

Embroidery Industry and Rural Revitalization Strategy in Ashima's Hometown

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With cultural system reform and cultural industry development, embroidery industry in Stone Forest area has gradually become a scale industry, with obvious impacts on farmers' income. This tangible benefit therefore has become new drive to push forward for the overall rural revitalization strategy in China.

Keywords: Embroidery Industry, Rural Revitalization Strategy

Stone Forest, hometown of Ashima, is one of the 10 trial counties declared as cultural industry construction site by Yunnan Provincial Committee and Government. Driven by tourism and tobacco industry, rural economy has accelerated rapidly. However, as a typical mountainous or half- mountainous agricultural county with 88.5% agricultural population, its industrial structure is still characterized by weak infrastructure construction. The cultural quality as a whole in the county needs improvement, and how to increase farmer's income is still the biggest challenge for the construction of socialist new rural areas. In recent years, together with cultural system reform and cultural industry development, embroidery industry in Stone Forest area has gradually become a scale industry, with obvious impact on raising farmers' income. This tangible benefit therefore has become new drive to push forward for overall socialist rural revitalization strategy.

Embroidery History and Technology Know-How

Embroidery, for Yi People, has a long history. The unearthed bronze in Shizhai Mountain in Jinning was found decorated with embroidery design in some figure's clothes. In Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasty, embroidery has been quite popular among Yi women, with variety of embroidery materials and colorful designs and patterns (Bai, 2002) . The thick local feature of ethnic nature kept its flavor till recent decades.

In the slack season, women start embroidery in addition to spinning and weaving, and skillful embroidery really begin from teenage time. While doing embroidery, they need not to draw lines as the art is there in their smart minds, and their nimble fingers produce artistic paintings. However, designs and patterns for embroidery work come from people's daily life. Needled with thousands of thread, clothes become more wear-resistant and durable.

Raw materials used by traditional Sani Yi People is linen or native cloth made by themselves. Nowadays, it is more common to use cotton cloth or chemical fiber; threads used for hand embroidery range from silk thread, cross thread to cashmere thread according to type of embroidery. Sani Yi People in Stone Forest generally divided their embroidery into two: cross stitch, sort of abstract geometric design

and flat embroidery, sort of fine and exquisite flower design. At present, Yi embroidery design in Stone Forest basically applies traditional pattern, majored in cross stitch abstract geometric design featured in center of symmetry or axial symmetry; mostly used colors are black, deep blue and white, with rare ones as yellow, orange and red as base color.

In the past, the embroidery pieces were not used other than as decorations on clothes for Sani women, for example on Baotou, the collar, skirt, sleeves, lower hem, pant leg, corset, ribbon as well as bonnet, haversack and vamp. With fast market development so far, the common Yi embroidery handiwork in Stone Forest include: haversack, knapsack, pockets, saddlebag, wallet, handbag, table cloth, cushion for leaning on, mobile phone cover, cup mat, telephone mat, cotton gown, coat, shawl, scarf, tie, shoes and wall hanging, sachet and so on. Valuable, both in decoration and practical use, considered as most unique traditional art and handicraft work for ethnic Yi People in Stone Forest (Xiao, 2005).

Commercialization Process of Yi Embroidery in Stone Forest

So far, total population in Stone Forest County is 251,000, out of which 116,000 are female, agricultural population is 104,000 (labor worker as 60,000), and 12,000 are non-agriculture people. In Yi populated areas, particularly in Yi villages, women aged between 15-55 years mostly engaged in embroidery, and 80% of laid-off female workers and women staying at home worked in the embroidery industry (Survey, 2008) .

According to statistics, individual business involved in embroidery processing, selling and leasing in the whole county are 126, employing 1188 persons working in this industry, in addition to around 10,000 working there in their spare time. Total output value of embroidery in the county stood at around 14.56million yuan; operation income of about 24million yuan; added value of about 8million yuan, and tax income up to about 1.44million yuan. Based on rich historical culture, ethnic heritage, actively developing ethnic embroidery industry is not only an important way to develop Stone Forest as a tourism county, but also is an important way to prosper ethnic culture in Stone Forest, and foster cultural pillar industry. As an important component of ethnic culture industry, Yi embroidery industry is making its way of commercialization through the long term historical development.

In the traditional Yi society in Stone Forest County, folk embroidery is a compulsory class for women. Most Yi villagers take embroidery for Sani women as a necessary skill, and it is taken as Sani women's talent and capacity to keep a family. After 1985, with rapid tourism development and construction of market economy, handicrafts of Sani women like decorations on clothing, saddlebag and others were increasingly embraced by customers both in China and abroad, so, it eventually became an established market. Among them, Ashima Embroidery Bag has won China International Technology Product Exhibition award. Embroidery has become one of the most successful traditional ethnic industry to bring benefits, attract attention of state, provincial, and municipality government sectors, even media, which enabled increased brand identification. Women from Beida Village Committee went to Beijing to sell embroidery products, and all became rich. The wife of the head of the village even bought an apartment in Beijing and sent back salary to the head of the village. Later on, even the head of the village resigned, and followed his wife to Beijing. Embroidery not only became a complementary in slack season for women, but even an important source of income.

Since early 1990s till now, embroidery industry in Stone Forest County gradually developed and specialized production enterprises have been established there. For example, led by Azhuodi Ethnic Embroidery Product Development Technology Association, Yi Embroidery Culture Industry Development Companies have been set up in Lufu, Guishang and so in townships; and company plus household mode was adopted as operation mode, with rapidly increasing economic benefits. Those engaged in ethnic folk culture industry became rich in shortest periods in the villages. As successful examples: Pushi Folk Ethnic Traditional Embroidery Plant engaged in producing handicrafts, technology know how all based on traditional ones, with designs and patterns sticking to original primitive Yi style; Stone Forest Bishi Ethnic Clothing and costume Ltd. Co., affiliated with ethnic clothing and costume plants , with Yi saddlebags, wall hangings as its brand products, possessing hundreds of embroidery machine tools, its products have been distributed to big cities and tourist spots all across China; Ashima

Ethnic Art Clothing and Costume Ltd. Co., majored in production and selling of traditional Yi clothing, in particular, stage costumes; Stone Forest Minimangduo Ashima Clothing Ltd. Co. sponsored by 4 sisters, producing traditional Sani clothing, has a considerable market share; Stone Forest Shenhua Handicraft Factory, using natural raw materials of hemp, linen, ramie, and cotton, producing hand-made ethnic clothing. All these enterprises provide raw materials, organize the local or neighboring women to engage in embroidery work in their spare time, and then re-processing to make exquisite final products. Most of these products sell in other provinces of China and Southeast Asian countries, some of them are only made for gifts, special products.

On top of this, some villages have become specialized embroidery villages, for example, Five Tree Village next to the Stone Forest Scenic Spot, and Yuehu Village in Beida Village. Five Tree Village next to the Stone Forest scenic spot has 43 business households, specialized in making Yi saddlebags, tourism souvenir, technology applied and design are all market-oriented, for example as saddlebag with zipper, embroidery shoes for pet and so on, combined tradition with modernity, together with ethnic embroidery features.

Potential Factors Affect Development of Yi Embroidery in Stone Forest

As a unique advantage to develop culture industry in Stone Forest, there are a number of factors that affect embroidery industry. These factors include favorable ones that are supportive in the industry's growth as well as unfavorable ones that confine and restrict the industry's development. Both of them have far-reaching impact on the industry.

Market Strength

In addition to brand name like Ashima as a Yi cultural content and National famous scenic spot for tourism, market advantages also include:

1. Government support and favorable production and sale environment. Government support is of crucial importance to secure market prosperity. Local government support embroidery industry development; see it as an important industry to boost economy; therefore, provide a relaxed policy environment to foster this industry.
2. Geographic advantage. Stone Forest is an important gateway for the 3 prefectures and 18 counties located in Southeast Yunnan. With No. 324 and No. 326 National Highway passes through its territory; Nankun Railway running 46.7 kilometers in the county and Kunshi Highway paving 7 kilometers within. This hub location favors Yi embroidery industry to expand its market.
3. Huge market need. Local industrial structure transformation and strategic choice of industrial upgrading bring new development for the embroidery industry. Increasing demand for handicraft embroidery presented both in the domestic and international market, providing huge market potential.

Develop Yi embroidery industry, planning rationally, speed up construction of a production platform, effectively consolidate resources, innovate development mode, translate potential resource advantages into practical development advantages to increase efficiency, foster a folk ethnic embroidery market with combined functions of exhibition, whole sale and retailing, bring about the development of relevant industries, to strengthen tourism culture market, become a new economic growth point for income increasing.

Risk Management

Full understanding of the potential risks in the embroidery market will be helpful in making rational decisions and keeping this industry in sustainable development. At present, there are three major risks existed in the embroidery market:

First, profit risk stem from unstable product quality. As most ethnic embroidery processing outsource raw materials to complete processing, combine both handmade and machine-made, and percentage point of machine-made bigger than handmade, result in low technological content of the embroidery products, primary processing bigger than in-depth processing; so far, part of the products have been processed by computer embroidery, in this way, although productivity has been increased dramatically, but the quality has been deteriorated and seriously undermined the level of the products; for many years, design and product lines as well as the technology have not innovated, and research and development is much lagging behind, resulting in low product quality, few choice of the range of products, low level of value for use and collection, further resulting in high cost and low profits.

Secondly, single industrial structure. Restricted by geographical location, ethnic embroidery processing industry belong to pure processing, not yet as an industrial chain, lacking in comprehensive efficiency. At present, opportunities of construction and development of Stone Forest Comprehensive Service Zone will enable a potential to construct Stone Forest Ethnic Tourism Products Trade Center, therefore, adjust ethnic embroidery processing industrial structure and processing location, gradually take shape of an integrated processing, wholesale, retailing, observation, exhibition, performance, recreation, transform and go beyond the pure processing confinement, improve efficiency as a whole to better manage risks.

Thirdly, embroidery industry is facing market vicious competition. Owing to weak brand identification and intellectual property rights awareness, embroidery market is facing risk of vicious market competition. In Stone Forest market, it has long been infringed of copying the design and pattern, or fierce price cutting for competition, directly resulted in low profits for embroidery firms and making its expansion more difficult. For these reasons, to what extent would industrial competition rules being established to secure an open, fair, standard and orderly market, or how long it will take to standardize this industry will have crucial importance in the future of the embroidery industry.

Reflection on Embroidery Industry Development in Stone Forest

Focus of rural revitalization strategy is to solve rural problems, that is, to address “three problems in rural areas” from perspective of a comprehensive solution in the countryside. It centered around economic construction, push forward for an overall progress, boosting both material and spiritual civilization, of course, cultural construction is embedded in nature.

First, ethnic embroidery is a short run, high return on investment, and labor intensive industry. As the most representative folk art, Yi embroidery could bring tens of thousands becoming rich through a single needle. However, lack of brand identification resulted in difficulties of expand market share. The key to address brand name issue is to strengthen intellectual property rights and brand identification awareness, making efforts in establishing complete brand names.

Secondly, ethnic embroidery processing as an important way of agriculture economy and sources of tourism income, should be planned in terms of development direction and scale as an important component of developing ethnic culture industry. The most pressing task is to regulate relevant industrial standard, to follow advanced international ones, enhance technology barrier. Deter counterfeit and poor-quality products through implementing standard production and detection, improving industrial technology progress and improving overall quality as a whole.

Thirdly, scattered processing for the rural households, and piece wage formed an intangible plant in the embroidery industry, resulted in low cost operation; moreover, the purpose of the tourists to buy is not for practical use, rather, they buy it for watching; therefore, tourists prefer external beauty and low price first in buying choice. This market trend led many embroidery pieces decorated in collar, sleeve, and pant leg used to be handmade changed to machine-made to lower the cost down. Only those that are not yet able to be substituted by machine still depend on hand making. Therefore, development of ethnic embroidery industry in pursuit of maximized profit will easily derail embroidery technology, down rate Boutique and good quality, mistakenly position into a mass market.

CONCLUSION

Looking at Yi People's traditional embroidery technology from the point of cultural resource development protection is a double-edged weapon and presents both positive and negative sides. From positive side, embroidery industry enriched tourism souvenir market, with sales going beyond China. It expands Yi cultural influence. Meanwhile, during the process of development of traditional embroidery, a group of talents able to pass over this technology has been cultivated. From negative point of view, more and more people see embroidery as a way to make money that forced original handmade embroidery way out of its previous positioning. In time of the villagers, pursuit of economic profits was not bigger than respect to their traditional culture. It is not appreciable that the development direction of the local Yi embroidery industry will be fully market-oriented that aimed at profit as the sole purpose and ignore or even give up the cultural connotation of traditional embroidery technology.

Only if short-term and long-term profit can be integrated, and hardware and software are brought together, the rural revitalization strategy could bring tangible benefits and serve local people. It can strengthen the rural cultural industry in its real sense while deepening the understanding among urban and rural people to promote social harmony.

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