

**A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF PATTERN
CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL
MEANING IN BAILING MIAO BATIK**

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2025

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CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL
MEANING IN BAILING MIAO BATIK**

by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As I pursued my doctoral degree, I knew it would be a lonely and challenging journey. During this time, I overcame many difficulties and honed my mental toughness. I also made many friends for whom I am very grateful.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Siti Rohaya Yahaya. Her insightful advice and unwavering encouragement have been instrumental in transforming me from a novice researcher into the researcher I am today. Her patience, wisdom, and dedication have profoundly impacted my growth.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my family. Without their unwavering support, this journey would not have been possible. Their constant encouragement, financial assistance, and emotional backing have been the pillars that sustained me throughout this academic pursuit. Their love gave me the strength to persevere, and their support made it possible for me to focus entirely on my research and goals.

A special note of thanks goes to my dear friends, whose companionship and support have made my doctoral studies abroad a joyful and enriching experience. Their presence helped me navigate the ups and downs of this journey with a positive outlook.

Finally, I am also deeply grateful to the participants who generously shared their knowledge and experiences with me during my research. Their insights and expertise were crucial to the completion of this study, and their contributions have significantly enriched the content and findings of my dissertation.

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KAJIAN SEMIOTIK TERHADAP CIRI-CIRI CORAK DAN MAKNA BUDAYA DALAM BATIK MIAO BAILING

ABSTRAK

Batik merupakan salah satu seni tradisional tekstil dan warisan budaya yang terkenal di China. Teknik rintangan dan celupan tradisional dapat menghasilkan pelbagai reka corak yang indah dan bermakna, terutamanya dalam kalangan etnik Bailing Miao. Batik Miao diiktiraf kerana gaya reka coraknya yang unik, merangkumi pelbagai produk fesyen dan kraf. Corak batik ini menjadi simbol budaya dan estetika yang mencerminkan identiti etnik Bailing Miao. Keunikannya berbanding kumpulan etnik lain di China terletak pada kepelbagaian bentuk, garisan, dan komposisi pada kain. Setiap corak membawa motif dan makna yang dapat mengungkap sejarah, adat resam, sosial, dan kepercayaan masyarakat Miao. Namun, kemajuan teknologi, pengaruh budaya asing, dan peredaran masa telah menyebabkan identiti batik Miao semakin terhakis. Pasaran semasa untuk produk batik juga kurang menekankan elemen reka corak tradisional sehingga menyebabkan generasi muda semakin kurang mengenali dan menghargai keaslian corak batik tersebut. Justeru, kajian ini dibangunkan untuk mengenal pasti dan menganalisis ciri-ciri reka corak batik Miao, termasuk motif, warna, gaya dan komposisi, serta menjelaskan makna dan simbol yang terkandung dalam budaya etnik Miao. Pendekatan kualitatif dan teori semiotik telah digunakan bagi mengkaji ciri-ciri dan simbol budaya dalam reka corak batik Miao di Danzhai. Kaedah triangulasi data, yang melibatkan pengumpulan data daripada dokumen, temu bual dan pemerhatian, dianalisis melalui penggunaan perisian NVivo dan analisis tematik. Seramai 13 orang peserta yang merangkumi pakar tekstil, pereka, dan pewaris budaya, dengan 70 hasil karya batik Miao telah dipilih sebagai sampel

kajian. Dapatan daripada hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa batik Miao mempamerkan ciri-ciri reka corak dan makna yang mendalam terutamanya daripada sudut motif. Berdasarkan dapatan ini, satu model reka bentuk tradisional telah dibangunkan bagi menyokong pemeliharaan warisan batik Miao. Selain itu ia juga bagi meningkatkan kesedaran budaya di kalangan generasi muda, dan mengukuhkan lagi nilai batik Miao sebagai satu bentuk seni tradisional tekstil di China. Model ini menawarkan panduan praktikal yang menggabungkan elemen reka corak tradisional dan kontemporari agar terus berkembang, selari dengan pembangunan lestari batik Miao.

A SEMIOTIC STUDY OF PATTERN CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL MEANING IN BAILING MIAO BATIK

ABSTRACT

Batik is one of the renowned traditional textile arts and cultural heritages in China. The traditional resist and dyeing techniques produce a variety of beautiful and meaningful patterns, especially among the Bailing Miao ethnic group. Miao batik is recognized for its unique design style, encompassing a wide range of fashion and craft products. These batik patterns serve as cultural and aesthetic symbols that reflect the identity of the Bailing Miao ethnic group. Its uniqueness, compared to other ethnic groups in China, lies in the diversity of shapes, lines, and compositions on the fabric. Each pattern carries motifs and meanings that reveal the history, customs, social practices, and beliefs of the Miao community. However, technological advancements, foreign cultural influences, and the passage of time have led to the erosion of Miao batik's identity. The current market for batik products also places less emphasis on traditional design elements, causing younger generations to become less familiar with and appreciative of the authenticity of these batik patterns. Therefore, this study was developed to identify and analyse the design characteristics of Miao batik, including motifs, colours, styles, and compositions, as well as to explain the meanings and symbols embedded in the Miao ethnic culture. A qualitative approach and semiotic theory were used to examine the characteristics and cultural symbols in the Miao batik designs in Danzhai. The data triangulation method, involving data collection from documents, interviews, and observations, was analysed using NVivo software and thematic analysis. A total of 13 participants, including textile experts, designers, and cultural inheritors, with 70 pieces of Miao batik works, were selected as study samples.

The findings show that Miao batik exhibits profound design characteristics and meanings, especially in terms of motifs. Based on these findings, a traditional design model was developed to support the preservation of Miao batik heritage. In addition, it aims to increase cultural awareness among the younger generation and further strengthen the value of Miao batik as a form of traditional textile art in China. This model offers practical guidance that combines traditional and contemporary design elements to ensure the sustainable development of Miao batik.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research topic and establishes a semiotic framework for examining Danzhai Bailing Miao batik, a significant art form deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Miao ethnic group in China. It begins by exploring the cultural and artistic importance of Miao batik, celebrated for its intricate patterns, vibrant designs, and profound symbolic meanings (Jia, 2013). Recognized as part of China's National Intangible Cultural Heritage, Danzhai Miao batik embodies the unique aesthetic ideology, traditions, and values of the Miao community (Shang, 2004). However, despite its historical and cultural prominence, gaps remain in motif identification and theoretical research, particularly in interpreting the symbolic meanings embedded in its patterns.

In recent years, the commercialization of traditional batik has diminished its ethnic authenticity, transforming it into a market-driven product (Zhou & Tian, 2011). Driven by the economic benefits derived from batik and stimulated by tourism-induced demand for rapidly consumable batik products, the batik market has gradually descended into disorderly and unhealthy competition environment. The market is saturated with numerous batik products lacking ethnic identity and regional distinctiveness (Li, 2010). Under the development of modernization, machine weaving has rapidly intervened in the field of batik production, inevitably impacting on Danzhai batik, which is mainly by handmake (Chen, etc.al, 2018). This shift has contributed to eroding its cultural connotations and symbolic essence. Moreover, younger generations are increasingly disconnected from the cultural and artistic heritage of Miao batik, often perceiving it as a relic of the past rather than a vibrant expression of

identity (Ren et al., 2014). These challenges underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive study to address theoretical gaps and cultivate a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of Danzhai Bailing Miao batik.

To address these issues, this study examines the characteristics, symbolism, and cultural significance of Danzhai Miao batik motifs. Utilizing semiotic theory, it analyses the patterns as carriers of cultural and aesthetic ideologies, aiming to develop a batik design model that preserves traditional elements while adapting to contemporary artistic contexts. Through this approach, the research seeks to illuminate the rich cultural narratives embedded in Miao batik and to ensure its continued relevance and preservation in an increasingly globalized world.

The subsequent sections of this chapter outline the research aim, objectives, and questions, establishing a clear direction for the study. The scope of the research is then defined, with an emphasis on the Bailing Miao community in Danzhai and the symbolic analysis of its traditional batik patterns. This is followed by discussions on the study's limitations and delimitations, which identify the boundaries and challenges of the research. Lastly, the significance of the study is articulated, highlighting its potential contributions to the preservation of Miao cultural heritage and the theoretical understanding of traditional batik. The chapter concludes with a summary, laying the groundwork for the detailed exploration and analysis presented in subsequent chapters.

1.2 Background of the Study

Batik, one of China's traditional dyeing techniques, boasts a long history and embodies significant cultural and artistic value, renowned for its rich artistic features and profound cultural connotations (Shang, 2004), Miao batik has been preserved and further developed in the Southwest alongside the migration of the Miao people (Pan,

1990). Among the batik styles of Guizhou, Danzhai batik, often referred to as "Bailing Miao batik," is particularly representative (Yang, 2008). As an integral aspect of Danzhai Miao's daily life and cultural practices, batik plays a vital role in various folk traditions, including marriage, childbirth, funerals, rituals, festivals, and ceremonies (Ma & Ma, 2003).

Despite its symbolic significance as a marker of national identity and cultural heritage, traditional handmade Bailing Miao batik faces considerable challenges. The pressures of global economic integration and the dominance of contemporary cultural trends have contributed to its gradual decline. Younger generations exhibit decreasing interest in learning the traditional craft, further diminishing its prevalence (Feng, 2017). Additionally, the intricate nature of traditional batik production, coupled with its lengthy production cycle, hinders its competitiveness in modern markets. Traditional batik patterns are also often regarded as outdated, failing to align with contemporary consumer aesthetics (Mo, 2016).

In response to these challenges, many batik producers have introduced machine-made batik to cater to rapid consumption patterns and economic demands (Jia, 2011). However, these mass-produced items lack the ethnic authenticity and cultural depth inherent in traditional batik (Lei & Xiang, 2014). The erosion of batik's cultural and ethnic characteristics poses a significant threat to the original culture it embodies, resulting in the gradual disappearance of its traditional symbols and potentially the extinction of the traditional craft (Lei & Xiang, 2014). Therefore, preserving the original characteristics and cultural meanings of traditional batik is vital for safeguarding its cultural heritage (Liu, 2009).

Although substantial research has been conducted on Danzhai Bailing Miao batik, existing studies primarily concentrate on collecting artifacts, documenting production processes, and exploring historical and cultural contexts. Current theoretical research on traditional batik exhibits conspicuous gaps, with documentation lacking systematic organization and scientific analysis. This inadequacy arises, in part, from the limited academic expertise of many practitioners, who typically lack professional research perspectives. Additionally, prior studies have largely overlooked precise and detailed investigations into traditional batik materials, techniques, processes, and recipes (Jia, 2013, p7). Moreover, the current content of Bailing Miao Batik is mainly derived from customary interpretations circulated in Miao folklore, oral literature and research results of Miao history (Luo, 2023). However, these interpretations often fail to consider the local cultural context, leaving many concepts and knowledge related to Bailing Miao Batik remaining ambiguous. Furthermore, studies on Danzhai batik patterns mainly provide visual descriptions from graphic design perspective, with little systematic semiotic analysis.

Given the theoretical gaps in interpreting Bailing Miao batik's cultural connotations, this study uses semiotic theory as analytical framework, employing qualitative methods and a case study approach to explore the characteristics and symbolic meanings of Bailing Miao batik. Semiotic theory emphasizes that symbols must be interpreted within their specific cultural and social contexts (Zhang & Xu, 2009), effectively revealing the deeper cultural significance underlying Miao batik patterns (Yang, 1997). Moreover, compared to previous research on text descriptions or picture records, semiotics provides a more systematic and nuanced theoretical perspective. Through multi-layered analyses of symbols, meanings, and ideologies, this approach accurately decodes the visual characteristics and cultural symbolism of

Bailing Miao batik, thereby addressing the theoretical and interpretive deficiencies in current scholarship. This theoretical framework not only enriches the understanding of Bailing Miao batik patterns but also offers robust academic support for the preservation and innovation of Miao culture, establishing a clear foundation for subsequent methodological exploration.

1.3 Problem Statement

The preservation and development of Miao batik heritage rely heavily on safeguarding its original ethnic culture. Despite significant efforts by the government, scholars, and cultural inheritors to preserve and promote Miao batik, it must be acknowledged that its current state remains concerning. This research identifies several critical issues, including:

1.3.1 Ambiguities in the Characteristics of Traditional Danzhai Bailing Miao Batik

Understanding the characteristics of Miao ethnic batik design is vital for maintaining a strong and authentic sense of identity within the Miao ethnic group. At the same time, the unique artistic language of traditional batik has garnered attention from the research community, ensuring the originality and authenticity of batik pattern elements, enhancing their symbolic value, and providing momentum for their continued development. Furthermore, the accurate identification and analysis of batik characteristics serve as a critical foundation for this research, enabling a deeper exploration of the functional and symbolic meanings embedded in batik design (Rafeah, 2012).

A review of the existing literature reveals that previous researchers have not systematically organized or classified batik patterns, leading to ambiguous interpretations of their characteristics and meanings. Alarming, even some Miao

ethnic heritage holders are unable to fully determine the defining characteristics of traditional batik. The inheritance of traditional handmade batik crafts typically relies on oral transmission and experiential learning, resulting in a focus on how to create batik rather than understanding the underlying why (Jia, 2013, p. 345). These ambiguities and inconsistencies necessitate a more rational, concrete, and scientific approach to ensure the accurate preservation of traditional batik culture. Therefore, the collation and research of batik pattern characteristics require further improvement and exploration.

1.3.2 The Cultural Connotation and National Identity of Batik

The cultural connotations and national identity of batik are increasingly being eroded by foreign influences. Presently, there is an overemphasis on its aesthetic function, while its profound cultural significance receives insufficient attention.

As Miao communities undergo modernization, the art of batik from Miao villages is experiencing a rapid decline and facing a significant survival crisis. Younger generations, deeply embedded in urban lifestyles, often perceive traditional culture, including batik art, as a symbol of backwardness (Li, 2010). Furthermore, many batik products available in the market today fail to reflect the unique characteristics and cultural values of traditional Miao batik. Artisans often prioritize the aesthetic appeal of batik and rely on economic strategies to drive market growth, often at the expense of exploring the deeper meanings and cultural connotations embedded in the patterns (Jia, 2013). To cater to contemporary aesthetic preferences, the cultural essence of Miao batik is often altered, leading to the erosion of its cultural and ethnic identity (Lei & Xiang, 2014).

As Miao (2008) emphasizes, cultural connotations are vital to the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage. Inheritance and promotion extend beyond formalized visual symbols; they require a deep understanding of the national spirit that underpins these original cultural expressions. To ensure the enduring relevance of traditional batik art, it is essential to preserve its formal language and cultural connotations while innovating upon a solid cultural foundation. This approach enables the creation of batik artistic symbols that integrate traditional ethnic culture with modern aesthetic values. Therefore, it is necessary to explore, organize, and study the humanistic value of batik art with local characteristics, elucidating it from a cultural perspective. Such efforts will foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of original batik art while uncovering its extended aesthetic elements and implicit meanings (Li, 2010).

1.3.3 The Necessity of Developing a Traditional Batik Guideline Framework

Despite the attention Miao culture has received from cultural and artistic circles, its unique traditional crafts, pattern forms, and profound cultural connotations must be preserved without being diluted by modern interpretations. This necessitates further efforts from researchers (He, 2006, p. 202).

Collecting and preserving all existing valuable batik artifacts, data, and tools is crucial for inheriting folk batik art. Additionally, efforts to preserve traditional batik should aim to maintain the original ecology and artistic characteristics of ethnic cultures. However, there has been a lack of serious research or comprehensive documentation on this subject, as repeatedly highlighted in Jia's research. Without more detailed and in-depth research into Miao batik, these issues will not only hinder its development but also contribute to the gradual extinction of traditional batik.

This study aims to employ semiotic methods to establish design criteria for identifying the characteristic pattern in batik art among the Bailing Miao ethnic group. Currently, comprehending the significance of each characteristic in Batik design remains challenging, as these elements encapsulate the identity of the ethnic group. Neglecting this aspect in research risks obscuring both the explicit and implicit intentions embedded within traditional Miao Batik art.

Building on these premises, the researcher conducted a detailed and systematic analysis of the Danzhai Bailing Miao batik using a semiotic perspective. In the context of Miao culture, this study systematically explored the issues of identification, interpretation, and development of Danzhai Bailing batik, and provided a structured and logical path for a comprehensive design model: Identifying the characteristics → Analysing the meaning → Developing a model → Validating the model. This model can also be innovatively applied in educational programs, heritage conservation strategies, and contemporary design practices, thereby expanding its practical relevance and facilitating broader engagement with Miao cultural heritage.

1.4 Aims and Research Objectives

The primary aim of this research is to study and address the gaps in motif identification and the interpretation of Danzhai Bailing Miao batik, with a focus on integrating semiotic analysis and bridging the lack of depth in while also bridging in existing theoretical study. Additionally, the study aim to develop and validate cultural resonant and practically applicable batik design model based on Miao ethnic aesthetic and cultural values, the following specific objectives have been identified:

1.4.1 Objectives 1

To identify the characteristics of traditional Danzhai Bailing Miao batik designs.

1.4.2 Objectives 2

To analyze the meaning and cultural connotation of Danzhai Bailing Miao batik design through the semiotics study.

1.4.3 Objectives 3

To develop a batik design model based on Bailing Miao ethnic cultural characteristics and aesthetic ideology.

1.4.4 Objectives 4

To validate the suitability of the Bailing Miao Batik design model for further users.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1.5.1 Question 1

What are the characteristics of traditional batik design in the Danzhai Bailing Miao indigenous community?

1.5.2 Question 2

What do the batik motifs represent in the Danzhai Bailing Miao community from a semiotic study?

1.5.3 Question 3

How can Bailing Miao batik be innovated while preserving its cultural symbols and aesthetics, ensuring the continuity of its ethnic characteristics?

1.5.4 Question 4

How can the suitability of the Bailing Miao Batik design model be validated for further users?

1.6 Limitation and Delimitation of the Study

In research studies, exploring complex cultural phenomena, often encounter inherent limitations and require specific delimitations to maintain focus and feasibility. Identifying these boundaries is essential to ensure clarity in the scope of the study and to acknowledge factors that may influence the findings. Therefore, this section outlines the limitations and delimitations of this research, highlighting both the constraints faced during the study and the deliberate choices made to refine its scope.

1.6.1 Limitation of the Study

Every research endeavor has its limitations, often stemming from restrictions in methodology or research design. These limitations can influence the conclusions and perspectives derived from the study, making it essential to provide a clear explanation of them. Given the qualitative research method and design adopted, this study acknowledges the following limitations:

This study may be constrained by limitations in time and resources. It focuses specifically on the batik traditions of the Bailing Miao subgroup in Qiandongnan Prefecture. The village with the highest concentration of the Bailing Miao population and the most well-preserved batik tradition was selected as the study site. However, this selection may not comprehensively represent the diversity of the entire Bailing

Miao population within the region. By restricting the scope to a specific area, the study may overlook the heterogeneity of the broader Bailing Miao population, resulting in findings that primarily reflect the characteristics of the selected location. This study focused on minority groups. Therefore, language and cultural differences are also one of the limitations of this study. However, all the interviewees in this study were able to express clearly to help me fully understand the culture and significance of batik.

The scope of this study is confined to the traditional batik pattern designs of the Miao people in Danzhai County, with a particular emphasis on the patterns and symbolic meanings created by the female members of the Bailing Miao community. Consequently, aspects such as the materials, techniques, and broader applications of batik fall outside the purview of this research. While this focused approach allows the researcher to delve deeply into the essence of Miao batik design and culture, it also constitutes a limitation of the study.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, relying on case studies, interviews, and observations. While this allows for a deep, contextualized analysis, it has certain limitations: such as: The subjective interpretation of data by the researcher may introduce bias. The small sample size of participants may limit the representativeness. In this study, participants were recruited based solely on their voluntary involvement. If participants expressed reservations or chose not to disclose certain information, their decisions were fully respected. This approach may have unintentionally prioritized individuals who were more accessible or willing to cooperate, potentially overlooking those who were less engaged or harder to reach. While this recruitment method was ethically sound and ensured informed consent and voluntary participation, it may have limitations in terms of sample representativeness.

1.6.2 Delimitation of the Study

This study specifically focuses on the Bailing Miao subgroup of the Miao ethnic group, particularly within Danzhai County. The primary fieldwork site is Paimo Village, a well-known center for Bailing Miao batik. The research is primarily concerned with the distinctive characteristics of Bailing Miao batik, aiming to uncover the symbolic meanings and cultural significance embedded in these patterns. As such, the study does not extensively explore other aspects of batik production, such as materials, dyeing techniques, or economic factors.

A qualitative approach was adopted to facilitate a deep and contextualized analysis of batik patterns and their associated cultural meanings. Semiotic theory serves as the primary analytical framework for interpreting these symbolic and cultural dimensions. To ensure the representativeness of the data, a diverse group of participants was selected, including cultural experts, designers, and batik inheritors.

The research gathers necessary information through interviews with key participants, in-depth observations in Miao villages, and an extensive literature review. The study focuses on developing a design guidance framework that encompasses motifs and patterns, along with a sequential process for identifying design characteristics, deciphering design connotations, and apprehending cultural and aesthetic consciousness. The goal is to preserve the original ecological Bailing Miao batik for sustainable development and promote broader public recognition.

1.7 Scope of the Research

This study analyses the pattern design characteristics of Bailing Miao batik through a semiotic lens. The research primarily focuses on the design of Bailing Miao batik in Danzhai County, with particular emphasis on the traditional patterns created by local women. Key aspects, including patterns, motifs, style, colors, function,

arrangement, and composition, are examined. Using semiotic analysis methods, the study interprets the meanings, connotations, and other elements within the patterns to uncover the cultural significance, social functions, and aesthetic consciousness embedded in the designs.

Following a preliminary investigation, the researcher selected Paimo Village in Danzhai County, a Bailing Miao community, as the primary site for this study. Renowned for its long history of batik, Paimo Village is a prominent representative of Miao batik art and one of the birthplaces of Chinese batik. Data for this study will be gathered through interviews and observations within the Bailing Miao community in Danzhai, complemented by an extensive review of relevant literature. The collected data will examine the relationship between the pictorial features of batik and Miao culture, history, beliefs, and lifestyle, as well as their symbolic significance in social, cultural, and religious contexts. Based on the research findings, a design guidance model incorporating motifs and patterns will be developed to provide theoretical support for the preservation and innovation of batik art.

1.8 Justification of the Study

The subsequent section presents justifications for the core concepts of the study.

1.8.1 The Necessity of Selection Danzhai Bailing Miao Batik and Conducting Field Research in Paimo Village

The batik crafts of ethnic minorities exhibit diverse styles, shaped by the unique cultural characteristics of each group. Among these, Danzhai Bailing Miao batik stands out as a particularly distinctive and culturally significant form of Miao art. Renowned for its intricate designs, unique patterns, and rich cultural connotations, Danzhai Bailing Miao batik is an integral part of the Miao people's heritage. Paimo Village, located in Danzhai County, was selected as the primary site for this study due

to its historical and cultural importance in preserving the Bailing Miao batik tradition. The village has long upheld batik practices that embody the artistic essence and cultural values of the Bailing Miao. As such, it provides an ideal setting for in-depth observation and documentation of traditional techniques, designs, and the symbolic meanings embedded in batik patterns. Additionally, the relatively well-preserved state of batik practices in Paimo Village allows for the study of this art form within its authentic cultural context, offering valuable insights into both its traditional and contemporary significance.

The decision to focus on Danzhai Bailing Miao batik and conduct field research in Paimo Village is motivated by the desire to study a culturally and artistically significant form of Miao heritage at its source. This approach enables the research to capture the essence of the Bailing Miao batik tradition and its role within the broader cultural and social framework of the Miao people. By situating the study in a key cultural hub, the research contributes to the preservation and deeper understanding of an endangered yet invaluable aspect of China's intangible cultural heritage.

1.8.2 The Development of Danzhai Bailing Miao Batik Under Modern Cultural Influences

With the passage of time and the influx of modern culture into ethnic minority regions, batik faces the dilemma of gradually losing its national identity and cultural significance. For the Miao people, whose cultural expressions are deeply embedded in practices such as batik, this shift poses a significant threat to the preservation of their unique heritage. Without proper documentation and scholarly attention, these cultural treasures risk being lost, taking with them essential aspects of Miao's cultural identity. The urgency of studying Danzhai Bailing Miao batik lies in the need to address and counteract this cultural erosion. Such research can provide a foundation for educational

initiatives aimed at revitalizing interest and pride in Miao's cultural heritage among younger generations.

1.8.3 Relevance of Semiotics Theory in Analyzing Miao Batik Patterns

The viewpoints of symbolologists support to some extent that Miao batik can be studied as symbols and the importance of interpreting them within their socio-cultural contexts, this study further applying semiotic specifically to the symbolic analysis of Danzhai Bailing Miao batik. It not only explores the symbolic meanings of batik motifs but also provides a theoretical framework, enabling a systematic approach to preserving and innovating traditional batik art.

According to Eco's (1979, p. 7) definition of semiotics,

"Semiotics is the study of all things that can be regarded as symbols."

Batik patterns can be understood as symbols, as they are not merely created for artistic expression but also carry profound cultural significance. Researchers can uncover information about national history, ethnic identity, myths and legends, political systems, organizational structures, modes of production, ancestor and nature worship, religious beliefs and rituals, as well as aspects of marriage, fertility, and gender relations (Zhang & Liu, 2008, p. 28). Therefore, an in-depth study of the artistic characteristics of Miao batik patterns is crucial for understanding their symbolic meanings.

Chinese scholar Yang (1997) holds the view that the role of motifs as symbols in minority cultures, offering a fresh perspective on motif analysis. Moreover, Zhang (2009) asserts that examining the formal representations of motifs through a semiotic lens can reveal deeper symbolic meanings and cultural essences. This indicates that

semiotic theory can provide a new perspective for understanding the intricate meanings and cultural significances embedded in Miao batik patterns.

In the context of semiotic theory, the focus is not only on the sign and its meaning but also on the importance of situating the sign within a particular context to derive its true meaning. According to the Hungarian ethnosemiotician Mihály Hoppál (2014, pp. 48–49), symbol systems are always defined within the context of the societies and cultures that use them for communication. It is through their everyday use in transmitting information that these symbol systems gain life. Furthermore, it is only when combined with specific stylistic styles, aesthetics, and belief systems—such as those related to sorcery—that these symbols can fulfill the cultural functions assigned to them by the Miao (Yang, 1997). This aspect, which scholars often overlook, remains crucial to understanding the full cultural significance of these symbols.

Therefore, the application of semiotic theory is essential to this study, as it offers a robust analytical framework for unraveling the complex layers of meaning in Miao batik. Semiotic theory not only facilitates a deeper analysis of the cultural symbols embedded in these batik patterns but also enhances understanding of the cultural value and aesthetic concept associated with batik. Additionally, it provides a theoretical basis for the design innovation of batik, thereby contributing to the effective preservation and transmission of this intangible cultural heritage.

1.9 Significance of the Study

This thesis makes several important contributions to the semiotic study of Miao batik design by examining the patterns and motifs characteristic of the Bailing Miao community.

The first major contribution is the systematic categorization, identification, and analysis of the motifs and their meanings in Danzhai Miao batik. This effort addresses the long-standing ambiguity in pattern classification that has been prevalent in earlier studies, thereby advancing the theoretical research on the semiotics of Danzhai batik. By providing a more structured understanding of these motifs, this study not only enriches the academic discourse but also strengthens the cultural identity of ethnic minorities by uncovering the deeper symbolic meanings embedded in traditional art forms.

Additionally, the design framework developed for Danzhai batik offers practical value beyond academic circles. It provides clear, actionable guidance and inspiration for future researchers and batik designers, while also enhancing public understanding and appreciation of the cultural significance of traditional Miao batik. By bridging theory and practice, the findings of this study contribute to the preservation and revitalization of this intangible cultural heritage.

Moreover, the design model developed for Danzhai Bailing Miao batik offers significant implications for cultural education and the creative industries. the design model developed in this study can inspire innovation in the creative industries, providing clear, actionable guidance and inspiration for future researchers and batik designers. It enables designers to draw upon traditional cultural symbols while adapting them to contemporary contexts.

Furthermore, it provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that can be integrated into educational programs, enhancing students' understanding of cultural heritage and semiotics. By inspiring a deeper appreciation of traditional batik motifs among younger generations and fostering pride in local traditions and culture, this

research supports the sustainability of this unique art form. Through these contributions, the study underscores the importance of preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of the Bailing Miao community for future generations.

1.10 Definitions of Key Terminologies

To avoid confusion, the key definitions relevant to this research are as follows:

Semiotics: Semiotics (also known as semiotic studies) is the systematic study of sign processes (semiosis) and meaning-making. Semiosis refers to any activity, conduct, or process involving signs, where a sign is defined as anything that conveys meaning to its interpreter.

Miao & Hmong: The Miao are the fifth largest ethnic group in China, primarily residing in Southeast Asia and China (Guizhou, Sichuan, Yunnan). Some literature uses the term "Hmong" to refer to the Miao (苗族). In this study, the term "Miao" will be used.

Bailing Miao Community: The study focuses on Bailing Miao batik in Danzhai, with fieldwork conducted in Paimo Village, Danzhai County. Paidaomo (排倒莫) is a general term for Paidao (排倒) and Paimo (排莫) Villages. Paidaomo's batik is a typical representative of Danzhai County's batik art and one of the birthplaces of Chinese batik art. In the Villages surrounding southeastern Danzhai, all women practice batik, each village has batik experts, and every family possesses batik treasures. Moreover, Paidaomo is renowned for its long history of batik making, with its products known for their simple, elegant, bold, and beautiful artistic style. It is famously referred to as "*The Hometown of Batik Art*" and "*The Premier Traditional Dyeing Technique in the East*."

Pattern Characteristics: Pattern characteristics refer to the unique visual elements and their expressions within a pattern. These elements typically include motifs, lines, colors, textures, compositions, and overall structural rules. Pattern characteristics reflect not only aesthetic beauty but also the cultural, historical, and social significance behind them. In this study, pattern characteristics encompass visual elements such as motifs, colors, styles, and compositions, as well as the cultural connotations and aesthetic consciousness they symbolize.

Cultural Meaning: In this study, cultural meaning is defined as the system of shared symbolic values, beliefs, and ideologies embedded in the traditional patterns of Bailing Miao batik. These meanings are encoded through visual elements such as motifs, color, and composition, and are interpreted within the Miao community through cultural conventions, ritual practices, and collective memory.

Batik: Batik is a wax-resist dyeing technique applied to fabric. A design is painted onto fabric using a mixture of white wax and beeswax in the process known as "wax printing". The fabric is then dyed, and the wax mixture is heated and removed, revealing the white-colored design on the fabric (Tong, 2015, p. 52,53). In ancient China, this technique was called "Laxie" (蜡缬).

Danzhai Bailing Miao Batik: Danzhai Miao batik refers to the batik style of the Bailing Miao, distributed in Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, and Danzhai County, which borders Qiannan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture and Sandu County, Guizhou Province (Yu, 2020, p. 2). The main inheritors are the Bailing Miao who call themselves "Ganao (嘎闹)", and they mainly reside in Danzhai, Sandu, Rongjiang, Lipo and other counties, as well as Duyun City in Guizhou”(Chiang & Fong, 2000, p. 333; Shi et al., 2016, p. 62). In this study,

the research scope of Miao batik in Danzhai is limited to the Bailing Miao batik style in Paimo Village, Danzhai County.

Miao Branch: In anthropological and sociological terms, a branch refers to a subgroup. Among all ethnic groups in China, the Miao nationality has the largest number of subgroups (Yang, 1998, p. 25). Due to the vast distribution of the Miao people, differences in distance and environment have led to the evolution of distinct branches with variations in clothing, customs, beliefs, and language (Wu, 2017, p. 111). While local branches maintain some common characteristics, they also exhibit differences. This study focuses specifically on the Bailing Miao branch of batik.

Sheng Miao (生苗) : The term "Sheng Miao" first appeared during the early years of the Ming Yongle period. It carries three main meanings: First, it refers to the Miao people living in remote mountainous areas, who are isolated from the Han people, speaking a different language and following distinct customs. Second, it signifies the Miao people who, under the central feudal dynasty, were not directly governed or exploited, maintaining a state of independence. Third, it describes the Miao people living outside the jurisdiction of the Tusi system, who are not influenced by its control (Wu, 2017, p. 137).

Shou Miao (熟苗) : "Shou Miao" refers to the Miao people who were deeply influenced by Han culture. These individuals adopted Han-style clothing and hair accessories and paid taxes to the ruling government of the time (He, 2006, p. 10).

Bureaucratization of Native Officers (改土归流) : This was a political, economic, and cultural reform initiated by the feudal dynasty in minority regions, beginning during the Ming Dynasty (Zhang, 2005, p. 84). The Qing Dynasty's policy

of returning authority to the land directly intervened in and altered the internal life of the Miao people, impacting the development of Miao society and history (Wu & Long, 1992, p. 323).

1.11 Summary

The introduction highlights the significance of Miao traditional batik as a symbol of the continuity of ethnic heritage and culture, emphasizing its value as a rich art form that must be preserved for future generations. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study's foundational elements, including the research background, problem statement, research questions, and objectives.

It introduces the research framework, which serves as a guiding structure for the methods and analytical tools employed throughout the study. Additionally, the chapter defines the scope of the research, establishing clear boundaries to ensure focus and relevance. Acknowledging the inherent limitations of research, the researcher addresses the constraints encountered and outlines strategies to mitigate their potential impact on the findings.

Furthermore, the importance of preserving Miao batik culture is underscored, with this study contributing to both the existing knowledge base and broader cultural preservation efforts. Key terms are precisely defined to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency throughout the discourse.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature concerning the pattern design characteristics of Miao batik. The study aims to explore the meanings and design elements of Miao batik through the lens of semiotics, offering a deeper understanding of its cultural and artistic significance. The purpose of this review is to establish a theoretical foundation by investigating both traditional and contemporary contexts of Miao batik and analyzing how semiotic theory can be effectively applied to its intricate patterns.

The chapter begins with an overview of the Miao nationality, encompassing their population, geographical distribution, historical background, and cultural practices. This contextual foundation is crucial for understanding the significance of Miao batik within the broader Miao community. Subsequently, the chapter examines the development and current state of Miao batik, emphasizing the distinctive pattern characteristics that define this traditional art form.

Drawing on a range of ancient and contemporary sources, including contributions from anthropologists, ethnographers, and artists, the review integrates diverse perspectives on Miao batik. Furthermore, the chapter explores prior research on Miao batik, identifying key themes and findings that have emerged over time. This includes an analysis of the role of semiotics in interpreting batik patterns, particularly their symbolic, aesthetic, and indicative functions.

In this study, semiotics serves not only as a theoretical lens for analyzing Miao batik designs but also as a crucial approach for the protection of visual cultural heritage.

Semiotics, by decoding the symbolic meanings embedded within visual elements, enables a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical, and social significance of Miao batik patterns. This integration of semiotics and cultural heritage preservation will guide the subsequent chapters, where the theoretical foundation of semiotics is systematically applied to the analysis of Miao batik designs, and the research findings are further translated into practical strategies for safeguarding and innovating traditional visual culture.

Through this literature review, the chapter aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of Miao batik, its cultural significance, and the applicability of semiotic theory in this context. The insights derived from this review will inform the subsequent analysis and contribute to developing a design framework for Miao traditional batik.

2.2 A Map of Literature Review in This Study

In this study, the researcher employed a literature map to organize the reviewed literature, thereby clarifying the structure of the literature review and enhancing comprehension. Figure 2.1 presents a map illustrating the collected literature on the semiotic pattern characteristics of Bailing Miao batik. The literature map highlights key keywords, with further detailed information accessible through related literature searches.

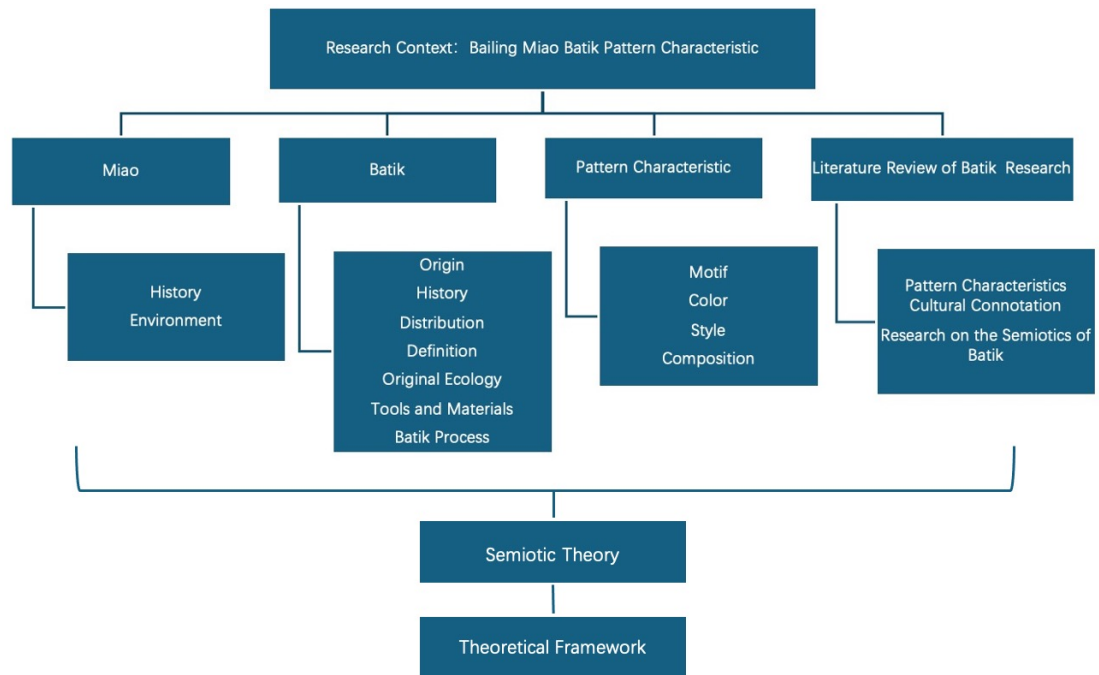


Figure 2.1 A map of literature review

The first keyword, "Miao," encompasses literature on Miao history, environment, population, and Bailing Miao general information. The second keyword, "batik," covers various aspects, including its origin, history, development, and craft. This foundational knowledge establishes a comprehensive understanding of the Bailing Miao and its batik art, which is essential for subsequent exploration of their culture and aesthetics.

The third keyword, "pattern characteristics," pertains to the identification and understanding of different types of motifs, colors, styles, and compositions. These contents helped the researcher identify several key characteristics, which to a certain extent contributed to the realization of the research objective 1. The last term is 'batik research', which refers to a review of the results of modern batik research, including the characteristics and cultural connotations of batik patterns that are more relevant to the content of this study.