

# Brief Analysis of Qiang Nationality's Silver Art

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**How to cite this paper:** Zhou, L., Zeng, J. H., & Chen, B. Y. (2020). Brief Analysis of Qiang Nationality's Silver Art. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, 327-339. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.88028>

**Received:** August 7, 2020

**Accepted:** August 23, 2020

**Published:** August 26, 2020

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## Abstract

The silver ornament of the Qiang nationality is an important part of Chinese traditional craft culture, like a magnificent pearl, containing rich ethnic minority characteristic culture and symbolic symbols. It has been passed down to this day with superb skills, exquisite engraving craftsmanship and decorative techniques with extremely national characteristics. In terms of shape, it is simple and resplendent, beautiful and generous, simple and elegant, wild and unrestrained; In terms of decoration techniques, it is unique and colorful, most of which are decorated with filigree inlaid gemstones and engraved decorations. The colors are bright and eye-catching, which are very brilliant; In terms of technique, it is rich in layers, strong in folk interest, bold in design, quirky in imagery, and extremely modern, just like a bright pearl in the history of traditional silverware craftsmanship. This thesis will analyze the artistic aesthetics and artistic characteristics of Qiang silver ornament through the development origin, modeling characteristics, cultural connotation and decorative aesthetics, so as to look forward to exploring a new theoretical basis for modern research on Qiang silver ornament art.

## Keywords

Silver Ornament of the Qiang Nationality, Artistic Features, Cultural Connotation

## 1. Introduction

The silver ornament of the Qiang nationality is the practice of life and art of Qiang people in the thousands of years of history, which is a comprehensive cultural art that integrates anthropology, literature, history, folklore, aesthetics and other disciplines together. It collectively reflects the history and culture, religious beliefs, aesthetic concepts, folk customs and the development context of traditional handicrafts of the Qiang nationality. It is the cultural carrier of the

Qiang people's spiritual life such as carrying civilization, expressing emotions, conveying lovesickness, driving out ghosts, sending away illnesses, and protecting life and safety; It "is not only a symbol of the Qiang nationality, but also a systematized state of the Qiang nationality's rules and signs. It is more in line with the silent Qiang national language and symbols in a pure state, and it is also a reflection of national character, psychology and aesthetics" (Zhu & Li, 1993). It can be seen that Qiang silver ornaments carry all aspects of Qiang culture, whose decorative patterns, totem symbols, and modeling features clearly record the cultural context of the Qiang people. The silver ornament of the Qiang nationality has also become a splendid pearl in the treasure house of Chinese national silver ornament culture for its excellent workmanship, exquisite craftsmanship, exquisite shape, exquisite patterns, and rich content. It records beautiful fragments and historical changes in the production and life of the Qiang people, and has the functions of cultural inheritance, beautification of life, witnessing the historical development of the Qiang people, the rise and fall of national handicrafts, and the spread of aesthetic ideas, which is also an important carrier in the evolution of the spiritual and material civilization of the Qiang people.

## **2. Overview of the Silver Ornament of the Qiang Nationality**

In ancient times, our country had silver refining technology, and the history of silver began. Like gold, silver is a precious metal with a long history of application, with a history of more than 4000 years. Silver is silvery white, with a certain degree of hardness and luster. Because of the unique characteristics of silver, people have given it dual values of currency and decoration. Silver ornament refers to a variety of smooth, shiny, and beautiful decorations and living utensils made of silver through various technical means and processing techniques to meet people's daily needs and aesthetic needs. It has a wide variety of categories, basically divided into headwear, neckwear, hand accessories, footwear, clothing, silverware and so on. According to investigations, our Chinese archaeologists have discovered "golden and silver complexes" embedded in the surface of the utensils from the unearthed bronze wares of the Spring and Autumn Period (a pattern inlaid with gold and silver wires), as well as very exquisite silverware unearthed from the ancient tombs of the Han Dynasty, which can be seen that my country's silver jewelry aesthetics has a very long history. Since the Han and Jin Dynasties, the ancient Qiang people have been a nation that has been in constant migration and integration for a long time.

The Qiang nationality has been migrating and merging continuously for a long time since the Han and Jin Dynasties. In the process of continuous migration, not only has it formed a different way of life and social customs from other nations, but also formed its own unique cultural and artistic characteristics, thus shaping its uniquely representative spiritual world and national character. The Qiang people believe that all things have anims, and they still retain the primi-

tive religion, the spiritual worship of polytheism, and the totem worship of nature is unparalleled. All of these reflect the simple and clumsy emotional aesthetics of the Qiang people advocating nature, loving nature, and uniting nature and man. However, silver ornament is one of the most representative carriers of this cultural character and artistic aesthetic. Therefore, they use silver to carve the gods of various primitive religions and nature worships, such as the mountain god Bodhisattva, the land bodhisattva, the cow king bodhisattva, the horse king bodhisattva, the thunder god bodhisattva and so on. These gods are small and exquisite, lifelike in shape, and uniquely decorated. They are objects for the gods carried by the Qiang people, which can be taken out at any time when they need to pray for the protection of the gods for worship and prayer. At the same time, the shapes and decorations of different regions are different, which form a good tribal distinction and regional characteristics. It is not only a symbol of the tribe's tribe, but also a means for the tribe to distinguish between elder and inferior. As a result, a method of using ornament to decorate and identify has emerged, which is the origin of Qiang silver ornament. However, the specific origin time has been unable to verify the historical changes. Nowadays, Qiang people are mainly distributed in Mao Xian, Wenchuan County, Li Xian, Hei Shui, Song Pan, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Beichuan and Pingwu in Mianyang City in Aba Prefecture in western China, all of which are the plateaus and valleys of Western Sichuan. The special geographical location and natural environment give birth to the unique cultural and artistic aesthetics and silverware craftsmanship of the Qiang nationality, and provide us with abundant resources for studying the silverware art of the Qiang nationality today.

The ancient Qiang people have been fond of silver ornament since ancient times, who love its whiteness, and cherish its flawlessness.

It is an indispensable decorative ornament for the ancestors of the Qiang people. From birth to death, from the elderly to the children, they all regard "silver ornament as beauty and wearing silver ornament as a symbol of honor" as the fashion concept. It is the reproduction of their unique artistic aesthetic, cultural form, lifestyle, and national customs. For different ages, different genders, and different occasions, they have different silver ornament shapes and aesthetic needs, but most of them are presented according to the silver ornament wearing habits of different people. The silver ornaments worn by Qiang men mainly includes silver headbands (**Figures 1-2**) inlaid with various patterns to avoid evil, silver earrings, silver collars, silver necklaces, silver bracelets, silver rings, and silver fire sickles hanging around the waist, silver tobacco rods, pipes, cigarette cases, silver belts, silver handle knives and so on. Some silver ornament is particularly large, exaggerated and crude. The Qiang men who are decorated by such silver ornament have a masculine and mighty, rugged, bold, chic and vigorous beauty. They are particularly handsome, unrestrained, brave and strong, just like the unyielding group of eagles on the Qiang Mountain, shining brightly.

However, it is the Qiang girls who wear the heaviest, most beautiful, and most dazzling silver ornament. They wear jewelry from head to toe. Handkerchiefs, breastplates, earrings, hand rings, belts, and various ornaments are all inlaid with silver ornaments. All kinds of silver ornaments make their posture soft and beautiful (Figure 3(a), Figure 3(b)).



Figure 1. Qiang men's silver ornament (Taken by the author).



Figure 2. Qiang men's silver ornament (From the Internet).



Figure 3. Qiang women's silver ornament (Taken by the author).

“On their heads, there are inlaid silver pieces, silver head ornaments, silver beads, and individually decorated silver-head hairpins, silver-head hair claws, silver hair accessories, and silver earrings; The silver collar flower on the collar, the big silver medal on the chest, the silver collar buckle on the waist, the various life pendants decorated on the silver belt are below: such as silver leather bag, leather sewing bag, silver knife, silver toothpick, silver spoon and various small bells that exorcise evil spirits” (Beichuan Dayu Qiang’s Girl’s Blog, 2012). There are also silver bracelets, silver hand chains, silver rings on the hands, and silver anklets, silver ankle bells and so on. These silver ornaments have fine craftsmanship, vivid patterns, exquisite shapes, and full of three-dimensionality. They mirror each other with the gorgeous colors of Qiang costumes and headdresses, giving people a strong artistic aesthetic and visual impact. These silver ornaments look like fairies walking in the clouds from a distance.

The Qiang people wear silver ornaments from top to bottom. The silver is shining, which complements the matching of national costumes and is very dazzling, thus demonstrating their wealthy, vigorous and graceful posture. Through these decorations, we can not only feel the Qiang people’s love for silver ornament, but also appreciate the vigorous vitality of Qiang’s silver ornament in the folks. It is not only rooted in people’s daily life, but also contains deep national sentiments and carries rich historical and cultural values.

These “precious, dazzling, unique styles, folk, and a wide variety of silverware objects, record and display the profound cultural information of this nation in detail, and reflect the development of thousands of years of history, culture, religious beliefs, society, economy, and the national folk art of the Qiang people, as well as the self-contained aesthetics. The formation and production of Qiang silver ornament not only contains the technical content of craftsmanship, but also reflects the aesthetic thought of national art. It is a combination of technology and art, and it is also the artistic crystallization of the materialization of the traditional craft aesthetic thought of the Qiang people” (Yi, 2011).

### 3. The Artistic Aesthetics of Qiang Nationality’s Silver Ornament

The Qiang nationality is a migrating ethnic group, and the environment for production and life is vast and majestic with grasslands, mountains, and ravines. In ancient times, the ancient Qiang people lived in the grasslands with high sky and wide land, and then migrated to the mountains and ridges, the three counties of Maoxian, Wenchuan, and Lixian in the upper reaches of the Minjiang River in northwestern Sichuan. This kind of living environment gave birth to the Qiang people’s broad, magnificent, and soft artistic sentiment, and cultivated the aesthetic characteristics of the Qiang people. However, in the process of migration, the Qiang people have developed a fearless spirit of perseverance and hard work. Therefore, Qiang silver ornament has bred the artistic aesthetics of peculiar shape, exquisite color, unique decoration, broadness, robustness, magnificence

and fineness and softness in this humanistic spirit.

### 1) The modeling features of Qiang silver ornament

Qiang silver ornament has a peculiar shape with square or round, which is very varied, flexible and natural, simple and elegant. Although it is not large in size, it has a unique shape and rich connotation. Because Qiang silver ornament is the carrier of the reappearance of the gods, which is an object for the gods carried by the ancient Qiang people. Therefore, they are not particularly large in shape and are very easy to carry. At present, the concentrated areas of Qiang people are mainly concentrated in the Aba area in western Sichuan of China, bordering the Tibetan area to the west and the Chengdu Plain to the east. In the course of history, the continuous fusion, symbiosis, and compatibility with the Tibetan and Han ethnic groups have not only made the blood of the Qiang people closely connected with these ethnic groups, but also blended with each other in terms of language, customs, and art. Therefore, the silver jewelry of the Qiang nationality also penetrates with their blending. The Qiang silver ornament near the Tibetan area has broad and vigorous, rugged and powerful shapes, and is even more rugged and tough. However, the Qiang silver ornament in the Han area near the Chengdu Plain is soft and graceful, delicate and exquisite. The modeling features of the Qiang's heartland neutralize the two, which are both rugged and graceful. The modeling is lifelike, simple and unsophisticated, and the lines are smooth and graceful.

Looking at the overall development of Qiang silver ornament, there are three factors that really influence the characteristics of Qiang silver ornament: Firstly is the integration and nourishment of Han culture from the Chengdu Plain. Among them, the modeling patterns with the characteristics of Han cultural ideology and aesthetic culture, such as auspicious dragon and phoenix, peony, pomegranate with many children and more blessings, twelve zodiac signs, Qilin sends children, Taishi Shaobao, Taiji gossip and so on, are used frequently in the Qiang silver decoration modeling. It is used more and profoundly affects the modeling characteristics and cultural connotation of Qiang silver ornament. In addition, in the expression of the craftsmanship of gold and silver ornaments, the Han gold and silver ornaments are also used in hammer discs, casting, engraving, gilding, inlay, and delicate techniques (Figure 4), which makes the Qiang silver ornaments work more refined than other ethnic silver ornaments with more gorgeous shape. It fully highlights its exquisite shape, delicate physique, and detailed artistic characteristics. Secondly is to absorb and integrate its traditional craftsmanship and craft aesthetics from its neighbors from the northwest, such as the appearance of metal craftsmanship in Tibetan areas, decorative features of patterns and symbols, product types, craftsmanship and so on, thus forming a simple and unadorned, free and unrestrained plastic arts charm. Among them, the reference and integration of the artistic shapes and functions of Tibetan waist knives, fire sickles, milk hooks, and Gawu silver ornaments is the most unique and in-depth reflection in Qiang silver ornaments, and is the most common expression in traditional Qiang silver ornaments. However,



**Figure 4.** Engraving technique (Taken by the author).

the Tibetan arts of waist knives, fire sickles, milk hooks, and Gawu silver ornaments are bolder in physique and expression, while those of the Qiang people are more refined, compact and graceful. It can be seen that the aesthetics of Qiang traditional silver ornament is deeply influenced by the traditional Tibetan metal craftsmanship. Thirdly is to be influenced by the primitive religion of the nation, to pursue “all things have anims” as the highest realm, and to use all things as the carrier to create patterns and shapes, so as to obtain the aesthetic characteristics of auspiciousness, safety and wealth.

## 2) The color matching characteristics of Qiang silver ornament

“Qiang people admire white, and white is one of their main worship colors. This intention is reflected in the white stone, white headkerchief, the white long gown they wear, and the use of white fur animals as sacrifices in sacrifice activities” (Wei & Cheng, 2014). According to the *Sichuan Tusi Biography*: “... their custom is to use white to symbolize kindness and black to symbolize evil”. In the thinking of the Qiang people, white represents the noble virtues of truth, goodness and beauty. The Qiang people are descended from the nomadic people in the northwest. The northwestern region is mostly snow-capped mountains. Moisturizing pastures and irrigated farmland rely on melting snow from snow-capped mountains, so snow is closely related to people’s production and life. And the food that people usually eat is mostly dairy products, which is one of the reasons why they admire white. The snow white of silverware is even more a dazzling white. The bright white silver ornament is the most beautiful and precious thing of the Qiang people. It seems to shine with a kind of spiritual light, which is loved by the people of the Qiang people and has been passed down to this day.

In addition to advocating white, the Qiang people also love red, which is their most noble etiquette. Red of Qiang is a token of the Qiang people’s prayers for auspiciousness, and is the most solemn form of etiquette of the Qiang people in long-term social interactions. It is called Najinalu, which means good luck and happiness in life. The red of the Qiang nationality symbolizes peace, auspicious-

ness, celebration, dignity, harmony, success, loyalty, bravery, prosperity, and enthusiasm, which stands for cultural significance of success in all things, expelling diseases and eliminating disasters, turning good fortune from evil, abandoning evil and promoting good and so on. It highly summarizes the endless history of the Qiang nationality. The silver ornament of the Qiang nationality has been the carrier of thousands of years of history and culture of the Qiang nationality, so the red-loving characteristic can be seen everywhere in the traditional silver ornament of the Qiang nationality. In the production of silver ornament, the traditional artists of the Qiang nationality cleverly combine the white and red of the Qiang nationality, making the entire silver ornament have a strong contrast, bright and dazzling, brilliant and elegant.

### 3) The decorative features of Qiang silver ornament

The Qiang people believe that all things have anims, so nature, mountains, rivers, animals, and plants all reflect their spiritual beliefs and artistic aesthetics, thus creating many exquisite totem symbols, patterns and patterns. These symbols and patterns contain the profound cultural connotations and symbolic meanings accumulated by the Qiang people for thousands of years. Some symbols and patterns have already become the symbols of this nation and ethnic symbols, deeply integrated into the blood and memory of this nation, and embody the historical process of the Qiang people's multiplication for thousands of years. They also reflect the decorative aesthetics and artistic creativity accumulated by the Qiang people, and are widely used in Qiang's silver ornament, clothing, paper-cutting, and architectural art.

Qiang silver ornaments have rich decorative patterns and a wide range of types. Some graphic symbols are simple and mellow, some are sturdy and refined, and some are graceful and delicate, which are very colorful and amazing. Decorative patterns mainly include primitive totem worship, abstract patterns and symbolic patterns derived from nature worship. Abstract patterns are the Qiang people's summarization and refinement of natural phenomena such as sun, moon, mountains and rivers, wind, rain, thunder and lightning. Among them, geometric figures are mainly used. Abstract patterns can be summarized concisely with rich connotations, and accurately grasp the basic laws of the universe, such as moiré, water, sun, and moon. The symbolic pattern is used by the Qiang people to compare people with the help of objects. It is a graphic symbol that contains a good meaning and a good wish for life.

Its representative patterns include pomegranate flower, gourd, lotus, white crane, tree pattern, chrysanthemum and so on, which symbolize life elements (Figure 5); It carries the meanings of peony, golden pheasant, phoenix bird, curly grass and other patterns that wish for a better life, as well as the "sheep" pattern, the cleat pattern, the swastika pattern "卍" and so on that symbolize ethnic symbols.

These patterns range from realism to abstraction, from lines to shapes, and various straight, curved, and flowing and rotating forms have become the main

theme of decoration. Some are symmetrical, some are neat, some are well-defined, some are full of rhythm, and some are very rhythmic. The Qiang people unconsciously have created and cultivated a kind of pure beauty, and summed up the beauty rules of cadence, rhythm, symmetry, balance, interval, overlap, thickness, density and other decorative forms.

In addition to different shapes, Qiang silver ornaments also contain rich connotations. Behind each pattern has its deep cultural connotation.

First of all, sheep pattern and dog pattern are unique in animal patterns. Sheep pattern is one of the totem symbols of the Qiang people (**Figure 6**, **Figure 7**).

Qiang people are also known as “Xirong shepherds”. Qiang people call themselves “Er Ma” or “Er Mie”, so sheep is one of their oldest totem worship patterns, which are widely used in Qiang silverware, Qiang architecture, clothing and other aspects closely related to Qiang people. The dog’s totem pattern is also one of the most frequently used symbols, and it gradually evolved into the round figure of the beast most worshipped by the Qiang people, (**Figure 8(a)**, **Figure 8(b)**) showing the dignity and solemnity, and fully embodying the advanced aesthetic concept of the ancient Qiang artists.



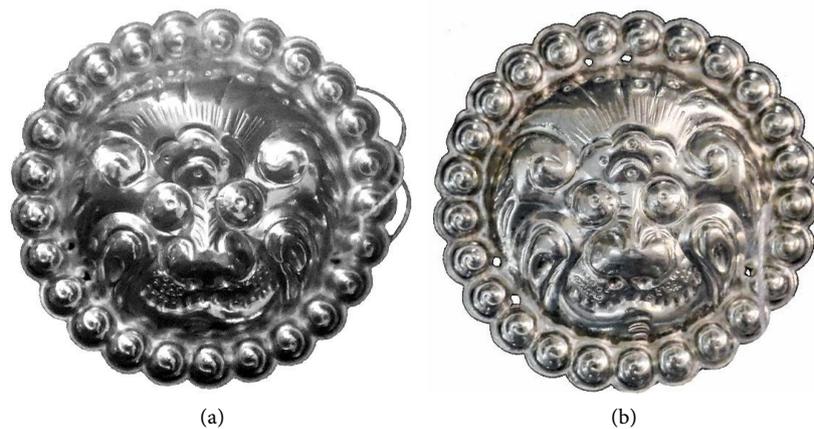
**Figure 5.** Plant pattern silver ornament (Taken by the author).



**Figure 6.** Sheep pattern decoration (Taken by the author).



**Figure 7.** Sheep pattern headdress (From the Internet).



**Figure 8.** Round beast (Taken by the author).

Nowadays, dog totem patterns abound in the silver jewelry works collected by the major museums in Qiang district, in architectural components, children's dog hats, and Qiang embroidery. Because the Qiang people believe that dogs can ward off evil spirits, they engraved evil dogs on their tokens, believing that they can turn bad luck into good luck. Moreover, they worship the mountains, rivers, sun, moon, and stars in the natural patterns. The sun, moon and stars are the most respected graphic patterns of the Qiang people. In the face of the infinite mystery and awe of nature, the Qiang people worship the sun and the moon even more, creating various patterns representing the sun, the moon and the stars, among which the swastika “卍” is the most unique.

It can be the sun and the moon, it can also symbolize light, or it can symbolize flame. “This kind of pattern has appeared in the Neolithic sites in Gansu, Qinghai and other places six or seven thousand years ago. For example, there are many 10,000-character patterns on Majiayao colored pottery. These areas are

where the ancient Qiang people thrived, so the ancient Qiang people created this symbol. Today, the swastika pattern not only appears in large numbers in Qiang silver ornament, but also frequently appears in other Qiang arts” (Zhong et al., 2012). Cloud pattern is also one of the representatives of the Qiang people’s worship of nature. The Qiang people think that they are the people on the clouds, so they engraved various cloud patterns on the silver ornaments, using clouds to imply good luck, happiness and peace. In addition, the claw pattern in the plant pattern is the representative pattern of its proliferation. Claw is another name for alpine rhododendron by the Qiang people, and it is the flower guarded by the Qiang people. According to legend, the universe was dark in ancient times, as if covered with black gauze. There was no sky, no earth, and nothing else. Aba Mubita (the emperor of heaven) called the God Father mubaxi Brazil to create the sky, and the God Mother Rubu to create the land. After the heaven and the earth were built, Aba Mupyta created the sun, the moon, and the stars in a hurry, and then made everything. At this time, the earth is quiet without any vitality. So Aba Mubita used claw flowers to refine the tree trunks to create humans. From then on, the Qiang people began to multiply, so the claw pattern has been passed down as a representative pattern of the Qiang people’s multiplication. Nowadays, the claw pattern is widely used in silver ornaments for head ornaments and chest ornaments, and some claw flower shapes are independently used to make ornaments (Figure 9, Figure 10); Some are inlaid with red coral agate and green turquoise in the center of the flower, which complement each other in red and green, red and white, and green and white, which are particularly eye-catching and shining; Some of them are used in other shapes to be presented as decorative patterns of graphic symbols, and their expressions are rich and colorful, and they complement and complement each other with various graphic symbols and elements, which complement each other and demonstrate their unique artistic charm. In general, the decorative patterns of Qiang silver ornaments are unique and rich, and are the carrier of their cultural spirit and artistic aesthetics. All of these reflect the Qiang people’s love of nature, harmony between nature and man, and simple and unpretentious emotional aesthetics.



**Figure 9.** Claw pattern head ornaments (Taken by the author).



**Figure 10.** Claw pattern chest ornaments (Taken by the author).

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, as a form of Qiang culture and art, Qiang silver ornament has formed its own unique style due to its special geographical environment, production and lifestyle, ethnic beliefs, totem worship and other factors during the long historical development process. From the content point of view, Qiang silver ornament mainly expresses the religious beliefs and living customs of the entire nation, deeply embodies the cultural connotation, artistic aesthetics and modeling characteristics of the Qiang nationality, and conveys the culture of the Qiang nationality to the world with its magical artistic charm information.

The traditional silver art of the Qiang nationality is simple and magnificent, beautiful and generous, simple and elegant, and unique in decoration. It is not only the display of the wearer's aesthetic consciousness, but also the carrier of the spiritual culture of the Qiang nationality. Its artistic features, cultural connotations, and decorative patterns have been passed down for thousands of years under the oral teachings of the artisans, and are the inheritance and development that generations of Qiang craftsmen have adhered to. No one deliberately changed its traditional form and shape, because every craftsman knows that his responsibility is to pass on these ancient Qiang silver ornaments intact, so as to retain the foundation of the national silver ornament culture. Because they are the embodiment of the spiritual sustenance, national beliefs and cultural aesthetics of the Qiang people, they are also the materialized forms of spiritual teaching culture, and they are also a significant symbolic element and symbol that distinguishes the silver ornaments of the Qiang people from other ethnic silver ornaments. In the long historical process, the Qiang people have accumulated infinite wisdom and creativity. The connotation, modeling characteristics, totem symbols and patterns of its silverware culture are the essence of the national culture that has been passed down through thousands of years, and it has become the intermediary, window and bridge for the emotional and cultural exchanges between the Qiang people and the outside world. Nowadays, Qiang silver ornament shines out with its unique regional cultural characteristics, national customs and artistic aesthetics, and occupies a unique position in the world

silver ornament art industry.

### Remarks

For the two web pictures cited in the article, the photographer should contact the author of this article on 15882237580.

### Project

This research is the phased research result of the 2019 National Art Foundation Tibetan, Qiang, and Yi Silver Ornament Craft Innovative Design Talent Training (project number: 2019-A-04(153)-0695);

This research is the research result of Southwest Minzu University in the central university general project Research on the Construction and Development Strategy of Qiang Ethnic Traditional Villages under the Background of Migration (project number: 2019SYB01).

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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