

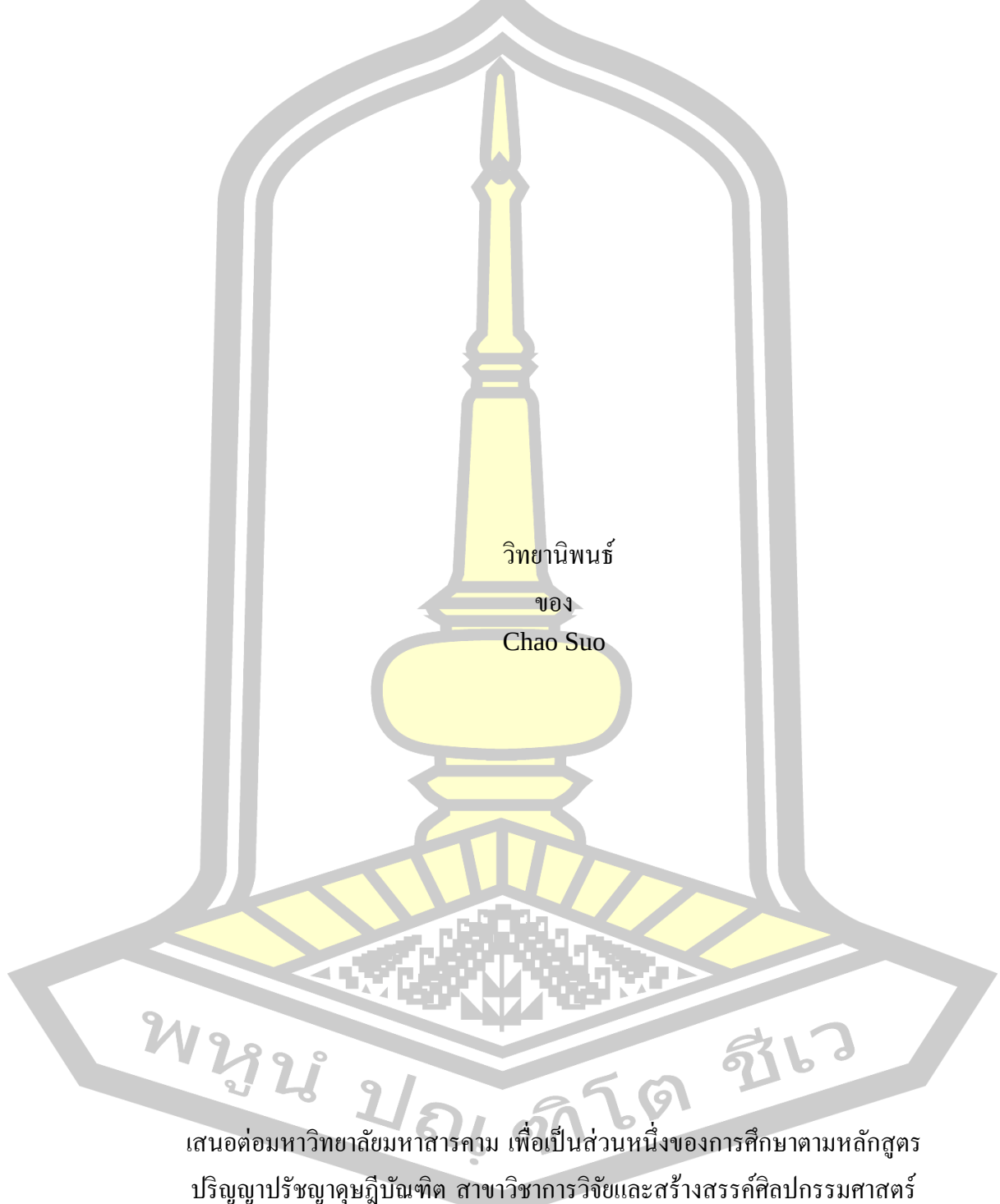
Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Application of Material Culture and Cultural Identity in  
the Context of Revitalization of Traditional Chinese Crafts

Chao Suo

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation  
March 2025

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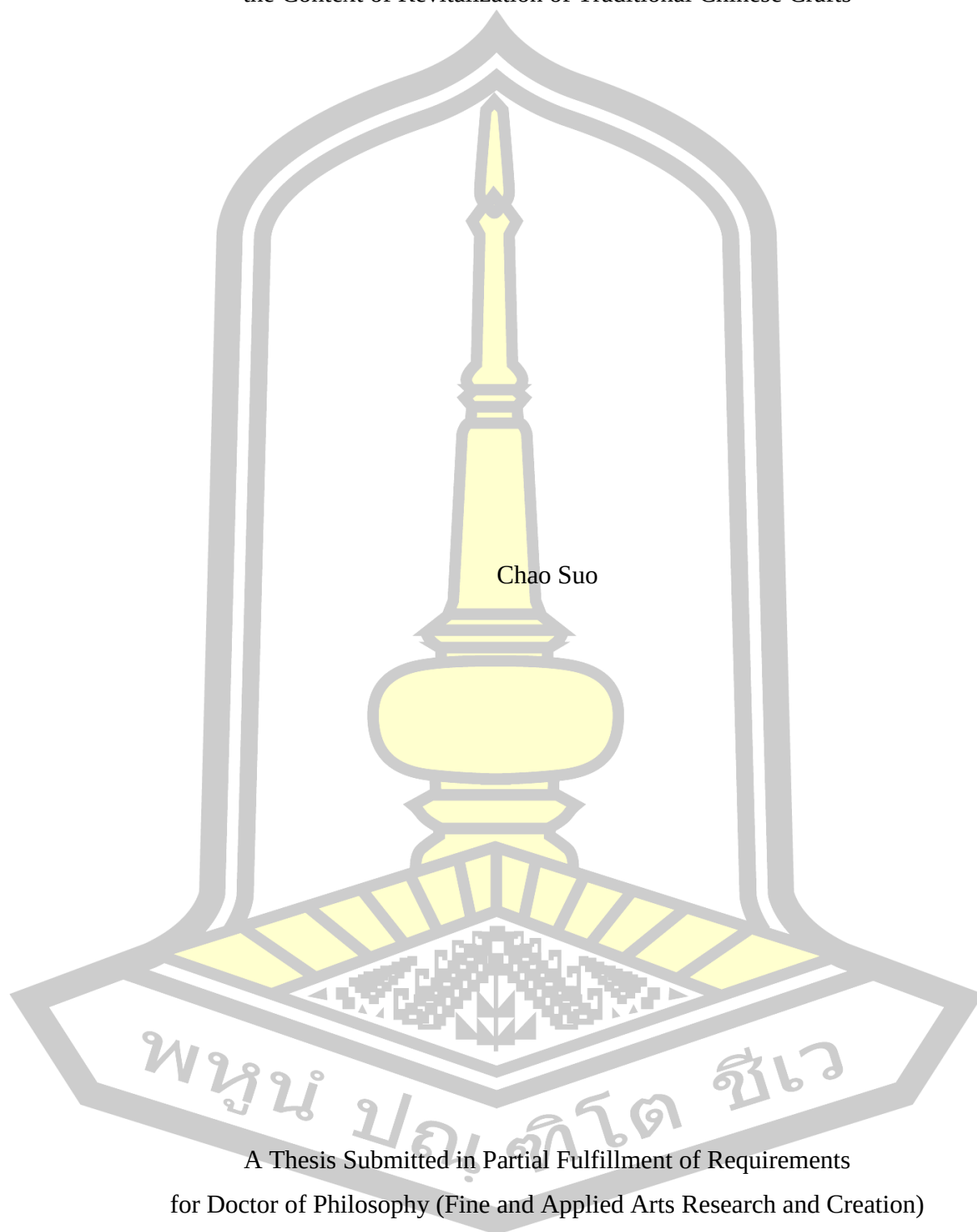
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March 2025

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The examining committee has unanimously approved this Thesis, submitted by Mr. Chao Suo , as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Fine and Applied Arts Research and Creation at Mahasarakham University

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|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>TITLE</b>      | Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Application of Material Culture and Cultural Identity in the Context of Revitalization of Traditional Chinese Crafts |              |                                             |
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### ABSTRACT

This study adopts qualitative research methods. During the research process, it uses literature research, field investigation, case analysis and other methods to complete data collection. The three research objectives are as follows: 1. To study the historical and cultural background of Liangshan Yi and the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware 2. To study and analyze the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the dimension of material culture and cultural identity 3. To study and analyze the development and innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of traditional crafts revitalization. This study focuses on Liangshan Yi lacquerware, systematically combining its cultural background, development context and current situation, and analyzing the challenges and opportunities it faces in the process of development. By exploring the material and spiritual cultural attributes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and its relationship with people and society, we draw conclusions and create new designs in the context of the revitalization of Chinese traditional crafts.

The research results show that Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a history of thousands of years and is an important part of Chinese lacquer art, containing rich cultural value and profound artistic connotation. It is not only a symbol of the material culture of Liangshan Yi people, but also represents the national spirit and cultural identity of the Yi people, reflecting the aesthetic taste and spiritual connotation of the Yi people, and has very important research value. Its unique shape, decorative language and the iconic colors of the three primary colors of "black, red and yellow" have formed characteristics different from lacquerware in other regions, and have become a symbol of the self-cultural identity of this ethnic minority. Based on the theoretical frameworks of material culture and cultural identity, the paper deeply explores Liangshan Yi lacquerware, analyzes its production process, decorative colors, and its use and cultural connotation in the lives of the Yi people, and explains the significance of lacquerware as a symbol of Yi culture and identity. The two rely on each other, providing precise artistic elements and cultural connotations for creation, exploring the diverse application possibilities of lacquerware, and laying the foundation for subsequent innovative designs. Based on the above theoretical research results, the researchers conducted specific creative practices, successfully designed

and created the "Yi·Cloud" Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series of art works, and invited industry experts to comment on the academic value of the art works to reflect the views and suggestions of this study. At the same time, by participating in professional art exhibitions, the cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is spread to the outside world, reflecting the social and cultural value of the art works, and realizing its innovation and transformation in the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts. This process not only provides scientific theoretical support and practical guidance for the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also aims to provide reference for the modernization and transformation of other traditional crafts.

Keyword : Traditional crafts, Liangshan, Yi lacquerware, material culture, cultural identity, innovation

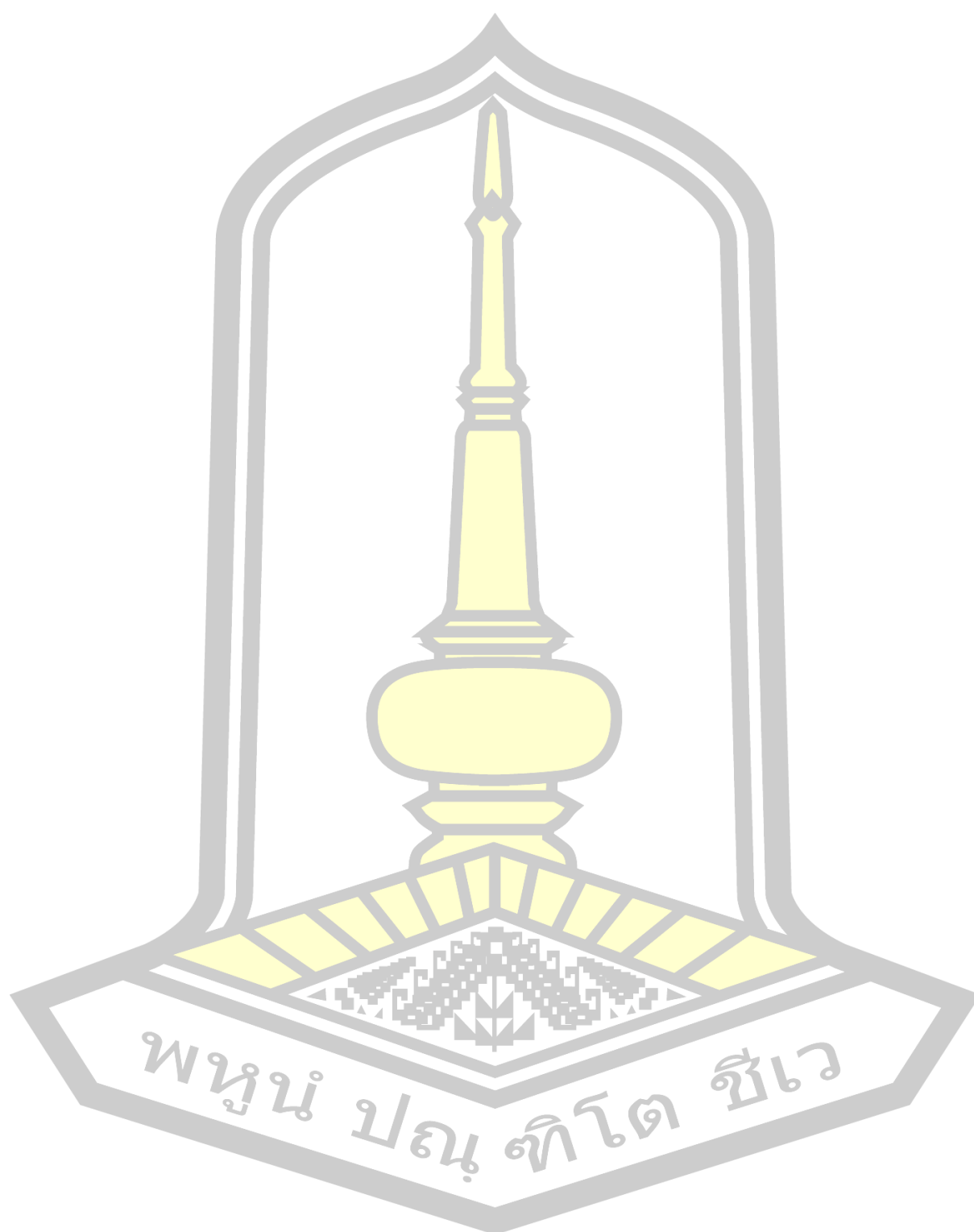


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At this point, my thesis has come to an end, this thesis is a comprehensive assessment of my doctoral three years of knowledge accumulation, to cultivate my comprehensive application of the ability to think independently and analytically, three years of time is short but full, I am very unforgettable in the Mahasarakham University campus time.

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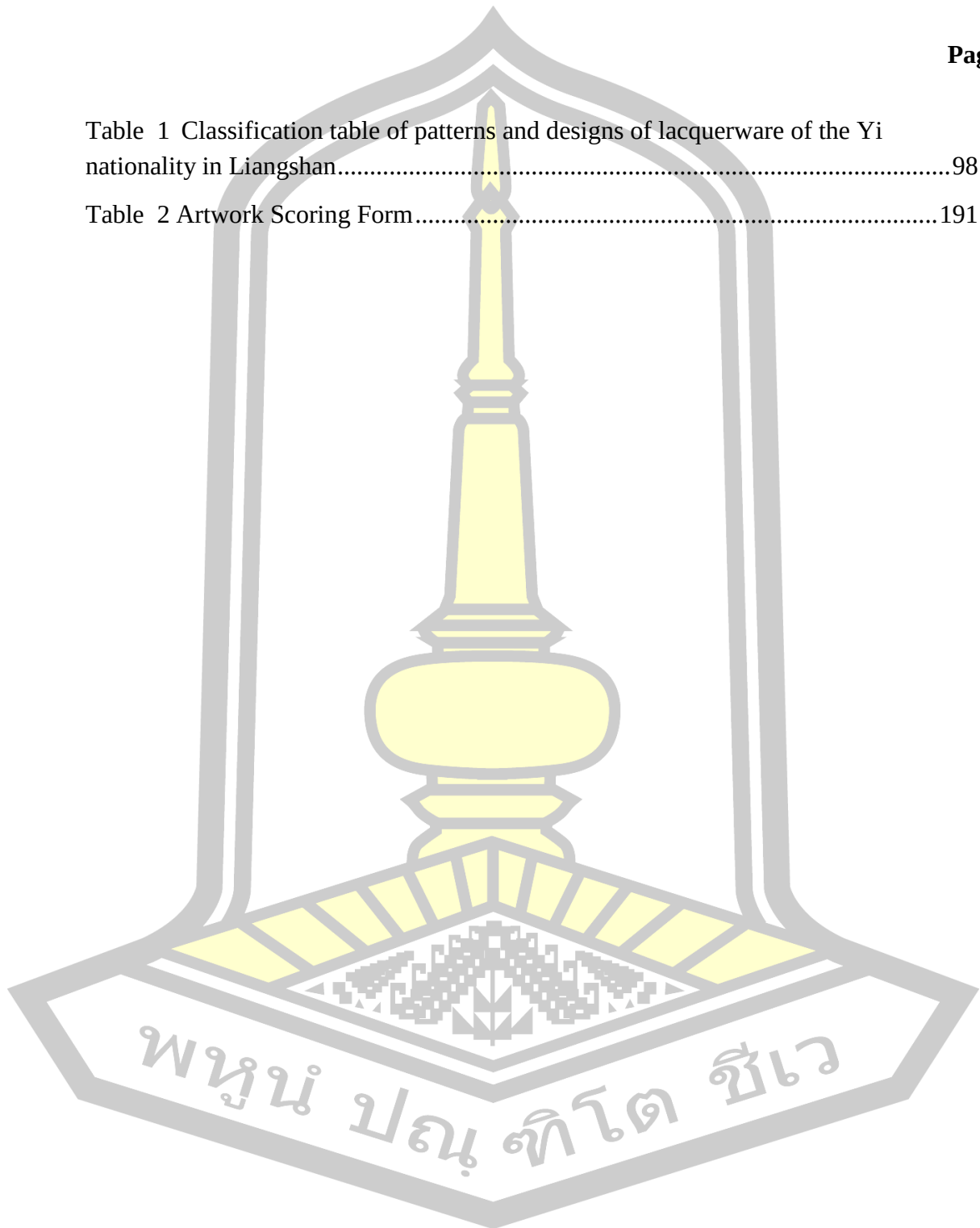
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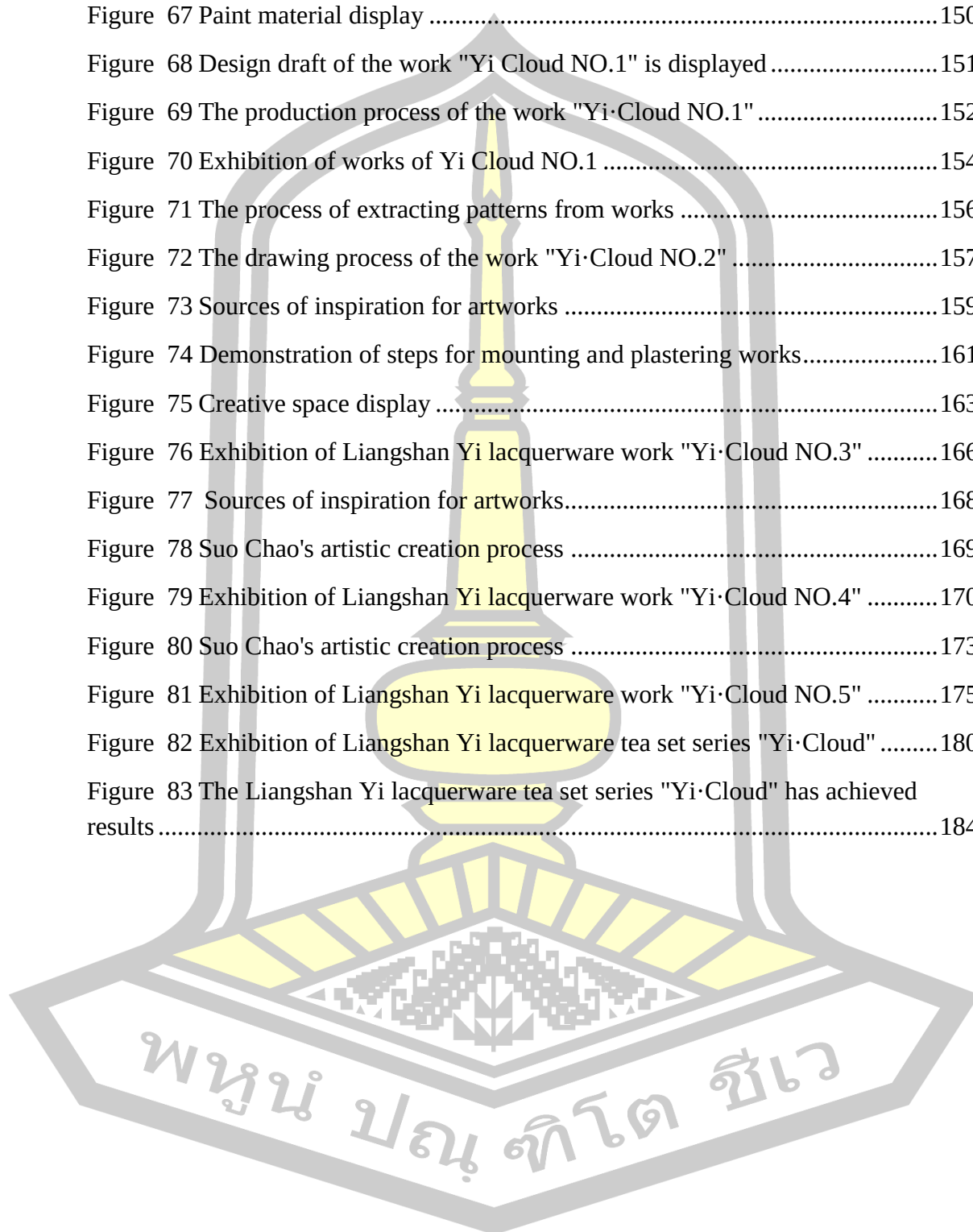
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# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1. Background of Research

The existence of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware affects the material life and spiritual life of the locals. It is one of the cultural symbols of the Liangshan Yi people. As an important cultural carrier of the Yi people in Liangshan, Liangshan Yi people, it contains the unique philosophy, religion, aesthetic concepts and natural concepts of Liangshan Yi people behind it, closely related. The Liangshan Yi lacquerware has the characteristics of lacquerware different from other regions. The unique utensil shape, the special color constructs of special decorative symbols and the three primitive colors of "black, red, and yellow" are full of primitive and religious nature. Symbols of self-cultural identity. Looking back on relevant literature, the conclusion that the previous literature and materials were mostly studied in the Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and most of them stayed in the lacquerware itself, concentrated on craftsmanship, techniques, materials and other aspects. In contrast, studying China's Liangshan Yi lacquerware cannot only stay in terms of its explicitness, but should focus on its artistic forms and the deep cultural significance behind the ethnic minorities on color worship and totem worship. Research objects should be linked with social phenomena and their backgrounds, and research and analysis should be carried out in international concepts. This study has a new point of view on the Liangshan Yi lacquerware. In the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts, the evolution of the material culture of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been studied, and the system analyzes the correlation between the Liangshan Yi lacquerware and the society and society. This will help people have a deeper understanding of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

From this, it can be seen that ethnicity and self-expression run through the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. I will use material culture and cultural identity as the main concepts to study and analyze Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

"Material Culture" is the first main concept used in my research. The Liangshan Yi lacquerware, which was born and gave a gentle and mysterious texture due to the wisdom of lacquer, has become a material culture that ethnic minorities show their national identity in daily life. As a specific form of material culture and material art, Liangshan Yi lacquerware can study how it expresses social relations and cultural value.

"Cultural identity" is the second main concept used in my research. Pay attention to how individuals or groups recognize their identities through shared cultural practice, values and symbols. With a symbol of identity, the influence of the Yi lacquerware on the identity of the Yi people and its community can be explored.

Liangshan Yi people are located in the border position of the southwestern part of China. Since ancient times, it has been an important channel to the southwest border of the motherland. In ancient times, the "Southern Silk Road" and "Tea Horse Ancient Road" must pass. one.

The activities of the Yi ancestors were very extensive, and it is recorded in the document "Southwest Yi Zhi" that the activities of the Yi ancestors are found in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and part of Guangxi in China, and that the junction of

Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guizhou in China is the most concentrated area of the Yi population. In China's Yunnan Province, there are about 3 million Yi people, mainly in Dali, Lijiang, Kunming, Diqing, etc.; in China's Sichuan Province, there are about 5 million Yi people, mainly in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Nanchong, etc.; in China's Guizhou Province, there are about 3 million Yi people, mainly in Bijie City, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Qiuxiandibuyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, etc.; in China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, there are about 500,000 Yi people, mainly in Baise City, Hechi and other places. Among the splendid cultures of the 56 ethnic groups in China, the Yi are the sixth largest minority group in China, with a large population, and there are great differences between the ethnic groups in terms of clans, religious beliefs, cultural differences, and modes of production, as well as with the Han Chinese.

The Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is located in the western part of China's Sichuan Province, a high-altitude area inhabited mostly by mountainous and semi-mountainous areas, which is referred to by outsiders as "Daliangshan". With its complex geography, frequent natural disasters and harsh climate conditions, it is one of the poorest regions in western China. However, it is this special geographic location and natural environment that has given birth to the unique traditional culture of this region.

The Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is a multi-ethnic autonomous area. It has different branches of culture, language, and customs inside it, and special native religious culture. The religious beliefs such as the "ancestor worship", "totem worship", "color worship", and "Bimo Culture" of the Liangshan Yi people generally exist in their lives and culture. The early Liangshan Yi tribe focused on agriculture and animal husbandry. "Fire" has become an indispensable material culture in their production and lifestyle. The worship of Liangshan Yi people's worship of fire is the process of seeking cultural ownership and resisting cultural erosion. Fire ponds, torch festivals, cremation, color (red) in the clothing, the pattern (fire sickle pattern) and color (red) in the lacquer wares all set up collective memory and cultural beliefs between ethnic groups. This is to a certain extent Promote the continuity and stability of national material culture.

In 1952, the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture was established. Democratic reforms were implemented in 1956. They enjoyed the reputation of "one step and a thousand years"<sup>1</sup>, and directly entered a socialist society from a slave society. Liangshan Yi people have their own language, hierarchical system, family branch system, religious belief and production methods. We need to pay attention to the recognition value of the traditional culture of the Yishan Yi nationality, explore the role of Liangshan Yi traditional culture from national identity, regional identity to national identity. In the process of learning and examining traditional culture, we must pay attention to the artistic expression forms and cultural processes left in the long river of history. The production and use of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware is the collective wisdom of the Yi people of the Liangshan Yi people. Xide County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is an important place for the Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

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<sup>1</sup> The Liangshan Yi have "crossed the millennium in one step", meaning that they have moved directly from slavery to socialism.

China has a long history of lacquer craftsmanship and was the first country to discover and use natural lacquer. Lacquer culture in China is comparable to ceramic culture and bronze culture, with the same long history and splendid culture." Lacquer" is the same as "Lacquer". It is a pictographic text. The splitting is composed of "wood", "people" and "water". This is because natural paint is a pure natural natural lacquer farm. Resin coatings are natural adhesives. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Xu Shen's "Shuo Wen Jie Zi" has recorded that, "The juice of the wood is also very important, and it can be used to paint things, from the wood, like the shape of the wood, and it is also like the water dripping down." At the same time, it is mentioned in the Shuo Wen Jie Zi (Previously on Title XI). "Lacquer: Lacquer water, out of the right Fufeng Duling Qishan, east into Wei. From the water, the sound of sincerity. A said into the Luo". The main components of natural lacquer are lacquer phenol, laccase, and resin. Cut from the tree for the light milky white sap, after oxidation to reddish brown, and gradually show for the dark brown, after drying the surface of the paint layer will film hardening, for acid and alkali and other chemicals have a strong resistance to corrosion, heat insulation, moisture-proof, corrosion-resistant, stable nature. Not only that, natural lacquer can also be used in medicine, the ancient Chinese famous doctor Li Shizhen in the "Compendium of Materia Medica" recorded that: "dried lacquer into medicine, the main treatment of absolute injuries in this divination, renewing the sinews and bones, fill the marrow cell, and the five viscera, five invasion of the six urgent, wind and cold handful of spleen ..... have repellent worms cough and other dynamic effects. Dried lacquer is categorized as a superior product in Shennong's Classic of the Materia Medica, "Lord of terminal injuries. It nourishes the middle and renews the muscles and bones. Taken for a long time, it lightens the body and endures old age." Natural lacquer is full of treasures, but the harvest is not easy, "a hundred miles and a thousand knives a catty lacquer," the annual summer solstice to the cold dew, with a special tool to cut open the lacquer tree, lacquer harvesting and cutting, with a mussel shell to collect the lacquer, to be a drop out of the lacquer, a lifetime of lacquer tree lacquer production of only 10 kilograms. It is not easy to harvest lacquer, which determines the preciousness of the lacquer liquid and also leads to the preciousness of the lacquer products. Ancient ancestors made use of this characteristic of natural lacquer to paint lacquer on the surface of objects, laying the foundation for the birth of lacquerware.

Lacquer originated in China during the Neolithic period, nearly 4,000 years before Japan, but the development of modern Japanese lacquer craftsmanship is so outstanding that Japan enjoys the reputation of "Lacquer Country" in the West, but in fact, most of the foreign lacquer is influenced by Chinese lacquer, and the East Asian Lacquer Culture Circle is also originated from China. Since the Han Dynasty, the art of lacquer has continued to spread and be exported overseas. It was the Chinese influence that gave birth to lacquer culture in Japan during the Sui and Tang dynasties. In the context of the tribute trade, Chinese lacquerware from the Ming and Qing dynasties was imported to Vietnam, France and other countries in Europe. At this point, Japan, North Korea, Vietnam and other countries have formed their own prosperous lacquer culture circle. It has not yet been found in the literature of Southeast Asian lacquer art, but according to the artistic style and technical judgment of lacquerware in Southeast Asia, and speculation in oral history, the source of its craftsmanship should also be in China. China occupies the central position of the East

Asian cultural circle, and the culture of lacquer has also continuously affected neighboring countries, forming a lacquer culture circle in Asia. As a typical material culture within Asia, lacquer art shows Asia's unique artistic form and spiritual appearance.

The "paint bow" unearthed from the cross-lake bridge site has a history of 8,000 years. Since ancient times, lacquer wares have been luxurious and prosperous in the courts of all ages, which are enjoyed by the nobility rulers. "Han Feizi · Ten Pass" once recorded, "Yao Zen world, Yu Shun suffered, as a food device, cut the mountains and woods (tailor), cut the traces of the stream, loses it in the palace, and loses it in the palace. "For the food device". This is the earliest record of lacquerware. From the Neolithic era to Xia, Shang and Zhou, from the Warring States Period to the Qin and Han dynasties, to the Jin Dynasty, the two northern and southern dynasties, and the Sui and Tang dynasties of the Three Kingdoms, until the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The use and development of lacquer wares have gone through decay and prosperity, and craftsmanship has been continuously innovated and promoted. The royal court workshop and local lacquerware manufacturing industry coexist, which has achieved unprecedented development, a prosperity, and achieved unprecedented brilliant achievements. The invention and use of lacquerware is an outstanding contribution of the Chinese nation to human civilization.

The most important wisdom of the ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people is to produce and use the Liangshan Yi lacquerware. This is also an important text of this study. Liangshan Yi paintware is an ancient traditional tradition of national tradition. Its long history and unique production craftsmanship reflect the unique aesthetic awareness of the Yi people. In the thousands of years of development, it has formed its own unique aesthetic concepts and has been circulating to this day. In June 2008, the "Liangshan Yi lacquerware decorative skills<sup>2</sup>" was included in the "Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List<sup>3</sup>" by the State Council; in 2009, the Yi lacquerware was part of the "Chinese lacquer art" and successfully was successfully by the United Nations Includes the list of "Representatives of Human Intangible Cultural Heritage".

The Liangshan Yi people are located in a special physical space with a remote geographical location. It is located on the edge of Han culture. It is far from the center of ancient Chinese cultural and political development centers. Cultural development and production methods are far behind other provinces. The special environment makes Liangshan a regional whole in history in history. This also allows its own traditional culture and art's body language to remain more complete. The social factors and nationality of the Yi nationality have promoted the generation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

This ethnic minority uses the unique local natural resources to plant lacquer trees, mixes lacquer liquid, grind large paint, master tiremaking craftsmanship, decorative skills, popularize the wisdom of large lacquer, and passed down from generation to generation, creating the Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

<sup>2</sup> "Painting" refers to the use of a traditional technique of lacquering works of art or objects with lacquer as a method of decoration.

<sup>3</sup> The "Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List" was approved by the State Council/Ministry of Culture and announced on June 14, 2008, following the "First Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List", with a total of 510 items.

The Yi people of Liangshan, Sichuan, China are the descendants of the Langxiang nation. In the early days, as a nation with nomadic migration, all tableware and utensils did not use fragile pottery products. The material is applied to the surface of the utensil, which can not only resist the moisture and anti -moisture, increase the toughness of the utensil itself, but also play a role in decorating and beautifying the utensil itself. People in this group use the local warm and appropriate environmental climate, use materials on the spot, use large paint technology, and practice in daily life. They are widely used in tableware, daily necessities, weapons and sacrifice activities. The wisdom of the locals was formed. Under the influence of the aesthetic concept of the nation, the Liangshan Yi lacquerware was created, and the Yi people experienced the changes in history and the integration of culture. The traditional culture of the Liangshan Yi people is deeply rooted in the rich historical long river of the Yi people in Liangshan. It is the overall lifestyle and value system of the Yi people of the Liangshan Yi people. It is not only reflected at the spiritual level, but also on the material level.

In history, the development of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been affected by the political, economic and cultural environment of various periods. The timeline is not clear enough, but it is certain that the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a long history and unique cultural value. It is a traditional Chinese tradition. Important part of process.

The development of the Yishan Yi lacquerware in Sichuan has gone through four stages:

During the origin (prehistoric): Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a long history and rich cultural connotation. In the early days, the ancestors of the Yi people discovered the growth of lacquer trees and mastered the materials and processing techniques of lacquer. Apply it to daily life. According to the oral research and inheritors, the development process of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be traced back to the origin of around 2000 BC. However, due to the lack of conclusive historical documents and archeological evidence, it is impossible to provide a particularly exact timeline.

Initial development: (During the Ming and Qing Dynasties) Over time, the ancestors of the Yi people continued to accumulate experience, developed and expanded, and improved the processing technology of lacquer, and began to produce more beautiful and delicate and simple lacquerware. These utensils are mainly based on wooden utensils and have a few leather lacquerware, which are decorated with lacquer layers and various decorative methods. The production techniques of lacquerware have been further improved, and the craftsmanship such as carving, inlaid, and painting can be widely used. During this period, the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has become an important folk crafts and gradually spread to all parts of the country.

In the stage of prosperity: After the Song Dynasty, due to the government's strengthening of the rule and cultural exchanges of the Yi region, the production skills of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware further developed and improved, the craftsmanship of the Yi lacquerware became mature, and the decorative methods became more complicated. The characteristics have gradually become one of the representatives of the Yi traditional handicraft production.

Modern development: (at the end of the 20th century since the end of the 20th century), after the establishment of the New China, the government has protected and supported folk crafts, and the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has developed rapidly. With the development of the economy and the exchange of culture, the traditional technique of Liangshan Yi lacquerware combines modern design elements, showing a more beautiful and exquisite artwork. At the same time, the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has also become an important cultural messenger in Chinese and foreign exchanges. The government has issued relevant policies to propose to revitalize the traditional craftsmanship. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only used as a commodity, but also as a sign and symbol to express the identity of our people to the outside world.

With the continuous change of social development, under the dual influence of the economic background and political factors, the marginal position of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the edge position has been greatly impacted during the development process, which is out of the modern aesthetic needs and functionality. The significance of existence was also transformed into the carrier of culture. It lacks internal creativity and vitality. It once moved towards marginalization and seemed very passive.

On March 12, 2017, the State Council issued the "Chinese Traditional Craft Rejuvenation Plan"<sup>4</sup>, which clarified the importance, overall requirements, main tasks, and guarantee measures of my country's revitalization of traditional craftsmanship in the future. Revitalizing traditional craftsmanship will help inherit and develop the excellent traditional culture of China, cultivate cultural ecology, enrich cultural resources, and enhance cultural self-confidence. Promote the spirit of excellent craftsmen. As one of the important traditional craftsmanship of the Liangshan Yi nationality, lacquerware contains the connotation and value of the traditional culture of the Liangshan Yi nationality, and builds the awareness of the traditional cultural and community of the Chinese nation.

In the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts, the Liangshan Yi national government, the inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of the local community, and the local residents of the Yishan Yi people began to express their "nationality" and "cultural identity" to the outside world through the Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The identity of the lacquerware has changed from the initial practical utensils to the crafts. In the 1990s, the state gradually attached great importance to the ethnic minority and folk traditional handicrafts. After the views of "protection, promotion, development", the Liangshan Yi lacquerware has also become provincial and national intangible cultural heritage, and it has become a traditional handicraft of the country's key protection and development.

Lacquerware has become the logo of Liangshan Yi, representing the symbol of Liangshan Yi. The famous Yi poet Jidimaga once said, "Let every piece of lacquerware condense the glory of our nation's great civilization." In such a development process, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has gained the identity of the residents of this ethnic group for it his, and the residents of this ethnic group express

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<sup>4</sup> The traditional crafts referred to in this plan refer to the production crafts and related products that have historical inheritance and national or regional characteristics, are closely connected with daily life, and mainly use manual labor, which are creative manual labor and personalized production based on materials, and have the characteristics that cannot be replaced by industrialized production.

their identity through Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and to a certain extent enhance the national pride and national identity of the people of Liangshan Yi.

In the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese craftsmanship, various regions actively respond to the policy requirements of traditional craftsmanship, support the development of lacquerware-related industries, encourage the skills of traditional handicrafts, and face various skills training in the face of social groups. On the way from Xichang to the Yide County of the Yi people in Liangshan, the stone pier and walls that can be seen everywhere are painted with lacquerware patterns, ethnic cultural centers, national middle schools, county government and other important places. In the renovation and reconstruction of the county in 2012, the street lights on both sides of the central street were also transformed into the shape of the "Mashizi"<sup>5</sup> of the Liangshan Yi nationality. The three primary colors of the "black, red, and yellow" of Yi lacquerware were used to decorate the lamps. The Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only interacted between the nation through the production and lifestyle, but also the nation spread to the outside world through "material culture" and "cultural identity" to show its unique nationality.

The Liangshan Yi lacquerware has become the business card of the Liangshan Yi nationality with its superb skills and unique artistic charm. It is loved by professionals at home and abroad. It has promoted cultural exchanges and trade between international. Drive the local cultural economy and complete the construction of cultural identity. The precious cultural heritage of inheritance protection and innovation development is not only respecting history, but also promoting the development of traditional Chinese craftsmanship.

Since I have studied and worked in Sichuan for many years, and I am engaged in the research of lacquer art, I have a certain foundation and field research on the study of Yi lacquer ware in Liangshan, China, and I have a strong interest in this cultural phenomenon, which also inspires my passion for research. Through such a "small place, big topic" form of research, we can understand the connection between Liangshan Yi lacquerware and local people and society, enhance the public's knowledge of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and thus influence practitioners in the industry and academics to have a more in-depth understanding of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Finding a new path for the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts in China, and helping Liangshan Yi lacquerware to get out of its current predicament, is the reason why I want to study this topic. This paper describes the historical causes of Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the history and culture of its ethnic groups, and the group objects associated with it. Under the impact of modern cultural factors, the acceleration of cultural processes has changed the previous meanings of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and new aesthetic concepts, cultural values, and production techniques have been incorporated into contemporary aesthetic demands.

This study will describe and analyze the Liangshan Yi lacquerware through qualitative research methods, after which we can understand the development and changes of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of Chinese traditional crafts, greatly benefiting the academic community of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and at the same time, the research results will have an important impact on the development of Chinese traditional crafts. It will help to

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<sup>5</sup> "Mashizi" is the Yi word for "soup ladle", a type of Yi tableware.

enhance the traditional cultural self-confidence of our people, strengthen the cultural identity of our nation, and enhance the protection and recognition of cultural pluralism.

## **2.Research Objectives**

2.1 To study the historical and cultural background of Liangshan Yi and the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

2.2 To study and analyze the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the dimension of material culture and cultural identity.

2.3 To study and analyze the development and innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of traditional craft revitalization.

## **3.Research Questions**

3.1 How did the historical, cultural and social environment of the Liangshan Yi people influence the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware?What is the current development status of Liangshan Yi lacquerware?

3.2 What are the aspects of material culture embodied in Liangshan Yi lacquerware? How is lacquerware constructed in relation to the cultural identity of the Liangshan Yi?How did Liangshan Yi lacquerware become a cultural symbol and a symbol of identity for the Yi people?

3.3 In the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts in China, how can Liangshan Yi lacquerware be inherited and developed? How can symbols and identities be extracted and used in artistic creations?

## **4.Definition of Terms**

### **4.1 Yi lacquerware**

Liangshan Yi people are descendants of the Dai people. In the early days, as nomads and migrants, their living tableware did not use fragile pottery, but used soil lacquer on the surface of the utensils, incorporating the unique totem and color of the nation. The original Liangshan Yi lacquerware was widely used in the lives of the Yi people, and accompanied them to experience the historical changes and the integration of culture.

As an important part of the art of Chinese lacquer art, the Yi lacquerware has not only been used in rituals and life for thousands of years, but also formed a unique artistic style and national aesthetic culture, making it a treasure of Chinese minority lacquer culture in China. The emergence of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware is the ideology and material culture of the ethnic minorities in the process of getting along with nature. At the same time, lacquerware, as a symbol of cultural symbols and identity of the Yi people, carries the values and world outlook of the ethnic minorities.

### **4.2 Material culture**

Material culture refers to material carriers such as items, technology and production tools used in social life, as well as cultural symbols related to them. Among them, gaze stipulates the way of living, ideological emotions, and spiritual sustenance. Material culture is an important part of the development of human society and one of the important manifestations of human culture diversity.

German anthropologist Ratzel believes that migration and other forms of contact are the main reasons for cultural similarities in various places. He calls material culture "the object of ethnological research" and believes that material culture is the proof of the historical connection between people of various ethnic

groups. In (Daniel Miller)'s book "Material Culture and Mass Consumption", it is mentioned: "There is no independent individual, subject and object are not distinguished, and the viewpoint of subject and object forming each other has opened up a new way for the study of human material culture. How does material culture lead to Cultural processes." This is a theoretical concept concerned with the role of objects and the physical environment in human social life. In this study, Liangshan Yi ethnic lacquerware, as a material culture, can be studied how it expresses the social relations, cultural values and identity of the ethnic group.

#### 4.3 Cultural identity

The concept of cultural identity focuses on how individuals or groups identify themselves through shared cultural practices, values, and symbols. Individuals establish their own cultural identity by resonating with the common characteristics and values of the culture to which they belong. This identity is related to the individual. Values, beliefs, cultural symbols, and participation in cultural activities are closely related, mainly focusing on the essential characteristics of the nation and the essential characteristics of culture with national imprints in cultural research. The concept of cultural identity is also seen in anthropology as the result of an individual's interaction with the social and cultural environment. It not only affects individual self-identity, but also is closely related to factors such as social status, cultural change, and social identity.

In this paper, the concept of cultural identity is used to study and analyze Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Through the research, we can explore the influence of Yi lacquerware on the identity of Yi people and their communities, and gain a deeper understanding of the position and role of Liangshan Yi in traditional culture, as well as the traditional culture. The shaping and influence on the Yi people in Liangshan.

#### 4.4 Traditional Reinvention

Reinvention of tradition is a continuous process and points to the contemporary innovation of invented traditions. Only through constant interpretation and re-invention can tradition be able to continuously develop modernity, emphasizing the continuity and continuity of traditional culture. transformative. People re-examine traditional culture to adapt to the needs of contemporary society. This can also be regarded as a process of cultural revitalization. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is facing the crisis of cultural fault in modern society. In this case, how to re-excavate and reconstruct tradition? Cultural elements, how to innovate and change, meet the aesthetic needs of the modern public. This involves the modernization and improvement of lacquerware production processes, innovations in lacquerware design, and new ways of using and disseminating lacquerware.

The concept of tradition reinvention is used as an auxiliary concept in the thesis to study the possibility of preserving and transmitting the core values of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as well as creating new ways of cultural expression and practice to meet the needs of contemporary society.

#### 4.5 Local Wisdom

Local wisdom refers to the knowledge and wisdom closely related to the local environment, local culture, and social background formed in a specific region or group. It emphasizes the local people's in-depth understanding of their own environment and society, and reflects the local people's ability to live in harmony and adapt to their own environment. The inheritance and development of local wisdom is

of great significance to the protection and inheritance of local culture and the promotion of sustainable development of local culture.

Local wisdom is one of the auxiliary concepts in the study of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Liangshan Yi has a complete ecosystem, suitable temperature and humidity, and has the conditions for the growth of lacquer trees. The Liangshan Yi minority has national aesthetics and religious beliefs that are different from other areas. Therefore, local residents A collection of local knowledge about Yi lacquerware is created, which can be used both as knowledge exchanged with other communities and as an accumulation of self-culture.

## **5.Research Methodology**

This study adopts qualitative research methods and the research type is developmental research.

In the process of research, on the basis of introducing the general background of Liangshan Yi lacquerware art, the research concepts of "material culture" and "cultural identity" are used to analyze Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Research data and related information are collected by field, and the relationship between Liangshan Yi lacquerware and people and society is analyzed based on the background of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts. The Liangshan traditional Yi lacquerware is innovated in practice, and the research results are presented in the form of applied creation, with pictures attached.

### **5.1 Population and Sample**

The research is divided into four groups of producers, researchers, consumers and regulators, who interact with the relevant conditions of minority lacquerware culture in Liangshan Yi area. The specific categories are as follows:

5.1.1 Producer: (In the process of guarding the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware culture, located in Apuruha Village, Yiluo Township, Xide County, Liangshan Yi Region, China, Jiwu Wuque, the 16th generation inheritor, has devoted his life to preserving and Inheriting the craftsmanship of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and becoming a national intangible cultural heritage inheritor)

- Craftsmen from Liangshan Yi area
- Inheritors of intangible cultural heritage
- Local craft Liangshan Yi lacquerware industry

5.1.2 Researcher: (Lacquerware of the Yi nationality in Liangshan has been passed down for thousands of years, and it has gathered the collective wisdom of the ancestors of the Yi nationality. Institutions of higher learning, practitioners of modern lacquer art and a large number of scholars from all over the world poured into the Liangshan area to conduct research, conduct academic and field activities, and collect relevant materials for their own academic research)

- Practitioners of modern lacquer art
- Institutions of higher learning

5.1.3 Consumers: (Tourists who come to see and consume ethnic minority culture, including tourists from different provinces in mainland China, as well as tourists from all over the world, who usually have a strong interest in ethnic minority culture, Lacquerware has become the brand cultural label of the Yi ethnic minority area in Liangshan, China. It is sold abroad and has become a collection that people are eager to collect.)

- Tourists
- collector

5.1.4 Regulators: (The local government and officials adopt cultural intervention policies to promote the development of Liangshan Yi ethnic lacquerware, pay more attention to the development and protection of local minority culture, introduce various protection policies and publicity channels, government staff can be used as information collection Object.)

- Local and national government

Inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, local lacquerware craft industries, modern lacquer art practitioners, universities and colleges, etc. are the main forms of the evolution and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in contemporary society. This is not only a transformation of expression forms, but also a transformation of skills, technological processes, and The reconstruction of the cognitive system such as the expression of ideas is the modern transformation of the social value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware from single to rich and diverse. They are rooted in Chinese culture and people's lives, and jointly shape and spread the Chinese artistic spirit and cultural values in the new era.

## **6.Research Data Collection Tools**

### **6.1 Instrumentation**

Equipment used in the data collection process included mobile phones, cameras, tape recorders, laptop computers, and other tools that were used to collect and analyze images and documents during the course of the study. The basic data recording tools are cameras and audio recorders. The camera is used to collect image data, which is applied to the image data collection of Liangshan Yi lacquerware itself and the on-site image data of Liangshan Yi lacquerware related activities. A voice recorder was used to record conversations in formal or informal settings to facilitate further data analysis and research.

### **6.2 Data Collection**

#### **6.2.1 Field visits and data collection**

6.2.1.1 Interviews; formal interviews, informal interviews, focus group interviews

#### **6.2.1.2 Observation; general observation, participant observation**

The general source of information is mainly through informal interviews, which can be conducted in different places. The interviewees are composed of different members, covering a wide range of people with different professional backgrounds, social groups and economic conditions. Through their interviews, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and the cultural relationship between lacquerware and the Yi ethnic group.

#### **6.2.2 Document data collection**

#### **6.2.3 Tools or equipment for data collection**

##### **6.2.3.1 Cameras, video recording equipment**

##### **6.2.3.2 Recording pen**

##### **6.2.3.3 Notebook**

##### **6.2.3.4 Mobile phones**

Through online inquiries, field visits to libraries, museums, and intangible cultural heritage bases, data and pictures about Liangshan Yi lacquerware, patterns, and craftsmanship are collected. The image information studied includes slides, audio data, videos, images, information, advertising banners, maps, texts, etc. For analysis purposes, the information will be collected and analyzed through copying, recording, and video recording. Using theories from disciplines such as aesthetics, art, and anthropology, the artistic expression and cultural process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware are deeply analyzed and studied in many aspects.

### **6.3 Data Analysis**

This paper takes Liangshan Yi lacquerware as the research object, collects relevant documents through papers, journals, books, pictures, interviews, etc., and provides a theoretical basis for the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware under the background of the revitalization of Chinese traditional crafts. When the researcher collects data using the research conceptual framework as the main tool, he simply groups the data. Data analysis can be roughly divided into the following three directions:

6.3.1 Through extensive data collection and on-the-spot investigation, analyze the historical and social environment of Yi Nationality lacquerware in Liangshan, China, and analyze its significance as a part of traditional culture, so as to provide reference for the following discussion.

6.3.2 Through market research and interviews, analyze the artistic form and historical causes of Yi ethnic lacquerware in Liangshan, Sichuan, China. From material culture to cultural identity, it has theoretical guiding significance in the context of sustainable development.

6.3.3 Through the collection of different types of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, study and compare the different functional attributes of lacquerware, extract totem and color elements from traditional Yi lacquerware, and combine them with new aesthetic concepts and cultural values to make Liangshan Yi lacquerware Innovate on the basis of maintaining its traditional uniqueness and cultural value, and better integrate into the development of modern society.

### **7.Scope of Research**

This paper mainly studies the application of material culture and cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of Chinese traditional crafts. Research areas include the artistic form of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and aspects such as population, religious rituals, political systems, social attributes, and cultural processes related to Yi lacquerware.

7.1 The geographical space of this study is Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, China. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is located on the edge of the southwest inland. It is located in the area where the Hengduan Mountains on the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau extends northward to the Sichuan Basin. It is the junction of the Pacific tectonic domain and the Tethys tectonic domain. at. There are more than 10 traditional ethnic groups such as Han, Yi, Tibetan, Miao, and Naxi in the territory. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is the largest Yi inhabited area in my country and the area with the most widely distributed Yi population in China. Liangshan Prefecture is the abbreviation of this area.

The vegetation here is lush, the climate is mild, and the natural scenery is beautiful. The climate is a subtropical monsoon climate with distinct dry and wet conditions, with little rain and dry and warm conditions.

The Yi nationality in Liangshan, Sichuan borders Ya'an and Ganzi Prefectures from the Dadu River in the north, faces Yunnan Province from the Jinsha River in the south, borders Zhaotong in Yunnan Province, Yibin and Leshan in Sichuan Province in the east, and connects Ganzi Prefecture in the west. The total area of Liangshan Prefecture is 60,400 square kilometers, accounting for 10.61% of the total area of Sichuan Province, under the jurisdiction of 2 county-level cities, 14 counties, and 1 autonomous county. As of the end of 2021, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture has a permanent population of 4.874 million, 1.884 million in urban areas, 2.99 million in rural areas, and a population of about 1.659 million in the Yi nationality.

Liangshan Prefecture is surrounded by mountains, the geological structure is complex, and the blockage of traffic has led to the largest preservation of the traditional culture of the Yi people. The originality and uniqueness of the development of the Yi people in Liangshan has become a typical area for the study of ethnology, anthropology, and cultural studies in my country.

Liangshan prefecture was called the ancient Qiongzhus country or Qiongzhus tribe before the Qin and Han Dynasties. There were "Qiongzhu", "Zuo", "Yi" ethnic groups and Tibetan, Han and other ethnic groups in Liangshan area. In the process of exchanges and integration, the main ethnic characteristics based on the alliance of blood and family branches have been formed, and closed development has been adopted to resist the interference of foreign cultures. In this special environment, the Yi people in Liangshan have bred a unique national culture, and the lacquerware of the Yi people in Liangshan, which is an important cultural carrier, has also been well preserved. Among them, the lacquerware in Xide County is the most typical and has been preserved to this day.

The selection of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture as the research area is mainly based on the following factors:

7.1.1 From an artistic point of view: Yi lacquerware, as a treasure of the traditional craftsmanship of Liangshan ethnic minorities, helps Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture to export the traditional culture of Liangshan Yi people in the form of handicrafts, build its own identity through cultural affiliation and values, spread it to the outside world, and show its uniqueness nationality.

7.1.2 From a political perspective: During the production and operation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the local government intervened and carried out cultural intervention, including Liangshan National Craft Company, which is a state-owned enterprise. Therefore, the cultural policy of Liangshan Yi area has research significance for the development of Yi lacquerware.

7.1.3 From the perspective of space: the Yi people in Liangshan are located in a special physical space, surrounded by mountains, and traffic is blocked, which blocks cultural exchanges with the outside world. The special ecological environment has prompted the Yi people in Liangshan to form their own cultural outlook, aesthetics and values. The Yi people worship nature, respect their ancestors, and have their own primitive religion and hierarchy. Therefore, the special physical space of the Yi area in Liangshan is also of great value for research.

## 7.2 Time scope

Most of the research on the timeline of Liangshan Yi lacquer ware is based on research and oral accounts of the inheritors, and it is impossible to provide an exact timeline due to the lack of conclusive historical documents and archaeological evidence. The period of study will be from BC to the present day, and I have categorized this research into four main time phases:

7.2.1. Stage of origin: ca. 2000 B.C.

7.2.2. Initial development: Ming and Qing Dynasties

7.2.3. Prosperity stage: after Song Dynasty

7.2.4. Modern developments: late twentieth century to the present

## 8. Research Conceptual framework

### 8.1 Research Concept

The main concepts of this study are material culture and cultural identity

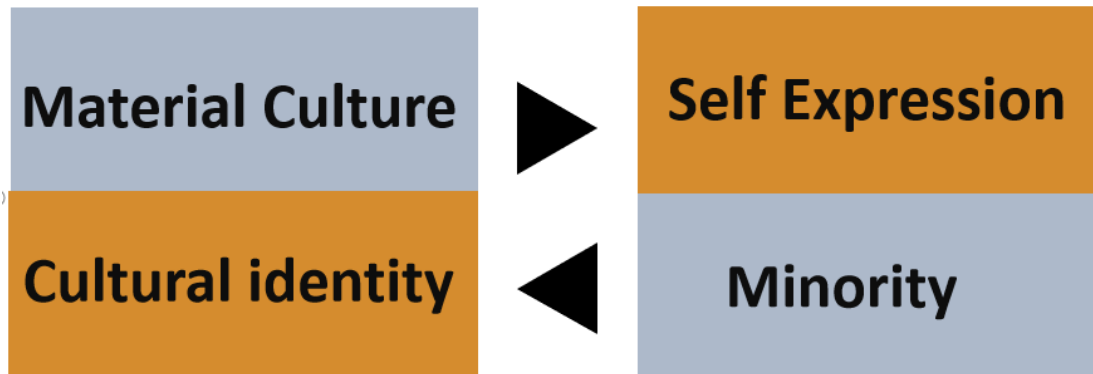
### 8.2 Research Conceptual Framework

The text “Liangshan Yi Lacquerware” is associated with academic issues or concepts; material culture, as the first major concept in the study, can be used to explain how Liangshan Yi lacquerware expresses the social relations, cultural values and identity of the Yi people, which corresponds to ethnicity. Cultural identity, as the second main concept in the study, can be used to explain the impact of Liangshan Yi lacquerware on the identity of the Yi people and their community, and its counterpart is self-expression. To a certain extent, Liangshan Yi lacquerware records the historical lineage and development of the Liangshan Yi people, and lacquerware, as a carrier of cultural dissemination, carries the cultural traditions and values of the Liangshan Yi people, and has become a cultural symbol of the Yi people and a symbol of their identity.

Based on the above associative structure, I designed a research conceptual framework to be used as an ideological tool in my research work. The concept is divided into left and right parts, with the left part exploring how the Liangshan Yi people construct their identity through lacquer ware, and the right part is a discussion of the Yi people's outward expression of themselves through their constructed national identity in the context of revitalization of traditional crafts in China, as shown below.



## LIANGSHAN YI LACQUERWARE



## CONTEXT OF THE REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CRAFTS

Figure 1 Research Conceptual Framework  
Source: Suo Chao production

Under this framework, we can comprehensively and deeply study and analyze the development and changes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts in China, from the micro to the macro, from the concrete to the abstract. At the same time, it is also possible to focus on and reveal the significance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware to the Yi people and community, as well as its key role in maintaining and constructing Yi cultural identity.

### 9.Literature Review

China Liangshan Yi lacquerware belongs to the national intangible cultural heritage and representative of intangible cultural heritage of mankind, which is an important cultural symbol of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group, with a long history and thousands of years of historical records. Due to the special geographical location of Liangshan, the early Liangshan Yi ethnic group blocked the cultural communication with the outside world because of the closed transportation, which also preserved the native culture of the Liangshan Yi ethnic minority to the greatest extent. But in the Liangshan Yi lacquer ware earliest origin of time information, historical records are through the Yi ancestors oral way, so the academic community does not have a clear conclusion.

In the collected historical data, we can know that China is the first country to discover natural lacquer and use it, and the lacquer bow unearthed from the Cross Lake Bridge in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province has a history of 8,000 years, which can provide a feasible reference for us to study the lacquer ware of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group. Meanwhile, Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as a typical representative of Liangshan culture, is not only a pure cultural practice symbolizing family memory and family unity, but it is also an important carrier carrying the history, emotion,

lifestyle, and regional cultural identity of the Liangshan region, so as to achieve the trend of homogenization of regional foreign culture.

This paper focuses on the research and analysis of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Most of the previous literature focuses on the study of lacquerware itself, including the description of the craftsmanship and production process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the study of Liangshan Yi lacquerware ornamentation and color, however, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has not been researched and analyzed in an international conceptual way from the perspectives of material culture, cultural identity.

Yi culture is one of the issues of concern to foreign countries; from 1996 to 2001, the United States, Germany and China held important international symposia on Yi studies. The conference focused on how to pass on and protect the excellent traditional culture of the Yi people at the level of cultural development.

In China's many art categories, unique, according to historical and archaeological documents, as early as in the Chinese Liangshan Yi folk, circulating the ancient song "the beginning of all things", A Fu created a variety of living vessels, has been "fifty-seven generations".

According to Mr. Tan Qichang's Historical Atlas of China II, "that is, Yanyuan County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan Province, Peishui is the present-day Shijiao River, as the name of the county, whose seat is now in the northwest of Leibo County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan Province; Taideng is the present-day southeast of Coronation County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan Province. This area is still the origin of raw lacquer."

The Le'ot'i is a famous creation poem of the Yi people, which vividly describes the formation of heaven and earth, the growth of everything, the development and evolution of human society, and the history of the Yi people. In the poem, it describes the migration of the Yi ancestors with the lines "Aqibir land, plowing black oxen with broken handles, using broken handles to hold the .....". "Aqibir" refers to the area of Coronation County in the present-day Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, while 'Ai Zhi' refers to the Yi lacquered wooden spoon, which is now also known as 'Mashizi'. The first poem "Le Otei" was formed more than 2,000 years ago, which shows that the development of Yi lacquer art has a very long history.

To sum up, the Yi ancestors used lacquer ware for a very long time, and they were full of wisdom, obtained from nature and gave back to nature, creating colorful and characteristic national handicrafts, and the typical nomadic life style of the Yi people was the main social reason for the production of Yi lacquer ware.

Through the search of China Knowledge, about 236 articles named after Yi lacquer ware were selected in the interval of 1988-2023, including 145 articles in academic journals, 21 articles in master's theses, and 0 articles in doctoral dissertations, and through the search of Google Scholar, about 4,200 articles named after Yi lacquer ware were selected.

Most of the related literature focuses on the study of Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquerware itself, including the study of ornamentation, color, religious beliefs, and historical process. However, according to the collected papers on Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquer ware, not too many of them are based on the research method of art anthropology, and even many of them are based on the method of combining art

ontology and ontology. In many cases, the research is based on a combination of art ontology and ontology, but the research is limited to the objects themselves, and there is a lack of connection between the objects and the people and society of the region. Research based on concepts such as cultural identity and material culture is almost non-existent, with only a few articles using the concept of reinvention of tradition.

According to the reader's extensive collection and review, the main literature with the approach of art ontology are: Example's "The Shape, Color and Graphic Implications of Yi Lacquerware" points out that Yi lacquerware has a long history, and it consists of a variety of series of production and living utensils. From the three elements of styling characteristics, color application and graphic art of the lacquerware series, it reveals its artistic characteristics suitable for the aesthetic interests of this ethnic group. The paper "Yi Lacquerware - The Inheritance of Liangshan Yi History and Culture" points out that Yi lacquerware is the source of Yi plastic arts, which embodies their unique cosmology and aesthetics, covering religious beliefs, philosophical thoughts, folk wisdom, myths and legends, and the origin of everything, and fills in the blank of the history of lacquerware of the minorities in China, and it is the most powerful inheritance of the history and culture of the Yangshan Yi ethnic group. And "Analysis of Liangshan minority craft" explains the Yi people through thousands of years of hard work, life practice to create a black, red, yellow as the main body of the unique, colorful, traditional ethnic crafts. Yi lacquerware has high reference value for the study of anthropology, ethnology and other social sciences. Associate Professor Lv Li of Southwest University for Nationalities, "Study on the Patterns of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware", explains that Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a wide range of patterns, from various kinds of wine utensils to ritual utensils, etc., it can be said that no lacquer is not decorated with patterns. Zhang Wenmeng's master's thesis, "Comparative Analysis of the Decorative Elements of Liangshan Yi Lacquer Ware", compiled similar decorative features between Liangshan Yi lacquer wares and those of the Neolithic period. Peng Yucong's dissertation "Study on the Color Culture of Yi Lacquerware" from China Academy of Art analyzes the meanings and reasons for the formation of the three primary colors of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, while Binghe's "Lacquerware and Decorative Patterns of Yi" elaborates in detail on the production, colors, shapes and styles of Yi lacquerware, as well as the materials and techniques of the decorative patterns. The book is a detailed exposition of the production, color, shape, style, and decorative patterns of Yi lacquer ware art. Songlin and Hu Xiaoping, "The Ancient and Exquisite Lacquerware of the Yi People" describes the artistic characteristics of Yi lacquerware. There are also Ma Shan's The Aesthetic Value of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware, and Zou Zhijuan's Analyzing the Beauty of Liangshan Minority Crafts - Taking Yi Lacquerware as an Example, etc., which understand Yi lacquerware craftsmanship and art from the perspective of aesthetics. Stevan Harrell(USA), "Yi Lacquerware in the Eyes of an American Anthropologist", in which the article introduces the craftsmanship of Yi lacquerware, ornamentation, color matching, etc., and at the same time links the Yi lacquerware with sacrificial rituals and customs, etc., which provides valuable references for artistic research.

In summary, there are only a few papers that utilize anthropological, iconographic and semiotic research methods, and there is still a great void in academic research. It is from this aspect of research that I would like to begin, in

order to provide a new research basis for a comprehensive understanding of the Yi lacquerware culture in Liangshan, China. It helps in the final practical creation.

## **10. Benefit of Research**

### **10.1. Beneficial to the academic community:**

This study combines academic concepts and explores the innovative development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Its success not only has important academic value for the study of Liangshan Yi ethnic minority and its lacquerware culture, but also can be used as supplementary material for the study of traditional Chinese craft culture and applied in the field of teaching. In addition, incorporating this study into the model will have a positive impact on the international academic community.

### **10.2. Conducive to the protection, inheritance and innovation of intangible cultural heritage:**

To protect the inheritance and dynamic flow of handicrafts of ethnic minorities in China, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has gone through thousands of years of development. Although the original language of the traditional culture and art of the ethnic group has been preserved relatively completely, with the changes of the times and the impact of foreign cultures, Liangshan The Qi lacquerware of the Yi nationality has also encountered unprecedented difficulties in the process of development. This study further inspires thinking about the protection and inheritance of the Yi nationality lacquerware in Liangshan, which is conducive to the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities.

### **10.3. Conducive to the development of ethnic minorities:**

Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only an ancient handicraft, but also carries the life needs and spiritual connotation of Liangshan Yi people, and has a profound meaning. In the context of the revitalization of traditional crafts, it provides a comparable case for the contemporary social practice research of ethnic minority intangible cultural heritage, which is helpful to promote the Liangshan Yi lacquerware culture and promote the development of Liangshan Yi ethnic minority.

## **11. Chapter structure**

The structure of the study is divided into five chapters

**Chapter I** : Introduction

**Chapter II** : Historical and Cultural Background of the Liangshan Yi and the Development of Lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi

**Chapter III** : Material Culture and Cultural Identity of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware

**Chapter IV** : Development and Innovative Application of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware in the Context of Revitalization of Chinese Traditional Crafts

**Chapter V** : Summary and conclusion recommendations

## Chapter II

### Historical and Cultural Background of the Liangshan Yi and the Development of Lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi People.

This chapter outlines the historical and cultural background of the Liangshan Yi and the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The author organizes the historical and cultural background of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture as a basis for the phenomena described below. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the natural space and historical and cultural background of the Liangshan Yi, where the specificity of the region and the uniqueness of the human environment laid the foundation for the creation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The second part introduces the background of the origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, tracing the historical development of Chinese lacquer craftsmanship and laying the foundation for the production of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The third part introduces the development and changes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in different historical stages, focusing on the social causes of the changes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

#### **Part I: The Natural Space and Humanistic Environment of the Liangshan Yi**

##### **People**

##### **1.1 Geographic Overview and Climatic Characteristics of the Liangshan Yi Nationality**

The creation and formation of culture comes from the specific natural geographic environment. The special geographic environment of Liangshan Yi has an important influence on its politics, economy, education, religious beliefs and national culture. Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is located in the Hengduan Mountain area in the southwest of China, between latitude 26°03'~29°18'N and 100°03'~103°52'E, with an area of more than 60,100 square kilometers. It starts from Dadu River in the north, bordering with Ya'an, and reaches Jinsha River in the south, bordering with Yunnan Province, and Shaotong City in Yunnan Province and Leshan City and Yibin City in Sichuan Province in the east. It borders the Hengduan Mountains to the west and connects to Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, making it one of the most important corridors in Sichuan to and from the southwest border of the motherland. As of 2014, Liangshan is the country's largest Yi settlement, and the region with the largest number of ethnic categories and the largest ethnic minority population in Sichuan Province.

Among the resident population of Liangshan, the Han population is 2,155,357, accounting for 47.55%; the minority population is 2,377,452, accounting for 52.45%; among them: the Yi population is 2,226,755, accounting for 49.13%. Compared with the fifth national census in 2000, the proportion of ethnic minority population increased by 4.46 percentage points. Liangshan Yi is a multi-ethnic region with more than 10 hereditary ethnic groups such as Han, Yi, Tibetan, Mongolian and Naxi within its territory. The state has 1 city and 16 counties, of which Muli is a Tibetan autonomous county.

Liangshan Prefecture governs Xichang City, Dechang County, Yanyuan County, Huili County, Huidong County, Ningnan County, Xide County, Zhaojue County, Meigu County, Leibo County, Coronation County, Yuexi County, Leibo County, Jinyang County, Puge County, and Butuo County. Muzhu Autonomous County (city). The capital city of Xichang is located in the middle of the Chengkun Railway, since ancient times is the “Southern Silk Road<sup>6</sup>” and the “Tea Horse Road<sup>7</sup>” to the southwest frontier of the motherland of Yunnan and Southeast Asia is an important channel.



Figure 2 Map of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture  
Source: from <https://pic.sogou.com/pic/searchList>. (February 2024)

As early as Zhang Qian has not yet opened to the Western Regions, opened up the Northwest Silk Road before the Southwest ancestors have opened up a from Chengdu, Sichuan Province to Yunnan Diandong area of the “five-foot road”. The Records of the Grand Historian: “the Qin often jiao Tong five feet of road”, “five feet of road” from Sichuan to the southeast, through Bo Road (Yibin), Nanguang (Yanjin), Zhuti (Zhaotong), Yelang Northwest (Weining area), taste County (Qujing), to Dianchi (Kunming), and continue to the west to the Yeyu (Dali).” Emperor Wu Yuan Guang six years (129 years ago), Emperor Wu sent Sima Xiangru actively excavated through the South Sichuan Ya'an, Xichang and Yunnan Dayao Qiong, board, well, white and other western barbarians in the region of the “Western Barbarians Road”, so the road passed through the Yuexi territory of the “Lingguan”, so it is also known as the “Lingguan Road”, the south out of Shu, through the Qionglai (Qionglai), Yandao (Xingjing), Banner cattle (Hanyuan), Qiongdu (Xichang), will be no (Haili), cross the Jinsha River to Qingwing (Dayao), arriving at Yeyu.

<sup>6</sup> The “Southern Silk Road” refers to the passageway connecting Sichuan, Yunnan, Tibet and other southern regions of China to the outside world at different times in history, and it is an ancient international passageway in ancient southwestern China running through Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, connecting Myanmar and India, and leading to Southeast Asia, West Asia and European countries.

<sup>7</sup> The “Ancient Tea and Horse Trail” refers to the commodity trade corridors since the Tang Dynasty, in response to the needs of the local people, in the southwestern and northwestern regions of China, with tea and horses as the main content of the transaction, and with the horse gangs as the main means of transportation, and it is the corridor for economic and cultural exchanges among the ethnic groups in southwestern China.



Figure 3 Map of the “Southern Silk Road”

Source: from [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2FD-rk-0m0\\_msYxl-6BFcg](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2FD-rk-0m0_msYxl-6BFcg) (February 2024)

As shown in the picture, the orange color is the Xiyi Road (Lingguan Road), the green color is the Nanyi Road, the yellow color is the Yongchang Road, and the dotted line is the branch line of the Southern Silk Road passing through Liangshan. It is China's earlier external land transportation line, and is also an ancient international corridor in ancient southwestern China running through Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, connecting Myanmar and India, and leading to Southeast Asia, West Asia and European countries.

The landforms in Liangshan Prefecture are complex and varied, with rugged terrain, high and low, grandeur, and deep gullies and valleys. The terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast, with great undulations on the surface. The vast majority of the terrain in Liangshan Prefecture is mountainous plateau, with more than 20 peaks over 4,000 meters above sea level, and from east to west, there are mainly Xiaoliang Mountain, Daliang Mountain, Lunjun Mountain, Yak Mountain, and Jinping Mountain, etc. The terrain is characterized by high mountains, deep valleys, and plains, and is also characterized by deep valleys. High mountains, deep valleys, plains, hills and basins are intertwined with each other, and the relative heights of the land surface vary greatly. The highest elevation is 5958 meters of Chalandoji Peak in Muli County, and the lowest is 305 meters of Jinsha River valley floor in Dayandong, Leibo County, with a relative height difference of 5653 meters. The tectonic landforms in the state are fully developed, crisscrossed by fracture zones, and there are many fracture basins, fracture block mountains and fracture valleys. There are river alluvial plains, flood fans, hills and terraces distributed in the fracture basin, and the basin is surrounded by fault block mountains, with the relative height difference between the bottom of the basin and the top of the mountains up to 1,000 meters. The difference in height not only constitutes a special geomorphological landscape, but also forms a rare subtropical dry and hot river valley savanna landscape in China.

Basin Zhou Baishan glacial landforms well-preserved, typical development, the basin internal glacial valleys and ridge geomorphology in the vertical direction in a layered distribution, both multi-level peeling surface, multi-level terraces. Such as the Jinsha River, Yalong River and so on. Liangshan Prefecture within the territory of numerous rivers, varying in length, are the Yangtze River system, Jinsha River, Yalong River and Dadu River three major water systems. Greater than 1,000 square kilometers of the river there are more than 10, Jinsha River system of the Dust River, the Blackwater River, Xixi River, Shuiluo River, Slipper River; Yalong River system of the Anning River, Litang River, Woluo River, Sunshui River; Dadu River system of the Nizhi River. There are more than 120 rivers larger than 100 square kilometers and smaller than 500 square kilometers.



Figure 4 Topographic map of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, China

Source: from <https://ms.mbd.baidu.com/r/1dCVHq95JVm?f=cp&u=dbfd2a5120fcfc50> (January 2024)

It can be seen that the geomorphology of the territory has a big difference in height, the terrain is complicated, the terrain is high in the northwest and low in the southeast, and the special geographic environment has given birth to the original culture of the Liangshan Yi people.

The climate of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture belongs to the subtropical monsoon climate zone, with a clear distinction between wet and dry, with plenty of sunshine in the winter half year, little rain and dry warmth, and more rain in the summer half year, with a cooler climate. In addition to higher altitude areas, other places to divide the season, the four seasons are not obvious. Because of the complexity and variability of the geographical environment, the vertical and horizontal differences in climate are very obvious, often snow-capped mountains, green grass under the mountains, can be described as “a mountain divided into four seasons, ten miles of different days”. Compared with the same latitude and its neighboring areas in China, this is 1.2 ~1.5 times the annual sunshine hours in Hunan, Gan, southern Zhejiang and northern Fujian; 1.6 ~ 2.1 times that of Qianxi; and 1.6~2.8 times that of the Sichuan Basin. The ecological structure here shows diversity

and transition, and plants from subtropical to cold desert zone have their footprints here.

The area where the Liangshan Yi live is basically an alpine mountainous area with an average altitude of more than 2,000 above sea level, where the average temperature of the hottest month of the year is 10°C and that of the coldest month is below 2°C. The frost period lasts for more than half a year, and the climate is changeable, belonging to alpine tableland climate, with big temperature difference between day and night. Although the altitude here is high, it is located in the southern slope of the northern hemisphere, so that the intensity of ultraviolet rays and light are relatively strong, and the annual rainfall is relatively large compared with other regions of the same altitude. The Yi settlements are mostly located in the high mountainous areas or the sunny areas of the river valleys, with the settlements scattered in the high mountainous areas and relatively concentrated in the river valleys. (Chen Xiaoli, 2013) The special geomorphological structure is distributed in a mosaic shape, and the ecological structure is also characterized by fragmentation, and the transition between nature and ecosystems. Even in this high-altitude area with a harsh environment, the greatly differentiated ethnic culture of the Yi people can still blossom here, and be able to adapt to and make good use of the unique local natural environment and geographic location to settle down and multiply their offspring.

#### Historical origins of the Liangshan Yi people

The formation and reproduction of the ancient Yi ethnic group is a complex historical process involving multiple factors and various academic views. The Yi are one of the major ethnic groups in southwest China, with a long history and deep cultural roots. Regarding the origin of the Yi, there are various hypotheses in the academic world, but there is no consensus yet. The following are the main points of view: there are the “indigenous theory”, the “northern theory”, the “western theory”, the “southern theory”, the “foreign theory”, the “central theory”, the “overseas theory”, and so on. At present, there are the “indigenous theory”, the “northern theory”, the “western theory”, the “southern theory”, the “external theory”, the “Central Plains theory”, the “overseas theory”, and so on. In the “indigenous theory”, it is believed that the Yi are the indigenous people of the southwest region and have been living in this area since ancient times. The Yi share similar ethnic origins with other ethnic groups such as the Hani, Lisu and Lahu, and may have originated from the same ethnic group. Scholars who support this viewpoint believe, based on ancient Yi literature, myths and legends, as well as Chinese literature, that the Yi people have developed and evolved over a long period of time to form the present Yi people. According to the “Northern View”, the ancestors of the Yi tribe originally lived in the upper reaches of the Yellow River in the region of the Ancient Qiang people. Six or seven thousand years ago, the Ancient Qiang began to spread out in all directions, and one of them migrated to the southwest of China. This group of ancient Qiangs merged with the local indigenous tribes and gradually formed the Yi people, which is more supported by the “north-speaking” view. The “Southern perspective” is a lesser supported view, which believes that the Yi people may have developed from China's southwestern border or even neighboring countries, and that they may be descended from the ancient Yiyue people. In the “Western view”, Western scholars have suggested that the Yi may have come from Europe, and that they were of the same

ethnicity as the Aryans, or were related to the Caucasian race, and there is also a view that the Yi came from Tibet.

The Yi is an ancient nation with a long history, and the formation of the nation is a long-term evolutionary process. According to the records of Yi historical materials, the formation of the Yi originated mainly from the ancient Qiang tribes, which was one of the important parts of the ancient Southwest barbarians.<sup>8</sup> The Yi ancestors and the early Shu people descended from the Shushan clan, who were distributed outside the Banner Niu Mere in Sichuan, China, with the Yellow Emperor as their ancestor, and the Kunyi<sup>9</sup>, who had the Zhuanxu clan of the ancient Eastern Barbarians<sup>10</sup> as their ancestor, as well as the Chu people, who were the ancestors of Emperor Yan Di, they are all closely related. In the Western Han Dynasty, one of the ancestors of the Yi tribe was known by the name “Kunming”. In the Eastern Han Dynasty, “Cao” and in the Northern and Southern Dynasties, “Cuan” (Black Cuan) were also the names of the Yi ancestors at that time. The ancient name for the current Yi people is “Yi”, or “Barbarian”. The word “yi” means “foreign nation” in Chinese; the word “barbarian” means “also”, which is derived from the word “worm”. “Bug” means ‘big bug’, which means ‘tiger’ in ancient Chinese, and the Yi people are called ‘barbarians’. In ancient Chinese, “big bug” meant “tiger”, and the Yi people were called “barbarians”, which coincided with the worship of tigers by the Yi people. The plateau nomadic farming culture of the Yi society exhibits prominent Qiang characteristics, and in the course of their southward journey from the northwest outside the Yak Surrender, the Yi combined the economic mode of plateau nomadic farming with the natural geography of the southwest region to develop a variety of lifestyles mainly characterized by migratory labor. (Wen Quan, 2015) In the early stages of their formation as an ethnic group, the Yi underwent a process of transformation from blood ties to geographic ties.

The ancient Yi people are mysterious, in the elaboration and exploration of the origin of the Yi people, it is also full of many legends and stories, in the creation of the Yi epic there has been a record: “gourd creation, brother and sister into marriage” said, this is the origin of the Yi people's most widely circulated legends. From the content of the legend, it is said that in ancient times the earth was flooded, inundating the entire surface of the earth, Only Apudumu<sup>11</sup> lived, and the gods in heaven sent down three nymphs to the earth, and the god of heaven on Mount Loni betrothed the three nymphs to Apudumu. After the marriage, they multiplied and gave birth to six sons, who began a long journey to expand the frontier, six sons are six branches. The six sons were six branches, namely the Nuo, the Bu, the Heng, the Cha, the Wu and the Mo, which is also known as the legend of the “Six Ancestors' Branches” of the Yi

<sup>8</sup> “Southwestern barbarians” refers to the various tribes in the area of Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan that were active for a long time during and before the Qin and Han Dynasties and were not unified and integrated.

<sup>9</sup> “Kunyi” is an ancient Chinese name for one of the ancient Eastern barbarian tribes, which were mainly active in Shandong, Anhui and Jiangsu. The name “Kunyi” first appeared during the Shang Dynasty, and was one of the vassal states of the Shang Dynasty.

<sup>10</sup> The “Ancient Dongyi Zhuanxu Clan” refers to one of the ancient Chinese Dongyi ethnic groups, of which Zhuanxu was the leader. He once unified the various tribes of the Eastern Barbarians and established a powerful tribal alliance. The Dongyi ethnic group refers to the various ethnic groups living in the eastern part of China in ancient times, including some disappeared ethnic groups and some still existing ethnic groups, such as the Han Chinese, Manchus, Koreans and so on. They have had a brilliant civilization in history.

<sup>11</sup> “Apu Dumu” is the common ancestor honored by the Yi people in four provinces of Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Gui, ‘Apu’ is the meaning of the old ancestor, ‘Dumu’ is his real name.

people. After the “Six Ancestors” branched out, due to the conflicts brought about by internal and external economic interests, the descendants of the “Six Ancestors” migrated out from the Loni Mountain, and the Yi tribal system was gradually expanded, and in the process of getting along with other ethnic groups, the slavery system was established and developed, and the Yi tribes were dispersed in the Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi and Guizhou areas. In the process of getting along with other ethnic groups, the slave system was established and developed, and scattered in Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi and Guizhou in China, taking root and breeding six animals, which is of great significance in the history of the Yi people.

After the “Six Ancestors Branch” of the Yi tribe, the tribal chiefs led the tribal brigades to start expanding their territories to Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Gui, among which the chiefs of the Nuo tribe, Muyajie and Heng tribe, Muyazhou, led the tribal brigades along the Jinshajiang River basin into the present Liangshan Mountain, southern Sichuan as well as the Wumeng Mountain area of Shaotong, and the ancient hun and chu nes of the Nuo tribe migrated to the Liangshan Mountain from the south to the north. Liangshan. The establishment of the Nanzhao State in the Tang Dynasty and the Dali State in the Song Dynasty expanded the distribution of the Yi to the areas of national influence. To the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongolian rulers set up in the Yi settlement area in Yunnan, road, prefecture, state, county and Xuanwu Si and other levels of administrative areas, set up Xuanwu Si in Guizhou Shuixi area (today's Dafang, Qianxi County), set up in Sichuan Leibo, Pingshan, Jinsha River and other places to set up the Mahu Road, set up in the present day in the city of Xichang and Coronation, Pug and other counties set up the road of Jianchang in the big and small Liangshan set up the Roluos Xuanwu Si, the establishment of these administrative divisions The establishment of these administrative divisions has largely stabilized the geographical distribution of the Yi. During the Ming Dynasty, the central government adopted a combination of native officials and exiled officials for the administrative management of the Yi area, and a large number of Han Chinese migrated to this area, forming a situation where Han Chinese and Yi live together, which also greatly promoted the development of the local economy, and during the Qing Dynasty, the Manchurian government implemented the “Reform and Return to the Streams” policy in this area, which strengthened the government's control over the Yi area. It strengthened the government's direct ruling power over the Yi region. (Xiong Rui Zhu, 2019)

The Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is located in the southwestern part of China, with towering peaks, long river valleys and complex terrain. It is located on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, where the Hengduan Mountains and their remnants, the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and the Sichuan Basin meet, creating a unique geographic space. Due to the blockage of mountains and rivers, this geographical area has always been in a relatively closed state, and the impact of outside culture is relatively weak. Under the relatively independent development, the Liangshan Yi have formed their own unique political system, cultural system and social structure, and have become the area with the most complete cultural characteristics of the Yi. The traditional Liangshan Yi region is far from the core area of Confucian culture and far from the center of political power, and is weakly influenced by traditional Chinese politics and culture, forming a social structure with certain characteristics. Because of the special function of the “family branch” in traditional Yi society, traditional Yi

society is a society structured according to the “family branch”<sup>12</sup>. The “family branch” is very important in traditional Yi society. Before the founding of New China, most of the regions inhabited by the Yi did not have a unified political organization, and only a few regions were ruled by the “Zimo”<sup>13</sup>. The “family branch” is an important guarantee of the traditional rule of the Yi people, playing a role in organizing power and maintaining social order, and forming a large number of small social systems with the “family branch” as the main body. In the Yi language family, “family branch” is called “this Wei” or “Tsosi”, which is a patrilineal blood group linked by blood relationship, and adopts the genealogy of father and son to consolidate and extend the blood relationship. The genealogical system is used to consolidate and extend blood ties, and each “family branch” has a common ancestor and family name. In ancient times, the Yi people, with the Liangshan region as the birthplace of the Yi people, were gradually formed and flourished in ancient times. The Yi population gradually increased and formed their own culture and social system. With the passage of time, the Liangshan Yi gradually entered the stage of feudal society. In this stage, the Yi formed a family-based social organization structure, developed a certain amount of agricultural production and a small amount of handicrafts, and at the same time produced a certain aristocratic class.

After the founding of New China in 1949, the Liangshan Yi region gradually realized political, economic and social development. The Yi people gradually got rid of poverty, improved their living conditions, and also enjoyed more rights and interests of the nationalities. Before the completion of the “democratic reform” of the Liangshan Yi in 1958, the productivity of the region was relatively backward, and the handicraft industry did not separate from agriculture to become an independent production category, but rather served as an important supplement to agriculture. Due to the barren land in the region and the prominent contradiction between man and land, on the basis of the original agriculture-oriented development, the local residents had to make extensive use of all the available resources to carry out the production of cottage industry and cash crops, and bring the products into the market. As an important supplement to agriculture, handicrafts not only relieved the pressure of survival of local residents, but also promoted the development and progress of the Liangshan Yi society. The Liangshan Yi then entered a process of modernization since the reform and opening-up, which has led to great progress in economic and social development. Through the introduction of foreign capital, the development of tourism and the improvement of infrastructure, the Liangshan Yi region has accelerated its modernization process and raised the living standards of the Yi people. Generally speaking, the Liangshan Yi have experienced a long course of development from ancient times to modern times, gradually transforming from a traditional farming society to a modernized multicultural society. The Liangshan Yi have made remarkable achievements in economic, cultural and social terms, and have made important contributions to China's ethnic unity and social progress.

#### Native Religious Beliefs of the Liangshan Yi People

<sup>12</sup> The Liangshan Yi family branch system refers to the historical family system of the Yi ethnic group in the Greater and Lesser Liangshan Mountains in Sichuan Province and the Lesser Liangshan Mountains in Ninglang, Yunnan Province, China, which was established on the basis of patrilineal blood ties.

<sup>13</sup> “Zimo”, meaning ‘right’ in Yi language, and called ‘Tushi’ in Chinese, used to be the highest ruling rank in the whole Liangshan Yi area, but later gradually weakened and the ruling area became smaller and smaller. In most areas, the “Zimo” was replaced by the “Nuohe” rank.

The religious identity of ethnic groups is based on different ethnic groups and types of religions, and primordial religions play an important role as part of China's religious diversity, which is prevalent among all ethnic groups. As a form of religion that grows with the ethnic group and is rooted in the traditional culture and customs of the ethnic group, indigenous religions are often at the bottom of the culture of the ethnic group and are internalized in the thinking patterns of the ethnic group, influencing the spiritual life and material culture of the ethnic group. Although the distribution and degree of influence of this indigenous religious cultural element varies from one ethnic group to another, it is universal. The primitive religion of the Yi people is a religion of the native beliefs of the Yi people, formed by their forefathers over a long period of time in the social life of the Yi people. The Yi have two kinds of clergymen who specialize in channeling spirits, dealing with matters of faith and presiding over religious ceremonies: the first is the "Bima"<sup>14</sup> and the second is the "Suni". The characteristics of the rituals of Bi Mo and Suni are different. The rituals of Bi Mo are mostly used for recitation and expressed in language; the rituals of Suni are mostly used for the body, i.e., beating drums and dancing, and are enthusiastically and fanatically performed. Bi Mo is the priest of the Yi society, responsible for hosting religious ceremonies and communicating with the gods. They have a sacred status and provide services such as praying for blessings, exorcism and sacrifices for their people. The belief of Bi Mo is an important part of the religious culture of the Yi people, which has a far-reaching impact on their social life. The original religion of Yi nationality takes "Bi Mo" and its inherited belief culture as the core and representative, this kind of complete original religion form exists in Nuosu<sup>15</sup> branch of Liangshan Yi nationality, which is mainly self-created and absorbs a small part of other religions, and is still a form of religion inherited in the Yi area, and the original Yi religion is the refraction of ancient social life and thought of the Yi nationality. The original religion of the Yi people is a refraction of the life and thoughts of the ancient society of the Yi people. Bamo Ayi, a scholar of Yi studies, defines the culture of the Yi Bi Mo in this way: "Bi Mo culture is a special religious culture created and inherited by Bi Mo, with scriptures and rituals as the carriers, belief in ghosts and gods and sorcery rituals as the core, and at the same time involves the inclusion of Yi philosophical thinking, social history, education and ethics, astronomy and calendar, literature and art, customs and etiquettes, and so on." (Bamo Ayi, 1996)

The Bima beliefs include a series of religious rituals and activities such as sacrifices, prayers, prophecies and exorcisms. The most important of these activities is the sacrificial ceremony, in which sacrifices and prayers are offered to the gods with a view to obtaining their blessings and guidance. These ceremonies and activities are usually held on important festivals, weddings, funerals and other occasions. The belief in Bi Mo has had a profound impact on the Liangshan Yi society. Bi Mo faith of the Liangshan Yi is an important part of the traditional religious beliefs of the Yi, and

<sup>14</sup> Bi Mo culture is the core representative of the Yi faith culture, and the word "Bi Mo" has multiple meanings in the Yi language, with different translations due to the differences in the pronunciation of the Yi language in different regions. The word "Bi Mo" has a double meaning: "Bi" means education, teaching, learning, reciting, and "Mo" means elder, wise, so the word "Bi Mo" means elder with wisdom. Therefore, the word "Bima" means an elder with wisdom.

<sup>15</sup> It is the self-name of the Yi people in some areas of Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan provinces. One of the most numerous clans of the Yi, mainly distributed in the Liangshan Mountains of Sichuan, Yunnan, part of the Yi area, "Nuo" means "black" or "main body", "Su" and "Pu" both mean "people". Nuo means 'black' or 'main body', 'Su' and 'Pu' both carry the meaning of 'people'.

BiMo, as a priest, is responsible for hosting religious ceremonies, transmitting the will of the gods and treating diseases. Through a series of ceremonies and activities, BiMo faith provides religious guidance and spiritual comfort for the Yi people. It not only provides religious worship and guidance in religion, but also has an important influence on the social, cultural and moral values of the Yi people. The inheritance and development of the Bi Mo faith maintains the uniqueness and continuity of the Yi religious culture.

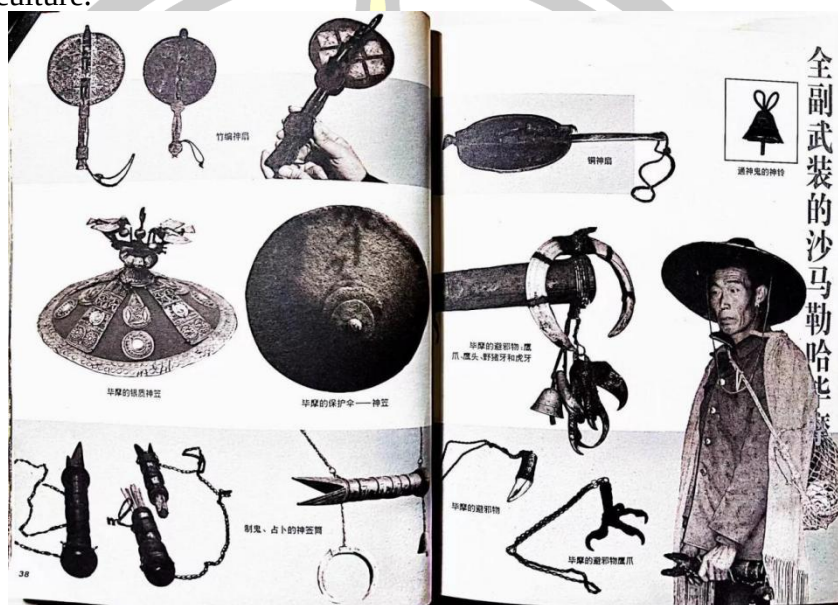


Figure 5 Dharma implements used by Liangshan Yi Bimo to perform divine rituals  
Source:from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bcBMzpS521LZ0dS8dRbsUA> (February 2024)

Bi Mo uses methods such as changing intonation and intensifying the tone of voice during the ceremony to attract the attention of the master as well as the participants of the ceremony. Traditional religious ceremonies are a major part of the life of the Liangshan Yi.

Suni beliefs originated from the ancient Yi society, with strong mystical and religious colors. Suni is a special kind of sorcerer among the Yi, who is believed to have mysterious powers and is usually responsible for practicing sorcery, prophecy, and curing diseases. The basic concept on which Suni beliefs are based is the relationship between man and nature, man and society, and man and the gods. Suni play an important role in the Yi society. They are responsible for settling various religious ceremonies, sacrifices and matters of divine communication. They maintain the spiritual beliefs and order of life of the clan through a series of activities such as prophecies, naming their children, treating diseases and praying for the blessing of the gods. Suni enjoy a high status and authority in the Yi society. According to Suni beliefs, Sunis regularly hold various ceremonies and activities to pray for blessings, exorcise evil spirits and offer sacrifices. Among them, the most important activity is the Suni Worship Ceremony. This ceremony invites the participation of Suni clergy with various skills who perform various rituals of sacrifice, purification and prophecy. The Suni faith has had a profound impact on the Yi society, not only does it play a unifying and ordering role in terms of religion, but it has also had a significant impact on the culture, customs and taboos of the Yi people. The inheritance and development

of the Suni faith is conducive to the maintenance of the uniqueness of the traditional religious culture of the Yi people, as well as to the formation of the values and moral concepts unique to the Yi people. Suni plays an important role in the Yi society, maintaining the religious beliefs and cultural traditions of the Yi people through various ceremonies and activities. In some areas, Suni beliefs coexist with Bhima beliefs, and together they form the core of the religious life of the Yi.

The religious concepts of the Yi people were initially based on nature worship, totem worship and ancestor worship, and the core of the indigenous religious culture of the Yi people is ancestor worship and ancestral spirit belief, which emphasizes the origin and traces back to the roots, and has a certain degree of primitiveness. The Yi minority believes that all things have spirituality, focuses on the harmony between man and nature, and always carries the ideas of “love” and “harmony is precious”. They have a reverence for elves and ghosts and gods, and this belief is reflected in the worship of natural phenomena such as heaven, earth, water, fire, rocks and mountains, and the belief that these natural elements are related to human life. The primitive religion of the Yi people has a long history, starting in primitive society, spanning matrilineal and patrilineal societies, maturing in slave society, and continuing into feudal society. In order to understand the social, historical, cultural, political and psychological characteristics of the Yi people, it is necessary to study the belief in the ancestral spirits of the Yi people. The native religion of the Yi is closely connected with the geography, culture and society of the Liangshan Yi, and it is the special natural geography of the Daliang Mountains that has shaped and preserved this native religious culture, while the social organization of the Liangshan Yi's family lineage also strengthens and perpetuates this kind of social organization with the distinctive features of “ancestor worship” and “ancestor belief”. The social organization of the Liangshan Yi family lineage also strengthens and perpetuates this indigenous religious culture characterized by “ancestor worship” and “ancestor spirit belief”. The “Nosu” of the Liangshan Yi is based on strong ancestor worship, and on this basis, it has formed an indigenous religious culture centered on “ancestor spirit belief” and “ancestor worship”, with priests, Bi Mo and sorcerer, Suni, as the core, and comprised of a rich and diverse group of clergymen. The “BiMo Religion” is formed on the basis of “Ancestral Spirit Belief” and “Ancestor Worship”, with priests and shamans as clergymen, and rich and systematic religious ceremonies. (Zhang Kejia, 2015)

The traditional religious identity of the Liangshan Yi is constructed on the basis of the community's “blood” identity. The social structure of the family branch, with patrilineal blood as the core, lays down the social foundation of the religious identity, and the blood relationship evolves into the memory of ancestors, belief and worship. The traditional religious identity of Liangshan Yi has a certain degree of closure, which is manifested in the fact that it seldom affects other ethnic groups besides the Nuosu group. Due to the geographical and spatial closure, the Liangshan Yi are blocked by the surrounding mountains and rivers, forming a closed “cultural island” isolated from the neighboring regions. The long -term closed state has made it difficult for external forces and centralized power to enter here, which is separated from foreign cultures. This also retains the native cultural beliefs of the Liangshan Yi people. For the traditional religious religion of Liangshan, as a native religious type that is different from institutional religion, its particularity is that it does not have faith groups independent of ethnic groups. The Yi people believe that the ancestral spirit

will take away all kinds of souls. On the one hand, the ancestral spirit, like people, has difficulty in her family business and their descendants. On the other hand, the people and descendants are in awe of their ancestors and admire their souls. From the perspective of the local residents of the Yi people in Liangshan, human life and soul are inseparable. "There is no soul in the sun, the moon is not clear, the human soul is difficult to live, the crops and souls, and the granules are not harvested." The Yi language "ancient tile" refers to the branches inserted on the ground during the ceremony. "Ancient tile cluster", that is, inserting god branches. The layout ceremony of Bimo's branches is another important feature of the religious ritual of the Liangshan Yi nationality.



Figure 6 Liangshan Yi Bimo's ceremony for god branches

Source:<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bcbmzps521LZ0DRBSUA> (February 2024)

Bi Mo's ritual should be delayed according to the nature and scale of the ceremony. From this, it can be seen that the native religious culture of the Liangshan Yi nationality worships all things.

The Nuo Su Yi people believe that survival and reproduction must rely on the asylum and blessings of the ancestral spirit. For the individual of Noesu, in the important stage of the lifetime, they are closely related to the asylum of the ancestors and the sacred power of the ancestral spirit. The ancestral spirit played a decisive role in birth, growth, marriage, and death. The fate of individuals is closely linked to the fate of the family family branch. The power of Zuling penetrates all aspects of the family's family affairs, and is inseparable from the life of the family branch of the Yi people. In social life, the reason for the ancestral spirit is to respect the ancestral system and devotion to the ancestral spirit that the family branch relies on. As a migration nation, the Liangshan Yi people will worship their ancestors every time they migrate. They also move away from their ancestral spirit to expect the ancestral spirit to bless and shelter at any time.

#### 1.4 Family Branch System of Liangshan Yi Nationality

There is a clear social hierarchy in Liangshan Yi society, mainly divided into the following levels: nobles, civilians, and slaves. The nobles enjoy privileges and honors, and civilians are ordinary people, while slaves are workers who serve the nobles and civilians. An important feature in the history of the Yi people is that it has gone through the stage of slave social development. As the ancestors of the Yi people entered Liangshan during the Han Dynasty, they developed slavery. In the Western Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BC, the ancestral society of the Yi people had differentiated nomadic tribes and settled agricultural tribes. At that time, the production of slaves was the main productive forces of the society, and the bad and isolated natural geographical conditions led to backward agriculture and handicraft conditions. The policy of frequent looting slaves. It made the ethnic relations around Liangshan nervous, and the Yi people were isolated and excluded by the society. These reasons have led to the slow development of the social productivity of the Yi people, and the development of the social system is also affected. During the Eastern Han Dynasty, the family members of the Yi nation were generally slavery. Moreover, the characteristics of this slavery have been preserved in the Liangshan Yi society until the mid -1950s.

The family branch is a social group that does not intermarry and is formed by paternal blood ties. It also plays the role of local political organization to a certain extent. At the same time, the family branch is the highest organizational form in the Yi society. It not only maintains the dispersion of personnel and property within the family branch, but also plays the role of jointly safeguarding the interests of the family branch. In the Yi social system, the class and hierarchy system is very strict. The status of different classes and levels cannot be raised or lowered. Intermarriage between classes and levels is prohibited to ensure the purity of blood. The strict family branch order determines the rules of communication in Liangshan Yi society. Under the memory framework with the family as the core, kinship becomes the key to national cultural identity and shapes the common memory of individuals. Before 1956, the Liangshan Yi people had long maintained the slavery and feudal chieftain system, with five levels of "Nuohe", "Quhuo", "Ajia" and "Xiayi". The first two correspond to the Chinese terms "Black Yi" and "White Yi". Black Yi are the ruling nobles, while White Yi are subordinates of Black Yi. Black Yi clans are not subordinate to each other and have no unified political organization. Each clan has its own leader who is responsible for managing clan affairs and dealing with clan affairs. Since the Yuan Dynasty, the central government and the Sichuan government have regained control of the Liangshan Yi area and implemented the Tusi system at the grassroots level. Since the Qianlong and Jiaqing years of the Qing Dynasty, Black Yi have relied on the power of their clans to oppose Tusi and Tumu and drive them to the margins. The expulsion of Tusi and Tumu marked the collapse of the "institutionalized" political construction in the heartland of the Yi people and the temporary "absence" of the Qing Dynasty's rule. The reason why this Yi area was not recognized by the outside world until modern times is that it has dangerous gateways on all sides. To the south, it is bordered by the Yalong River and Jinsha River; to the north, it is connected to the roaring Dadu River; to the west, it is backed by the Snow Mountain Range; and to the east, it is connected to the high mountains and forests of

the Daliang Mountain. More importantly, the local Yi residents are closed-minded, and the blockage of information has formed a "cultural island", which is also the main reason for the slow development of the social system.

Until the beginning of liberation, the Liangshan Yi people were still stagnant in the slave system, and the Mongolian and Tibetan peoples were still in the feudal serf system. In order to get rid of poverty and backwardness and backward productivity, the slave society and feudal serf system were reformed. This was a necessary result of the historical development of the Liangshan Yi people. In the mid-1950s, the state implemented democratic reforms in ethnic minority areas, and the slave system of the Liangshan Yi society was overthrown. However, the family branch as a form of civil society organization still plays an important role today, and the tradition of handling social contradictions in accordance with the principles of customary law continues. Due to the strict hierarchy and low productivity, the family branches continued to quarrel until Liangshan was liberated in 1950. In 1952, the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Region was established, and later changed to Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. The family branch genealogy (father and son names together) plays an important role in the Yi area and is the root of the formation of the family branch system culture.

## **Part II: The Origin and Background of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware**

### **2.1 Historical Origins of Chinese Lacquer Craft**

Lacquer, also known as natural lacquer, raw lacquer, earth lacquer, and generally known as Chinese lacquer, is a kind of deciduous tree with pinnate leaves. It is a milky white liquid harvested from the lacquer tree. After being oxidized in the air, it will turn dark brown. Mixing fine mineral color powder, grinding and blending, you can make a warm and bright "color paint". It is the only biopolymer paint in the world that comes from green plants and solidifies into a film at room temperature under the catalysis of biological enzymes. It is the earliest natural resin known to humans and one of the oldest decorative materials in my country. Lacquer has extremely high economic value and is recognized as the "king of paints" in the world. It is environmentally friendly, healthy, non-toxic and pollution-free. The paint film is hard, wear-resistant and waterproof, and more resistant to high temperatures and acids and alkalis. Therefore, in ancient Chinese culture, lacquer is regarded as a sacred material with unique symbolic significance.



Figure 7 The process of harvesting natural lacquer

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Zhuxi County, Shiyan, Hubei (April 2022)

Lacquer is an ancient tree species. The Chinese mainland is the origin of lacquer. There is a Qishui River in Shaanxi Province, China, which is named after the lacquer trees on both sides of the river. The Qishui River is the legendary birthplace of the Yellow Emperor. "Guoyu Jinyu" says: "In the past, Shao dian married Youqi and gave birth to the Yellow Emperor and the Yan Emperor. The Yellow Emperor was born in Jishui." According to textual research, "Jishui" is the Qishui River in Wugong today.

The solemn and pious ceremony of respecting the mountain is also an indispensable part. Before cutting lacquer, lacquer farmers pray for the protection of the mountain god to avoid being attacked by fierce birds and beasts or natural disasters. Respecting the laws of nature and fearing nature are the rules followed by every lacquer farmer. "Lacquer" was originally written as "漆", with the character for wood on the top and the character for water on the bottom, with a left stroke and a right stroke in the middle, just like cutting a hole with a lacquer knife. This is how our ancestors obtained raw lacquer 8,000 years ago. From the summer solstice to the autumnal equinox every year is the best time to cut lacquer. Lacquer farmers need to find a suitable lacquer tree, then cut the lacquer tree with a special lacquer cutting knife, and clamp the clam shell at the cut to catch the natural lacquer liquid flowing out. This process is extremely complicated and long. In ancient times, there was a saying that "a pound of lacquer can be obtained by cutting a pound of lacquer after walking more than a hundred miles of mountain roads and cutting more than a thousand times", which is enough to show the low output and precious value of lacquer.

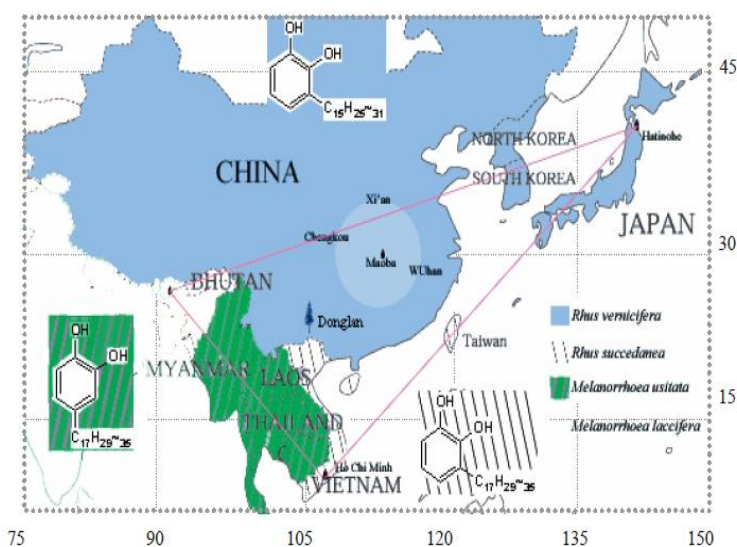


Figure 8 World Rhus distribution map

Source: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/okKMY\\_OpTBh1CphuPZsabA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/okKMY_OpTBh1CphuPZsabA) (February 2024)

There are three lacquer-producing tree species in the world, mainly distributed in Southeast Asia, namely Chinese lacquer tree (China, Japan, South Korea); Burmese lacquer tree (Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia); Annam lacquer tree (Vietnam, Taiwan, China).

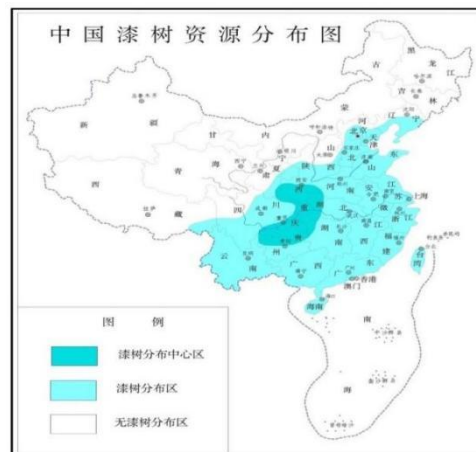


Figure 9 Distribution map of Chinese lacquer tree

Source: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/okKMY\\_OpTBh1CphuPZsabA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/okKMY_OpTBh1CphuPZsabA) (February 2024)

As can be seen from the above figure, the disease is distributed in 24 provinces and more than 500 counties and cities across the country, and is concentrated in seven provinces (cities): Shaanxi, Hubei, Sichuan, Chongqing, Gansu, Guizhou and Yunnan.

In ancient times, lacquer was often used to paint on the surface of objects. After being polished and polished, it emits a warm luster. Then, through carving, inlaying, painting, casting, and painting, it can be made into various exquisite and beautiful lacquerware, such as boxes, bowls, cups, etc. Lacquerware not only has practical functions, but is also regarded as a symbol of nobility and is often used as gifts and furnishings for nobles and royal family members.

The origin of Chinese lacquer craft can be seen from two aspects: one is written records, and the other is archaeological data. According to ancient Chinese literature and data, the earliest use of lacquer as a coating on wooden products was in the era of Shun and Yu. The Warring States document "Han Feizi•Ten Mistakes" records the use of lacquerware during the time of Shun: "Yao passed the throne to Yu Shun, who took over and made food utensils. He cut mountain wood and made treasures, cut and sawed the traces, and flowed lacquer and ink on them. He sent them to the palace and made them into food utensils. ... Shun passed the throne to Yu, who made sacrificial utensils, dyed the outside with ink, and painted the inside with vermilion." This provides important textual clues for the formation of Chinese lacquer culture. At the beginning of lacquer craft, archaeological artifacts also provide important scientific basis for researchers. From the lacquer ornaments unearthed from the Kuahuqiao site in the Yangtze River Basin in China, from the Jingtoushan cultural site (about 8300-7800 years ago), Kuahuqiao culture (about 8000-7000 years ago), Hemudu culture (about 7000-5000 years ago), Liangzhu culture (about 5300-4200 years ago), to 4000 years ago, physical examples can be found almost every hundred years. The emergence of Chinese lacquer craft can be traced back to the Neolithic period. A lacquer bow unearthed from the Kuahuqiao site in Hangzhou, Zhejiang is the earliest known lacquerware with a history of 8,000 years. This lacquer bow is 121 cm long and 3.3 cm wide, with lacquer all over the body. The lacquer bow consists of four parts: a red deteriorated lacquer surface film, a lacquer layer, a monochrome lacquer lower layer, and a wooden frame, but some parts have fallen off. After

physical and chemical analysis of the lacquer, research has shown that it is confirmed to be natural lacquer. This is the earliest lacquerware discovered in China.

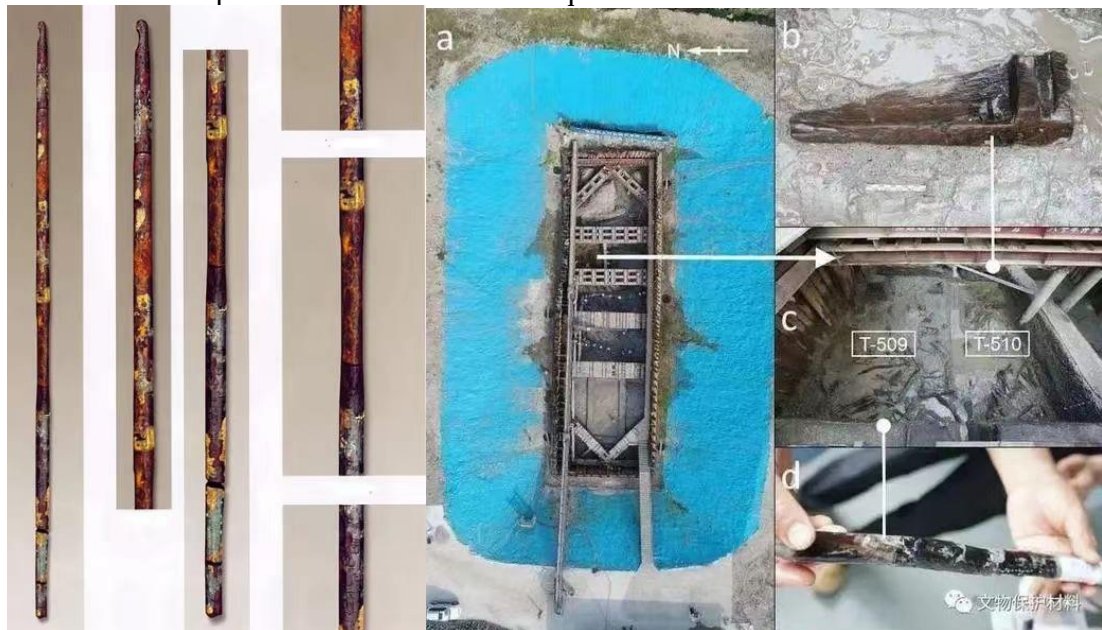


Figure 10 Lacquer bow unearthed from the Kuahuqiao site in Hangzhou, Zhejiang  
Source: Cited from [http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art\\_1665719\\_58876428.html](http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art_1665719_58876428.html)  
(February 2024)

As shown in Figure 10, the lacquer bow unearthed from the Kuahuqiao site in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, has a history of 8,000 years, breaking the record held by the lacquer bowl unearthed from the Hemudu site and pushing the history of the use of lacquerware in ancient my country back 1,000 years. This is one of the most important physical evidences for studying the development of Chinese lacquerware. In addition, the red lacquer wooden bowls unearthed from the Hemudu site 7,000 years ago; the jade-inlaid lacquerware unearthed from the Liangzhu culture site; the pottery-based lacquerware unearthed from the Tuanjie Village site and Meiyan site in Jiangsu; and the thin-bodied lacquerware unearthed from the Dadianzi tombs in Aohan Banner, Liaoning Province, about 3,500 years ago, all confirmed to the outside world that China was the first country to discover and use natural lacquer.





Figure 11

A red lacquer wooden bowl unearthed from Hemudu Village, Yuyao City,

As shown in Figure 11, the red lacquer wooden bowl unearthed in Hemudu Village, Yuyao City, Zhejiang Province, has a history of 7,000 years. The surface of the vessel is painted with vermilion lacquer, which turns black after oxidation. This discovery shows that seven thousand years ago, the climate was very suitable for the growth of lacquer trees. The ancestors of the Yangtze River Basin Zhejiang Province Source: Cited from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zFMcS1oCpn46ByegsZ3bGw> (February 2024)

in China had already used natural lacquer to decorate the surface of daily utensils, and the craftsmanship had already been highlighted.



Figure 12 Jade-inlaid lacquerware unearthed from the Liangzhu cultural site

Source: Cited from [http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art\\_1665719\\_58876428.html](http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art_1665719_58876428.html) (February 2024)

The jade-inlaid lacquerware unearthed from the Liangzhu cultural site dates back to about 5,300 to 4,200 years ago. The body of the vessel is made of wood and the entire body is painted with vermilion lacquer. A total of 141 jade grains are inlaid. It is a powerful representative of jade inlaid decoration of lacquerware. This shows that the Liangzhu ancestors had initially mastered the jade inlay technology of lacquerware.

The Neolithic lacquerware unearthed in various parts of China fully reflects the wisdom of the ancient ancestors in discovering, developing and applying the properties of lacquer. The characteristics of the utensils can reflect the philosophical thoughts of the ancestors. Lacquerware played an important role in ancient times and had a strong religious and ceremonial nature. These utensils pioneered the Chinese lacquer craft and laid the foundation for the subsequent development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

## **2.2 Characteristics of Chinese lacquer craft in different historical stages**

Chinese lacquer art culture has a long history. The invention and use of lacquerware is an outstanding contribution to human civilization and an excellent traditional craft in ancient China. The "Annotations to the Painting Record" compiled by Mr. Wang Shixiang roughly divides the history of Chinese lacquer art into the Neolithic Age; during the Shang, Western Zhou, Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, inlays, mother-of-pearl, and painted lacquerware have reached a high level; during the Qin and Han Dynasties, it took 500 years to form the period when lacquer painting flourished; during the Eastern Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, the development of lacquer craftsmanship fluctuated, but it did not affect the development of lacquer craftsmanship; during the Tang and Song Dynasties, the main lacquer varieties were basically available, and carved lacquer reached the peak of history; During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, different painting techniques blended with each other, ushering in the endless development of Chinese lacquer craftsmanship.

### **2.2.1 Neolithic lacquerware**

Since the Neolithic Age, ancient people have mastered the art of lacquerware. From the disintegration of clan communes to the rise of slave society, there are historical records of using lacquer for food utensils and sacrificial utensils. "The Book of Xia: Yu Gong" once recorded that "the tribute was lacquer silk, and the baskets were woven with patterns. They floated on the Ji River and Luo River and reached the Yellow River." Here, lacquer was used as one of the tributes to make lacquerware for the ruling class, which shows the importance the ruling class attached to lacquer craftsmanship and lacquerware at that time. The lacquer craftsmanship in the Neolithic Age was still in the exploratory stage, and the types of products were mainly daily necessities, and the body materials were mainly wood and pottery.

### **2.2.2 Shang Dynasty Lacquerware**

The Shang Dynasty was an important development period of human "barter"<sup>16</sup> trade. Frequent trade activities led to a rapid improvement in the production level of various industries during this period. The lacquerware craftsmanship of the Shang

<sup>16</sup> "Barter" is an exchange value model under the conditions of social contract or clear agreement. It is the opposite of the free value model of gift economy. It is a transaction method that existed before the emergence of the current trade model, using one's own goods or services to exchange with others in exchange for their goods or services.

Dynasty was also greatly improved, and its uses became more and more extensive. Although bronze vessels and pottery products were relatively popular in the field of life during this period, the appearance of lacquerware just met the aesthetics and requirements of the powerful nobles in the court because bronze vessels were expensive and bulky, and pottery was relatively rough and fragile. Therefore, it was deeply favored by the powerful nobles. From the unearthed artifacts, it can be seen that the lacquer craftsmanship at that time had simple inlays, black vermilion paintings, and carved patterns. The patterns of lacquerware were based on various animals, and were deeply influenced by bronze ware, with "Taotie patterns, thunder patterns, banana leaf patterns, etc. The colors are mostly matched with vermilion lacquer and black lacquer, with vermilion lacquer as the base and black lacquer piled high, and the lacquer surface has a delicate texture. The utensils of this period were mainly practical and often used in life and religious sacrifices. The craftsmanship uses simple inlay, piling, flat painting and other techniques. From the simple decoration, it can be seen that the level of lacquer craftsmanship at that time was relatively low. Due to the particularity of the lacquer material, there are relatively few complete vessels preserved from this period. During this period, bronze vessels and pottery were relatively popular in the field of life, but because bronze vessels were expensive and heavy, and pottery was relatively rough and fragile, the emergence of lacquerware just met the aesthetics and requirements of the court nobles, so it was deeply favored by the nobles. From the unearthed objects, we can know that the lacquer craftsmanship at that time had simple inlays, black vermilion painting, and carved patterns. The patterns of lacquerware were based on various animals. At the same time, they were deeply influenced by bronze ware, and "Taotie patterns, thunder patterns, banana leaf patterns, etc. appeared. The colors are mostly red lacquer and black lacquer. The red lacquer is the base, and the black lacquer is piled up. The texture of the lacquer surface is delicate. The utensils of this period are mainly practical and often used in life and religious sacrifices. The craftsmanship uses simple inlays, piles up, flat painting and other techniques. From the simple decoration, it can be seen that the level of lacquer craftsmanship at that time was low. Due to the particularity of the lacquer material, there are few intact utensils preserved during this period.

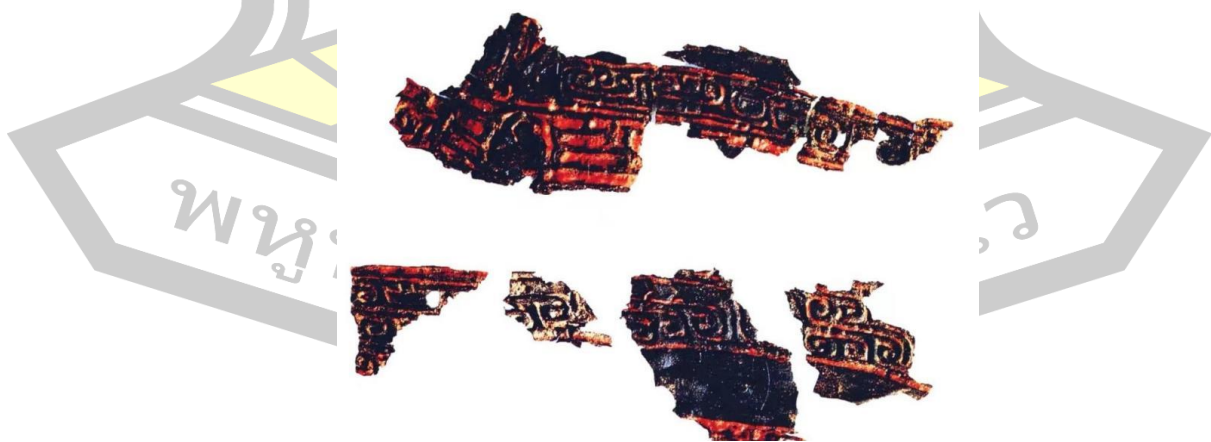


Figure 13 Unearthed fragments of lacquerware from the Shang Dynasty  
 Source: Cited from [http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art\\_1665719\\_58876428.html](http://wwj.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art_1665719_58876428.html)  
 (February 2024)

Figure 13 shows the unearthed Shang Dynasty lacquerware fragments, which are mainly black and vermilion in color, with black patterns painted on the vermilion lacquer base. The patterns are delicate and well-proportioned, and are obviously influenced by bronze ware. This shows that basic techniques such as lacquer drying and painting had already been mastered at that time.

### 2.2.3 Western Zhou Lacquerware

The Western Zhou Dynasty was the heyday of China's slave society. Social productivity further improved, promoting the local cultural economy. As people demanded better quality of life, the demand for lacquerware also gradually increased. "The Book of Zhou: Spring Officials: Censors" mentioned "lacquerware" and "lacquered carriages and fences"<sup>17</sup> when describing the travel items used by rulers to show their status. It gave a detailed description of the noble and gorgeous lacquered carriages, indicating that professionals had already conducted research and exploration on the properties and craftsmanship of lacquer. At the same time, "Kaogongji" recorded the description of the properties of raw lacquer, as well as the taxation of lacquer.

After inheriting the lacquer craftsmanship of the Shang Dynasty, the lacquer craftsmanship of the Western Zhou Dynasty became more diversified and the procedures were more complicated. The lacquer craftsmanship basically covered the making of the body, lacquering, carving, inlaying, painting, etc., which also laid an important foundation for the production of lacquerware in later generations. The complexity of the lacquerware craftsmanship reflected the hierarchy and order in the Western Zhou Dynasty. It often formed a large part of ritual vessels together with bronze and jade ware. Its owners were all people with a certain status at that time. The types and decorative effects were strictly defined to indicate the level and conform to the ritual system. There were not many geometric patterns on the lacquerware of the Western Zhou Dynasty. Its function was roughly the same as that of the string pattern on the bronze ware of the same period, just as a foil for the main pattern. The decorative patterns of the lacquerware of the Western Zhou Dynasty mainly included taotie pattern, kuilong pattern, string pattern, thunder pattern, phoenix pattern, cloud and thunder pattern, vortex pattern and hui pattern. The decorative patterns of this period inherited the techniques of the Shang Dynasty, using painted and mother-of-pearl to form patterns. The organic combination of painted and mother-of-pearl became the most distinctive decorative technique in the decorative patterns of Western Zhou lacquerware. The hierarchy and sense of order of the Western Zhou Dynasty created the unique artistic beauty and characteristics of the lacquerware of this period, and also influenced the aesthetics and class understanding of later generations.

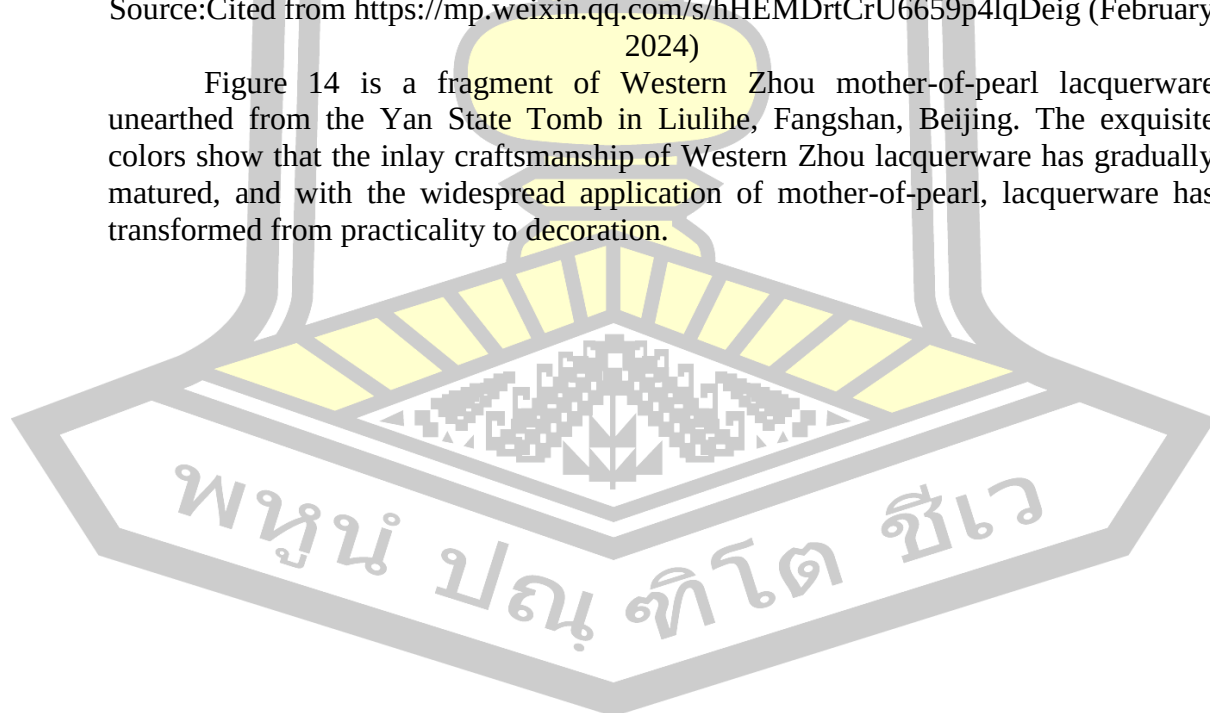
<sup>17</sup> "Lacquer car cover" comes from "Zhou Li·Spring Officials·Jinche", which was a car cover made of lacquered reed mats in ancient times.



Figure 14 Western Zhou mother-of-pearl lacquerware fragment

Source:Cited from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/hHEMDrtCrU6659p4lqDeig> (February 2024)

Figure 14 is a fragment of Western Zhou mother-of-pearl lacquerware unearthed from the Yan State Tomb in Liulihe, Fangshan, Beijing. The exquisite colors show that the inlay craftsmanship of Western Zhou lacquerware has gradually matured, and with the widespread application of mother-of-pearl, lacquerware has transformed from practicality to decoration.



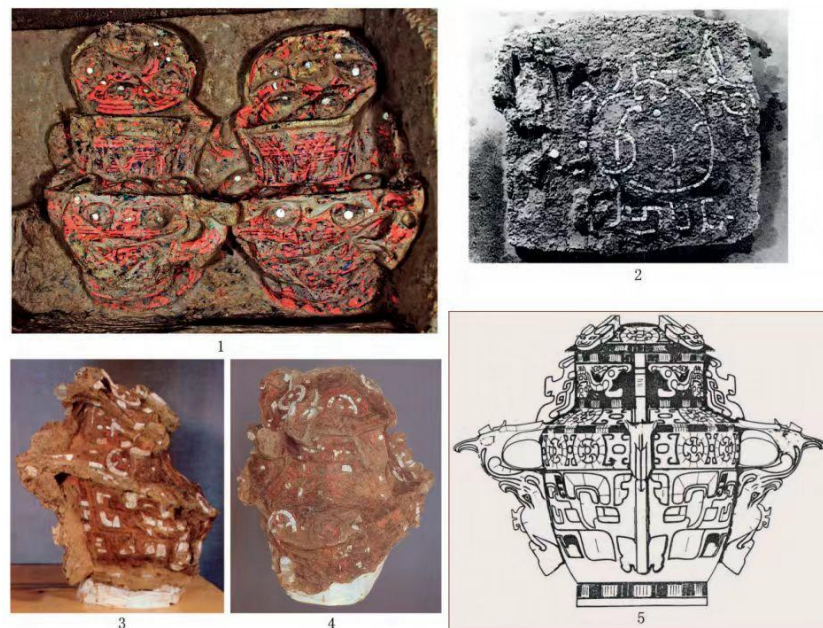


Figure 15 A lacquer jar unearthed from the Western Zhou tomb M163 at Zhangjiapo, Chang'an, Shan xi

Source: Quoted from "Complete Collection of Chinese Lacquerware 1: Pre-Qin" (February 2024)

Figure 15 shows an earthen lacquer jar unearthed from the Western Zhou tomb M163 in Zhangjiapo, Chang'an, Shaanxi. The outer wall of the reddish-brown lacquerware has a pattern inlaid with clam pieces and surrounded by curling grass patterns. The discovery of Western Zhou mother-of-pearl lacquerware shows that the mother-of-pearl inlay technique was first created in the Western Zhou Dynasty, which is undoubtedly of great value to lacquerware research.

#### 2.2.4 Lacquerware from the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period

Lacquerware craftsmanship flourished from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties to the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Lacquerware in the Spring and Autumn Period was light and exquisite, and was widely used in all areas of life. Lacquerware became an important part of the material and spiritual life of the royal family and aristocracy. The lacquerware craftsmanship in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period had obvious progress in terms of technology. The lacquerware of this period was of various types, excellent craftsmanship, and widely distributed.

The production of fetal bones is more diverse. In addition to ordinary wooden bodies, lacquerware carcasses are also commonly made of different materials such as copper tire, quilted tire, leather tire, bamboo tire, etc. Lacquerware was also widely used during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Common types of lacquerware include food utensils (cups, plates, pots, and urchins); daily utensils (lunch boxes, screens, beds, etc.); weapons (lacquer bows, lacquer shields, and armors). ); musical instruments (qin, drums, sheng); funeral utensils (coffins, tomb beasts, sacrificial supplies), and means of transportation (boats, carriages), etc. In addition, purely ornamental lacquerware handicrafts appeared, and this technology

progressed into lacquerware. The development provided a broader platform, reflecting the high development of lacquerware craftsmanship and people's understanding of the practicality of lacquerware at that time.

The lacquerware of this period was more colorful. In addition to the traditional vermilion and black, it also added a variety of colors such as red, yellow, green, blue, white, and gold, forming a colorful artistic effect. In terms of decoration, there are two types of patterns in the Spring and Autumn lacquerware: square and round. The square pattern is mainly applied on the table, and the round pattern is mainly applied on the plate. The color is mainly painted on black with red. The patterns and decorations of lacquerware are complex and regular. The geometric patterns are combined with animal patterns. They are deeply influenced by bronze decoration. This decorative style is also the main feature of bronze decoration since the Shang and Zhou Dynasties, showing a high level of artistic creativity and aesthetic level. The lacquerware craftsmanship in different regions began to show obvious local characteristics. For example, the Central Plains, Chu State, Bashu and other places all have their own unique lacquerware styles, forming their own craft traditions and artistic characteristics. The lacquerware craftsmanship in the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods was no longer a single coating application, but was combined with other artistic techniques such as carving, painting, and inlaying, making lacquerware not only a practical item, but also a handicraft with high artistic value. With the changes in people's ideas and aesthetic concepts, the lacquerware craftsmanship developed rapidly during the Warring States Period and ushered in its first prosperous period. This change is reflected in the design, shape, color and decoration of lacquerware, showing a trend of greater emphasis on aesthetics and personalization.

The lacquerware craftsmanship during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period not only made great achievements at the technical level, but also made significant progress in artistic expression, aesthetic pursuit and cultural connotation. It was an important period in the history of Chinese lacquerware craftsmanship. According to historical records, since the Western Zhou Dynasty, ancestors have attached great importance to the planting and cultivation of lacquer trees. During the Warring States Period, the economy of the lacquer tree planting industry was even comparable to that of salt, mulberry, hemp, etc. This also provided the basis for the development of the lacquer art industry at that time, an important material and economic foundation. At the same time, the use of iron tools improved the craftsmanship conditions of craftsmen at that time, thereby promoting the development of lacquer art. At this time, decorative techniques such as depiction, needle carving, carving, and silver buckles had appeared in lacquer craft. Based on the original craftsmanship of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, more richness and diversity. During the Warring States Period, the aristocracy's pursuit of luxurious life catalyzed the rapid development of lacquer art. Craftsmen studied their craftsmanship, and the craftsmanship at this time was greatly improved. Lacquer craftsmanship not only became more sophisticated, but also gradually became an independent craft. Traditional craftsmanship.



Figure 16 Lacquerware Gui with Qiaoqu Pattern (Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period)

Source: Quoted from "Complete Collection of Chinese Lacquerware 1: Pre-Qin" (February 2024)

The lacquerware shown in Figure 16 above is now in the collection of the Yichang Museum in Hubei Province. The inside of the vessel is painted with red lacquer, the surface is painted with black lacquer, and red and yellow lacquer are used to paint water ripples, curved lines, deformed curved lines, triangle lines, ripples, wave stripes and hook lines. The overall shape is composed of a lid and a body. The body of the gui has a narrow mouth, a bulging belly, a round bottom, and two symmetrical cow-shaped ears on the shoulders. It can be seen that whether it is shape or color, lacquerware in this period pays more attention to aesthetics and artistry.



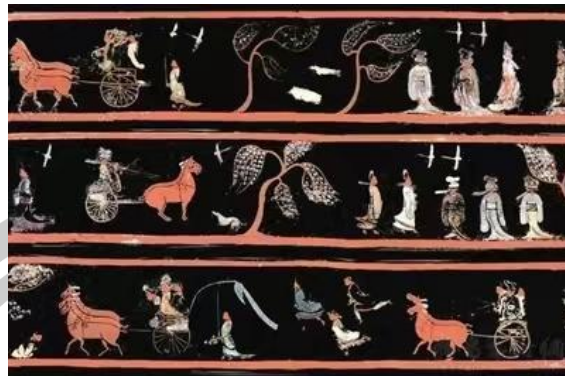


Figure 17 Round box with painted figures and carriages (Warring States Period)  
Source: Quoted from "Complete Collection of Chinese Lacquerware 1: Pre-Qin"  
(March 2024)

The painted round box with figures and chariots unearthed from Tomb No. 2 in Baoshan, Jingmen, Hubei Province (Warring States Period) is now in the collection of Hubei Provincial Museum. Judging from the presentation of patterns and colors, the lacquerware of the Warring States Period inherited the characteristics of bronze ware in terms of shape and decoration. It can be seen that the splendor and wealth of the lacquerware of the Warring States Period also reflects the strong economic foundation of the court at that time.

#### 2.2.5 Lacquerware from the Qin and Han Dynasties

From the Warring States Period to the Qin and Han Dynasties, the strong economic and political foundations provided strong support for the development of humanities and arts. The Qin and Han Dynasties were the most typical golden period of ancient Chinese lacquerware art. Qin and Han lacquerware developed on the basis of Warring States lacquerware. At this time, lacquerware gradually replaced bronze ware and became the main utensils in the lives of our ancestors. The shape and decoration of the utensils showed a new look. According to the Qin bamboo slips in Yunmeng Shuihudi, Hubei, Qin Shihuang continued the lacquer garden economy of the Warring States Period, put forward new requirements for the planting of lacquer trees, implemented the production responsibility system, and formulated relevant standards. Officials who did not meet the production standards were subject to economic sanctions. It can be seen that the lacquer art of the Qin Dynasty accompanied the fall of the six countries, not only without a break, but also further developed. With the changes of history, while pursuing practical functions, Qin and Han lacquerware also began to focus on the pursuit of the enrichment of its aesthetic spiritual functions. Lacquerware changed from a simple material form to a cultural form and became an art carrier with profound cultural connotations.

The most notable feature of lacquerware in the Qin Dynasty is the application of decorative techniques to large-scale buildings. It is said that when Qin II built the Epang Palace, he used a large number of lacquer decorative techniques. Not only that, he also specially excavated the first According to the "Chang'an Chronicle" cited in the "Kuo Di Zhi", "The Lacquer Canal was opened by Hu Hai when he built the Epang Palace to transport lacquer from Nanshan." Whether the lacquer canal was transported through Nanshan? There is no way to prove the lacquer, and it has become an eternal mystery. However, it is an indisputable fact that the palaces of the Qin Dynasty were greatly renovated and the use of paint was amazing. There is a

Qiqu River near Xi'an, which flows through the Epang Palace ruins and still exists today. As an agricultural cash crop, lacquer cultivation has received widespread attention from society. It once became an effective way for farmers to make a fortune during the Qin and Han Dynasties. "Historical Records" records: "Chen and Xia Qianmuqi...these people are equal to Qianhuhou", which shows that at that time, the status of "Qianmuqi" was comparable to that of "Qianhuhou".



Figure 18 Qishui River in Shan xi

Source: Quoted from "Complete Collection of Chinese Lacquerware 1: Pre-Qin" (February 2024)

The legendary birthplace of Huangdi. "Guoyu·Jinyu" records: "In the past, Shao dian married Youqi and gave birth to Huangdi and Yandi. Huangdi was born in Jishui." This also shows that the large-scale planting of lacquer trees in the early Qin and Han dynasties provided a strong guarantee for the production of lacquer art.

From the perspective of the modeling technology of lacquerware in the Qin and Han dynasties, the shapes of the objects are rich and varied, the ideas are ingenious, and the design focuses on both practical and ornamental functions. It has a unique artistic style, and new and ingenious designs are often presented on lacquerware. The design of lacquerware in the Qin and Han dynasties has a series concept, and is no longer a simple vessel. For example, in wine vessels and food vessels, many lacquerware are designed in sets, which can save space and be beautiful and coordinated. Among them, the multi-child makeup box has typical characteristics. The largest outer vessel contains several small boxes of different shapes and sizes for storing dressing utensils. It saves space, is easy to carry, and is exquisite and beautiful, reflecting the outstanding design ideas of craftsmen in the Qin and Han dynasties. Among the Qin Dynasty lacquerware, the lacquerware unearthed from Yunmeng Shuihudi is very representative. The records of Qin bamboo slips and unearthed objects prove that the lacquering technology in the Qin Dynasty was very developed, but it was mainly seen in practical vessels and owned by the upper class aristocrats. Appreciative lacquerware objects are almost absent, which is directly related to the short history of the Qin Dynasty to a large extent.

From the material analysis, most of the lacquerware in the Qin and Han Dynasties were made of wood and paper. Paper craft, as a production technique of ancient Chinese lacquerware, is closely related to the development of lacquerware production technology. In terms of the method, wood or mud is used to make the inner tube, and then summer cloth or linen is applied to the inner tube, fixed with lacquer paste, and repeated several layers. After it is completely dry, the inner tube is removed, and finally the lacquer ash of the linen is repeatedly polished and painted to make "bodiless lacquerware". Paper craft has been mostly used to make Buddha statues since the Wei and Jin Dynasties. After the Qing Dynasty, it was used to make bodiless lacquerware in Fuzhou, China, and it has continued to this day. In modern times, bodiless lacquerware has been further improved and developed on the basis of learning from the ancient paper craft. Paper craft also has important significance in the development of lacquer art.

From the perspective of decorative techniques, the decorative techniques of lacquerware in the Qin and Han dynasties can be roughly divided into several main techniques, such as painting, inlaying, inlaying, and gold and silver foil decals. Among them, painting, as an important decorative technique in this period, adds a unique artistic charm to lacquerware with its rich colors and delicate lines. The unique and exquisite decorative technique of "inlaying gold" is unique in the lacquerware of the Qin and Han dynasties. Its production process is quite exquisite: first, on the lacquer layer that has not yet dried, the craftsmen use carving knives to skillfully carve delicate and exquisite patterns. These patterns have smooth lines, delicate and delicate, fully demonstrating the craftsmen's superb skills and unique pursuit of beauty. Subsequently, the craftsmen will fill the grooves carved by the carving knives with gold foil or gold powder. This step makes the entire pattern glow with golden brilliance, forming a sharp contrast with the black lacquer base, making it more luxurious and elegant. This "inlaying gold" decorative technique not only enhances the ornamental value of lacquerware, but also reflects the ancient craftsmen's pursuit of details and love of beauty. In summary, the lacquerware decoration techniques of the Qin and Han dynasties, with their rich and diverse techniques and exquisite craftsmanship, have left a valuable cultural heritage for future generations. Among them, the unique decorative technique of "incised gold" further demonstrates the wisdom and unique pursuit of beauty of ancient craftsmen.

Judging from the ancient lacquerware unearthed so far, the lacquerware decorations from the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period to the Qin and Han Dynasties are dominated by various animal elements, among which fish, birds, cranes, tigers, leopards and other birds and beasts are the main elements, as well as mountains and rivers in natural landscapes. Observing the decorative patterns of lacquerware unearthed from the Qin and Han Dynasties, it can be found that the decorative images of dragons and phoenixes, fish and birds that are connected head to tail and circling around each other occupy the main position. For example, the A-type lacquer ear cup unearthed from the Han Tomb No. 168 in Fenghuang Mountain, Jiangling, has three large carps swimming around the central four-leaf pattern on the bottom of the cup, and the fish mouths hold flower-like plant patterns. Similar to this three-fish pattern cup are the two phoenix-patterned lacquer bowls unearthed from the Qin Tomb No. 11 in Shuihudi, Yunmeng. In addition, circling and intertwined dragon and phoenix patterns and abstract and deformed phoenix patterns are also everywhere.

The symbolization of these natural objects or supernatural objects makes them a meaningful form.

In terms of color, lacquerware from the Spring and Autumn Period to the Qin and Han Dynasties was based on black, red, and yellow, and then gradually added other colors such as brown, gold, gray and black. The use of these colors not only enriched the visual effect of lacquerware, but also showed the unique insights and superb skills of ancient craftsmen in color matching. From the large number of lacquerware unearthed during this period, we can clearly see that lacquerware at this time has shown an artistic tendency of both ornamental and practicality. They are not only practical items in daily life, but also works of art, carrying the wisdom and creativity of ancient craftsmen. These exquisite lacquerware are undoubtedly the shining pearls among the ancient cultural treasures, representing the superb traditional craftsmanship of ancient China.



Figure 19 Type A lacquer-handled cup unearthed from Han Tomb No. 168 at Fenghuang Mountain, Jiangling

Source: Quoted from "Complete Collection of Chinese Lacquerware 1: Pre-Qin" (February 2024)

พหุ ประถมศึกษา



The Sui Dynasty (581-618) was a relatively short-lived dynasty, lasting for more than 30 years in Chinese history, and there are relatively few documents on lacquerware production. However, it is puzzling that lacquerware seems to have disappeared somewhat. Due to the lack of archaeological documents, it has become a very special "blank period" in the history of ancient lacquerware development. Lacquerware continued to develop in the Tang Dynasty, and lacquerware was listed as one of the taxable items. According to the "Geographical Records of the Book of Tang", some areas such as Xiangzhou and Lizhou used lacquerware as tribute. It can be seen that lacquerware has been widely developed. In the history of lacquerware craftsmanship, this dynasty showed outstanding creativity and extraordinary expressiveness. "New Book of Tang. Records of Officials" and "Book of Tang. Records of Ceremonial Guards" have records of the origin of raw lacquer and the production of lacquerware. Cui Zhiyuan's "Tang Wen Shiyi" Volume 36 "The Lacquerware Report" records that "15,935 lacquerwares were supplied in the sixth year of Qianfu." In order to adapt to the artistic requirements for gorgeous and splendid objects during the rise of the feudal economy, its production has developed towards gorgeous decoration.

The development of arts and crafts during the Tang Dynasty also reached an unprecedented level, representing the unprecedented prosperity of the economy and culture during this period. The lacquerware at this time had superb craftsmanship and exquisite decoration, with distinct characteristics of the times. More emphasis was placed on the development and innovation of decorative techniques, such as lacquerware with raised patterns formed by thick lacquer; mother-of-pearl ware with images cut from shells, line-carved on them, and inlaid on the lacquer surface to form patterns; and gold and silver flat-peeled lacquerware inlaid with gold and silver flower pieces. Not only did the traditional mother-of-pearl inlay technique become more mature, but the newly created gold and silver flat-peeling, carved lacquer, and lacquerware laid the technical foundation for the development of lacquerware towards display and appreciation after the Song Dynasty.

During the Tang Dynasty, lacquerware became increasingly diverse and refined, including daily necessities such as bowls, alms bowls, cups, bowls, boxes, spoons, plates, mirrors, bottles, and zithers, as well as handicrafts. The shapes of the lacquerware vary greatly, with round lacquerware preferring to have curved rims and square lacquerware preferring to have angled rims, which are very distinctive. Flat-peeled lacquerware originated from the gold-plating technique of the Han Dynasty. After years of refinement and innovation, it has gradually evolved into two unique gold and silver flat-peeling techniques. One is to carefully carve the pattern and the lacquer base to the same plane, and the other is to make the pattern slightly raised above the lacquer base. The production process of flat-peeled lacquerware requires superb skills of lacquer workers. First, the lacquer workers will select gold or silver sheets and cut out patterns according to the preset decorative patterns. Then these patterns will be pasted on the surface of the lacquerware, and then the lacquer workers will paint three to four times on this basis to perfectly blend the lacquer layer with the gold and silver patterns. After drying, the gold and silver patterns gradually reveal their dazzling texture after being polished. At this time, the patterns and the lacquer base have been integrated, and the warm and gorgeous texture highlights the unique charm and charm of flat-peeled lacquerware. Gold and silver flat-peeled lacquerware

was extremely popular in the Tang Dynasty, fully reflecting the rich and gorgeous artistic characteristics of the Tang Dynasty. According to "Xiyang Zazu", during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty, a large number of flat-peeled objects were produced to reward officials. The items given to An Lushan by Emperor Xunzong of the Tang Dynasty and Yang Guifei included gold flat-peeled large plates, gold and silver flat-peeled wonton plates, and silver flat-peeled five-legged rice cakes. Yao Runeng's "An Lushan's Deeds" and Le Shi's "Zizhi Tongjian" and other books all describe and record that Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang Dynasty and Yang Guifei rewarded An Lushan with gold and silver flat-peeled lacquerware. There are many such lacquer products in the Shosoin in Japan. Among them, the gold and silver flat-peeled qin of the Tang Dynasty is a typical lacquerware of this period. (As shown in Figure 22 below), this work is now in the collection of Shosoin in Kyoto, Japan. It is 114 cm long and 20 cm wide at the shoulder. According to the "National Treasures Account of Todaiji Temple" in Japan, the gold and silver Heiwenqin was collected in the Shosoin treasury in May of the eighth year of Emperor Saga's reign (814 AD, the twelfth year of Emperor Xianzong's reign in the Tang Dynasty), and it has been more than a thousand years. The gold and silver Heiwenqin in the Shosoin collection has thirteen emblems on the surface of the qin inlaid with gold, and the drawings on the top and bottom plates (including the inscriptions on the bottom plate) are inlaid with silver. It is made by the gold and silver flat-peeling technique. There are gold and silver flat-peeling figures, birds, animals, plants and flowers on the surface. The surface of the qin is purple, and the front of the flat-peeling pattern is a brocade pattern square. There are three people inside, playing the ruan, playing the qin, and drinking. There are trees, bamboos and flying celestials around, and the empty space is filled with flowers, birds, and clouds.

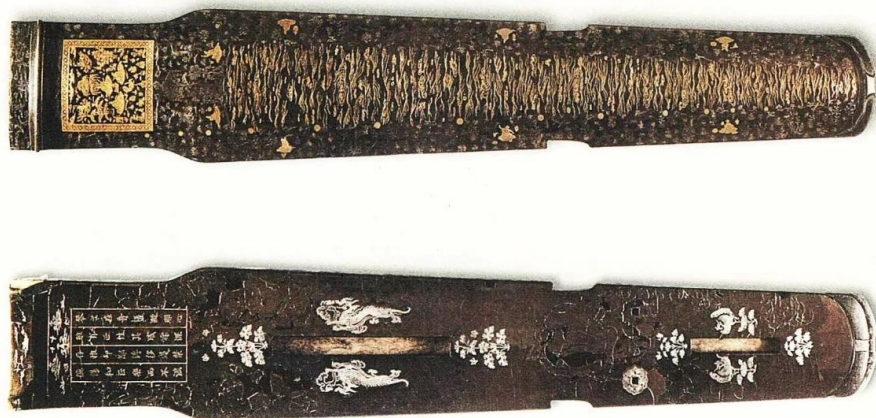




Figure 22 Tang Dynasty Guqin

Source: Quoted from the book "Chinese Handicraft Lacquer Art" (May 2024)

The picture above is a Tang Dynasty guqin currently preserved in Japan's Shosoin. This guqin is complex in craftsmanship, exquisitely made, with delicate patterns and all inlaid with silver. It is a typical representative work of Tang Dynasty gold and silver flat-peeled lacquerware. It can be seen that the lacquerware of this period was luxurious and gorgeous, and the development of traditional crafts reached a peak.

The lacquerware craftsmanship of the Tang Dynasty reached its peak. Among them, the most eye-catching skills, in addition to the dazzling "gold and silver flat peeling", are the ingenious "mother-of-pearl inlay" craftsmanship. The emphasis on inlay decoration is the main feature of Tang Dynasty lacquerware. The mother-of-pearl inlay technique was widely popular in the middle of the Tang Dynasty. It is pure shells, or combined with tortoise shells, amber, turquoise, etc., to produce a bas-relief decorative effect on lacquerware. This technique provides a unique and highly creative expression method for the decorative art of lacquerware. The clam shells are cut into thin slices and inlaid on the plain black lacquer. This white light forms a sharp contrast effect on the dark background, providing lacquer workers with an excellent creative method. The profound wisdom and superb technology contained in this ancient craft still show their unique charm after years of baptism.

According to the "Biography of the Monk's Eastern Expedition in the Tang Dynasty", when Monk Jianzhen sailed east from Yangzhou for the second time in the second year of the Tianbao period of the Tang Dynasty, he carried "fifty mother-of-pearl sutra boxes" among the items he brought. Tang Dynasty lacquerware inlaid with mother-of-pearl has been found in Henan, Shan xi, Xinjiang and other places. Although gold and silver flat-peel lacquerware and mother-of-pearl lacquerware are gorgeous and exquisite, their craftsmanship is complicated and time-consuming. Therefore, Tang Suzong, who experienced the "Anshi Rebellion", banned the manufacture of such lacquerware, which gradually declined and almost disappeared in the Song Dynasty. This is also the reason why although Tang Dynasty lacquerware has been discovered, there are relatively few physical objects unearthed by archaeology. However, combining archaeological discoveries, documentary records and handed-down lacquerware, we can feel the glorious history of Tang Dynasty lacquerware.



Figure 23 Tang Dynasty Lacquer Mirror with Mother-of-Pearl Figures, Flowers and Birds

Source: Quoted from the book "Chinese Handicraft Lacquer Art" (May 2024)



Figure 24 Tang Dynasty Mother-of-pearl Sandalwood Five-String Pipa

Source: from <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/DxE40rijsUhb1n31q4MNqA> (May 2024)

The carved lacquer in the Tang Dynasty is different from the earlier lacquer carving decoration. The previous lacquer carving decoration was to carve on the wood base first and then paint it, while the carved lacquer in the Tang Dynasty was to paint dozens of layers of lacquer on the lacquer base first, and then carve it after it reached a certain thickness. This method is now called red carving. The real carved lacquer in the Tang Dynasty has not been found yet. However, according to the "Lacquer Record", "Most of the Tang Dynasty printed boards were carved flat, with brocade red color, and the carving method was ancient and simple, which was admirable. There were also some sunken yellow brocades." It can be seen that the carving method of

the lacquer in the Tang Dynasty was sharp and sharp, showing a sharp edge, unlike the later delicate and smooth ones.

The Tang Dynasty was another peak period in the history of Chinese art. After nearly 400 years of multi-ethnic integration and foreign cultural influence during the Three Kingdoms, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties and Sui Dynasty, the craft culture of the Tang Dynasty integrated local culture with Western culture and Indian Buddhist culture, showing the confident and generous demeanor of a great country. As an important stage of ancient Chinese lacquerware art, Tang Dynasty lacquerware has rich cultural connotations and far-reaching significance and influence. They have an important position and influence in the history of lacquerware art in China and East Asia. The lacquerware craft of the Tang Dynasty has realized its historical mission of carrying forward the past and opening up the future, and has laid a solid foundation for the development of lacquer craft in later generations. As Yang Ming, a lacquer worker in the Ming Dynasty, said in "The Original Preface to the Lacquerware Record": "Today's craftsmanship is based on the ancient style of the Tang Dynasty and the common method of the Song and Yuan Dynasties."

#### 2.2.7 Lacquerware from the Song and Yuan Dynasties

The Song and Yuan dynasties played an important role in the development history of Chinese lacquerware. Since the Song and Yuan Dynasties, lacquer art technology has gradually become popular among the people, and the technology has become increasingly mature. During this period, specialized lacquerware workshops began to emerge. They not only met the domestic market demand, but also promoted the commercial trade of lacquerware, making lacquerware a wide range of daily necessities and works of art. The wide variety of lacquerware sold in the store, from practical tableware to exquisite decorations, reflects the important status of lacquerware in society at that time. In addition, the craftsmanship of lacquerware during the Song and Yuan Dynasties has also been significantly improved. The emergence of innovative technologies and unique styles made the Song and Yuan periods a golden period for the development of lacquerware.

The artistic charm of lacquerware in the Song and Yuan dynasties was further enhanced and deepened. The literati and scholars of this period began to have a profound impact on lacquerware design, and the simple aesthetics they advocated gradually became the dominant concept of lacquerware design. This change in aesthetic concepts has caused the decorative style of lacquerware to change from complex to simple and restrained. Lacquerware is no longer a luxury limited to the royal family and the nobility, but is more integrated into daily life and appreciated and used by a wider range of social classes. The lacquerware of the Song and Yuan dynasties is more sophisticated in shape, and the proportions and structures are carefully designed to achieve a perfect visual balance. The craftsmen's attention and control of details have reached an unprecedented level, and each work is particularly exquisite and elegant. This pursuit of beauty is not only reflected in the appearance of lacquerware, but also runs through every link in the production process, reflecting the high attention paid to aesthetics and craftsmanship by the Song Dynasty society. The main lacquer crafts during the Song and Yuan dynasties include: carved red, mother-of-pearl, piled red, gold painting, gold inlay, lacquer filling, rhinoceros skin, etc. The biggest outstanding achievement in the development of lacquerware craftsmanship in the Song and Yuan dynasties was the rise of carved lacquer.

The earliest written records of lacquer carving technology began in the Tang Dynasty and flourished in the Song and Yuan Dynasties. The only existing ancient lacquer art monograph in China, "Painting and Decoration Record" (Huang Cheng), records: "The red paint is the carving of red lacquer. The thickness of the paint layer, the light and dark of the vermilion, and the fineness of the carving are also It is very clumsy. Many printing plates made in the Tang Dynasty are carved with flat brocade and vermilion colors, and the carving method is primitive and clumsy. Some of them have sunken yellow brocade. "The carving lacquer is painted on the body repeatedly, and a certain amount of tung oil is added. The tung oil has the effect of slow drying. It can be more than a hundred times, accumulating to form a certain thickness. Carving is carried out when the paint layer is not completely dry, and the pattern is carved according to the required pattern. The pattern is clearly layered and the relief theme is highlighted. After the carving is completed, it is polished to make it smooth and detailed, revealing a deep artistic effect. Each process relies on the precipitation of time. The complexity of this technique and the ultimate pursuit of details make carved lacquer works an indispensable treasure in Chinese lacquer art.

The development of carved lacquer reached its peak during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. The cultural accumulation since the Han and Tang Dynasties experienced a process of internal digestion, integration and further sublimation during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. During this period, carved lacquer not only became one of the highest achievements in the development of lacquer art in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, but also achieved major breakthroughs in technology and materials. Among the most important technological advances were the refinement of varnishing and the painting and polishing of utensils. The innovation of these two key technologies developed the decorative function of lacquerware to the extreme, and significantly promoted the prosperity of carved lacquer craftsmanship in the Song and Yuan Dynasties.



Figure 25 A Song Dynasty carved red pine-shaped box with a lid and a painting of a hermit.

Source: Quoted from the book "2000 YEARS OF CHINESE LACQUER"  
(June 2024)

This carved lacquer box with a lid is exquisitely carved, with a natural transition from front to back, appropriate depth, distinct layers, and rich charm. The four walls of the box are all decorated with cloud patterns, exquisitely carved, uniquely composed, and highly decorative.



Figure 26 Yuan Dynasty carved red round plate with gardenia pattern  
Source: Quoted from the book "Chinese Handicraft Lacquer Art" (June 2024)

This Yuan Dynasty lacquerware round plate with a gardenia pattern is 16.5cm in diameter and 2.6cm in height. It is now in the collection of the Palace Museum in China. The lacquerware is carved with smooth knife skills, is rounded, has clear layers and pure colors. It is a typical lacquerware work of the Yuan Dynasty.

The manufacturing technology of lacquerware in the Song and Yuan Dynasties experienced unprecedented innovations, showing a flourishing scene. Many crafts, such as carving red, piling red, gold-burning, mother-of-pearl, lacquer filling, gold tracing and rhinoceros skin, etc., all flourished during this period and each showed its own strengths. In particular, the emergence of the "red-picking" process not only injected new vitality into the development of lacquer art, but also directly promoted the rise of lacquer carving art. During this period, lacquer carving works showed unprecedented delicacy and meticulousness in terms of shape, technique and pattern design. Literati of the past dynasties have spoken highly of the lacquer carving works of the Song and Yuan Dynasties, with many records and praises. This reflects the important position that the lacquer carving art of the Song and Yuan Dynasties occupied in the culture at that time.

#### 2.2.8 Lacquerware from the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Beijing was the capital of both the Ming and Qing dynasties in China. Its culture and art not only inherited the essence of the Song and Yuan dynasties, but also radiated new vitality in the continuous development and improvement. At the same time, the living customs and cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities such as

Tibetans, Mongolians, Uyghurs and Manchus also had a profound impact on the traditional culture of the Han nationality, greatly enriching the cultural traditions of the Chinese nation. The production of lacquer art in the Ming and Qing dynasties reached a new climax at this time. The lacquer craftsmanship of this period was combined with architecture, furniture, and furnishings, and shifted from practicality to the field of furnishings and decorations. It entered a new era of thousands of splendid texts with colorful, complex decoration, inlay, and pattern techniques as the basic techniques.

The Ming Dynasty was a peak period in the history of the development of Chinese lacquer art. Its characteristics and achievements were not only reflected in its unprecedented level of skill, but also occupied a prominent position in social culture. The development of lacquer art in the Ming Dynasty became diversified, with palace-run and private handicraft workshops coexisting. In addition to the palace's emphasis on lacquer art, private demand for lacquerware was also growing. With the popularization of commercial exchanges, lacquerware, as an important handicraft, began to be exported overseas through private channels, which further promoted the prosperity of lacquer art and the spread of skills. During this period, Huang Cheng, a lacquer worker in the Ming Dynasty, wrote the first book on lacquer craftsmanship in Chinese history, "Painting Decorations"<sup>18</sup>. It summarizes the experience of his predecessors and himself, discusses various aspects of lacquering, shows the brilliant achievements of folk lacquer art, and reflects the traditional creation ideas of ancient China. Later, Yang Ming, a lacquer worker in Xitang, Jiading, annotated each item and wrote a preface. The book is divided into two volumes, Qiankun, with a total of 18 chapters. This book laid a solid foundation for the development of Chinese lacquer art as a discipline and has been passed down to this day.

In order to consolidate their own regime, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty abandoned the provincial system of the Yuan Dynasty, which was not conducive to strengthening the centralization of power, and continued to implement the system of reducing the feudal system. These measures led to the Ming Dynasty attaching importance to the development of handicrafts on the basis of social stability, consolidation of political foundation, and strengthening of ruling power. The lacquerware art of the Ming Dynasty has made rapid progress on the basis of the Yuan Dynasty. There are rich and diverse varieties of lacquerware, among which the most developed is carved lacquer, followed by gold-inlaid lacquer, gold-inlaid lacquer, filled lacquer, gold-drawing lacquer, inlaid treasures, mother-of-pearl lacquer, and colored lacquer. The diversity and richness of these techniques made the lacquer art of the Ming Dynasty present a scene of flourishing in the field of arts and crafts. At the same time, the government established a special lacquerware workshop—the Orchard Factory, which specializes in the production of two types of lacquerware, "filled lacquer" and "carved lacquer". Under the guidance of this court atmosphere, the people began to follow suit and make carved lacquer. The carved lacquer craft developed rapidly in the Ming Dynasty, which was the period when the carved lacquer art in my country matured, and it was most prosperous in the Yongle and Xuande dynasties of the Ming Dynasty. The craftsmanship has been further improved

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<sup>18</sup> "Painting and Decoration Records" is a professional book on Chinese lacquerware manufacturing technology in the Ming Dynasty. It is also the only existing monograph on ancient lacquerware. It was created during the Longqing period (1567-1572) and was written by Huang Cheng.

on the basis of inheriting the styles of Song and Yuan dynasties. Its knife techniques are smooth and the tip is clearly hidden, with more changes than those of Song and Yuan dynasties; the carving process is fine and the images are vivid. There are two styles of carved lacquerware: one is finely carved, with sharp knife skills, and the sharp edges are exposed, but they still maintain the roundness and smoothness of the early period. The other is not finely carved, with a rough feeling, and the lacquer color is not good. The sharp edges are not well hidden. Although they are polished, they are not round. In the early Ming Dynasty, there were gold-inlaid lacquerware and carved lacquerware. The main decorative patterns included character stories, Baoxiang flowers, Taiping sparrow sunflowers, peonies, and pomegranates. In the Xuande period, there were red-carved lacquerware and gold-inlaid lacquerware. The shapes of carved lacquerware included round, square, lotus leaf, and diamond-shaped plates; boxes included sugarcane segments, square boxes with two corners, and saucers.



Figure 27 Ming Jiajing octagonal box with red carved dragon pattern  
Source: Quoted from the book "Chinese Handicraft Lacquer Art" (June 2024)

An octagonal box with cloud dragon pattern in red lacquer from the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty is now in the collection of the Shanghai Museum. It has intricate patterns, unique shapes, exquisite knife skills and fine carving, which shows that this was the period when my country's lacquer carving art matured.

During the Xuande reign of the Ming Dynasty, craftsmen either inlaid or polished the relief patterns into the base lacquer, making the surface of the lacquerware smoother and more delicate, which was called "filling lacquer". For example, when the lacquer was half dry, concave spots were deliberately left on the surface, and then filled with red, yellow, black and other colored lacquer, and then polished smooth, showing dark patterns of different colors, with natural beauty. The craft of "filling lacquer" is similar to "inlaying gold". Both the inlaying gold craft and the filling lacquer craft are indispensable parts of Chinese lacquerware culture, and they each show their unique artistic charm and cultural value. Inlaying gold is characterized by the embedding of gold foil or gold powder, while filling lacquer is famous for the filling and smoothing of colored lacquer.



Figure 28 Gold-inlaid lacquer round plate with floral pattern  
Source: from [http://www.j.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art\\_1665719\\_58876428.html](http://www.j.zj.gov.cn/art/2021/7/5/art_1665719_58876428.html) (June 2024)

This round plate with gold-inlaid lacquer and floral patterns, from the Jiajing period of the Ming Dynasty, is 34.8cm in diameter and 5.3cm high. It is now in the collection of the Palace Museum. It has complex patterns, unique shapes, exquisite knife skills and excellent carving. This shows that this was the period when my country's lacquer carving art matured.

The Qing Dynasty was the last dynasty in China. In the early period, the economy was strong and the politics was unified. After the Daoguang period, due to the escalation of domestic and ethnic conflicts and the invasion of China by Western powers, the Qing Dynasty gradually declined and died. However, the development of lacquerware has been a culmination of all dynasties. Lacquerware production has been valued and promoted by the court, forming a palace lacquerware production center dominated by the Imperial Household Department, which coexists with local lacquerware production and develops together, resulting in a situation of mutual influence and mutual reference. All are exquisitely made and gorgeously decorated. The most representative is the lacquerware made by the Imperial Household Department of the Qing Dynasty. The lacquerware of the Qing Dynasty is even more "thousands of words and thousands of flowers", and the lacquer craftsmanship has shrunk to a limited number of auxiliary means (gold painting, inlay of treasures, etc.). In the Qing Dynasty, many lacquerwares were made with gold lacquer as the base, and other decorative techniques were added on top, such as gold, silver, and lacquer painting. Lacquerware continued to develop throughout the country in the Qing Dynasty, and formed local production centers and local characteristics, such as Beijing carved lacquerware, Yangzhou mother-of-pearl lacquerware, and Fuzhou hollow lacquerware.

The gold-painted lacquerware produced by the Qing Dynasty's Imperial Household Department is mostly decorated with precious metals such as gold and silver, among which gold-painted lacquer is one of the most important techniques. Gold-painted lacquer usually uses gold to carefully depict various patterns on a black lacquer or red lacquer base. It has a very high pursuit of the smoothness of lines and the artistic conception of composition, which undoubtedly poses a great challenge to the maker's painting skills. For this reason, gold-painted lacquer works appear more and more noble in the court. Most of the black lacquer and red lacquerware produced in the Qing Dynasty are practical objects. Black lacquer includes cabinets, tables, dining tables, incense tables, inkstone boxes, and holding boxes; red lacquer includes desks, spittoons, incense boxes, and holding boxes. In addition to gold-painted lacquerware in the Qing Dynasty, there was also lacquerware inlaid with various treasures. It is recorded in "The Record of Lacquerware": "Coral, amber, agate, gemstone, tortoise shell, mother-of-pearl, ivory, rhinoceros horn and the like, which are intricately carved and inlaid with colored lacquer boards, are very valuable." Inlaid with various treasures also uses the adhesive properties of natural lacquer to carve various precious materials into molds and then embed them on the lacquer surface.



Figure 29 Red lacquer box with dragon pattern and gold-painted pattern, early Qing Dynasty

Source: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/A\\_ycwg1nybGs0ce2gSdUhQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/A_ycwg1nybGs0ce2gSdUhQ) (June 2024)

The red lacquer and gold-painted dragon-patterned box from the early Qing Dynasty is now in the collection of the Palace Museum. It has delicate craftsmanship, calm colors, unique shape, and noble and elegant objects. It can be seen that the gold-painting technique was perfect, demonstrating the superb skills and aesthetic standards of lacquer workers in the Qing Dynasty.



Figure 30 Mother-of-pearl lacquerware Qianli mark mother-of-pearl vase  
Source: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/A\\_ycwg1nybGs0ce2gSdUhQ](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/A_ycwg1nybGs0ce2gSdUhQ) (June 2024)

The mother-of-pearl lacquerware Qianli pattern mother-of-pearl bottle from the early Ming and Qing Dynasties has colorful mother-of-pearl pieces, complicated craftsmanship, and delicate and exquisite shape. It can be seen that the mother-of-pearl lacquerware in the Ming and Qing Dynasties was even more magnificent.

### **2.3 Social and cultural factors that led to the emergence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

In the development process of Chinese lacquer craft, Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only constitutes an important part of Chinese lacquer culture, but also becomes an indispensable part of this culture. Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only represents the cultural characteristics of the Yi people, but its birth and evolution process is also deeply influenced by the social and cultural factors of the Liangshan Yi people. These factors are integrated with each other, which not only gives Liangshan Yi lacquerware practicality in life, but also sublimates it into a unique cultural symbol with profound cultural and artistic connotations. It is also a national intangible cultural heritage that carries material culture and cultural identity, representing the national spirit and cultural confidence of the Yi people. The emergence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is closely related to the local geographical environment, social structure, ethnic relations and cultural traditions. The following content will analyze the social and cultural factors that led to the emergence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

### 2.3.1 Social structure and ethnic organization

The Liangshan Yi region is geographically far from the core area of Confucian culture and the center of political power, so it is relatively less influenced by traditional Chinese politics and culture. This unique geographical and social environment has contributed to the formation of the unique social structure of the Liangshan Yi people.

For a long time, the Liangshan Yi people have formed a "jiazhi" society based on family units. "Jiazhi" is called "this power" or "cuoxi" in the Yi language family. It is a patrilineal blood group connected by blood relations. In the cultural system of the Yi people, this system relies on its profound cultural form and social psychology, and contains the deep attributes of social development and humanistic spirit. It is not only the core of the social structure of the Yi people, but also an important manifestation of their cultural traditions and ethnic identity. In traditional Yi society, "family branch" plays a core role, and the entire social structure is built around the social unit of "family branch". Each "family branch" not only safeguards the interests of its internal members, but also realizes resource sharing and risk sharing through complex social networks. This social structure with "family branches" as the core gives Yi society distinctive characteristics and forms a close and organic form of social organization. After the founding of New China, it gradually transformed into a "half-family" society. In the early historical development of the Liangshan Yi people, due to the dominance of agricultural productivity and the significant contradiction between man and land, in order to effectively alleviate population pressure, the local residents of the Liangshan Yi people began to use handicrafts as an important supplement to agriculture. In the case of extreme material scarcity, production Lacquerware has become the survival choice of "family branches". The craftsmen who made lacquerware gradually became independent from the carpenters and formed a specialized hand-made category. They exchanged daily necessities by making lacquerware and maintained the stability of the family and society. This skill has been passed down from generation to generation. However, influenced by the traditional system of "family branches", the craftsmanship of making Liangshan Yi lacquerware is also inherited from generation to generation within the lacquerware craftsman's family. There is a family rule of "passing on to men but not to women, passing on to the inside but not to outsiders", and strictly following family rules. It is precisely the closedness brought about by this family branch system that has enabled the Liangshan area to fully preserve the ancient Yi culture and continue to develop in its own unique way. In this social structure, the lacquerware making skills of the Liangshan Yi people are mainly inherited by the family as a unit, forming a lacquerware style with family characteristics. At the same time, this way of inheritance also ensures the continuation and development of lacquerware skills. These unique styles of Liangshan Yi lacquerware witness the wisdom and creativity of the Liangshan Yi people.

### 2.3.2 Religious beliefs and ritual systems

In the traditional culture of the Liangshan Yi people, religious beliefs and ritual systems occupy a pivotal position. These beliefs and systems not only shape the worldview and values of the Yi people, but also inadvertently promote the production and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The clergy "Bimo" and "Suni" in Liangshan Yi society have a lofty social status. In Yi culture, they are not only priests

and wizards, but also masters of knowledge and culture. They play an important role in social activities, especially in the production and use of traditional Yi lacquerware. Lacquerware is not only a daily necessity in the lives of the Yi people, but also carries rich cultural connotations and religious significance, which are often closely related to the religious activities and cultural heritage of Bimo and Suni. The Yi people's worship of nature and ancestors, as well as complex religious beliefs, need to be expressed and passed on through various rituals and objects. For example, the "birth ceremony" of the Liangshan Yi people requires a ceremony of worshipping the sun after a newborn is born. The first time a newborn worships the sun, which means the beginning of life etiquette. Family members will take out the lacquerware stored at home, carry the lacquerware, sit on the ground facing the sun. These lacquerware utensils must be intact, otherwise it is considered unlucky. At the same time, grains will be put into the lacquerware tableware, implying that there will be food wherever the newborn goes when he grows up. In these religious activities and rituals, lacquerware has become an indispensable and important object with its unique aesthetics and practicality. In the sacrificial activities or religious ceremonies of the Liangshan Yi people in the past, the use of lacquerware played an important role. It is often used by "Bimo" and "Suni" as a container for carrying sacrifices, or as an important element in the ceremony to express respect for ancestors and gods. The exquisite patterns and decorations on lacquerware often contain profound cultural connotations and religious symbols. These patterns are not only for decoration, but also a kind of religious meaning.

The promotion of lacquerware production by the etiquette system cannot be ignored. In the social structure of the Liangshan Yi people, the family branch system and family concepts attach great importance to the maintenance of etiquette and tradition. As a symbol of family wealth and social status, the production process and inheritance of lacquerware are naturally highly valued. Families demonstrate their craftsmanship and family honor by making lacquerware, which has enabled the lacquerware making skills to be finely developed and inherited. In general, the religious beliefs and etiquette system of the Liangshan Yi people have formed a cultural ecological environment in which lacquerware is not only a daily necessity, but also a carrier of culture. It is the needs of these beliefs and systems that have inspired the creation and development of lacquerware art, making the lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people a shining pearl in the treasure house of Chinese civilization.

### 2.3.3 Aesthetic taste and spiritual pursuit

In the development process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the unique aesthetic taste and spiritual pursuit of the Yi people played an important role in the development of lacquerware art. This aesthetic taste and spiritual pursuit not only profoundly influenced the production process of lacquerware, but also promoted the enrichment and development of its style and symbolic meaning.

The Liangshan Yi people live in the southwest border area, and their natural environment inspires the Yi people's deep naturalistic feelings. This emotion is fully reflected in the decorative design of lacquerware, which is manifested in the large number of natural elements and totems, fully reflecting the Yi people's reverence and love for nature. The Liangshan Yi lacquerware has various forms, covering a wide range of fields from daily necessities to decorations. All of them show the Yi people's pursuit of beauty and spiritual creation. Whether it is used as tableware for daily use

or as a ritual instrument for religious ceremonies, their shapes and decorations are extremely varied, reflecting the Yi people's philosophy of life and aesthetic taste. Lacquerware is not only a daily utensil for the Yi people, but also a carrier of spiritual culture. The colors and decorations on these lacquerware have specific religious symbolic meanings and carry the national cultural heritage of the Yi people. The Yi people, with their unique animistic thinking and Bimox culture, have extracted pattern symbols that carry the Yi national culture from these objects in nature and daily life. In their artistic creation, they follow the principles of simplification, abstraction, exaggeration, decomposition and combination, and use artistic techniques such as symmetry, balance, repetition and continuity to form patterns, which further reflects the unique aesthetic taste of the Yi people.

In the history of the Yi people, exquisite lacquerware was once a symbol of aristocratic status and rank. In the social structure of the Yi people, exquisite lacquerware often symbolizes social status and family honor. Only nobles can use the most gorgeously decorated lacquerware. The exquisiteness of lacquerware is often regarded as an important symbol of family status and wealth, which prompts each family to strive for excellence in lacquerware production and continuously promote the development of skills. Lacquerware is an important heritage of the history and culture of the Yi people. Each piece of lacquerware is not only a daily necessity, but also carries the cultural memory and spiritual pursuit of generations of Yi people. Through the production and use of lacquerware, their cultural confidence can be enhanced. The prosperity and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is deeply rooted in the profound aesthetic emotions and spiritual pursuits of the Yi people. It is these unique cultural factors that make Liangshan Yi lacquerware increasingly sophisticated in artistic creation and become an indispensable part of Yi culture, showing unique national charm and profound cultural value.

Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only bears distinct regional and ethnic characteristics, but also deeply accumulates the profound ethnic cultural memory of the Yi people. They vividly express the thoughts, feelings and mental state of the Yi people in different environments, and have strong people-oriented, simple and unpretentious artistic characteristics, distinct national style, and superb artistic level and achievements.

### **Part III: Research on the Historical Development and Current Situation of Lacquerware of Liangshan Yi Nationality**

#### **3.1 The origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

Liangshan Yi lacquerware, collectively known as "Zugujidasu" in Yi language, is not only an important carrier of Liangshan Yi culture, but also a disseminator of this unique cultural heritage. There is no clear record of the specific time of the origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the academic field. It is mostly passed down and recorded through Liangshan Yi folk legends and ballads. Although these folk legends cannot provide an exact time clue, they vividly show the cultural connotation and historical context of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in another form.

The famous creation poem "Le'o Teyi" circulated among the Yi people once described the formation of the world and the growth of all things, as well as the development and evolution of human society and the history of the Yi people. In addition, the Liangshan Yi people have a ballad about lacquerware that has also been

circulated among the people. The lyrics roughly tell that more than 1,700 years ago, there was an old Yi man named Di Yihuofu, who was not only a well-known carpenter, but also a creator. The bird-shaped wine utensils he made were the most vivid. One day, Di Yihuofu dreamed that the bird-shaped wine pot he made spread its wings and flew into a large forest. After seeing this, he immediately chased after it. He witnessed that these wooden birds were stained with deep black after flying over the lacquer forest. After passing through the azalea forest, their bodies were stained with colorful patterns of red and yellow. After waking up from the dream, Di Yihuofu was inspired. He searched for the lacquer trees that had appeared in his dream in the forest, cut natural paint from them, and painted the natural lacquer on a single wooden vessel, making the surface of the vessel not only calm and harmonious in color, but also shiny and bright, giving the wooden vessel a new life and beauty, which was deeply loved by people. From then on, Yi lacquerware spread in every Yi village and has been passed down to this day. The red, black and yellow colors have also become the representative colors of Yi lacquerware, symbolizing the profoundness and magnificence of Yi culture.

In the Yi document "Kezhe", there is a description of the inventors, namely: "Ayouaxian invented the wool-stitching and felt-rolling; Ahuoqieqi invented the three-color lacquerware; Omu Ahuoqi invented the gold and silver ornaments; Zhige Along invented the saddle and bridle; Gemo'er invented the iron and metal tools; Zimi Aki invented the art of war; Jinjue Wuki invented tailoring and mending; Pumoni invented spinning and weaving; Puhuoersuo invented improving the soil and making fields; Bulurechi invented building houses; Heloni Zha invented steaming and brewing wine; and Jiniduozi invented hunting and catching animals." According to the legend recorded in the ancient Yi document "Kezhe", the invention of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is attributed to a Yi ancestor named Ahuoqie, who went up the mountain to farm and accidentally got his clothes stained with white liquid from the trees, which he was unable to remove. After a long time, the marks on the clothes turned shiny black. An accidental event led him to discover the protective value of raw lacquer on wood, and applying black raw lacquer on the wood became the early black lacquerware. From this, we can see that lacquerware does have a long history. From the initial application of single-color lacquer to the later painting of different patterns on objects, it shows the wisdom of the Yi ancestors.

There is also a theory about the origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, which is related to the Liangshan Yi people's worship of nature. Yi society is a society with the theme of "animism" and ancestor worship. With the disintegration of clans, people endowed spirituality and worship to all things in nature, and multiple beliefs in various totems emerged in their hearts. People believed that these mysterious powers could bring shelter and blessings to people. As one of the most important totems of the Yi people, the eagle occupies a pivotal position in the ancient totem mythology. The ancestors of the Yi people believed that their ancestors had an inseparable connection with the eagle. This sacred connection can be found in a large number of epics and myths. The image of the eagle runs through the cultural heritage of the Yi people and has become a profound and sacred symbol, embodying the Yi people's yearning for power, freedom and foresight. In the famous Yi myth "Zhi Ge Alu", it is mentioned that the Yi hero Zhi Ge Alu is the son of the dragon eagle. There are still many Yi people who believe that they are descendants of the hero Zhi Ge Alu. It can

be seen that the Yi ancestors believed that there was a certain blood relationship between their ancestors and the eagle. In the ideological cognition of the Yi ancestors, the eagle has great power. Its image is not only supreme in their hearts, but the totem also has the function of protecting the Yi ethnic group. Therefore, based on the worship of the eagle, the Yi ancestors made the "Eagle Claw Cup" with a typical image in the Yi lacquerware. The base of the Eagle Claw Cup is the concept choice of the Yi people's eagle worship.

Among the many clues to explore the origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, in addition to those folk legends and ancient ballads, there is also a more realistic and specific origin. This reason is closely connected with the life practice and natural environment of Liangshan Yi people, revealing the profound connection between this traditional craft and the daily life of Yi people. Liangshan area is rich in lacquer trees and natural lacquer resources, which provides unique conditions for the development of lacquerware craft. In the long-term life practice, the Yi people gradually discovered and utilized this precious resource given by nature. The early lifestyle of the Yi people was deeply influenced by nomadic migration. This long-term migratory life made their daily necessities have to adapt to the needs of frequent movement. In the vast natural environment, in order to survive and develop, the ancestors of Liangshan Yi people chose to use wooden farm tools that were easy to carry and not easy to break. These tools became the main items in their lives. Since fragile items such as pottery and tile products are not suitable for long-distance travel and frequent migration, these fragile utensils have not become the tableware of choice for the Yi ancestors. On the contrary, wooden utensils have become the ideal choice in the lives of the Yi people because of their durability and practicality. Whether in farming, eating or other daily activities, they play a vital role. They fully explore the available natural resources around them, adapt to local conditions, and use wood, bamboo, leather and other materials to make utensils adapted to the environment. Choosing wood as the material to make tableware is the most common. They began to try to make utensils with the local abundant lacquer tree sap to meet the needs of containers, tableware and other items in daily life. In order to make wooden tableware more durable, they applied raw lacquer on the surface of the wood, which not only protected the surface of the utensils from corrosion and water damage, but also enhanced the flexibility of the utensils. With the passage of time and the improvement of technology, this lacquer making technology gradually matured and passed down, evolving into a unique handicraft-forming the unique Liangshan Yi lacquerware craft. Today, these lacquerware not only demonstrate the Yi people's profound cultural heritage and aesthetic pursuit, but also become an important carrier for inheriting and promoting Yi culture.

Therefore, the origin of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only a beautiful story about divine revelation and legend, but also a realistic portrayal of the harmonious coexistence of the Yi people with nature and the combination of life practice and artistic creation.

### 3.2 The development and influence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a long and rich cultural history. Its development can be traced back to the Qin and Han dynasties, when the Yi ancestors had already mastered the lacquer technique. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the lacquerware production skills of the Liangshan Yi people gradually matured, forming a unique

style and craftsmanship. As for the specific time of its origin, due to the lack of documentary evidence, the history of the production of Liangshan Yi lacquerware production skills can no longer be accurately verified.

Although there is no accurate record in historical materials, it can be known from unearthed cultural relics, ethnic legends and literature that its historical and cultural accumulation is relatively long. It is said that this skill existed more than 1,700 years ago. Judging from the lacquerware unearthed in Zhaojue County, lacquer art existed in Liangshan during the Han Dynasty and was very popular in the Yuan Dynasty. In ancient times, the Yi people showed their simple and plain lifestyle with the original form of wooden living utensils. As time went on, the Yi people gradually invented and used pedal-operated wooden embryos to make simple machines. This innovation not only improved the production efficiency, but also opened a new chapter in their craftsmanship. Later, with the emergence of modern lathes, the work efficiency of the Yi people in making wooden embryos has been greatly improved, and the production technology and artistic level have also been developed and improved to varying degrees. This process witnessed the continuous exploration and innovation of the Yi people in the production of wooden daily necessities, and also demonstrated their outstanding wisdom in the inheritance and development of skills. In ancient Yi literature, lacquerware is frequently mentioned. They are not only daily necessities, but also an important part of Yi culture. Especially in the Liangshan area where there is a lack of material unearthed cultural relics, these lacquerware works have actually become a witness to "living history", passing on the ancient Yi people's lifestyle, artistic aesthetics and even spiritual beliefs to the present, becoming a cultural bond connecting the past and the present.

According to the Huayang Atlas·Hanzhong Records, "The four counties of Suiping... lacquer, cattle, and horses are used by the military and the state." From the text, we can know that during the Shu Han period, the Yi people had the ability to collect lacquer and paint objects, and there is a cultural accumulation of about 1,700 years. In the Records of the Grand Historian·Biographies of the Southwestern Yi, there is a precious record about the lacquer art of the Liangshan Yi people: "Taideng County,... there is also lacquer. At the end of the Han Dynasty, all the Yi people had it." This text not only records the signs that the Liangshan Yi lacquer art existed during the Han Dynasty, but also marks the beginning of the written record of the history of the Liangshan Yi lacquer art. The development of lacquerware technology after the Han Dynasty has greatly promoted the art and culture of the Yi society, and the ancestors of the Yi people absorbed the lacquer decoration skills.

The document "Mamuteyi" also wrote in praise of the ancient warriors' war uniforms: "The happiness of going to war, the beautiful helmets and armor, and the colorful paint for decoration can boost morale. The enemy is not left behind, the future is beautiful as brocade, the gods are as high as mountains, and the shooting seems to be divine." It fully shows that the leather industry in this period has been quite large, and leather products have been widely used in military armor and equipment. The following picture shows the leather armor of the Liangshan Yi people. Its structure is divided into two groups, the chest and the back. Each part has been carefully designed and made, showing the superb skills of the Yi craftsmen. The surface of the armor is painted with red lacquer, and decorated with black and yellow lacquer. The belt and shoulder straps, as important components of the armor, are

decorated with shells. These shell decorations not only enhance the overall beauty of the armor, but also highlight the Yi people's pursuit of beauty and awe of nature.



Figure 31 Liangshan Yi lacquer armor

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Sichuan University Museum(April 2024)

The lacquer armor of the Yi people in Liangshan has a heavy texture, warm colors, fine workmanship, and unique patterns. It can be seen that lacquer products are not only widely used in tableware, but also in weapons and equipment, showing the exquisite lacquer craftsmanship at that time.

There are relatively limited records about Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the Tang Dynasty, but we can still get a glimpse of the usage and artistic characteristics of Yi lacquerware at that time from some historical materials. In the "Products within the Territory of Yunnan" written by Fan Chuo in the Tang Dynasty, there is a detailed record of the usage of Liangshan Yi lacquer art. It is recorded that "the barbarians use armor and horses, as well as horse armor and weapons. They mostly use rhinoceros leather, and also use cowhide. Those who carry rhinoceros leather are all made of rhinoceros leather, all painted with red lacquer."<sup>19</sup> (Zhao Lvfu,1985) From Fan Chuo's description, we can see that the Yi ancestors at that time used a lot of rhinoceros skins and cowhide when making armor, horse harnesses and other equipment. When decorating and processing these items, they preferred to use vermilion paint. This choice of color not only reflects the Yi people's love for bright colors, but also symbolizes strength and courage. These texts not only show the wide application of Yi lacquer art at that time, but also reveal its important position in social life. In addition, there are also documents recording the exquisite craftsmanship and unique design of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the Tang Dynasty. The lacquerware craftsmanship at that time was quite mature, and Yi craftsmen were able to cleverly use the characteristics of lacquer to create works with practicality and artistry. These lacquerwares are not only used in daily life, but also as gifts and trade commodities, promoting economic and cultural exchanges between the Yi people and other ethnic groups.

<sup>19</sup> "Yunnan Chronicles Compilation and Interpretation" by Zhao Lvfu, China Social Sciences Press, 1985, 238 pages.

There are more and more records about Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the Song Dynasty. These records not only provide us with important information on the development of Yi lacquer art in the Song Dynasty, but also reveal the diversity and uniqueness of Yi lacquerware in terms of skills, style and use at that time. According to research, the ancient lacquer decoration skills of Yi people were recorded in the "Records of Instruments" of "Guilai Yuhengzhi" by Fan Chengda in the Song Dynasty. "The barbarian armor is the best in Dali Kingdom (Liangshan was under the jurisdiction of Nanzhao Dali Kingdom from the Tang and Song Dynasties to the early Yuan Dynasty). The armor is made of elephant skin. There is a large piece on the chest and back like a tortoise shell, as thick and strong as iron. Small pieces of leather are connected to make shoulder and head protection. It is made like Chinese iron armor, and the leaves are all red. The inside and outside of the hood and the body of the armor are all red with yellow and black lacquer with white flowers, insects and beasts, like the rhinoceros used in the world, and the wares are extremely exquisite." And the document "Song History Barbarian Biography" records that Yi lacquerware is "exquisite and elegant, of high quality", which shows that the Yi lacquer art at that time had reached a very high level. At the same time, the literature also describes the process of Yi craftsmen making lacquerware. In addition, the Song Dynasty literature records various types of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, including daily utensils, weapons, musical instruments and religious items. These lacquerware not only meet the needs of the Yi people's daily life, but also reflect their pursuit of art and culture. In ancient society, due to the complexity of the production process and the scarcity of materials, Liangshan Yi lacquerware was regarded as a precious object. It was mainly enshrined in the palace and aristocratic families. Ordinary Yi ancestors rarely had the opportunity to own it. Today, lacquerware has become an important part of Yi culture with its unique artistic charm and profound cultural connotation, and it is also a treasure in traditional Chinese handicrafts.

Direct documentary records of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the Yuan Dynasty are relatively limited, but through an investigation of the relevant historical background, cultural inheritance and social environment, we can clearly see that the Yi lacquerware in the Yuan Dynasty was important in terms of craftsmanship, cultural connotation, and social use. All have achieved significant development.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Yi lacquerware craftsmanship already had techniques such as "covering the light", "hidden flowers", "gold lacquer" and "inlay". Liangshan Yi lacquerware has reached a very high level in terms of shape, decoration and color, and many classic works have appeared. For example, techniques such as "black and red contrast, inlaid with wrong colors" are widely used and have become an important part of Yi culture. The Yi people, who are known as the "edge of the earth" and "magical secret land", have retained the most traditional Yi lacquer art due to the closed natural environment and backward transportation. Yi lacquerware can be regarded as a living fossil in the history of the development of Chinese lacquer culture.

After the Qing Dynasty, there are many records of the use of lacquerware among the Yi people. According to the "Xichang County Chronicles" (Qing Dynasty), the Yi people "use long-handled wooden spoons to eat soup, and the bowls for serving dishes are all hollowed out of wood, which are quite similar to the ancient bamboo baskets, dougui, and lacquered inside and outside, with yellow and red ancient

patterns painted on the outside." The "Xuanton Zhaojue County Chronicles" records that "they sit on the ground, use wooden drums, such as Dun, decorated with red lacquer, and use golden spoons like it... The crossbows are very fine, and there are armors for war." This shows that lacquer decorations and armor (armor) have been widely used as tools for life and war. From the records of historical documents, it can be found that combined with the armor, lacquer helmets, lacquer bowls and other products collected in Liangshan area, lacquerware products in Liangshan Yi area have been very common since the Yuan Dynasty. Especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, due to frequent wars, those solid and reliable lacquer armor, helmets, neck guards and other lacquer products were widely welcomed.

To date, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is widely found in Yi settlements, integrated into people's daily lives, and has become an indispensable material culture. Located in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southwest China, Xide County is known as the birthplace of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. According to legend, the origin of Yi lacquerware in Xide County can be traced back to the Jiwu family in Apuruha Village, Yiluo Township. Liangshan Yi lacquerware mainly consists of tableware and wine utensils, involving all aspects of the lives of Yi ancestors, and can be regarded as one of the important symbols of Yi culture. Since then, this skill has been passed down for 19 generations and has a long history of more than 1,700 years, which coincides with the time recorded in the document "Huayang Tuzhi·Hanzhong Zhi". From the initial form of the ancient and simple wooden living utensils of the Yi people to the simple machine invented and used by the Yi people to make wooden embryos, and then to the modern lathe with higher work efficiency for making wooden embryos, its production technology and artistic level have been developed and improved to varying degrees. The production process of Yi lacquerware has also evolved from the original log base, to the black log base painted with earth lacquer, and then to the exquisite Yi lacquerware that is manually painted with precious natural raw material earth lacquer. This development process fully demonstrates the progress and innovation of Yi craftsmen in lacquerware production technology.

After liberation, with the rapid social and economic development, the lives of the Yi people have been significantly improved, and lacquerware has gradually become popular in daily life and has become a widely used daily necessities. The production technology of Yi lacquerware has been greatly developed, and its sales market has also expanded accordingly, which has further promoted the prosperity of the Yi lacquerware industry. Lacquerware plays an increasingly important role in the lives of the Yi people and has become an indispensable part of their daily life. After the reform and opening up, with the rapid development of social economy and the gradual improvement of people's living standards, the demand for lacquerware has also increased accordingly, which has stimulated the growth of lacquerware consumption. At the same time, the production process of lacquerware has also begun to be integrated with modern science and technology, and modern mechanical tools such as lathes have been widely used, which has greatly improved the efficiency of lacquerware production. As a result, Yi lacquerware has shown a development trend of booming supply and sales, and even a situation in which supply exceeds demand.

In recent years, the government has stepped up its protection and support policies for traditional Chinese crafts. In June 2008, the "Liangshan Yi lacquerware painting technique" was approved by the State Council to be included in the "Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List"; in 2009, Yi lacquerware, as a component of "Chinese lacquer art", was successfully included in the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by the United Nations. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has become one of the important representatives of Yi culture, and its unique artistic charm has attracted more and more attention from the outside world.

The development of the Yi people in Liangshan has gone through a long process along with the inheritance of Yi culture. With the long-term use and manufacture of lacquerware by the ancestors of the Yi people, through continuous processing and improvement, the aesthetics of lacquerware have been significantly improved. They created primitive and simple patterns based on the three primary colors of red, black and yellow. The patterns and unique shapes of the utensils have strong national characteristics. It is not only a utensil in daily life, but also plays an indispensable role in etiquette, religious beliefs, sacrifices and weapons and equipment. They carry the faith and awe of the Yi ancestors, witness the leap-forward development of the Liangshan Yi people, contain the profound cultural heritage of the Liangshan Yi people, and accommodate the Yi people's unique production and lifestyle, geographical environment, and national aesthetic orientation and cultural characteristics. It has become one of the important symbols of Yi culture, not only showing the wisdom and creativity of the Yi ancestors, but also inheriting its rich cultural history.

### 3.3 Analysis of the current status of the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Since ancient times, lacquerware has held a high status in the social culture of the Liangshan Yi people. It not only spreads the profound cultural connotation of a nation, but also carries the material culture and cultural identity of the local nation. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is the cultural heritage and spiritual wealth handed down by the ancestors of the Yi people. In the era when ancient weapons were popular, noble soldiers widely used lacquer saddles, scabbards and armor, and the ritual implements used by the Bimos who dominated the religion were also lacquer products. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has not only been integrated into all aspects of Yi life, but is also one of the important symbols of Yi culture.

Liangshan Yi lacquerware is highly respected for its unique natural materials and special craftsmanship. It has rich artistic expression and profound cultural connotations. What is even more valuable is the spirit of craftsmanship passed down by lacquerware craftsmen from ancient times to the present. However, the birth of each lacquerware requires a time-consuming and laborious production process. The process is cumbersome and complicated, the production cycle is long, and the production cost remains high. These realistic factors have jointly led to this traditional skill facing the situation of being lost. Its development presents a complex situation where tradition and modernity, opportunities and challenges coexist.

Liangshan Yi lacquerware was once glorious in its past development. There are widespread lacquerware-making families or workshops in the Liangshan area.

Among them, the lacquerware works of the Jiwu family in Lapu Village, Xide County are the most representative. All the men gathered in the Jiwu family can make exquisite Liangshan Yi lacquerware. In 1994, American scholar Steven Hao Rui went to Lapu Village, Xide County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan Province for research and wrote an article titled "Nuosu lacquerware: a tradition craft and its recent transformations", which is translated as "Yi lacquerware: a traditional craft and its recent transformations". In the article, Steven Hao Rui <sup>20</sup>described the family tradition of handicraft production process of Yi lacquerware of Jiwu family in Lapu Village, Xide County from an objective perspective. The article also records that "all men in the village are making lacquerware, and he observed the entire process of Yi lacquerware production. For the villagers, this is a very profitable job." It can be seen that the production of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is very profitable compared to other jobs, and the income is also very considerable. After experiencing the cultural process and social changes, the Liangshan Yi people have undergone tremendous changes. After the abolition of the hierarchy system, the frequency of fighting has decreased a lot, and weapons have gradually withdrawn from the stage of history. Many families engaged in lacquerware production have gradually abandoned the production industry and began to look for other ways to survive. The development of the lacquerware industry was once lonely.

In the 1980s, the social system of the Liangshan Yi people underwent a major change. This change completely abolished the previous strict and rigid hierarchy, making lacquerware, a traditional handicraft, no longer just a symbol of social status and rank, but a symbol of a broader cultural identity. With the reform of the system, the value of lacquerware itself was redefined. They were no longer limited to the exclusive items of the aristocracy. Ordinary Yi families could also own and cherish these lacquerwares full of ethnic characteristics. During this period, lacquerware carried new cultural significance, becoming a bridge connecting ancient traditions with modern life, reflecting the continuous development and inheritance of Yi culture.

However, such unique Chinese Liangshan Yi lacquerware still faces many challenges in the process of inheritance and development. The "raw lacquer" (called earth lacquer in Liangshan Yi area) used in making Liangshan Yi lacquerware is a unique natural coating. Raw lacquer is mainly composed of lacquer phenol, laccase, polysaccharide, glycoprotein, water, metal ions and other substances. It is an oil-in-water reactive bio-based composite system. Urushiol is the main component of raw lacquer, accounting for about 40-80% of the total raw lacquer, which has a direct impact on the quality and film-forming properties of raw lacquer. However, "lacquer phenol" can cause skin allergies in people, commonly known as "lacquer bites", and will form lacquer sores.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Hao Rui: A famous American scholar. He was a professor at the Institute of Anthropology and International Studies at the University of Washington from 1988 to 1993, and the chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Washington from 1993 to 1999. He was also the director of the Asian Program of the Department of Ethnology at the Museum of History and Culture, and a professor of anthropology.

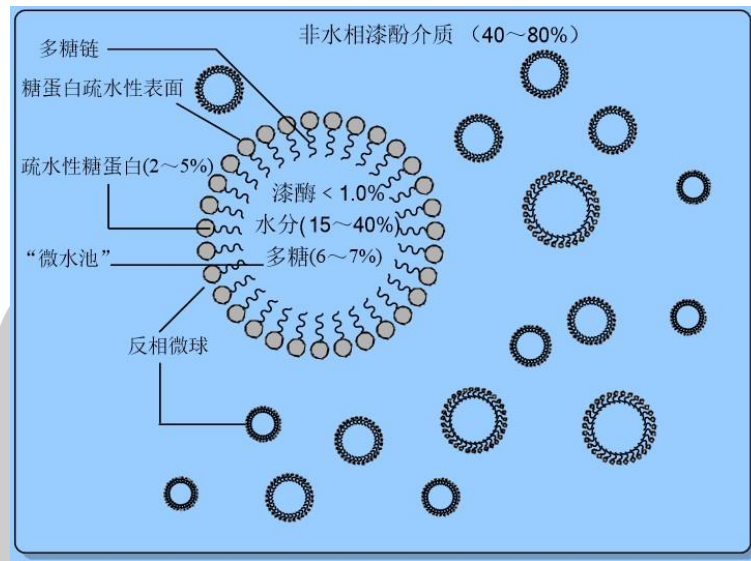


Figure 32 Schematic diagram of raw lacquer composition

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Xi'an Lacquer and Coatings Research Institute (April 2024)

Although raw lacquer can cause skin allergies, the lacquer itself is non-toxic. Currently in South Korea, there are many lacquer-related industries. Raw lacquer is used as the main ingredient in cosmetics research and development, pharmaceutical research and development, and the food industry. Raw lacquer allergies vary from person to person, but most people will be allergic. Generally, after a few allergies, the body will form antibodies and will no longer be prone to allergies. During the interview, Ji Wuwu, the 16th generation inheritor of the Yi lacquerware Jiwu family and the representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage "Yi lacquerware painting and decoration skills" project, said: "Even old employees who have been in the industry for decades still have allergies. The symptoms of allergies are accompanied by itching and redness of the skin. In severe cases, it can cause swelling of the face and body joints, blisters on the skin, and even death in the most serious cases." Allergy to raw lacquer has become the reason why many people give up learning the Liangshan Yi lacquerware craft, and it has also become one of the main obstacles encountered by Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the process of inheritance. The existence of allergy problems not only limits the scope of inheritance of lacquerware craftsmanship, but also brings certain difficulties to lacquerware production. Traditional lacquerware production requires long-term contact with raw lacquer, which is a huge challenge for people with allergies. They may not be able to persist in learning and making lacquerware due to allergic reactions, resulting in a gap in the inheritance of skills. Therefore, learning the lacquerware making skills of the Liangshan Yi people is not only a physical labor, but also a spiritual test.



Figure 33 Symptoms of lacquer allergy

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(April 2024)

The craftsmanship of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is complex. From the initial casting of the embryo to the fine drawing of the final lacquer process, each piece must go through dozens of processes and take up to half a year or a year to complete. During this process, the processing and drying of raw lacquer is particularly unique. Unlike other materials, it can be quickly cured under natural conditions, but it needs to be shade-dried in a specific temperature and humidity range during the production of lacquerware. The temperature must be maintained between 23-28°C and the humidity must be maintained between 80-85°C to dry naturally in the shade. Therefore, the warm and humid climate conditions in spring and summer are suitable for the production of lacquerware, which is also the limitation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware itself.

The lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people has been preserved through generations. Due to the influence of the early social structure of the Yi people, the lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people has been passed down in the process of inheritance, following the family rules of "passing on to the inside but not to the outside, passing on to men but not to women". Therefore, the inheritance of lacquerware has been greatly restricted. As the truly skilled lacquer workers grow older, there is no successor, and some traditional skills are also broken. For the young people in Liangshan now, making Liangshan Yi lacquerware will take a lot of time and energy, and going out to work in the city will give them more development opportunities. Compared with the inheritance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, most young people are more willing to go out to work. They have generally lacked the emotion and recognition of the traditional national crafts. According to Master Ji Wuwuqie, mastering the basic production skills of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is a journey that takes at least three years for apprentices. During this period, they need to devote at least five to six hours of practice and practice every day. And those senior craftsmen who are determined to be promoted to be able to independently undertake private customization tasks need to invest up to ten years or even longer to continue learning, studying and improving. Few people can fully focus on the production of authentic Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and the process is very difficult. The strict requirements for craftsmanship and the long test of time have made it very rare for people to devote themselves to learning the authentic Liangshan Yi lacquerware production skills. The hardships and twists and turns in the process have caused many

new undergraduates and postgraduates from art colleges to give up one after another after trying to devote themselves to the study of this traditional craft because they could not bear such difficult conditions. This is the most severe situation faced by Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the process of inheritance. The inheritance of lacquerware is not only a test of the essence of traditional craftsmanship, but also a test of the patience and perseverance of modern social culture. Despite this, there are still a few persistent people who always stick to this craft. It is precisely because of these tireless craftsmen and their unremitting pursuit that Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be preserved.

With the continuous advancement of the wave of industrialization, its huge impact has also had a profound impact on the traditional cultural industry. Liangshan Yi lacquerware, a treasure of the Chinese nation, has also experienced unprecedented challenges in the tide of the market economy. Under the temptation of profit, some merchants began to cut corners in the process of lacquerware production, ignoring the strict quality requirements of traditional craftsmanship. They replaced traditional lacquer with modern synthetic materials such as cheap chemical paint and polyurethane, and mass-produced lacquerware tableware and daily necessities at a low cost. This shoddy production method not only deprives the lacquerware itself of its artistic value and cultural connotation, but also seriously confuses the market order, causing those low-quality products to flood the market. This is not only difficult to meet consumers' demand for high-quality products, but also a destruction of traditional lacquerware skills. Because traditional lacquerware production is not only a production process, but also a cultural inheritance and protection of skills. Today, the proliferation of this production trend is gradually eroding the possibility of this living protection. What's more serious is that lacquerware made with chemical paint directly contacts food, which will cause direct harm to human health. The Liangshan Yi lacquerware, which was once full of artistic atmosphere and exquisite craftsmanship, should not be just a low-end tourist consumer product. Its value and significance go far beyond that.





Figure 34 Chemical paint products that can replace lacquer on the market  
 Source: Cited from <https://mp.qq.com/s/zFMcS1oCpn46ByegsZ3bGw>  
 (February 2024)

### Conclusion:

This chapter systematically combs the historical and cultural background of the Liangshan Yi people and the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and traces the historical context of Chinese lacquer craftsmanship. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a history of thousands of years and is an important part of Chinese lacquer art, with important research value. Lacquerware played an important role in ancient times and had strong religious and ritual significance. These utensils pioneered the Chinese lacquer craft and laid the foundation for the subsequent development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. At the same time, the unique social and cultural factors that led to the formation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware were analyzed. It can be seen that the production of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only deeply influenced by traditional Chinese lacquer art, but also closely linked to the local unique geographical environment, complex social structure, diverse ethnic relations and rich cultural traditions. These factors work together to promote the formation and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware art with distinct regional characteristics and national style. Therefore, when understanding the value and significance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, it is necessary to comprehensively consider the natural conditions, humanistic environment and historical heritage behind it.

The study found that lacquerware is not only a daily necessity, but also a product of social and cultural historical changes, carrying the cultural memory and spiritual pursuit of the local Yi residents. In the past, it was a symbol of power and noble status. After thousands of years of development, after the major changes in the social system in the 1980s, the meaning of lacquerware has changed from a symbol of social status to a cultural symbol, widely used in production and life. However, in the process of development, Liangshan Yi lacquerware faces many problems and challenges. Affected by many factors, the crudely made lacquerware on the market has deprived it of its original artistic value and cultural connotation, making it out of touch with the needs of the times, and seriously endangering the development of this cultural heritage.

## Chapter III

### Material Culture and Cultural Identity of Lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi People

This chapter aims to explore the unique role and importance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware as a carrier of material culture in shaping and inheriting the cultural identity of the Yi people through the two international concepts of material culture and cultural identity. Through the analysis of the material form, production process, and deep cultural connotation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the unique philosophy, religion, aesthetic concept and natural expression of the Yi people behind it are analyzed. The content of this chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part deeply analyzes the material cultural attributes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, explores its complex production process, unique color and decorative connotation, and its rich uses and cultural symbolic meaning in the life of the Yi people, so as to fully show the rich connotation and unique value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware as material culture. The second part focuses on the relationship between Liangshan Yi lacquerware and the construction of cultural identity, expounds the key role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in cultural inheritance, and focuses on how lacquerware has become a cultural symbol and identity symbol of the Yi people. This analysis not only provides a solid foundation for understanding the inheritance and development of national culture, but also opens up a new perspective and helps to deepen the understanding of the dynamics of national culture.

#### **Part I: Analysis of the Material Culture of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware**

##### **1.1 Meaning of the concept of material culture**

In the international academic field, the concept of material culture has been given a profound meaning. It highlights that the material products created by humans not only play an important role in practicality, but also carry extremely rich connotations at the cultural level. This cultural connotation permeates multiple dimensions such as technological inventions, artistic creations, and symbolic representations. Through the design and use of objects, they are like a mirror, reflecting the advanced level and diversified development of human social civilization. Material culture is not just a simple collection of material products, but also a concrete manifestation of a social and economic foundation and organizational method. It includes economic pillars such as the development of transportation networks, sufficient energy supply, and efficient communication systems, as well as supporting facilities for public utilities such as the improvement of education systems and the popularization of medical services. These infrastructures and economic services are not only an important part of material culture, but also a key force in promoting social and economic development and improving people's quality of life.

As one of the cornerstones of human social development, material culture not only constitutes the substantial framework of human civilization and becomes an important part of human social development, but also is an important way to show the diversity of human culture. In the long historical process of culture, the origin, inheritance, decline, revival and disappearance of cultural phenomena are closely linked to material culture at every stage. As Daniel Miller mentioned in his book

**Material Culture and Mass Consumption:** "There is no independent individual, no distinction between subject and object, and the view that subject and object constitute each other..., how does material culture lead to cultural process." This is a theoretical concept that focuses on the role of objects and material environment in human social life. Therefore, to understand the origin or development process of a cultural phenomenon, we should first understand its material culture.

Material culture is understood as the culture embodied in the material products created by humans. These material products not only reflect the level of technological development, but also demonstrate the way society and economy are organized, as well as the spirit and values of humans in the process of social evolution. In contemporary consumer society, the study of material culture has broken through the traditional scope of archaeology and anthropology, and has begun to focus on the interactive relationship between objects and modern society and consumption. Material culture is a multidimensional and dynamically changing concept. It not only includes the material products created by humans, but also includes the culture, values and social relations embodied by these products. Material culture is a bridge connecting the past and the present, technology and art, individuals and society. It is of great significance to understand the development of human society and the evolution of consumer behavior. With the development of science and technology and the changes in society, material culture is also evolving. The material culture of the future may place more emphasis on environmental protection, sustainability and personalization. In his book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*, Daniel Miller proposed a unique understanding, regarding material culture as an important part of mass consumption, emphasizing the core position of commodity consumption in modern society and how it affects social structure and individual identity. Daniel Miller pointed out that in addition to its function and use, objects also carry complex symbolic meanings. These symbolic meanings are spread and interpreted in society through consumption behavior, forming a cultural language through which people make social distinctions and express themselves. In modern society, the production and consumption of commodities have become an important means of cultural construction. Through the process of commercialization, material products are endowed with cultural meanings, which in turn affect consumers' choices and behaviors. In addition, material culture research should not be limited to a certain subject area, but involve multiple interdisciplinary disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Daniel Miller's book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* provides an important theoretical framework and rich empirical basis for us to deeply understand and analyze the consumption phenomenon in modern society. Through a detailed analysis of the concept of material culture, Miller reveals the dual role of consumption in modern society: on the one hand, it is a powerful driving force for economic development and injects vitality into the market; on the other hand, consumption has also become an important medium for cultural communication and social interaction, promoting cultural diversity and social interaction through the exchange of goods and the transmission of meaning.

In his book *Material Culture and the Meaning of Symbolic Expression*, Hodder proposed a profound understanding of material culture, emphasized the close connection between material culture and symbolic expression, and explored the

important role of material culture in human society and its future development direction. In the manifestation of material culture and human wisdom, material culture is the concrete embodiment of human wisdom and creativity. By making and using various tools, decorations and artworks, humans not only meet basic survival needs, but also express their aesthetics and emotions. The development of material culture reflects the progress of human society and the growth of civilization. From primitive stone tools to modern electronic products, the material remains of each era record the technological level and cultural achievements of the society at that time. Material culture is not only a component of social structure, but also a medium of social action. People establish social relations and achieve social status through the production and consumption of material products.

In Hodder's view, material culture is the core carrier of symbolic expression. The design, color, shape, and patterns of objects all contain specific cultural meanings and social information. Through the symbolic use of material culture, people can communicate ideas, convey values, and build social identity. This symbolic way of communication plays an important role in religious ceremonies, festivals, and daily interactions. The diversity of material culture is a direct reflection of the diversity of human civilization. People from different regions, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds have created material products with their own characteristics. These products are not only practical tools, but also symbols of cultural identity. Regarding the relationship between material culture and technology, Hodder believes that "the development of material culture is inseparable from technological progress. Technological innovation provides possibilities for the innovation of material products and also changes the way of production and consumption." However, the development of technology is not spontaneous, but driven by cultural needs. Therefore, material culture not only demonstrates the achievements of technology, but also reflects changes in social values and aesthetic standards. Hodder argues that we should pursue a more sustainable and meaningful material consumption model, valuing the cultural value behind material products rather than just pursuing their commercial value. In this way, material culture can become an important resource for promoting sustainable development and social harmony. Daniel Miller and Hodder provide us with a comprehensive and in-depth research framework for material culture. They point out that the evolution of material culture in modern society is a complex and multidimensional process, involving the interaction of science and technology, economy, politics, society and other aspects. A deep understanding of these changes and the motivations behind them will not only help us better adapt to and guide the development direction of material culture, but also promote cultural diversity and sustainability. It is crucial to fully understand and respond to material cultural phenomena in contemporary society.

In modern society, material culture has evolved into a key way to express individual and group identity. People express their social status, cultural taste and group by owning and displaying specific material products. The emergence of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in China is the embodiment of the unique ideology and material culture gradually formed by this ethnic minority in the historical process of living in harmony with nature. As a unique form of material culture, Liangshan Yi lacquerware contains profound material cultural connotations in terms of usage function, production skills, artistic characteristics and cultural expression.

### Usage functions and living customs of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Liangshan Yi lacquerware occupies an important position in the daily life of the Yi people. Its use function is closely related to living customs. This kind of lacquerware is not only a practical daily necessities, but also an exquisite handicraft with ornamental value. It is still widely used in Liangshan area. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has many kinds, which are classified into two categories according to the material: leather lacquerware and wood lacquerware. Among them, tableware (bowls, cups, plates, spoons, bowls), wine utensils, religious utensils and decorations are mostly made of wood; war weapons (such as armor, elbow pads), leather bags, horse gear, etc. are mostly made of leather. According to the use, they are classified into: tableware, wine utensils, weapons, horse gear, ritual instruments, architecture, etc. Involving many aspects such as daily life, rituals, religion, and supplies, each category has its unique production process and cultural connotation.

#### 1.2.1 Lacquerware tableware

Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan, this mysterious land located at high altitude, with its dense natural vegetation and mountainous geographical features, has become the main settlement of the Yi ancestors. In this vast mountainous and semi-mountainous area, most of the Yi ancestors lived in the hinterland of the mountains, which did not have suitable conditions for agricultural planting. This unique natural environment gave rise to the lifestyle of the Yi ancestors, which was mainly characterized by migratory labor, and formed a unique set of survival wisdom in the harmonious coexistence with nature. The local wood raw materials are abundant, and the Yi ancestors used local materials when making daily utensils to make light and stable wooden daily utensils. In addition, there are some leather-based lacquer tableware, which not only meets their basic needs in daily life, but also reflects the awe and gratitude of the Yi ancestors to nature.

With the continuous development of productivity, in order to better adapt to the needs of life, the Yi ancestors made shapes on the basic wooden frame and painted raw lacquer, thus forming unique lacquerware tableware. This innovation is not only the crystallization of the wisdom of the Yi ancestors, but also the embodiment of their pursuit of a better life. In the food culture of the Liangshan Yi people, these exquisite lacquerware tableware plays an important role, providing convenience for the Yi people's diet and life, and has become an indispensable part of the Liangshan Yi food culture.

There are many types of lacquerware tableware. The first type is the most common wooden bowl lacquerware (called "Kum" in Yi language), which is mainly used to hold rice and meat. This type of wooden bowl has a unique bulging belly design and a large capacity, which is convenient for holding food. It is a common utensil in the daily life of the Yi people.

The second category is the lacquer plate (called "Shepi" in Yi language), which is mainly used to hold meat and staple food. It can be divided into shallow plates, high-footed plates, and trays according to different shapes. It is often used to serve food to guests at major Yi banquets and public gatherings;

The third category is the lacquer bowl (called "Dezheng" and "Sishe" in Yi language), which can be divided into leather and wood in terms of material. The shape is relatively ordinary, without a base, and with an open round bottom, just like the porcelain bowl of the Han nationality; the wood-based lacquer bowl is mainly used to

hold rice and wine, and the leather-based lacquer bowl is mainly used to distribute food. The production process of the leather-based lacquer bowl is more complicated and cumbersome than that of the wood-based lacquer bowl, but the common characteristics of the two bowls are lightness and durability;

The fourth category is the wooden helmet (called "Kuzu" in Yi language), which is divided into high-footed and short-footed in terms of shape. It is similar to the bowl used by Buddhists, with a narrow mouth and deep belly. It is mainly used to hold dishes and soup, and has a good heat preservation effect;

The fifth category is the spoon (called "Mashi" in Yi language), which has a flat round head and a thin handle, and the handle is located at one-third of the flat round head. The Liangshan Yi people also have unique eating customs, and they are very particular about using spoons. During the use of the spoon, the eater's mouth does not directly contact the spoon body, but uses the method of "throwing food".



*Figure 35 Liangshan Yi lacquerware tableware set*

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at a lacquerware store in Meigu County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture(February 2024)

#### 1.2.2 Lacquerware wine utensils

The lacquered wine vessels of the Liangshan Yi people are not only indispensable utensils in daily life, but also an important carrier of hospitality in Yi culture. Since ancient times, the Yi people have had a deep respect and cherishment for wine culture. In Yi culture, wine is a symbol of etiquette, implying the deep emotion of "wine is full of respect for people". Whether it is the gathering moments of festivals and celebrations, the important occasions of weddings and funerals, or the solemn moments of worshiping ancestors and comforting souls, wine is an indispensable element. The profound influence of wine culture permeates the daily life of the Yi people and has become a part of the ethnic tradition. During festivals or family gatherings, relatives and friends sit around the fire pit, and wine vessels circulate among them. It is called "turning wine" in the local area. People connect with each other and enhance understanding by drinking together. In such occasions, wine is not only to set off the atmosphere, but also a material culture to express respect, blessings and emotional communication.

During the Yi people's ancestor worship ceremony, various exquisite lacquer wine vessels are placed on the table. This is a traditional practice with deep symbolic significance in Yi culture. Bimos will sing the ancient "Jijiu Song" during the ceremony. This song is not only a praise of wine, but also a profound sacrificial behavior. Through this form, they express gratitude to all things in nature and also offer sacrifices to the gods. The lacquer wine vessels used in the ancestor worship ceremony are not only practical, but also a symbol of the Yi people's material culture. Their use expresses the worship and respect for the ancestors. The ancestor worship ceremony strengthens the connection within the ethnic group and enhances the cohesion among the members of the ethnic group through the Bimos' "Jijiu Song" and related ritual activities. Lacquer wine vessels carry important cultural and spiritual symbols in the Yi people's ancestor worship ceremony. They are bridges connecting people and nature, people and gods, and people and ancestors. Through such rituals, the Yi people express their awe of nature, their offerings to gods, and their respect for their ancestors, which is a profound manifestation of material culture.

Traditional Yi lacquer wine vessels are unique in shape, beautiful and colorful, with distinct ethnic minority characteristics. Common Yi lacquer wine vessels are divided into four types. The first type is wine cups, including eagle claw cups, chicken claw cups, goose claw cups, buffalo horn cups, pig's foot wine cups, etc. "Eagle claw cup" is famous for its unique shape among Yi wine vessels. It is the most typical representative of Yi wine vessels. It is called "Jiuxi Zhera" in Yi language. "Eagle claw cup" has a unique shape, consisting of a cup body and a base. The design is exquisite, reflecting the superb craftsmanship of Yi craftsmen. In the profound cultural concepts of the Yi people, the eagle occupies an extremely sacred position. Because of its extraordinary flying ability and sharp eyes, it is regarded as a messenger connecting heaven and earth. It is not only a symbol of strength, but also a symbol of power and dignity. In the long history of the Liangshan Yi people, this reverence for the eagle is reflected in the design and use of the "eagle claw cup", a unique wine vessel. In the early Liangshan Yi society with its unique social structure and distinct class hierarchy, the "Eagle Claw Cup" was not just an ordinary drinking tool, but also a symbol of power and status. Those individuals or families who owned the "Eagle Claw Cup" undoubtedly enjoyed high prestige and considerable power in the ethnic group. In important social events such as festivals and family gatherings, the use of the "Eagle Claw Cup" not only strengthened the connection and sense of identity among ethnic group members, but this unique drinking tool also carried a profound material and cultural connotation, and also showed the rich cultural heritage of the Yi people to the outside world.



Figure 36 Liangshan Yi lacquerware eagle claw wine cup  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Meigu County Museum in Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan (March 2024)

The second category is the Liangshan Yi lacquer wine pot (called "Sa Le Bo" in Yi language), the main function of which is to store and dispense wine. "According to the shape, they can be divided into "flat wine pot", "round wine pot" and "pigeon-shaped wine pot". These wine pots are not only practical, but also full of profound cultural significance.

The distinctive feature of the "flat wine flask" is that the upper abdomen is higher and the overall shape is flat, allowing the front and rear parts of the flask to be tightly coupled. This design is not only elegant but also practical, making it easy to carry and use. The wine flask is composed of multiple parts: including the wine inlet, wine outlet, lid, body and base, etc. Each part is carefully designed to ensure the sealing and stability of the wine flask. The base is designed in a tapered shape, which not only increases the stability of the pot body, but also makes the flask more stable when placed. There is a circular hole at the bottom of the pot, which is connected to the internal straw for easy pouring and serves as a wine outlet. The overall structure of the wine bottle is simple and smooth, with smooth lines, but the internal structure is more complex, showing the sophistication and sophistication of the Yi people's craftsmanship. The unique structure of the "flat wine pot" makes the wine pot completely airtight. This design is completely consistent with the early nomadic life in Liangshan. With its exquisite structure and elegant shape, the "flat wine flask" plays an important role in daily life and festival celebrations.

The "round wine pot" is very popular in Yi culture, which is attributed to its soft and rounded appearance design and balanced and consistent shape. The design pursues an overall sense of harmony and balance, and is suitable for storing large volumes of liquid. Its round design style is not only visually eye-catching, but also promotes the smooth circulation of the wine in the container. This feature is particularly beneficial to the aging process of the wine and can better promote the development of the flavor of the wine. Compared with the "flat wine pot", the internal structure of the "round wine pot" is simpler. This design simplifies the production process and facilitates daily cleaning and maintenance. The appearance of the "round wine pot" presents a smooth line beauty. This design makes the wine pot more beautiful and easy to integrate into various life scenes. The wine pot occupies an important position in Yi culture with its unique design and practicality. It is not only

an indispensable tool in daily life, but also a reflection of the integration of Yi tradition and modern lifestyle.

The appearance of the "pigeon-shaped wine pot" imitates the shape of a pigeon or a turtledove. The shape is lively and vivid, and it reflects exquisite craftsmanship and respect for nature from the overall to the details. It is a very distinctive category of Yi wine vessels. This kind of wine pot is not only a drinking tool in Yi culture, but also a symbol of material culture. The wine pot is sealed all around, and the abdominal cavity is also sealed. The contact surface with the outside world is small, which can maximize the airtightness of the wine pot. The mouth of the pot is reasonably designed, and it is convenient to pour wine. The convenience of use will not be sacrificed because of its unique appearance. In Yi culture, pigeons often symbolize peace and tranquility. Therefore, the "pigeon-shaped wine pot" is not only a daily necessity, but also carries a profound cultural implication, symbolizing a harmonious and peaceful life.



Figure 37 Liangshan Yi lacquered wine pot

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Sichuan University Museum(March 2024)

### 1.2.3 Religious paraphernalia

The Liangshan Yi people are a nation that reveres nature and worships their ancestors. As an indigenous religion, religious culture coexists and grows with the ethnic group, and is deeply rooted in the traditional culture and customs of the Yi people. This indigenous religious culture is not only an important part of the Yi spirit, but also an important carrier of the Yi material culture inheritance.

As a special material culture ecology among the Liangshan Yi people, "Bimo culture" has developed and continued to this day in a closed environment. The special group of Bimos takes the family as the core of inheritance, and shoulders a whole set of rituals, concepts, ritual instruments and other cultural matters as its responsibilities. Its purpose is to pray and sacrifice, and eliminate harm for the Yi people. The Yi people regard Bimos as "wise men". They have a deep knowledge of Yi language, are proficient in Yi language, are good at divination, ancestor worship, sutras, compiling classics, and treating diseases. They use their unique and ancient professional skills to show the profoundness of the Yi Bimo culture to the outside world. To this end, Bimos must be proficient in the ritual instruments used in various rituals. The ancestor worship, nature belief, cosmology and typical sacrificial rituals in the Yi culture are all displayed through the Bimo culture. These cultural elements not only convey rich

material cultural connotations, but also show the Yi people's awe of nature and respect for life.

Bimo will have a set of instruments as tools for various rituals and carry them with them. Common instruments include fans, hats, bells, fortune sticks, scriptures, etc. These instruments have different functions and uses in various rituals. Bimo instruments are also the most direct expression of Bimo culture. Some of the instruments they use are also lacquer products, but compared with other lacquerware, instruments are a niche and rare object, so the number is relatively small. It can be divided into two categories. The first category is the "divine fan" (called "cheke" in Yi language), which is a traditional item with Yi cultural characteristics. Its main purpose is to invite gods and exorcise ghosts. By sprinkling sawdust and buckwheat flowers representing gold and silver to offer food to ancestors or ghosts, it expresses respect for ancestors and gods. Its shape is unique, similar to a round fan, consisting of a fan and a handle. The fan is made of bamboo weaving, and the handle is made of a wooden frame and painted with plain lacquer without any painting. Two carved male and female eagles stand on the left and right sides of the top of the fan, symbolizing auspiciousness and strength; the handle of the fan is carved with the shape of a monkey, symbolizing wisdom and dexterity. The whole design is full of strong national characteristics and artistic beauty.

The second category is the "divine fortune stick tube" (called "Wutu" in Yi language). Its original purpose was to hold the bamboo pen of Bimo. With the development process, it gradually evolved into a tube for holding bamboo sticks for divination. The divine fortune stick tube consists of three parts: upper, middle and lower. The overall length is 31cm and the diameter is 6cm. The production process adopts the method of bamboo wood base lacquer painting. The upper part is a wooden base, which is shaped like a duckbill. This unique shape is not only decorative, but also symbolizes a special sacred power of the Yi people; the middle part is a bamboo tube made of bamboo, which is used to hold the bamboo sticks used for divination, carrying the tradition of Yi people's beliefs and gods; the lower part is a wooden base, which is in the shape of a cover to ensure the safety of the bamboo sticks in the tube and prevent loss or damage. The divine fortune stick tube is made with exquisite craftsmanship. The outer body of the tube adopts the painting technology, and is painted with traditional patterns such as cockscomb patterns or fishing net patterns. The cockscomb pattern represents bravery and strength, and the fishing net pattern symbolizes the connection of wisdom. These patterns are not only beautiful, but also contain profound cultural significance. The use of colorful paintings adds to the visual beauty of the cylinder, and also reflects the Yi people's reverence and reference to nature and life elements. As an indispensable tool for Bimos to perform religious ceremonies, the fortune-telling cylinder is not only a religious ritual item, but also a material carrier of Yi cultural heritage. The use and inheritance of each generation of Bimos is a continuation of Yi history and culture.

The close connection between Bimo ware and lacquer ware is reflected in the fact that they both carry and transmit the profound cultural information of the Yi people. In particular, the lacquer decoration on the Bimo ritual implements. These visual symbols deepen the significance of the ritual implements in Yi culture. They not only significantly enhance the ornamental value of the ritual implements themselves, but also incorporate profound cultural connotations. Although they have

no practical function, they have been endowed with special symbolic meaning through the sacred rituals of Bimo of the Yi people, becoming a bridge connecting ancestors, gods and praying for future visions.

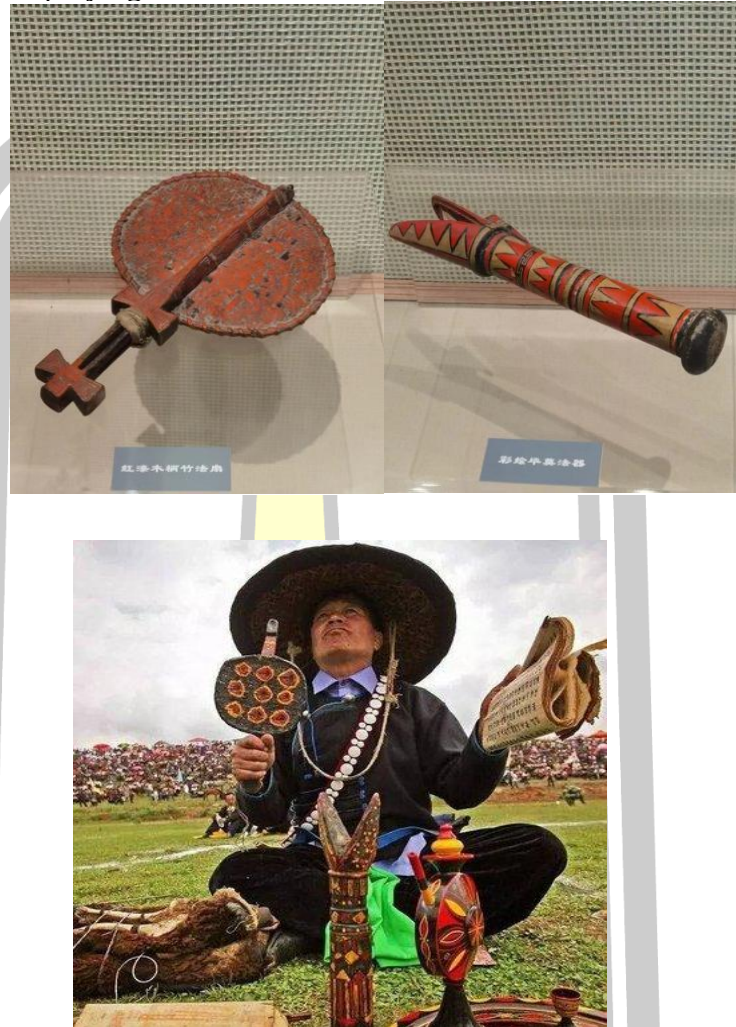


Figure 38 Lacquerware instruments used in the Liangshan Yi ethnic group's "Bimo Culture"

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Meigu County Museum in Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan(March 2024)

#### 1.2.4 Weapons and Equipment

Since ancient times, the Yi people in Liangshan have been brave and warlike. Under the influence of the Yi people's unique social structure and family branch system, the Yi people's pursuit of honor and prestige often requires the display of force, which enhances the Yi people's fighting tendency. The ancient Liangshan Yi people were far away from the political and cultural center, geographically remote and isolated, and information was always closed. With the paternal line as the key link, the Yi people established a unique "family branch system", and conflicts and struggles between family branches frequently occurred. In the history of the Yi area, there have been struggles between local forces. In order to maintain or expand their sphere of influence, local leaders and tribal nobles often initiated or participated in military operations, which also prompted the Yi people to maintain a certain amount

of armed forces to protect themselves. In order to gain an advantage in ethnic fights, the Yi people made various weapons, and most of the weapons were painted with Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Common weapons include armor, helmets, shields, arm guards, wrist guards, quivers, horns, daggers, spears, etc. Raw lacquer painted on the surface of weapons can prevent corrosion and make them durable. Secondly, the lacquer painting skills of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group can beautify and decorate the weapons.

The first and second categories have been recorded in the Yi document "Mamutiya", "The helmets and armor are very beautiful, and the colorful paint is used for decoration, which is very helpful in boosting morale."<sup>21</sup>

It can be seen that in ancient times, the lacquerware painting technique of the Liangshan Yi people was widely used in weapons and utensils. Armor is called "Xian" in Yi language. It is made of leather and has a complex production process. During the repeated painting process, the leather is penetrated by raw lacquer and becomes extremely hard. Its structural characteristics are divided into two sides, the front chest and the back, which are mainly used to protect the chest and spine to avoid damage to the main body parts in battle. The lacquered leather helmet is often matched with armor. It consists of three parts, one large and two small round covers. One of the large round covers mainly protects the top of the head, and the two small round covers are mainly used to protect the ears to prevent damage to the main head parts in battle.



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<sup>21</sup> Yi document "Mamutiya", Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House, 1986, page 167.



Figure 39 Liangshan Yi people painted armor and helmets

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Shanghai Museum and Sichuan University Museum(March 2024)

The third type is the shield (called "Tuoga" in Yi language), with a diameter of about 59cm. The overall shape of the shield is perfect circle, convex inside and concave outside, with thick logs in the center, which enhances the sturdiness of the shield and makes it more reliable in battle. In order to facilitate carrying and use, a rope is equipped in the center of the shield, which is mainly used for hand-held grasping to ensure that the shield is not easy to fall off in battle. On the outside of the shield, the three primary colors of black, red and yellow are used for decoration and painting, which is very ethnic. As an important defensive device in ancient wars, the shield symbolizes protection and strength. In Yi society, the shield is not only a tool of defense, but also a material and cultural symbol of bravery and might.



Figure 40 Exhibition of Liangshan Yi lacquered shields

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Shanghai Museum and Sichuan University Museum(March 2024)

The fourth category is arm guards and wrist guards (called "Biebuluotu" in Yi language). As the name suggests, arm guards and wrist guards are mainly worn on the arms and wrists to protect these vulnerable parts from direct blows from weapons in battle. The protective gear is made of leather, and the surface of the leather is repeatedly wiped with raw lacquer. The raw lacquer penetrates into the leather to form an extremely strong surface. The design of the arm guard fully considers the practicality and comfort of the battle. The design of the upper part is not only beautiful, but also helps to divert rainwater and prevent moisture from penetrating into the interior to affect the use. The shape of the lower part rolled into a cylinder provides convenience for wearing, while ensuring a close fit to the arm and providing the best protection. The unique feature of the design is that the width of the arm guard can be manually adjusted, the size is contractible, and the arm and wrist can be flexibly rotated, which greatly improves its universality and comfort. In Yi culture, the ability to make protective gear for war symbolizes an ability to be self-reliant and self-protective. The use of arm guards and wrist guards is not only a protection for individual warriors, but also a maintenance of family and ethnic group security.

The fifth category is the quiver (called "hehe" in Yi language), which is about 24cm long and 6cm in diameter. It is made of oval leather rolled up, and some are made of wood. It consists of three parts: upper, middle and lower. The upper and lower parts are made of wood or leather, and the middle part is made of bamboo or wood. It is mainly used to load arrows. In the history of the Yi people, the quiver is not only an indispensable equipment in war, but also an important tool in daily life and hunting activities. It symbolizes the Yi people's respect for life and nature and their survival wisdom. The possession and use of the quiver often marks the identity and status of the owner, reflecting a certain social level and symbol of power. The painted patterns are mainly painted on the upper and lower ends of the quiver, which not only beautifies the object itself, but also reflects the rich material culture and aesthetic value of the Yi people.

The sixth type of Yi lacquerware is the ox-horn trumpet, which is called "Lefuduobu" in Yi language. This ox-horn trumpet is made of high-quality ox-horn material and has unique historical and cultural significance. The main function of the ox-horn trumpet is to be used in battle. In the history of the Yi people, the ox-horn trumpet is often used for communication and command on the battlefield. Its sound is deep and distant, which can convey instructions and unify the actions of soldiers in a noisy battlefield environment. It is blown to send signals and orders, and is also used to boost morale and inspire the fighting enthusiasm of soldiers. The ox-horn trumpet also carries a special symbolic meaning in Yi culture. It symbolizes strength and courage and is part of the spiritual culture of the Yi people. In some traditional festivals or religious ceremonies of the Yi people, the ox-horn trumpet will also be used to pray for the protection of the gods or celebrate important festivals.



Figure 41 Liangshan Yi lacquer ox-horn horn

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Shanghai Museum and Sichuan University Museum(March 2024)

#### 1.2.5 Horse Harness

The Liangshan area in Sichuan has a complex geological structure and is mostly mountainous. The early Yi ancestors were scattered in various mountainous areas of Daliangshan. The winding mountain roads were inaccessible, and the only means of transportation was horses. Therefore, horses were very important to the ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people. They were their friends and their comrades-in-arms. Horses have played an important role throughout the dynasties, and the importance of horses in Liangshan Yi people can still be reflected. Traditional festival horse racing and fights between ethnic groups all require horses to be decorated with exquisite accessories. Gorgeously decorated horses have become an important symbol of personal wealth and social status. Exquisite horse gear not only reflects the owner's taste, but also a symbol of ethnic identity and cultural identity. Lacquer saddles are derived from this, which fully demonstrates the Yi people's deep feelings for horses. The production and exchange of horse gear, especially lacquer saddles, have become an important way to maintain social relations and strengthen ethnic ties. Through these activities, the social structure and cultural traditions of the Yi people have been maintained and carried forward.

Traditional horse gear is mainly divided into saddles, stirrups, bridles and stirrup straps, among which the most common is the saddle. These horse gears are not only practical, but also reflect the exquisite craftsmanship of the Yi people. As the most common type, the saddle is particularly exquisite in design and production. It usually uses solid wood as the base, covered with leather on the outside, and decorated with exquisite lacquer art. Saddles are not only a part of the life of the Yi people, but also a symbol of material culture. They carry the Yi people's dependence on and emotions for horses, and reflect the Yi people's exquisite craftsmanship and profound cultural connotations.



Figure 42 Liangshan Yi ethnic group leather lacquer saddle

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Sichuan University Museum (April 2024)

### The production process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

The ancient traditional craft of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, with its long history and unique production skills, reflects the unique aesthetic value of the Yi people, and also contains the Yi people's profound aesthetic consciousness and cultural expression. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is an important part of Yi culture. It vividly shows the material culture and aesthetic taste of Liangshan Yi people with its unique shape, decoration and color. Compared with other local lacquerware, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is more complicated in production process, covering multiple links from material selection to painting tools to lacquerware finished products. Each step reflects the Yi people's pursuit of beauty and respect for traditional culture. Compared with other local lacquerware, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has more unique materials, primitive production methods and full of simple charm, with distinct artistic characteristics, making it a unique material culture of Liangshan Yi people.

#### 1.3.1 Raw lacquer collection techniques

The Yi people of Liangshan belong to the subtropical monsoon climate zone, with distinct dry and wet areas, good natural ecology, and dense vegetation, which provide natural nutrients for the growth of lacquer trees. The harvesting of raw lacquer is generally carried out in April of the lunar calendar every year. Until August, lacquer farmers will carry out lacquer harvesting operations in the deep mountains of the Yi people at an altitude of more than 2,000 meters. For the Yi people, lacquer harvesting is a solemn and sacred thing, and there are also many requirements and taboos. The entire lacquer harvesting process includes offering sacrifices to the mountain, tying trees, releasing mouths, harvesting, and filtering. The solemn mountain worship ceremony is a necessary work before harvesting lacquer. Inserting incense, bowing, and praying are to pray for the protection of the mountain god and avoid encountering wild beasts during the harvesting of lacquer; the second is to respect and be grateful for the gift of nature. When cutting lacquer, use a special cutting knife to cut a triangular opening on the lacquer tree, and use a clam shell to catch the lacquer liquid flowing out at the junction of the triangle below. Generally, the lacquer cutting is done at intervals of about 80cm-85cm on a lacquer tree, and lacquer trees that are less than 3m long are not cut. This is to prevent the lacquer tree from dying after cutting, and to give the lacquer tree time to recover naturally. The entire lacquer collection process is complicated and long, so there is a saying that "a pound of lacquer is produced after a thousand cuts in a hundred miles", which is

enough to illustrate the low production and precious value of lacquer. When the raw lacquer is just cut, it is milky white. It will gradually oxidize to dark brown or black when it comes into contact with air. The collected raw lacquer needs to be filtered, precipitated and other processes to remove moisture and impurities, so that the superior topcoat and medium primer can be selected.

During the investigation, local Yi lacquer collectors recalled that in the 1980s, many outsiders flocked to Liangshan to collect lacquer liquid. Excessive and rampant harvesting seriously damaged the lacquer tree ecosystem, leaving lacquer trees covered with wounds and their precious lacquer liquid plundered, causing many lacquer trees to be unable to recover and eventually die of exhaustion. This is disrespectful to nature and is absolutely not allowed in the local area; at the same time, it also reflects the Yi people's deep worship of nature and the worldview of harmony between man and nature.



Figure 43 The process of collecting lacquer by Yi lacquer farmers in Liangshan  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Meigu County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan  
(April 2024)

### 1.3.2 Carcass making techniques

Liangshan Yi lacquerware is very particular about the selection of raw materials, and practicality is a major feature of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. The Yi ancestors took advantage of the unique ecological resources, so a large number of traditional lacquerware were made of wood. Later, under the influence of long-term nomadic farming practices, the base of lacquerware gradually expanded from the original single wood to leather, leather and wood, horn, bamboo, bamboo and wood, etc.; among them, wood and leather account for the vast majority and are the most commonly used materials for Yi people. Mixed and horn are second, and bamboo is relatively rare. The raw materials are different and the meanings are different. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has diverse modeling characteristics. In daily life, they have produced distinctive tableware, wine utensils, horse gear, weapons, Bimo ritual instruments, etc.

The first type of wood body material: In the process of making Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the selection of the raw materials for the body is very particular. The selection of wood body is relatively complicated, because the hardness of wood varies and there are many varieties, so the selected wood should have fine texture, easy to carve, and stable physical properties. Because in the concept of the Yi people, azalea

wood is the purest wood and is not polluted, so they usually take azalea wood from the high-altitude cold areas above 3,500 meters as the raw material for the lacquer body. After taking it back, dig a pit and bury the wood underground to dry in the shade for several months, and take it out in time. The purpose of doing this is that it is not easy to crack or deform after drying. Use special tools to hollow out the inner belly and polish the surface. The only spinning tools are flat hook-shaped double-edged digging knives and wedge-shaped iron knives. The whole process is primitive foot-operated hand spinning. There are no measuring tools during production, and it all depends on the degree of force and angle of the tools.



Figure 44 Ji Wuwuqie, a representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage project "Yi lacquerware painting technique", is making lacquerware wooden bodies

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Xide County, Sichuan(April 2024)

The second type of leather material: leather lacquerware requires more than 40 processes from material selection to processing and forming, including leather selection, leather soaking, hair removal, shaping, drying, applying grass ash, applying tofu milk, and then frosting, painting, painting, etc. First of all, leather lacquerware is extremely strict in the selection of leather raw materials. The material selection must be mainly yellow cowhide, and it must be fresh old buffalo leather. This is because the hardness and thickness of old buffalo leather can meet the production requirements to ensure the quality and durability of the finished product. The entire production cycle is long and the process is complicated. In the early stage of production, the old buffalo leather needs to be placed in the river for half a month to a month. If the river water rises sharply and the climate is cold during the production process, it will fail. After the cowhide is completely soft, take out the cowhide from the river, use a knife to gently scrape the fur, and remove the hair of the yellow cow; then carefully cut the leather into a suitable size, stretch it on the mold, and dry it naturally in the sun to shape it; finally, trim the shaped leather according to the edge of the mold, and the base layer of the leather is completed. Afterwards, the painters will repeatedly apply multiple layers of raw lacquer on the leather. Each layer is dried under strict temperature and time control to ensure the smoothness and firmness of the paint surface. This is not only a practical item, but also a valuable carrier of Yi cultural heritage and a vivid embodiment of their unique cognitive vision, aesthetic emotions and social customs.



Figure 45 Bai Shifuji, a representative inheritor of Yi ethnic group's leather-based lacquerware making, is making leather-based lacquerware

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Xide County, Sichuan(April 2024)

### 1.3.3 Paint making technique

The painting technique of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is even more unique. After completing the basic work of making the body, the raw lacquer is used as a medium to wipe the raw lacquer thinly on the completed body, so that the raw lacquer can penetrate into the gaps of the body, and repeat it many times until the surface lacquer can no longer penetrate into the body. This is called "eating green" in the jargon of Yi lacquer art. The purpose of this operation is to increase the toughness of the body and make it less likely to deform. Then, tung oil is added and blended with mineral colors. Since the Liangshan Yi area does not refine cooked lacquer, all raw lacquer is used directly when painting, and the basic color is adjusted according to the color requirements. There is a local proverb in the Yi people: "If you don't want to paint, don't paint. If you want to paint, paint it black and bright. If you want to dye it, dye it red." This also shows that the Yi people pursue purity in everything.<sup>22</sup> (Dong, Qianwen., 2020) .Liangshan Yi lacquerware is mainly composed of three colors: black, red and yellow. The materials of these three colors are all taken from nature. Black is also called "black color". Raw lacquer will turn into dark brown after oxidation, close to black, but it is still somewhat translucent. In the process of preparing black lacquer, Yi lacquer workers will mix black powder (usually pot bottom ash) or pig blood into the raw lacquer, and adjust the amount according to the specific color. At this time, the color of the black lacquer can become darker and the saturation is higher. In traditional Chinese culture, there are also many idioms related to "black lacquer", such as "red lacquer is black", which comes from "Confucius's Analects": "The place where cinnabar is hidden is red, and the place where lacquer is hidden is black. Therefore, a gentleman must be careful about who he is with." The popular meaning is "those who are close to cinnabar are red, and those who are close to ink are black."; Related idioms include "pitch black", "like glue and lacquer", "red lacquer follows dreams", etc.

<sup>22</sup> Dong Qianwen. (2020). "Aesthetic Analysis of the Composition of Black, Red and Yellow in Yi Lacquerware"

The red color used in Liangshan Yi lacquerware is made by grinding cinnabar stone or silver vermilion into powder and mixing it into raw lacquer. "Cinnabar", also known as "vermilion", is a mineral pigment unique to my country. It has stable color properties and will not change color or fade after mixing. When mixing red, Yi lacquer workers control the color saturation according to the proportion of cinnabar powder added to the raw lacquer. Yellow is made by grinding orchid ore. Orchid is produced in Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and other places in my country and is an important mineral pigment. Because orchid is quite hard, there is no special modern equipment in the grinding process, and it is more artificial. Yi lacquer workers cannot grind orchid particles to the same coarseness when making yellow lacquer, so there are often some fine particles in the lacquer when using yellow lacquer. Compared with black and red, it is relatively rough. It can be seen that the limitation of color making process is also one of the objective reasons for the formation of the three primary colors of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

#### 1.3.4 Lacquer Techniques

The lacquer art of the Liangshan Yi people is highly skilled. They have a set of methods of their own for the use and mastery of lines. In the construction of the patterns, they expand outward from the circle as the center, and control the entire composition with the center of the circle. Without any measuring tools, they can achieve symmetry, balance, clear priorities, and rigorous structure. These geometric patterns show the primitive beauty, power, and rhythmic beauty of the Yi lacquerware, crystallize the wisdom of the Yi people, inherit the cultural value of the Liangshan Yi people, and bring the art of the Liangshan Yi people to a new height.

The lacquer painting techniques of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware are unique, all of which are black, red, and yellow. When lacquering, filtered raw lacquer is mixed with pot ash as a base; then raw lacquer is mixed with cinnabar, stone yellow and other natural mineral pigments to make red and yellow. With simple lines and abstract patterns, nature and life are reproduced on lacquerware, achieving a fusion of practicality and artistry. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is very particular about the selection of the original wood base material, the use of lacquer as the medium, the decoration and color of lacquerware, and the tools used for painting are even more so. The brushes used for painting lacquerware are different according to different decorations. The types of brushes are mainly divided into bamboo and wood pieces of different sizes, line pens, and fan-shaped brushes. To draw the points, lines, and surfaces of lacquerware decorations. The overall length of the brush is usually about 20cm and the width is about 2-5cm. The pen holder is made of high-quality bamboo and wood pieces as raw materials, and the production method of the pen head is very particular. The first type is a brush made of fine hemp rope and goat beard. The goat beard is very tough. The position of the pen tip is an oblique cut so that it can be rotated flexibly and freely during the painting process. In the process of using the brush, when the brush is pressed down with force, it will then rebound by itself. This effect is exactly what other brushes cannot do. The second type is the hair of adult women that has not been permed or dyed; the third type is made of the back and neck hair of adult livestock pigs. The special lacquer tools made by the Liangshan Yi people are also very different from lacquer tools in other parts of China. The exquisite lines and patterns are not only the result of superb skills, but also have a lot to do with the use of tools.



Figure 46 Liangshan Yi lacquerware making tools display lacquerware making, is making leather-based lacquerware

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Institute in Xide County, Liangshan, Sichuan(April 2024)

The production process of Yi lacquerware is entirely done by hand, and each step is particularly important. It takes more than 40 processes to produce a piece of lacquerware from the initial material selection to the final product. In the Yi lacquerware painting technique, there are three commonly used decorative techniques. The first decorative technique is direct painting (flat painting), which is also the most commonly used and common method for Yi lacquerware production. Usually, black lacquer is used as a primer on the basis of the body, and red and yellow are used as auxiliary, and different types of pens are used for painting. Painting requires extremely high lacquer skills. During the painting process, two hands need to cooperate at the same time. There will be a rotating base, which is shaped like a round bench. The vessel is placed on the rotating base. The left hand controls the body and rotates slowly. The right hand holds the pen to draw and maintain balance. The painted patterns are mostly divided into single patterns and continuous patterns. The single pattern focuses on the balance of the picture. Based on a single pattern, the patterns are combined and connected. There will be a central pattern as a frame to control the rhythm of the entire pattern. The other is a continuous pattern. The characteristics of a continuous pattern are that the pattern rhythm is uniform, the pattern is drawn at equal distances, each pattern is cyclically combined, evenly distributed, and the density is taken into account, the beginning and the end are connected, and the complexity is appropriate, so that the objects and patterns are harmonious and unified, and the ancient beauty and abstract beauty are integrated. The second decorative technique is to use a special carving knife to engrave on the surface of the lacquer layer, engrave points, lines, surfaces and other patterns, and then fill the concave lacquer layer with colored lacquer, which is similar to the carving and coloring technique in Chengdu lacquer art. The third decorative technique is inlay. When painting, the lacquer layer has a certain thickness. When the lacquer is not dry, eggshells, gold and silver sheets or animal bones are embedded in the surface of the lacquer layer to make it firmly fixed and have the beauty of diverse materials. However, in the modern Liangshan Yi lacquerware production techniques, knife

carving techniques and inlay techniques are rarely used, and most lacquerware production is still based on flat painting techniques. The use of these techniques has given Liangshan Yi lacquerware its own unique material culture and artistic characteristics, and also improved the cultural value of the lacquerware itself.

#### **1.4 Artistic characteristics and cultural expressions of Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

Liangshan Yi culture is an indispensable part of Chinese culture. It has a profound humanistic history. In the process of continuous development and growth, it has formed a material culture unique to the nation. The typical patterns and colors of Liangshan Yi are mainly derived from ancestor worship, totem worship, and nature worship. Its concepts and beliefs adhere to the cultural roots of local culture, have profound cultural connotations, and affect the life and production of the Yi people. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has unique artistic characteristics and rich cultural connotations. In terms of shape, patterns, colors and production technology, these characteristics of Yi lacquerware not only show the Yi people's pursuit of beauty and respect for traditional culture, but also reveal their love for life and worship of nature. Liangshan Yi lacquerware expresses the Yi people's respect for their ancestors, worship of nature and love for life through its unique artistic language characteristics. It is not only a necessity for the daily life of the Yi people, but also an important carrier of their spiritual life.

##### **1.4.1 Decorative features and artistic connotations**

The traditional patterns of the Liangshan Yi people are deeply rooted in the local lifestyle, unique geographical environment, long historical origins and profound religious beliefs, thus giving birth to extremely rich and colorful artistic connotations. Due to the closed natural environment, backward transportation and inconvenient external communication, the Liangshan Yi people's traditional patterns have been preserved to the greatest extent, showing the primitive, simple and rough characteristics of early patterns. These patterns have a wide range of themes, unique shapes and bright colors, giving people a strong visual beauty, covering all aspects from daily life to mysterious legends. They are not only reflected in the Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also left a deep mark in the local architecture, silver ornaments and clothing, becoming a true portrayal of the Yi people's local culture and spiritual civilization. The modeling method of the Yi traditional patterns is extremely similar to the modeling of the Yangshao culture in the new period. They are all from nature worship to totem worship, influenced by nature, and reflect the wisdom and labor of the people at that time in the pattern modeling, using simple lines and clear block relationships to reproduce life on objects.

The Yi people believe that everything is alive, and the gods dominate everything, so the Yi people are full of awe for nature. When facing natural objects, they use primitive and simple creative techniques to express objects such as the sun, the moon, mountains, water waves, and stars. In these decorative shapes, the concepts tend to be image-based, with circles representing the sun and angles representing directions. The different decorative shapes contain different meanings and beliefs. As time goes by, even if new concepts are integrated into the traditional Yi patterns, the inheritance of primitive art is still deeply rooted.

In the slave society of the Yi people in Liangshan, slaves made high-quality and beautiful lacquerware, which was enjoyed by slave owners. Exquisite wine

vessels were used by chieftains and slave owners to enjoy themselves and drink; gorgeous armor and saddles were tools for chieftains and slave owners to plunder; and the simple eagle claw cup was a symbol of the noble rank and power of chieftains and slave owners.<sup>23</sup> These exquisite lacquerwares, with various shapes, bright colors and rich decorative patterns, are the result of the continuous refinement, processing, transformation and improvement of the production practices of the Yi ethnic group's lacquer art craftsmen from generation to generation, and gradually reflect the aesthetic consciousness of primitive society in the decorative patterns of lacquerware.

The production of traditional lacquerware patterns of the Liangshan Yi people originated from the ancient worship of nature and totem worship. The Yi people worship nature and are deeply influenced by nature. The patterns are mainly composed of three parts: points, lines, and surfaces. The patterns are simple and concise. Most of them are continuous and single patterns. For the overall visual effect, some single patterns are combined and connected to form continuous patterns with distinct priorities and harmonious and unified composition. They depict mountains, rivers, sun, moon, animal and plant forms, and production and living utensils, and refine, summarize, artify, and abstract them, thus forming the Liangshan Yi lacquerware with unique national decorative beauty represented by Xide. Each pattern carries a profound cultural connotation and unique meaning. These patterns are not only the sincere expression of the Yi people's worship of nature, but also the artistic reproduction of their delicate observation and deep understanding of life. Whether it is mountains, rivers, sun, moon, stars, flowers, birds, fish, or insects, they are all cleverly integrated into the creation of lacquerware through the wisdom of Yi lacquer workers. The traditional patterns of Liangshan Yi lacquerware cover a variety of patterns, which can be roughly divided into six categories: natural patterns, animal patterns, plant patterns, production patterns, life patterns, and humanistic patterns. These patterns are not only simple and delicate, but also contain the Yi ancestors' yearning for life, the wish for a prosperous population, and the desire for a good harvest. They are like hieroglyphs, using shapes to express the meaning of objects.

Natural patterns such as sun and moon patterns, landscape patterns, etc., such patterns use the sun, moon, mountains, rivers, etc. as creative elements. The Yi people worship mountains, and have special sacrificial activities for mountain gods, praying for the mountain gods to bless the Yi people, which embodies the respect and awe of the Yi ancestors for nature. The mountain-shaped patterns in lacquerware are derived from this natural worship.

There are many animal patterns related to lacquerware, such as ox eye patterns, cockscomb patterns, chicken eye patterns, fish eye patterns, snake patterns, sheep horn patterns, horse tooth patterns, etc. The specific form of ox eye patterns is like "thread", and the specific form of cockscomb patterns is like "serrated". This type of decoration is mainly based on animals such as cattle, sheep, and chickens, representing the Yi ancestors' memories of nomadic life and their yearning for a happy life. It not only has a decorative function, but also reflects the cultural identity and spiritual beliefs of the Yi ancestors.

<sup>23</sup> Compiled and illustrated by Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture Museum. Atlas of Cultural Relics of the Liangshan Yi Nationality. Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House. First edition in September 1982.

Plant decorations are mainly garlic cloves, flower petals, melon seeds, and fern patterns.<sup>24</sup>garlic cloves are two-layer shuttles, the inner layer is dark, and the outer layer is expressed with unique curves and layers, symbolizing the complexity of life. The shape of the petal pattern shows the outline of the flower, which is composed of a combination of lines and surfaces. The fern pattern, with its smooth curves and interlaced textures, symbolizes the tenacity and vitality of life. This type of decoration transforms the gift of nature in an artistic way, showing the Yi ancestors' love for life and respect for nature.

Production decorations are often used to express life and reflect production. Common production decorations include fishing nets, warp and weft patterns, nail patterns, and flint patterns. Among them, nail patterns and flint patterns are the most common, often painted on the edge of the vessel. Nail patterns symbolize individual strength and courage by simulating the shape of nails. Such patterns depict the production and lifestyle of the Yi ancestors, showing the Yi ancestors' diligence, wisdom and rich creativity, and also showing the Yi ancestors' perseverance in the face of difficulties.

The above decorative patterns show the profound awe and respect of the Yi ancestors for the natural world. They drew inspiration from nature and skillfully integrated the elements of nature into their artistic creations. In the traditional decorative patterns of the Yi people, a unique decorative system has been constructed. The shapes of animals and plants, the sun, moon, stars, and daily life production tools are widely used, and objective objects such as the sun, moon, stars, mountains, and water waves are expressed in primitive and simple creative methods. These decorative patterns, with their unique forms and styles, show the charm and diversity of Yi culture, and also provide us with a valuable window to deeply understand and appreciate this ancient national culture. Each decorative pattern contains rich cultural connotations and profound historical heritage. It is not only the pursuit and expression of beauty by the Yi people, but also the love and awe of nature and life.

|           |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 自然物纹样     |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 山脉纹                                                                                 | 1. 星星<br>2. 粟籽<br>3. 苏麻                                                             | 水纹                                                                                  | 1. 太阳及光束<br>2. 角度为 12, 表示 12 个月<br>3. 角度为 8, 表示 8 个方位<br>4. 角度为 4, 表示 4 个方向         | 月亮纹                                                                                 |
| 动物纹样      |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 虫纹                                                                                  | 鱼鳞纹                                                                                 | 蛇纹                                                                                  | 鸡冠纹                                                                                 | 1. 鸡肠纹<br>2. 牛肠纹                                                                    |
| 植物纹样      |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 鸡冠纹                                                                                 | 牛角纹                                                                                 | 牛角纹                                                                                 | 马牙纹                                                                                 | 1. 鱼刺 2. 鸟翅 3. 藤茎叶                                                                  |
| 生产、生活用具纹样 |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 花蕾纹                                                                                 | 花纹                                                                                  | 南瓜子纹                                                                                | 茄子纹                                                                                 | 蒜瓣纹                                                                                 |
|           |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 火镰纹                                                                                 | 1. 火镰纹<br>2. 鸡窝肠                                                                    | 藤线架纹                                                                                | 窗格纹                                                                                 | 吉祥纹                                                                                 |
|           |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 藤杆纹                                                                                 | 铜钱纹                                                                                 | 金链纹                                                                                 | 渔网纹                                                                                 | 鱼珠纹                                                                                 |
|           |  |  |  |  |  |
|           | 指甲纹                                                                                 |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |

Table 1 Classification table of patterns and designs of lacquerware of the Yi nationality in Liangshan  
Source: Source:Production by Suo Chao(April 2024)

<sup>24</sup> Fern pattern: A typical plant pattern in the Yi area of Liangshan, China. Fern patterns are collectively called fern patterns.

#### 1.4.2 Color characteristics and artistic connotations

"From the perspective of regional cultural genesis, in the long history of life, people and nature are closely connected, so different regions naturally form different regional cultures; and each regional culture is bound to form a harmonious group cultural aesthetic psychology adapted to the geographical environment, thus leaving its own unique code in the artistic tradition and entering the collective unconscious layer of the race's organism."<sup>25</sup>(Yang Cunchang,2011)

If the patterns are the spirit of Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware, then the colors are the soul of Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware. In the historical development of Liangshan Yi, the awe and worship of totems, religion and nature by the Yi ancestors profoundly shaped their cognitive concepts. This deep emotion gradually cultivated their unique perception of color, which was undoubtedly deeply influenced by the Yi native culture. Therefore, the lacquerware colors of Liangshan Yi gradually formed their own unique artistic language. The traditional lacquerware of Liangshan Yi is mainly based on the three primary colors of red, yellow and black. The formation of this color combination is not accidental. These three colors are not only widely used in lacquerware, but also occupy an important position in the Yi costumes, architecture and decorative paintings. In the long historical evolution and special natural environment, they gradually formed a unique and distinctive "three-color culture".

In the long history of the Yi people, the ancestors of the Yi people were full of admiration and worship for totems, religions, colors and all things in nature. Therefore, people have formed the ability to recognize colors invisibly in psychology, which is also influenced by the customs and culture of the ethnic group, prompting the colors of the Yi lacquer art to have their own artistic language. From an objective perspective, the color of Liangshan Yi lacquerware was initially quite limited. The color of natural raw lacquer is dark brown, and the red and black of minerals are relatively easy to obtain, and can represent the original and simple colors. The unique "three-color culture" is an effective carrier of cultural inheritance, a symbol of the cultural identity of the Yi people, and has a unique artistic aesthetic style of the ethnic group. The traditional lacquer art language of the Yi people integrates the ideological connotations of the agricultural civilization and nomadic culture of the ancestors of the Yi people, and also reveals the aesthetic value orientation of the Yi people towards emotional colors and the objective world, fully reflecting the aesthetic psychology of national aesthetics and the traditional lacquer art language of the Yi people.

The three primary colors of black, red and yellow have a profound historical origin in the folk culture and religious beliefs of the Yi people in Liangshan. In the traditional culture of the Yi people, "black" reveals the most essential aesthetic characteristics of lacquer. It is both the extreme of black and a praise for lacquer, showing the characteristics of purity, tranquility and depth. At that time, there was such a saying - "The black of lacquer is the darkest and most beautiful black in the world."<sup>26</sup>(Qiao Shiguang ,1999)"Respecting black" is a concept deeply rooted in

<sup>25</sup> Yang Cunchang. On the value of research on regional aesthetic culture of China's ethnic minorities. Qilu Culture Research Center, Shandong Normal University. 2011.6

<sup>26</sup> Qiao Shiguang, editor-in-chief. Lacquer Art. China Academy of Art Press. 1999.10

people's hearts. Black is regarded as the representative of the earth, which nurtures the growth of all things in nature. The ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people regard the black tiger as their ancestor, because black represents bravery, courage, and nobility, and symbolizes dignity, solemnity and prestige. Similarly, the ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people also call themselves "Nuosu".<sup>27</sup>"Nuo" means black, so "Nuosu" means the black nation. In the Liangshan Yi hierarchy, "Black Yi" is considered a noble class. Since the Liangshan Yi ancestors had a special admiration for black, they would use black in religious ceremonies, "Bimo"<sup>28</sup> sacrificial activities, and Tusi battles. Black not only reflects the Yi ancestors' respect for history and cultural heritage, but also highlights their tenacious, brave and militant spirit. Therefore, in the proportion of colors in Liangshan Yi lacquerware, black is dominant compared to red and yellow, and is often used as the base color to cover the entire surface of the lacquerware, while red and yellow are relatively less.

From the perspective of color composition, black itself has no hue and low brightness, which can stabilize the color of the picture and give the color of the picture a sense of order. The lacquerware eagle claw cup is a microcosm of the Liangshan Yi culture. In this land, the eagle is given a sacred status. It symbolizes power and dignity and becomes a symbol of hierarchy. Only people of noble blood can have the privilege of using the "eagle claw cup". In the process of making the "eagle claw cup", the cup body is painted black, the nails retain the original color, and the claws face the four directions of southeast, northwest, representing the vastness of the universe. This design not only demonstrates majesty, but also is an in-depth reflection of deterrence.

The Yi people love red because red represents bravery, enthusiasm, and boldness. Another more important reason is that the Yi people's love for red comes from their admiration for fire. The worship of fire has a mysterious religious color. Many Yi folk witchcraft activities are completed with the help of fire, such as many Bimo activities related to fire. In addition to the mysterious religious function, fire also occupies an important position in the production and life of the Yi people, such as the Torch Festival and the fire pond culture; therefore, the red in the traditional Yi lacquer art is more of the worship of color by the Yi ancestors.

In addition, in the "three-color culture" of the Liangshan Yi people, yellow also has a special meaning. It is not only favored because of its bright and warm visual experience, but also because yellow carries the profound meaning of auspiciousness, light, hope and prosperity. In Yi culture, yellow represents a symbol of beauty and is an expression of people's yearning for a happy life. Yellow has eternal and common morality. It is the source of all things and enables all things to evolve. The three primary colors of black, red and yellow are interwoven with each other, with bright and gorgeous colors, sharp contrast, and a balance of complexity and simplicity. The unique decorative aesthetic of the Yi nationality is fully reflected in the "three-color culture".

<sup>27</sup> "Nuosu" is the self-proclaimed name of the Yi people in Liangshan. In the traditional system of the Yi people in Liangshan, the Yi people are divided into five social classes, namely Zi, Nuo, Qunuo, Ajia and Gasi. "Nuo" means "black", so "Nuosu" means a nation that worships black.

<sup>28</sup> "Bimo" is a transliteration of the Yi language, "Bi" means "reciting scriptures" and "Mo" means "elderly with knowledge". "Bimo" refers to the priest who is engaged in religious activities.



Figure 47 Liangshan Yi lacquerware three primary colors display

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Meigu County, Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan

## Part II: Liangshan Yi Lacquerware and the Construction of Cultural Identity

### 2.1 Meaning of the concept of cultural identity

"Cultural identity" is an important cultural support in the international concept. It is not only a process of self-identification, but also the result of external identification and labeling. This external identification may come from various factors such as ethnicity, country, religion, etc. "Cultural identity" is not static, but constantly adjusted with the changes of time and environment. People tend to reshape their "cultural identity" in a new cultural environment and form a unique cultural mixture. At the same time, the international concept of "cultural identity" emphasizes the diversity, fluidity and changeability of identity.

Charles Lindholm, a famous Western anthropologist, mentioned the international concept of "cultural identity" in his book "Culture and Identity: History, Theory and Practice of Psychological Anthropology" and made an in-depth discussion on "cultural identity". He believes that "cultural identity" is a fluid and multidimensional concept, which has different manifestations and evolutions in different social and cultural backgrounds, and explains the concept of "cultural identity". Charles Lindholm believes that "cultural identity" is not just a fixed label or classification, but a dynamic process that covers various attributes and characteristics formed by individuals in a specific cultural background. The formation of this identity is influenced by the intersection of culture, history and social structure, and is constantly adjusted and evolved with changes in time and environment.

Charles Lindholm's book *Culture and Identity: The History, Theory and Practice of Psychological Anthropology* is the clearest and most up-to-date introduction to psychological anthropology available today, and is an indispensable bridge between anthropology and psychology. In academia, questions about "cultural identity" clearly provide a way to study the relationship between culture and the individual, a theory that is dialectical and seeks to link psychological, social and cultural levels to one another. Charles Lindholm makes extensive use of anthropological case studies and comparative philosophy in his research, identifies the Western philosophical and historical foundations of the concept, discusses the foundations and progress of psychological anthropology, and explores how the concept of authenticity develops, changes and what forms it takes from different cultures. He points out that the pursuit of authenticity is often the result of a loss of

faith and meaning in modern life. This desire for authenticity is not only reflected in "material culture", but also a psychological sense of belonging and identification. This complements his understanding of "cultural identity" and emphasizes the importance and complexity of "cultural identity" in modern society.

Globalization has shortened the distance between different cultures, but it has also intensified competition and conflict between cultures, which has had a profound impact on the shaping of "cultural identity". The impact of globalization on "cultural identity" is complex. On the one hand, globalization has promoted the exchange and integration of cultures, enabling different cultures to learn from and penetrate each other, which helps to enrich and expand the boundaries of various cultures; on the other hand, globalization has also brought about the problem of "cultural imperialism", in which strong cultures, especially Western cultures, often erode and assimilate weak cultures through various channels, resulting in the risk of some unique cultural characteristics being eliminated. In the context of globalization, cultural identity is constantly challenged and reshaped, which is reflected not only at the individual level, but also at the group and national level. Understanding and respecting cultural differences and promoting cultural exchanges and tolerance are important ways to cope with the challenges brought about by globalization.

Ren Yuhai, a famous Chinese scholar, has made an in-depth analysis of the formation process, mechanism and diverse types of identity in his monograph *Globalization, Identity and Transcultural Competence*, and explored its complex relationship with national identity. The content covers key issues such as the core concepts of identity and identification theory, identity issues in cross-cultural communication, and the impact of globalization on cultural identity. In the study, it elaborates on how individuals build cross-cultural identity in the context of globalization, explores the intrinsic connection between culture and language, and proposes effective ways to improve cross-cultural competence. The theoretical framework of identity and identification is comprehensively explored, involving multiple dimensions such as self-identity, social identity, ethnic identity and cultural identity, and analyzes how individuals continuously construct and reconstruct their own identities through interaction with society in different social contexts. The monograph *Globalization, Identity and Transcultural Competence* emphasizes the diversity and flexibility of identity, pointing out that identity is not fixed, on the contrary, it presents a dynamic development with the changes in history, time and space. Especially in a cross-cultural environment, an individual's "cultural identity" will change significantly. These views are not only of great academic value, but also have far-reaching practical significance for understanding the new connotation of cultural identity in the era of globalization.

These books explore the concept of "cultural identity" from different perspectives. Their discussion covers a wide range of fields, including the impact of globalization, the complexity of social interaction, and the study of memory levels. Not only can we deepen our understanding of the complexity of cultural identity, but we can also gain rich knowledge and profound insights from it. Understanding and respecting cultural differences have become particularly important. They are not only the cornerstone of multicultural coexistence, but also the key factors in promoting cultural exchanges and inclusiveness, and are crucial to meeting the challenges brought about by globalization. Through the analysis and exploration of "cultural

identity", we can better understand and cherish the uniqueness and commonality of different cultures, as well as their roles and influences in the great integration of globalization.

## **2.2 The formation and continuation of the lacquerware cultural identity of the Liangshan Yi people**

The formation of the cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is a complex process rooted in the history, culture and life practices of the Yi people. This process not only involves the inheritance and development of traditional crafts and technologies, but also covers the evolution and sublimation of national beliefs, aesthetic concepts and social values. In the long history of Liangshan Yi people, lacquerware, as an important cultural symbol, carries the Yi people's longing for beauty and love of life. Every update and iteration of skills embodies the wisdom and sweat of the Liangshan Yi people. Every color and decorative shape on the lacquerware represents the unique charm of Yi culture. Every piece of lacquerware contains the wisdom and ingenuity of the Yi people. Whether it is its unique artistic modeling, exquisite craftsmanship or profound decorative patterns, it reflects the profound heritage and unique charm of Yi culture. The cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been confirmed and stabilized in the long historical development, cultural inheritance and social practice. A lifestyle can form the personality of a nation, and the personality of a nation will be reflected in the culture and art of this nation.

### **2.2.1 Influence of religious culture**

The Liangshan Yi people are a nation with a profound original religious and cultural tradition. In the social culture of the Liangshan Yi people, primitive religious consciousness is everywhere, deeply affecting their daily life and way of thinking. This original religious culture is not only reflected in their beliefs, rituals and sacrificial activities, but also permeates their music, literature, art, dance, life and other aspects. The original religious culture of the Liangshan Yi people has influenced and given rise to the concept consciousness of the Yi ancestors of "animism", "primitive worship" and "totem worship". These beliefs constitute the foundation of the Yi religious culture and have a profound impact on their lives.

As a category of Liangshan Yi religious culture, primitive worship has a profound impact on the aesthetic consciousness and social system of the Yi ancestors, as well as the ideas of the Yi ancestors. The Bimo culture of Liangshan Yi is centered on primitive worship and has a distinct ethnic color. For a long time, due to the natural geographical location and self-contained social system, the unique Bimo culture of this ethnic group has been continued. Bimo is different from the witchcraft role that we associate with conventional thinking. In Liangshan Yi, Bimo is composed of highly educated people in the ethnic group and has a supreme status. They have played a huge role in the politics, economy, art, culture and religion of Liangshan Yi. It is precisely because of the special existence of Bimo culture that Liangshan Yi has formed the concept of "all things have spirits", "primitive worship" and "totem worship". The influence of Bimo culture on the formation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware cultural identity is first reflected in "totem worship" and "primitive worship". "All things have spirits" is the spiritual foundation of Liangshan Yi religious culture. In the philosophy of the Bimos, everything in the world follows the law of the universe of "harmony between man and nature". All things in nature are

full of gods. Birds and beasts, the sun, the moon and the stars all have life. In the process of believing in gods, they strengthen the worship of primitive ancestors. In the traditional culture of the Liangshan Yi people, this belief in "animism", "primitive worship" and "totem worship" is not only deeply maintained, but also cleverly integrated into the concept of creation. In the core of the Bimo culture, through solemn religious rituals, lacquerware is endowed with highly sacred attributes. These lacquered instruments are regarded as sacred objects that can establish connections with gods in religious rituals, acting as a bridge between people and gods, allowing participants to establish direct connections with gods. This sacred duty is not something that ordinary people can bear, but requires the special identity of Bimos with lofty status to have the right to use these lacquered instruments. Bimos not only play a key intermediary role in the belief system, but their identity and power are also reflected and strengthened by the exclusive right to use these sacred objects. The use of lacquerware in Liangshan Yi religious ceremonies further strengthens the connection between their cultural identity and religion. Many patterns on lacquerware are derived from the gods and totems of religious beliefs. This primitive worship idea is not only reflected in the production process of lacquerware, but also directly displayed in its use function, showing the awe of nature and respect for life. This expression of religious imagery makes lacquerware an important part of the Yi belief system.

The author followed the team of the "Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Innovation and Creation Talent Training Project" of the Sichuan University International Art Fund to visit the "Boshiwahei Rock Paintings", a Yi religious relic from the Nanzhao period in the Tang and Song Dynasties, in Tuanjie Village in the southwest of Zhaojue County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Boshiwahei is the transliteration of the Yi language, meaning dragons and snakes on rocks. It is regarded as a sacred place by the local Yi people. Many superstitious legends have been interpreted here, and it has also become a witness to the unique cultural identity of the Yi people. The mottled stone carvings and rock paintings are in various shapes and forms, with rich mysterious portraits, recording ancient symbolic languages. In the content of the rock paintings, there are many totems related to birds and beasts such as dragons, fish, and eagles, which further enrich the content and form of the rock paintings. The rough lines hide delicate emotions, witnessing the survival history of the Yi people. The rock paintings clearly show the Yi people's worship of gods and totems, with a strong religious color. This further confirms the religious and cultural ideas of the Yi ancestors on "totem worship" and "primitive worship".

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Figure 48 The Boshiwa Black Rock Paintings of the Yi Nationality in Liangshan  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Tuanjie Village in the southwest of Zhaojue County, Liangshan, Sichuan (May 2024)

### 2.2.2 Influence of social structure

The development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a history of more than a thousand years, and this long history provides a profound time background for the formation of their cultural identity. In the minds of the Yi people, lacquerware is not only a daily necessity, but also has the function of showing social class and identity. In the past Yi society, only the nobility could use certain specific lacquerware, and this social function reflects the social hierarchy of their cultural identity.

In the course of human social development, many societies have experienced the transformation from primitive society to slave society. However, the development trajectory of Liangshan region is particularly unique. While the social systems in other regions continue to evolve and move towards a more complex and diverse direction, the social structure in Liangshan region seems to have fallen into a relatively static state. Secondly, due to the isolation of the geographical environment and the limitations of historical conditions, Liangshan region has not been fully brought under the direct jurisdiction of the central government for a long time. This special political status has enabled Liangshan region to maintain a semi-independent state to a large extent, with a certain degree of autonomy and a unique social and cultural development path. This unique social structure and historical background have preserved a rich traditional culture and social organization form for Liangshan region.

In the past, the Liangshan Yi people were shrouded in the atmosphere of a deep slave society. The relationship between slave owners and slaves and other laborers was expressed through a strictly guarded hierarchical relationship. The entire social structure was divided into five levels: "Nuohe", "Quhuo", "Ajia", "Xiayi" and "Zimo". "Zimo" means "rights" in Yi language. In the social structure of the Liangshan Yi people, it is the role of the ruler and has a supreme status. In the Yi society, "Nuohe" has a special social and cultural meaning. In Chinese, it means "black group", which represents a specific social class. They are the main occupiers of Liangshan land and also serve as the leaders of the two social classes of "Ajia" and "Xiayi". According to this view, the Yi people are divided into "Tusi", "Black Yi" and "White Yi". Members of the ruling class all have a contemptuous attitude towards labor, and their lifestyle is mainly based on exploitation. In the social structure of the Yi people, "Zimo" and "Nuohe" are both representatives of slave-owning aristocrats, and their identity and status are inherited through blood, that is, hereditary system.

Regardless of whether the economic status of these noble members changes or declines, their social status and identity will not be shaken, and they will still maintain their original hierarchical status. This social stratification and identity maintenance mechanism reflects the deep-seated social structure and cultural traditions of Liangshan Yi society. In this slave society system with obvious class concepts and hierarchies, the use of Liangshan Yi lacquerware also has different levels.

In Yi culture, specific lacquerware is not only a daily necessity, but also carries profound cultural connotations and special identity marks. The lacquerware of the rich and powerful is particularly eye-catching. It is not only exquisitely crafted and uniquely patterned, but also a symbol of social status and cultural identity. According to traditional regulations, this type of lacquerware of the rich and powerful is only used by the black Yi nobles. This restriction not only highlights the noble status of the user, but also further strengthens the lacquerware as a symbol of cultural identity and status rights. In the context of ethnic disputes and family conflicts, the struggle between the local forces of the Liangshan Yi people can be seen everywhere. The lacquered armor, shields, wrist guards, and helmets of the Liangshan Yi people are given important significance beyond their practical functions. These defensive equipment can only be worn by local leaders, tribal nobles, and warriors with special and noble status. It is not only a material culture, but also a cultural identity symbol of bravery, might, deterrence, and power. In every battle, these equipment not only protects the warriors' bodies, but also gives the enemy a strong deterrent psychologically, thereby enhancing the identity of the warriors and their ethnic groups.

In Liangshan Yi culture, the use and possession of lacquerware, which symbolizes cultural identity, is usually subject to strict social norms and standards. These lacquerware are not just utensils for daily life, but they carry specific social status and cultural values. The definition criteria for this type of lacquerware mainly include three aspects: the first type is lacquerware with unique shapes, such as eagle claw cups, goose claw cups, ox horn cups and other relatively precious lacquerware. They are not only particularly exquisite in craftsmanship, but also become symbols of authority and status due to their rarity. The eagle claw cup is especially regarded as a symbol of noble and honorable status. Only the powerful and those with lofty status can use it. Ordinary people are not allowed to use these lacquerware at will. If this rule is violated, it will not only be regarded as an infringement of privilege, but may also be punished by society. This limitation not only reflects the user's power and status, but also a manifestation of cultural identity.

The second important defining criterion is the uniqueness of the patterns. Different from the popular aesthetic concept of "beauty in simplicity" among the Han people, the unique aesthetic system of the Liangshan Yi people gives special aesthetic value to complex patterns. In the eyes of the Yi people, the complexity of the patterns is not only a display of beauty, but also a symbol of the user's noble status and power. The more complex the pattern, the more it can reflect the honor of the user's identity. Therefore, when making important lacquerware, Yi lacquer workers pay special attention to the design of the patterns, and the complexity of the patterns also represents the value of the lacquerware itself. The pursuit of the complexity of the patterns through the richness of the visual to show the social status and cultural identity of the user makes each lacquerware a medium for conveying cultural

information, and its artistic value is closely related to cultural identity. Relatively speaking, in Yi society, the lacquerware used by ordinary people is usually simpler in decoration. This is not because of a lack of craftsmanship, but due to the constraints of social and cultural norms. Simple decorations are in line with their social status, while nobles and powerful people will choose more exquisite and more complex lacquerware to highlight their extraordinary status and power.

In the lacquerware culture of the Liangshan Yi people, the uniqueness of color is a crucial defining criterion. Color is not just a visual decoration, it carries the deep symbolic meaning of cultural identity and power. Only those individuals with noble status and prominent social status are allowed to use lacquerware with bright colors and exquisite patterns. This symbol of privilege is not only reflected in the design and production of lacquerware, but also in its use rights. On the contrary, slaves at the bottom of society are not allowed to own or use these colorful and exquisite lacquerware under strict social norms. The utensils they use can only be simple monochrome lacquerware, which indirectly strengthens their low social status. At the same time, ordinary civilians also follow the corresponding norms and usually can only use lacquerware painted with black lacquer. The design of this monochrome lacquerware is in line with their social status, and it also reflects the strict restrictions on the use of colors and social stratification in Yi culture.

In many important social ceremonies and social activities of the Liangshan Yi people, the powerful and those with high status and identity use these specific lacquerware and specific crafts to show their indisputable noble status, and also take this opportunity to strengthen their influence and control over society, revealing the complexity of the internal structure of the Liangshan Yi society and the strictness of the hierarchy. Through the use and classification of specific lacquerware, the Yi people expressed their respect and recognition of their cultural identity, and also reflected the maintenance and inheritance of cultural traditions. The existence of lacquerware is not only a reflection of the cultural tradition of the Black Yi aristocracy, but also an important part of the social structure and hierarchy of the Liangshan Yi people. Through the uniqueness of this material culture, the hierarchy and identity symbol of the Yi society are clearly displayed. Lacquerware is not only practical in the daily life of the Liangshan Yi people, but also an important symbol of cultural identity and social status. The cultural symbolic meaning of these lacquerware is not static, but is constantly reshaped and strengthened with the changes in society and the evolution of culture. These lacquerware with unique social and cultural value have become an important link between the past and the present, and between tradition and modernity.

### **2.2.3 Influence of aesthetic culture**

"From the perspective of regional cultural genesis, in the long history of life, people and nature are closely connected, so different regions naturally form different regional cultures; and each regional culture is bound to form a harmonious group cultural aesthetic psychology adapted to the geographical environment, thus leaving its own unique code in the artistic tradition and entering the collective unconscious layer of the race's organism."<sup>29</sup> (Yang Cunchang, 2011)

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<sup>29</sup> Yang Cunchang. On the value of research on regional aesthetic culture of China's ethnic minorities. Qilu Culture Research Center, Shandong Normal University. 2011.6

During the long process of development, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been passed down from generation to generation. Due to the unique national characteristics and specific geographical environment, the integration and mutual influence between the Yi art culture and the art forms of other nationalities are relatively rare. At the same time, the aesthetic culture of the Liangshan Yi people has gradually formed and given birth to the unique cultural identity of the Yi lacquerware in this process. This unique development background has enabled the Liangshan Yi lacquerware to retain its original and simple style to the greatest extent. The traditional skills of Liangshan Yi lacquerware reflect the long history and cultural heritage of the Yi people. The production techniques of these lacquerware have been passed down from ancient times to the present, containing the wisdom and aesthetics of the Yi ancestors. Each piece of lacquerware is the respect and inheritance of traditional craftsmanship by craftsmen, and has become a carrier of Yi culture. The unique "three-color culture" is an effective carrier of cultural inheritance, a symbol of the traditional cultural identity of the Yi people, and has a unique artistic aesthetic style of this nation. The development and inheritance of Yi lacquerware is not only the preservation of traditional skills, but also the continuation of the unique aesthetic concepts and cultural identity of the Yi people. The traditional lacquer art language of the Yi nationality integrates the ideological connotations of the agricultural civilization and nomadic culture of the Yi ancestors. At the same time, it also reveals the aesthetic value orientation of the Yi people towards emotional colors and the objective world, fully embodying the national aesthetic thoughts and the aesthetic psychology of the traditional lacquer art language of the Yi nationality.

National elements themselves have a heavy sense of history. They integrate the spiritual culture and material culture of the nation, and serve as a carrier to vent the emotions of the nation and express the relationship between man and nature. The traditional lacquer art language of the Yi nationality has formed its own characteristics and cultural identity in the long history and culture, and has the function of inheriting traditions and storing culture. The formation of this cultural identity not only enhances the national pride of the Yi people, but also provides a solid foundation for protecting and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of the Yi nationality. The aesthetic culture of the Yi nationality originates from the rich soil of folk life, and also gives back to the folk, which is closely connected with their daily life. The aesthetic concept of the Yi nationality is not only reflected in the pursuit of external beauty, but also deeply penetrates into all aspects of daily life. From the texture of clothing, the structure of architecture, to the shape design of utensils, all of them highlight the unique aesthetic value of the Yi nationality. These aesthetic elements not only beautify the living environment of the Yi people, but also become an important part of their social lifestyle, reflecting a profound symbol of cultural identity. In Yi society, the design and production of every item is not only for practicality, but also a way of expressing cultural heritage. The practice of this aesthetic concept enables the Yi cultural tradition to be continuously experienced and promoted in daily life.

### 2.3 The status and role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in Yi culture

The word "culture" comes from the Western word "Culture". It is regarded as a complex free organization coding system in academia, which covers specific cognition of things, value system and deep-seated ideas. These elements are closely intertwined and together form the behavior pattern and way of thinking of a specific nation or group. "Culture" also includes the "material culture" and "cultural identity" adopted and created by human beings in production practice or social practice life. These two are important components of culture and reflect the rich experience and wisdom accumulated by human beings in the interaction between nature and society. The value orientation of a nation is carried by its traditional culture, and this culture also has a profound impact on the lifestyle of the nation.

In the long process of social development, Yi traditional lacquerware has been passed down from generation to generation. Due to the characteristics of the nation and the geographical environment, the artistic culture of the Yi people has little integration and influence with the artistic forms of other ethnic groups, so it has maintained its original and simple appearance to the greatest extent. In the inheritance of Yi culture, Liangshan Yi lacquerware plays a vital role. As an important representative of traditional crafts, these lacquerwares are not only ordinary items in daily life, but also important carriers and identity symbols of carrying and expressing Yi culture, and play a significant role in the inheritance of culture. In the past, Liangshan Yi lacquerware existed in all aspects of daily life. Whether in traditional festivals, weddings, funeral ceremonies, or religious social activities, they were an indispensable part. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not limited to its own craftsmanship or use value. It is also a cultural symbol that covers rich and deep cultural connotations. These lacquerwares vividly show the social structure, cultural identity, functional significance, and ethnic identity of the Liangshan Yi people. They are not only the embodiment of national material culture, but also the embodiment of spiritual beliefs and cultural identity. As a symbol of ethnic identity, it enhances the national belonging and cultural confidence of the Yi people. Therefore, the value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in cultural heritage has long exceeded the simple materials and forms, and has risen to the level of inheritance and integrated development of national culture.

In the past, among the Yi people in Liangshan, there was a proverb that "the craftsmen don't need to stand up when Bimo comes". This proverb succinctly reveals the lofty status of Yi lacquer workers in the local society, and indirectly reflects the important social status occupied by Yi lacquerware. Bimo is regarded as a symbol of authority and wisdom in the Yi area of Liangshan. However, according to this proverb, even when Bimo comes, Yi lacquer workers do not need to interrupt their work to show respect. This custom also indirectly shows that Yi lacquer workers enjoy similar or close respect to Bimo in the local social structure. This respect comes from the important contribution of craftsmen to Yi culture, especially the lacquerware they make, which is not only regarded as daily necessities, but also a reflection of Yi cultural identity and aesthetic taste.

Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been a vital part of Yi culture since ancient times. From the perspective of the situation within the ethnic group, the emergence of lacquerware is mainly to meet the basic living needs of the ethnic minority people, so

tableware, wine utensils and other daily necessities are made. However, during the slave society of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group, the Black Yi and Tusi, as the ruling class, mainly relied on their status and identity to exploit slaves and lower-level laborers to obtain labor materials. With the help of the family branch system, they provoked struggles between ethnic groups, seized land on a large scale, and suppressed slaves. In this process, many weapons were given special status and important significance due to the intervention of the power layer.

In Liangshan Yi society, the distribution of power and status not only affects the social structure, but also subtly shapes the concept and consciousness of the local Yi residents. This ethnic minority believes that the use of lacquerware should follow certain class and level divisions. Slaves and ordinary classes living at the bottom of society can only use black plain lacquerware or lacquerware with simple patterns. The lacquerware used by powerful nobles is usually those works that are exquisitely painted, with complex patterns and bright colors. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only a vessel for daily life, but also a symbol of cultural identity. It is a material and cultural expression exclusive to the nobility and the power class. These exquisite lacquerware are not used casually in daily life, but are only displayed on specific occasions and times. For example, these lacquerware will be used in religious ceremonies, ancestor worship or wedding and funeral ceremonies, and in the process of receiving important guests. Their appearance not only highlights the noble status of the owner, but also reflects the lofty status of lacquerware in Yi culture. In this way, the cultural traditions of Yi society can be promoted and passed on in these important social activities. At the same time, such strict regulations on the use of lacquerware further strengthened the cohesion within society and reinforced the boundaries between different levels.

In the 1980s, the Liangshan Yi area entered a new historical stage. It experienced major political reforms, abolished the long-standing strict hierarchy system, and injected new vitality into the development of society and the revival of culture. Against this background, the cultural elements of lacquerware also changed. In the past, lacquerware was given a distinct symbol of hierarchy in Yi society and was a concrete expression of power and status. However, with the abolition of the hierarchy system, the social attributes and values of lacquerware have undergone a process of redefinition, and its own value has also been redefined. Lacquerware is no longer a symbol of distinguishing social classes, but has been transformed into a symbol of national cultural revival and an important link between the Yi people and their rooted cultural traditions. Lacquerware in this period has a new identity. With its unique artistic style and exquisite craftsmanship, it has begun to spread to ordinary Yi families. These ordinary Yi families can also own and cherish these lacquerware full of national characteristics. This is undoubtedly an affirmation of the inheritance and development of Yi culture. The value of lacquerware has changed from a former hierarchical symbol to a carrier of cultural inheritance. This transformation not only enriches the spiritual life of ordinary people, but also provides new possibilities for the protection and dissemination of Yi culture. Therefore, these lacquerwares not only have a place in daily life, but also become an important tool for the Yi people to educate the next generation and pass on their national culture. The outside world also relies on the unique carrier of lacquerware to gain a deeper and more comprehensive insight into the rich culture of the Liangshan Yi people. They tell the historical stories

of the Yi people, convey the wisdom and aesthetic concepts of their ancestors, and inspire the Yi people to continue to inherit and carry forward their cultural heritage in modern society.

#### **2.4 Cultural communication and exchange of Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

In today's era, as people pay more and more attention to traditional culture, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has also undergone profound changes in form and social function. For the Yi people, lacquerware has gone beyond simple practical value. They are also an important symbol of ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

As the Liangshan Yi people have increasingly close exchanges with the outside world, the unique charm of Yi lacquerware has also been recognized and appreciated by more and more people. These exquisite lacquerware not only provides a window for the outside world to intuitively understand the Liangshan Yi culture, but also becomes a bridge connecting the Yi people with the world. In various external cultural exchange activities, Yi lacquerware is often exhibited as a representative cultural exhibit, which not only shows the exquisite craftsmanship of the Yi people, but also a profound reflection of the Yi cultural identity and national cultural confidence.

The works of Ji Wuwuqi, the representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage project "Yi lacquerware painting and decoration skills", have been exhibited many times at international and domestic art events such as the First China Intangible Cultural Heritage Productive Protection Achievements Exhibition, the Santa Fe International Folk Art Fair in the United States, and the East Asian Lacquerware Seminar. These works have not only been highly praised by people from all over the world, but also made Liangshan Yi lacquerware, an art form representing the profound "cultural identity" of the Liangshan Yi people, gradually go out of Daliangshan and step onto the vast world stage. Ji Wuwuqi's lacquerware works, with their exquisite craftsmanship and unique cultural charm, have become a bridge connecting different cultures and regions. Every international exhibition has opened a new door for the dissemination and development of Yi lacquerware. Through these international exchanges, the value and significance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware have been more widely recognized and respected, and at the same time, it has also provided new opportunities and challenges for the protection and inheritance of Yi culture. In the context of globalization, the gradual internationalization of Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only demonstrates the unique aesthetics of Yi culture, but also promotes the exchange and understanding of cultural diversity, and deepens the understanding and respect of the Yi people and their cultural heritage around the world. This process fully demonstrates the vitality and contemporary value of intangible cultural heritage, and opens up new possibilities and bright prospects for the future of Yi lacquerware and Yi culture.



Figure 49 Ji Wuwuqi, a national representative inheritor of Liangshan Yi lacquerware decoration skills, participated in the Santa Fe International Folk Art Fair in the United States.

Source: <https://mp.qq.com/s/p4LjCMOxeyx84a822jWfaA> (May 2024)

The Yi region of Liangshan has developed cultural tourism and made Yi lacquerware a part of tourist souvenirs and experience activities, fully tapping its cultural value and economic potential, attracting a large number of foreign tourists. This has not only brought benefits to the local economy, but also allowed tourists to personally experience the Yi culture, forming a good interactive experience and enhancing the spread of culture. As a tourist souvenir, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only a material commodity, but also a materialized expression of the essence of Yi culture. Each work contains rich historical stories and profound cultural connotations. When tourists purchase these souvenirs, they are also understanding and spreading Yi culture. In terms of experience activities, the Yi region of Liangshan provides interactive links such as making lacquerware by hand, giving tourists the opportunity to directly participate in the production process of lacquerware, from material selection, tire making to painting and painting. Every step allows tourists to deeply experience the exquisite craftsmanship of Yi lacquerware and the cultural charm that has been passed down for thousands of years. This in-depth cultural experience not only allows tourists to have a more intuitive and profound understanding of Yi lacquerware, but also enhances their respect and admiration for Yi culture.

With the continuous development of cultural tourism, the Liangshan Yi area is also constantly improving related tourism facilities and services to enhance the quality of tourism experience. Whether it is improving transportation conditions, providing multilingual services, or holding various cultural festivals, they are striving to create a tourist destination that is both modern and traditional. Such efforts have not only made the Liangshan Yi area a place that domestic and foreign tourists yearn for, but also allowed the intangible cultural heritage of Yi lacquerware to be more effectively protected and more widely disseminated.

### Conclusion:

In this chapter, we conduct a comprehensive and in-depth discussion on Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the perspectives of the two academic concepts of "material culture" and "cultural identity". First, starting from the research concept of "material culture", we deeply analyze the material cultural attributes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Through the discussion of its complex production process, unique colors and decorative symbols, as well as its rich uses and cultural symbolic meanings in the lives of the Yi people, we can know that Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not just a practical item or decoration, but an important carrier of rich historical information and profound cultural heritage. Then, taking "cultural identity" as the second research perspective, we further elaborate on the key role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the process of Yi cultural inheritance. In particular, it emphasizes how lacquerware uses its unique formal language to indicate the cultural identity, social status and symbolic symbols of the user or creator. It reflects its indispensable position in maintaining and developing national cultural identity.

Through the above research, we can know that Liangshan Yi lacquerware does not exist in isolation. It is deeply rooted in the Yi people's unique philosophical thoughts, religious beliefs, aesthetic concepts and natural views. It not only reflects the Yi people's understanding of nature and the order of the universe, but also reflects their unique insights into the meaning of life and social value. This way of conveying the message through objects has made Liangshan Yi lacquerware an important channel connecting individuals and society, and an indispensable part of it. It has built a bridge of cultural communication between nations, countries, and even the world, and helped to enhance the outside world's understanding and respect for the culture of this region.

Through the integration of concepts, we can have a deeper understanding of the production process, artistic characteristics and cultural expression of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Combined with the researcher's understanding and development, we can more accurately extract the creative elements, providing strong support and inspiration for the creation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in subsequent chapters.



## Chapter IV

### The Development and Innovative Application of Liangshan Yi Lacquerware in the Context of the Revitalization of Chinese Traditional Crafts

This chapter comprehensively describes the key policies that China has formulated for the protection and development of traditional crafts from the cultural, political and economic levels, and focuses on the practice of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in China during its modernization transformation. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part introduces how China's traditional craft revitalization strategy has profoundly influenced traditional crafts including Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the perspective of national policies. The second part explores the innovative path of Liangshan Yi lacquerware from multiple important dimensions, proposes strategies for the development of Yi lacquerware, and gives specific opinions at the same time, aiming to promote the inheritance and innovation of this traditional craft. The third part focuses on the practical case analysis of contemporary art creation, especially the author's personal artistic creation - the "Yi-Cloud" lacquerware series. By elaborating on the creation process of this series of works in detail, it shows how Liangshan Yi lacquerware has achieved modernization transformation and how artists integrate traditional crafts into modern creation.

#### **Part I: Analysis of the Background of the Revitalization of Chinese Traditional Crafts**

##### **1.1 Contemporary interpretation of the value of traditional Chinese crafts**

Chinese traditional crafts have a long history and have played a vital role in China's political, economic and cultural development. Whether in ancient or modern times, the spiritual and material values carried by traditional crafts are of great importance. Traditional crafts are not only a manifestation of technology or art, but also a kind of cultural inheritance and expression. They not only provide us with material and cultural enjoyment, but also bring us cultural and spiritual recognition and pride, and enhance our national cultural confidence.

Since the 1980s, the core values of Chinese traditional culture have been continuously highlighted and promoted in the process of promoting the country's modernization. People have gradually realized that traditional culture is not just a solidified element that exists in a historical form, but can be renewed in contemporary society through innovation and inheritance, becoming a living cultural tradition with positive significance for social development. While promoting the traditional culture of the Chinese nation, people are also committed to combining traditional cultural elements with modern society to make them glow with new vitality in contemporary society. This living cultural tradition can not only inspire people's national pride and cultural confidence, but also provide a continuous source of innovative power for social development. In this way, traditional culture can continue to be inherited and developed in modern society, injecting a profound cultural heritage and spiritual power into the country's modernization.

In the current upsurge of traditional Chinese cultural research, traditional cultural elements are integrated with the modern development process. This integration not only leads to the rapid development of culture, but also promotes the recognition and credibility of traditional culture, including traditional crafts. The importance of traditional crafts in the contemporary era is gradually highlighted, and its value and charm are also recognized and valued by more and more people. Through the promotion and inheritance of traditional crafts, people can experience and understand the traditional lifestyle more deeply, and find national self-confidence and cultural identity in excellent traditional culture. This process not only enhances national cohesion, but also promotes cultural diversity and inclusiveness.

Integrating traditional crafts into the development of modern art is not only a kind of inheritance and protection of traditional crafts, but also a creative transformation of excellent Chinese traditional culture. This integration not only retains the essence of traditional crafts, but also injects new vitality and sense of the times into them. More importantly, this integration promotes the transformation of cultural value into economic value. The revitalization and development of traditional crafts not only promotes the prosperity of related industries, but also provides new growth points for economic development. At the same time, the development of traditional crafts has also driven the vigorous development of tourism, cultural industries and other fields, and has made positive contributions to the comprehensive development of social economy.

The intrinsic value of traditional crafts is not only a powerful internal driving force for revitalizing traditional crafts and shaping Chinese traditional craft brands, but also the unique charm of traditional crafts in the long process of formation and development. This value is not only reflected in the exquisite craftsmanship, but also in the profound historical and cultural heritage and unique regional characteristics.

In the earliest work on crafts in my country, Kaogongji, it was recorded in detail: "The wise create things, the skillful describe them, and those who preserve them are called craftsmen. All the work of craftsmen is the work of sages. Melting gold to make blades, solidifying earth to make tools, making carts to travel on land, and making boats to travel on water, these are all the work of sages." This passage not only reveals the historical origin of traditional crafts, but also shows the wisdom and creativity of ancient craftsmen. The text records that craftsmanship is composed of "craftsmanship" and "art", and craftsmanship comes first.<sup>30</sup> (Ni Jianlin, Zhang Shu, 2012) The combination of "craft" and "art" constitutes the core of traditional crafts. Among them, "craft" comes from the ancient "hundred craftsmen" and represents the hard work and superb skills of craftsmen; while "art" comes from planting and agriculture, symbolizing people's pursuit of harmonious coexistence with nature, as well as the aesthetic taste and artistic talent gradually accumulated in production labor. With the changes of the times, the connotation of "art" has gradually extended and developed into the meaning of talent and skill, becoming an indispensable part of traditional crafts. The formation and development of traditional crafts is a process full of wisdom and innovation. Every traditional craft work embodies the hard work and wisdom of the craftsmen, showing their unique pursuit of beauty and superb mastery of skills. These works are not only the carriers of material

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<sup>30</sup> Ni Jianlin, Zhang Shu, *Selected Chinese Craft Literature*, Jinan, Shandong Education Press, 2012, p. 6

culture, but also the inheritance of spiritual culture. Revitalizing traditional crafts and building Chinese traditional craft brands is not only an affirmation and inheritance of the intrinsic value of traditional crafts, but also the promotion and development of China's excellent traditional culture. We should deeply explore the cultural connotations contained in traditional crafts, combine them with modern design concepts and technologies, promote the innovative development of traditional crafts, and let traditional crafts shine with new brilliance in modern society.

Traditional crafts, as representatives of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, carry thousands of years of skills and wisdom. China's excellent traditional culture is a traditional culture that can embody the spirit of the Chinese nation and the core values of the Chinese nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of traditional culture. The cultivation of contemporary socialist core values requires traditional culture. In the development of the new era, the inheritance of traditional culture is not only about the continuation of cultural traditions, but also about the inherent cohesion and centripetal force of culture. To build a value system that fully reflects national characteristics and Chinese characteristics, it is necessary to give full play to the role of traditional culture. There is a close relationship between China's traditional crafts and traditional culture. The current traditional crafts contain manual creativity and unique artistic aesthetic characteristics. In modern society, these traditional crafts not only retain the creativity and unique artistic aesthetics of handmade products, but also continue to inherit and develop. Traditional crafts developed from primitive creation skills, originated from the actual needs of people's daily life and social interaction, and gradually nurtured the artistic nature of both practicality and beauty. With the passage of time, these crafts have been continuously integrated into people's life culture, forming a unique craft culture, which not only reflects the survival wisdom of the nation, but also shows a profound cultural heritage, and is an important manifestation of material culture. The profound cultural connotation contained in traditional crafts is reflected in the process of its production, the way of inheritance, and the exquisite craftsmanship. These crafts not only incorporate rich traditional cultural elements, but also continue the cultural values carried by traditional crafts, becoming an important link between the past and the present, and one of the important significances of inheriting traditional crafts.

Based on aesthetic and practical functions, traditional crafts convey the knowledge accumulated by craftsmen of different generations about natural objects over time, and reflect the working people's understanding of the relationship between man and nature in history.

## **1.2 National policy support and measures**

With the continuous advancement of modernization and industrialization, the influence of Chinese traditional crafts and their brands in the market has gradually become fragile. Most traditional folk crafts have gradually lost their original vitality and cultural connotations in modern society and are facing huge challenges. How to revitalize traditional crafts and give them new vitality in modern society has become a key issue on the development path of modern China. This is not only related to the inheritance and protection of traditional culture, but also an important direction for the development of cultural industries. Therefore, we need to take effective measures to strengthen the protection and inheritance of traditional crafts, and at the same time

actively explore the combination of traditional crafts and modern design, and promote the innovative development of traditional crafts to adapt to the needs and aesthetics of modern society.

#### 1.2.1 Public attention to traditional crafts

Boas once said, "The development of all cultural phenomena is the result of historical development, and the formation of culture is not static." Boas believes that cultural phenomena are colorful and their development process is full of changes at any time. This change is inevitable, because with the passage of time, human society continues to evolve, and new ideas and concepts continue to emerge. Therefore, culture is also constantly adapting and adjusting itself to adapt to new environments and needs. Traditional culture is not only a phased product formed in the historical development of a nation or country, but also a cultural resource with vitality.

In recent years, with people's growing interest in traditional culture, the topic of traditional crafts closely linked to traditional culture has once again attracted widespread attention. The public's enthusiasm for traditional crafts continues to heat up, and the rich national cultural diversity value behind them has also regained recognition and attention from all walks of life. Although some traditional skills that once represented the advanced level of ancient Chinese society have been replaced by modern technology in the process of modernization, many traditional crafts have been preserved and continue to play an important role in people's daily life and production activities. These precious cultural heritages not only witness the development and changes of history, but also serve as a bridge between the past and the future, carrying profound cultural significance and social value. In the past two decades, my country has actively responded to the call of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and vigorously promoted the protection of intangible cultural heritage. Through this series of efforts, traditional crafts have gradually moved from behind the scenes to the front stage, becoming one of the focuses of public opinion and gaining attention from all walks of life. The public has begun to pay more attention to these traditional skills that carry rich history and culture, and give them due respect and support. This change not only gives us the opportunity to rediscover and understand those traditional crafts that are on the verge of being lost, but also prompts us to think deeply about how to better inherit and develop these precious cultural heritages so that they can be revitalized in modern society.

Although traditional crafts are facing many challenges, they still have strong vitality and broad development space. In the future development, we need to pay more attention to the protection and inheritance of these precious cultural heritages, and at the same time actively explore how to better integrate them into modern social life and contribute to the diversity and sustainable development of human culture.

#### 1.2.2 Changes in demand in the art market

China has extremely rich traditional craft resources, and its types account for a huge number. Among the national intangible cultural heritage projects that have been announced, the "traditional skills" item includes 629 sub-items. These national traditional skills intangible cultural heritage projects are only a part of China's rich traditional craft resources. In addition, there are a large number of provincial and municipal traditional skills intangible cultural heritage projects, as well as those folk traditional crafts that have not yet been included in the protection list. These

traditional crafts, whether they have been protected or have not yet been discovered, are an important part of China's traditional culture.

The return of traditional crafts to handicrafts means that they have not been completely replaced by modern technology. In the face of the current social changes, the field of traditional crafts shows a distinct cultural hysteresis phenomenon, which enables some traditional crafts to coexist with modern technology. The slow development of traditional crafts is an established fact, but the vitality of traditional crafts is still vigorous, and it has blossomed in different traditional handicrafts. From the perspective of cultural sociology, as a cultural heritage, the value of traditional crafts lies not only in the skills themselves, but also in the historical memory and cultural identity it carries. Therefore, even in the process of modernization, many traditional crafts still maintain tenacious vitality and become a bridge connecting the past and the future. This cultural hysteresis phenomenon reflects the adaptation and transformation process of traditional culture in modern society. With the improvement of people's living standards and changes in consumption concepts, more and more people are beginning to pursue personalized and customized products, which also provides new development opportunities for traditional crafts. For example, some craftsmen combine traditional crafts with modern aesthetics through innovative design and marketing strategies to create new products that have both traditional charm and meet the needs of modern people, thus gaining market recognition and support.

### **1.3 The impact of China's traditional craft revitalization strategy on Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

Since the end of the 20th century, the Chinese government has gradually increased its attention to the protection and inheritance of 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 aims to provide special protection and support for those "handicraft varieties and skills that enjoy a high reputation at home and abroad".<sup>31</sup> (Shao Qin, Hua Miaomiao&Li Xingli, 2023.06)

It marks the recognition of the importance of arts and crafts at the national level and the concrete actions to protect them. "The implementation of the "Regulations on the Protection of Traditional Arts and Crafts" marks an important milestone in the development of traditional crafts in my country in recent years. The introduction of this policy means that the traditional craft industry will be clearly protected at the national legal level, thus providing a more scientific and standardized environment for the sustainable development of traditional arts and crafts. The regulations standardize the scope of protection objects and classify the so-called traditional arts and crafts as those with a long history, handed down from generation to generation, exquisite skills, complete process flow, made of natural and original ecological materials, and with distinct national and local characteristics. The introduction of the policy has established the national development policy and direction for traditional arts and crafts. This not only helps to maintain the purity of craft traditions, but also promotes the innovation and development of arts and crafts, making it an active cultural industry, further enriching people's cultural life, and

<sup>31</sup> Shao Qin/Hua Miaomiao/Li Xingli: "Building Chinese Traditional Craft Brands: Process and Practice", Chengdu, Sichuan University Press, 2023.06

promoting the organic integration of traditional culture and modern society. On this basis, in June 2008, the "Liangshan Yi Nationality Lacquerware Painting and Decoration Technique" was approved by the State Council to be included in the "Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List".

On March 12, 2017, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Information Technology jointly launched the "China Traditional Craft Revitalization Plan". This policy is committed to improving the quality awareness, brand awareness and market awareness of traditional crafts, and at the same time emphasizes the importance of combining traditional crafts with modern life needs. The plan advocates improving the overall quality and market competitiveness of traditional craft products by improving design, optimizing materials and innovating production technology. In addition, practitioners of traditional crafts are encouraged to sign their works or products by hand, which not only demonstrates the confidence of personal craftsmanship, but also increases the personalized value of the products. At the same time, the plan also supports the development of modern handicrafts based on manual labor and rich in cultural connotations, aiming to perfectly integrate the charm of traditional crafts with modern innovation, so as to promote the unique status and sustainable development of traditional crafts in modern society, and clarify the importance of revitalizing traditional crafts in my country in the future.



Figure 50 China's Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Information Technology jointly launched the "China Traditional Craft Revitalization Plan"

Source: from [https://www.gov.cn/2017-03/27/content\\_5181257.htm](https://www.gov.cn/2017-03/27/content_5181257.htm) (May 2024)

At the same time, under the background of the influence of China's traditional craft revitalization strategy, Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as an intangible cultural heritage, has also been highly valued and effectively protected by the Liangshan Prefecture Government of Sichuan Province in recent years, and a series of effective measures have been taken. In 2008, the Standing Committee of the Liangshan Prefecture People's Congress initiated and completed the drafting and deliberation of the "Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Regulations", and officially promulgated and implemented the regulations in 2010, providing a strong cultural guarantee for the intangible cultural heritage work of Liangshan Prefecture. The Liangshan Prefecture Government has also established a

four-level intangible cultural heritage list system, which is classified into four levels: national, provincial, prefecture and county. This classification system not only helps to better manage and protect various intangible cultural heritage projects, but also creates favorable conditions for the publicity and promotion of traditional handicrafts such as Liangshan Yi lacquerware. In July 2018, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People's Republic of China and the National Poverty Alleviation Office identified Liangshan Prefecture as the first batch of key support areas for "intangible cultural heritage + poverty alleviation". The Sichuan Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, the Liangshan Prefecture Party Committee and the Prefecture Government attached great importance to it and took a series of strong measures to actively promote the implementation of the work. These measures not only promote the protection and development of intangible cultural heritage, but also provide new economic growth points and employment opportunities for local residents, effectively helping the poverty alleviation work. In the specific implementation process, the government has strengthened its support for traditional handicrafts with important cultural value in Liangshan by establishing intangible cultural heritage workshops. Liangshan Prefecture has adhered to traditional craftsmanship and its products have gradually been recognized by the market through the protection of intangible cultural heritage production.

## **Part II: The innovative path of Liangshan Yi lacquerware**

### **2.1 Design Concept Innovation**

Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as an intangible cultural heritage passed down for thousands of years, is not only an important part of material culture, but also a concentrated embodiment of the Liangshan Yi nationality's national spirit, aesthetic concepts and cultural connotations. From its inception to today, this unique art form has always carried the Yi people's yearning and pursuit for a better life, and is a product of the high resonance between the Yi people's traditional cultural connotation and spiritual needs. The macro background of the revitalization of traditional crafts is to build a system for the inheritance of the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, but the current traditional crafts still face many problems.

Although Liangshan Yi lacquerware has rich national cultural connotations, the development and dissemination of lacquerware is still a difficult topic in the face of the innovation dilemma in modern society. As time goes by, despite the great changes in the external environment, Liangshan Yi lacquerware still maintains its vigorous vitality, which is inseparable from the unremitting exploration and development of its production skills by generations. More importantly, in the context of modern society, people begin to pay more attention to the value of traditional culture and regard it as a bridge connecting the past and the future.

In traditional society, many crafts were originally developed to meet the basic needs of daily life, and they emphasized practicality rather than aesthetic value. These skills are often not regarded as part of cultural heritage, and therefore have not received widespread attention or protection from the government and society. With the changes of the times and the progress of society, some traditional utensils that were once used as production tools or daily utensils have gradually lost their original practical status, are used less and less frequently, become less important, and even become out of touch with the needs of modern society and gradually marginalized. Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as a typical traditional Chinese artifact, naturally cannot

avoid such a result. Armor, saddles, Bimo instruments and various weapons represented by Liangshan Yi lacquerware are rarely seen in contemporary life; even some large lacquerware works that can be seen occasionally can only be displayed in museums. When innovating and developing traditional crafts represented by Liangshan Yi lacquerware, we need to introduce new design concepts to balance the diversity and unity of modern civilization and traditional culture. This balance requires not only that we retain the core elements and uniqueness of traditional crafts, but also that we combine these elements with modern design trends to create products that have both cultural connotations and contemporary aesthetics.

As a treasure of traditional Chinese crafts, Liangshan Yi lacquerware contains a profound history and culture. This lacquerware not only carries the adaptation and transformation of Liangshan Yi ancestors to nature in their nomadic life, but also becomes an important part of Yi culture with its exquisite patterns and practical value.

Due to long-term living habits and education methods, the local residents of Liangshan Yi have formed a subconscious and fixed mindset about traditional lacquerware. They are well aware of the practical value of lacquerware and widely use it in daily life. Tableware is used to hold soup and food, wine utensils are used to store fine wine, armor can resist external attacks, and ritual instruments are indispensable sacrificial props in religious ceremonies. These lacquerware not only meet the basic living needs of the Yi people, but also give them deep comfort and sustenance on the spiritual level. Therefore, the reason why Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be used, produced and continued to this day is precisely because of the profound historical and cultural connotations and irreplaceable practical value it carries. The formation of the shape, color and decoration of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is by no means accidental, but originated from the lifestyle, religious beliefs and unique historical development process of the Yi ancestors.

With the development of social history, items such as armor, elbow guards, ritual implements and saddles in traditional Yi lacquerware have gradually faded out of the needs of modern life. Most of the traditional Yi lacquerware currently circulating on the market retains its original form, and no significant innovation or improvement has been made in terms of material selection, production process or appearance design. Although these works carry strong local cultural characteristics and ethnic customs, they are difficult to meet the growing and diversified needs of the contemporary public. Many new industrial products have gradually replaced the status of Yi lacquerware in people's hearts, resulting in the production skills of traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware facing a gap. Therefore, how to combine traditional cultural elements with modern design concepts so that it can retain the original cultural essence and meet the aesthetic and practical requirements of modern people has become one of the problems that need to be solved urgently.

It is not just Liangshan Yi lacquerware, most traditional crafts in Chinese traditional culture are facing the same dilemma. These traditional skills have gradually lost their original application scenarios in modern society and urgently need to find new ways to integrate with modern life.

For Liangshan Yi lacquerware, its revitalization not only involves the historical and practical issues of how to integrate and connect traditional and modern elements, but more importantly, how to innovate in design concepts. The renewal of design concepts is undoubtedly the best adhesive to connect tradition and modernity.

It can help traditional crafts to better adapt to modern aesthetic and practical needs while retaining the cultural essence, thus giving new vitality and vigor. Design itself is a dynamic development process full of vitality and constant pursuit of innovation. For traditional crafts, this innovation does not mean the break or abandonment of existing culture, but a process of extension and traditional reinvention based on profound cultural heritage. It represents a spirit of actively exploring and integrating modern elements while respecting and inheriting historical heritage, so that ancient skills can give off unique charm and vitality in the new era. The design concept of an outstanding work should not only be practical and ornamental close to real life, but also have a form-guiding effect. This design intervenes in the visual psychology of the viewer through visual images and usage functions, thereby achieving the purpose of promoting the positive development of traditional crafts.



Figure 51 Liangshan Yi lacquerware artworks in innovative forms  
Source: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/pXxeKIyqT36-JsNLn-18gg> (May 2024)

## 2.2 Modeling and pattern innovation

The ancestors of the Yi people in Liangshan created light and portable Yi lacquerware due to their long-term nomadic lifestyle. These lacquerwares have rich and diverse shapes, including round, oval and square, and each shape closely fits its practical function. In order to facilitate carrying and lifting, the designer cleverly added a handle; at the same time, considering the convenience of moving and placing, a base of the vessel was specially set. Therefore, the shape of each piece of Yi lacquerware is perfectly matched with its purpose. (Liu Huizi, 2011) The patterns of Yi lacquerware are also influenced by the worship of nature by the ancestors of the Yi people. The patterns are formed with the elements of the sun, moon, stars, birds and beasts, mountains and rivers in nature. Although the traditional Yi lacquerware patterns are very exquisite, most of them are complex two-sided continuous and single patterns, which is inconsistent with the aesthetic concept of minimalist aesthetics that people in modern society tend to have. Therefore, even if the Yi lacquerware itself is very exquisite, its audience is relatively small.

### 2.2.1 Breakthrough and development of modeling

Most of the tableware of the Liangshan Yi people inherits the classic shape of the ancient "bean", which is deeply rooted in the living habits of the Yi people. In addition to the common shapes of bowls, plates, and bowls, there are also some unique shapes of utensils used by the Yi people. These utensils are only native to the Liangshan Yi people and have distinct ethnic characteristics. Such as eagle claw cups, exquisite lacquerware wine utensils, and mysterious Bimo ritual instruments, these uniquely shaped utensils are not only practical, but also a vivid embodiment of religious and cultural concepts, symbolizing the noble identity and lofty status of slave owners and powerful nobles.

As the process of social diversification continues to accelerate, the traditional and unique vessel shapes of the Liangshan Yi people, although deeply recognized and inherited by local residents, have gradually revealed certain differences in the integration with the aesthetic trends of contemporary society. This difference is not only reflected in the design style, but also in the collision of cultural connotations and aesthetic concepts. Some traditional vessel shapes may be difficult to be widely understood and accepted in modern society due to their strong national characteristics and religious cultural colors, and may even face the situation of being unrecognized. However, this does not mean that these traditional vessels have lost their own value and charm. On the contrary, as an important carrier of national culture, they still occupy an irreplaceable position in the Yi community, and also provide rich cultural diversity and inspiration for modern society.

The shape of the traditional lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people is deeply influenced by the lifestyle, production methods and religious concepts of the ethnic group. Although this profound cultural heritage has endowed lacquerware with unique artistic charm, it has also led to a certain extent that the Yi people have formed a relatively fixed thinking mode for the shape of traditional lacquerware. For a long time, this thinking mode has made it difficult for the design of lacquerware to be improved and innovated in repeated cycles, making it difficult to match the aesthetic concepts of modern people. The key to achieving the innovation of the traditional lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people is to integrate it into the modern design

concept. In this process, we should cleverly combine modern design elements on the basis of retaining the essence of Yi traditional culture, so as to create a new shape that not only contains national characteristics but also meets modern aesthetic needs. At the same time, in the process of pursuing innovation, we must ensure that the lacquerware strikes a balance between functionality and aesthetics. In order to promote the innovation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, we can explore from both the form and function aspects. For example, the traditional round lacquerware can be transformed into a simpler and smoother line, or the square lacquerware can be designed into a more modern geometric shape, so as to achieve a breakthrough in form. At the same time, in terms of functionality, we should consider how to improve the practicality and convenience of these lacquerware. In terms of design, we need to improve the design level, aesthetic value and quality standards of traditional crafts represented by Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and strengthen aesthetic awareness and design awareness. In combination with the living needs of people in modern society, we should continuously improve the design scheme, optimize the material selection, and improve the production process, so as to make this traditional craft in line with the life aesthetics of the new era. Liangshan lacquerware in modern society should never be limited to tableware, but should pay more attention to the concept of both functionality and aesthetics, and have a deep understanding of the living habits and living needs of the current Yi people among the consumer groups. In the design of lacquerware, we can also make changes in its use function. For example, design some lacquerware works suitable for modern home environments, such as tea sets, furniture, jewelry, and art soft decorations, so that while seeking new artistic breakthroughs, we can also maintain its unique national style and make Liangshan Yi lacquerware better integrated into modern life.

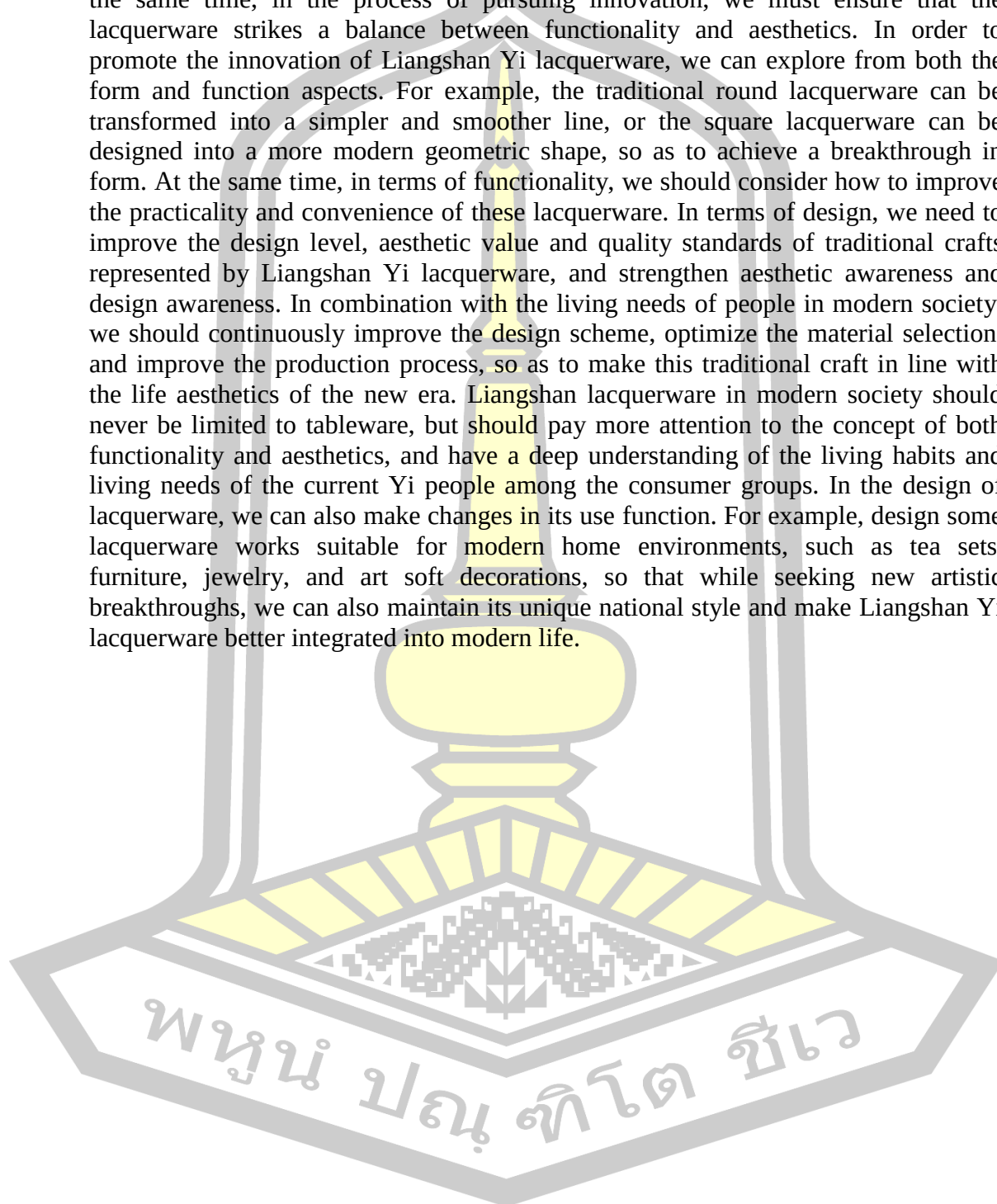




Figure 52 Innovative Liangshan Yi lacquerware works with different functions  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Xichang University (September 2024)

### 2.2.2 Innovative design of patterns

The patterns of Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware are mostly inspired by ancient totem worship and nature worship. The Yi ancestors had a deep reverence for all things in nature. Therefore, lacquerware often features patterns of the sun, moon, directions, mountains, water waves, etc. with nature as the main elements, as well as patterns of animals such as sheep horns, ox horns, chickens, cockscombs, fish, snakes, etc. These exquisite patterns not only show the production and lifestyle of the Yi ancestors, but also deeply reflect their concepts and beliefs.

From the perspective of the shape and expression of the patterns, the traditional lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people is mainly divided into two types: figurative patterns and more abstract patterns. The latter was bred on the basis of the former, but the common feature of both is that they are based on nature. Through observation, copying, refining and processing, the ancestors of the Yi people presented all things in nature on lacquerware in an artistic way, creating unique Yi

lacquerware patterns. They skillfully used the density relationship of lines and the contrast of opening and closing of layouts to reproduce the characteristics of all things in nature on lacquerware. However, the patterns of Liangshan Yi lacquerware are complicated and the craftsmanship is complex, so its audience still accounts for a small proportion. With the continuous development of social progress, people's aesthetic concepts have gradually changed. At present, minimalist aesthetics is more popular than traditional complex decorative styles. If this kind of decoration is used in large quantities in home soft decorations, daily necessities, and artworks, it is not only complicated and time-consuming, but also difficult to obtain a refreshing and simple visual effect. In addition, many local small workshops use chemical paint polyurethane to replace traditional earth lacquer raw materials, and many patterns have not been innovated. They are simply copied and the carriers are replaced, replicating the production format of traditional Yi lacquerware, and the craftsmanship is even cruder. These practices have greatly damaged the original cultural value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and caused aesthetic fatigue among the audience, thus limiting the diversified development of Yi lacquerware.

Although the value of traditional Yi lacquerware patterns still has great potential for exploration, its application in modern design requires innovation and change to give it contemporary aesthetic value so that it can be accepted by modern society. In modern design, the formal beauty and ordering rules of traditional patterns of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can still be used as reference and applied in many design fields. Minimalist aesthetics represented by "Bauhaus" pursues a simple and concise aesthetic style, draws on traditional cultural elements, and simplifies the elements. Therefore, the traditional lacquerware patterns of Liangshan Yi are simplified, and the patterns are made more modern through decomposition, reorganization, and the composition of points, lines, and surfaces. This is also an important creative means of "starting from tradition and based on the contemporary". At the same time, abstracting the patterns of traditional Yi lacquerware is another important means in creation.

In the creation of ancient Chinese ink painting, the "blank" of the picture, also known as "surplus jade", is an important artistic expression technique. This unique spatial layout not only constitutes a unique aesthetic form of Chinese painting, but also deeply reflects the spiritual connotation of Taoist aesthetics. When constructing the elements of the picture, it is not the pursuit of being comprehensive and exhaustive to show every detail, but to emphasize the alternation of virtual and real, and the density. Following the principle of "dense and airtight, sparse enough to run horses" in the composition of Chinese painting, more attention is paid to the harmonious relationship between the "positive shape" and the "negative shape" in the picture, and the concept of harmonious coexistence with nature and the unity of man and nature. This relative harmony of yin and yang is also a cosmological spirit of awe for man and nature. In the process of refining the traditional lacquerware patterns of the Liangshan Yi people, we can also learn from the artistic expression of "blank". By selecting a part of the traditional decoration to enlarge, extend and abstract it, while leaving a part of the space, the imagination of the onlookers is mobilized to inspire them to actively extend and supplement the design. This refining method not only retains the unique charm of Yi lacquerware, but also gives it a modern and innovative feel.



Figure 53 Refinement and combination of traditional patterns of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Xichang University (September 2024)

### 2.3 Brand Culture Construction

Value is a philosophical category that reflects the relationship between the attributes of an object and the needs of the subject. If the attributes of an object can meet the needs of the subject, then the object is valuable to the subject. Cultural value is a characteristic of traditional crafts. (Shao Qin, Hua Miaomiao& Li Xingli, 2023.08) At the same time, traditional crafts have huge potential for brand development, and they can become an effective way to promote the transformation of cultural resources into capital. Brand building is deeply rooted in culture. Most successful traditional craft brand building is based on cultural inheritance. Traditional

craft brand building is the construction of a social environment for technology.<sup>32</sup> (Zhang Xueyu, 2020)

How to understand and explore the brand culture construction of traditional crafts is a common problem faced by many traditional handicrafts.

As an important branch of Chinese lacquer art culture, Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only carries the long cultural history of the Yi people, but also deeply reflects the rich connotations of the social process, political changes, folk customs, aesthetic pursuits, religious beliefs and craftsmanship of the Yi local culture. After generations of careful polishing and practice, it has gradually formed a unique cultural symbol. It can be said that it is through the accumulation and condensation of long-term cultural elements that the Yi people have their own "Mingpian", showing the outside world this ancient and ethnic cultural brand. However, brand building is not static, but changes and innovations with the continuous development of social processes.

The support of national policies has injected new vitality into many traditional crafts and played a vital role in the inheritance and protection of skills. Take Liangshan Yi lacquerware as an example. Since the "Liangshan Yi lacquerware painting skills" were included in the "Second Batch of National Intangible Cultural Heritage List" in 2008 and the "China Traditional Craft Revitalization Plan" policy was introduced in 2017, the public's attention to this unique art form has increased significantly. However, this does not mean that Liangshan Yi lacquerware has completely escaped the difficulties it faces. Although policy support and social attention have brought positive effects to its development, more efforts and innovations are needed to achieve true revival and sustainable development.

Since the country has successively introduced relevant policies, the concept of intangible cultural heritage has become well known to the public through various publicity channels. Liangshan Yi lacquerware has also gradually shaped its unique national cultural brand in the process of inheritance and development. As one of the main birthplaces of Yi lacquerware, Xide County of Liangshan Yi has few families and inheritors engaged in lacquerware production. The most famous one is the Jiwu family. They are the only ones who still insist on using pure natural raw lacquer to make lacquerware. Jiwu Wuqi has also been rated as a national intangible cultural heritage inheritor, which is well deserved. The title and identity of the inheritor are, to a certain extent, official proof of the craftsmanship level. This is not only an affirmation of their personal skills, but also an affirmation of the cultural value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

When shaping the brand image of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, we can learn from the story of the Jiwu family and carefully create a unique brand that combines traditional charm with modern aesthetics, exquisite craftsmanship and artistic innovation. Through storytelling marketing strategies, we can tell the long history of Yi lacquerware and let collectors feel the warmth of each piece. Official cultural propaganda can allow more outsiders to understand the cultural value behind traditional crafts, thereby enhancing the social value of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and attracting more young people to enhance the influence of traditional crafts.

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<sup>32</sup> Zhang Xueyu: "Traditional Craft Brand Building from the Perspective of Technological History", *Journal of Dialectics of Nature*, No. 9, 2020

Li Ziqi, a famous Chinese short video blogger, returns with "Purple Air from the East". In the video, she presents her entire preparation process for a lacquerware work, from collecting lacquer, drying lacquer, mixing lacquer, painting to the entire steps of creation, transforming an old wardrobe into an exquisite lacquerware work. With her own strong brand influence, Li Ziqi has brought huge attention to Chengdu lacquer art. Her videos have quickly become popular on the Internet, not only allowing more people to understand the charm of lacquer art, but also showing the unique beauty of this traditional art. Chengdu lacquer art instantly became a hot search on online social platforms. Just like the influence brought by Li Ziqi's video, more people have learned about what lacquer art is and have also seen the beauty of lacquer art. The audience can deeply feel the efforts and hardships behind the inheritors of intangible cultural heritage skills and lacquer art practitioners, thereby increasing the society's attention and support for these precious cultural heritage. In addition, the innovative transformation and development of intangible cultural heritage has become one of the important means to shape brand image and enhance cultural value. This model not only helps to protect and inherit precious historical heritage, but also injects new vitality into modern design and promotes the integration of traditional culture and contemporary life. With the help of well-known figures like Liziqi and their works, we can effectively promote and spread China's excellent traditional culture.

In addition, more people can experience and understand the production process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware by holding relevant lacquer art exhibitions, academic forums, traditional craft experience activities, cultural exchange exhibitions, etc., to increase the interactivity and experience of the brand. For example, on December 13, 2024, the 2024 academic activity cooperation project "Contemporary Arts and Crafts" Art Life-oriented High-quality Development Road-the Fourth Young Scholars Arts and Crafts Forum Academic Seminar hosted by Shanghai Arts and Crafts Association and Shanghai Arts and Crafts Vocational College. Focusing on the theme of "Contemporary Arts and Crafts Art Life", the forum has successively delivered keynote speeches on research directions such as arts and crafts creation, the combination and application of digital technology in the arts and crafts industry, the cultivation of arts and crafts talents, the modernization of intangible cultural heritage inheritance and innovation, and cross-border applications, based on the contemporary design perspective and life context.

In the process of innovation, artists and designers can be invited to jointly create and design, refine and summarize the unique patterns and colors of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and give it new vitality through innovative applications. With the creative inspiration of "artists" and the modern aesthetic perspective of "designers", a bridge connecting tradition and contemporary times can be built to promote the brand image of Liangshan Yi lacquerware to a new height.



Figure 54 Chinese short video blogger Li Ziqi is creating lacquer art

Source: [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SJScGek0Ua-\\_M9DoaDTbJA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SJScGek0Ua-_M9DoaDTbJA) (September 2024)

#### 2.4 Continuation of cultural symbols

In his 1978 book *Semiotics: A Critical Research Paradigm*, Peter, a famous American semiotics scholar, pointed out: "Semiotics is both an insight into critical research and a methodology. In this sense, semiotics can be used as a framework to examine our universe and our way of understanding it."<sup>33</sup> (Dai Ping, 2000)

Semiotics, as an international methodology, often provides important assistance for academic circles to explore the subtle connection between man and nature. Liangshan Yi lacquerware, a unique cultural symbol, has built a rich emotional world and carries the historical memory of the Yi people. Not only is lacquerware itself a profound symbol, but its patterns and colors also independently carry cultural significance. The essence of inheritance lies in the realization through the production and reproduction of culture. The inheritance and innovation of national art are closely linked to human culture. People transform the ideas and technologies they have acquired into symbolic forms and continuously pass them on to the next generation, thus forming the basic content of social reproduction. There is an interrelated relationship between people, symbols and art. Human beings have achieved themselves through symbolic culture, and thus better understand the world and themselves.

As a powerful cultural symbol, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is not only a mark of history, but also a profound symbol of culture. As part of the cultural system, we should pay attention to the continuity of cultural symbols in the process of innovation. In the process of inheritance, it should not be limited to simple reproduction, over-

<sup>33</sup> Dai Ping, "Research on Chinese National Costume Culture", Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2000 edition, page 276.

emphasizing the beautiful meaning of cultural symbols, directly applying ancient methods, and mechanically copying. On the contrary, we should innovate on the basis of retaining its traditional essence and combining it with the current era background. By refining, summarizing, decomposing and recombining the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the traditional cultural symbols are refined and deformed to meet the needs of the context of the times. We can start from a contemporary perspective and recreate on the basis of the original culture to promote and enrich the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. This will not only help maintain the unique cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also further enhance the cultural confidence of the Yi people.

The continuation of the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is a comprehensive project that requires the joint efforts of the family, strong support from the government, extensive participation from the society, and active promotion from the art market. In the context of the era of cultural integration, Liangshan Yi lacquerware must balance the relationship between tradition and innovation in the process of integrating with society. We can neither stick to the old ways and stick to tradition too much, nor abandon the profound cultural connotations in pursuit of novelty. Only by innovating with the times on the basis of rooting in tradition can we ensure the continuity of the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Such innovation can not only give new vitality to the Yi lacquerware art, but also maintain the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the process of change, so that it can still retain its own cultural roots in the tide of modernization.

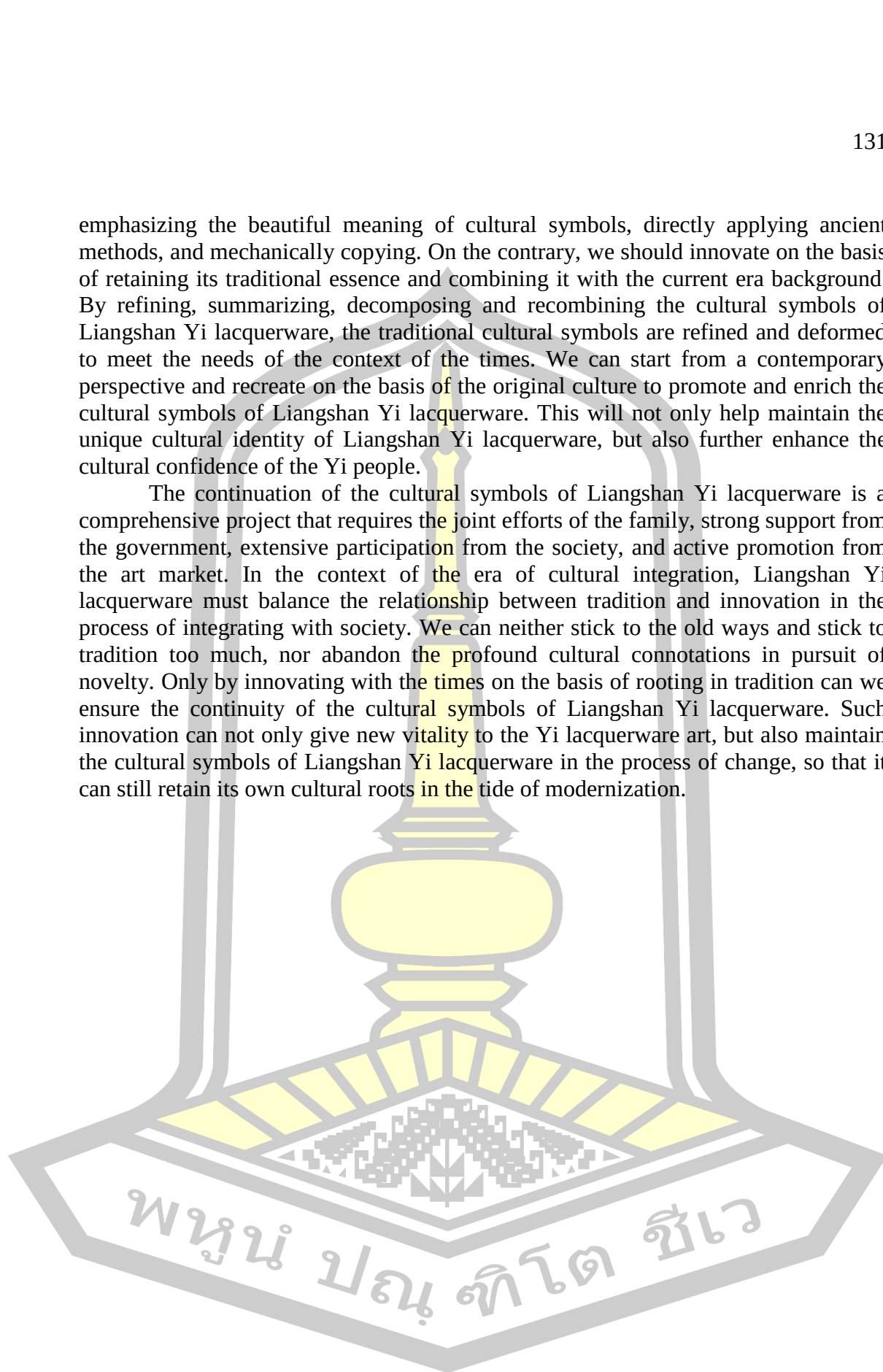




Figure 55 The continuation and innovation of the cultural symbols of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at Xichang University (September 2024)

## 2.5 Integration of teaching and practice

Under the current strategic background of revitalizing traditional crafts, arts and crafts, as a treasure of Chinese traditional culture, have not only provided a new way to explore the connotation, form and value of traditional crafts through the implementation of the innovative measure of "bringing traditional crafts into campus", but also effectively responded to the question of how traditional crafts can be integrated with the modern education system, and realized their modern expression in contemporary society. This move has far-reaching enlightenment and demonstration significance for the revitalization and inheritance of traditional crafts and the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It not only deepens the

understanding and recognition of traditional crafts by colleges and students, but also greatly enhances the national cultural confidence and injects new vitality into the inheritance and development of excellent traditional culture.

#### 2.5.1 Inheritance of school education

In recent years, the country has attached great importance to the inheritance and development of China's excellent intangible cultural heritage. Concepts such as "intangible cultural heritage into campus" and "traditional crafts into campus" have been proposed one after another, emphasizing that classroom teaching and traditional experience are important carriers and paths for inheriting traditional crafts on campus. Through the combination of hands-on practice and theoretical knowledge, teachers and students can have a deeper understanding, knowledge and inheritance of these precious intangible cultural heritages. Colleges and universities and primary and secondary schools together constitute the two core sections of traditional craft inheritance. In terms of spreading traditional craft culture education, colleges and universities are committed to systematically sorting out traditional craft knowledge and building a complete knowledge and value system. To this end, colleges and universities have established a traditional culture research and practice platform, opened a wealth of traditional craft-related courses, and organically integrated traditional skills into education and teaching. At the same time, colleges and universities implement an innovative "on-campus tutor + off-campus tutor" dual-teacher teaching method, and specially invite national and provincial intangible cultural heritage masters to serve as the second tutor. A famous teacher studio is set up on campus, and the famous teacher shares his production skills and inheritance experience, so that college teachers and students can understand and learn the production skills of traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware, laying the foundation for the innovation and transformation of lacquerware in the later period. In order to implement the inheritance and development project of China's excellent traditional culture in depth. Through this initiative, colleges and universities have effectively implemented the inheritance and innovation of traditional handicrafts, laying a solid foundation for cultivating a new generation of intangible cultural heritage inheritors.

As an important branch of Chinese lacquer culture, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has a unique artistic charm and profound cultural heritage, making it unique among intangible cultural heritage. Campus cultural construction undoubtedly bears an important responsibility for the inheritance and development of this precious cultural heritage. Incorporating the inheritance and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware into the key topics of campus cultural construction is not only a respect and promotion of traditional culture, but also an important measure to educate students on national culture and cultivate national pride and identity. Integrate traditional skills into education and teaching, and through systematic learning, let students have a deep understanding of the historical origins, production technology and cultural connotations of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. This can not only promote the inheritance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also enrich the content of education, promote the development of regional cultural characteristics, and promote the spirit of national culture. At the same time, colleges and universities can cultivate a team of traditional craft teachers, establish a Liangshan Yi lacquerware workshop, open Liangshan Yi lacquerware theory and practice courses to the whole school, and explore traditional craft research activities.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee with President Xi Jinping as the core has attached great importance to the inheritance and development of traditional handicrafts, and provinces and cities at all levels have successively launched policy documents on the protection and development of traditional crafts. Sichuan, as a province with a large number of intangible cultural heritage, is rich in traditional craft resources and a hundred flowers bloom. One of the Sichuan universities represented by Chengdu University established the Chengdu University Traditional Crafts Research Institute in 2020 on the premise of integrating the cultural and artistic resources of the school and all walks of life, including Chengdu Lacquer Art Workshop, Shu Brocade and Shu Embroidery Workshop, Sichuan Shadow Puppet Workshop, Traditional Papermaking Workshop, Sichuan New Year Painting Workshop, Tibetan Qiang Yi Traditional Workshop, etc. (Among them, the Tibetan Qiang Yi Workshop includes an in-depth study of Liangshan Yi lacquerware). There are 13 workshops in total and 3 research institutes for traditional craft theory, traditional craft cultural creation, and traditional crafts of the ten ASEAN countries. The Traditional Craft Theory Research Institute is based on the study of the culture, characteristics and value of traditional crafts, excavates local traditional craft resources, explores the inheritance of regional traditional crafts on the basis of cultural protection, and provides theoretical support for the design and innovation of traditional crafts; the Traditional Craft Research Institute of the Ten ASEAN Countries advocates the national "Belt and Road" initiative, relies on the China-ASEAN Academy of Arts, explores the comparative study and educational inheritance of the traditional crafts of the ten ASEAN countries, and effectively carries out international exchanges and cooperation; the Traditional Craft Cultural and Creative Research Institute explores the application of new technologies, new media, and new materials for traditional crafts based on the research of traditional craft cultural and creative product development and cultural and creative industry development, so that it can be widely used in modern life. These measures have injected new vitality into the protection, inheritance and development of traditional handicrafts.



Figure 56 Chengdu University Traditional Crafts Research Institute Lacquer Art Workshop

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Workshop of the Institute of Traditional Crafts of Chengdu University (September 2024)

### 2.5.2 Practical training and promotion

Under the background of the country's vigorous advocacy of the protection and inheritance of intangible cultural heritage, Sichuan Province, as an important gathering place for traditional crafts, is actively committed to expanding the intangible cultural heritage team and improving the aesthetic and professional qualities of craftsmen. To this end, incorporating traditional crafts into the core

content of the training program for intangible cultural heritage inheritors can encourage more ambitious young people, local intangible cultural heritage inheritors, designers, young artists and other people from all walks of life to participate in the traditional craft revitalization plan. Through this measure, it can not only enhance the participants' sense of innovation and cross-border thinking ability, but also further strengthen the aesthetic concept and deepen the understanding and integration of contemporary society.

In recent years, the National Art Fund, the National Social Science Fund, the provincial art funds, and the Department of Culture and Tourism have all launched talent training projects for Liangshan Yi lacquerware. In the 2018 National Art Fund project, Sichuan University professor and doctoral supervisor Zhao Zhihong, as the project leader, successfully applied for the "Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Inheritance and Innovation Talent Training Project", which stood out from more than 10,000 projects. The project publicly released the enrollment brochure to the society through various channels, and selected 30 people mainly from colleges in Sichuan, Yunnan and other places, including university teachers, middle school teachers, corporate designers, young artists, and local intangible cultural heritage inheritors. In the specific learning practice, the project team participated in theoretical learning training in Xichang, and in the field investigation, went to Liangshan Yi Meigu County, Xide County, Zhaojue County and other places to inspect the production of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in different areas, and hired "National Intangible Cultural Heritage Inheritor" Ji Wuwuqie to give lectures on on-site skills and practical course demonstrations. In the 45-day tight course schedule, project team trainees are required to understand the historical development and production process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, master basic crafts, complete traditional craft works, and go to Chengdu, Chongqing and other places to train traditional skills and artistic modeling, lacquerware creative design and other related courses at the School of Art of Sichuan University. In the later stages of the training, trainees need to develop creative designs for Liangshan Yi lacquerware, develop innovative lacquerware artworks and lacquerware products, and through the "industry-education integration" model, build a "course + competition + exhibition" approach to enhance the effectiveness of industry-university-research cooperation, help the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware industry, and enable the dynamic inheritance of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, so that Liangshan Yi lacquerware can be integrated with more new vitality.





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Figure 57 The Sichuan University project team of "Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Inheritance and Innovative Talent Training" conducts operational courses in Xide County

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao in Xide County, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (September 2018)

In addition, Xichang University successfully held the "Liangshan Yi Lacquer Art Creative Design Talent Training" project and the "Liangshan Yi Clothing Crafts Inheritance and Innovation Talent Training Project" in 2019. The project has enhanced the learning and time ability of young talents in Liangshan Yi lacquer art and clothing culture, opened up diversified creative ideas, and created social value and market value for the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Such practice and training promotion projects reflect the country's emphasis on inheriting national culture, intangible cultural heritage and cultivating young artistic talents, and gather the strength of different professional fields to jointly inherit and promote the important concept of China's excellent traditional culture and art.





Figure 58 Achievements of the 2019 National Art Fund-funded project "Cultivation of Creative Design Talents in Liangshan Yi Lacquer Art"

Source:Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Art Museum of the School of Art, Southwest University for Nationalities(September 2019)

### **Part III Application cases of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in modern art creation**

#### **3.1 Design Concept**

In the public's cultural concept, Liangshan Yi lacquerware is often regarded as a traditional art form. In fact, this traditional art form has experienced many challenges and setbacks in the process of innovation. In the process of social development, the function of lacquerware has gradually changed from the original weapons and instruments to the single functionality of tableware. So far, lacquerware is still mainly used as tableware in the Liangshan Yi area, reflecting its important functional role. However, it is difficult to get rid of the stereotype of "tradition". It also means that in addition to practicality, the cultural value and artistic charm behind these exquisite handicrafts need to be further explored and developed.

By integrating modern design concepts and artistic aesthetics into the Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series "Yi·Cloud", a set of artistic creations with ethnic characteristics and contemporary formal beauty is formed, which can not only preserve and pass on this precious cultural heritage, but also give it new vitality. In the fusion of cultures, with the help of this artistic creation, Yi lacquerware is presented to the outside world in a new art form, allowing more people to come into contact with the Liangshan Yi lacquerware culture.

#### **3.2 Sources of inspiration**

Chinese tea culture has a long history, and tea originated in southwest China. From the Qin and Han Dynasties to the Tang Dynasty, tea culture gradually became popular. Tea tasting and drinking is not only a daily behavior, but also a symbol of status. It was initially limited to the royal nobility and literati, and later gradually became popular among the whole people. At the same time, the formation and development of tea culture was deeply influenced by Confucian culture and Taoist aesthetics, and gradually constructed a unique Chinese tea ceremony aesthetic system. The concept of "harmony between man and nature, and the mysterious union of things and myself" is not only a high-level summary of the spirit of Chinese tea culture, but also a profound reflection of people's outlook on life. The essence of beauty lies in Tao, and Tao represents the highest level of aesthetic pursuit. Whether it is tea culture or lacquer culture, they carry a profound historical heritage and cultural connotation, revealing oriental philosophical thoughts and traditional aesthetic concepts, and embodying the close connection between man and nature. Therefore, there are many similarities between tea culture and lacquer culture in temperament and aesthetic viewpoints, which is also the main source of inspiration for the author in this creation.

#### **3.3 Concept Formation Process**

Teaware, which is closely related to tea culture, presents the beauty of nature. Teaware is the medium that conforms to the aesthetic laws of nature and fully demonstrates the unique charm of the beauty of objects. In the Song and Ming dynasties, teaware occupied a pivotal position in the daily life of literati and scholars, becoming an important carrier for them to express their personal aesthetic tastes, shape and construct aesthetic culture. Through the careful selection and use of teaware, literati and scholars skillfully integrated the understanding and pursuit of natural beauty into the art of tea, further enriching the profound connotation and artistic realm of Chinese tea culture. As an important part of the traditional culture of

the Yi people, lacquerware contains typical traditional cultural elements, which is also a concentrated embodiment of national values.

Lacquer art, this oriental treasure with a long history, covers two major areas: lacquer flat art and lacquer three-dimensional art. Among them, lacquer three-dimensional art, more commonly known as "lacquerware", is the perfect collision of traditional craftsmanship and modern creativity. In the early stage of creation, I was committed to combining the profound meaning of tea culture with the unique charm of lacquer culture, selecting teaware as the carrier of this cultural fusion, and exploring the harmonious coexistence of traditional culture and modern aesthetics. This process of reinvention of tradition is not only a tribute to tradition, but also a pursuit of innovation. On the basis of following the aesthetic principles of the Yi people, the role of shape, function, and material in the Liangshan Yi lacquerware teaware series "Yi· Cloud" is fully considered.

### **3.4 Design and practice of Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series "Yi· Cloud"**

#### **3.4.1 Tools for making instruments**

Lacquerware production is a delicate craft that requires not only excellent skills but also the right tools. As the old saying goes, "If you want to do your work well, you must first sharpen your tools." Before starting this artistic creation, it is crucial to choose the right tools and materials. From the initial sanding to mounting, scraping, flat painting, lacquering and even inlaying, each step requires specific tools to complete. As the different stages of the process progress, the tools used will also change to ensure that each step can achieve the best results. Therefore, understanding and mastering various professional tools is indispensable to improving the quality and beauty of lacquerware production.

( 1) Painting tools: Common painting tools include hairbrushes and nylon brushes. Hairbrushes are also called paint brushes. They are an indispensable tool in the lacquerware production process. They are mainly made of young girls' hair that has not been permed or dyed. They are suitable for use when the surface of the object is uneven and the paint layer is relatively thick. The hairbrush hair is soft and can leave no brush marks during the painting process. Unlike ordinary paint, paint is a highly viscous paint that is difficult to spread, but it needs to be spread as thinly as possible. Because paint brushes are different from ordinary pens with soft bristles, they require a certain degree of toughness. Therefore, hairbrushes become a unique choice in the painting process. The production of hairbrushes is also extremely complicated. It takes dozens of rigorous processes and several months to make a hairbrush, so the price of hairbrushes is also very expensive.



Figure 59 Display of lacquer art making tools: hair brushes  
 Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

Paint mixing tools: Common paint mixing tools include ox horn pestles and horn spades. Horn spades are also called ox horn scrapers. They are mainly used in paint mixing, scraping lacquer base, mounting cloth, using a knife instead of a pen, and making some special texture effects. Its production process is exquisite. Adult buffalo horns are selected and processed into thin slices for use. They are of moderate thickness, good flatness, and elasticity.

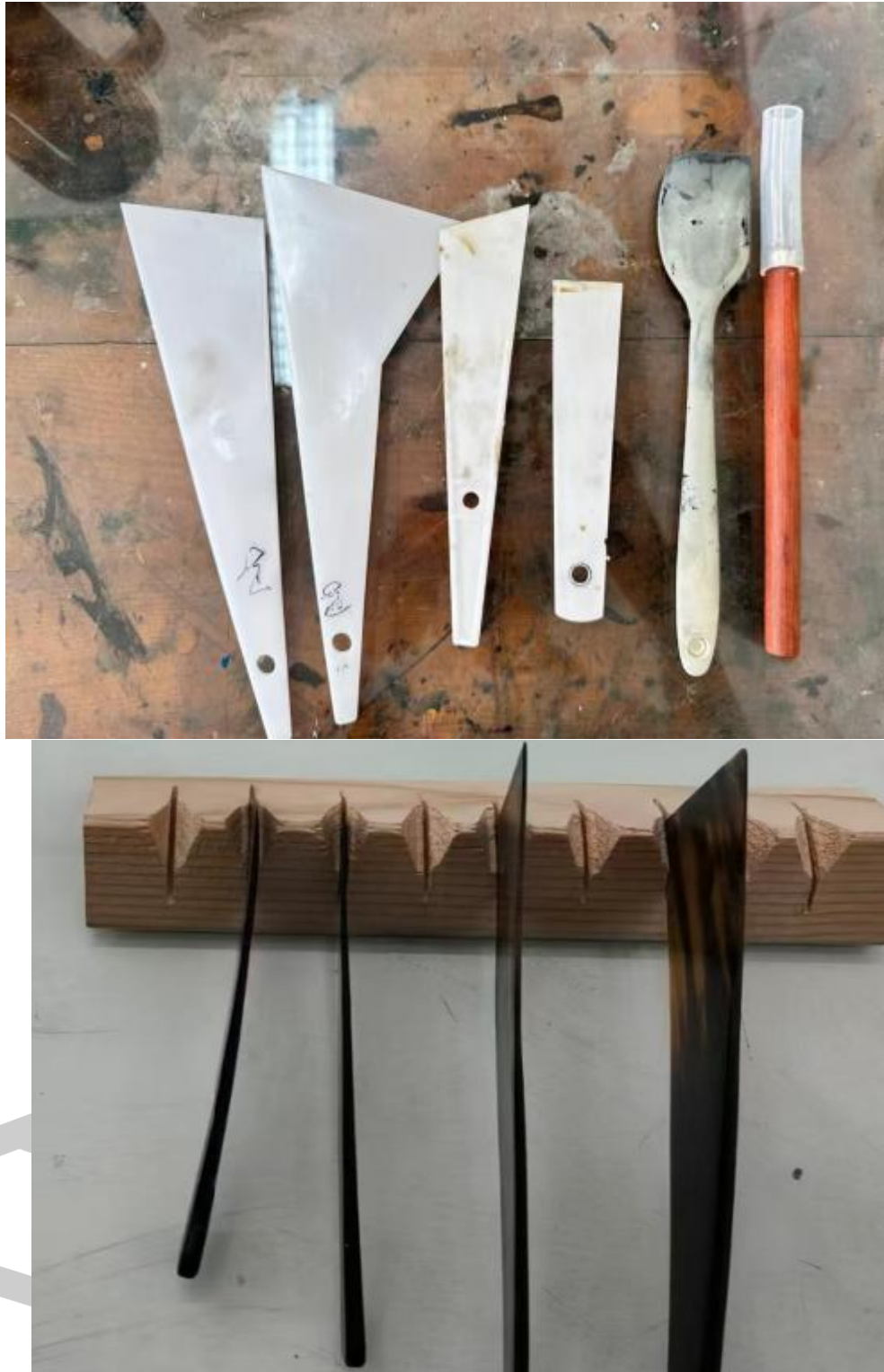


Figure 60 Display of lacquerware tools angle shovel  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

**Grinding tools:** In the process of making lacquerware, besides brushes, sandpaper is the most commonly used tool, and there are the most types. It is mainly used for grinding. The types of sandpaper are distinguished by the mesh number, which is the difference between coarseness and fineness. The different mesh numbers of sandpaper determine the extent of the production process. The smaller the mesh number, the closer to the beginning, the rougher the surface of the sandpaper. The larger the mesh number, the closer to the end, the finer the surface of the sandpaper.



Figure 61 Display of lacquerware tools and sandpaper

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

**Paint filtering tools:** The raw lacquer that has been harvested must be filtered to remove impurities, and the colored paint must also be filtered frequently to prevent coarse paint residue from being left on the painted surface. Filter cloth and paint filter rack are commonly used paint filtering tools. The filtered paint is bright and smooth, making it easy to paint.

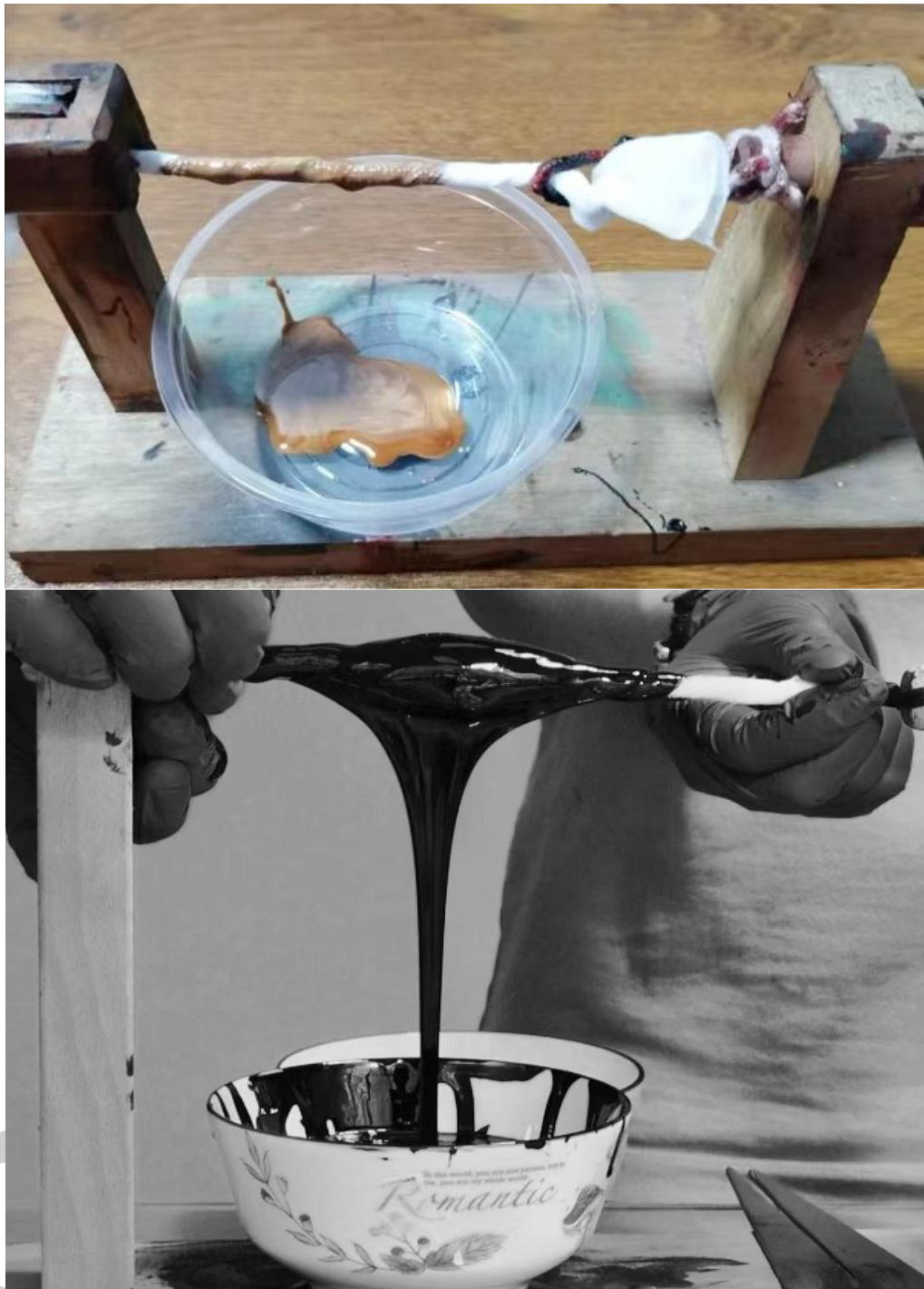


Figure 62 Tools for filtering lacquer

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

tools: Other tools used in lacquer crafts include brushes, carving knives, tweezers, screens, etc. These are commonly used tools for drawing, carving, inlaying, filtering, etc. in the process of lacquer painting.





Figure 63 Tool tweezers display  
Display of tools and materials: tweezers, screens, and carving knives  
(September 2024)

#### 3.4.2 Material of the device

( 1) Lacquer material: Lacquer can be divided into raw lacquer and cooked lacquer. Raw lacquer is a pure natural paint harvested from lacquer trees. It can be made into cooked lacquer through filtering, drying and stirring. After adding various color powders and grinding them evenly, it can be made into colored lacquers of various colors.



Figure 64 Raw lacquer and color lacquer material display  
Display of tools and materials: tweezers, screens, and carving knives  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

(2)Diluting materials: Because lacquer has a certain viscosity, the fluidity of the lacquer is not good during the painting process, and various diluent materials are needed to decompose the lacquer. Common diluent materials include turpentine, camphor oil, tung oil, orange oil, etc.



Figure 65 Lacquer Thinner Display

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

(3) Decorative materials: Common decorative materials in lacquer crafts include mother-of-pearl, eggshells, lacquer leather, etc., which have rich expressiveness and are common decorative techniques in lacquer crafts. Among them, eggshells are also rich and varied, such as duck eggs, chicken eggs, goose eggs, etc., providing rich raw materials for lacquer art decoration techniques.



Figure 66 Display of lacquer inlay materials such as eggshell and mother-of-pearl

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

(3) Lacquer base material: Liangshan Yi lacquerware commonly uses wood and leather as base materials, but from the perspective of environmental protection, leather cannot be used. Since lacquer materials are rich in tolerance, in my creation, I first chose materials such as porcelain and bamboo that have rough surfaces and are environmentally friendly. These materials are easy to shape and can fit closely with the paint film, preventing the paint film from peeling off the surface of the object after long-term contact with water, thereby extending the service life.



Figure 67 Paint material display

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(September 2024)

### 3.4.3 Creation of Artworks

#### (1) The creation process of the artwork "Yi Cloud NO.1"

The work "Yi·Cloud NO.1" is a lacquer art work that combines modern design concepts with the beauty of traditional craftsmanship. It is inspired by the unique sheep horn pattern in the long history of the Liangshan Yi people. In this work, the author transforms this traditional pattern into a vivid and charming decorative element on the tea table, which not only shows the profound heritage of the Yi culture, but also gives the work a unique artistic charm. The entire tea table uses red as the main color. This color choice not only echoes the enthusiasm and vitality of the Yi people for life, but also makes the work exude a warm and noble temperament. Combining the ancient culture of the Yi people with contemporary aesthetics has become a bridge connecting the past and the future, allowing viewers to feel the unchanging pursuit of beauty under the flow of time.

In terms of the function of the object, the main premise is that the shape adapts to the function, and the connotation of the design elements of the Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware is extended and applied. More emphasis is placed on the coordination of appearance and function, starting from the perspective of human functional aesthetics, so that the connotation of the Yi traditional lacquerware can adapt to the needs of contemporary aesthetics.

In terms of creative structure, the author breaks the traditional way of composition and pays more attention to the form of the picture and the sense of spatial rhythm. The linear relationship divides the entire plane into golden sections, and the butterfly breaks the "line" in the form of a "point" to avoid the rigidity of space. In the linear space, the extracted and decomposed sheep horn pattern of the Yi ethnic group is stretched and deformed, decomposed and reorganized, and repeatedly deliberated from the layout of the pattern to the division of space. After many studies on the spatial structure, the pattern is finally reproduced in the form of a "symbol". In terms of color, a large area of silver bead red is used. Pure silver beads are a symbol of nobility and luxury. They are gorgeous but not vulgar, solemn and elegant, which conforms to the color characteristics of traditional Yi lacquerware.





Figure 69 The production process of the work "Yi-Cloud NO.1"

Source: Produced by Suo Chao (October 2024)

The third step is to decorate the painting part. Start copying the pattern and painting it. Pre-bury the decoration at the bottom of the paint layer to create texture. Pile up some of the decorations and apply different colors of paint again to make the color layer rich. After completing the above steps, put the tea table in the shade room and dry it for 3-5 days. Next comes the step of gilding. Apply a layer of transparent paint. The requirement is that it must be thin and the paint liquid cannot be

accumulated on the surface. According to the viscosity of the paint, wait for the paint layer to dry quickly and apply gold foil. After it is dried in the shade, grind it with water, and grind it with sandpaper from 600 mesh to 1000 mesh until the surface of the paint layer is smooth. After drying, brush a layer of silver vermilion paint in a dust-free space, repeat it many times, until 2-3 times, so that the red paint layer has a certain thickness.

The fourth step is the final grinding, polishing and clearing. Use 1000-5000 sandpaper to grind in sequence, and grind the surface of the paint layer from bright to matte. Grinding is a very critical step. If the force is too small, the texture effect embedded in the bottom layer cannot be ground out. If the force is too large, the paint layer will be worn through, so this is a step that requires a lot of experience. After the overall grinding is completed, polish with vegetable oil, flour or pearl powder, repeatedly until the surface of the paint layer becomes warm and smooth. After completing the above steps, place the lacquer tea table for 5-10 days and then proceed to the clearing step. Use raw lacquer to rub 5-6 times thinly. Depending on the number of times the paint is rubbed, polish once every two coats.





Figure 70 Exhibition of works of Yi Cloud NO.1  
Source: Produced by Suo Chao (October 2024)

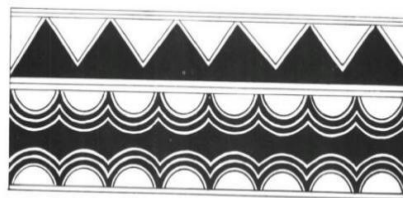
#### 1) The creation process of the artwork "Yi Cloud NO.2"

The work "Yi· Cloud NO.2" is a set of innovative works deeply inspired by the traditional lacquerware of the Yi people. In this work, the author cleverly combines simple and unique design concepts, aiming to reinterpret the ancient cultural heritage of the Yi people from a modern perspective. The entire series includes a teapot and three fairness cups, which not only complement each other in terms of function, but also form a perfect match visually. The design of the appearance of this work is inspired by the aesthetic principles of the Song Dynasty in China, a period known for its exquisite, restrained and poetic artistic style. Through the study and understanding of Song Dynasty aesthetics, the author incorporates this classical beauty into Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

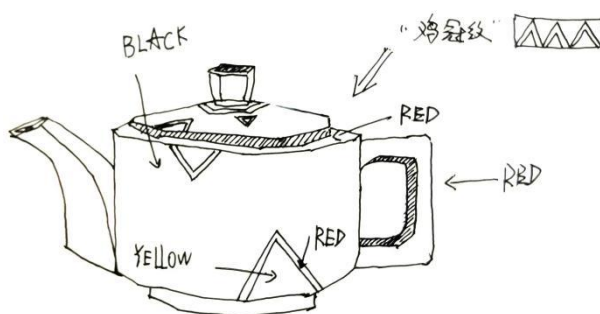
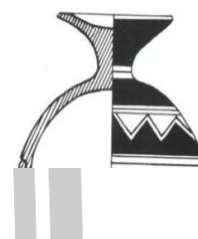
When creating the work "Yi· Cloud NO.2", in order to consider the balance between the functionality and aesthetic value of the work, the author chose black porcelain with heat and heat resistance as the body material. This material can not only withstand the temperature changes in daily use, but its unique granularity on the surface also enhances the adhesion of the paint surface, making the final product more durable and easy to maintain. The design of the pot is mainly square and tough. The handle of the pot is round inside and square outside, which breaks the tough feeling of the appearance and makes the shape of the pot square with roundness, giving it a modern design sense.

In the process of creation, the author drew on the traditional Yi pattern "cockscorn pattern", and broke up, refined, sorted and reconstructed the traditional Yi pattern "cockscorn pattern", which not only retained the traditional national cultural characteristics, but also gave new vitality to the modern minimalist style. Adhering to the aesthetic principle of "seeing simplicity and simplicity, the great way is simplicity", we strive to show the deep cultural connotation while maintaining a simple and generous appearance. Exploring diversified innovation, closely linking

lacquer art with contemporary life, and using lacquer art to pass on the new aesthetics of life.



木鉢型  
通高32.5公分  
腹径23.5公分  
底径15.3公分



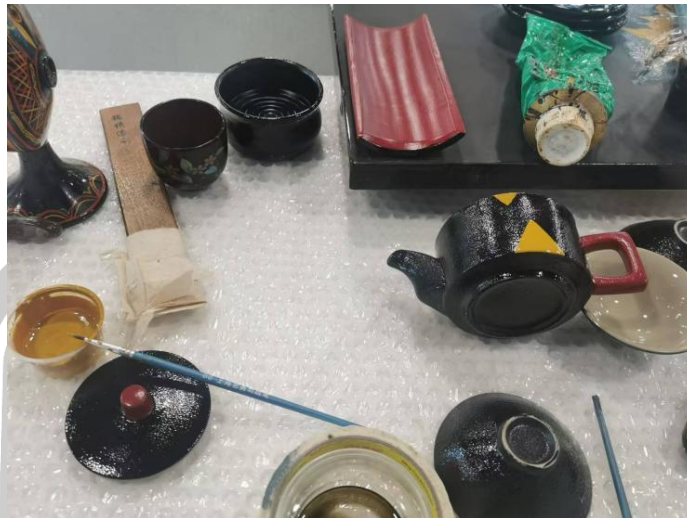


Figure 71 The process of extracting patterns from works  
Source: Produced by Suo Chao (October 2024)

In terms of decoration techniques, the flat painting method is adopted, and the body of the pot and the cup are painted black. This color tone not only highlights the solemnity and restraint in the traditional culture of the Yi people, but also gives the work a calm and mysterious atmosphere. The handle and lid of the pot are decorated with small areas of red and yellow. The "concentric circle" linear expression method is used to decorate the lid and the bottom of the cup. This design element not only echoes the Liangshan Yi people's worship of the sun, moon and stars, but also forms a strong color contrast and visual impact.

During the painting process, in order to make the edges of the lacquer surface clean and tidy, traceless glue is used to protect the outer parts of the lacquer painting. The pot body and the cup body are uniformly primed with black polishing paint. After it is shade-dried, it is lightly polished with 600-800 mesh sandpaper to increase its adhesion. After drying, it is painted with black polishing paint again and shade-dried for 3-5 days. Then it comes to the painting part, which is also the most critical step in the entire production process. When traditional Yi lacquer art craftsmen paint Yi lacquerware, they do not make drafts in advance, but use homemade special drawing pens to paint the patterns from one part in the order of black, red and yellow, which requires extremely skilled skills. Before painting, the author uses the carbon paper prepared in advance to copy the patterns to be painted on the primer of the vessel, and then paints it. This method can ensure the accuracy of the pattern shape. After it dries, use 1000-1500 mesh sandpaper for slight grinding. After water grinding to matte, it is polished with vegetable oil, tile ash and pearl powder. The last step is to "Kaiqing"<sup>34</sup>

Use raw lacquer to gently wipe the surface of the object, and then wipe off the excess lacquer with paper towels. Polish once each time, until 2-3 times, all steps are completed.

This artwork has been creatively redesigned from shape, decoration to color, giving the lacquerware more possibilities and creativity in appearance. Its connotations echo each other, the overall coordination and unity, the proper density

<sup>34</sup> Kaiqing: Kaiqing is the last step in lacquerware production. It is a delicate polishing process, which involves using absorbent cotton dipped in raw lacquer to gently wipe the surface of the object.

relationship, and the contemporary artistic beauty. In the process of innovation, it not only retains the cultural connotation of the traditional lacquerware of the Liangshan Yi people, but also continues its artistic characteristics, which meets the aesthetic needs of modern people.



Figure 72 The drawing process of the work "Yi·Cloud NO.2"  
Source: Produced by Suo Chao (October 2024)

(3) The creation process of the artwork "Yi Cloud NO.3"

This group of works uses the characters of Liangshan Yi people as creative elements. These characters are not only a syllable text, but also a symbol. Yi characters have gone through a development process from simple symbols to complex characters, from pictograms to ideograms, and then to the combination of phono-semantic. Its characters are beautiful in shape and rigorous in structure. They are both vivid in pictograms and profound in ideograms. This unique writing system has distinct regional characteristics and is similar to the pictographic characters of ancient my country. The Yi characters have the characteristics of pictograms and indications in terms of modeling characteristics, that is, they express meanings by depicting the characteristics or shapes of things intuitively. Its pictograms are somewhat abstract and imaginative. In the creative process, the author made full use of the characteristics and advantages of Yi characters, and incorporated its unique style and aesthetics into the works, making the works more culturally connotative and decorative.

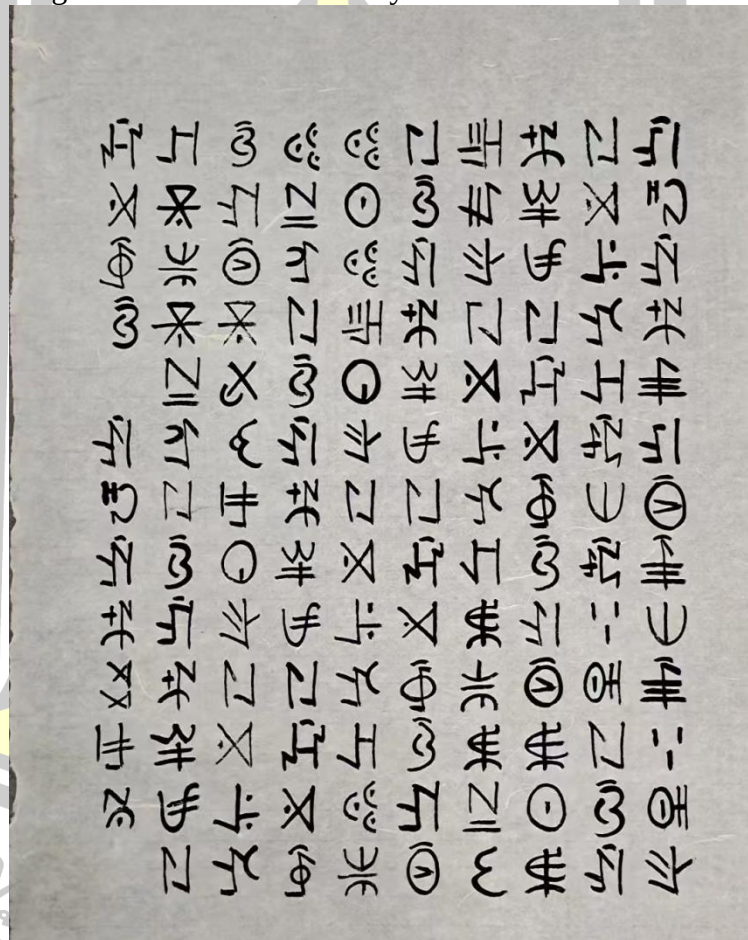




Figure 73 Sources of inspiration for artworks  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao (October 2024)

The creation selected the cross section of the original tree stump as the shape of the vessel, and this choice reflects the respect and feedback to nature. The shape of the vessel is somewhat accidental. During the design process, the creator retained the natural texture beauty of the side of the tree stump, making each work have a unique appearance and full of accidental beauty. Painting and decorating the cross section of the tree stump not only enhances the overall visual effect of the vessel, but also gives these natural elements richer cultural connotations and aesthetic values.

The first step of the creation is to select tree stumps of different sizes, use 400-600 mesh sandpaper for rough grinding, and clean the impurities on the surface of the stumps. The cleaned stumps are first "eaten green" with raw lacquer.<sup>35</sup> Make the raw lacquer evenly penetrate into the wood and improve the stability of the wood. After completing the above steps, put it in the shade room to dry. In the second process, use 600 mesh sandpaper to lightly grind the body, wipe the surface of the body with raw lacquer again, and enter the "mounting cloth" stage, and roughly cut the prepared

<sup>35</sup> Eating green: refers to brushing a layer of raw lacquer evenly on the surface of the body to improve the stability of the wooden body and enhance the hardness of the surface. Lay a good foundation for subsequent mounting and scraping. This is an important process step in lacquerware production.

cloth fiber according to the body. Then use raw lacquer and glutinous rice flour, mix in equal proportions, in a paste-like state, with stickiness, and then stick it to the linen cloth. Place it in a shade room and let it dry for 3-5 days. After it is dry, paint both sides with black paint and place it in the shade room again.





Figure 74 Demonstration of steps for mounting and plastering works  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

After completing the above steps, it is time to start drawing and decorating. First, extract the traditional Yi characters, refine, decompose, abstract and deform them, reassemble the deconstructed characters, and arrange them. At this time, the Yi characters are more often presented in the form of "symbols", which weakens their own meaning. In the picture, the relationship between points and lines, lines and surfaces is cleverly arranged and combined, and rich visual effects are created through different layout methods. Then, the "symbol" part is piled up with red and yellow to form a sense of hierarchy and three-dimensionality, giving people a strong visual impact. This color combination retains the traditional "three primary colors" artistic characteristics of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, while giving it a unique modern art aesthetic feature.



พูน ปณ ฑิต ชีเว

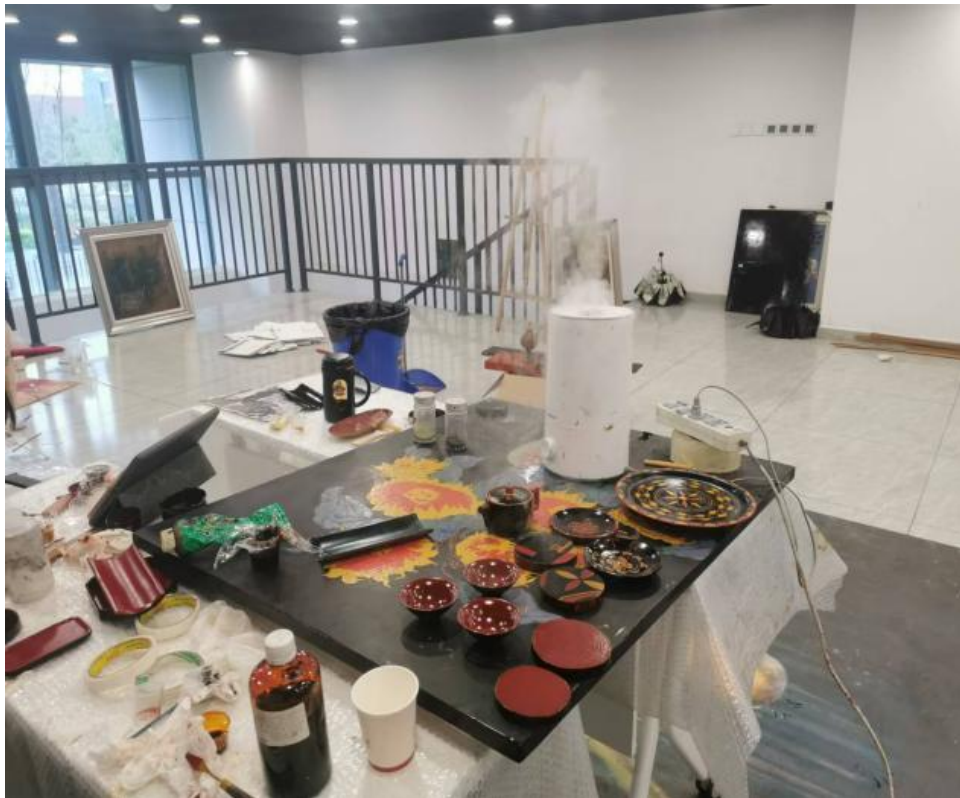


Figure 75 Creative space display  
Source: Photographed by Suo Chao at the Lacquer Art Studio of Chengdu University(October 2024)

The ancestors of the Liangshan Yi people worship nature and have unique aesthetic concepts. In traditional Yi decorations, many animal and plant patterns are included. Whether in Yi lacquerware, Yi costumes, or Bimo paintings, chicken elements can be seen. In this series of works, the author combines the elements of "chicken" with the elements of traditional Yi characters, and abstractly deforms them to form a new "symbol" language. At the same time, the chicken's eyes are refined and deformed into simple "sun and moon" symbols, and the simple composition concept is integrated into artistic creation. Pay attention to the density relationship between lines, and use the fashionable "black, red, and yellow" three primary colors to match, so that the work retains the traditional charm and adds a sense of modernity.







Figure 76 Exhibition of Liangshan Yi lacquerware work "Yi·Cloud NO.3"  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

### (3) The creation process of the artwork "Yi Cloud NO.4"

The Song Dynasty lacquerware advocated the concept of "plain lacquer without decoration", which represents a supreme realm of lacquerware art. The most representative of the characteristics of Song Dynasty lacquerware is plain lacquerware, also known as single-color lacquer. The characteristic of this kind of lacquerware is that only one color is used throughout the body, the shape of the vessel is simple and plain, and there is no complicated decoration in the decorative effect, which is characterized by "minimalism". This style not only shows the unique charm of Song Dynasty aesthetics, but also reflects the society's pursuit of natural and simple beauty at that time.

When creating the series of works "Yi Cloud NO.4", the author took the magnificent mountains in Liangshan as the source of inspiration. Liangshan, known as the "Daliangshan", has won the reputation of "the kingdom of mountains" for its unique landforms with rugged peaks and crisscrossing river valleys. Here, mountains and rivers are interdependent, and the canyons are deep, forming a series of breathtaking natural paintings. The design of the vessels in the works cleverly echoes this natural wonder. Its shape is based on smooth long arcs, with bulges around the edges and a slow depression in the center, just like the topographical features of the Sichuan Basin. Inside the vessel, a series of irregular grooves are carved out using a printmaking U-shaped knife. These intricate textures are like the well-arranged mountain and river veins of Daliangshan, vividly reproducing the unique landform characteristics of Liangshan.

In terms of the shape of the works, the author draws on the aesthetic essence of Song Dynasty lacquerware, pursuing the simplicity and generosity of the shape, and the color is based on pure monochrome, which can convey a profound artistic conception through concise visual language. This group of works consists of three pieces, each of which is endowed with the three primary colors of "black, red, and yellow", which not only symbolizes the basic elements of nature, but also implies the rich cultural connotations of the Liangshan Yi people.

In terms of production technology, the author adopted the traditional technique of "plain lacquer", which perfectly embodies the aesthetic characteristics of Chinese Song Dynasty lacquerware with its unique charm and simple style. Through the careful treatment and polishing of the lacquer layer, the surface of the vessel presents a texture as warm as jade and restrained luster, which not only shows the elegant beauty of Song Dynasty lacquerware, but also integrates modern aesthetic concepts, making this group of works inherit the characteristics of Liangshan Yi lacquerware art while also showing the innovative spirit of the times.

During the production process, the author selected beech as the main material. With its solid texture, easy shaping and unique physical properties, beech is an ideal choice for furniture and handicraft production. First, the author used a curved saw to saw the raw materials into the required proportions. Then, the beech was basically shaped with a carving knife to ensure that each work can show a unique artistic style. After completing the basic shape, the surface of the work was polished with sandpaper of 600 to 800 mesh to make it smooth and delicate. Then, it entered the lacquer art processing stage. First, "eating green" was carried out, that is, two coats of lacquer were applied on both sides, and then the work was placed in a shade room for

drying. The next step was the process of mounting cloth and scraping plaster. Because this set of utensils has an irregular shape, a horsehair brush was specially selected as a tool for mounting cloth and scraping plaster. This ensures that the linen cloth fits the surface of the utensils completely, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent lacquer art processing.

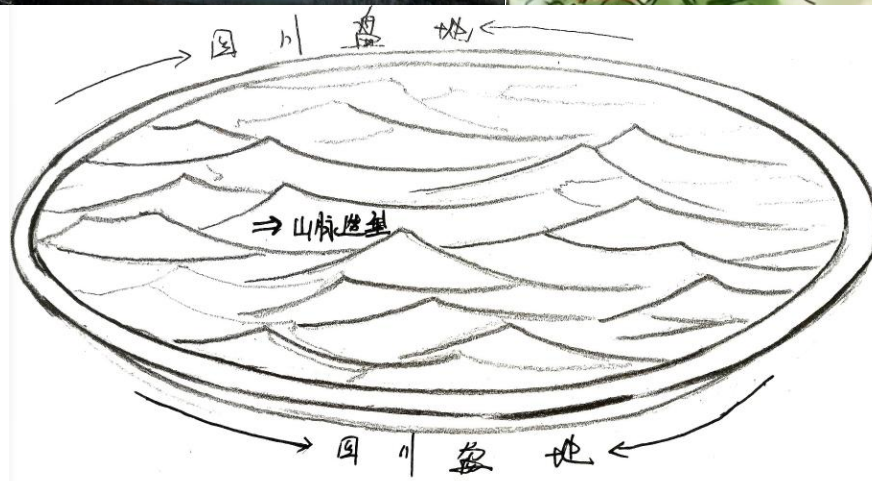


Figure 77 Sources of inspiration for artworks  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

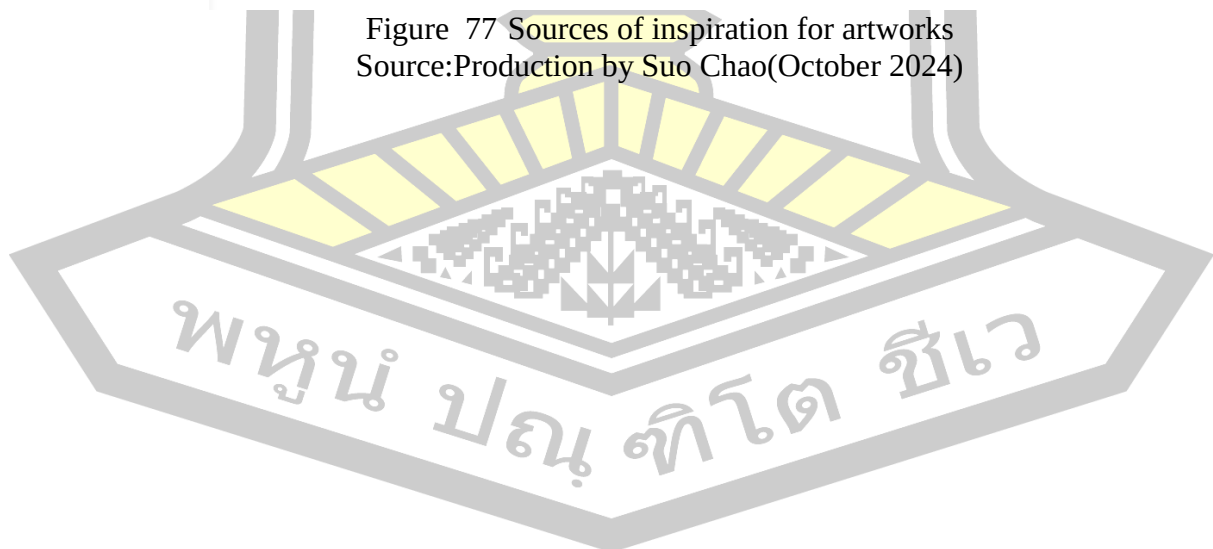




*Figure 78 Suo Chao's artistic creation process*  
Source: Chengdu University Lacquer Art Studio(October 2024)





Figure 79 Exhibition of Liangshan Yi lacquerware work "Yi·Cloud NO.4"  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

The creation process of the artwork "Yi Cloud NO.5"

In the traditional decorations of the Yi people, many patterns are derived from daily life and natural elements, including animals, plants, and designs related to production and life. These colorful patterns reflect the lifestyle of the Liangshan Yi people after they entered the agricultural society. They mainly rely on growing fruits and vegetables for a living, and engage in farming, textiles, picking, hunting and other activities all year round. Therefore, natural patterns, plant patterns, and animal patterns were produced. This lifestyle not only enriches their cultural connotations, but is also reflected in their unique artistic creations.

In the work "Yi·Cloud NO.5", the author extracted a variety of traditional pattern elements from the rich cultural heritage of the Yi people according to the needs of creation, including common petal patterns, fern patterns, water ripples, nail patterns, and bull's eye patterns. These patterns not only carry profound cultural significance, but also show the Yi people's unique understanding and praise of the beauty of nature. By using the formal rules of plane composition as a guide and arranging them based on the relationship between points, lines, and surfaces, the author cleverly transformed these patterns into a new visual expression on the basis of retaining the essence of Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware, and finally presented a series of art works that retain both national characteristics and modern atmosphere.

In terms of practical functions, it can be used as a tea tray to place tea cups. The unique decorative shape gives it a new artistic beauty. The deep color shows the warm texture of lacquer. Its pure natural and pollution-free characteristics give the object unimaginable durability and aesthetic value.

In terms of production technology, first polish the surface of the vessel, then brush paint, mount cloth, and scrape the ash to increase the stability of the body. After it dries, use black polishing paint to prime and enter the lacquer art decoration step.

The red and yellow parts use lacquer wrinkling, pile paint and other techniques to paint the objects. Under the condition of increasing temperature and humidity, the lacquer liquid of the decorative part is piled up, and then placed in the shade room for quick drying, so that the lacquer instantly wrinkles. After it dries, gently polish it, and partially retain the natural effect of wrinkles, which can increase the richness and layering of the picture and show the ontological language of lacquer art. After the painting is completed, put it in the shade room to dry for 3-5 days. After completing the above steps, polish and clean it, and the warm and thick color of the lacquer can be presented.







*Figure 80 Suo Chao's artistic creation process*  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)







Figure 81 Exhibition of Liangshan Yi lacquerware work "Yi·Cloud NO.5"  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

### 3.5 Forms of Exhibition and Expected Effect of Works.

#### 3.5.1 Exhibition form of works

The Liangshan Yi ethnic group lacquerware tea set series "Yi·Cloud" contains a total of 5 groups of works, which are displayed on the shelf in the form of arts and crafts. Arts and crafts pursue the perfect combination of material and shape, and are finally presented in the form of real objects, which are suitable for static display. While exhibiting the works, more detailed and in-depth academic research reports should also be assisted to show the production process, craft techniques, and material application in the form of pictures and texts. The following is the real display effect of the author's works:

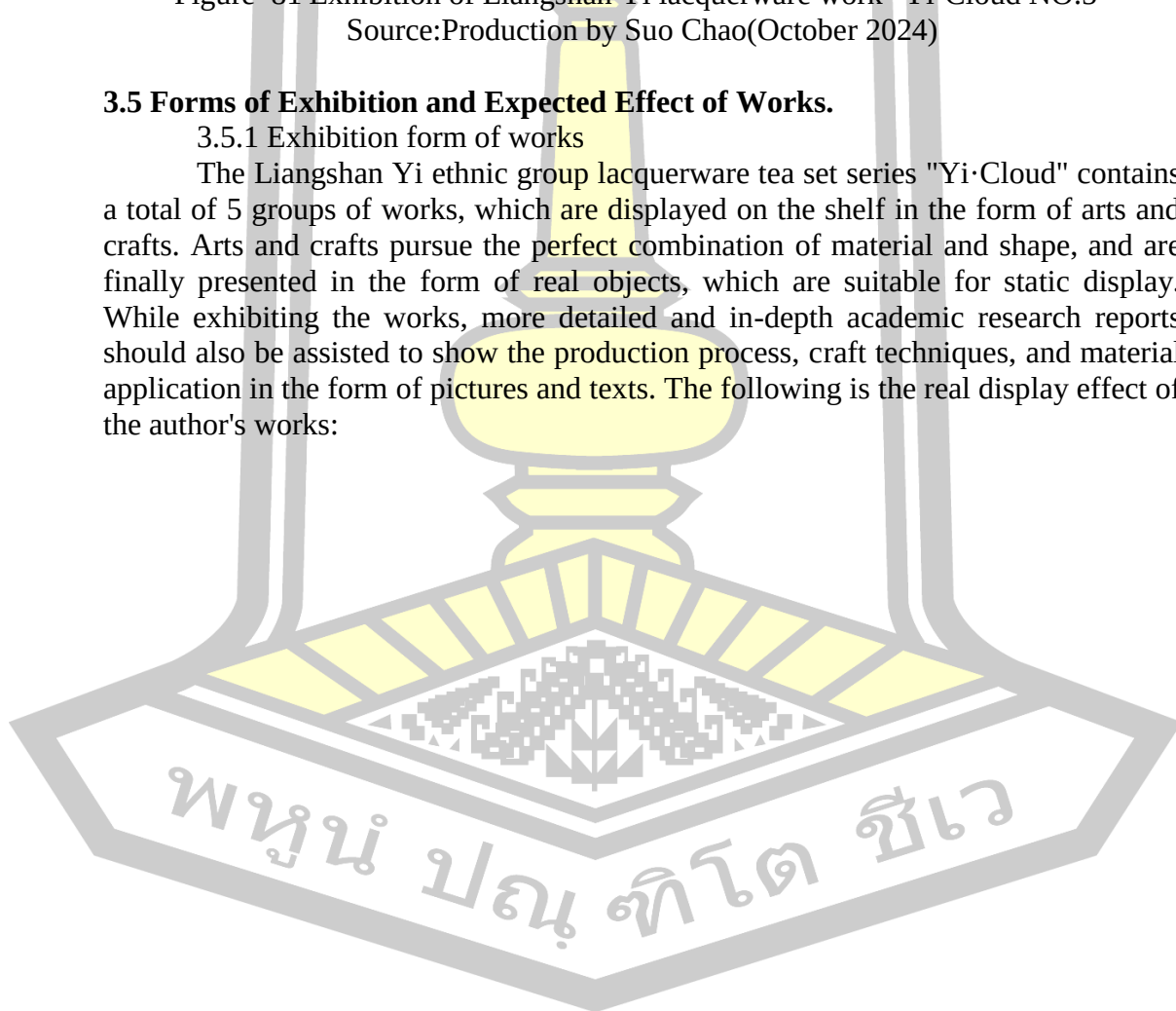












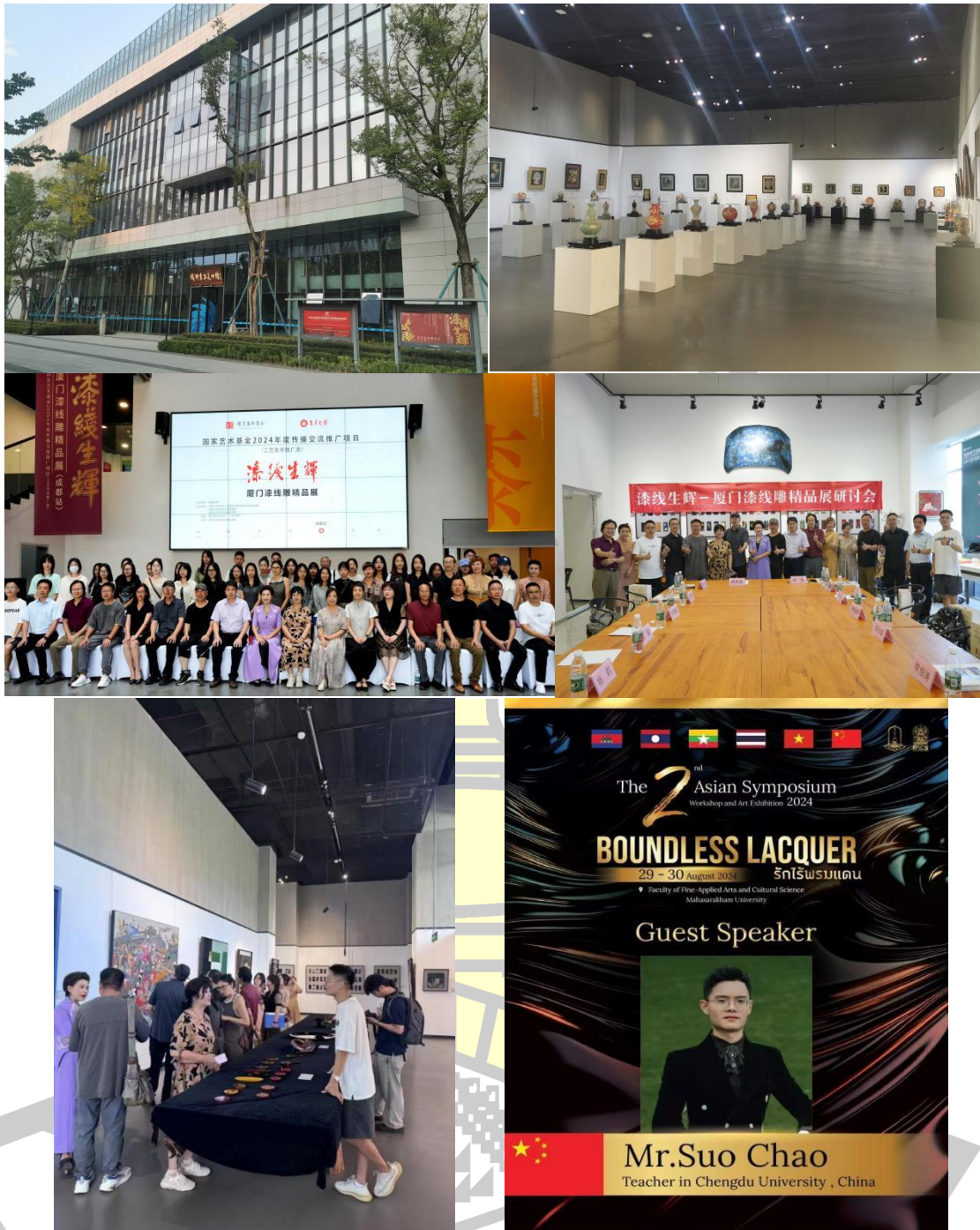
Figure 82 Exhibition of Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series "Yi-Cloud"  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

### 3.5.2 Expected results of the work

The author is a young artist who has been engaged in theoretical research and creation of lacquer art for a long time. The value of an artwork is reflected in its ability to be selected for professional art exhibitions and win awards. The work is exhibited in professional art galleries and museums in the form of arts and crafts, reflecting the value of the work itself.

The Liangshan Yi lacquer tea set series "Yi Cloud" has achieved remarkable results in the previous exhibitions. It won the "Bronze Award" in the second Hong Kong Youth Art Awards in July 2024; it was selected into the Sichuan Art Museum in September 2024. Jointly guided by the provincial literary and art circles, the "Wonderful Lacquer Art Exhibition" sponsored by the Sichuan Moruo Art Academy and the Sichuan Folk Literature and Art Association; selected by the Chengdu Municipal Committee of the China Zhi Gong Party and the China-ASEAN Arts College of Chengdu University "Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Political Consultative Conference" organized by the Art Photography Exhibition. Selected for the 2024 Chengdu University Traditional Crafts Communication and Exchange Activities.







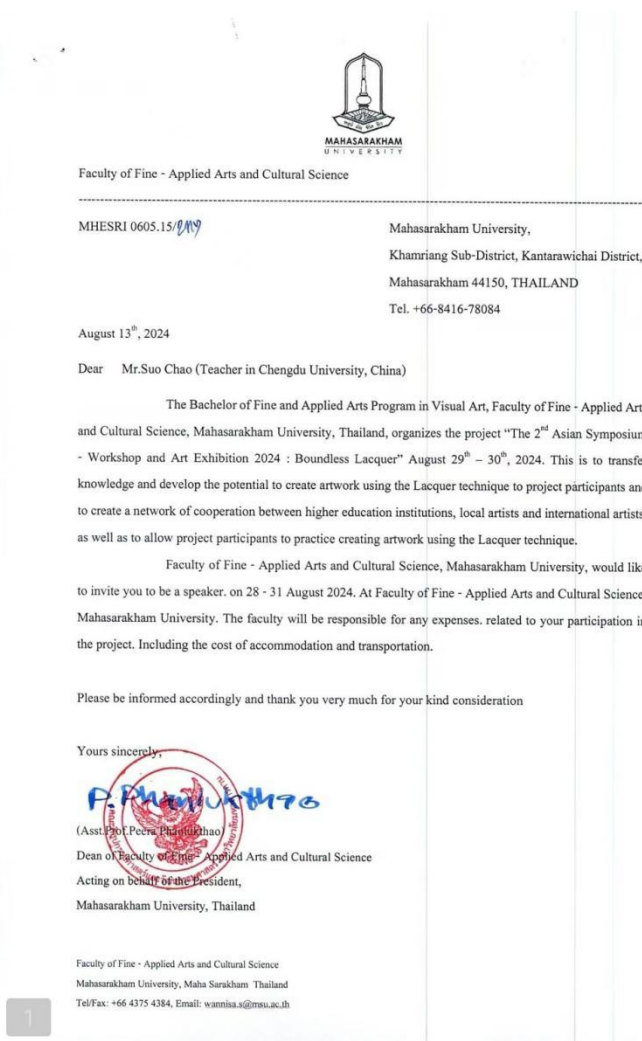


Figure 83 The Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series "Yi·Cloud" has achieved results

Source: Photographed by Suo Chao (October 2024)

### Conclusion:

This chapter explores the profound impact of China's traditional craft revitalization strategy on traditional crafts including Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the perspective of national policies. Through multiple important dimensions such as design concepts, modeling and pattern innovation, brand culture construction, cultural symbol continuation, and teaching practice integration, it elaborates on the innovative path of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and introduces modern design elements to give it new contemporary connotations and forms of expression.

Based on the above research, the author has actively explored and tried on the road of inheritance and innovation of traditional crafts. Taking Liangshan Yi traditional lacquerware as the research object, through the analysis of contemporary art creation practice cases, its cultural elements are refined, decomposed, abstracted, and reorganized, and a series of art works are created by using contemporary art creation methods to carry out creative new designs. These works show in detail the specific process of Liangshan Yi lacquerware's modernization transformation and explore the harmonious coexistence of traditional culture and modern aesthetics. On the basis of following the Yi aesthetic principles, the application of elements such as shape, function, and material in the role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware is fully considered, so that traditional lacquer art can return to the lives of the public.

Finally, a series of strategic suggestions were put forward for the future development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, aiming to further promote its innovative development, creatively transform excellent traditional crafts, promote the transformation of cultural value into economic value, and make it a living cultural heritage with positive significance for social development.



## Chapter V

### Summary and conclusion recommendations

#### Part I: Research Summary

The title of this study is Liangshan Yi lacquerware: application of material culture and cultural identity in the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts. The study adopts a qualitative research method. During the research process, data collection is completed through various methods such as literature research, field investigation and case analysis. The study focuses on Liangshan Yi lacquerware, systematically combs the cultural background, historical context and development status of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, deeply discusses the social causes of Yi lacquerware, and analyzes the problems and challenges it faces in the development process. Based on the theoretical framework of material culture and cultural identity, the material cultural attributes and spiritual cultural attributes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as well as the relationship between lacquerware and people and society, are deeply explored, and the significance of lacquerware as a symbol of Yi culture and identity is explained. Through the fusion of concepts, it can provide accurate artistic elements and cultural connotations for subsequent creations, which is helpful for the construction of creative ideas, the extraction of cultural symbols and the expression of painting language. The diverse application possibilities of Liangshan lacquerware were explored, and the foundation for innovative design was laid. The study concluded that it is necessary to create new designs in the context of the revitalization of Chinese traditional crafts, which not only helps to protect and inherit this traditional craft, but also provides useful inspiration and reference for the protection and development of other similar traditional crafts.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. To study the historical and cultural background of Liangshan Yi and the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware

This chapter introduces the cultural background, historical context and current development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, discusses in depth the social causes of Yi lacquerware, and analyzes the problems and challenges it faces in the process of development. Chinese lacquer culture is extensive and profound, with a long history of more than 8,000 years. Whether as an intangible cultural heritage or a tangible cultural heritage, it carries extremely important cultural and artistic values. Lacquerware played an important role in ancient times and had strong religious and ritual significance. These utensils pioneered the Chinese lacquer craft and laid the foundation for the subsequent development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware.

As an important part of Chinese lacquer art, Liangshan Yi lacquerware has gone through thousands of years of development, from prehistoric period, Ming and Qing Dynasty, Song Dynasty, after the founding of New China to the present. Liangshan Yi lacquerware not only reflects the unique cultural connotation, concept belief, multi-level use needs and aesthetic emotions of the Yi people for a long time, but also constructs a rich and profound emotional expression system and cultural identity. In the study of the entire Yi culture, lacquerware occupies an extremely important position and is regarded as a microcosm of the Yi history and culture,

showing the profound cultural heritage and unique charm of the nation. Therefore, LiangshaThrough the study of concepts, we can conclude that as a specific form of material culture, the study of Liangshan Yi lacquerware should not be limited to the object itself, but should also focus on the unique philosophy, religion, aesthetic concepts and natural views of the Yi people behind it to express a deeper meaning. The integration of the above concepts can help us understand the production process, artistic characteristics and cultural expression of Liangshan Yi lacquerware more deeply. Combined with the understanding and development of researchers, the creative elements can be extracted more accurately, providing strong support and inspiration for the creation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in subsequent chapters.n Yi lacquerware has important artistic research value and lays an important foundation for the research in subsequent chapters.

2.To study and analyze the Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the dimension of material culture and cultural identity

This chapter analyzes and studies Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the perspective of material culture and cultural identity. From the perspective of material culture, it deeply analyzes the material and spiritual cultural attributes of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, studies its production process, patterns and colors, as well as its rich uses and cultural symbolic meanings in the lives of the Yi people. From the perspective of cultural identity, it analyzes the key role of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in cultural inheritance and explains how lacquerware has become a cultural symbol and identity symbol of the Yi people.

3.To study and analyze the development and innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of traditional crafts revitalization.

This chapter starts from the perspective of national policy and makes innovative applications of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of China's traditional craft revitalization strategy. It explores the innovative path of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and proposes a development strategy.

Combining the research content and results of the above chapters,the researcher conducted specific creative practice and successfully designed and created the Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series of art works "Yi·Cloud" as the research results of this chapter. At the same time, industry experts were invited to comment on the academic value of the art works to reflect the views and suggestions of this study. The research results spread the cultural identity of Liangshan Yi lacquerware to the outside world through participating in professional art exhibitions, reflecting the social value and cultural value of the art works.This chapter realizes the innovation and transformation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts through the practical case study of contemporary art creation.This 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.

## Part II: Research Discussion

The title of this study is "Liangshan Yi lacquerware: The application of material culture and cultural identity in the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts". Taking Liangshan Yi lacquerware as the research text, the research concepts of material culture and cultural identity are used to explore the evolution of the material culture of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and the cultural connotations and artistic characteristics carried by this unique art form. It also analyzes the many problems and challenges faced by Liangshan Yi lacquerware in the process of development. In addition, this study focuses on how the traditional craft of Liangshan Yi lacquerware can achieve innovation and transformation in the process of modernization and adapt to the needs of the development of the times, thereby providing new perspectives and ideas for the revitalization of traditional crafts. It is concluded that new designs that conform to the context of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts can be created.

First of all, most scholars' research on Liangshan Yi lacquerware focuses on the lacquerware itself, and more on the production process, color and decoration, and historical process. For example, Ma Shan's research "A Brief Analysis of Liangshan Minority Crafts-Yi Lacquerware Inheritance and Innovation"; American scholar Stevan Harrell's research "Yi Lacquerware in the Eyes of an American Anthropologist" uses interviews to record the production process of traditional Yi lacquerware. Their research focuses on introducing the selection of materials, production technology and processes of Yi lacquerware. Wang Yue's research "Analysis of the Current Situation of Yi Lacquerware Culture and Research on Development Paths under the Perspective of Industrial Prosperity" focuses on the analysis of the cultural status of Liangshan Yi lacquerware; Li Siguo's master's thesis of the Central University for Nationalities "Contemporary Inheritance Research on Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Pattern Modeling" also introduces the decorative modeling of lacquerware.

The above studies all explore Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the aspects of decoration, color, craftsmanship, historical process, etc., which are limited to the study of lacquerware itself. However, they ignore the profound relationship between Liangshan Yi lacquerware and people and society, lack the combination of academic concepts such as material culture and cultural identity, and make a profound analysis of the cultural connotation formed behind Liangshan Yi lacquerware. Through the perspective of anthropology and combined with academic concepts, we can have a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between lacquerware and people and society, as well as the multiple roles and meanings of lacquerware in Yi society. Secondly, most of the current research on the innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware at home and abroad focuses on constructive opinions at the purely theoretical level. There are a few practical applications that focus on product design, which are only the extraction of patterns and colors and their conversion and application on other materials. There is a lack of innovative application research on Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the level of the ontological language of lacquer art. For example, Yan Weina's research, "The Development Dilemma of Yi Lacquerware and Innovative Countermeasures in Teaching"; Hong Junmei's research, "Research on the Traditional Lacquerware Language of Liangshan Yi and Its Application in

Modern Product Design"; Sun Yuanzhi's "Research on Digital Innovation and Communication of Yi Lacquerware Painting Skills", etc. In the process of studying Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the author used academic concepts such as material culture and cultural identity, and based on the research of predecessors, was able to fill the academic gap in this area.

Secondly, most of the current research on the innovative application of Liangshan Yi lacquerware at home and abroad focuses on constructive opinions at the purely theoretical level. There are a few practical applications that focus on product design, which are only the extraction of patterns and colors and their conversion and application on other materials. There is a lack of innovative application research on Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the level of the ontological language of lacquer art. For example, Yan Weina's research, "The Development Dilemma of Yi Lacquerware and Innovative Countermeasures in Teaching"; Hong Junmei's research, "Research on the Traditional Lacquerware Language of Liangshan Yi and Its Application in Modern Product Design"; Sun Yuanzhi's "Research on Digital Innovation and Communication of Yi Lacquerware Painting Skills", etc.

By combing the cultural background, historical context and development status of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, the author explored more possibilities of Liangshan Yi lacquerware in practical application and carried out specific creative practice. Based on the background of the revitalization of traditional Chinese crafts, using the expression of contemporary art, combined with the current aesthetic needs, and integrating the creation methods of modern plastic arts, we can create simple, fashionable and lacquer art works. Such attempts not only make traditional crafts more in line with the aesthetic trends of modern society, expand the dissemination channels of Yi lacquerware culture and art, but also open up new paths for the future development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and provide more diversified development possibilities. Help the ethnic minority to build their own identity through cultural affiliation and values, and show their unique nationality to the outside world.

After the creation of the works, experts will comment on the academic value of the works as a supplement to the views of this research and creation. The creation of the "Yi·Cloud" Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series has received support from three experts:

(1) Yin Liping (Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts, Master of Chinese Arts and Crafts Industry, National Representative Inheritor of "Chengdu Lacquer Art", Art Design Director of Chengdu Lacquerware Craft Factory)

(2) Yang Bo (Member of the Chinese Artists Association, Director of Chengdu Lacquer Painting Art Committee, Professor of the School of Fine Arts and Design of Chengdu University)

(3) Li Haolei (Yi name: Anie Amulifu)  
Inheritor of leather lacquerware in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture.

Professor Yin Liping said "In the cultural inheritance of the new era, the inheritance of traditional culture is not only about the continuation of cultural traditions, but also about the inherent cohesion and centripetal force of culture. Liangshan Yi lacquerware is an important heritage of Yi traditional culture, but with the impact of foreign culture and the change of people's aesthetic concepts, the inheritance and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware has been greatly threatened. This is not only the dilemma faced by Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also

the dilemma faced by Chengdu lacquerware. The same question. Attaching importance to lacquerware culture and contributing to the inheritance and innovation of Chinese lacquer art is not only the mission of our older generation of craftsmen, but I am also very pleased to see young people participating in it. Young artist Suo Chao has very high professional qualities. In recent years, Suo Chao's works can also be seen in various exhibitions. His works are very personal. In the series of art "Yi Clouds", he cleverly innovated the traditional Yi lacquerware, using the artistic techniques of decomposition and reorganization to give the works more decorative interest. In terms of design, this group of works breaks the stereotypes left by traditional Liangshan Yi lacquerware, and reinterprets the classic elements in a novel and creative way, which makes the audience shine. By integrating the inspiration sources from different cultural backgrounds, these works show the exploration spirit of the younger generation of artists for the balance between innovation and tradition and their infinite possibilities in artistic creation. In terms of decoration, he did not simply copy the existing patterns, but carefully refined, simplified and reorganized them, so that the final effect not only retains the national characteristics but also retains the modern sense. This treatment method well reflects the harmonious coexistence between tradition and modernity, and is in line with the value orientation of today's society for both cultural inheritance and innovative development. With the integration of a group of young lacquer artists like Mr. Suo Chao, on the road of inheriting and innovating Liangshan Yi lacquerware, I believe that the cause of lacquerware cultural protection and development will surely flourish. "

Professor Yang Bo said: "Liangshan Yi lacquerware is an important intangible cultural resource. In order to inherit and develop this traditional craft, it requires reasonable layout and planning, and the use of development and sustainable vision to design and create. China's lacquer culture has a history of more than 8,000 years, and lacquer, as a special medium, has played its unique role from ancient times to the present. Liangshan Yi lacquerware, as an important symbol of Yi culture, is also a symbol of identity. In recent years, traditional crafts have been a hot topic of concern in the academic community. Many research topics have also emerged on the inheritance and protection of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but most of them focus on constructive opinions at the theoretical level. In contrast, young artist Suo Chao explored the development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware from the perspective of artistic practice. The essence of art lies in constant exploration and innovation, while also meeting the aesthetic needs of contemporary people. Through a series of creative works, Suo Chao not only brought a refreshing experience to the audience, but also reinterpreted the charm of Liangshan Yi lacquerware from a new perspective, and tried to use the concept of modern national culture to build a new development model for Yi lacquerware culture. The key to the development of Chinese lacquer art lies in the proper balance between integrity and innovation. This balance is not only an inevitable requirement for the development of national culture, but also the core of the prosperity and development of Liangshan Yi lacquerware art. In the diverse trends of contemporary art, we should avoid blindly pursuing innovation and ignoring the unique language characteristics and profound national cultural connotations of lacquer art; similarly, we should not simply stick to traditional craftsmanship and over-emphasize craftsmanship at the expense of artistic expression. Only by combining

inheritance and innovation can the Liangshan Yi lacquerware art be given new vitality and vigor. "

Li Haolei, the inheritor of Liangshan Yi leather lacquerware, said: "Teacher Suo Chao is our classmate in the 2018 National Art Fund Project Liangshan Yi Lacquerware Inheritance and Innovation Talent Training Project. We are connected because of lacquer and are fortunate to be able to study together. After so many years, I didn't expect that he is still studying our Liangshan Yi lacquerware. I am a genuine Liangshan Yi and the inheritor of Yi leather lacquer bowls. I was also very surprised to see this series of his works. Suo Chao's works are great! Combining the patterns of Yi lacquerware with modern aesthetics, creating works that conform to modern aesthetics, simple but distinctive, especially combining Yi characters with lacquer art is a very good creative idea. It would be even better if it could be mass-produced and operated, so that such works can be used by the people and culture can be spread and inherited in life!"

Experts gave comprehensive scores to the works in terms of theme, innovation, artistic language, craftsmanship and techniques of the "Yi-Cloud" Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series. The results are shown in the table below:

| Artwork Scoring Form                        |                                                                                                                 |       |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Rating Indicators                           | Scoring Requirements                                                                                            | Point |
| Theme<br>(10 points)                        | It must be consistent with the theme, have prominent central content, and be an original work of the individual | 8     |
| Innovation<br>(10 points)                   | The works must have a certain sense of innovation and artistic expression                                       | 9     |
| Artistic Language<br>(10 points)            | Artistic language must be novel and personalized, and in line with Yi elements                                  | 8     |
| Craftsmanship and techniques<br>(10 points) | Reasonable composition, vivid image, bright colors and smooth lines                                             | 9     |
| Overall effect (10 points)                  | Beautiful, artistic and craftsmanship, and able to reflect cultural identity                                    | 8     |

Table 2 Artwork Scoring Form  
Source: Production by Suo Chao (October 2024)

After discussion and evaluation, the experts summarized their suggestions and opinions on various aspects as follows: The "Yi·Cloud" Liangshan Yi lacquerware tea set series provides a useful model for the sustainable development of traditional crafts in the contemporary era. In the creative process, the artist was able to accurately extract the cultural elements of Liangshan Yi lacquerware and cleverly transform them into modern art language, so that the works can achieve the coordinated development of artistry and craftsmanship on the basis of continuing the inherent artistic characteristics and cultural connotations of Yi lacquerware, and achieve fruitful innovative practices. This series of works not only shows the harmonious coexistence between tradition and contemporary, but also conforms to the value orientation of today's society that attaches equal importance to cultural inheritance and innovative development. It is suggested that the creation of this subject can be continued and further put into the market.

### **Part III: Research Suggestions**

(1) This study not only has important academic value for the study of the Liangshan Yi ethnic minority in China and the study of the Liangshan Yi lacquerware culture, but also can be used as a supplement to the research materials related to the traditional Chinese craft culture. In addition, the results of this study can also be used to supplement teaching and enrich the research content of the Liangshan Yi. During the field investigation and data collection process, the researchers took a large number of photos at the research site as supporting materials for the research. The pictures and photos used are favorable evidence for exploring the cultural elements contained in traditional crafts for innovative development and application. It can provide artists, collectors, and relevant researchers in the academic community with more reasonable research directions and data supplements. It is recommended that other researchers can use the graphic materials of this study as a reference. At the same time, the methods and contents of this study can be used as a model for the study of traditional Chinese crafts. It is recommended that other researchers can use it as a reference to further promote academic research in this field.

(2) In the study of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, we should not just stop at the exploration of its surface features. Instead, we should link the lacquerware itself with the close relationship between the Liangshan Yi people and their community groups, and understand this relationship at a deeper level. It is recommended that other researchers can adopt new perspectives and methods, combine academic concepts from an anthropological perspective, and explore the relationship between Liangshan Yi lacquerware and people and society in more depth, so as to help build and strengthen the cultural identity of the Liangshan Yi people. Such research can not only enrich our understanding of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also enhance the cultural confidence of this ethnic minority and promote the inheritance and development of its culture.

(3) When inheriting and protecting the traditional craft of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, it is not enough to simply reproduce it. This craft not only needs to be rescued and inherited, but also needs to be combined with the background of the times, balance the relationship between tradition and innovation, and focus on the combination of "technicality" and "artisticity". We should not be too adherent to

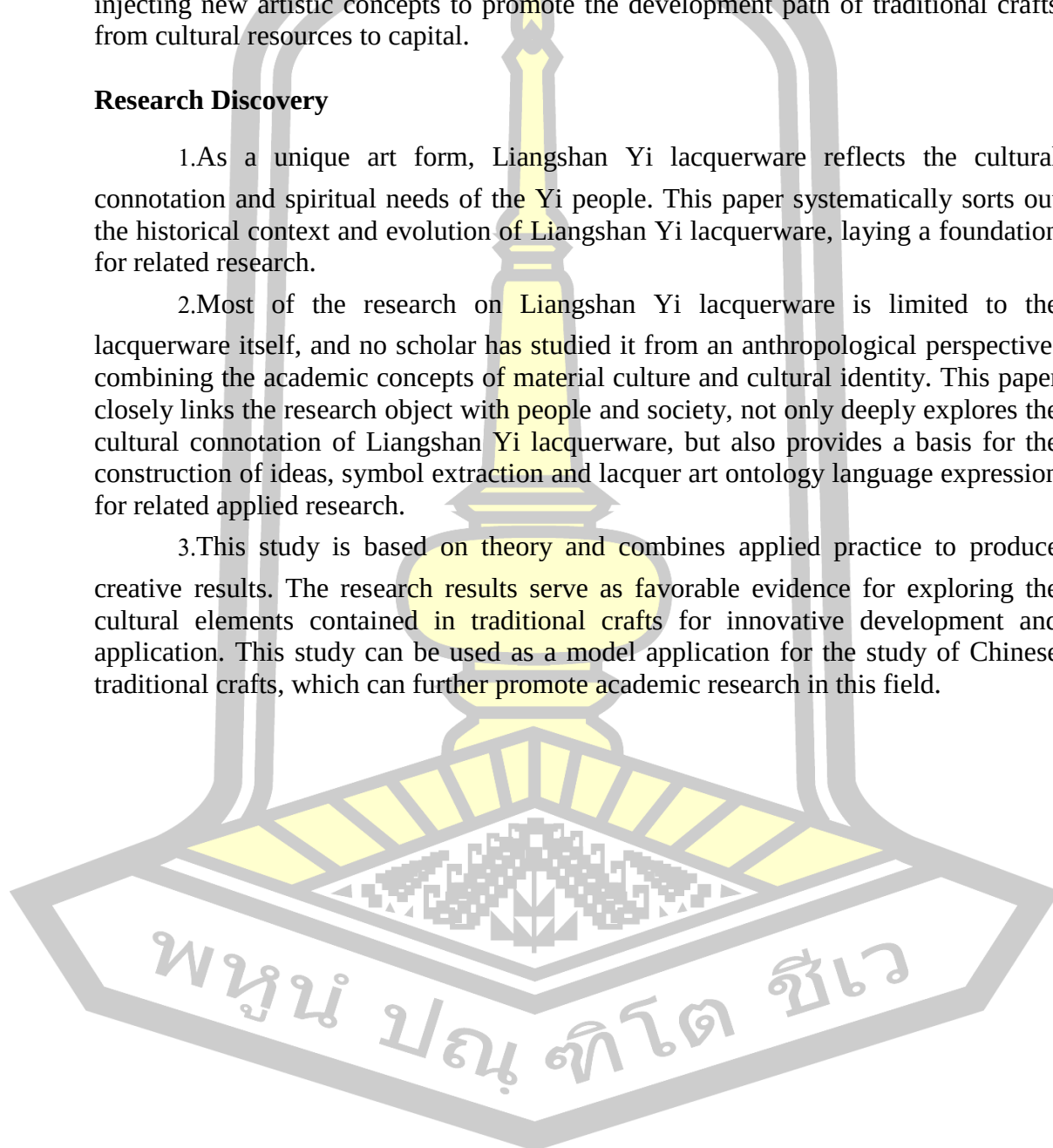
tradition and only focus on technicality while ignoring its artistry, nor should we pursue novelty and only focus on artistry while abandoning the unique cultural connotation and artistic characteristics of the Liangshan Yi people. It is recommended that other researchers should effectively inherit and develop Liangshan Yi lacquerware and expand the innovative path of Liangshan Yi lacquerware. In the process of inheriting and protecting Liangshan Yi lacquerware, we should focus on maintaining its original artistic characteristics and cultural connotations, while also injecting new artistic concepts to promote the development path of traditional crafts from cultural resources to capital.

### **Research Discovery**

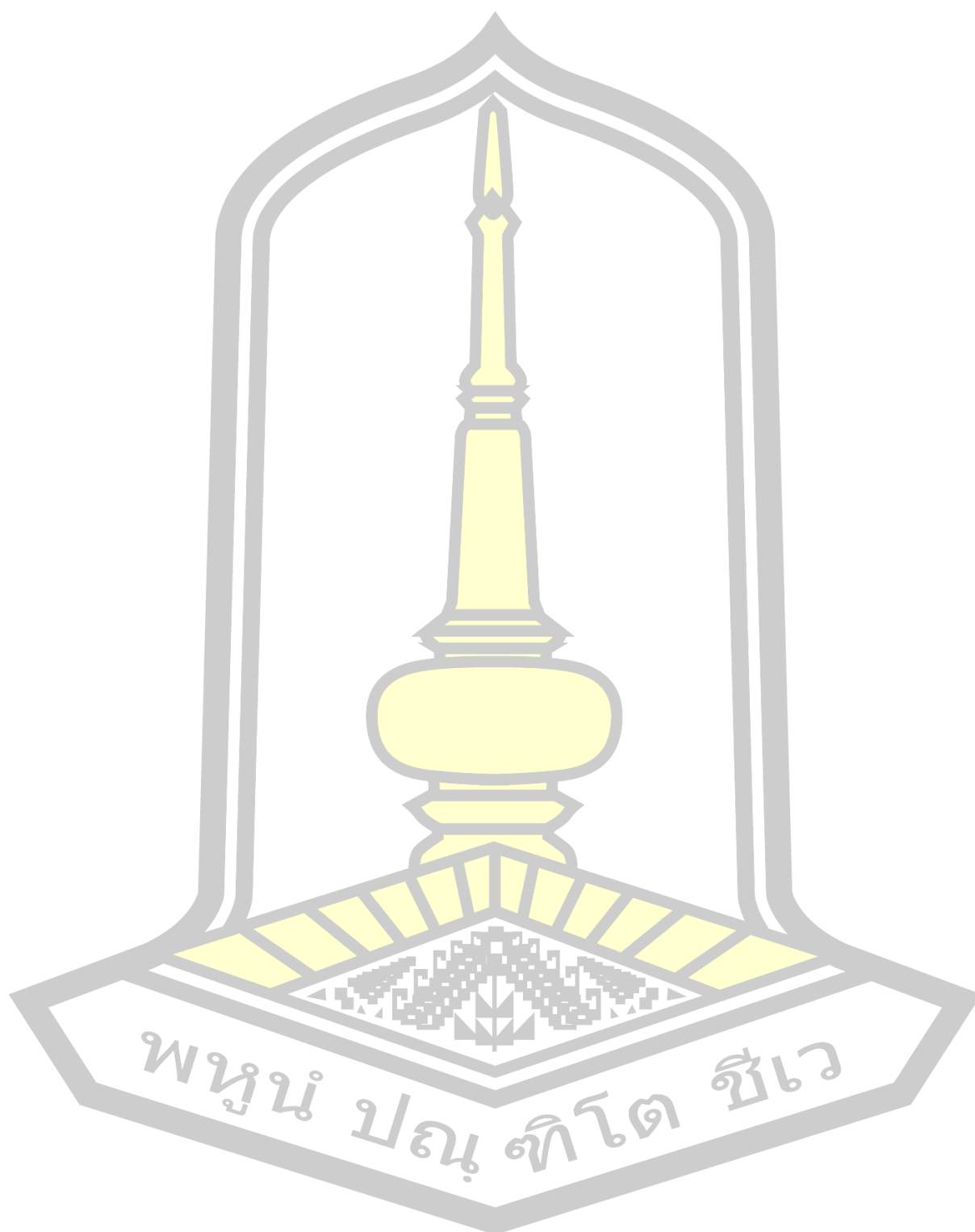
1.As a unique art form, Liangshan Yi lacquerware reflects the cultural connotation and spiritual needs of the Yi people. This paper systematically sorts out the historical context and evolution of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, laying a foundation for related research.

2.Most of the research on Liangshan Yi lacquerware is limited to the lacquerware itself, and no scholar has studied it from an anthropological perspective, combining the academic concepts of material culture and cultural identity. This paper closely links the research object with people and society, not only deeply explores the cultural connotation of Liangshan Yi lacquerware, but also provides a basis for the construction of ideas, symbol extraction and lacquer art ontology language expression for related applied research.

3.This study is based on theory and combines applied practice to produce creative results. The research results serve as favorable evidence for exploring the cultural elements contained in traditional crafts for innovative development and application. This study can be used as a model application for the study of Chinese traditional crafts, which can further promote academic research in this field.



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|                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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