

Identifying the Traditional Color Scheme in Decorative Patterns Used by the Bahnar Ethnic Group in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

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Abstract : The Bahnar is one of 11 indigenous groups living in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. It is one among the four most popular groups in this area, including the Mnong who speak the same language of Mon Khmer family, while both groups of the Jrai and the Rhade belong to the Malayo-Polynesian language family. These groups once captured fertile plateaus, left their cultural and artistic heritage which affected the remaining small groups. Despite the difference in ethnic origins, these groups seem to share similar beliefs, customs and related folk arts after a very long time living beside each other. However, through an in-depth study, this paper points out the fact that the decorative patterns used by the Bahnar are different from the other ethnic groups, especially in color. Based on historical materials from the local museums and some studies in 1980s when all of the ethnic groups in this area had still lived in self-sufficient condition, this paper characterizes the traditional color scheme used by the Bahnar and identifies the difference in decorative motifs of this group compared to the others by pointing out they do not use green in their usual decorative patterns. Moreover, combined with some field surveys recently, through comparative analysis, it also discovers stylistic variations of these patterns in the process of cultural exchange with the other ethnic groups, both in and out of the region, in modern living conditions. This study helps to preserve and promote the traditional values and cultural identity of the Bahnar people in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, avoiding the fusion of styles among groups during the cultural exchange.

Keywords : Bahnar ethnic group, decorative patterns, the central highlands of Vietnam, the traditional color scheme

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