

Cultural memory and transmission of Hainan Li brocade under rural revitalization

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ABSTRACT

Li brocade is a significant intangible cultural heritage of the Li ethnic group in Hainan, carrying rich historical memory, ethnic identity, and social-cultural value. Under the context of rural revitalization, this study systematically analyzes the construction mechanisms of cultural memory, transmission practices, and the opportunities and challenges facing Li brocade. Employing literature review, field investigation, and case study methods, the research conducted in-depth examinations of Li ethnic communities, brocade workshops, and cultural festivals. The study finds that Li brocade's cultural memory is preserved mainly through intergenerational inheritance, community activities, ritualized display, and symbolic patterns. Modern educational systems, digital technologies, and the tourism industry provide new pathways for its transmission. However, the aging of inheritors, insufficient youth participation, and commercialization pressures remain key challenges. The study proposes integrated strategies including multi-level transmission systems, industrial integration and innovation, youth engagement, and policy support, providing theoretical and practical guidance for the sustainable development of Li brocade.

Keywords: Li brocade, cultural memory, cultural transmission, rural revitalization, intangible cultural heritage.

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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of China's rural revitalization strategy has underscored the importance of cultural revitalization as a critical component of sustainable rural development (Xi Jinping, 2018). While culture serves as both a driving force for rural economic growth and a key factor in ethnic identity and social cohesion, its preservation and transmission face challenges in the modern era. Hainan Li brocade, a prominent intangible cultural heritage of the Li ethnic group, is emblematic of these challenges. This textile tradition, known for its unique weaving techniques, rich symbolic patterns, and deep historical significance, plays a vital role in preserving rural cultural heritage and advancing cultural revitalization efforts in Hainan.

Historically, Li brocade has existed for centuries, with its patterns and colors embodying the aesthetic preferences, religious beliefs, social norms, and practical knowledge of the Li people (Chen, 2023; Wang, 2021). However, contemporary forces such as modernization and commercialization have introduced significant challenges

to the transmission of Li brocade, particularly in terms of the aging of its inheritors, limited youth participation, and the erosion of traditional practices (Liu, 2018). Additionally, the rapid growth of tourism and digital media has created new opportunities and pressures for the preservation and innovation of this traditional craft.

Internationally, the protection and transmission of intangible cultural heritage has become a pressing issue. UNESCO (2003) highlights the global concern surrounding the sustainability of such heritage practices. In comparison with other ethnic weaving traditions, such as Japan's Nishijin weaving and India's Patola textiles, Hainan Li brocade demonstrates potential for further growth, particularly through policy support, community involvement, and industrial application. However, existing scholarship on Li brocade has been limited in its scope, particularly in integrating theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches for a comprehensive study of its cultural memory and transmission mechanisms. While

there are isolated studies on its history, techniques, and symbolism, the gap remains in understanding how these elements can be preserved, transmitted, and innovated under the broader context of rural revitalization.

This study aims to fill this gap by systematically exploring the construction and transmission of cultural memory related to Li brocade, particularly under the framework of rural revitalization. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: How is the cultural memory of Li brocade formed and maintained across historical, social, and daily life contexts? What are the roles, advantages, and limitations of modern education, digital technologies, and tourism in the transmission of Li brocade? How can a sustainable cultural transmission system be developed that integrates policy, industry, and social participation?

In contrast to previous studies that primarily focus on individual aspects of Li brocade, this research adopts a combination of literature review, field investigation, and case study methods to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the heritage transmission of Li brocade. This approach positions the current research as a valuable contribution by integrating theoretical insights and practical guidance, addressing both the cultural preservation and industrial development aspects within the rural revitalization strategy. The study's comparative dimension—drawing on international experiences in heritage protection—will be further developed through the analysis of policy support, community engagement, and industrial practices, offering a clearer delineation of how these factors can be applied to the case of Hainan Li brocade.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, research on Li brocade and intangible cultural heritage has developed across multiple dimensions. Existing studies mainly focus on three aspects: first, the history and technical characteristics of Li brocade; second, cultural memory theory and mechanisms of heritage transmission; third, the protection and industrialization of intangible heritage under rural revitalization.

As a unique weaving craft of the Li ethnic group in Hainan, Li brocade exhibits highly systematic techniques and patterns. Studies indicate that Li brocade's motifs are not only aesthetically pleasing but also hold social functions and cultural symbolic values, such as those related to marriage, religious rituals, and social hierarchy (Chen, 2023; Wang, 2021). The design of colors and patterns follows traditional conventions, reflecting the Li people's aesthetic preferences and ethnic identity while also demonstrating continuity and innovation potential in craftsmanship. Compared with other ethnic textiles, such as Yi brocade in Yunnan or Zhuang brocade in Guangxi, Li brocade exhibits richer integration of color schemes and

socio-cultural symbolism.

Cultural memory theory emphasizes the role of collective memory in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage (Liu, 2018). Cultural memory can be maintained across generations through mechanisms of symbolization, ritualization, and education. Mother-daughter inheritance, community festivals, and religious ceremonies serve as important carriers of Li brocade's cultural memory. Recently, scholars have proposed integrating digital technologies with cultural memory, using digital archives, virtual exhibitions, and short video platforms to broaden dissemination and enhance recognition among younger generations (Zhou, 2016).

Under the rural revitalization context, the protection of intangible cultural heritage is closely linked with industrial development. Zhao (2019) highlights that creative product development, tourism experiences, and educational training can enhance the economic value of heritage while promoting sustainable transmission. Zhang (2020) emphasizes that modern dissemination of intangible heritage requires balancing policy support, market mechanisms, and community participation to prevent the commercialization of cultural symbols from eroding cultural connotations.

Moreover, international studies provide useful reference experiences. UNESCO (2003) emphasizes that sustainable protection of intangible heritage requires community involvement, educational systems, and policy safeguards. The industrialization and education model of Japan's Nishijin weaving and the community cooperation mechanism of India's Patola textiles offer lessons for Li brocade transmission. These international experiences indicate that multi-level, multi-stakeholder inheritance systems are crucial for effective intangible heritage protection.

In summary, although domestic and international studies on heritage protection and cultural memory are abundant, systematic analyses of Li brocade under the rural revitalization context remain limited. Current research lacks an integrated analysis of policy, industry, education, digitalization, and social participation. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive study combining literature review, field investigation, and case analysis to examine the formation, transmission, and innovation pathways of Li brocade's cultural memory, providing insights for both theory and practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a multi-method approach combining literature review, field investigation, and case study methods to systematically explore the construction and transmission mechanisms of Li brocade's cultural memory within the context of rural revitalization. The research subjects include Li ethnic communities, brocade workshops, cultural festival activities, as well as relevant

educational institutions and policy bodies. This comprehensive approach enables a nuanced understanding of the inheritance of Li brocade from historical, social, and practical perspectives.

First, a literature review was conducted to examine the historical development, technical characteristics, cultural symbolism, and policy background of Li brocade. This involved collecting academic papers, government policy documents, and international case studies on Li brocade and other ethnic textiles (Chen, 2023; Wang, 2021; UNESCO, 2003). Content analysis and comparative study of these documents helped shape the research framework and identify key areas for field investigation.

Second, a field investigation was carried out in the Li ethnic communities in Changjiang, Lingao, and Baisha. A combination of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and surveys was employed. The interviewees included:

- Inheritors and workshop owners to explore skill transmission, production processes, and market influences;
- Community residents and festival participants to understand cultural identity, usage patterns, and participation willingness;
- Educational and policy personnel to assess the implementation and challenges of educational programs and policy support.

Over 10 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 45 and 90 min, covering aspects such as the history, techniques, cultural symbolism, transmission modes, and industrial development of Li brocade. Participant observation documented workshop weaving processes, community festival activities, and school curriculum displays, supplemented by photographs and notes. Surveys were used to quantify youth awareness, interest, and participation, offering valuable data for the quantitative analysis.

Finally, case studies were selected for an in-depth analysis of representative brocade workshops, community events, and digital projects. Examples include family workshops in Changjiang Li Brocade Village, the Baisha Li Brocade Cultural Festival, and online virtual exhibitions. Case analysis integrated both qualitative and quantitative data, using content analysis, coding, and comparative analysis to derive systematic conclusions.

For data analysis, qualitative data were analyzed thematically and coded to identify core concepts and patterns. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and frequency analysis to validate the generality and representativeness of the interview and observation results. To ensure scientific rigor and ethical compliance, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and both anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. The research also respected local cultural practices throughout the process.

In summary, despite the wealth of research on heritage protection and cultural memory in both domestic and international contexts, systematic studies specifically focused on Li brocade within the rural revitalization framework remain limited. Existing studies lack an integrated analysis that encompasses policy, industry, education, digitalization, and social participation. As such, this study fills a critical gap by combining literature review, field investigation, and case analysis to examine the formation, transmission, and innovative pathways of Li brocade's cultural memory. This comprehensive approach provides important insights for both theoretical development and practical applications in the sustainable preservation and transmission of Li brocade.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Formation of cultural memory

Field investigation reveals that the cultural memory of Li brocade is primarily formed through three key mechanisms: intergenerational inheritance, community rituals, and symbolic preservation. The first mechanism, intergenerational inheritance, serves as the most fundamental channel. Skill transmission between mothers and daughters is not limited to weaving techniques but extends to color matching, pattern design, and practical applications. In Changjiang Li Brocade Village, 70% of inheritors reported learning basic techniques from their mothers or grandmothers, gradually mastering complex patterns through daily interactions and hands-on demonstrations.

To provide a clearer picture of respondent characteristics, Table 1 summarizes the demographics of interviewees and their involvement in the transmission process.

Table 1. Demographics of interviewees and their involvement in the transmission process.

Respondent category	Number of participants	Age range	Transmission role
Inheritors	7	45-75	Primary skill bearers
Workshop owners	4	35-60	Skill transmission facilitators
Community participants	8	18-65	Cultural identity bearers

Community rituals and festival activities reinforce collective identity and serve as a second mechanism for cultural memory transmission. During the Baisha Li Brocade Cultural Festival, villagers engage in traditional wedding ceremonies, ritual performances, and group weaving competitions. These events not only transmit skills but also embed cultural memory into the fabric of social interactions. Young participants, in particular, deepen their understanding of Li brocade by learning about historical stories, symbolic meanings, and production processes.

Symbolic preservation acts as the third mechanism, stabilizing cultural memory. Li brocade patterns carry both aesthetic value and significant historical, religious, and social meanings. For example, the "Phoenix pattern" symbolizes luck and prosperity, while the "Dragonfly pattern" reflects the natural environment and daily life. These symbolic elements are carefully explained and displayed in family workshops and educational courses, ensuring the continuity of cultural memory across generations.

Representative quotations from interviewees illustrate these findings:

Inheritor, Changjiang Village: "I learned everything from my grandmother, not just the weaving, but also the stories behind each pattern."

Workshop Owner, Baisha: "The festival is not just about making brocade; it's about keeping our culture alive for the next generation."

Transmission practices

Families and communities remain core spaces for transmission, but modernization has diversified inheritance methods. Educational systems have increasingly incorporated Li brocade culture into school curricula. For example, Changjiang Middle School offers a "Li Brocade Cultural Experience" course where students learn techniques through hands-on practice and historical study. This program, which integrates practical and historical learning, has contributed to greater youth

engagement.

Digital technologies, including short videos, online exhibitions, and virtual museums, have expanded dissemination efforts, particularly attracting younger audiences. Data analysis from surveys indicates that 65% of individuals aged 18 to 30 have encountered Li brocade culture via social media platforms. This suggests that digital dissemination has become an effective tool for cultural transmission.

For example, a respondent noted:

Festival Participant, Baisha: "I learned about the brocade patterns and their meanings through short videos. It's more accessible for us young people."

The tourism industry provides substantial economic support for the transmission of Li brocade. The Baisha Cultural Festival and Li brocade experience workshops attract large numbers of visitors, whose participation and purchases further promote skill inheritance. However, commercialization introduces risks of cultural simplification. Some commercial patterns oversimplify the historical and cultural depth of Li brocade in favor of producing fast, cheap souvenirs. This tension between commercialization and cultural preservation remains a critical issue for the sustainable development of Li brocade.

Opportunities and challenges

Policy support and industrialization opportunities of intangible cultural heritage

The rural revitalization strategy emphasizes the importance of cultural revitalization in rural development. Recent government initiatives, such as the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage" and provincial measures in Hainan, have created a supportive policy framework for Li brocade. These policies have facilitated the improvement of the inheritance system, offering financial subsidies and social recognition to national and provincial-level inheritors.

Table 2. Policy mechanisms supporting Li brocade's transmission.

Policy type	Description	Impact
National-level protection	Legal framework for intangible cultural heritage preservation	Provides financial and social support
Provincial-level measures	Local initiatives to promote Li brocade inheritance and utilization	Encourages industrial integration and economic growth
Cultural heritage integration	Support for the development of cultural and creative industries	Facilitates the market-oriented development of Li brocade

Under policy support, Li brocade has gained a broader development space, transitioning from "protection" to "activation," infusing new dynamics into the rural economy. This industrial integration has made Li brocade a significant cultural resource within the rural revitalization strategy.

Cultural tourism and branding development

With the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port and tourism development, Li brocade has gradually become a cultural symbol of Hainan. Li brocade products are now sold at tourist attractions, folk villages, and museums, where visitors not only purchase products but also engage in the weaving process. This process has contributed to the branding of Li brocade. Some workshops and cooperatives have registered trademarks and launched online marketing campaigns, enhancing market visibility.

Tension between marketization and symbolization

The commercialization of Li brocade has provided opportunities for its development, but has also led to tensions. Market-driven product simplification has resulted in the "symbolization" of Li brocade, where complex, traditional weaving techniques are substituted with mass-produced patterns. This reduces the craftsmanship value and cultural depth of Li brocade, and contributes to "cultural hollowing out." This tension between commercial demands and cultural authenticity must be carefully managed to prevent Li brocade from losing its unique cultural identity.

Dilemma of inheritors and insufficient youth participation

A critical challenge in Li brocade's inheritance is the shortage of inheritors. The long learning cycle and low economic returns have led many young people to pursue urban employment rather than continue the tradition. As a result, the group of inheritors is predominantly made up of middle-aged and elderly women, leading to an issue of "aging" among practitioners. This demographic shift presents challenges for the long-term sustainability of Li brocade's transmission.

Interview excerpts illustrate these concerns:

Inheritor, Changjiang: "I don't want to see the younger generation give up this tradition, but many of them prefer to work in the city."

Workshop Owner, Lingao: "We need young people to learn, but the long hours and low pay don't attract them."

Integrated transmission pathways

Deepening the protection and reconstruction of cultural memory

To ensure the sustainable transmission of Li brocade, it is essential to deepen the protection and reconstruction of cultural memory. Strengthening the construction of oral history and image archives is a priority. Through interviews with inheritors and recordings of the weaving process, a comprehensive database can be created to preserve endangered knowledge.

Moreover, further research into the symbols of Li brocade and their cultural interpretations will ensure the patterns are not reduced to mere decorative motifs but remain deeply connected to the ethnic history and social life.

Constructing a multi-level inheritance education system

Education is crucial for the inheritance of Li brocade. This study proposes a multi-level education model incorporating family, school, and society. Establishing family-based skill centers and community workshops will allow younger generations to engage with Li brocade from an early age. Schools should integrate Li brocade into arts and crafts curricula, while universities should focus on innovation in design and research.

Promoting integration of industries and cultural innovation

Sustainable development of Li brocade requires deep integration with modern industries. This integration should include partnerships with the tourism industry, modern fashion design, and the digital economy. For instance, Li brocade patterns can be applied to contemporary clothing, home furnishings, and accessories, enhancing market competitiveness while preserving traditional aesthetics.

Improving policy mechanisms and social support

A robust policy framework is essential for supporting the transmission of Li brocade. The government should increase subsidies for inheritors and establish a dynamic evaluation system that rewards active participants. Furthermore, cross-sector participation from enterprises, social organizations, and charitable foundations will create a diversified support system for Li brocade.

Inspiring youth participation and creativity

Attracting young people is vital for the future of Li brocade.

Creative transformation, such as integrating Li brocade with modern fashion and digital art, will help bridge the generation gap. Support for youth entrepreneurship and involvement in international exchanges will ensure Li brocade's continued relevance and appeal.

CONCLUSION

This study systematically analyzes the construction and transmission mechanisms of the cultural memory of Hainan Li brocade in the context of rural revitalization. The findings indicate that Li brocade's cultural memory is primarily formed through intergenerational inheritance, community rituals, and symbolic preservation, while educational systems, digital technologies, and cultural industries provide new pathways for its transmission. Field investigations show that families and communities remain the core transmission spaces, whereas school education, tourism experiences, and digital media platforms effectively engage younger generations. However, the aging of inheritors, insufficient youth participation, and commercialization pressures remain key challenges.

The study further proposes that establishing a multi-level transmission system is essential for sustainable development. This system includes:

Family and community inheritance: Strengthening mother-daughter and household workshop skill transfer, and encouraging community festivals and ritualized demonstrations.

Institutionalized education: Incorporating Li brocade cultural experiences into school curricula to foster historical awareness and skill interest among students.

Industrial integration and innovation: Expanding economic value through creative products, tourism experiences, and online sales to stimulate market vitality.

Digital dissemination: Creating digital archives, virtual exhibitions, and short video promotions to enhance youth engagement.

Policy and social support: Government provision of funding, training, and publicity, alongside community and enterprise participation to ensure a balance between cultural and economic values.

Moreover, the study emphasizes that cultural memory transmission involves not only skill inheritance but also the preservation of historical, social, and spiritual values. The sustainable development of Li brocade requires balancing protection and innovation, tradition and modernity, and economic and cultural interests. International experiences indicate that multi-level, multi-stakeholder inheritance systems are widely applicable in intangible heritage

protection, offering valuable lessons for Hainan Li brocade.

The academic contributions of this study include:

- Systematically outlining the formation mechanisms and transmission pathways of Li brocade's cultural memory;
- Establishing a five-level transmission framework connecting family, school, community, industry, and digital platforms;
- Providing theoretical and practical references for intangible heritage protection in the context of rural revitalization.

Future research directions include:

Longitudinal studies: Assessing the long-term effects of policy, educational, and industrial measures on inheritance;

Youth engagement mechanisms: Exploring how digital tools, interactive education, and cultural innovation enhance young people's recognition and participation;

International comparative studies: Systematically comparing Li brocade with other ethnic textiles globally to inform international heritage protection.

In conclusion, under the rural revitalization strategy, through scientifically planned inheritance systems, the effective use of modern technologies, and integration with industrial mechanisms, the cultural memory and transmission of Li brocade can achieve sustainable development, thereby supporting the revival of Hainan's local culture and strengthening ethnic identity.

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