


# Aesthetic flowing between islands: migrating loom, traded cotton, mountain of dye

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## Abstract

The political isolation and environmentally vibrant of Hainan Island fostered interactions between humans, non-humans, and islands. Li brocade, crafted by the interaction between Li women and Hainan, embodies the cultural essence of the Li ethnic group, spanning daily life to beliefs. It is hypothesized that, besides the indigenous Li, Austronesian groups also dispersed to Islands Southeast Asia (ISEA) with textile techniques. Then, exchanges among island communities with the transformation of Li brocade started. However, since Song Dynasty and the 1980s with UNESCO's involvement, Li brocade has been detached from its original context, symbolized as “low-tech” and heritage artifact, with Li women instrumentalized for Han Chinese-focused industry and nationalism. By examining the aesthetics of textiles through Austronesian migration with looms, the cotton trade with India, and the tropical plants for dyeing, this paper argues that Li brocade, beyond human-made object, is a temporal life. It connects and shapes weavers' aesthetic of sensing the world in the creative reinvention in every encountering built upon past experiences. By shifting focus from Hainan-Mainland China to Hainan-ISEA, it seeks to uncover obscured histories and foster imaginative future of Li brocade's own life direction and interaction with Li women, transcending the borderline of modern nation states.

## Keywords

Li brocade

Hainan Island

aesthetic

textile

## 1. Introduction

Environmentally, Hainan Island is situated in the tropical zone, characterized by a central rainforest and mountainous terrain with abundant natural resources. Geographically, it is surrounded by the ocean and located along the central East-West maritime routes. Politically, Hainan lies in southernmost China, distant from the power centers of Zhongyuan in

ancient China and Beijing in modern China. This combination of natural richness and political isolation has fostered a unique vitality, freedom, and fusion among human, non-human, and island.

Thus, Hainan Island hosts a diverse array of cultures, including Han, Li, Miao, and Hui groups. The Li ethnic group, who first migrated to Hainan over 7000 years ago, have developed unique cultural practices in dialogue with the island's environment, including tattooing, music, cuisine, water gourds, etc. Li brocade—a textile produced by Li women—has played a crucial role in connecting and fostering the community, serving both everyday needs and ritualistic purposes. Moreover, the formation and transformation of Li brocade extends beyond Hainan, influenced by connections across the ocean with Islands Southeast Asia (ISEA) through migration and trade.

However, since BC110 (Han dynasty) when Han emperor (*Hanwudi* 汉武帝) firstly established military garrisons on Hainan, Hainan has been represented by the government as geographic and political marginalization in the Sinophone narrative, from playing the role as tributary and military base (since Han BC110), prison (since Sui 581-619, especially since Song 971), to special economic zone (1988), international tourism island (2011), and free trade zone (2018). Accordingly, both life forces of Li brocade and Li community are cut off from its original context and redirected. Li brocade has been symbolized as tribute, souvenir, fashion clothes, and cultural heritage, serving to Han Chinese-centered nationalism and industry. In this case, Li brocade is mostly designed by Han Chinese officials, intellectuals, and international designers, while Li weaver reduced to pure producer.

By tracing the appearance and spread of weaving tool- the body-tensioned loom in the world, rather from the first archive recorded by Han-Chinese in Han dynasty on Li brocade as tribute, there is evidenced textile culture connections between Hainan and (ISEA) around 7000 years ago. Later, by moving the scope from Hainan-China to Hainan-ISEA, specifically, the spread of cotton from India to Hainan and ISEA during BC300, the trade between Hainan and ISEA since Tang dynasty, and the common dyestuff on islands, the formation process of Li brocade's aesthetics flowing between islands gradually appears, as well as Li women's aesthetic. Thus, I argue that Li brocade is not only a human-made object but functions as a temporal artifact, linking islands and shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of Li women in conjunction with weavers in ISEA through repetitive practices of making, built upon past experiences.

From the eighteenth century onward, aesthetics in Europe becomes the “study of the beautiful,” which was later translated into Chinese as *mei xue* (美学), sub-ordinating work to the universal standard of beautiful and offering sub-value for consumerism and submit to the logic of machine (Hui, 2021; 20). According to Hui (2021) and Ranciere (2006), aesthetics is the study of the sensible, which means that through the visual appearance, the invisible way of sensing and expressing the world can be felt. Sensibility comes out of the “inner necessity” of life and has to be cultivated and invoked, under the condition that it is able to produce an identification as dialogue.

Such aesthetic is constantly constituted in the repetitive communication between islands. According to Deleuze (2004), geography categorized oceanic islands and continental islands. Oceanic islands are originary, essential islands, punch through the surface of the ocean. Continental islands are accidental, derived islands from the mainland by subsidence of the earth's crust or by the rise of the sea. Both two islands reveal ocean as a profound opposition to islands. Thus, in human imagination, dreaming of islands means separation, pulling away, far from any continent, of being alone, or creating and beginning anew. However, there is no absolute new beginning, but re-creation in repetition. Every human on islands has the ancestor migrated from other islands through ocean, and then recreating the original lifestyle. Thus, islands are in connection through the passage of ocean and sharing common origin, which is usually ignored.

Therefore, the aesthetic flowing between islands is not something that human being is born with, but an ontogenetic process in synthetical time of past and present, and formed in such repetition. It contributes to the shared ontology by situating oneself in the work and situating the work in communal life. In other words, in continuing exchange between Hainan Island and ISEA, the common aesthetic of Li brocade and islanders' similar way of sensing the worlds are gradually constituted.

By moving the focus from Hainan Island-Mainland China to Hainan-Island Southeast Asia (ISEA), Li brocade can be redirected to its own ancestors, experience, and relatives on islands, which has been isolated and derived from by the temporal and spatial borderline created by modern Chinese nation. Redirecting the historical connection between Hainan and ISEA through textile helps to discover shared identity of aesthetic in communal life, which is different from and usually hidden by the modern universal beauty created by hegemonic representation. Countering with more constructive views could inflict lasting damage on people's images of themselves and on their ability to act with relative autonomy in their endeavors to survive reasonably well within the international system in which they have found themselves and reimagine the future (Hau'ofa, 2008: 29).

## 2. Flowing route of Li brocade's aesthetics

### 2.1 Migrating loom

Li brocade involves several tools in its production, including spinning wheel to process cotton fibers into yarn, the frame to organize the yarn, the ikat settings to dye (only used in Meifu Li), and the most important tool of foot-braced body-tensioned loom (FBBT) to weave.

The basic principle of textile is the organization of warp and weft. Woven textiles are made of—warp and weft—interlaced at a right angle. A loom is essentially a device for arranging and tensioning warp yarns, and for facilitating the raising of groups of warps so that wefts can be inserted. Basic loom setups allow the lifting of one group of warps then the opposite group (called shed and counter-shed) alternately, so that plain-weave (tabby) can be made. Various aids may be added to this basic setup to facilitate the lifting of more complex sequences of warps, in order to make patterned textiles, or to make the weaving process faster or more convenient (Buckley, 2018).



Fig 1. The weaving tool of FBBT for Li brocade

FBBT used by Li women is the oldest and one of the three main kinds of looms in Asia, alongside the external-braced body tensioned (EBBT) and frame loom. According to archeologist's discovery, the oldest known remains of textile-making equipment in Asia are fragments recovered from Hemudu (河姆渡), an archaeological site in present-day Zhejiang province on the southeast coast of China, and dated to between 7,000 and 6,500 years ago (Chen, 1984). These include a number of weaving implements, including flat wooden blades, pointed sticks, bone needles and hooks of various kinds. These have generally been interpreted as loom components, with various reconstructions as a foot-braced back-tensioned loom (Chen, 1992: pp. 32–33). Besides, Zhao (2005; 2012) presents a reconstruction of parts as a backstrap loom found in Liangzhu (良渚) culture in Yuhang (5000-4000 years ago), consisting of cloth beam, warp beam and weft beater, and describes it as a foot braced backstrap loom, which shows that by the late Neolithic period FBBT has already been developed well. Similar loom parts have also been found in burial contexts in northern Vietnam from approximately the same period. It is evidenced that the foot-braced form is the principal loom in three localized areas: Taiwan (Formosan-speaking weavers), Hainan (Li), and the border between southern Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.



Fig 2. Li women are weaving with FBBT

At some point, prior to the Austronesian speakers' expansion into ISEA 4500-2500 years ago, externally braced back-tensioned looms were developed from the older foot-braced type. It represents a modification in which the warp beam is fixed to an external support (such as a tree, the side of a house or two stakes in the ground), enabling a longer and wider cloth to be woven more conveniently (Boudot & Buckley, 2015). It eventually became the dominant form on the Asian mainland, replacing the foot-braced variety over much of its original range. The externally braced loom was also carried into many of ISEA by Austronesian settlers (Buckley, 2017).





Fig 3. EBBT in Timor

The main structure of the body tensioned loom consisting of a warp beam braced behind the feet (FBBT) or stick (EBBT), a cloth beam secured at the weaver's waist with a backstrap, a rod that retains the natural shed (shed stick), and a heddle for opening the counter-shed. The weft is beaten in place with a wooden 'sword', a multipurpose implement that facilitates opening sheds in the warp, as well as the beating-in of weft (Buckley, 2018). The more complex the pattern, the more heddles are needed (Hua, 2013).

Later, frame loom was invented around 2500 years ago in Asia. Transposing the body-tensioned loom into a raised frame with a seat and adding various mechanical aids (such as treadles), frame loom can make thinner thread, free from strong fiber, and wider cloth, which is no longer limited to the weaver's body size. It was well advanced in central China by the Han dynasty, replacing in most of the mainland Asia, from southeast China (except Hainan and Taiwan) to Japan and Korea, but did not spread offshore into ISEA.



Fig 4. Weaver is weaving with frame loom

My hypothesis is as follows: 1) The geographical isolation of Hainan Island and ISEA, separated from the mainland by the ocean, has limited external influence and allowed indigenous cultures to develop independently. 2) The use of the FBBT is well-suited to the indigenous practice of slash-and-burn agriculture. This method requires living in mountainous areas or engaging in agriculture for extended periods, and the portability of the FBBT loom makes it convenient for such a lifestyle. 3) The FBBT loom offers greater flexibility for weaving intricate patterns. Traditional weaving often requires the use of heddle rods to create designs. If the loom is too large and beyond the control of the body, more heddle rods are needed, complicating the process. Today, although frame looms are present in Hainan, they are primarily used to produce large textiles for museums or as national gifts. In daily life, the FBBT loom remains the preferred tool for production. The so-called “advanced” techniques associated with frame looms are geared towards mass and efficient production but are not necessarily advantageous for the everyday lives of the indigenous people.

The division of FBBT in Hainan, Taiwan, and ISEA and frame looms in most of East Asia provides distinct foundations with varying limitations and possibilities for the subsequent formation of textiles. It is important to note that the associated identity did not emerge instantaneously; rather, it was continuously invoked through the flow of the ocean and shaped through repetitive practices that incorporated past experiences and newly exchanges (Duara, 2021).

Since the spread of body-tensioned looms with Austronesian speakers’ migration 4000-2500 years ago, the second significant historical event to the formation of Li brocade are the arrival of cotton from India around BC 500-200 and cultural exchange along maritime silk road since Tang dynasty.

## 2.2 Trade of cotton

As been found in Neolithic archaeological sites in Liangzhu, the fibers body-tensioned loom was used to weave include silk and bast extracted from plant stems. Since the introduction of cotton cultivation from India, bast fibers have been in steady retreat in the region (Brite & Marston, 2013). Cotton was first cultivated in western India around 2800 BC. It spread to Southeast Asia, as Buddhist monks brought cotton to Java during a certain period in the 3rd to 5th centuries CE (Beckert, 2015). Its earliest introduction to China occurred during the Han Dynasty, primarily through the southwestern and southeastern coastal regions, including Hainan Island. In the pre-Qin period, *Shang Shu* (尚书) records the tribute of various products, mentioning the “island barbarians” (referring to the inhabitants of Southeast Asia), who wore fiber garments and wove “Ji bei (吉贝)” (岛夷卉服, 厥筐织贝) . According to *Hou Han Shu* (后汉书), residents in the regions of Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Hainan referred to cotton as “ji bei”. Therefore, the ancestors of Hainan Island were already familiar with spinning and weaving techniques using cotton during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, and these techniques have been continuously practiced to this day. The use of similar materials also implies the existence of comparable techniques and tools for transforming cotton into thread. This process includes several stages: removing cotton seeds, fluffing the cotton, and spinning the fibers into thread using either hand-spinning methods or spinning wheels.



Fig 5. The procedure of removing cotton seeds, fluffing the cotton, and spinning the fibers on Hainan



Fig 6. The procedure of removing cotton seeds, fluffing the cotton, and spinning the fibers Bali in Seraya-Kerajinan Tenun

With cotton as main fiber material, Li brocade during Han dynasty was in very simple style and purely white. *Han Shu* mentioned that the people of Zhuya and Dan'er regions(Hainan) all wore single-layered garments made of cloth, with a hole in the center for the head to pass through(珠崖、儋耳，民皆服布如单被，穿中央为贯头). In *Hou Han Shu*, it is described that Sun Xing, the Administrator of Zhuya, from Kuaiji, sent wide and fine cloth as tribute. However, the indigenous people found it burdensome and subsequently attacked the commandery and killed Sun Xing. The cloth was five feet wide, pure white, and resistant to stains (珠崖太守会稽孙幸，调广幅布献之，蛮不堪役，遂攻郡杀幸……幅广五尺，洁白不受污垢).

### 2.3 Mountain of dye

It is worth noting that the name "Li brocade" originates from the poem 'remarkable patterns and colors exhibited in the fabric, evoking a sense of splendor and vibrancy akin to clouds' (黎锦光辉艳若云). The hot and humid subtropical climate fosters the growth of numerous plants, which form the basis of dyeing materials. These include but not limited to fruits, leaves, roots, soil, and bark of trees. Over time, the weavers have also developed remarkably similar dyeing techniques. Unlike chemical dyes, which is the result of scientific research and experimentation, these dyeing knowledge and techniques are the outcome of the women's long-term interaction with their environment and the exchange between islands, which have been passed down and improved through generations, with each exchange further enhancing their understanding and cooperation with nature.

In terms of color usage, these textiles predominantly feature black, red, yellow, and blue, with supplementary hues such as pink, orange, brown, and purple. The primary reason for not using white as a base color is the practical consideration



of the mountainous living environment and the agricultural and hunting activities, which make white impractical due to its susceptibility to dirt and difficulty in washing (Feng, 2015). It is important to note that any color on textile is not the pure one produced by chemical processes; rather, it is transforming with the time of dyeing, using, and washing. Wild Chinese chestnut is one of the raw materials used for making red dye. The yellow dye is extracted from wild yellow ginger, as well as the bark and leaves of the maple tree. Even today, many Li women cultivate yellow ginger in their own fields. The blue dye (indigotin) is primarily derived from the leaves of native indigo plants and herbs. Indigo is a general term for several species capable of producing indigo dye, including about four or five commonly used varieties. One of these varieties is known as "false indigo." Despite its unremarkable appearance, false indigo requires minimal management. In many Li villages, we observed numerous clusters of false indigo thriving around houses, as well as in Timor and Bali.

The specific ingredients and procedures for dyeing vary across different villages and historical periods. These secrets are known only to experienced artisans who understand the intricate formulas. The choice of plant parts, the processes they undergo, and the resulting hues are all part of this specialized knowledge. Generally, the process involves placing materials such as leaves and roots into a large vat, where they are either pressed with stones overnight or crushed. The materials are then boiled and dried, with vinegar or lime water added to create the dye solution. Then is the process of immersing the threads into the dye solution, known as "dipping." This typically requires multiple repetitions—sometimes even dozens—of soaking and drying to achieve the desired effect. Completing a full dyeing cycle usually takes one to two years, or even longer. Unlike modern chemical dyes, some of these traditional colors become more vibrant with each wash, showcasing their unique and enduring qualities.



Fig 7. The procedure of picking yellow ginger, boiling threads, mixing and mashing, and drying, on Hainan Island.



Fig 8. The procedure of picking yellow ginger, boiling threads, mixing and drying, on Bali in Seraya-Kerajinan Tenun.



In addition, these regions have a unique dyeing technique known as ikat, which involves creating patterns through the binding and dyeing process. It is also called tie-dyeing is that the most crucial process of Ikat dyeing is in tying the threads (Huang, 1980). Although primarily using indigo dye, this method does not involve dyeing the entire thread. Instead, the design is conceptualized before weaving, and the sections of the thread that are not to be dyed are tightly bound with palm leaves or, more recently, strips of plastic. Then they are together dipped into the dye. This process can be done once to produce white designs on a colored background or repeated with several dyeing steps to create multi-colored patterns. After the dyeing process is complete, the bindings are carefully removed, and the threads are rinsed with clean water to remove any excess dye, then dried. This results in unique, blurred patterns on the warp threads. Once the warp threads are dyed, they are woven together with the weft threads to create a beautifully crafted tubular skirt.



Fig 9. Ikat setting in Bali, Timor, and Hainan

Ikat dyeing is also known as Xie Ran (纈染 in *Shi Shu* (史书)). In the Yuan Dynasty, the famous historian Hu Sansheng in the *Zi Zhi Tong Jian* (资治通鉴): 'Xie Ran, a handful of picking the knot with the thread, and then dyeing; both dyeing, then untie the knot, where the knot is the original color, the rest is into the dyeing carry on, the color of the class is called Xie'. (纈，撮采以线结之，而后染色；既染则解其结，凡结处皆原色，余则入染矣，其色斑斓谓之纈) In the Yuan Dynasty, Lv Cheng's *Lei He Ji* (耒鹤集) recorded that 'Dan and Wanzhou Li folk generally used "Xie Ran Li cloth" (儋、万两州黎族民间普遍使用“纈花黎布”). At that time the use of knotting and dyeing techniques woven into the "Xie Ran Li cloth" "Pan Ban cloth" "Hainan chessboard cloth" and so on has been the court tribute and marketed inland.

However, these dyeing techniques are not invented by any single group of people at ant specific moment, but continually transforming in the exchange between islands. After Qin and Han Dynasties, the core areas of Chinese maritime culture gradually moved from the coast of Shandong, Jiangsu and Zhejiang southward to Fujian and Guangdong. Especially since late Tang Dynasties, Guangzhou and Hainan was the most famous harbor of international trade in South and West Asia for its long-lasting prosperity (Xu, 1999). Until Ming, most part of the maritime trade routes transformed into a naval defense. According to the historical document *Zhu Fan Zhi – Hainan* (诸藩志-海南), it states that 'Hainan's subordinate regions, including Qiongsan, Chengmai, Lingao, and Wenchang, all had market ports.' (海南) 属邑：琼山、澄迈、临高、文昌...皆有市舶”。 Hainan became an important trading hub connecting Southeast Asia, engaging in business and tribute system. Besides importing, according to the historical document *Dao Yi Zhi Lue - Pu Ben* (岛夷志略-蒲奔), 'the goods involved in Southeast Asian trade included celadon porcelain, coarse bowls, Hainan cloth, iron wire, and jars of various sizes' (东南亚贸易之货，用青瓷器、粗碗、海南布、铁线、大小埕瓮之属). This indicates that Li brocade was exported to many regions in Southeast Asia. In one year in the 17<sup>th</sup>, over 400000 Indian textiles were imported into the archipelago. Cotton textiles produced in Hainan Island were traded to the islands of the Indonesian archipelago and the east coast of the Malay peninsula (Lin, 1993). Through these exchanges, various Li brocade techniques and processes,

such as spinning, weaving, dyeing, and embroidery, gradually improved over time. As a result, the distinct features of Li brocade and the shared aesthetics with ISEA began to take shape.

According to *Nanzhou Yiwu Zhi* (南州异物志), since Three Kingdom period (AD220-280), there has been five-color cloth(五色斑布), indicating the formation of Li brocade. Varieties of style and usages as recorded in the *Song Hui Yao Ji Gao*(宋會要輯稿), 'the Ministry of Revenue proposed that "orders be given to initiate the dispatch of tribute envoys and merchants." Among the listed items were various fabrics, including Fan Xian cloth, Hainan chessboard cloth, Hainan clamshell cloth, Hainan blue-and-white chessboard leather, Hainan white cloth, Hainan white cloth leather, and blue chessboard cloth twill, etc.' (諭令起發赴行在送納「蕃商販到」物品當中, 有蕃顯布、海南碁盤布、海南吉貝布、海南青花碁盤皮單、海南白布、海南白布皮單、青碁盤布紬.....等布疋). The vibrant colors of Li brocade were described by the Song dynasty scholar Zhou Qifei in his work *Lingwai Dai Da*(岭外代答): 'Hainan produces a wide variety of woven fabrics... adorned with multiple colors and intricate patterns. Four pieces combined can be used as a hanging screen, known as Li ornaments.'(海南所織, 則多織品矣.....間以五彩, 異紋炳然, 聯四幅可為幕者, 名曰黎飾). The Tang dynasty scholar Duan Gonglu recorded in his work *Bei Hu Lu*(北戶錄) that 'Qiongzhou produces five-colored rattan, combined with cases for holding books and woven with numerous patterns of running beasts and flying birds, intricately fine like silk.'(瓊州出五色藤、合子書囊之類, 花多織走獸飛禽, 細于綿綺). The vibrant style indicates the improved procedure. In the Song dynasty document *Zhu Fan Zhi - Ji Bei*(諸蕃志-吉貝), it is mentioned that 'Ji Bei trees belong to the mulberry family, with calyxes resembling hibiscus flowers. They have a half-inch long fluff, similar to goose down, with dozens of seeds. Southerners gather the soft fluff, use iron chopsticks to remove the seeds, and then spin the fluff by hand, without the need for complicated processes. This fluff is used to make fabric. The thickest variety is called "Dou Luo Mian," followed by "Fan Bu," then "Mu Mian," and finally "Ji Bei." Sometimes, these fabrics are dyed with various colors, featuring distinct patterns, with widths reaching five to six feet.'(吉貝樹類小桑, 萼類芙蓉, 絮長半寸許, 宛如鵝毳, 有子數十, 南人取其茸絮, 以鐵箸碾去其子, 即以手握茸就紡, 不煩緝績, 以之為布。最堅厚者謂之兜羅綿, 次曰番布, 次曰木棉, 又次曰吉布, 或染以雜色, 異紋炳然, 幅有闊至五六尺者). During Qing dynasty, in the work of *Guangdong Xin Yu*(廣東新語): 'Li brocade is out of Hainan, which is made of silk and cotton, woven into the characters of flowers and birds poetry, rich and lovely. White for hanging scroll, mixed colors for quilt. Four pieces connected is called Li curtain, and the gold silk is the top' (其出于瓊者, 或以吳綾越錦, 拆取色絲, 間以鵝毳之綿, 織成人物花鳥詩詞, 名曰黎錦, 濃麗可愛。白者為幃, 雜色者為被, 曰黎單。四幅相連曰黎幕, 亦曰黎幔, 以金絲者為上。).

Ikat making is prevalent across a wide area of ISEA and MSEA, predominantly among Daic and Austronesian speakers. Notably, it is absent from Taiwan and mainland China, aside from Li people on Hainan Island, where it remains a significant cultural practice. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Li people, who speak the Meifu dialect in the western part of Hainan Island (now Changjiang and Dongfang), preserved this unique technique, which has since been lost among the Li in other regions. Consequently, the Meifu Li ikat tradition holds substantial importance for understanding the history of weaving in Asia, as it represents the only remaining complex warp-ikat tradition among Daic language-speaking groups (Buckley, 2014). In contrast, other Daic speakers in Southeast Asia have transitioned to producing weft-faced and weft-patterned textiles, influenced by new techniques and looms (Gittinger & Lefferts, 1992; Boudot & Buckley, 2015. pp. 349).

### 3. Aesthetic flowing between islands

The weaving of intricate patterns is not only the essence of Li brocade but also a motif that reflects the aesthetic values and cultural identity of the islanders. From Austronesian speakers carrying body-tensioned loom to ISEA 4000-2500



years go to maritime silk road of cotton trade and culture exchange between Hainan and ISEA since Tang dynasty, copying of designs does occasionally occur, and the development of Li brocade in Hainan and textiles in ISEA led to the emergence of similar aesthetics. This shared aesthetics were shaped by the limitations and possibilities presented by the tools of loom, cotton, and dyeing materials, invoked and nourished by repetitive exchange. When copying of a design from a foreign source, weavers are likely to re-interpret the copied motif in terms of their own vocabulary of basic shapes rather than produce an exact copy (Buckley, 2012). Consequently, a similar visual world depicted on textiles with colored rhombic abstract motifs was created.



Fig 10. Textile from West Timor, Timor-Leste, and Hainan

As supplement to warp pattern, weft bands or variations of warp float patterning will also be created on major bands of motifs. Intuitively, it can be found that one of the basic features of Li brocade pattern modelling is straight line - horizontal line, vertical line and approximate 45 degree and 30-degree diagonal line, from these three kinds of lines and then purchased all kinds of diamond shapes, and then combined into all kinds of complex shapes (Shan, 2012). The most important reason is the use of cotton in body-tensioned loom. The tool limits the thickness of fiber, and even if the image expresses curves, the actual presentation of the Li brocade pattern will inevitably become geometric, producing the visual effect of a mosaic (Shan, 2012). Besides, The fabrication of curves requires the use of a significantly greater number of heddle rods compared to straight or diagonal lines, and the length of the loom's body cannot accommodate an excessive number of heddle rods.

In continues practice, the convergence is achieved between the order of tools and weavers' aesthetics. Li brocade's feature of linear, abstract, and repeated also shapes Li women's insight in sensing and expressing the world, across the limitation of tool (Hui, 2016). According to Li and ISEA weavers, the creation of textile typically does not involve a preliminary drawing or design process. Instead, the weavers rely on an automatic continuous transformation of the visible and invisible world within their minds, transitioning from reality to imagination (STÜBEL, 1937). This transformation occurs through the utilization of linear, abstract, and repeated elements, which are then freely produced on the loom.



For example, the frog patterns from Meifu Li are getting more and more abstract and simple, beyond the limitation of the tool, but the subjective creation on it. The frog pattern on the Li ethnic group's tube skirt undergoes a clear transition process. Initially, it is a highly figurative, vivid, and lively representation of a jumping frog. Over time, certain parts of the limbs may be simplified, or additional decorations may be added, until eventually, only simple lines are used to depict the pattern. Although the frog pattern on the Li brocade tube skirt goes through a progression from figurative to abstract and then to simplified forms, it consistently maintains a diamond-shaped body. This diamond pattern accounts for over 70% of all geometric patterns used (Sun, & Jiao, 2012). They even create and abstract elements that are not visible to us. For example, they symbolize the four seasons: the new tendrils of a gourd represent spring, the seeds of the fruit signify autumn, slices of sweet potato denote summer, and the continuous falling of the fruit represents winter. Additionally, abstract lines can also be used to depict smoke.



Fig 11. Fog motif on Li brocade from Hainan

The aesthetic described here does not involve being confined to the presentation of a particular pattern or the description of a theme. Instead, it focuses on the pure ability of expression. By abandoning the inherent nature of things and presenting their own perspectives, weavers express their way of life (Ranciere, 2006). They use techniques to recreate the essential forms, and it is through these forms that various perceptible events occur and collectively shape the world.

The unified aesthetic of the Islanders symbolizes a shared sensibility and a complete understanding of a certain life through the overall presentation of textiles (Ranciere, 2006; Behrence, 1900). The vitality manifested in this stylized form breaks free from narrow universal standards. It elevates to a more peaceful realm, allowing individuals to feel a sense of connection and escape loneliness while experiencing their own selves. Therefore, if we can truly explain these unconscious activities, that is to say, the principles in the construction of material forms that evoke corresponding emotions within them, it liberates them from confusion when facing themselves, no longer relying on universal standards. Thus, through the habits of everyday life, it brings forth the spirit of each community across the human-made borderline (Simmel, 1908).

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