragon”, a symbol of supreme imperial power, representing divinity and myth, in real life. Dragon often appearing in the form of grass dragon pattern on the Saddle Chan of Mongolian people comes from the simplification and deformation of dragon pattern and then appears in combination with volume grass grain. The identity and status of horsemen can be seen according to the pattern decoration of Saddle Chan. Besides, the dragon pattern can only be used by imperial nobles. (Figure 1)



*Figure 1. Dragon Pattern.*

### **2.2.2. Lion Pattern**

It is regarded as an auspicious beast in the Mongolian people, generally appearing in two forms in Mongolian Saddle Chan: one is a male lion with a fierce momentum and the second is in the form of a combination of a big lion and a small lion, with cute expressions and exaggerated shapes.

### **2.2.3. Crane Pattern**

The white crane is inextricably linked with Taoist culture, so it can also be called the crane. In Mongolian Saddle Chan, it can appear in combination with deer patterns, or it can appear alone as the main pattern.

### **2.2.4. Butterfly Pattern**

Butterflies symbolizing wealth and auspiciousness represent females and feminine beauty in folk handicrafts. In the Mongolian Saddle Chan, it often appears together with plant and flower patterns to set off.

### **2.2.5. Bat Pattern**

Bat pattern common in the decorative patterns of Mongolian Saddle Chan symbolize “happiness”, which generally appears in the Traditional Five Bat Patterns and Longevous Pattern.

### **2.2.6. Deer Pattern**

In the allusion of “wolf, white deer” in the Secrete History of Mongols, deer are regarded as ancestors by the Mongolian people [4]. There are static and realistic deer and simplified galloping deer on the Mongolian Saddle Chan, which can also be combined with plant patterns, representing holiness and auspiciousness. (Figure 2)



*Figure 2. Deer Pattern.*

## **2.3. Plant Pattern**

Mongolian life is closely related to nature, so many elements in nature have gone deep into Mongolian life. Besides, Mongolian people worship and love nature, so there are many images that directly copy natural plants, such as flowers and volume

grass in Mongolian decorative patterns. In the decorative patterns of Mongolian Saddle Chan, it will also appear in combination with geometric patterns and animal patterns, changing diversely.

### ***2.3.1. Flower Pattern with Tangled Branches***

Also known as “longevity vine”, it has been named for its continuous structure, meaning “endless life”. Combined with flower patterns, it often appears on the edge of Saddle Chan in a continuous way, and sometimes in the main pattern.

### ***2.3.2. Realistic Flower Pattern***

Influenced by Manchu costumes, realistic flower pattern, such as peony, lotus and plum, often appears in the decorative patterns of Mongolian Saddle Chan. With bright color and enchanting shape, it is a feast to the eye. Flower pattern mainly represents wealth, purity, holiness and elegance, etc. (Figure 3)



*Figure 3. Realistic Flower Pattern.*

### ***2.3.3. Volume Grass Pattern***

In Mongolian, the volume grass pattern is called “ebusun wugalaji”. The volume grass pattern generally appears in the decoration of the edge of the Saddle Chan in a curly and continuous way, combined with flower patterns and geometric patterns.

### ***1.3.4. Tree Pattern***

The most common tree pattern on the Mongolian Saddle Chan is Chinese toon and pine, generally matched with deer pattern and crane pattern.

## ***2.4. Other Pattern***

### ***2.4.1. Eight-Treasure Pattern***

The eight-treasure pattern on the Mongolian Saddle Chan can be divided into Han eight treasures and Tibetan eight treasures [5]. The design content is the eight treasures held by eight immortals.

### ***2.4.2. Patterns of Seawater River Banks***

The seawater river bank is also called Fushan Shouhai, generally consisting of three parts. The bottom, a curved line that is slanted from the middle to both sides, is called the ocean freight. Above the water waves, there is a rock in the middle, and the rock is in the shape of a broken line, decreasing to both sides.

### ***2.4.3. Longevity Pattern***

Longevity pattern, one of the traditional patterns in ancient China, is a kind of character pattern. Longevity pattern originates from the traditional Chinese Shou, and

its shape changes are rich because of its various strokes. Longevity pattern is widely used because its continuous lines imply the endless life.

#### ***2.4.4. Tiger Skin Pattern***

The Mongolian Saddle Chan is rarely decorated with tiger images directly, but more decorated with tiger skin patterns. The Saddle Chan decorated with tiger-skin pattern can be divided into two categories, one of which is the artificially designed pattern by simplifying, deforming, exaggerating and other artistic techniques of the tiger-skin pattern and the other of which is the Saddle Chan made of real tiger skin.

Some of the decorative patterns of the Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan are evolved from their own beliefs and worship, and almost all have moral meanings. In addition, some decorative patterns contain elements of other national cultures, so it can be concluded that the content of decorative patterns of Saddle Chan in the Mongolian saddle horse culture is inclusive.

### **3. The Composition Forms of Decoration Patterns of Saddle Chan are Diverse**

#### ***3.1. One-Point Composition***

One of the decorative patterns of Saddle Chan is the main pattern, which is generally in the center of Saddle Chan, but it is not absolute. A continuous pattern is decorated at the lower corner of the main pattern to set off the theme and small patterns are also decorated around the main pattern. The change of the position of the main pattern in the Saddle Chan is related to the manufacturing sequence of the Saddle Chan and the size of the stirrup [6].

#### ***3.2. Two-Point Composition***

It is a composition form formed for rectangular strip Saddle Chan. The presentation method is that a larger round pattern is decorated on the wide part above. A smaller pattern is decorated in the narrow part below, and the theme content is mostly flower patterns. Some simple geometric decorative patterns are also decorated on the edge of the Saddle Chan. Mongolian people also have the aesthetic characteristics of “advocating roundness”. In the hearts of Mongolian people, the circular pattern is a symbol of longevity and auspiciousness.

#### ***3.3. Scattered Composition***

The scattered composition has no clear main pattern. The decoration of the Saddle Chan is divided into inner and outer double layers. The double layer is decorated with circular patterns of the same size. Scattered composition is a common composition form on pile blanket circular Saddle Chan.

#### ***3.4. Continuous Composition***

In the decoration of Mongolian Saddle Chan, it is rare to use continuous composition. Characterized by a pattern composed of form with four continuous corners, there are two styles: (1) there are decorative patterns on the edge of the Saddle Chan, and the patterns composed of four consecutive corners are decorated in the edge. (2) It is a frameless decorative pattern directly decorated with patterns composed of forms with four continuous corners.

### **3.5. *Painting Composition***

Painting composition is to organize the pattern in the edge of Saddle Chan with the composition law and form law in painting. This composition form is applied to both pile blanket Saddle Chan and leather saddle, and the themes are mostly auspicious patterns such as “spring is everywhere” and “peace and wealth”.

## **4. The Decorative Features of the Saddle Chan are Regional**

### **4.1. *Material***

For Mongolian people living on the prairie, their clothing, food, housing and transportation are inseparable from the “five domestic animals” including goats, sheep, cattle, horses and camels. Therefore, the nomadic lifestyle also limits the main materials of the Saddle Chan. The traditional Mongolian Saddle Chan mainly includes pile blanket and leather.

The material and manufacturing method of pile blanket Saddle Chan are basically the same as that of Mongolian handmade carpet. Generally, high-quality wool or camel hair can be used, that is, they can be spun into wool through processes such as wool selection and wool washing, and then dyed, and some can also be directly used in their primary color [7].

The leather Saddle Chan is mainly made of cow leather which is thick and wear-resistant, and is relatively easy to obtain on the prairie.

### **4.2. *Decorative Techniques***

Saddle Chan made of different materials is of great difference in decorative techniques, so the artistic effects are also different.

#### **4.2.1 *Decorative Techniques of Pile Blanket Saddle Chan***

Because the local pile blanket industry is developed, there are many ways to make blankets. Generally, weaving and inlaying methods are used to decorate pile blanket Saddle Chan.

##### **(1) *Weaving Method***

The decoration of pile blanket Saddle Chan is mainly made by weaving method. The production process is basically the same as that of handmade blanket in Inner Mongolia, which has strong national characteristics. The weaving method is mainly divided into three stages: preliminary preparation, manufacturing molding and later beautification. There are many processes in the preparation stage of making Saddle Chan. First, the high-quality wool is spun into wool after processes such as wool selection and wool washing and then, dyeing is carried out. The quality of dyeing directly affects the quality of Saddle Chan. The Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan is dyed with natural dyes extracted from plants and minerals. The dyed color is soft and free from hurting the hair.

##### **(2) *Inlaying Method***

The edges of some pile blanket saddles with a saddle cloth are also inlaid with metal ornaments, most of which are engraved with patterns of flowers, butterflies, bats, etc. [8]. In addition to the decorative function, the metal components inlaid on

the Saddle Chan can also increase the middle weight of the Saddle Chan to prevent the horse from being frightened by the elegance of the Saddle Chan when running.

#### ***4.2.2. Decoration Method of Leather***

The nomadic people in northern China use animal skins earlier than other textiles. Leather having been an important raw material for Saddle Chan since ancient times is also a material relatively easy to obtain on the Mongolian grassland with flocks of cattle and sheep. Therefore, the Mongolian people like to make Saddle Chan with cow leather. Decoration method of leather is also related to the maturity of local leather technique and leather art, including carving method, painting method and sewing method.

##### ***(1) Carving Method***

Carving has been an important decoration method of leather products since ancient times. Leather Saddle Chan was decorated by this method as early as the Tang Dynasty. When using the carving method to decorate the leather Saddle Chan, first wet the surface of the Saddle Chan with water. The surface of the Saddle Chan will be more elastic after absorbing water, which is conducive to carving. Then use the carving knife to depict the outer contour of the pattern. After the depiction, use iron tools with different shapes and sizes to carve the whole pattern of the Saddle Chan [9].

##### ***(2) Painting Method***

Painting method is a common decoration method on leather Saddle Chan. The biggest advantage of decorating Saddle Chan with painting lies in the strong expressiveness of the pattern, and the painted pattern of Saddle Chan is vivid and delicate. Most of the pigments used in painting are mineral pigments, such as ochre, malachite, cinnabar and turquoise. The ground mineral pigment also needs to be mixed with tung oil, so the painted pattern is not easy to decolorize.

##### ***(3) Sewing Method***

Sewing method is the most commonly used decoration method on xiangniu saddle. Since most of the fragrant cow leather Saddle Chan has been pressed with shading in the production process, it is not suitable to use painting and carving methods for decoration. Therefore, the sewing method is widely used on fragrant cow leather Saddle Chan.

## **5. The Use of Decorative Patterns and Colors of Saddle Chan is of National Character**

Each nation has its own color worshipful and different color collocation, which is a nation's unique artistic aesthetic concept [10]. Mongolian people also have different understanding of color, which is reflected not only in Saddle Chan, but also in other items.

### ***5.1. White***

White is a part of Mongolian life. Mongolian people live under the blue sky and white clouds, reside in white yurts, heard white sheep, eat all kinds of white dairy products, etc. These are the life that Mongolian people cannot live without. White is a color that symbolizes simplicity, cleanness and kindness.

### **5.2. Blue**

Blue is very common in Mongolian Saddle Chan. The famous species of Mongolian Saddle Chan is three-blue Saddle Chan. The so-called “three-blue Saddle Chan” refers to the pile blanket saddle woven with only three kinds of blue wool. Its beauty lies in the grassland craftsman’s control of color. Mongolian people love blue pretty much, because blue symbolizes eternity, brightness, prosperity, perseverance and loyalty.

### **5.3. Golden**

Gold is yellow. There are two kinds of yellow in Mongolian Saddle Chan, one of which is earthy yellow with low brightness, and the other of which is bright yellow with high brightness. There are great differences in the use of these two kinds of yellow on the Saddle Chan, where bright yellow represents power and status, while earthy yellow is a lot more casual.

### **5.4. Red**

The Mongolian people’s worship of red comes from the worship of fire. In the decoration of Saddle Chan, a lot of red will be used in both flower patterns and edge patterns. Red has been the warmest and most joyful color in the Mongolian people’s heart since ancient times.

### **5.5. Black**

Black is often used as the background color in decoration for Horqin Mongolian Saddle Chan for visual contrast with the bright flower patterns.

## **6. Conclusions**

By analyzing the decorative content, decorative composition, decorative characteristics and color application of Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan, four viewpoints, such as the content of Mongolian traditional saddle decoration pattern is inclusive, the composition form is diverse, the decorative characteristics are regional, and the color application is national, are obtained in this paper. The outstanding feature of Mongolian traditional Saddle Chan is that it has been influenced by different regions and cultures in the process of development, showing an artistic style and aesthetics of multi-cultural integration.

## **Conflicts of Interest**

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

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