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Traditional Cultural Inheritance under the Perspective of Aesthetic Education -- Research on the Integration of Maliu Embroidery into the Aesthetic Education System of Schools

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Abstract: Maliu embroidery, a nationally recognized intangible cultural heritage originating from Maliu Township, Chaotian District, Guangyuan City, Sichuan Province, embodies profound historical significance and rich cultural legacy. Renowned for its natural color palette, minimalist patterns, and lifelike depictions, this art form emerged from the historical Sinicization process of the Qiang ethnic group, carrying profound implications of cultural evolution, spiritual values, aesthetic preferences, and socio-cultural contexts. This study examines the integration of Maliu embroidery into formal education systems through aesthetic education frameworks, proposing its inclusion in cultural heritage education programs to foster students' cultural identity and local pride while strengthening cultural confidence. Through comprehensive analysis of its cultural values and pedagogical potential, we develop implementation strategies encompassing curriculum design, instructional material development, teacher training, campus cultural initiatives, and assessment mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that incorporating Maliu embroidery into school education not only facilitates intangible cultural heritage preservation, but also enhances Qiang-Han cultural exchange, elevates students' cultural literacy and innovative capacities, while offering innovative approaches to traditional culture education.

Keywords: Maliu Embroidery; Cultural Heritage; School Education; Traditional Culture

Introduction

Situated in northern Sichuan Province, Guangyuan City (historically known as Lizhou) occupies a strategic position as "Sichuan's Northern Gateway and the Thoroughfare of Shu Roads". Bordering Gansu and Shaanxi provinces to the north, Nanchong and Mianyang to the south, and Bazhong to the east, this region boasts not only profound Taoist traditions, Three Kingdoms historical legacy, and revolutionary culture, but also picturesque landscapes, abundant natural resources, and well-preserved vernacular architecture. It is within this culturally rich context that the resilient and inventive Maliu community has cultivated their distinctive textile heritage - the nationally protected intangible cultural heritage of Maliu embroidery.

Characterized by resource-efficient craftsmanship, Maliu embroidery demonstrates remarkable technical sophistication through minimalist implements - utilizing undyed hemp cloth as canvas and hand-spun multicolor threads for pigment. Artisans masterfully manipulate chromatic contrasts between warm and cool hues, applying iconic geometric motifs to functional textiles including tent drapes, pillowcases, waistcoats, handkerchiefs, and footwear.

Demographic archaeology of Qiang migrations unveils multilayered ethnic interactions that shaped China's northwestern cultural topography. The peripatetic nature of Qiang communities functioned as cultural vectors, disseminating textile technologies while absorbing regional artistic idioms. This dialectical process culminated in Maliu embroidery's hybrid visual lexicon - where nomadic cloud motifs interlace with Han floral symbolism, materializing transethnic imagination through chromatic semiotics.

Ultimately, the revitalization of Maliu embroidery necessitates implementing four-dimensional preservation: Digital archiving of craft knowledge; Ethno-education in minority schools; Creative industry integration; Cross-cultural exhibitions. These strategic interventions will transform static heritage into living tradition, fostering multicultural citizenship in China's ethnic corridor.

1. Maliu Embroidery Demonstrates Profound Traditional Culture and Potential Aesthetic Education

1.1 The Traditional View of the Five Colors

The five-color theory of Chinese color aesthetics not only forms the basis for color selection in Maliu embroidery but also contributes

to its unique artistic charm. In practical applications, Maliu embroidery typically uses blue-and-white combinations (e.g., red-bordered white garments), red-and-green pairings on plain backgrounds, and black-and-red pillow covers. These bold yet balanced color schemes avoid vulgarity while creating striking visual effects, ensuring aesthetic harmony through contrasting primary tones against neutral backgrounds.

1.2 Natural Plant Dye Coloring

Nestled in rugged mountainous terrain, the Maliu region historically faced material scarcity, relying on self-sufficient plant-based dye production. Local inhabitants extracted pigments from leaves, flowers, and roots to create earthy ochres, verdant greens, and vibrant floral hues. This eco-conscious tradition aligns with Daoist principles of natural harmony, though Maliu artisans now adapt ancestral techniques with innovative color combinations. Such practices extend beyond mere decoration, embedding cultural values of environmental reverence and community identity into everyday objects.

1.3 The Visual Impact of Color

Maliu artists transcend fabric limitations through masterful color manipulation. By contrasting thread colors against plain backgrounds and layering traditional hues like red, yellow, and blue over monochrome foundations, they achieve both technical precision and emotional resonance. These chromatic choices not only enhance visual appeal but also encode cultural narratives—each stitch weaving stories of Maliu history and collective memory into the fabric itself.

2. Strategies for the Implementation of the Integration of Maliu Embroidery into the School Education System

As a national intangible cultural heritage, Maliu embroidery embodies core Chinese aesthetic values through its technical repertoire and symbolic language. Its emphasis on stitches, patterns, and color theory highlights the perseverance and creativity of the Maliu people. Three key dimensions could guide its pedagogical integration: technical training, pattern analysis, and cultural interpretation.

2.1 Embroidery Techniques for Maliu Embroidery

Maliu embroidery encompasses over twelve distinct techniques, with marionette stitch standing out for its bilateral symmetry. Craftsmen stitch uniformly from front to back, requiring warp-counted fabrics like cotton to preserve structural integrity. Traditional stitches like rack flowers and pull flowers depend on precise warp/weft engagement, distinguishing Maliu embroidery from silk-based works.

2.2 The Pattern Connotation of Maliu Embroidery

Maliu embroidery, distinguished by its unique artistic style, forms a triad with Shu and Qiang embroideries, boasting distinct cultural charm. Historical migrations of the Maliu people catalyzed cultural syncretism, shaping embroidery's regional identity and enriching local cultural landscapes. This fusion not only preserved Qiang ethnic characteristics but also integrated Han cultural elements, evolving into a living testament to cross-cultural symbiosis—even during Sinicization, Maliu people maintained strong ethnic identity, exemplifying mutual recognition between two civilizations.

2.3 Pattern Characteristics: Repetition, Rectilinearity, and Symmetry

Unlike conventional embroidery requiring pre-drawn drafts, Maliu artists directly stitch predetermined motifs onto fabric.

Notably, the "semi-abstract" treatment of motifs—such as distorted floral shapes within triangular pillow covers—blends formalism with expressiveness. Artists employ exaggeration, simplification, and deformation to create a distinctive decorative vocabulary, with Longfeng Chengxiang (Dragon-Phoenix Symbolism) epitomizing aspirational themes.

2.4 Layout Philosophy: Cosmic Balance of Square and Circle

Traditional Maliu designs adhere to the tianren heyi (cosmic unity) principle: (1) Central Circular Motifs: Symbolize yuan (wholeness) and spiritual connectivity; (2) Peripheral Square Borders: Represent fang (order) and material stability; (3) This binary structure echoes Chinese cosmology, where squares embody earthly stability and circles signify celestial perfection.

3. The Cultural Significance of Maliu Embroidery

3.1 Embroidery as a Testament to National Ingenuity

The Qiang people—historically nomadic warriors celebrated in legends like the defeat of Chi You by the Yellow Emperor—contributed their bold stitching techniques and vibrant color palette to Maliu embroidery. While Han agricultural influences gradually transformed their way of life, Qiang cultural traits persisted through embroidered symbols of livestock, warfare, and nature worship. These textiles chronicle both ethnic resilience and cultural adaptability.

3.2 Textile Art as Nature Worship

Geographic isolation and environmental constraints fostered a deep ecological ethos among the Maliu. Their transition to settled agri-

culture—facilitated by Han agricultural knowledge—manifests in embroideries depicting fertile landscapes, auspicious animals, and seasonal cycles. This artistic tradition embodies the ancient Chinese concept of "Tianrenheyi" (harmony between humans and nature), aligning with modern sustainable development principles.

3.3 Embroidery as a Spiritual Mirror of Chinese Civilization

Maliu embroidery encapsulates China's cultural DNA through: (1) Silk Road connections: Cross-cultural motifs reveal trans-Asian artistic exchanges; (2) Confucian aesthetics: Symmetrical patterns reflect hierarchical social ideals; (3) Daoist philosophy: Naturalistic designs emulate the ziran (spontaneity) principle.

As living heritage, these textiles bridge past and present, offering insights into China's multicultural evolution.

4. Conclusion

Maliu embroidery stands as a pinnacle of Chinese intangible cultural heritage, harmoniously merging technical mastery with profound symbolic meaning. Its geometric patterns, botanical motifs, and symmetrical layouts constitute a visual lexicon of Qiang-Han cultural synthesis. By integrating this embroidery into education: (1) Students gain tangible connections to China's multicultural history; (2) Traditional craftsmanship fosters creativity and motor skills; (3) Cultural identity and ecological awareness are strengthened.

This pedagogical approach not only safeguards intangible heritage but also cultivates global citizens who appreciate cultural diversity. As UNESCO recognizes, Maliu embroidery embodies the universal human values of creativity, community, and environmental stewardship—qualities essential for sustainable cultural development in the 21st century.

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