Qingyang Sachet: Symbolic Narratives of One Chinese Cultural Heritage and Referential Guidance to Sustainable Development in Less-developed Regions

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Abstract: - Qingyang sachet (Xiangbao), a unique intangible cultural heritage in China, makes ingenious combination of colorful patterns, various shapes as well as contrastive colors with time-honored local custom, profound cultural connotation as well as native people's aspiration for a better life. The sachet integrates multifaceted roles of decorating living space, driving away misfortune, and dispelling pests and preventing diseases, and thus maintaining strong vitality over thousands of years. It fulfills the new concept of empowering women to spare full use of time free of labour work by making the crafts as a house decorator, a facilitator to healthcare by expelling pests via its herbal fillings, a contributor to environment by beautifying living spaces, as well as an assistant to poverty alleviation by transforming the handicraft into a commercial product as an income source, which provides exemplary guidance to less-developed regions like Sub-Saharan Africa in preserving intangible cultural heritage, alleviating poverty, controlling epidemics as well as empowering women to realize the goals as envisioned in Agenda 2063.

Key-Words: - Cultural heritage, protective inheritance, sustainable development, women empowerment, poverty alleviation, referential guidance

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1 Introduction

Qingyang, one east Gansu (P. R. China) city nestled in the Loess Plateau neighboring Shaanxi and Ningxia, is the birthplace of Yellow Emperor, the forefather of Chinese people, and thus an important cradle of Chinese civilization. The Yangshao culture, enjoying an 8000-year history, gave rise to one famous cultural handicraft in the region, Qingyang sachet, and hence the city of Qingyang is officially nominated as "The Hometown of Chinese Sachet" in the year of 2002 by China Folklore Society [1]. As a traditional cultural heritage deeply rooted in the thickest layer of loess land on the planet, this small exquisite handicraft is not merely a festive decoration but also a container of the wisdom of local ancestors with profound cultural connotations. Besides, it also serves a practical value, closely related to people's health and livelihoods as the function of warding off evil spirits and expelling infectious pests. It also makes an effective practice of the new-era notion of empowering women groups by vesting this cultural product with an economic role of raising household income, creating a very promising prospect to reducing and alleviating poverty, which is what less-developed regions like Sub-Saharan African nations are in urgent need of learning from and drawing on [2], [3].

2 Cultural Narratives of Qinygyang Sachet

2.1 Original Narratives of Ancient Totem Worship in Sachet Crafts

Qingyang, the cradle of Chinese agricultural civilization, is said to be the place where Buzhu, the ancestor of the Zhou Dynasty of over 4,000 years ago, had ever instructed the local natives with farming techniques. The shortage of ample rainfall in this piece of loess land developed its distinctive characteristic of agricultural farming on seasonal rains and also of deep reliance on nature for survival. Moreover, natural disasters like drought, sandstorms and the invasion of fierce creatures such as tigers, leopard, wolves, snakes and wild boars were always deadly threats to ancient locals, therefore, the ancestors attributed the living creatures in nature with some specific mysterious force of life guardians and fortune protectors, and thus totem worship took shape

and passed down as a conventional custom. The custom assumed that bright-colored flowers and good-looking animals are always invested with happiness and fortune, on the contrary, ugly or ferocious animals come with bad luck or misfortune [4]. One classic example is that the animal bat is similar in Chinese pronunciation to wealth and therefore the visit of a bat into the house signifies the befalling of happiness and treasure on the family. Another fascinating instance is that the flower peony is often revered as a sign of big fortune and honorable social status (da fu da gui in Chinese). This worship gradually evolved into varied patterns and shapes embroidered on the regional sachet, implying their sincere reverence to the nature and keen expectation of a good life [5] .

2.2 Procedural Narratives of Hand-made Sachet

Qingyang sachet, as a millennium-old cultural handicraft, was originally needle-embroidered by rural housewives in the leisure time from farming work, with scrap materials of figured cloth, silk satins or fleece fabrics in various sizes, different colors and proportional texture, shaped like animals or flowers with the implication of sincere wishes and ardent blessings of a safe and sound life free of diseases and disasters. Generally speaking, its production usually goes through the following stages from selecting materials, scissor-cutting silk cloth, embroidering patterns, filling fragrant herbs to final sewing. The first step is to select appropriate silk or cloth fabrics, requiring cotton cloth or silk satins with various colors as the outer cover for a beautiful look and fragrant spices and silk floss as the internal fillings for aroma and three-dimensional modeling. Next comes cutting these silk fabrics with scissors into intentional shapes, full of local characteristics and cultural implications. The most crucial step is to embroider the fabrics with colored silk threads into various figures such as grasses, flowers, birds, and auspicious beasts, involving a variety of techniques such as row stitching, braid stitching, and inside-concealed stitching for esthetic attraction and implication transmission. Immediately following, the embroidered fabrics are concealing needled into internal-bulging models by imitating the forms of objects in real life, with some features exaggerated to intensify visual attention. At this moment, one side or a small part will keep open to fill inside with flosses and herb spices for stereo perception and aromatic odors. Finally, the small mouth or opening part is sewed together and a tassel is stitched onto for human wearing or as indoor pendants, besides two or more tassels of bright silk threads stitched at the lower end for higher attention.

2.3 Evolution of Qingyang sachet as a cultural heritage

Qingyang locals have been maintaining for thousands of years the custom of wearing the fragrant sachets on Dragon Boat Festival, May Fifth of Chinese lunar calendar. Sachet crafts, also known as incense pouches, or fragrant pouches, was named in the Chinese history as “xiangnang” or “peiwei” (a traditional Chinese decorative pouch), also referred to in local folks as “hebao”, “shuahuo”, or “chou’er/chuchu”. The origin of Qingyang sachets can be traced back to ancient times of the Yellow Emperor more than 4,000 years ago. The history records that Qibo, the originator of traditional Chinese medicine and also the author of the first Chinese classic on herb medicine The Yellow Emperor’s Canon of Internal Medicine (huang di nei jing), was often seen taking with himself a sachet of herbs to prevent epidemics, ward off plagues, and repel venomous snakes. Its medical effect resulted in more and more emulation of his practice by the common public, making the herb sachet highly popular among the locals, with herbs being substituted by “fragrant herbs” and the pouches transforming into “scented sachets”, which is considered as the original prototype of Qingyang sachet. The custom became conventionally localized since and continued in the Dynasties of Qin throughout Han and Tang to Song, and came into maturity during Ming and Qing. With time going by, the sachet has evolved from a simple medical sachet into a kind of folk handicraft with multiple functions of life decoration, health care, folk art, and cultural beliefs[5].

3 Symbolic Writing of Qingyang Sachet

Qingyang sachet concentrates on the embroidered handicraft multifarious aspirations of local people nestling in the Loessland for a better life by taking a wide variety of patterns and shapes embroidered with bright-colored silk threads, with a long history near to five thousand years [1]. As a traditional cultural symbol, it involves harmonious incorporation of many elements, patterns, shapes and colors being the three crucial ones.

3.1 Pattern Symbolism

Qingyang sachet varies its symbolic patterns in conveying the local residents’ beautiful aspirations for a safe and sound life, in particular best wishes of children being smart and lively and senior people’s health and longevity[6], [7], [8], often by imitating the form from nature, classical mythology, and daily life like little lovely kids, flowers in full blossom or

animals with majestic appearance [5]. The peony, commonly acclaimed as "the monarch in the flowers" in the Chinese custom, takes the symbolic meaning of wealth and prosperity and thus this flower in the sachet is often embroidered with bright colors to bring the plump petals and elegant postures to life, full of the housewives' genuine yearning for a sweet and cozy life. The sachet craft patterned like the lotus flowers exists as a pendant in the bedroom or living room, wishing the whole family harmonious and prosperous. Flowers of peony, lotus, water lily and Chinese rose, symbols of four seasons in a year, are embroidered together on a piece of colorful saint cloth with various color threads in a pattern series, bearing the heartfelt wishes for the whole family's safety and well-being all year around.

Animals are also the most common content elements in the patterns of handmade sachets. Birds such as magpie and mandarin duck are popular in the handcraft patterns, in that the latter is often considered in the Chinese as a mascot of good news and hence the pattern of "magpies on plum branches" symbolizes the advent of good fortune. Mandarin ducks, on the other hand, are often seen as the token of spousal love and marital harmony in Chinese culture and accordingly the sachet craft patterned with mandarin ducks is often functioned as a gift wishing a couple a lifetime of love and happiness. The centipede is conventionalized to refer to by the ancient residents in this Loess Plateau as a coin string in that the Chinese character "wan" (ten thousand) in the form of Oracle Script resembles the structure of this creature and thus the centipede is often sewed in the sachet as the felicitous wish of wealth arriving. In fact, the most ethnically distinctive is none other than the shape of dragon (loong), the totem of the Chinese nation. This handcrafted artwork, designed in the image of a majestic soaring dragon, is often adopted either as an auspicious charm for children to wear or as a decorative ornament hanging in the living rooms and bedrooms, placing the profound respect for the ancestors. The animal fish, a homophone with "vast wealth" in the Chinese language, is often taken as the emblem of living a prosperous life and therefore embroidered into the sachet with a round-shaped composition of two fish having fun in the water of lotus flowers, face to face, gracefully curved bodies and intimately intertwined tails, denoting people's expectation of living a happy and abundant life year after year. A piece of craftwork takes the embroidery of a bat, a deer and one Chinese character "shou" together, with an anticipation of living a life satisfactory in three major aspects, that is happiness, longevity and honor.

Of all the sachet works, the most representative is the traditional one taking the pattern of five ugly-looking creatures, specifically for little children to wear on the back on the day of Dragon Boat Festival. The detailed legend in ancient Chinese goes that the month of May in the Chinese lunar calendar is generally viewed in folk communities as stained with malicious power and therefore the fifth of May was commonly viewed as the vicious day by the locals. The natives assumed that people, in particular little kids, because of their not enough strong physique, are more vulnerable to ailments or evil ghosts. As a countermeasure, it is sensible for little kids to wear on the day of Dragon Boat Festival a sachet with the motif of the so-called five poisonous creatures, that is a centipede, a scorpion, a gecko, a snake, and a toad. In the real life, these five animals constituted an existential threat to the residents as well as their poultry and livestock in the primitive tribe, accordingly, were accustomed to be referred to as "Five Toxins" in the traditional belief of Chinese people, and hence wearing sachets with the pattern of "Five Toxins" on the festival day is believed to be able to ward off evil spirits and prevent diseases, enveloping the ancient folks' ideals and wishes of a good life free from diseases and disasters and also their unique way of mindset to achieve the purpose of self-protection by practicing the traditional Chinese medical principle of combating poison with poison. As recorded in the literature, this custom was conventionalized as early as in the Zhou Dynasty of over 4,000 years ago, because the human as early as that period commonly considered that an unsightly countenance is instinctive to evoke an involuntary physiological response of dread and repulsion on the people. What's more, following the philosophy of fighting poison with poison, the creatures of this kind are attributed with an incredible power of warding off evil force, averting disasters, and inviting good fortune.

In addition, the story plots and character images in Chinese classic literary works and folktales constitute the latest fashionable contents in the sachet patterns. Characters such as Sun Wukong (Monkey King), Zhu Bajie, and Tang Seng in Wu Cheng'en's famous classic novel The Journey to the West are being embroidered with lovely and vivid figures on the folk handicrafts like on the embroidered pillows or the insoles, making the artworks best sellers domestically and abroad, promoting the spread of traditional Chinese culture into more parts of the whole globe.

3.2 Shape Symbolism

Unlike explicit westerners and extroverted Africans, Chinese people are inherent with being implicit and self-reserved in expressing themselves, and Qingyang

sachet is a specific manifestation of this distinctive feature in personality. In other words, diversifying its shapes is a frequent tactic in the folk culture of sachet works to make explicit their wishes for a blessed life without being invaded by evil forces [9], [10], of which the tiger-shaped sachet is highly representative. The tiger is widely accepted as a sign of bravery and strength in the Chinese culture and is thus incarnated by the Chinese as "the king of all beasts", playing the role of driving away evil spirits and safeguarding the peace of family members. Correspondingly, the tiger-shaped sachet is usually designed in real works with a round head, a fat body as well as big eyes. What catches eyes most is its bulging eyes and majestic claws, highlighting its grandeur and power, and therefore the children, by wearing tiger-shaped sachets, are expected to avoid the invasion of evil spirits and grow up free of diseases or disasters. Just as dates, peanuts, longan, and lotus, all similar to the sounds of descendants in Chinese language, are integrated into the sachet shape for the heartfelt wishes of "early birth of a cute baby"; sachet crafts shaped like gourds and pomegranates, because of the abundant seeds inside, are applied to take the symbolic connotation of fertility of more children, in compliance with Chinese tradition of "more children, more blessing". This convention stems from a fact that agriculture cultivation had taken a dominant position in the Chinese economic system for a long time in the past history, and accordingly more children means an increase in labor force and correspondingly a reduction in the labor load of the parents, which is the main reason why more children are traditionally believed in the Chinese culture as more blessing and why Chinese people are accustomed to present their best wishes to the newlyweds saying "may you have a lovely baby soon" (the early birth of a noble child), such conventional folk beliefs are in high popularity in the design of sachet shapes.

Qingyang sachet varies its style in many different types, specifically symbolizing in different parts like the pectoral, the head, the shoulder, the dorsal, and the shoe [11]. The pectoral type, vivid and varied in its style, often mimics the shape of joyful and auspicious plants or animals, full of female embroiderers' hopes for life blessing characterized mainly with big harvest and large fortune. In real life, this kind of craftwork can be employed singly or embroidered artwork series, from two or three to as many as eight or nine ones, are stitched on the upper end with strands of color threads as neck laces for lovely kids to wear on the buttons pitched on the front chest part of their jacket, filled with strong festive atmosphere and warm wishes for the descendants. The second popular type is the handicrafts shaped like head of animals like tigers, cats, or rabbits, ready for little kids to wear as caps, praying that the children live as energetically as and as cutely as the animals modeled. In the similar vein, the shoulder type is also more often shaped like vigorous tigers or majestic lions, an embroidered craft featuring with a large head but a petite body as well as with robust claws but short legs. The craft of this type is often sewed on the shoulders of little kids' upper garment with an intention to drive away evil and wicked forces. The dorsal type is largely featured with the shapes of the five toxin creatures, that is centipedes, scorpions, spiders, snakes, and toads. As mentioned above, wearing the sachet crafts with these five naturally poisonous creatures centers on the ancient Chinese medical philosophy of combating poison with poison. By sewing the crafts of this type onto the back part of little children's tops, the adults accumulates with their best wishes for the descendant's future life disease-free without disaster. Quite different from other types, shoe-shaped craft works are more practical in their values, often formed like the head of tigers or cats, as a symmetrical pair of a left one and a right one, fully implementing the fundamental principle of yin-yang harmony in the ancient Chinese medical philosophy. This kind of work is special for little kids, whereas, if special for new brides, the two shoe sachets are embroidered with festive magpies on the boughs of blossoming plum, or the prosperous pair of a dragon and a phoenix living and flying in pairs all day long. The fragrant pillow pouches also fall into this type, either with the oblong form or with the form of square outside and hollowly round inside, full of their aspirations for longevity in lifespan, prosperity in business, and happiness in family members.

3.3 Color Symbolism

Qingyang sachet, an exquisite craft product with artistic ingenuity, masterful techniques and natural fragrances, is hand-embroidered with colorful silk satins or cloths as an integrator of visual and material expressions concentrating the value and wisdom of ancient people in the Loessland of China. Once the craftwork is made, tassels of bright-colored silk thread are stitched to its top and both ends, suiting for children to wear or as indoor decorative pendants. Its lower end is also decorated with tassels of bright-colored silk threads, for the sake of aesthetics. In essence, red, yellow, green, blue, white, and black constitute the major color basics in the sachet works [10],[12], [13]. The fundamental principle supporting this practice is that red, as the first dominant color symbolizing vitality, festivity, and success, is widely used in sachet works for festivals and weddings. The color yellow, a dominant color tone only second to red,

as an symbolism of the earth and human life representing imperial nobility and national stability in ancient Chinese culture, and also the color of the Loess Plateau's earth soil, is the particular favor in the embroidery artisans to make sachet patterns more attractive or as an accent color to make the sachet crafts more magnificent. Green, the symbol of nature, means vitality and growth, while blue, which is closely associated with the sky or the sea, represents tranquility and vastness. Thus, green is fit into the sachet work with the connotation of freshness and elegance and blue is applied to create a feeling of calmness. Furthermore, green, blue are paired with red to establish a visual effect of vibrancy and harmony. White, symbolizing purity and simplicity, and black, the major color of the uniform of ancient Chinese emperors and government officials representing solemnity and authority, are also the major components of color schemes in the sachet crafts. Actually, white is often adopted in the practical works to compose the visual contrast as a plain background while black is served in the sachets as a border color to make the overall pattern more prominent.

In fact, the color format in Qingyang sachet is deeply affected by traditional Chinese concepts of color, following traditional Chinese esthetic principles with symbolic implications. Besides the basics, colors in bright warm tones like magenta, cyan, lime, gold, aquamarine, orange, dodger blue, orange red, lawn green, green yellow, and deep sky blue also come to predominate the color scheme of the sachet, trying to build a sharp contrast in effect or to be mutually complementary as visually appreciated. The color layout, like the combination of bright red and green or red and yellow as the base, are in full efforts to enhance the artworks' ornamental value by making the sachets look more vivid and eye-catching. In addition, Qingyang sachet is also saturated with heavy cultural characteristics of the unique geographical environment of the plateau land. Yellow, the color of the Loess Plateau, is needled into the sachet works with high frequency, featuring the sachets with a sense of earthiness and simplicity, and also embodying in the embroidered sachet their deep and genuine affection for the land they are living on. As a mirror of affective and cultural connotations, Qingyang sachet is a concentrate of being simple and straightforward in character, elegant and unsophisticated in aesthetics, and sincere in expectation of a life full of energy and vitality of the local people [10].

4 Reference-inspired Enlightenment of Qingyang Sachet to Sub-Saharan Africa

As documented in many authoritative literature, Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular is currently being challenged with multifaceted predicaments in the development, with drought, epidemics and poverty being the most plaguing. In fact, its current hardships are what Qingyang, an inland city in northwest China, have once experienced. Nevertheless, the native locals, insubmissive to any insurmountable hardships, have constructed a miracle of human life and development on the Losse Plateau, a region which the United Nations have once doomed as uninhabitable. Diligence, optimism, and persistence, core qualities to this marvel, are well embodied in the local needle craftwork, Qingyang sachet, which can serve as profound inspirations for Sub-Saharan Africans to achieve the goals envisioned by Agenda 2063 [14].

4.1 Healthcare

The first inspiring aspect to Sub-Saharan Africans is Qingyang sachet's medical function in repelling pests like mosquitoes and flies as well as in preventing diseases. The current Africa, especially sub-Saharan region, has some of the world's highest rates of preventable neonatal and maternal mortality, and deaths from infectious diseases, antimicrobial -resistant infections, malnutrition and an epidemic of non-communicable diseases accounting for over 37% of all deaths on the continent [15]. At the same time, many pests like mosquitoes, tse-tse flies, bed bugs are aggrieving infectious threatening to the life of local people and livestock on this second largest continent in the world [16], [17]. On the other hand, this larger piece of continent is rich in medical herb plants and an estimated 5,400 species with medical properties are being extended into universal application by culturally diverse indigenous healers or populations on this continent land of 30 million square kilometers in many ways for a wide range of diseases and illnesses [18]. Despite its widespread use and cultural significance, African traditional medicines are still encountering enormous challenges in terms of recognition, standardization, and integration into formal national healthcare systems, though these herb plants function as the primary healthcare provider with higher acceptance and extensive application in most rural areas [19].

As an superb artwork of form and function, Qingyang sachet, after being embroidered, is often filled inside through one tiny concealed opening at the bottom part (needled together later) with several kinds of herb

plants like mugwort, angelica, cardamom, clove, fennel, or honeysuckle, each with its own unique medical functions [20]. This medical practice originated from indigenous folk knowledge accumulated by ancient residents of Qingyang in their daily life and farming that realgar wine (spraying on the sachet surface on the night before the day of use) is unique and miraculous in the effect of expelling pests and dispelling toxins and that the aroma of mugwort is innately attributed with a particular function for repelling flies and mosquitoes. More knowledge is that herb plants like wormwood, mint, and cloves are capable to produce some volatile substances that are effective to repel mosquitoes, flies, and moths, especially in good effect in summer, a season of flies and mosquitoes in flock. In addition, aromatic herbs such as agastache, atractylodes, and angelica are naturally borne with a certain function of purifying air, inhibiting bacteria, and improving immune system, which is crucial for disease prevention in spring, a season of high occurrence of infectious epidemics like influenza, measles, mumps, scarlet fever, chickenpox, and epidemic meningitis. Furthermore, substances like lavender, jujube kernels, and chrysanthemum are natural with some sedative effects in getting anxiety relieved and making sleeping improved. Accordingly, mugwort is the most common herb filled in the sachet in that this plant is rich in volatile oils such as artemisia ketone, borneol and cineole, with the medical effect of dispelling cold, removing dampness, and warming the meridians. Therefore, the smell of mugwort filled in the sachet can help to regulate the harmonious circulation of qi (energy) and blood in the human body, especially for those with a damp-heat constitutional type. Atractylodes rhizome is in widespread use in the sachets and its smell helps alleviate spleen dysfunctioning symptoms such as loss of appetite and abdominal distension because atractylone and atractylodin, the major components in atractylodes rhizome, can fulfill the function of invigorating the spleen, drying dampness, and expelling wind-cold. Angelica dahurica is popular in the sachet because the compounds like imperatorin and osthole in the herb plant are able to perform a wide range of roles in dispelling wind, relieving pain, and promoting blood circulation and its fragrance can help relieve headaches and nasal congestion caused by wind-cold. Indeed, the synergistic effect of traditional Chinese medicines necessitates filling with more than one herbs, such as the compatibility of mugwort and atractylodes rhizome because combining mugwort's efficacy of warming the meridians and dispelling cold with atractylodes rhizome's role in drying cold-dampness and invigorating the spleen suffices to regulate and eliminate cold and dampness in the body. Singly, angelica dahurica helps to ease pain and promote blood circulation, while mint has the functions of clearing heat, relieving sore throat, and refreshing the mind. Filling these two herbs into the sachet crafts is effective to make the patients relieved and comfortable out of the affliction of headaches and throat discomfort.

As a matter of fact, the medicinal efficacy of herbs filled in the handicrafts has long been substantiated and supported in ancient medical classics, like the most authoritative Chinese medical classics The Compendium of Materia Medica (ben cao gang mu) with precise documentation of the effect in regulating qi and blood to expel cold and dampness by human body's exposure to burning mugwort leaves, consistent with the herb's antimicrobial and antiviral role as well as the preventive and therapeutic effect on respiratory diseases. Minors, due to their underdeveloped immune systems, are more susceptible to infectious diseases; older people, because of decreasing organism, are also the potential target group to suffer from diseases such as sleeping trouble, weak spleen and stomach, or poor blood circulation. A sachet with some traditional Chinese medicinal herbs inside can help improve their immune function by boosting the development of immune cells, activating their immune systems, and thus more resistant to diseases by warding off viral attacks. Likewise, the elderly can also be benefited in that the filled herbs such as ginseng, angelica sinensis, and poria cocos can help nourish and enhance the circulation of qi (energy) and blood, invigorate the spleen and stomach, and improve the physical condition, playing a crucial role in enhancing their overall health. Sub-Saharan Africans may learn from Qingyang sachet for a reference, to fill small daily articles with indigenous herbs fulfilling the function of preventive treatment in the medical plants as they are more affordable, available, and accessible to millions of rural people in under-developed regions of the Africa continent.

4.2 Poverty-alleviation

So far, poverty is severely plaguing the whole African continent and Africa still remains the highest poverty in the whole world region [21]. One recent report by the United Nations indicated that 429 million people, a rough ratio of one third in the total population of 1.4 billion inhabitants on the continent, were living below the extreme poverty line in 2024, the highest extreme poverty rates in the world [22]. Of the world's 28 impoverished countries, 23 are Africans with extreme poverty rates above 30%, Mozambique, Malawi, Central African Republic, and Niger ranking the

highest by the extreme poverty indicator of 2.15 U.S. dollars per day. Although many African nations are forecast to experience strong growth episodes, relatively few members on the continent have factually witnessed a significant decline in extreme poverty. On the other hand, many studies have confirmed that female-headed households demonstrate higher rates of poverty and hunger than male-headed in Sub -Saharan Africa [23], [24], [25], constituting a large proportion of the victims of extreme poverty, which is in severe conflict with Agenda 2063. Notably, Aspiration 6 of Agenda 2063 identifies Africa as people-driven development, especially relying on the potential of women and youth [26] and the fulfillment of African housewives' responsibility in the new era involves the transformation of their role from field labor to a main supply to household income as well as a a major contributor to the family out of poverty.

For a long time in history, Qingyang sachets are hand-embroidered by adult housewives in the leisure time free from farming work because of rain or snow, and elderly women as well as teenage girls not strong enough for manual labor also participate. The craft products, except for a small proportion for family members' own use, are mostly taken to the market for sale as the supplement of household expenditure. Nowadays, people are exhibiting renewed appreciation for natural original ecological handicrafts, revitalizing the sachet craft into a burgeoning industry, and thereby many rural women are newly empowered with more accessible opportunities to make much greater contributions to household poverty alleviation. Qingyang sachet, a representative of local folk art and handicraft, has been evolving beyond an original decoration on Dragon Boat Festival into a diverse range of embroidery products, including traditional festival ornament, social customs accessories, practical daily commodities, and decorative pendants. Its roles have been permeating into every aspect of the lives in the local residents, from original incense pouches as children's "toy crafts" (shuahuo in the local speech) or serving functions for health preservation and spiritual protection into a variety of social customs items for weddings, birthdays, and celebrations of babies' full-month life, along with practical and decorative applications, totaling over 200 types, with many diverse functions of health preservation, spiritual blessings, daily functionality, and aesthetic enhancement as a relatively independent folk art system with longstanding artistic vitality, functional utility, symbolic meaning, cultural psychology and practical service in everyday life [5]. This constitutes the second aspect that Qingyang sachet inspires Sub-Saharan Africans in poverty alleviation as one cultural heritage craftwork.

4.3 Environment

The third point of Qingyang sachet enlightening Sub-Saharan Africans is its green philosophy and follow-up action inspired by this philosophy. It cannot be denied that, more than anywhere else on the earth, a vast majority of Sub-Saharan African nations have been among the least producers of global carbon emissions, yet they are among the most vulnerable to and impacted by global climate change, significantly negative impacting them in a multitude of ways including exacerbating water stress, damaging agricultural harvests, affecting lifestyles, and amplifying inequality of gender and other dimensions [27]. The continent, in particular the Sahel region, is in constant danger of devastating impact of climate change, droughts, floods and biodiversity loss. Lack access to sustainable livelihoods, potable water, adequate food, health care, electricity, sanitary, and other fundamental services, together with conflicts over dwindling natural resources and mass migration to Europe, is the resulting consequences, threatening Sub-Saharan African's ecology, economy, and political stability [28]. In fact, as early as in 2007, the African Union launched an African-led Great Green Wall Initiative to grow an 8,000km natural wonder across the entire width of Africa, aiming to restore the continent's degraded landscapes and transform millions of lives in the Sahel. In addition to land restoration, the project also aims to sequester 250 million metric tons of carbon and create 10 million green-sector jobs by 2030. Yet, this project has not been without its share of formidable challenges—environmental, social, cultural, and political. In 2020 alone, over 220,000 people were displaced and 10,000 hectares of cropland were destroyed in Niger alone, underscoring the fragility of the region's subsistence-based economies [29]. With the self-imposed 2030 deadline fast approaching, the question remains: how will the Great Green Wall's story unfold in not so many years to come?

Qingyang, the largest piece of plateau land with the thickest layer of loess on the planet, was once recognized by the United Nations as an uninhabitable region for humans. Furthermore, uneven distribution of rainfall, particularly the scarcity of precipitation and frequent winds in spring, exacerbated its agriculture with a strong tendency of being rain-fed. As a local proverb puts it, there was one round of wind blowing throughout a year, from spring to winter. In addition to this, soil erosion affected 85% of its territory, and annual sediment into the Yellow River reached 168.4 million tons, accounting for one-third

of the soil erosion in the region and one-tenth of annual sediment of the entire watershed. Other natural disasters such as sandstorms, desertification, low-temperature frost and occasional flooding, also prove to be big impediments to social and economic progress in the region. As a result, it is no surprise that green and other vivid colors like cyan, lime, aquamarine, lawn green, green yellow are much a preference in the handcraft works, as an index of the local natives' strong anticipation of a life full of green and vibrancy. Beyond a deep affection for bright and vivid colors, people in Qingyang have also managed to convert this view into practical endeavor; successfully preserving the Meridian Mountains (Ziwu Ling/Ridges), the intra-regional natural vegetation with an area of over 300 thousand hectares. The locals are striving with great consistency in words and deeds, starting one great initiative of "Building Another New Meridian Mountains" in 2013. The past ten years witnessed artificial afforestation of more than 500,000 hectares and the reduction of soil erosion to less than 800 hectares, forest coverage having increased from 11.32% in 1985 to 26.30% in 2024. The green economy, especially the tree-side economy in the courtyards, has formed a new income stream for local rural residents. Exquisite handcrafts, once as a mere life decoration, have as well become a powerful incentive for people to pursue a more beautiful, healthy and prosperous life, which provides a valuable reference for Sub-Saharan Africans being severely afflicted by drought, famine, and poverty.

5 Conclusion

Millennium-old Sachet (qian sui xiang bao), discovered at Huachi County of this Loess Plateau city within a temple built in the Jin Dynasty over 1500 years ago, is a vivid indicative of the long history of the handicraft in this northwest China city. The five-venom sachet, a traditional folk craftwork themed on the five venomous creatures, assimilates the negative traits of animals into the needlework to symbolize human's longing and blessings for a better life free of evil spirits or disasters. The herbal fillings also bestow this folk cultural product with rich fragrance as well as practical purpose of health guardians in repelling mosquitoes and flies, besides the record of folk beliefs, esthetic values, and inheritance memories with the integration of craftsmanship and wisdom through patterns, shapes and colors. Qingyang sachet has been evolving into an industry boasting about 200 folk culture enterprises, an annual production of 10 million craft products, and an annual output value of 100 million RMB yuan (including 20 million from overseas e-commerce) per year, having exported to over 30 countries including the UK, France, Germany, and those in East and Southeast Asia [30]. The development of Qingyang sachet signifies the transformation of village women from the past accessories to society into a powerful driving force in poverty elimination and social development of the new era. All has set a good model for impoverished regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, showcasing a successful path in protective inheritance and sustainable development of cultural heritage as well as in fully unleashing the immense potential of culture craft and women group in the modern society in promoting poverty alleviation, economic growth and the construction of social civilization. In future the local government should learn to integrate the handcraft into the China-Africa cooperation in a package of collaborative efforts like preservation of intangible cultural heritage as well as poverty reduction and alleviation, taking the form of academic presentation, seminar, workshop, and Africans' site visit to Qingyang.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized artificial intelligence (AI) technologies solely for the purpose of linguistic refinement and grammatical correction. Following the application of these tools, the author(s) comprehensively reviewed, verified, and edited the resulting text. The author(s) maintain full accountability and responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the publication.

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