

# *A Brief Introduction to Batik of Minority Ethnic Groups in Southwest China*

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**Abstract:** Batik is one of the important skills of ethnic minorities in China, and it has a long history in minority areas in Southwest China. This paper introduces the archaeological remains and basic techniques of batik in Southwest China. It briefly discusses the crisis and opportunity of batik in Southwest China, and let the world know about this treasure of the Chinese nation.

## **1. Introduction**

There are many ethnic minorities living in Southwest China. As a folk art that can reflect national history, national culture, folk customs and national aesthetics on cloth, batik has a long history in minority areas in Southwest China. It still spreads among Miao, Buyi, Yao, Yi, Tujia, Shui and other ethnic groups to this day [1]. At the end of last century and the beginning of this century, the transmission of batik in southwest China's ethnic minorities appeared a crisis. In the past decade, new opportunities for development have emerged.

## **2. Batik archaeological remains**

The academic circles generally believe that the batik craft should have started in the Han Dynasty or earlier, and had made great progress in the Tang Dynasty. After the Song Dynasty, it was gradually spread only in the southwest region. After the Tang and Song Dynasties, the anti-dyeing technology was improved to replace the beeswax anti-dyeing with slurry made of soybean milk and lime, and the batik technique in the Central Plains gradually declined and was gradually lost.

### **2.1 Chinese ancient batik**

Since 1959, in the ancient tombs of Astana in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, several pieces of "waxvaler" silk and yarn from the Tang Dynasty have been excavated through archeology, and two of them have used the two-color dyeing process. The existing three-color batik in the Palace Museum and the "Taishu Xiangyang Wax Valerian Screen" hidden in Japan's Shosoin are all relics of the Tang Dynasty [2]. From the archaeological excavations of the ancient tombs in Astana, Xinjiang, and the real objects in the Forbidden City and Japan, it can be seen that the "wax valerian" craft was very prosperous in the Han and Tang Dynasties.

## 2.2 Batik archaeological discoveries in southwest China

After the Han and Tang Dynasties, although the batik technique was gradually lost in the Central Plains, it was gradually transferred to the Southwest with the migration of the Miao people, and finally it was mainly in Guizhou, where it was widely inherited. In the 1960s, at the Fengxiangxia cliff burial site in the Xiajiang area of eastern Sichuan (that is, the Three Gorges area of the Yangtze River in Chongqing today), among the scattered cultural relics, there were seven or eight plain weave fabrics of different thicknesses, which were tuanhua and The lozenge-shaped wax print patterns and fragments of "wax valerian" costumes were probably produced from the Warring States Period to the Qin and Han Dynasties.

In the 1970s, in the hanging coffins of the "Bo people" in Matangba, Luobiao, Gongxian County, Sichuan Province, a group of hanging coffins of the Gelao people in the Ming Dynasty were cleaned up, and linen fabrics containing batik silk were found in the funeral objects . The patterns are wax-printed group flowers and rhombuses, and the patterns are mainly geometric patterns and swirl patterns. To this day, Gongxian County still has the inheritance of Miao batik skills.

1987, in order to publicize Guizhou batik to the world, the Guizhou Provincial Department of Culture prepared to hold a Guizhou batik cultural exhibition, and specially organized an archaeological team to visit the Liu clan in Taohua Village, Qibai Town, Pingba County (now Pingba District, Anshun City) Archaeological excavations were carried out on the coffin cave and the Jiaomagandai Tianxing cave in Changshun County. Eight batik fabrics made of cotton skirts were unearthed in Tianxing Cave in Qiandai, Changshun. According to expert research, its production process is consistent with the process described in Song Dynasty Zhou Qufei's "Lingwai Daida" and Zhu Fu's "Ximan Congxiao", and it is made by the mixed dyeing method [3].In the coffin cave of the Liu surnamed people in Taohua Village, Qibai Town, Pingba District, 15 colored and plain batik dresses made of cotton and linen were unearthed through archaeological excavation. The textile technology is plain weaving. At the same time, a copper wax knife was unearthed in the coffin hole.

## 3. Basic Batik Techniques of Ethnic Minorities in Southwest China

In the production of folk batik of ethnic minorities in Southwest China, beeswax and mixed wax (mixed with beeswax and paraffin wax) are used as anti-dyeing agents. The production steps, production methods and production techniques are basically similar, and there are some small differences in the production process. In terms of patterns and patterns, different regions and different nationalities have different characteristics.

### 3.1 Batik fabric and processing

According to the survey, in the past , the ethnic minority areas planted cotton , picked it, spun thread by hand, and wove it into homespun cloth; Although there are still a few areas that still grow cotton by themselves, they use spinning machines and looms to spin and weave cloth , and then use homemade cloth to make clothes, skirts, etc. The traditional batik of ethnic minorities is mainly made of homemade cotton cloth, and linen cloth is also used in some hemp-producing areas [4].Since the homemade earthen cloth is relatively thick, it will be washed before painting with resist to facilitate later painting. Today, under the impact of industrialization and agricultural modernization, ethnic minorities make batik, and most of the fabric comes from the market. According to the needs of batik making, cotton, linen, silk, etc. are bought in the market.

### 3.2 Preparation and use of anti-dyeing agent

There are generally several types of anti-dyeing agents for batik. One is beeswax. Beeswax is the secretion of the wax glands in the abdomen of bees. Because of its high softness and not easy to break, it is often used as batik material. The second is paraffin. Paraffin is distilled from petroleum, is a crystal refined by solvent, and is a product of modern industrialization. Among ethnic minorities, there is also a method of anti-dyeing with liquidambar resin, which is similar to batik [5]. Wax is used to draw patterns and needs to be melted to a suitable temperature. Traditionally, ethnic minority women use a brazier to fill slow -burning charcoal and carbon ash with heat-retaining effect, and fix the porcelain bowl filled with wax liquid on the appropriate position of the charcoal ash. At present, many inheritors like to use electric pots for melting wax specially made for drawing batik.

### 3.3 Batik drawing and inheritance

Batik drawing is both art and experience, and it is also the most time-consuming and creative part of the entire batik production process. In the production process: First, master the temperature of the wax, and the temperature should be appropriate. The second is to draw patterns. In the process of batik painting, women of ethnic minorities generally do not make sketches, but can paint with a brush. The third is the making and selection of wax painting tools. Different nationalities and regions have different choices. In the inheritance of batik painting, women of ethnic minorities generally learn to make clothing at a very young age, and at the same time begin to learn batik techniques. Minority women draw wax , and the pattern is completely conceived in the heart, and the straightness and thickness of the lines in the pattern are controlled by the strength of the wrist , which can be fully mastered after two or three years of study.

### 3.4 Production and use of dyes

The blue dye for batik is indigo. Blue indigo is a dye made from the leaves of woad indigo, cruciferous plant, indigo plant in legume family, horse indigo plant in acanthaceae plant or indigo plant in Polygonaceae plant. For the technology of planting indigo and making indigo, there are detailed records in "Liping Mansion Chronicles" compiled by Yu Wei during the Guangxu period of the Qing Dynasty. That is: plant bluegrass, and when it matures in September or October, cut the leaves into the indigo pool and soak them for three days. When the blue color is exhausted, put lime in it. Purple indigo is the top grade. After the indigo is produced, when it needs to be used, put a certain amount of indigo into the dyeing vat. When there is at least a small bowl of foam in the center of the dyeing vat, it means that the dyeing vat has been cultivated and can be dip-dyeed. During the dip-dyeing process, after putting in the wax-painted fabric, it is then evenly stirred clockwise with a wooden stick, so that the batik fabric is in full contact with the dye solution in the dye vat, and then the fabric is picked up and left to fully oxidize in the air. The number of dyeing times is determined by the batik fabric used and the color depth of one's preference.

### 3.5 Dewaxing and rinsing

Put the dyed batik products into the pot, add a certain amount of water and an appropriate amount of lime, and heat and dewax the painted wax materials. During the process, the cloth is repeatedly turned over with wooden sticks, bamboo sticks, etc., boiled in boiling water and dewaxed, and finally the cloth is picked up and washed repeatedly with well water, stream water or river water. During this process, the used wax is recycled, which has a dark brown color. At this

point, an exquisite batik product is considered complete. General batik products include clothing, headkerchiefs, curtains, backs, pad sheets, straps, Tibetan flags, tablecloths, scarves, basket covers, handkerchiefs, etc.

#### **4. Crisis and opportunity of ethnic minority batik in Southwest China**

Batik of ethnic minorities in Southwest China is widely distributed, and it was once brilliant in the last two decades of the 20th century. After the glory, the succession crisis appears. In recent ten years, just ushered in the inheritance of the spring. The specific reasons are as follows:

##### **4.1 The crisis of batik**

Since the end of the 20th century, with the rapid economic development and national integration, various cheap and light industrialized products and modern techniques have been rapidly introduced to the originally closed and backward minority areas in Southwest China, which has had a huge impact on the folk batik techniques of ethnic minorities. This has led to a crisis of inheritance in folk batik of ethnic minorities, and is facing the danger of losing its skills. The main reasons for the crisis are: First, economic and social development. Working outside the home can earn more money and improve their lives, which leads to generational gaps in ethnic minority folk batik inheritors. The second is the introduction of a large number of cheap and light industrialized products, which has impacted the use of folk batik by ethnic minorities. The third is the introduction of modern dyeing and weaving techniques, which led to the differentiation of batik production techniques. The above-mentioned factors have led to a great reduction in the scope of folk batik inheritance of ethnic minorities in Southwest China. The batik technique, which was once widely inherited among many ethnic groups in Southwest China, is in a crisis of inheritance.

##### **4.2 Development opportunities for batik**

In the past ten years, with the government's attention, cultural development, economic prosperity, social interaction and other factors, batik skills have been fully exchanged and integrated. Under the influence of village neighbors, the spread of marriage and marriage, the protection of intangible cultural heritage, the promotion of tourism development, and the promotion of poverty alleviation, ethnic minority compatriots in various regions are dying out in some places while batik . In other places, it was revived through the dissemination of ethnic minority compatriots who mastered the batik technique; some places died out, but the national cultural memory is still there, and through protective inheritance, there has been a recovery of the technique. As of the end of 2022, according to the author's search, there are more than 50 counties (districts, cities) in Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Chongqing and other places where ethnic minority folk batik inheritance exists, and counties such as Danzhai and Rongjiang in Guizhou Province are showing prosperity.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The batik printing of the ethnic minorities in southwest China has a long history and has high cultural and aesthetic values. It is true that there are also some unsatisfactory aspects in the inheritance of batik skills of ethnic minorities. In Southwest China, there is a crisis of negligent transmission in the transmission of batik in ethnic minorities, and at the same time, it also ushered in a new development opportunity. Batik as one of the artistic treasures of all mankind, we must inherit and carry forward. The future of minority folk batik in Southwest China still needs the joint efforts of the government and inheritors.

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