

A Study on the Hakka Children's Hats of South Jiangxi Province in China

Shunai Zhang[†] and Liyun Huang

Dept. of Fashion & Art Design, Dong Hua University, Shanghai, P. R. China

(Received August 10, 2009 : Accepted October 31, 2009)

Abstract

Hakka is a very special sub-ethnic group in China, which was formed during several migrations in Chinese war history. Today the majority of Hakka people, living in the boundary between Jiangxi, Guangdong, and Fujian province, still keep a quite old custom and culture. The bell hat for children is a unique and splendid illustration. We have imposed researches and studies in local area a lot and interviewed the local crafts-women to get to know more about bell hat. We are trying to describe the decorations on the bell hat, silver items and embroidery respectively, and then give an overall analysis of Chinese auspicious culture that the motifs of decorations have contained.

Key words : bell hat, silver items, embroidery, auspicious culture.

I . Introduction

Hakka ethnicity refers to a group that historically migrated from central plain (today Shanxi, Henan provinces) to south China because of the war, plague or famine. The migration could be dated to as early as Barbarian invasions of China in eastern Jin dynasty.

After several historical primary migrations, today 60% of the hakka population live in the boundary between Jiangxi, Guangdong, and Fujian province, where it developed to be the biggest residency in China. South of Jiangxi was the first station of the Hakka migration route and considered to be as a source to shape the Hakka culture. Due to the rough mountainous environment and closed traffic condition, south Jiangxi has preserved many aspects of Hakka traits, such as language, costume, food, and folk custom. The bell hat is a

unique and gorgeous illustration.

The bell hat is for children, trimmed with silver items such as bell, eight immortals, butterfly, fish etc, and with Hakka's embroidery craft combined. Early in late Qing dynasty, people suffered from the harsh natural environment and bandit sturting, as well as plaguc. A lot of children died. Thus parents pray to God to protect the feeble children and tried to make a particular hat that can keep children safe and far away from harm. They will be healthy and secure once the hat is worn. As time goes, the bell hat has transferred beyond an exorcised hat and becomes a customed gift when calling on families. As the married daughter carry her child who has just passed one year old to return home by first time, the grandmother will give a colorful and silver-decorated bell hat as a gift which exhausted lots of time and money. She chooses the silver items carefully and makes embroider patiently.

[†] Corresponding author E-mail : zhang5@dhu.edu.cn

Each motif of the silver and embroidery tells a rich auspicious culture, and expresses grandmother's best wish to her grandchild.

II. The Bell Hat's Decorations

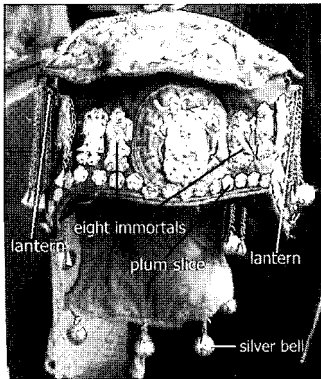
The bell hat's decoration includes two parts, which are embroidery and silver respectively. This is the front (Fig. 1) and back (Fig. 2) of it.

I. The Silver Accessories

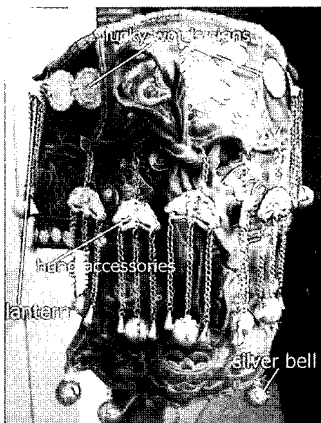
The silver accessories have their own particular names and matched locations. Six parts include eight immortals, plum slice, hang accessories, lantern, lucky words signs and silver bells. Silver

accessories are ancient and classy. The eight immortals hold their power tools with real look, while the movement complies with the Taoism. The animals such as butterfly, fish, monkey and deer are very lifelike and vivid. The silver bell is various, and get a delicate, graceful flowery carve on the surface.

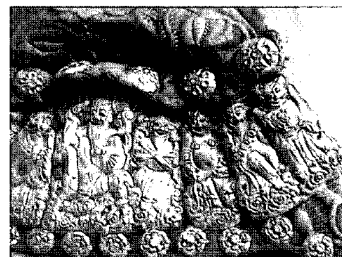
Eight immortals: the silver eight immortals (Fig. 3) and the elderly longevitied immortal in the middle location are on the forehead of the bell hat, which are easy to catch people's eyes. They here play a role of guardian. Eight immortals are immortal woman He (he xian gu), Royal uncle cao (Cao Guojiu), Iron-crutch Li (Li Tiegua), Lancaihe, Lü Dongbing (leader), Philosopher Han Xiang (Han Xiang Zi), Elder Zhang Guo (Zhang Guolao), and Zhong Liqian. Each immortal's power can be transferred to a power tool. These power tools are also called "covert eight immortals" or "eight precious", frequently used in folk artworks and embroidery. The eight immortals stand for men, women, the old, the young, the rich, the poor, the noble, and the humble. For they have turned into a immortal as a ordinary citizen, they gained a great respect and popularity in China. The stories of "The eight immortals cross the sea" and "the eight immortals celebrate the birthday of the queue mother of the west" are well known among public. "the eight immortals cross the sea" depicts a story that they use their each different power tools to get across the sea when they attend the conference of the magical peach in Penglai Island." The eight immortals cross the sea, each reveals its own divine power" indicates people



<Fig. 1> Picture the Front of Bell Hat.



<Fig. 2> The Back of the Bell Hat.



<Fig. 3> Silver Eight Immortals.

acquire various skills and qualifications to achieve goals. The eight immortals celebrate the birthday of the queue mother of the west" is about eight immortals attend to annual birthday celebration for the queue mother of the west, which has become the most common element in artwork.

Plum slice: The plum slice (Fig. 4) or nipple slice (which looks like a nipple with half round shape) is located under and up the eight immortals. There are eighteen pieces of them and have trimmed the bell hat more gracefully.

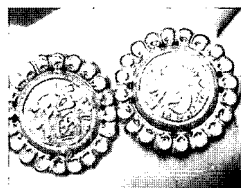
Hang signs: there are five hung signs in back of the bell hat, each is about 8 centimeters and hungs a little round bell at the bottom. The hung signs will wobble with the children's steps and the bells will ring. The butterfly (Fig. 5) is most commonly used in the hung accessories, as well as bee (Fig. 7), fish (Fig. 6), longevity words (Fig. 6).

The silver lanterns: The silver lanterns (Fig. 8) given name for its appearance are at each side on left and right and upward the ear. The lantern's design looks like a flower, and there are six hanging chains with a little round bell or square bell (Fig. 9) at the bottom.

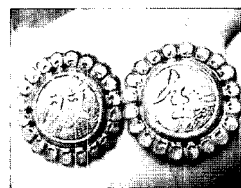
The bottom bells: there are five bells at the

bottom (Fig. 10, Fig. 11). Bells are used in a quite lot of locations, such as in the hung signs and silver lanterns, yet as a supporting role. They complete the bell hat to be more rhythmic and refinedly. The five bells at bottom has a specific meaning to give a implication of "five sons get awarded" and "five fortunes coming".

Lucky words signs (Fig. 12, Fig. 13): Each side has a pair of lucky words signs. They are slightly bigger than copper coins with lucky words in the middle and flower form on the outer edge with four needling holes. Besides the lucky words such as longevity, fortunes, eternal joy, more children, owning both longevity and prosperity, some words under the particular political circumstance like "national flower"(resemble the children), world peace, self-dependence were also used.



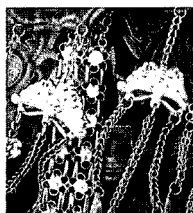
〈Fig. 12〉 Lucky Words Signs (1).



〈Fig. 13〉 Lucky Words Signs (2).



〈Fig. 4〉 Plum Slice.



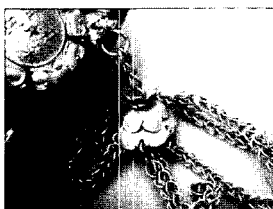
〈Fig. 5〉 Butterfly Signs.



〈Fig. 6〉 Goldfish and Longevity Signs.



〈Fig. 7〉 Bee Signs.



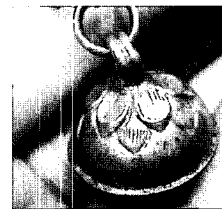
〈Fig. 8〉 Silver Lantern.



〈Fig. 9〉 The Square Bell.



〈Fig. 10〉 The Bottom Bell (1).



〈Fig. 11〉 The Bottom Bell (2).

2. The Embroidery

Embroidery is another important decoration of the bell hat. If amounts of refined silver accessories are a standard to judge the financial level of a family, then we could say the embroidery on the bell hat decoration stands for the women craft skills and art appreciation level. Some of the poor can not afford the numerous costly silver accessories, but they can make up the deficiency by flaring embroidery. The embroidery in south Jiangxi is bright and diverse in color, live and natural in motifs on basis of black fabric. The main colors are scarlet, orange, plum, while the subsidiary is green, blue, white and yellow. Black and red matching carries an ancient mysterious atmosphere and reflects people's worship to this lovely red land of the south Jiangxi. According to the whole structure of the bell hat, we could divide it into parts of forehead, cheek, top, body, back, and the trail. These parts will be connected together after it's embroideredly finished. The patterns are not only restrained in one part to be used, but in any parts. Women must be very careful and patient, in both the symmetry and balance of motifs, and the percipience of motif connotation which needs a solid knowledge of auspicious culture. Thus, the embroidery is often not finished by one time but dismantles or remakes times to complete.

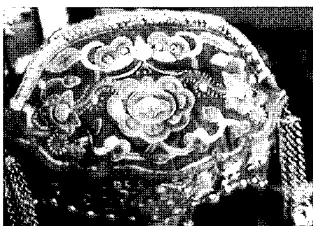
The motifs in the bell hat's embroidery (Fig. 14, Fig. 15, Fig. 16) are various, including plants, flowers, birds, bests, characters etc. Generally the motif in forehead is a tiger head, but there might be other animals and plants as well, such as persimmon flower, phoenix, kylin. Though the forehead motif is significant, it is hard to see its

whole picture because it is covered by the elderly longevitied immortal. The bell hat's top motif are diverse too, including both traditional auspicious patters of guava, lotus, plum, and local plants such as four-leaves lotus, persimmon flower, tree flowers, which express people's warm attitude and happiness towards life. Chanticleer and butterfly are the most used patterns among animals. Chanticleer or phoenix are companied by butterfly and lotus, which implies that butterfly falls in love with flower. Above that, the patterns could be dragon, phoenix, kylin, tiger, bec, cyprinoid, spotted deer, mouse, monkey, shrimp. The motifs in the hat's body and cheek must be symmetrical on basis of the central axis. The overhand is dainty. Though it is just a rim, there could be many patters used, such as chopsticks pattern, dogtooth pattern, number nine patter, lotus pattern.

III. The Auspicious Cultural Connotation in the Silver and Embroidery Motifs

1. The Chinese Traditional Auspicious Design's Historical Origin and Primary Themes

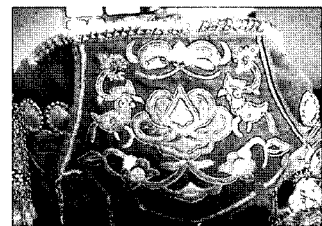
Auspicious idea that exists in different races, coareas, is the people's basic need and commonly psychological characteristic. It is the human collective sense and expectation when they confront the inclement natural environment and complex changing social environment. Auspicious idea is the most common and popular cultural concept in traditional Chinese society. The origin of the traditional auspicious patterns is the sorcery in the primitive society. Under the guidance of pan-



〈Fig. 14〉 The Hat's Top.



〈Fig. 15〉 The Hat's Trail.



〈Fig. 16〉 The Hat's Body.

theism, the primitive people thought some things and phenomena happening were omens which foretell good or evil, luck or unluck. Hence they practiced divination to tend to the good and to avoid the evil. Auspicious idea comes from ancient people's inner insecure feeling towards life. They are confused and feared about diseases, plague, death and thought it must be evil invading into their body. So they had to rely on some things or ghost to help them fight with evils and protect themselves.

Chinese auspicious patterns mainly refer to five themes, which are fortune, emoluments, longevity, joy, wealth. People also call these five characters five fortunes, and pursue a goal that human must gain five fortunes. These themes contain rich concepts such as making fortunes, giving wish, destroying evil, persuading, warming. The methods of symbolism, substitution and pun in images, especially the homophony are adopted to compose the auspicious patterns that suit both refined and popular tastes. In Chinese heart, auspicious implies all the sincere wish and pursuit to happy life and it is the basis of Chinese folk custom culture. Each auspicious motif gives a beautiful legend that expresses the pursuit for security, beauty, luck, health, wealth. Chinese traditional auspicious patterns tell people's sincere wish in every aspect of life through its graceful design and creative idea, which has become the Chinese nationality precious heritage. According to themes of auspicious patterns, we could clarify the silver and embroidery patterns' cultural connotation into four categories, which are praying for luck and preventing evil, fame and gain, health and longevity, happiness and contentment. We will depict these four parts following.

2. Praying for Luck and Preventing Evil

Praying for luck and preventing evil are originated from people's fear to disaster or death or unknown phenomenon in nature. People believe there are ghosts or spirits beyond human society that can control human's life, everything running and regenerating. But people can use some patterns to influence ghost's mind to protect and

care human, to make them benefit and far from harm. In the past, due to the high rate of natural disaster and little medical treatment, thousands of people died, much of those are infant. Hence the grandmother tried to add some patterns which can erase evil and cure illness in the silver accessories or embroidery to protect the weak infant. For an example, Gannan Hakka make the bell hat by red patterns in black fundus because they believe red and black are the just color that can conquer evil, then evils will keep a distance from children and be afraid to appear. Besides, the tiger head (Fig. 17) is in forehead with 卐 around. Tiger is an animal which is fierce and strong, especially the violent head with an innate king (look exactly like 王 in Chinese) and fangs protruding makes people feared, thus it has become an label that stands for power and strength. Then 卐, an ancient auspicious mark, which could go to Neolithic age and some experts thought it symbolized the sun, was internationally used. It appeared in ancient Persia, India, Greece, as well as different religions such as Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism and was used as an auspicious mark. Buddhism thought 卐 before the Sakyamuni's chest was one of his thirty two lucky faces and had a meaning that Buddha is holy and extremely powerful that can gather all the luck and virtues. In Tang dynasty the empress Wuzetian gave 卐 a name WAN, which was called WAN NEVER ENDDING in public that means fortunes never ended. Putting tiger head and 卐 together in forehead of the bell hat was to protect children and prevent evil from harming under the guard of tiger power. Another example is dragon (Fig. 18) and phoenix (Fig. 19). Dragon is the Chinese nationality's totem and cultural identity with a long history which could go back to Neolithic age seven thousands ago. In Shang dynasty, it was frequently used in bronze ware, jade and had a religious concept of theocracy. In the following three-thousand history, the rulers saw it as a symbol of royalty and high class. Phoenix also has a long history as dragon. The phoenix had become the primary patten in bronze ware and



〈Fig. 17〉 Tiger Head.



〈Fig. 18〉 Dragon.



〈Fig. 19〉 Phoenix.

jade in Shang and Zhou dynasty, while it was just rarely used as totem in early clans in primitive society. In accordance with the dragon was the avatar of emperor, phoenix represented queen and court wives. Dragon and phoenix stands for the nobility and stateliness of royalty and represent the rule for kingdom so that all the evils and devils should be submitted to them. Chinese people thought dragon and phoenix were the most powerful patterns that could destroy evils.

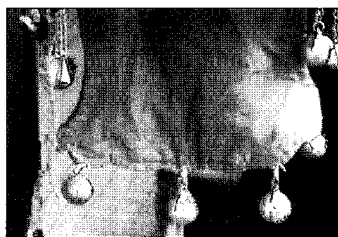
3. Fame and Emolument

The theme of fame and emolument most refers to pass in the imperial examinations or to get promoted in official career. This theme is connected to the special elite selection system that men, only from the imperial examination and officialdom, can achieve individual goal, further the revival of clan. Having passed in examination or raised up in position means that literators will own the fame and gain instantly in some extent, afterwards go a glory and prosperous way. Patterns about fame and emolument are numerous, such as crowing rooster, deer, halberd, cockscomb, official coronal, emolument star. Themes like "five sons get awarded in imperial examination" and

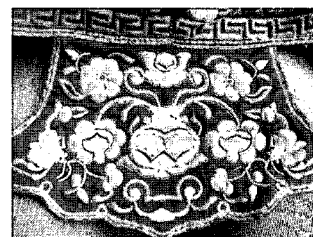
"win champions thrice in imperial examinations", "rooster crows to be prosperous", "carps jump over the dragon gate" (which means to succeed in examination), "bring breeze smiles", "get top in a row" come frequently in folk art. The traditional fame and emolument culture has passed to Gannan area. For an example, there is a series of patters of rooster, bee, spotted deer, vertical monkey (Fig. 20). This combination is gorgeous and sapid in its form, as well as strong fame and emolument in its culture. Rooster crowing has a partial tone with honor and rank in Chinese, which implies parents' hope that children can get honor in examination and rank in career. Then the deer is homophonic with emolument in Chinese, and bee with verb knight, as well as monkey with Marquis. It is apparent that parent hope children could be knighted to be Marquis and get high emolument in future. Another example is "five sons get awarded" (Fig. 21) in the form of five bells at bottom. "Fine sons get awarded in imperial examination" was sourced from Three Character Primer. It tells a story that in Five Dynasty and Late Zhou Dynasty under the teaching of the father to follow the step of oracle and study industriously, perform justly, the five chil-



〈Fig. 20〉 Fame and Emolument.



〈Fig. 21〉 Fine Sons Get Awarded.

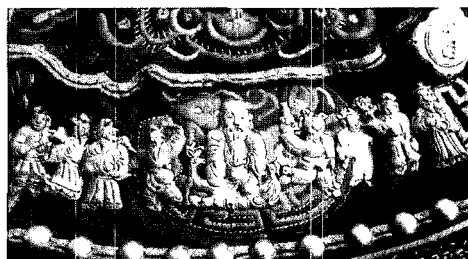


〈Fig. 22〉 Get Promoted.

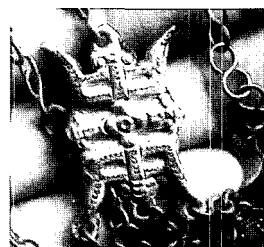
dren ended up getting awarded. The story of "The five sons get awarded in imperial examination" is showing how sincerely the parents wish children to succeed and become a prominent figure. The jardinière (Fig. 22) in embroidery pattern is homophonic with promote, which means promoting in official career.

4. Health and Longevity

The hope of health and longevity is sourced from people's love for life, which is a positive life value and enthusiastic philosophy. Chinese nation has a tradition of respecting for the old, love for the young. The old people live more long, gain more luck. The old longevities were seen to be a label that the family would prosper forever. Four or five generations under one roof is an family expectation under the influence of longevity culture. <Chuang-tzu Dao tuo> says "for human, the superior longevity is to live one hundred year old, while the mediocre is at eighty and the inferior is at sixty." People believe the longevity is the most important one of five fortunes. The themes about congratulating or celebrating the longevity have pines and crane celebrating, eight immortals greeting, Women Ma congratulating to the longevity, and pines long live, auspicious clouds greeting, hundreds longevities, nine generations under one roof etc. Due to the low standard of life and few medical facilities and medicine man, people's average life span was much shorter than that of today. So people placed their hopes in infant who was constitutionally healthy and strong to resist diseases. Healthy child was seen a sign of longevity. When they grew up, if died at an early age, it had nothing to do with others because it was the fate to make



<Fig. 23> Eight Immortal Celebrating the Longevity.

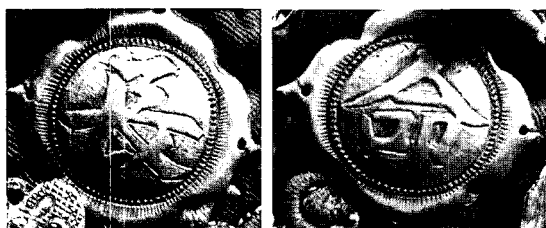


<Fig. 24> The Ancient Character of Longevity.

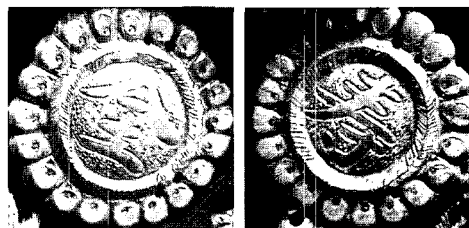
it occur. Thus, different from so many places where celebrating was to the old men in China, Gannan Hakka people channel their celebrating to parents' care and love for children. The common theme of eight immortals celebrating (Fig. 23) is also put on the forehead of the bell hat, with the longevitied immortal who sat on a deer in the middle, who is called uncle in Hakka language. Here it expresses an idea that the child would be like the longevitied immortal always fit, safe, and live to one hundred years old. The Chinese characters of longevity and long life in the hung signs (Fig. 24) and lucky word signs (Fig. 25, Fig. 26) were used directly to indicate their wish for longevity.

5. Happiness and Contentment

Happiness and contentment is one of the most

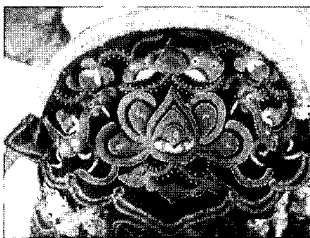


<Fig. 25> Character of Longevity.

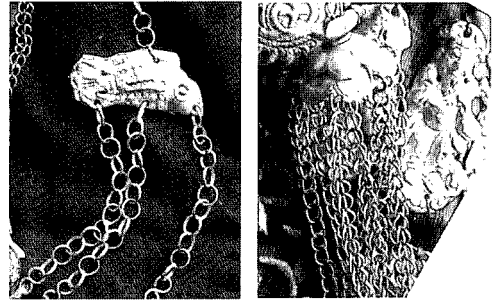


<Fig. 26> Full Life-span.

common themes and often refers to sweet love, marital felicity, family reunion and joy, more children, happy days, peace every year. Happiness and contentment, the word spread belief and most common psychological expectation, embody people's wish and pursuit for happy family. These themes are also numerous and various in Gannan area. Butterfly and lotus flower often appear in the top or trail of the bell hat, which implies that butterfly falls in love with flower (Fig. 27). Butterfly resembles the love and the theme of butterfly falling love with flower was frequently used in the poem, painting, and music, which means happy marriage. These reflect people's long for beautiful love and happy life. Two lotus flowers on one stalk also tell the conjugal love. Persimmon flower is used frequently in embroidery, which gives a meaning of everything going smoothly. The hung signs often use fish pattern (Fig. 28) which is homophonic with surplus in Chinese and contain a connotation that amount of remaining will be in family. Fish traditionally stands for "every year there is remaining" and "family is full of fortunes", both of those refer to a well finance in family. Also, the fish is red, which is considered to resemble a warm life like fire. Another example is hanging lanterns (Fig. 29) on each side of bell hat. Hanging lantern is a traditional custom that celebrates New Year in China, when people say goodbye to the old days and welcome the new era and wish everything would go well. While in the Gannan area, hanging lantern has a meaning of uniting the gens and relatives and welcoming a new member (the baby just was born) of the family. Each home will hang lantern or festoons and play gongs, drums to plead a pro-



〈Fig. 27〉 Butterfly and Lotus.



〈Fig. 28〉 Family is Full of Fortunes.

〈Fig. 29〉 Hang Lantern.

sperous life and good fortune. The lantern adornment on the bell has the same meaning with real lantern which is considered to be a sign of prosperity and happiness.

IV. Conclusion

The bell hat is a gift as a feedback to grandchild when daughters visit their parents with children. It is not only a clothing keeping warm for children, but also for painstaking effort plunge in form of hands craft by grandmother it carries a sincere wish of the last generation. The sub-ethnic group of Hakka was formed in ancient China by nobles immigrating from central plain (around Henan, Shanxi area) to the boundary of Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong province. For rooting in central part deeply, the glorious cultural heritage has been passed by naturally. Auspicious culture is a convincing illustration. The auspicious culture in the bell hat has four parts of praying for luck and preventing evil, fame and gain, health and longevity, happiness and contentment. From the silver and embroidery adornments on bell hat we could see how the Chinese Auspicious Culture radiates and strengths its power in Gannan area.

References

- Yin, Wei and Yin, Feiran (2005). *The Chinese Prosperity Culture-Chinese Auspicious Culture Series*. Yunnan Peoplc Publication.
- Duan, Jianhua (1999). *The Chinese Auspicious Decoration Design*. China Light Industry Press.