

The Modern Conversion Type of Cultural Identity and Literacy Role in the Context of Traditional Craft Revitalization: The Case of Lacquerware of the Yi Ethnic Group in Liangshan, China

Chao Suo¹, Kerdsiri Noknoi^{2*}

¹Faculty of Fine-applied Arts and Cultural Science, Maharakham University Maharakham 44150, Thailand

²Faculty of Informatics, Maharakham University Maharakham 44150, Thailand

Corresponding author: Kerdsiri Noknoi, E-mail: Kerdsiri.n@msu.ac.th

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: September 27, 2024

Accepted: December 28, 2024

Published: January 31, 2025

Volume: 13 Issue: 1

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

This study examines the modernization and transformation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in China, focusing on its cultural identity and the role of literacy. As a vital symbol of the Yi people's material culture, this traditional craft embodies rich cultural values and aesthetic sensibilities. However, amidst societal changes, technological advancements, and external cultural influences, Liangshan Yi lacquerware faces both challenges and opportunities. To sustain its relevance, this heritage must adapt and innovate to meet contemporary demands. By combining qualitative research and creative practice, the study investigates how literacy—the ability to convey cultural narratives through craft—supports the preservation and evolution of Yi lacquerware. It offers insights and strategies for its sustainable development while contributing to the broader discourse on modernizing traditional crafts.

Key words: Liangshan Yi lacquerware, Traditional Craft, Revitalization, Cultural identity, Literacy Role, Modern Transformation

INTRODUCTION

China, as the source of Chinese civilization, is one of the oldest ancient countries in the world, with 56 ethnic groups blossoming, integrating with each other, and developing together, promoting the significant development and prosperity of ethnic culture. The Yi people, originating from ancient clan tribes whose history can be traced back to the Yan and Huang periods, are the sixth most significant ethnic minority in China, standing firmly on the stage of ethnic culture. Traditional crafts concentrate on the cultural values and practical experience of the Chinese nation and, at the same time, are an essential part of China's intangible cultural heritage. Chinese traditional culture is profound and profound and has profoundly influenced the East Asian cultural circle, establishing China as the center of the East Asian cultural circle. This influence has enabled China to occupy an unshakeable central position on the world cultural stage and become the leader of East Asian culture. In China, lacquer, ceramics, and bronze cultures are mutually reinforcing, constituting the glorious treasures of Chinese civilization. These cultures share the same long history and display their unique cultural charms. With the country's increasing concern and attention to traditional crafts, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has attracted the public's attention and become one of the hotspots of academic discussions. Facing the challenges of

globalization, Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquerware carries the heavy responsibility of protecting and passing on the national cultural identity and literacy role. As a precious heritage of Chinese traditional crafts, highlighting its unique value in modern society, closely integrating it with modern life, and nurturing new art forms have become essential and urgent issues in the strategy of "revitalizing Chinese traditional crafts". In order to meet this challenge, we need to uphold the concepts of innovation and openness, dig deep into the cultural connotation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and urge it to achieve innovation and transformation in the development process of modern society to meet the aesthetic needs of contemporary society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objective of this paper is to explore how cultural identity and literacy role influence and promote the modernization and transformation of Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts and to open up a new path for the innovative development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. This study not only provides scientific theoretical support and practical guidance for the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware but also aims to provide a reference for the modernization and transformation of other traditional crafts.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a combination of qualitative research and creative practice to collect research data and relevant information by field, gathering information from books, magazines, journals, and dissertations as literature sources. The literature study included fieldwork in Xide and Meigu counties in Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan, China, and interviews with locals. Using the academic concept of cultural identity and literacy role as a guide, the findings are presented through descriptive analyses. Finally, the physical works of lacquerware created by the author are shown with pictures.

Population and Sample

The study is divided into four populations: producers, researchers, consumers, and regulators, who interact through the conditions associated with the lacquerware culture of the ethnic minorities in the Liangshan Yi region. The specific categorization is as follows:

The participants came from three different groups:

1. Craftsmen in the Liangshan Yi region
2. Inheritors of intangible cultural heritage (Jiwu Wuqie, representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage project ‘Yi lacquerware painting techniques,’ Apuraha Village, Yiluo Township, Xide County, Liangshan Yi Region, China)
3. Local Crafts Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Industry

The researchers both were practitioners of modern lacquer art and came from institutions of higher learning. The consumers were either tourists or collectors. Finally, the regulators came from local and national governments. Inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, local lacquer craft industry, practitioners of modern lacquer art, universities, and colleges are the primary forms of Liangshan Yi lacquer in contemporary society, which is not only a transformation of the expression form but also a reconstruction of the cognitive system of technique, process and concept expression, and a modern transformation of the social value of the Liangshan Yi lacquer from a single one to a rich and diversified one. They are rooted in Chinese culture and people’s lives, and together, they shape and spread the spirit of Chinese art and cultural values in the new era.

RESULTS

Historical Overview of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware

Chinese lacquer craftsmanship has a long and brilliant history, and China was the first country to discover and use natural lacquer. The “Lacquer Bow” (Figure 1) unearthed at the site of the Cross Lake Bridge in Xiaoshan District, Hangzhou City, Zhejiang Province, has been identified by research as the earliest lacquer object ever found in the world and is also a typical representative of the Cross Lake Bridge culture. This significant discovery not only refreshes the 7,000-year historical record kept by the lacquer-painted wooden bowls unearthed at the Hemudu site in Zhejiang Province but also becomes a historical witness to the aesthetics of ancient Chinese craftsmanship and is a bridge in time, advancing our



Figure 1. The lacquer bow unearthed at the cross lake bridge site in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, with a history of 8,000 years, is one of the most critical physical witnesses to studying the development of Chinese lacquer ware.

Source: From http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art_1665719_58876428.html (February 2024)

understanding of the origins of human civilization to 8,000 B.C. This significant discovery highlights that the Chinese culture was the first in the world to discover lacquerware. This significant discovery highlights the wisdom and brilliance of ancient Chinese civilization and also demonstrates the vital contribution of the Chinese nation to the progress of world civilization.

Mr. Wang Shixiang’s “Painting and Decorating Record Commentary” roughly divides the history of Chinese lacquer art into the Neolithic period, when the lacquer craft was still in the exploration stage; the Shang, Western Zhou, Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, inlaid, inlaid, painted lacquer has reached a higher level; the Qin and Han periods, which formed 500 years of lacquer painting prosperity; the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Wei, Jin and North and South Dynasties periods, when fluctuations in the development of the lacquer craft were produced, but did not affect the development of the lacquer craft; the Tang and Song periods, when the main varieties of lacquer were available, and carved lacquer ascended to the historical peak; the Yuan, Ming and Qing periods, when different painting techniques were blended, ushering in a thousand words of Chinese lacquer craft. During the Tang and Song dynasties, the main lacquer varieties were available, and carved lacquer reached its historical peak; during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, different painting techniques were intermingled with each other, ushering in the Chinese lacquer craftsmanship of thousands of articles.

The Liangshan Yi, an ethnic group with a long history, enjoys the reputation of “one step across a thousand years,” which stems from their leapfrog development from slavery to socialism. Along with the development of the Liangshan Yi, there is also an important cultural heritage - “Liangshan Yi Lacquerware.” Liangshan Yi lacquerware, collectively known as “Zu gu Ji da su” in the Yi language, is an essential

carrier of Liangshan Yi culture and a disseminator of this unique cultural heritage. It has different characteristics from other lacquer ware, with unique vessel shapes, special decorative symbols, and the three primary colors of “black, red and yellow.” Liangshan Yi lacquer ware has become a symbol of the self-identification of this ethnic minority. As one of the most representative and essential branches of Chinese lacquer craft, it not only marks the specific stage of development of this traditional craft but also unites the profound collective wisdom of the Liangshan Yi people. The complex production process and unique color language fully demonstrate the wisdom and cultural creativity of the Liangshan Yi people accumulated during the long social practice, and these lacquerworks are not only practical objects in life but also vivid carriers of cultural inheritance and innovation. The development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a long and rich history, dating back to the Qin and Han Dynasties when the Yi ancestors had already mastered the lacquer painting technique. During the Tang and Song Dynasties, the lacquer-making skills of the Liangshan Yi evolved into a distinctive style and craftsmanship. However, due to the relative scarcity of direct historical records and archaeological evidence, it is challenging to establish an exact timeline detailing its developmental lineage. Despite these difficulties, the profound cultural significance and unique artistic value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware secure its prominent place in Chinese arts and crafts history.

Situated in southwest China, Xide County of Liangshan Yi is known as the birthplace of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Liangshan Yi lacquerware was ubiquitous in the lives of the Yi ancestors and is considered one of the most important symbols of Yi culture. Since then, this art has been passed down for nineteen generations, with a long history of over 1,700 years. Until now, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been widespread in Yi settlements, integrated into people’s daily lives, and has become an indispensable symbol of material culture and cultural identity and literacy role. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only a witness to the customs of the Liangshan Yi area through the ages but also a bridge connecting the area with the outside world and an essential carrier for disseminating China’s excellent traditional culture.

Forms of Expression and Craftsmanship of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware

The lacquerware art of the Liangshan Yi people is famous for its unique “black, red, and yellow” three primary colors and unique decorative symbols, which are very different from the lacquerware styles of other places. It is not only a reflection of the Yi people’s material culture but also an important symbol of their cultural identity and literacy role. The Yi people show the outside world their rich traditional culture and unique aesthetic concepts through these exquisite lacquerware.

The traditional tattoos of the Liangshan Yi people are deeply rooted in their native way of life, unique geographical environment, long history, and profound religious beliefs, thus giving rise to a rich and colorful artistic connotation. These decorations not only cover a wide range of subjects,

from daily life to mysterious legends but also have unique and distinctive modeling, which is representative. They have embodied in Liangshan Yi lacquerware and left a deep mark on local architecture, silver jewelry, and costumes. The patterns of Liangshan Yi lacquer ware come from nature and life; each pattern carries deep cultural meaning and unique symbolism. These patterns are not only the sincere expression of the native Yi people’s worship of nature but also the artistic reproduction of their delicate observation and deep understanding of life. Whether it is the mountains and rivers, the sun, the moon and the stars, or the birds, the fish, and the insects, all of them are cleverly integrated into the creation of lacquer wares through the wisdom of the Yi lacquerers. The traditional decorations of Liangshan Yi lacquerware cover a wide variety of motifs, which are roughly divided into six categories: natural decorations, animal decorations, plant decorations, production decorations, life decorations, and humanistic decorations. These decorations are simple and detailed but also contain the yearning of the Yi ancestors for life, the wish for prosperity, and a good harvest.

Natural decorations such as sun and moon patterns, landscape patterns, etc. These patterns use the sun, moon, mountains, and rivers as creative elements. The Yi people worshiped mountains. There are special sacrificial activities for the mountain gods, such as praying for the blessing of the mountain gods on the Yi people, which implies the respect and reverence of the Yi forefathers for the natural world. The lacquerware with the mountain motifs originates from this nature worship (Zhao & Liu, 2022).

There are more animal decorations related to lacquerware, such as bull’s-eye patterns, cockle patterns, cock-eye patterns, fish-eye patterns, snake patterns, goat’s horn patterns, horse’s tooth patterns, sheep’s horn patterns, etc. This kind of pattern is like “thread,” and the specific form of the cockle pattern is “jagged.” The specific form of the bull’s eye pattern is like “thread,” and the specific form of the cock’s crown pattern is like “jagged.” This kind of pattern is mainly based on animals such as cows, goats, and chickens, which represent the memories of the Yi ancestors for the nomadic life as well as the desire for a happy life, which not only has a decorative role but is also a symbol of the Yi ancestors. It is not only decorative but also a reflection of the cultural identity and literacy role and spiritual beliefs of the Yi ancestors.

Garlic petal motifs, flower petal motifs, melon motifs, and fern precarious motifs dominate botanical motifs. Garlic petal motifs are two-layered pike shapes, with the inner layer in dark colors. In contrast, the outer layer is expressed with unique curves and layering, symbolizing the complexity of life. On the other hand, the petal pattern shows the outline of the flower’s shape and is composed of a combination of lines and surfaces. The fern’s precarious pattern, with its smooth curves and interlocking textures, symbolizes the resilience and vitality of life. These patterns artistically transform the gifts of nature, showing the Yi ancestors’ love for life and respect for nature.

The production-type decorations are often used to express life and respond to production. Typical production-type decorations include fishing net patterns, warp and weft patterns,

fingernail patterns, fire sickle patterns, etc. Fingernail and fire sickle patterns are the most common. Among them, the nail pattern and the fire sickle pattern are the most common, often drawn on the edge of the vessels. The nail pattern symbolizes an individual's strength and courage by simulating the nails' shape. This kind of pattern depicts the production and lifestyle of the Yi ancestors, showing the hard work and wisdom of the Yi ancestors and their rich creativity. At the same time, it also demonstrates the resilience and spirit of the Yi ancestors in the face of adversity.

Taken together, the above decorations show the profound reverence and respect of the Yi ancestors for the natural world, who drew inspiration from nature and skillfully incorporated elements of nature into their artistic creations. In the traditional tattoos of the Yi people, a unique system of tattoos has been constructed. Elements such as the shapes of plants and animals, the sun, the moon, the stars, and the tools of daily life and production are widely used. Objective objects such as the sun, the moon, the stars, mountain ranges, and waves of water are expressed with primitive and simple creative techniques. With their unique forms and styles, these decorations show the charm and diversity of Yi culture and provide us with a valuable window to deeply understand and appreciate this ancient ethnic culture. Each kind of decoration contains rich cultural connotations and a deep historical background, which is the pursuit and expression of the Yi people's beauty and their love and reverence for nature and life.

During the historical development of the Liangshan Yi (Figure 2), the Yi ancestors' reverence and worship of totem, religion, and nature have profoundly shaped their cognitive concepts. This deep emotion gradually cultivated their unique perception of colors, which was undoubtedly influenced by the far-reaching influence of the native culture of the Yi people. Therefore, the lacquerware colors of the Liangshan Yi people have gradually formed their unique artistic language. The traditional lacquerware of Liangshan Yi is mainly made of three primary colors: red, yellow, and black, and the formation of this color scheme is not accidental. These three colors are not only widely used in lacquerware but also occupy an essential position in the costumes, buildings, and decorative paintings of the Yi. In the long historical evolution and exceptional natural environment, they gradually formed a unique and distinctive "three-color culture."

The three primary colors of black, red, and yellow have a profound historical connection with the Yi people's folk culture and religious beliefs in Liangshan (Figure 3). In the traditional culture of the Yi people, the concept of "blackness" is deeply rooted in people's hearts, and blackness is regarded as the representative of the earth, which nurtures the growth of all things in nature. The ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people regarded the black tiger as their ancestor because black represents bravery, boldness, and nobility and symbolizes dignity, solemnity, and prestige. Similarly, the ancestors of Liangshan Yi also call themselves "Nuosu," which means black, so "Nuosu" means black people. In the hierarchy of Liangshan Yi, "Black Yi" is regarded as a noble class. As the ancestors of Liangshan Yi have particular reverence for



Figure 2. Liangshan Yi Lacquerware with bull's eye patterns

Source: Photographed by Suochao at Meigu County Museum, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan (April 2019)



Figure 3. Liangshan Yi Lacquerware color display

Source: Photographed by Suochao in Xide County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan (April 2019)

blacks, they will use blacks in religious ceremonies, and "Bimo" sacrificial activities, as in Tusi's battles. The black color reflects the Yi ancestors' respect for history and cultural heritage and highlights their spirit of perseverance and bravery (Li & Wu, 2022). Therefore, in the proportion of colors in Liangshan Yi lacquerware, compared with red and yellow, black dominates and is often used as the base color to cover the entire surface of the lacquerware, with red and yellow being relatively rare. From the perspective of color composition, black has no hue, and its low brightness can play a role in stabilizing the color of the picture, giving it a sense of order. Lacquerware Eagle Claw Cup is precisely a microcosm of Liangshan Yi culture. In this land, the eagle is endowed with a sacred status, symbolizing power and dignity and becoming a symbol of rank. Only the noble blood can have the privilege to use the "Eagle Claw Cup." In the process of making the "Eagle Claw Cup," the cup body is painted black, the nails retain their original color, and the claws are oriented towards the four directions of the southeast, northwest, and northwest, representing the vastness of the universe, which not only shows the majesty of the design but is also an in-depth embodiment of the power of deterrence.

The red color in Liangshan Yi lacquerware symbolizes the attitude of the Yi ancestors towards life; red represents bravery, passion, and boldness (Figure 4). This love stems from the reverence for fire and incorporates mysterious religious colors. In the Yi folklore, red is regarded as the color of life, and many witchcraft activities are completed with the help of fire; for example, there are many fire-related rituals in the activities of Bi Mo; in addition, there is the famous "Torch Festival" of the Liangshan Yi people. The Yi people revere the sun and fear fire; red colors symbolize fire. This sacred emotion towards fire is a mysterious function



Figure 4. Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Eagle Claw Cup Wine
Source: Photographed by Suochao at Meigu County Museum, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan (March 2019)

of religion and a deeper reflection of the Yi ancestors' high respect for nature (Zhang & Yang, 2023).

In addition, yellow has a special meaning in the "three-color culture" of the Liangshan Yi people. It is favored because of its bright and warm visual sensation and because it carries the far-reaching meanings of good luck, light, hope, and prosperity. In Yi culture, yellow represents a symbol of goodness, an expression of people's desire for a happy life, and it is the source of all things and the evolution of all things, with its unchanging and common sense of morality. The three primary colors of black, red, and yellow are intertwined; the colors are bright and vivid, contrasting, simple and complex, and the unique decorative aesthetics of the Yi ethnic group are reflected in the "three-color culture" to the fullest extent. From tableware to furniture, furniture to architecture, the application of the three primary colors in these material fields makes life more colorful, and each color and decoration follows the traditional law, conveying the corresponding cultural symbolism. In conclusion, the three primary colors of Liangshan Yi lacquerware are visual art and the embodiment of the deep cultural heritage of the Yi people. By applying these colors, the Yi people convey their understanding of nature, respect for life, and cultural heritage.

Liangshan Yi lacquerware is an ancient national traditional craft whose long history and unique production process reflect the unique aesthetic consciousness of the Yi people. Liangshan Yi ancestors used unique ecological resources, so a large number of lacquerware are made of wood; after a long period of nomadic labor practices under the influence of the lacquerware from the original single wood gradually expanded to the leather tire, leather and wood tire, horn tire, bamboo tire, bamboo and wood tire, etc.; which the majority of the wood tire and the leather tire, mixed tire, horn tire, followed by a relatively small number of bamboo tires, the raw material is different, the significance of the different. Different raw materials have different meanings. In the practice of life, they produce characteristic tableware, wine tools, horse tools, weapons, Bi Mo magic weapons, and so on. In the production process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, first of all, the selection of raw materials for the carcass is exceptionally delicate; from the altitude of 3,500 meters above the alpine zone to take suitable Zijing wood as raw materials, digging pits will be buried in the ground under the shade of the wood dry for several months, and then take out at the right time. The purpose of doing so is not easy to crack and deform after drying, with special tools to pluck out the inner

belly, polishing the appearance; spinning tools only flat hook-shaped double-edged digging knives and chisel-shaped iron knives, and all the processes are primitive pedal hand spinning, in the production of any measuring tools, rely on the mastery of the tool's degree of force and angle. The lacquer painting technique of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is unique, and the three primary colors of black, red, and yellow are the main colors. When the lacquer is painted, the filtered raw lacquer is used to add potash to the base, and then the raw lacquer is twisted and ground with the modulation of silver, Zhu, Shi Huang, and other natural mineral pigments to make the red and yellow colors at the end (Yang & He, 2024).

Lacquerware reproduces nature and life with simple lines and abstract decorations, combining practicality and artistry. From the selection of raw materials for the wood to the medium of lacquer, lacquerware patterns, and colors are incredibly delicate, especially true of the tools used to paint it. It is made of high-quality bamboo and wood pieces, fine twine, and goat's beard from the brush, goat's beard with toughness; the position of the peak of the brush is a diagonal incision in order to draw in the process of dynamic rotation when the brush is pressed, it will rebound on its own, an effect that other brushes cannot do. In addition to technical skills, using tools has much to do with fine lines and ornamentation (Figure 5).

Modern Conversion of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Cultural Identity and Literacy Role in the Context of Traditional Craft Revitalization

In the wave of globalization and modernization, the importance of cultural identity and literacy role has become increasingly pronounced and a critical factor in the search for self-orientation and a sense of belonging for individuals and people. Cultural identity and literacy role is a set of characteristics unique to a particular culture and inherent to a specific nation. It is reflected in the confirmation of individual identity and the enhancement of the sense of group identity, but also in its role as a force for resisting the impact of foreign cultures, protecting the uniqueness of national cultures, and reinforcing common values. Cultural identity and literacy role is the inheritance of historical experience and a process of continuous construction and remodeling in real life.

In the long course of history, the Liangshan Yi region has a unique social structure shaped by its strict hierarchical system, which affects the distribution of resources and materials and reflects the distinctive hierarchical division in the use of lacquer ware. In the past, the use of different lacquerware in the Liangshan Yi area symbolized the different levels of power of the Yi; only the upper-status Yi, such as the Tusi and the Black Yi, were allowed to use beautifully painted lacquerware, while the general White Yi could only limit themselves to using simple black lacquer products. After the change of local power and cultural leadership, as well as the continuous advancement of the social process, the lacquerware of Liangshan Yi gradually changed from a symbol of power and rank to a vital symbol carrying the cultural identity and literacy role of the whole Yi group. The cultural connotation it represents has also evolved from a single social



Figure 5. The process of painting Liangshan Yi lacquerware
Source: Photographed by Suochao at the Lacquer art research institute in Xide County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan (April 2019)

class symbol to a rich expression of national culture. This change shows the adaptability and development of Yi culture and highlights the reinterpretation of traditional culture in modern society. As an essential representative of traditional craftsmanship, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is an inheritance of material culture and a continuation of cultural identity and literacy role (Wang & Chen, 2023).

With the change of information and the intensification of foreign cultures, the development of traditional crafts has had ups and downs, and these ancient skills have encountered the significant impact of modern industrialization on the path of independent development. At the same time, political background and economic factors have profoundly impacted them. Many traditional crafts are facing unprecedented challenges, and the significance of their existence has begun to change to a carrier of culture. Liangshan Yi lacquerware, which is in the marginal position, is also profoundly affected. It is gradually detached from the aesthetic demand and function of modernization. The traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware lacks inherent creativity and vitality and was once marginalized and appeared very passive. How to maintain the deep cultural heritage of Liangshan Yi lacquerware while realizing its modern transformation and innovation and ensure that the lacquerware not only meets the contemporary aesthetic needs but also continues the unique cultural identity and literacy role of Liangshan Yi is an issue that we need to pay close attention to and think deeply about at present. The cultural identity and literacy role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is embodied in the specific artifact itself and in the profound cultural connotation of the whole traditional craft system it represents. In modern society, the protection and development of this cultural heritage is of far-reaching significance for the Yi ethnic group and even the Chinese nation.

Since the end of the twentieth century, the Chinese Government has gradually increased its emphasis on protecting and transmitting traditional crafts through a series of policy adjustments. On May 20, 1997, the State Council promulgated the Regulations on the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts, which were designed to provide exceptional protection and support for those “crafts and techniques

that have enjoyed a high degree of fame both at home and abroad.” (Shao et al., 2023). Marking the recognition of the importance of arts and crafts and concrete actions to protect them at the national level, the State Council issued the “Plan for the Revitalization of China’s Traditional Arts and Crafts” on March 12, 2017, which clarified the importance of revitalizing traditional arts and crafts in China in the future. On this basis, in June 2008, “Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Painting Technique” was approved by the State Council to be included in the “Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List”. This initiative recognizes the unique culture and craftsmanship of the Liangshan Yi and reflects the state’s attitude towards protecting multicultural and ethnic heritage. Under the policy environment of protection and development of traditional crafts in China, cultural identity and literacy role has also found new forms of expression and adaptive policies in modern society.

Cultural innovation

The innovation of traditional crafts is a complex process involving creative conversion and innovative development, which not only requires modernization and improvement of the materials and techniques of traditional crafts but also focuses on cultural continuity in the innovation process (Figure 6). While maintaining the original traditional cultural connotations, the cultural concepts of the new era are injected to meet contemporary aesthetic needs. The cultural connotation in the Liangshan Yi lacquer ware is mainly presented in decoration and color; traditional Liangshan Yi lacquer ware decoration is more complex, the form of most of the two sides of the continuous, separate decorations, and so on. The content is mostly birds and animals, with the sun, the moon, and the stars as the creative elements. Although the traditional Yi decorations have excellent national characteristics, they are detached from contemporary society’s times and aesthetic needs. In the process of innovation, it is necessary to combine with the aesthetic needs of people nowadays, deeply excavate and refine the traditional Yi cultural elements, decompose, refine, and reorganize the traditional Yi decorations, and use innovative forms to



Figure 6. Innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Source: Drawn and photographed by Suochao (June 2024)

make the language of traditional Yi decorations closer to the contemporary aesthetic needs. Taking the lacquer artwork “Yi - Cloud” as an example, the author has combined the traditional Yi pattern “Horse Tooth Pattern” with the traditional Yi pattern “Horsetooth Pattern”, which is the most popular pattern in the world. It is broken up, refined, sorted, and re-constructed so that while highlighting the regional culture, it adheres to the aesthetic principle of “Seeing the plain and embracing the simple, the Great Dao is the simplest,” explores diversified innovations, closely links the lacquer art with contemporary life, and passes on the new aesthetics of life with the lacquer art.

Brand culture building

The traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware has experienced ups and downs in the process of development, but due to the impact of industrialization and the dividends brought to the business people by the fast-food era, the medium of lacquerware has been gradually replaced by industrial lacquer from the original natural lacquer (Figure 7). The low-quality lacquerware can only satisfy the market’s demand for quality and is conducive to the living protection of the craft. This change has eroded the original cultural connotation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware over the past thousand years and violated the “temperature of craftsmanship” emphasized by traditional skills. This has led to confusion in the market, low prices of lacquerware, and crude painting techniques, which have gradually reduced these once-artistic works to low-end consumer goods in the tourist market. The rise of cultural heritage at the beginning of the 21st century has led to a renewed emphasis on the value of many traditional crafts. Traditional crafts are used as «knocking bricks» for discovering culture and have the potential for branding and cultural construction to enhance their value. The development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware must refrain from following the tradition and ignoring the market demand, nor should the market law determine the craft’s direction (Yu, 2023). In the process of inheritance and development, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has gradually shaped its unique national cultural



Figure 7. Liangshan Yi Lacquerware works “Yi - Clouds” Series

Source: Painted and photographed by Suochao (June 2024)

brand. However, the traditional lacquerware production process is long and complicated, with complex patterns and decorations that cannot be popularly integrated into modern cultural aesthetics. In order to combine this traditional craft with contemporary aesthetics, artists, and designers can be invited to carry out joint creation and design in the process of innovation. The unique patterns and colors of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be refined and generalized, and new vitality can be given to it through innovative application. With the innovative ideas of “artists” and “designers,” we can build a new height of contemporary Yi brand culture. Not only can it fundamentally change the problem of complex inheritance and output, but it also promotes the benign cycle of craft inheritance, promotes the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, maintains the cultural identity and literacy role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and enhances the cultural confidence of Liangshan Yi (Li & Zhang, 2023).

Integration of teaching practices

Under the strategic background of revitalizing traditional crafts, arts and crafts, as a treasure of traditional Chinese culture, through the initiative of “traditional crafts in school,” can explore the connotation and value of traditional crafts, respond to how it can be integrated with education to achieve modernity of expression, and the revitalization of the inheritance of traditional crafts and the protection of non-heritage have revelation and demonstrative significance. It is also inspirational and exemplary for revitalizing and inheriting traditional crafts and protecting non-heritage. It not only deepens the understanding and recognition of traditional crafts by institutions and students but also dramatically enhances the national cultural self-confidence and injects new vitality into the inheritance of excellent traditional culture.

As an essential part of intangible cultural heritage, traditional crafts are receiving extensive attention from universities, scholars, local governments, enterprises, and other social sectors, and the craze of crafts revival has quietly emerged.

The establishment of traditional culture research and practice platform in colleges and universities, the opening of courses related to traditional crafts, and the integration of traditional skills into education and teaching, especially the detailed introduction of the history, craftsmanship, and cultural connotations of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can not only promote the inheritance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also enrich the content of education, and promote the development of regional cultural characteristics, and carry forward the spirit of national culture. Colleges and universities are committed to combining the traditional craft knowledge system and building a complete knowledge and value system to spread traditional craft culture education. Classroom teaching and traditional experience are important carriers and paths for inheriting traditional crafts in colleges and universities (Wang & Ma, 2023).

Therefore, colleges and universities can cultivate traditional crafts teachers and establish workshops on Liangshan Yi lacquerware while offering theoretical and practical classes on Liangshan Yi lacquerware to the whole university and exploring traditional crafts study activities. Through systematic study, students can understand the artistic characteristics of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and the spiritual connotation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware culture. Secondly, the non-heritage masters of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be invited to the campus. A master teacher's studio can be set up on the campus, where the master teacher shares his/her production techniques and inheritance experience so that the teachers and students of colleges and universities can understand and learn the production techniques of the traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and lay the foundation for the innovation and conversion of the lacquerware in the later stage. Introducing the concept of contemporary art and combining it with the traditional craftsmanship of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, this fusion not only preserves the cultural connotation but also makes the lacquerware more in line with the contemporary aesthetic demand through innovative design, which not only shows the perfect fusion of tradition and modernity but also injects new vitality into the Liangshan Yi ethnic group. The mode of "fusion of industry and education" enhances the effectiveness of cooperation between industry, academia, and research, helps the industrial development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and allows for the dynamic inheritance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Establishing the Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Non-heritage Cultural and Creative Competition and constructing the mode of "course+competition+exhibition" to integrate the Liangshan Yi Lacquerware with more new vitality.

I am starting international cultural exchange programs to bring Liangshan Yi lacquerware into the international market as a representative of Chinese traditional culture. International exhibitions and exchange activities increase the interest of outsiders in Liangshan Yi lacquerware and enhance the international influence of Chinese culture and the cultural self-confidence of the Liangshan Yi people. Develop digital teaching resources, such as virtual reality (VR) experience and online teaching videos, so that the experience can show the delicate production process of Liangshan Yi

lacquerware intuitively and interactively. This innovative teaching method not only enhances the fun of the learning experience but also significantly improves the effect of teaching and enables the students to understand and appreciate the rich connotation of this traditional craft more deeply.

The innovative development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is combined with education through multi-level and multi-form educational activities inside and outside the university, the building of excellent traditional cultural mutual aid paths, as well as the innovative application of modern technology, so that the cultural essence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be more widely spread and recognized. It not only helps the inheritance and protection of traditional crafts but also enriches the content of education, carries forward the regional cultural characteristics, enhances the national cultural self-confidence, and maintains the cultural diversity of the world.

DISCUSSION

The discussion emphasizes the cultural, historical, and educational significance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, a traditional craft deeply rooted in the identity and heritage of the Yi people. This craft exemplifies the integration of artistry, functionality, and cultural symbolism, showcasing the unique "three-color culture" of black, red, and yellow, which embodies reverence for nature, life, and ancestral beliefs. However, the challenges posed by globalization, industrialization, and modernization have threatened its traditional relevance, necessitating innovative strategies for its revitalization. Integrating traditional craftsmanship with contemporary education, such as incorporating lacquerware into university curricula, establishing master workshops, and introducing digital teaching resources, demonstrates its potential to bridge tradition and modernity. These efforts preserve the cultural connotations and aesthetic principles of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and align them with contemporary aesthetic and functional needs. Furthermore, international cultural exchange programs and branding initiatives highlight its global significance, fostering cross-cultural appreciation and enhancing the cultural confidence of the Yi people. By leveraging modern technology, fostering collaboration between academia and industry, and promoting educational literacy, Liangshan Yi lacquerware emerges as a dynamic medium for cultural continuity and innovation, contributing to the broader discourse on preserving and developing intangible cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The revitalization of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is a compelling model for integrating traditional craftsmanship into contemporary culture, education, and industry. Through the cultural innovation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, artists and designers can refine and reimagine traditional patterns and colors, bridging ancient aesthetics with modern sensibilities. This process preserves the cultural identity and literacy role and artistry of the Yi people, emphasizing the value of maintaining traditional crafts in the face of globalization and industrialization. Efforts to transform Liangshan Yi

lacquerware into a cultural brand enhance the public's cultural awareness and foster a deeper connection to national heritage. Inviting collaboration between artisans and contemporary designers reinvigorates the craft's relevance and enables its sustainable growth, promoting cultural pride and self-confidence within the Yi community.

Additionally, embedding traditional crafts like Liangshan Yi lacquerware into educational practices has far-reaching implications for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Establishing university-based research platforms, hands-on workshops, and collaborations with master artisans supports the craft's transmission and innovation while fostering an appreciation for traditional arts among the younger generation. Initiatives like digital teaching resources and international exchange programs broaden the scope of cultural heritage education, ensuring that the cultural legacy of Liangshan Yi lacquerware reaches a global audience. Ultimately, integrating traditional crafts into education enriches cultural diversity, reinforces cultural identity and literacy role and literacy role, and contributes to the global understanding of China's unique heritage, promoting these traditions' resilient and evolving nature in the modern world.

REFERENCES

- Ba, M. Q. (1998). *Divine figures, witch symbols, and ritual symbols: An examination of the ghost beliefs and witch rituals of the Greater Liangshan Yi*. Ethnic Art.
- Feng, M. (1988). Exploring the meaning of Liangshan Yi motifs. *Ethnic Art*, 4, 65–72.
- Liu, Y. (2004). *The thousand-year Liangshan: A civilization scattered in parchment scrolls*. Sichuan Literature and Art Publishing House.
- Li, J., & Wu, X. (2022). The Evolution and Modernization of Traditional Crafts: A Case Study of Yi Ethnic Lacquerware in Liangshan, China. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 12(3), 234-252.
- Li, X., & Zhang, Y. (2023). Creative Transformation of Excellent Traditional Culture of Ethnic Minorities and Innovative Development Path Research—Taking the Yi Lacquerware of Xiaoliangshan as an Example. *Advances in Social Sciences*, 11(5), 123-135.
- Museum of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. (1982). *Atlas of Liangshan Yi cultural relics*. Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House.
- Pan, S. Y. (1999). *Exploration of the artistic beauty of lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi tribe*. Sichuan Cultural Relics Press.
- Shen, F. W. (1998). *Lacquerware in modern Chinese art*. Hebei Fine Arts Publishing House.
- Shao, Q., Hua, M., & Li, X. L. (2023). *Branding of Chinese traditional crafts: History and practice*. Sichuan University Press.
- Wei, A. (2004). *Studies on the culture and art of the Liangshan Yi*. Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House.
- Wu, J. (1993). *Customs of the Liangshan Yi*. Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House.
- Yang, D. (2012). The three colors of Yi culture and their metaphorical meanings. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies*, 3, 45–48.
- Wang, L., & Ma, J. (2023). Revitalizing Traditional Chinese Lacquerware: A Cross-Generational Approach to Craft Innovation and Cultural Identity. *Asian Journal of Anthropology*, 31(4), 378-396.
- Wang, L., & Chen, J. (2023). Protection, Inheritance, and Revitalization of Traditional Crafts: A Case Study of Yi Lacquerware. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(2), 98-112.
- Yang, M., & He, W. (2024). The Role of Literacy in Craft Modernization: A Case Study of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware. *Journal of Folk Art and Design*, 18(1), 45-62.
- Yu, Y. N. (2023). Study on the path of living conservation of Yi lacquer ware painting techniques. *Research on Intangible Cultural Heritage*, 1, 78–83.
- Zhang, F. (1998). *Ancient cultural history of the Yi*. Yunnan Education Press.
- Zhang, Y., & Yang, H. (2023). Cultural Identity and Craft Preservation in Contemporary China: The Role of Indigenous Knowledge and Modern Literacy. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26(2), 119-135.
- Zhao, H., & Liu, Q. (2022). Sustainable Cultural Innovation Practice: Heritage Education in the Revitalization of Yi Lacquerware. *Sustainability*, 15(2), 1194.
- Zhu, D. (1992). *Liangshan Yi folk art*. Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House.