

The Qiang Embroidery Patterns of the Goat Horn Flower—Semiotic Analysis of Folk Stories

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Abstract: The pattern of Goat Horn Flower is the most representative pattern in Qiang embroideries, which embodies the Qiang women's creative wisdoms. Through the combing of Qiang folk stories, and from the perspective of semiotics to interpret its patterns, it is helpful to improve the understanding of Qiang embroidery patterns and enhance the understanding and identity of Qiang culture. By combing Qiang folk stories describing the Goat Horn Flower, the author find that the connotation of the Goat Horn Flower is the gestation of life, the yardstick of morality and ethics, and the embodiment of wisdom, bravery, beauty and purity. As a symbol, the Goat Horn Flower is influenced by the sender in the communication elements in Qiang embroidery works, that is, Qiang women use the letters (media) to regard the Goat Horn Flower as the symbol in the form of embroidery, and convey the content of the message to be transmitted by the sender to the recipient. From the folk stories, the author interprets the patterns of the Goat Horn Flower from the perspective of semiotics, and finds that the industrious and beautiful Qiang women write the hymns for life with needles as pen and lines as ink.

1. Introduction

Using semiotics knowledge to analyze the themes of national ornaments has become a systematic method to study ornaments. Zhang Xianrong's explanation of the symbol is that it is a symbol which is systematically used by human beings to convey or similarly communicate the signifying effects [1]. It can also be understood as a symbol in the system that is used by people to express a particular meaning in a way of communication. Bao Lin believes that the main task of semiotics is that it takes the used symbolic system as the object, and analyzes their "language" structure and the semantics they produced in this structure [2], that is, through the symbolic system to study its structure and language, and analyze the semantics produced by symbols.

In basic semiotics, Zhang Xianrong defined the function of symbols as that on the one hand, it was communication, but on the other hand, it was signifying effect. In the process of communication, it is divided into the communication elements, the communication processes and the communication types. The signifying effect is divided into the formation of symbols and the process of deciphering. The meaning of image is that image becomes the communicator of meaning, the recorder of history and the executor of rules [3]. The Qiang "Goat Horn Flower" has rich functions of graphic and text communication. Understanding patterns from the perspective of semiotics is more conducive to a

comprehensive understanding of the Qiang people's humanistic feelings hidden behind Qiang embroidery, and can also better understand the significance of Qiang embroidery ornaments. Through the understanding of the origin of the Goat Horn Flower and the Qiang folk stories, this paper will decode the meanings hidden behind the Goat Horn Flower, and then have a new and more comprehensive interpretation of the Goat Horn Flower.

2. An Understanding of the Origin of the Qiang Goat Horn Flower

At present, there are two aspects of the understandings of the Qiang “Goat Horn Flower”, one is the alpine rhododendron distributed in the Qiang areas, and the other is the Qiang embroidery patterns.

2.1 The Geographical Distribution of the Goat Horn Flower

The Goat Horn Flower refers to the alpine rhododendron distributed in the Qiang areas. In the Qiang nationality settlements, taking Wenchuan County in Sichuan Province in China as an example, more than ten kinds of rhododendron varieties are mainly distributed. The colour of rhododendron in Qiang settlements is mainly red, with a small amount of white, yellow and purple. The calyxes are mainly 5 to 7, and the flowers are 2 to 11 in cluster state [4].

2.2 The Embroidery Patterns of Goat Horn Flower

The Qiang people call rhododendron “Goat Horn Flower”, and its embroidered ornamentation theme is rhododendron (“Goat Horn Flower”), while it is also expressed by goat horn + rhododendron = “Goat Horn Flower” [5]. The Qiang embroidery ornaments “Goat Horn Flower” collected by the author is often presented in two forms: one is the simulation of natural form, and the other is the combination of the “Goat Horn Flower” and the flower patterns. The former is mainly composed of red 5-lobed calyxes, also 6-lobed or 7-lobed, mostly clustered, and with green pointed leaves and yellow or dark brown branches. The pattern is composed of scattered point perspective, and the natural form is quasi-natural in a balanced way according to the rules of the pattern composition. They are mostly used in Qiang apron, tile style kerchief, ribbon and other pattern designs, cluster by cluster, and festive and warm, and commonly used by lock embroidery, needle embroidery, flat embroidery, needle embroidery and other needle makings. Moreover, for the combination of the Goat Horn Flower and the flower patterns, the shape of the sheep horn and the calyx of rhododendron were used to form an angular pattern, which was curved like a sheep's horn. The integration in the construction method of morphological use between the goat horn and the calyx of the alpine rhododendron is used to form a horn pattern like a curved goat horn. This pattern of goat horn is similar to the natural features of rhododendron, splitting to the middle only. The shape of the flower pedicle is curved like a goat horn. For example, the pattern decorations of Xiangba on the Qiang little girl's golden chicken hat or little boy's dog head hat, that is, the combination of curly horn-shaped flower stem and alpine rhododendron corolla, which is symmetrical in shape and suitable for pattern. The colour is mixed with the RGB tricolor and the YMC tricolor, and matched with the five colours like red, green, blue, yellow and white, bright and cheerful. The embroidery is made by the needle embroidery combined with the flat embroidery techniques. Qiang women in Chibusu area in Mao County of Sichuan Province, use the patterns of Goat Horn Flower on their aprons in full dress. In the design of graphic pattern, the figures of the corolla and the horn-shaped flower pedicle are combined by using the “bottom relationship” on the surface composition. The colour matching on the black cloth follows the natural colour matching method of safflower and green leaves. You can see the open flowers when you see colour as a picture, and you can see the shape of the goat horn when you see black as a picture. In order to mimic natural flowers, the colour from outside to inside uses from light to deep to gradual red to make up the flowers. In the acupuncture method, it mainly uses needle pressing embroidery, flat embroidery and other techniques to complete.

3. An Interpretation of the Semiotics of Qiang Folk Stories

Qiang is a nation without words. Qiang's culture is mainly passed down from hand to mouth. Folk stories not only contain the ethical value system of ethnic groups, but also contain the cultural images with the rich connotations. This kind of cultural image can be well communicated by means of appearance. Through the collection and collation of the Qiang folk stories of the "Goat Horn Flower", the author summarizes the following five aspects of image expressions.

3.1 The Gestation and Protection of Life

It is mentioned in *The Origin of the Goat Horn Flower* that the god, Abambita, cut the trunks of the Goat Horn Flower tree into nine pairs of small wooden people..... From then on, there was a race in the world [6]. From this we can interpret the simple primitive religious belief of Qiang nationality, that is, respect for the things of nature, which is born through the cutting and shaping of trees. In the book *The Goat Horn Flower* the third sister told the prince about her experience of being framed by her second sister. Then she said that, "fortunately, I had the Goat Horn Flower sent by the Dragon King, which made me grow into a goat horn tree, but the tree was cut down and burned as firewood. Later, this old mother saved my life, otherwise I would not be alive!" [7] The third sister here was reborn thanks to the Goat Horn Flower, and the Goat Horn Flower was also the protector of marriage.

It is not difficult for us to understand the meaning of the Goat Horn Flower embroidered with Xiangba on Qiang children's hats. Baby is a new life to be conceived, and also the crystallization of marriage and love. The family not only implies the gestation of new life, but also conveys the cognizance and protection of the crystallization of marriage and love with the help of the Goat Horn Flower in Xiangba.

3.2 Morality, Ethics and Order

In *The Origin of the Goat Horn Flower*, the Goddess Ebabaxi listened to the God Zhibiwaxi's words, who supervised reincarnation. "The goddess lived in the cuckoo garden and made regulations for the mortals to be born. All reincarnated mortals will pass by. The man to the right side of the goddess will pick a horn and a bunch of azalea in the right pile of goat horns while the woman to the left will pick a horn and a bunch of azalea in the left pile of goat horns, so that they can cross the mountain to be reborn. All men and women who have two horns on the same goat's head are a husband and wife in the mortal world. No matter what the world is, the horns always must match. In this way, the goddess established the marriage of goat horns in the mortal world, and from then on ended the situation of random match in the world." [8] The Qiang people called the Goat Horn Flower "Esilaba" or "Ebabaizhu", meaning the flower of marriage. The Goat Horn Flower in the story means that the Qiang nationality has gone from ignorance to civilization, thus establishing the basic morality and ethics in marriage. The Goat Horn Flower has become the defender and witness of monogamy morality and ethics.

Meibu and Zhiladuo tells the story of Meibu, the daughter of the god and Zhiladuo, the son of the tribal leader. "Meibu went to the Galaxy every day to dress up, wash clothes and fetch water. Zhiladuo went up the hill every day to hunt, so they often met each other. Meibu saw the brave Zhiladuo carrying the hunted wild animals every day, sweating all over his face, and blandly held the wooden ladle to treat him to some water and wash his face. Zhiladuo saw that the beautiful Meibu was so kind-hearted that he came back from the hill every day and always picked the Goat Horn Flower for Meibu. For a long time, Zhiladuo and Meibu had the pure love." [9] Zhiladuo presented the Goat Horn Flower in the hill for Meibu. At this time, the Goat Horn Flower became the transmitter of the love between men and women, and it was also the pledge of love. In *The Goat Horn Flower*, the python was glad that the third daughter can accede to its request, and it gave the bunch of the Goat Horn Flower to the third daughter and took her away [10]. In this story, the python gave the Goat Horn Flower to the third daughter as the pledge of their engagement. There is also the link of flower arrangement in the real Qiang marriage custom [11].

From the belief that Qiang men and women admire each other to the custom of Qiang wedding to the Qiang folk stories, it is difficult to tell who is the origin. However, when the young Qiang women gave the handbags embroidered with the Goat Horn Flower patterns to their favorite men, and the wives gave their husbands the articles with the Goat Horn Flower embroidery patterns, the Goat Horn Flower ornaments served as the expectations for love and the significance of marriage ethics and order witness.

3.3 Bravery and Guardianship

The Qiang legend said that, long long ago, the Goat Horn Flower was white, and people only used it as a match. One year, at the intersection of the mountain, there was a ferocious gold leopard. There was a young and brave hunter in the village, determined to get rid of the evil for the people. With a shotgun and a hunting knife, he fought with the beast, and ultimately the beast was removed. He was seriously injured and spilled his blood on the Goat Horn Flower in full bloom. From then on, the white Goat Horn Flower turned red. It was the hero's hot blood that dyed the Goat Horn Flower red, so the people in their hometown loved it so much [12]. The Goat Horn Flower here becomes a symbol of the male courage. The Goat Horn Flower changed from white to red, implying the ethnic memories of the Qiang men's bloodshed and sacrifice in the war in the process of ethnic migration. When the mother sent her son the insoles and the cloth bands embroidered with the Goat Horn Flower, she was filled with the fervent hope that her son would grow into a brave and fearless Qiang man.

3.4 Diligence and Wisdom

The Goat Horn Flower [13] tells about the story of Wang Daqiang who was born in Yang Que Zhai and saved the God's son, and then the God gratefully gave him the Goat Horn Flower. The flower became into a young girl and married him, then they returned to his hometown and fought with the chieftain. The first half of the story tells of the hardworking and capable young girl named Goat Horn Flower, who not only has to deal with orderly family affairs, but also goes hunting. The second half tells the story of the Goat Horn Flower taking advantage of her parents' palace to cleverly defeat the greedy chieftain. In the face of the repeated difficulties from the chieftain, the Goat Horn Flower didn't give in, but made use of her own advantages to resolve the difficulties, which is like the spirits from the hardworking and intelligent Qiang women who are not afraid of and face the difficulties.

In the age of material scarcity, they decorated their families with their hard-working hands and intelligent minds, thus evolving the Qiang unique intangible cultural heritage - Qiang embroidery. Those articles that are added by Qiang embroidery are not only more generous and beautiful, but also stronger and more durable. Qiang embroidery is full of Qiang women's deep love for themselves and their families. They love beauty and decorate the beautiful things on their bodies by their observation of nature. The Goat Horn Flower embroidered on the apron not only makes the apron more durable, but also the beautiful apron can make the dress appear more vibrant. Moreover, the techniques of embroidering the patterns of the Goat Horn Flower have become a manifestation of the Qiang women's self-identity and ability.

3.5 Beauty and Purity

In *The Willow Tree, the Palm Tree, the Goat Horn Flower*, it is recorded that among the three sisters of Qiang nationality, the eldest sister and the second sister became the willow tree and the palm tree, respectively. Later, the third sister also became a tree, the goat horn tree. So, none of the horn trees are straight, they all look bent and twisted, and that's why the third sister turned her leg. The flowers of the goat horn tree are white or red. The white flowers are the third sister's tears while the red flowers are the third sister's sincere and hot heart. Therefore, the Qiang people especially like the Goat Horn Flower and regard it as a symbol of beauty and purity [14]. In Qiang's clothing, there is a common pattern of "amniotic flower". The clothes made by Qiang mother for her daughter are embroidered with "amniotic flower", implying the hope that her daughter has the heart like the heart of hope that the daughter has the third sister. The patterns of the Goat Horn Flower on the ribbons are commonly seen in Qiang dress. The

Qiang mother embroidered the Goat Horn Flower patterns on the clothing ribbons made for her daughter, implying the hope that her daughter would have a sincere and hot heart like the third sister.

4. Conclusions

By combing the Qiang folk stories describing the Goat Horn Flower, it is not difficult to find that the connotation of the Goat Horn Flower is the gestation of life, the yardstick of morality and ethics, and the embodiment of wisdom, bravery, beauty and purity. As a symbol, the Goat Horn Flower is influenced by the sender in the communication elements in Qiang embroidery works, that is, Qiang women use the letters (media) to regard the Goat Horn Flower as the symbol in the form of embroidery, and convey the content of the message to be transmitted by the sender to the recipient. The addressee forms different objects according to different viewers. According to the recipient's difference, the sender forms the coding process through the formation of the messages, and in the recipient, there will be decoding and reconstruction of the information according to its own knowledge structure, life context and so on.

Different recipients have different decoding of the "Goat Horn Flower" symbol. The Goat Horn Flower for tourists is only limited to the understanding of the mountain rhododendrons, best wishes, and Qiang people's totems. For the Qiang ethnic group, the articles given by the wife to her husband and embroidered with the patterns of the Goat Horn Flower, the purse given by a young woman to her favorite man and embroidered with the patterns of the Goat Horn Flower, the patterns used on their own clothing, and the Xiangba on the Qiang children's hats will have different decoding results.

The Goat Horn Flower has gradually accumulated through the process of coding and decoding, and has become the representative of Qiang ethnic group. For non-written nationalities, historical narration and cultural inheritance are expressed by the oral, image and other related rituals [15]. From the folk stories, the author interprets the patterns of the Goat Horn Flower from the perspective of semiotics, and finds that the industrious and beautiful Qiang women write the hymns for life with needles as pen and lines as ink. This kind of ethnic memories not only represent the deep interpretation of the folk cultures, but also the artistic reproduction of the national emotions. To some extent, it has greatly deepened our understanding and identity of the Qiang nationality traditional cultures.

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