

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**ART APPRECIATION AS A TOOL
FOR CULTURAL REVIVAL: A CASE
STUDY OF MIAO BATIK IN
RONGJIANG**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the visual features, motif classification, and design structure of Rongjiang Miao batik through the application of art appreciation theory, formalist art theory, and iconology. The Miao people, one of China's oldest ethnic groups, have cultivated a sophisticated dyeing and weaving tradition, shaped by centuries of migration and adaptation. Rongjiang Miao batik embodies this cultural heritage through its intricate motifs and unique artistic expressions. In recent decades, however, modern industrialization, cultural assimilation, and the spread of mass-produced imitations have caused a sharp decline in traditional batik practices. The loss of handmade techniques and the erosion of authentic cultural forms have weakened both the transmission of intangible heritage and the sense of ethnic identity among younger generations. To address these challenges and document this endangered tradition, the study employs a qualitative methodology, combining field observation, in-depth interviews with artisans and community members in key Rongjiang villages, and a comprehensive literature review. The collected data are systematically coded and analyzed using NVivo software. The analytical frameworks include Panofsky's three-level iconology, formalist principles focusing on structure and rhythm, and art appreciation theory, which emphasizes cultural meaning and viewer experience. The findings demonstrate that Rongjiang batik features a rich visual language, integrating geometric, animal, and plant motifs into symmetrical, stylized, and symbolically charged compositions. These patterns reflect the collective memory, cosmological beliefs, and aesthetic values of the Miao people, providing deep insights into their cultural worldview and historical identity. This study contributes to academic discourse by filling gaps in Miao batik research and offering an interdisciplinary analytical model. Practically, it supports the preservation and revitalization of traditional crafts and serves as a reference for innovation in folk art and cultural industries.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| CONFIRMATION BY PANEL OF EXAMINERS | ii |
| AUTHOR'S DECLARATION | iii |
| ABSTRACT | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | vi |
| LIST OF TABLES | xiii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xiv |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Research Background | 1 |
| 1.2 Problem Statement | 4 |
| 1.3 Research Objectives | 5 |
| 1.4 Research Question | 6 |
| 1.5 Scope of Study | 6 |
| 1.6 Significance of Study | 8 |
| 1.7 Chapter Summary | 10 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW | 11 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 11 |
| 2.2 Miao Background | 12 |
| 2.2.1 A Brief History of the Miao | 13 |
| 2.2.2 The Origin of Miao Batik | 16 |
| 2.2.3 The Formation of Miao Batik Patterns | 18 |
| 2.3 Overview of Batik in Rongjiang County | 21 |
| 2.3.1 Historical and Geographical Environment of Rongjiang County | 21 |
| 2.3.2 Batik in Miao Villages in Rongjiang County | 25 |
| 2.3.2.1 <i>Batik Labor Environment in Villages</i> | 25 |
| 2.3.2.2 <i>Batik Tools and Materials</i> | 26 |
| 2.3.2.3 <i>Batik Process</i> | 35 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Batik is an ancient Chinese dyeing and printing technique, passed down through generations by the Miao people in Rongjiang County, Guizhou. It is unique among various forms of folk art. Historically known as wax dyeing, batik is considered one of the three major ancient Chinese printing techniques, alongside tie-dyeing and stencil printing (Qi, 2005, p. 26). In the Miao language, batik is called mutu, meaning wax-dyed fabric. It is a dyeing method that uses wax as a resist to create patterns or designs on fabric (Fang, 2000, p. 34), as shown in Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.2.

Since the Miao people have no written language, batik became an artistic medium through which they recorded cultural and practical needs. Its primary purpose was to produce daily necessities such as clothing, bed sheets, quilt covers, backpacks, baby carriers, and funeral shrouds, as illustrated in Figure 1.3. Batik is not only practical but also holds significant artistic value. Archaeological discoveries — from batik fragments depicting a half-naked goddess unearthed at the Niya ruins in Minfeng, Xinjiang, to the Tang Dynasty colored batik screens preserved in the Shosoin Repository in Japan — demonstrate the historical prosperity and cultural importance of Chinese batik art (Yang & Yang, 2002).



Figure 1.1 Part of The Drum-Shaped Flag