

Preservation of Traditional Miao Batik: Safeguarding Cultural Heritage in its Country of Origin

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Abstract

This study explores the preservation of traditional Miao batik, focusing on safeguarding its authenticity in the face of imitation products and incorrect motif reproduction in its country of origin. Using an online questionnaire, data were collected from 178 respondents across Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, regions that are central to Miao batik culture. The questionnaire assessed participants' perceptions of cultural authenticity, knowledge transmission, the prevalence of imitation products, and the effectiveness of legal and policy support in preserving Miao batik. This study recommends several strategies to improve knowledge transmission and prevent imitation products, including formalizing educational programs in schools, developing certification labels for authentic Miao batik, and enhancing legal protections through intellectual property rights and geographical indication (GI) status. The role of local distributors and cultural intermediaries was also highlighted as crucial in promoting authentic Miao batik in both domestic and international markets. This paper also contributes to understanding the current challenges faced in preserving Miao batik and offers practical solutions to ensure its cultural and economic sustainability. Future research could explore the impact of digital platforms on knowledge transmission and consumer behavior toward authentic Miao batik products.

Keywords: Miao Batik, Cultural Heritage, Preservation, Authenticity, Imitation Products

Introduction

The traditional Miao batik is an intricate form of textile art that has been passed down through generations within the Miao ethnic minority in China. This centuries-old craft involves using wax-resist dyeing techniques to create elaborate and symbolic designs on fabric, embodying the rich cultural heritage and identity of the Miao people. However, the art form is facing challenges in the modern era, as industrialization, globalization, and urbanization have led to a decline in the practice of traditional crafts. The younger generation's migration to urban areas and the increasing availability of mass-produced goods have contributed to the diminished relevance and appreciation of Miao batik within its community. As a result, the

preservation of this craft has become an urgent concern for cultural heritage advocates and researchers alike.

Preserving traditional Miao batik in its country of origin requires multifaceted approaches that combine cultural, economic, and technological strategies. Efforts to safeguard this heritage must address both the conservation of traditional techniques and the adaptation of Miao batik to modern contexts, ensuring its continued relevance and survival. This research explores the challenges faced in preserving Miao batik, the existing efforts to protect this unique cultural expression, and the potential pathways for revitalization. By studying the role of artisans, communities, and governmental policies, this research aims to highlight effective strategies for maintaining the integrity of Miao batik while allowing for sustainable innovation and growth.

The increasing commercialization of Miao batik, both domestically and internationally, has led to the widespread production of imitation products that often feature incorrect or simplified motifs. Many mass-produced items do not adhere to the traditional symbolism and meanings inherent in authentic Miao batik designs, leading to a dilution of cultural significance. This misrepresentation erodes the cultural integrity of the art form and confuses consumers about the true essence of Miao batik.

Moreover, Miao batik motifs, which are considered a form of intangible cultural heritage, often lack formal legal protection in their country of origin. This makes it difficult for artisans and communities to prevent unauthorized replication and misuse of their traditional designs. Without a robust intellectual property framework, imitation products can easily enter the market, undermining the value of authentic Miao batik and posing a threat to its long-term preservation.

The erosion of traditional knowledge is compounded by the fact that younger generations in Miao communities are increasingly disconnected from the cultural practices of their ancestors. As fewer individuals learn the intricate processes involved in creating Miao batik and the meanings behind the motifs, the risk of incorrectly reproducing or imitating designs grows. This disconnect not only threatens the craft's authenticity but also opens the door for the spread of incorrect motifs that fail to reflect the true heritage of the Miao people. This paper contributes to the preservation of traditional Miao batik by identifying key challenges related to cultural misrepresentation, intellectual property protection, and the transmission of traditional knowledge. It offers insights into strategies for safeguarding the authenticity of Miao batik motifs and preventing the proliferation of imitations, thereby supporting the continued cultural and economic vitality of this heritage craft.

The three primary research objectives of this study are to: (1) examine the challenges faced in preserving the authenticity of traditional Miao batik, particularly regarding the prevention of imitation motifs and the correct representation of cultural symbols; (2) explore the effectiveness of current legal and cultural protection mechanisms in safeguarding Miao batik from misrepresentation and unauthorized replication; and (3) identify sustainable strategies that can enhance the transmission of traditional knowledge to future generations, ensuring the continued cultural and economic viability of authentic Miao batik within its country of origin.

Literature Review

The production history of batik, an ancient folk art, extends over two thousand years globally. Batik is mostly practiced in southern minority regions of China, including the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, and Hunan. The cultural significance and intricate designs of Miao batik art are immense. Miao aesthetic concepts, cultural practices, and historical shifts are all on display, along with distinct regional traits and a distinct national character. One distinguishing feature of the batik pattern unique to Danzhai that known as the "land of batik" which known of its raw, primitive and simplicity (Zhennan & Yahaya, 2021).

In northwest Guizhou, the most representative districts for Miao Costume culture include Zhijin, Nayong of Bijie city, Suoga Town of Liuzhi Special Zone, and many more. The intricate and varied crafts, exquisite and refined embellishment, and enigmatic patterns seen in Miao costumes all contribute to its dazzling creative allure and rich cultural legacy (Bo, 2015). Preserving the core values of traditional culture is important for identifying their worth, which, when combined with modern aesthetic preferences and ways of life, can ensure the long-term viability of both.

Within the Miao culture, batik transcends its status as a mere art form and assumes the role of a fundamental aspect of existence, serving as both a way of life and a medium of communication. Historically, women have predominantly carried forward this practice, acquiring the skills from a young age and producing clothing and fabrics for both ceremonial and everyday use. These batik clothing have a significant impact on significant life occasions, including as weddings, funerals, and festivals, by acting as symbols of one's identity and cultural history (Wijayanti & Fakhriati, 2024). The Chinese government increasingly promotes traditional culture in a favourable light, seeing it as an expression of China's unique cultural legacy that helps the economy grow and provides an opportunity to showcase China's "soft power" in global competition (Chen et al., 2021).

The Importance of Country of Origin

The country of origin plays a crucial role in the preservation and authenticity of Miao batik, as it is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage and traditions of the Miao ethnic community in China. The unique motifs, techniques, and symbolism of batik are intricately tied to the geographical and cultural landscape of its origin, reflecting the history, beliefs, and identity of the Miao people (Soeprapto et al., 2021). Maintaining the production of Miao batik within its native region ensures that the traditional knowledge and craftsmanship are passed down through generations, preserving the authenticity and cultural significance of the art form. According to Ocvirk et al. (2010) aesthetic theory, the beauty of batik can be recognized through its elements and principles, which serve to define its aesthetic form. Furthermore, protecting Miao batik at its source prevents the dilution of its cultural value and combats the spread of imitation products that lack the integrity of the original designs.

Table 1

Overview of traditional clothes from different countries

| Authors | Overviews of examination | Methodology |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Kimono Dalby (1988) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan's official dress. • The kimono's role as an article of apparel. • Kimono style. • Through cataloguing, we can learn about culture, history, art, and personalities. • The evolution of the kimono as a cultural garment and its historical context. • What anthropologists find to be the most valuable parts of material culture. • The examination highlights the historical significance of the kimono, both socially and artistically (modern kimono). | Sociological |
| Indian sari Shah (2002) and (Estelami & Maxwell, 2003) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The evolution and progression of saris as a form of attire • The history and evolution of saris as a form of attire. • Motif design is a way to highlight beauty. • Sari is practical. • The way fabric hangs and makes folds, particularly when sewn into an item of clothing, is called drape. • What we call "tradition" is actually just a set of long-held beliefs or practices that have been passed down over many generations. | Cultural and aesthetic. |
| Kashmiri shawl Irwin (1973), Ames (1988) and Jafri (2006). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified via the history and evolution of methods. • Identified via the history and evolution of methods. • Shawls are typically rectangular in shape and have a simple edge. They also have huge flower cones with a semi-naturalistic design around the borders. • The patterns for decoration. • The influence and growth of current European portrait painting and costume engravings are portrayed. • A shawl's purpose. | Historical and aesthetic. |
| Javanese batik sarongs Raffles (1817), Mijer (1919), | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What batik means and how it came to be. | Material culture. |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Baker (1920), Lewis (1924), Adam (1935), Steinmann (1958), Kafka (1959), Muehling (1967), Belfer (1972), Spee (1982), Elliot (1984), and others.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional handicrafts: the history of batik sarong method and procedure. • Batik patterns and motifs are looked at to see what they mean in terms of social rank, the local community, nature, history, and cultural tradition. • Traditional batik sarong usage includes carrying a baby, weddings, and brides. • Batik patterns and motifs are influenced by various cultures, including Hindu and Buddhist, Islamic, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Indo-European (colonial era), Japanese, and indigenous traditions. | |
|---|---|--|

The country of origin is important because it holds the cultural and historical knowledge essential for maintaining the authenticity of traditional crafts (Halabi, 2021). It ensures that the techniques, symbols, and meanings passed down through generations are preserved, protecting the art form from distortion and imitation in external markets. The country of origin is vital in addressing the challenges of preserving the authenticity of traditional Miao batik, especially in preventing imitation motifs and ensuring the correct representation of cultural symbols. In its native region, Miao batik is not just an art form but a living cultural expression, where artisans possess the intricate knowledge of traditional motifs, their meanings, and the specific techniques required to create them.

This localized knowledge is essential for maintaining the integrity of the designs and preventing misrepresentation. However, the rise of imitation products often stems from external markets that lack this cultural understanding, leading to inaccurate motifs that erode the art form's authenticity (Salma & Eskak, 2020). By focusing on preservation efforts in the country of origin, it becomes possible to reinforce cultural education, strengthen intellectual property laws, and promote community-based production, all of which are critical for safeguarding the true essence of Miao batik.

Cultural Protection Mechanisms

Today, Indonesian batik is celebrated worldwide for its craftsmanship and cultural significance, recognised as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Meanwhile, Malaysia is also popular with batik; it has a similar historical trajectory, though it developed its own unique regional styles and techniques. Malaysian batik is influenced by the patterns and designs of its multicultural society, incorporating motifs inspired by Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous cultures. The crucial role of local distributors and foreign designers, who act as cultural intermediaries by connecting domestic and foreign cultural practices and interpretations (Zhong et al., 2023). The product adaptation is a continuous process, evolving alongside a firm's international expansion, as producers and intermediaries work to navigate cultural differences and the process involves extensive learning, unlearning, adjustment, and reconsideration, as managers strive to balance standardization with adaptation in their efforts to internationalize (Sasaki et al., 2021). The exploitation of culture through fake Aboriginal-style art and craft products in the Australian market refers to the unethical practice of producing and selling imitation Indigenous art, which misrepresents authentic Aboriginal

culture, deprives Indigenous artists of economic benefits, and undermines the cultural integrity of their traditional crafts (Parkin, 2021).

Method

This study employs an online questionnaire to gather data from 178 respondents in the Yunnan and Guizhou provinces, regions that are central to the traditional practice of Miao batik. The questionnaire is designed to explore participants' knowledge of Miao batik, their perceptions of its authenticity, and their experiences with imitation motifs. Respondents are selected through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling, targeting both local artisans and community members who have a connection to Miao batik. The data is collected via an online survey platform, distributed through local cultural networks, social media groups, and community organizations to ensure broad participation. Responses are then analyzed to understand the challenges and perceptions related to the preservation of authentic Miao batik in its country of origin. Out of the 178 respondents surveyed, 42% (75 individuals) were men, while the remaining 58% (103 individuals) were women.

Table 3

Measurement instruments for 4 constructs

| Construct | Measurement Instrument |
|---|--|
| Cultural Authenticity | Items measuring participants' perception of the accuracy and traditional significance of Miao batik motifs (e.g., Likert scale on the preservation of motifs). |
| Knowledge Transmission | Items assessing the effectiveness of knowledge transfer of Miao batik techniques between generations (e.g., Likert scale on learning and teaching practices). |
| Perception of Imitation Products | Items evaluating respondents' views on the prevalence and impact of imitation batik products (e.g., Likert scale on the quality and cultural significance). |
| Legal and Policy Support | Items measuring awareness and perceived effectiveness of legal frameworks and policies protecting Miao batik (e.g., Likert scale on government support). |

The measurement instruments in the questionnaire use a Likert scale format, where respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement or perception on various statements related to each construct. These statements are designed to assess the authenticity of Miao batik motifs, the effectiveness of knowledge transmission, perceptions of imitation products, and the adequacy of legal and policy support, providing quantifiable insights into each area.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 showed that the AVE values for all four constructs are above 0.65, with Cultural Authenticity scoring 0.65, Knowledge Transmission at 0.72, Perception of Imitation Products at 0.68, and Legal and Policy Support at 0.70. These AVE scores indicate that a substantial portion of the variance in the items is explained by the constructs, demonstrating strong construct validity. Furthermore, the CR values for each construct exceed 0.88, with Knowledge Transmission achieving the highest at 0.91, indicating excellent internal consistency. The CR values for Cultural Authenticity (0.88), Perception of Imitation Products (0.89), and Legal and Policy Support (0.90) similarly demonstrate high reliability, meaning that

the items within each construct are measuring the intended concepts consistently. Overall, these results suggest that the constructs are both valid and reliable for the purposes of the study.

Table 3

Average Variance Extracted and Composite Reliability

| Construct | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Composite Reliability (CR) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cultural authenticity | 0.65 | 0.88 |
| Knowledge transmission | 0.72 | 0.91 |
| Perception of imitation products | 0.68 | 0.89 |
| Legal and policy support | 0.7 | 0.9 |

Managerial Implications

Based on the research analysis, the managerial implications suggest that to preserve the authenticity of Miao batik, efforts must be made to support cultural heritage through targeted policies and community engagement. The high Composite Reliability (CR) values across all constructs indicate that the items measuring cultural authenticity, knowledge transmission, and legal support are consistent and valid, highlighting the need for managers and policymakers to prioritize the accurate representation of Miao batik motifs and enforce stronger legal protections against imitations.

Additionally, the strong results by enhancing knowledge transmission of traditional Miao batik requires a multifaceted approach that combines both formal and informal strategies. One effective method is establishing intergenerational training programs, where younger generations can learn directly from experienced artisans, ensuring that the intricate techniques, motifs, and cultural significance of Miao batik are passed down authentically. Incorporating Miao batik into local school and university curriculums can also formalize education on this craft, blending hands-on practical lessons with an understanding of its historical and cultural importance. Additionally, utilizing digital platforms, such as online tutorials and virtual workshops, can expand access to traditional knowledge, especially for younger people who may not have direct access to artisans. Community-based workshops, exhibitions, and festivals can further foster cultural pride and provide social learning opportunities. Finally, partnerships with government agencies and NGOs can offer financial support, grants, or incentives to artisans who teach traditional skills, ensuring the sustainable transmission of Miao batik for future generations.

Thirdly, enhancing the perception of imitation products in relation to traditional Miao batik involves raising awareness about the value of authentic craftsmanship and addressing the negative impacts of counterfeit items on cultural heritage. One key approach is to educate both consumers and producers about the differences between authentic Miao batik and imitation products, highlighting the cultural significance, labour-intensive processes, and unique artistry involved in creating genuine pieces. Public campaigns, workshops, and exhibitions can help reinforce the value of purchasing authentic items, encouraging consumers to support traditional artisans. Collaborating with local governments to enforce

intellectual property rights and legal protections will also be critical in reducing the spread of counterfeit products. By promoting transparency in the market, increasing consumer awareness, and ensuring legal safeguards, the perception of imitation products can be reshaped to favour the preservation and value of authentic Miao batik.

Lastly, establishing intellectual property Rights IPR) laws specific to Miao batik can prevent unauthorized replication and commercial exploitation. Geographical indication (GI) status can be granted to Miao batik, linking the craft to its region of origin and ensuring only genuine products produced in the Miao communities are recognized as authentic, protecting against imitations. Legal frameworks can support Miao batik by providing subsidies, grants, or financial incentives for artisans and small businesses that produce authentic batik, helping them compete against mass-produced imitations. These policies can encourage artisans to continue practicing their craft and ensure the economic sustainability of traditional production methods.

Conclusion

The preservation of traditional Miao batik is essential for safeguarding the cultural heritage and identity of the Miao people. This study has highlighted several critical challenges, including the misrepresentation of motifs through imitation products, the decline of knowledge transmission among younger generations, and the lack of sufficient legal and policy protections. The findings suggest that robust intellectual property rights, cultural heritage protection laws, and educational initiatives are vital to maintaining the authenticity and relevance of Miao batik in its country of origin. Furthermore, fostering greater consumer awareness of the importance of purchasing authentic products, combined with stronger legal frameworks, can help mitigate the impact of imitation products.

This paper not only sheds light on the historical and cultural significance of Miao batik but also highlights the current challenges in preserving this traditional craft in the face of modernization and globalization. These challenges include the decline in the number of skilled artisans, the impact of mass production on the quality and authenticity of batik, and the lack of awareness among younger generations about its cultural value. By analysing these obstacles, the paper offers practical solutions, such as incorporating digital technology into the batik-making process, enhancing educational programs, and fostering partnerships between artisans and contemporary designers to ensure both cultural preservation and economic sustainability. These strategies aim to keep the craft relevant while supporting the livelihoods of Miao artisans.

Future research could explore the role of modern technology in enhancing the transmission of Miao batik knowledge, such as through the use of digital platforms or virtual reality. Additionally, further investigation into consumer behaviour and perceptions regarding authentic versus imitation batik products could offer deeper insights into effective market strategies for promoting cultural heritage. Research could also examine the economic impacts of granting Geographical Indication (GI) status to Miao batik, as well as the long-term effects of legal protections on traditional craft industries. Expanding this study to other regions with similar traditional crafts could offer comparative insights and contribute to broader heritage preservation strategies globally.

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