

苗族の服飾における龍紋に関する考察

——貴州省黔東南の苗族を例に

An Examination of the Dragon Patterns of Miao Clothing
—— Taking the Miao People of Qiandongnan as an Example

ZHANG Ling

張 玲

愛知大学国際コミュニケーション学部 非常勤講師

Faculty of International Communication, Aichi University

E-mail: Lingstudy5@gmail.com

概要：

龍は中華民族の象徴とされている。漢族の文化では、龍は皇族の専属紋様であり、一般の人々が龍を刺繍や装飾として衣服に使用することは許されない。しかし、苗族の伝統的な衣装では、龍の紋様が至る所に見られる。そして、その構図は漢族の衣装の龍の模様とは異なっている。本論文では、貴州省の苗族の伝統衣装にある龍の模様を詳細に調査し、苗族と漢族における龍紋の異同を比較することにより、その違いと共通点を明らかにしたうえで、その相違が生じた文化的背景と社会的歴史的要因を考察した。

キーワード：中国貴州省 ミャオ族 龍紋 伝統衣装

The Miao are the fourth largest ethnic minority in China, living mainly in Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi and Hunan. Miao women's costumes are rich and varied, and are considered to be the richest in style among China's ethnic minorities. The most characteristic part of the Miao costumes is the embroidery and patterns on the costumes. They are not only colorful, exquisite and beautiful, but also record the history of the Miao people. Since the Miao have no words of their own, they are accustomed to expressing their history and legends through the embroidery and patterns on their costumes.

The embroidery patterns on Miao women's clothing can be categorized into animal patterns, plant patterns, and geometric patterns. Butterfly, dragon, fish, and bird patterns are the most common animal patterns. The dragon has long been recognized as the symbol of the Chinese nation, and in Han Chinese culture, aside from the royal family and officials or special personnel granted permission by the emperor, ordinary people were not allowed to embroider or decorate their clothing with dragons. However, in the costumes of the Miao women, dragon patterns can be seen everywhere. And it has a different composition from the dragon pattern in Han Chinese costumes. This paper will examine in detail the dragon motifs on the costumes of Miao women in Guizhou in order to explain why the same dragon worship occurs in the Miao and Han, and what characteristics of Miao dragon culture are reflected in the differences between the Miao and Han in the dragon motifs.

Dragon Patterns and Dragon Worship in Miao Costumes

1. Dragon Patterns in Miao Clothing

The dragon pattern in Miao costumes is a relatively common pattern. In the Miao costumes of southeastern Guizhou, the dragons have different shapes. For example, there are snake dragons with dragon heads and snake bodies, naive silkworm dragons, bull dragons with huge horns on their heads, centipede dragons with vivid images, bird dragons with spread wings, and even flying dragons with human faces and snake bodies. These dragons have different shapes and characteristics. There is a big difference with the dragon patterns of the Han people. For example, the snake dragon, which is similar in shape to the Han Chinese dragon, has a long and slender body but no feet, and its body has the characteristics of a snake.

The snake dragon is usually surrounded by decorations such as butterflies, pomegranates, and flowers. The Ichthyosaurus, on the other hand, is usually stylized with a dragon's head, dragon's body, and fish's tail. Although the dragon's body is slender, it tends to have fins on its back and abdomen and a scissor-like tail. It has the typical characteristics of a fish tail. The centipede dragon, on the other hand, has the body of a dragon-headed centipede, which means that its body has numerous densely packed pine-branch-like arms and legs. It has the typical characteristics of a centipede. Silkworm Dragon is the body of a dragonhead silkworm, which is characterized by a short and fat body with a wave-like sense of writhing. The silkworm dragon pattern is most often seen on the sleeves of Miao women's clothing. The bull dragon shape is characterized by a dragon head with a snake body, or a dragon head with a dragon body, but the dragon head has two curved bull horns.

The bird dragon, on the other hand, is a dragon with a pair of giant bird wings. Many scholars have pointed out that the Miao dragon motifs embody the Miao worship of the dragon. This is also reflected in their folk activities and folk songs. For example, in Rongjiang County, Leishan County, and Taijiang County, there is a custom of inviting dragons. Inviting the Dragon refers to the Miao people's belief that the reasons for unfavorable weather, insufficient harvests, lower birth rate, or the unrest of their livestock is that the Dragon God is absent or displeased. To improve the situation, they must summon the Dragon God back or regain the Dragon God's favor. The series of sacrificial activities held for this purpose is called "Inviting the Dragon". (Ouyang, 2012: 4-5)

The Miao people's "Song of Drawing the Dragon" says: "Without the dragon, raising pigs and chickens cannot make them grow big. Planting rice cannot yield fruit, bringing the dragon back, the livestock are well fed, and the rice also gets a rich harvest. (Luo 1993: 10)

Apparently, the Miao people worship the dragon as a sacred animal and expect the dragon to bless people's lives with abundance and peace. In this sense, the Miao and Han people have something in common in their worship of the dragon.

2. The Origin of Dragon Worship

The history of Chinese civilization has a long history of dragon worship, and dragon figures have appeared in cultural sites since prehistoric times. For example, in 1987, the more than 6,000-year-old Yangshao cultural site was discovered in Xishuipo, Puyang, Henan Province. A dragon pattern, known as the Puyang Dragon, was discovered in Tomb No. 45 at the archaeological site. The pattern is as follows (see Figure 1), the right side of the skeleton of the tomb owner, there is a dragon formed by many clamshells, and on the left side of the tomb owner, there is a tiger formed by clamshells. As can be seen in the picture, the dragon is holding its head high and bending its tail, as if ready to fly.

In addition to this "Puyang Dragon", in Liaoning Fuxin Chahai Neolithic site unearthed "Chahai



Fig. 1 Puyang Dragon

Dragon”, in Hubei Huangmei County, Zhang Chen Village Jiao Dun site unearthed “Huangmei Dragon”. In Inner Mongolia Wengniuote flag Samsung Tala site unearthed the “C” shape jade pig dragon and so on. These dragons are distributed in different places and have a varied appearance. This indicates that the belief in dragons was already formed in the vast land of China in prehistoric times. This belief is also confirmed in the prehistoric myths and stories.

It is generally believed that in prehistoric times there were three major tribal groups in China, namely the Huaxia (華夏), the Eastern group (東夷), and the Miao group (苗蠻). Among them, the Huaxia group mainly lived in the upper reaches of the Yellow River and the Weishui Basin, the Miao group concentrated in the Jiangnan Basin, and the Eastern group gathered in the Jianghuai Basin. Among them, Emperor Yan and Emperor Huang were the leaders of the Huaxia group in the central plain, while Fuxi and Nvwa were the leaders of the Miao group in the southwest, and Taihao and Shaohao were the leaders of the Eastern group. Coincidentally, the myths about these tribal leaders all indicate that they are either descendants of dragons, or they have a belief in worshipping dragons. For example, the “Emperor’s Century” (帝王世紀) and the “Three Emperors’ Chronicle” (三皇本記) both record this: “Nvdeng (女登), Yandi’s mother, sense of the divine dragon and gave birth to Emperor Yan (炎帝)¹⁾.”

The Eastern group, According to the Zuo Zhuan - Zhaogong 17th year (左傳·昭公十七年), their leader Taihao used the dragon as his symbol and named his official positions after the dragons²⁾. The Taihao tribe of the Eastern groups utilized the dragon as their sign and symbol, while the Miao group inhabited the Jiangnan plain and worshipped their ancestral gods, Nvwa and Fuxi. The Xuanzhongji (玄中記) records that Fuxi had a dragon-like body, and the Bamboo Book Chronicle (竹書記年) refers to Fuxi as various dragon titles such as the Flying Dragon, the Submerged Dragon, the Dwelling Dragon, the Descending Dragon, the Earth Dragon, the Water Dragon, the Green Dragon, the Red Dragon, the White Dragon, the Black Dragon, and the Yellow Dragon. All of Fuxi’s depictions are connected with dragons.

For an extended period, the three primary groups of Huaxia, Eastern, and Miao engaged in mutual exchanges and marital relations. However, as the Chi You tribe in the Miao groups grew in power, their influence expanded to Shandong and the central plains, resulting in the emergence of two opposing groups: the Huaxia group led by Yellow Emperor and Yan Emperor, and the Miao group led by Chi You. The two factions engaged in a battle at Zhuo Lu, ultimately concluding with

1) the original text from “三皇本紀” is as follows: “炎帝神農氏，姜姓，母曰女登，有蟠氏女，少典之妃，感神龍而生炎帝”。

2) the original text from “左傳·昭公十七年” is as follows: “太皞氏以龍紀，故為龍師而龍名”。

the triumph of the Chi You clan. Following the encounter, the Chi You (or Miao) clan fled to avoid being pursued by the Huaxia group, eventually migrating towards southern territories and settling deep in the mountains of Hunan, Guizhou, and Yunnan. Despite unique cultural practices stemming from extended national migration and adverse living circumstances, the Miao culture largely diverged from the Han culture. However, at the start of their respective cultures, the Miao and Han Chinese groups held reverence towards the dragon.

In his 1942 publication “The Examination of Fuxi (伏羲考),” renowned scholar Wen Yiduo (闻一多) identified the dragon myth as “a relic of ancient totemism.” He argued that the primary precursor to the dragon was the serpent. The cult of the dragon emerged due to the annexation of various tribes by dominant snake-worshipping ones. The dragon, an artifact of the imagination, is characterized by a serpent-like body, four animal legs, a horse’s head, an iguana’s tail, deer horns, dog claws, and fish scales and whiskers. The mythical creature was essentially a combination of many diverse totems. He further explained that dragon worship progressed through three stages. In the first stage, the dragon was viewed as an all-animal totem. In the second stage, it transformed into a half-human, half-animal god, represented by the human-headed, snake-bodied statues of Fuxi and Nuwa. Source: The final stage involved the dragon being fully deified as a god with the ability to ascend to the heavens, descend to the earth, and control the elements (Wen Yiduo 2006: 25–26)

Since the 1980s, scholars have presented alternative viewpoints regarding the dragon’s origin. For example, Qi Qingfu and Wang Mingda noted that the dragon’s prototype was not a snake, but a crocodile (Qi 1981; Wang 1981).

Zhu Tianshun proposed that lightning was the prototype of the dragon, as heavy rain typically follows thunder and lightning. This natural phenomenon evokes in people the association between rain and thunderstorms, leading to the fanciful depiction of an animal that has the ability to soar through the skies and expel water, inspired by the form and function of lightning. (Zhu 1982). The notion that the dragon’s shape originated from lightning is also attested in Zhao Tianliang’s research (Zhao 1983).

Wang Weidi suggests that early humans linked stormy weather to lightning, snakes, and other natural occurrences, leading to the belief in divine snakes ascending to the sky on clouds and wind and thunder exerting great force (Wang 1988).

Through a comparative study of dragon-shaped artifacts unearthed from prehistoric ruins, Sun Shoudao proposed the pig-dragon theory, arguing that the dragon’s avatar should have originally originated from a pig (Sun 1984).

On the basis of extensive research, He Xin conducted a thorough analysis, revealing that the dragon originated from the Bay Crocodile - a giant, man-eating crocodile that existed in ancient

China. In his book “Dragon: Myths and Truths” he supports his argument by examining the phonetics, structure, and meteorological data associated with the dragon. He Xin’s research has significantly enriched and expanded the scope of knowledge surrounding the origin of the dragon. However, Wen Yiduo’s doctrine that the dragon originated from the snake is still in the mainstream.

The Chinese, being primarily an agricultural society, worshipped the dragon as their rain deity. The dragon was believed to influence the rain that nourished and nurtured the crops, playing an indispensable role in the yearly harvest and survival of the community. As a result, the divine dragon, which had power over the wind and the rain, was revered.

As early as the Shang Dynasty, people used oracle bones for divination, asking whether dragons could bring rain. A specific example can be found in the “Oracle Bone Inscriptions 13002 (甲骨文合集13002): “Divination at the time of B-Wei: Will the dragon die and not send rain?” Furthermore, in the same document of 29990, the inscription reads “Having made an image of a dragon in an ordinary field, will it rain again?” demonstrating the belief in the dragon’s power to affect the weather. In the Shang Dynasty, where divination was favored in all things, it seemed to have become a common thing to ask whether dragons could bring rain to the people. It is clear that the dragon has become a well-known rain god at that time.

As for the Spring and Autumn Period, records relating to rainwater and dragons were even more prevalent. The “Classic of Mountains and Seas” (山海經 - 大荒东经) includes the account of the Fierce Plow Touqiu (凶犁土丘), located in the desolate northeast region. Yinglong (应龍) resides in the South Pole, having defeated Chi You (蚩尤) and Kwa Fu (誇父). As a result, Yinglong was banished from heaven and the world has been plagued by droughts since. People can get heavy rain when they pray in the manner of imitating Yinglong³).

People also widely accept that dragons have control over clouds and are capable of summoning them; thus, being considered as gods of the clouds. According to the Yi Department of Rhetoric (易·系辭), “The clouds follow the dragon”.

During the pre-Qin to Han Dynasty period, there was a clearer understanding of the connection between dragons and water and a more detailed description of dragons can be found in the historical records. According to Guanzi – Situation (管子·形勢篇), dragons were seen as deities of the water and relied on water to display their divine power. If they left the water, they would lose their divine power. People believe that the dragon is a divine being in the water. It swims freely in the water with its colorful scales. It can become as small as a silkworm, and as large as the vast

3) the original text from “山海經 - 大荒东” is as follows “大荒東北隅，中有山，名曰凶犁土丘，应龍处南極，殺蚩尤与誇父，不得復/複上。故下数旱，旱而為应龍之状，乃得大雨”。

world. Additionally, it can take flight into the clouds or plunge deep into the sea⁴).

The dragon has been defined as the deity responsible for water. Its divine abilities are contingent upon the presence of water. According to the *Huainanzi Geomorphology Training* (淮南子・地形訓), the dragon dives underground, causing spring water to gush out from the ground. The dust in the spring water flies up and turns into clouds in the sky. The Yin and Yang energies between heaven and earth conflict with each other, producing thunder. The thunder and lightning stir, forming lightning⁵. Here the text provides a detailed account of the dragon's ability to stir thunder and lightning and produce rain. People offer a plausible explanation for the dragon's divine power to control the elements.

The Miao people also worship the dragon as the god of rain. For instance, in Shi Bing County, Qiandongnan, Guizhou Province, they regularly conduct the "Inviting the Dragon" ritual, which is based on a tale of slaying a dragon. It is said that a father and son went to the river to fish, and the dragon ate the son. So people killed this dragon and ate it. Unexpectedly, this dragon was the son of the Dragon King. So the Dragon King got angry and stopped raining from then on. As a result, the land became barren and people could not grow food. So the elders of the Miao villages agreed that the Miao people living in the mountains would call the dragon on the ridge with a reed pipe, and the Miao people living by the river would row a boat and beat a drum to invite the dragon in the river. During the activity, the priest chanted the "Dragon Sutra", asking the dragon gods from all directions to come to the village to share the sacrifices, asking them to forgive their past mistakes, and then bless the villagers with good weather and peace in the future. It is said that such sacrificial activities have a history of thousands of years.

From this, we can observe that throughout ancient Chinese history, regardless of any alterations in the depiction of the dragon's physical features, the perception of the dragon being a water god has remained steady. (Luo 1990: 22).

4) the original text from "管子・水地篇" is as follows "欲下則入深泉，竜生于水。被五色而遊，故神。欲小則化如蚕蠶，欲大則蔵于天下，欲上則凌于雲氣，欲下則入于深淵”。

5) the original text from "淮南子・地形訓" is as follows "黄龍入蔵生黄泉，黄泉之埃上為黄雲，陰陽相薄為雷，激揚為電……青龍入蔵生青泉，青泉之埃上為青雲，陰陽相薄為雷，激揚為電……赤龍入蔵生赤泉，赤泉之埃上為赤雲，陰陽相薄為雷，激揚為電……白龍入蔵生白泉，白泉之埃上為白雲，陰陽相薄為雷，激揚為電……玄龍入蔵生玄泉，玄泉之埃上為玄雲，陰陽相薄為雷，激揚為電……”。

II Characteristics and Cultural Expressions of Miao and Han Dragon Patterns

1. The Evolution of the Dragon Patterns in Han Chinese

Most of the dragon patterns seen in Han costumes exhibit a nearly identical image consisting of a camel-like head, antler horns, rabbit-like eyes, cow-like ears, snake-like body, and scales of a fish with claws resembling those of an eagle.

The Miao dragon can be combined with various elements such as people, snakes, fish, centipedes, loaches, birds, and more, without following a fixed pattern. The dragon patterns in Miao culture typically utilize bright colors such as red, blue, dark brown, and navy blue, resulting in a sense of roughness, and the Miao dragon motif is prominently positioned in the center, complemented by surrounding flora and fauna such as flowers, plants, fish, shrimp, birds, and butterflies. The flora and fauna are paired randomly, do not follow the logic of life, for example, the fish and dragons in the rippling water are sometimes accompanied by small flying birds.

Even the morphology of a dragon may be compounded and superimposed, however, the Miao possess their own reasoning to elucidate it. For example, Chun Yu Bu found in his investigation that a Miao woman believed that the composite dragon she created represented three stages of the dragon flying from the sky. The smallest brown ball in the middle is the unclear appearance of the dragon when it first appears. The middle blue curved thick line is the gradually clear appearance of the dragon as it flies closer to us. The larger one on the outside is the clear appearance of the dragon when it flies in front of us. At this time, the dragon is flapping its wings, raising its head high, and opening its mouth to call the wind and rain (Chun 2016: 101–111).

Zhang Jianmin notes that the majority of dragon designs featured in Miao clothing originate from prehistoric artifacts and mythological stories. For instance, “Guanzi - Water and Earth (管子·水地篇)” identifies the dragon as a water deity, donning vivid scales and armor to glide effortlessly through the water. It exhibits the ability to transform in size from the petite silkworm to the vast expanse of the world. The dragon patterns seen on the Western Zhou Dynasty also include silkworm dragons. The Western Han ichthyosaur discovered in the tomb of concubine Moshu in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province is comparable to the ichthyosaur of the Miao people. The Qin Dynasty’s hollow bricks, which were discovered in Qindu, Xianyang, Shaanxi Province, feature dragon motifs that resemble the bull dragons depicted in modern-day Miao artwork (Zhang Jianmin 2009: 9–12).

Therefore, Miao embroidered dragons today represent the manifestations of dragons in early Chinese dragon culture (Yang 1994). In this sense, the dragon pattern of the Miao nationality can be considered as a living fossil, which mirrors the understanding of the dragon by the Chinese nation

thousands of years ago. Yang Yuan asserts that the dragon in ancient times originated from the totemic awareness and embodies characteristics of various totems (Yang 2016: 76–86).

Zhu Xueliang notes that the Han Chinese worship of the dragon underwent a transformation from totem worship to spirit worship due to the development of society. As a result, the dragon became the mediator between heaven and earth, controlled by both sorcerers and the royal family. The reason for this change is that during the Yin and Shang periods, the social structure evolved from tribes to states, and the upper class began to emerge, such as the group of wizards who managed religious sacrifices, and the group of professional bureaucrats who governed the people. They obtained the divine power to communicate with heaven and earth by controlling dragons and snakes, and thus obtained the authority to manage the people. For example, the “Classic of Mountains and Seas (山海經)” records a large number of people who manipulate dragons and snakes, who are either wizards or emperors in legends.

It is written in the Overseas Eastern (海外東經) Scriptures that Jumang in the east had the body of a bird and the face of a man, and rode two dragons⁶⁾. It is written in the Overseas and Western (海外西經) Scriptures that in the West, there is a man named Ruishou, who has a snake in his left ear and rides two dragons⁷⁾.

It is written in the Overseas South (海外南經) Scripture that Zhu Rong in the south had the face of a beast and the body of a man, and rode two dragons⁸⁾.

In the Overseas Northern (海外北經) Scriptures that Yujiang in the north had the face of man, and a bird’s body, and wearing two green snakes as decorations on the ears, stepping on two green snakes under the feet⁹⁾.

With the establishment of the feudal state, the king gained greater centralization of power as he became the leader of administrative officials and at the same time guides the thoughts of the people. The king became the supreme ruler. Therefore, the authority of the dragon was converged on the royal family.” Especially after low-born counter-insurgents took control of the kingdom, they frequently established a connection with the dragon to legitimize their rule.

For example, “The Records of the Grand Historian: The Annals of Gaozu (史记·高祖本纪)” describes Liu Bang, the humble-born founder of the Han Dynasty, as the son of a dragon. “The Records of the Grand Historian: The Annals of Xiang Yu (史记·项羽本纪)” also records that Fan Zeng once told Xiang Yu that he had someone observe Liu Bang’s aura, and found it to be in

6) the original text from “海外東經” is as follows: “東方句芒，鳥身人面，乘兩龍”。

7) the original text from “海外西經” is as follows: “西方蓐收，左耳有蛇，乘兩龍”。

8) the original text from “海外南經” is as follows: “南方祝融，獸面人身，乘兩龍”。

9) the original text from “海外北經” is as follows: “北方禺疆，人面鳥身，珥兩青蛇，踐兩青蛇”。

the shape of a five-colored dragon or tiger, which is the aura of an emperor. He urged Xiang Yu to eliminate Liu Bang immediately¹⁰). Clearly, Liu Bang emphasized his relationship with the dragon to gain his own divinity and authority, making himself a king recognized by both God and the people.

Subsequently, emperors practiced using the dragon's divinity to legitimize their secular rule. The cult of the dragon underwent a transformation into the cult of kingship, wherein the dragon pattern became the exclusive symbol of the royal family (Zhu 2012: 12–25).

Although the dragon became a royal exclusive pattern in Han society, the Miao nationality had been considered as peripheral barbarians for a long time. Until the Qing Dynasty strengthened the rule over the frontier minorities, the Miao nationality was not actually included in the usual management system of the Han regime. Therefore, Miao culture has a high degree of independence, and the dragon pattern of the Miao nationality does not have the characteristics of royal worship. This is also why the dragon pattern of the Han nationality can only be used exclusively by the royal family, while the dragon pattern of the Miao nationality can be used by the common people. At the same time, the Miao nationality's understanding of the dragon has not been transformed synchronously with the Han nationality. The dragon pattern of the Miao nationality largely retains the form of the prehistoric period, presenting a free state of arbitrary mixing with other animals.

2. Miao Dragon Patterns with Multiple Worship Meanings

The linkage of the dragon to kingship has resulted in the gradual standardization and homogenization of its image in Han society. The dragon is revered as the god of rain that can ride the clouds and overturn rivers, possessing an aggressive and terrifying deterrent force. However, the Miao dragon motif differs from the Han dragon, which is adorned with antlers that epitomize longevity, an animal head that signifies authority and power, eagle claws, and a golden coat that symbolizes the emperor's dignity. Rather, the Miao dragon pattern is replete with whimsical companions (Luo 1993: 10).

The dragon of the Miao nationality has more human characteristics. It can be a good dragon that blesses the people, or a bad dragon that harms the people. As mentioned before, in the Miao 'Inviting Dragon Song', the dragon is clearly described as a divine beast that blesses livestock to be healthy and crops to be abundant. At the same time, the bad dragon that harms the people must also be driven away. In the ceremony of driving away the bad dragon, the spell chanted by the Miao

10) the original text from “史記·項羽本紀” is as follows “范增說項羽曰：‘吾令人望其氣，皆為龍虎，成五採，此天子氣也。急擊勿失’”。

shaman is, “This dragon plays all day, this dragon gambles. This is a lazy dragon, this is a sick dragon. If it originally lived in the south, let it go back to the south. If it originally lived in the north, let it go back to the north.” From this, it can be seen that the dragon of the Miao nationality is more casual and has more human characteristics of both good and bad (Shi 1986: 475).

Compared with the Han nationality, it is precisely because the dragon of the Miao nationality has more humanized characteristics and is more casual. Therefore, when the dragon, as the rain god, is integrated with other animals, the divine power of the dragon is given new functions. For example, the water buffalo is an assistant to the Miao people’s farming, and it is closely related to the life of the Miao people and is indispensable. When the dragon grows buffalo horns and becomes a buffalo dragon (see Fig. 2), the dragon becomes a local mountain god. It can bless the villagers with a good harvest and peace, and can resolve the contradictions and disputes of the local Miao people, even such as the love disputes between men and women. Ouyang Zhiguo mentioned that in Rongjiang, Leishan and other places in Guizhou, In addition to holding the dragon summoning ceremony regularly according to customs, the Miao nationality will also hold the dragon summoning ceremony irregularly due to the needs of their own family or village. The reasons for summoning dragons are diverse, ranging from building new houses, avoiding plagues, to resolving love disputes between men and women, and blessing the village with good weather (Ouyang 2012: 4–5).

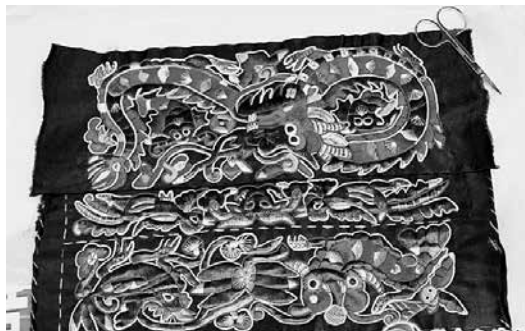


Fig. 2 Buffalo dragon

The fish, on the other hand, represents fertility and family prosperity. So when the dragon and the fish combine to form the ichthyosaurus, the dragon becomes the divine animal of fertility, blessing women with many children. For example, the National Geographic China website featured a Miao embroidery in which the dragon is a fish dragon (see Fig. 3) with a fish tail. The two dragons play happily around a pearl, symbolizing happiness, while at the bottom of the image, the baby dragon crawls obediently at the feet of its parents.



Fig. 3 Fish dragon

In addition to the fish dragon, the bird dragon and the silkworm dragon also have reproductive significance. The reproductive connotations of the dragon motifs in Miao costumes are extremely rich, which is different from the dragon in Han culture. (Liang 2012: 174–175)



Fig. 4 Bird dragon

Taking the bird dragon (see Fig. 4) as an example, the bird dragon is a dragon with a pair of gorgeous wings. In some Miao branches in Leigong Mountain, the dragon pattern of men's clothing likes to use the pattern of bird dragon. The ancient Miao song describes the story of the Whistling Bird helping the butterfly mother to hatch twelve eggs, and the butterfly is recognized by the Miao as their ancestor. Therefore, the bird itself is endowed with the divine power to bless production. In Miao society, people call the genitals of little boys "little sparrows". Sparrows are birds, which shows the close connection between bird dragon and reproductive worship.

Yang has observed that dragon worship among the Miao people is essentially a form of fertility worship, and believes that in the early stages of such worship, the dragon served as a symbol of the female reproductive organs. The numerous tales about riding dragons to the heavens are actually metaphors for sexual intercourse between males and females (Yang 1994).

Although Yang's argument still has some room for discussion and further proof, the dragon of

the Miao nationality is not only the rain god, who can summon wind and rain, bless people with good weather, but also the god of reproduction, protecting the offspring of each family, and the understanding of “many children, many blessings” is indeed rooted in many branches of the Miao nationality.

Conclusion

In Chinese culture, the dragon has always been considered a mythical creature. It is a rain god that can ascend to heaven and descend to earth, and it is also a symbol of imperial power and emperors. However, in the costumes of the Miao nationality, the dragon has more diverse representational characteristics and a wider range of divine powers. This article points out through a detailed analysis of the dragon patterns of the Miao nationality that the dragon patterns of the Miao nationality maintain the initial form of the Chinese dragon patterns. It shows that the Miao and Han nationalities have commonality at the source of culture, but because the Miao nationality has long been considered a barbaric nationality in remote areas, until the Qing Dynasty strengthened the rule over the frontier minorities, the Miao nationality was not actually included in the usual management system of the Han regime. Therefore, Miao culture also has a high degree of independence, and the dragon pattern of the Miao nationality does not have the characteristics of royal worship. That is to say, the dragon of the Miao nationality has not been endowed with royal power. It is not the incarnation of the king. Moreover, the dragon of the Miao nationality is not just a rain god, it can obtain new divine powers by combining with other animals. At the same time, it also has the characteristics of reproductive worship.

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Graphic Source

Fig. 1 “The Puyang Xishuipo Shell Dragon: Recognized by Multiple Disciplines as the Earliest “Dragon”” (濮陽西水坡蚌殼堆塑龍：被多學科所公認的最早的“龍”). <https://hct.henan.gov.cn/2022/12-17/2658973.html> accessed at 23 July 2023

Fig. 2 “The Hometown of Miao Embroidery: A Hundred Embroiderers from Taijiang Stitching with Flying Needles” (苗族刺繡之鄉：台江百名繡娘飛針走線). http://expo.ce.cn/zt/2013/yjyh/02/201307/16/t20130716_24576953_5.shtml accessed at 12 August 2023

Fig. 3 “Appreciate Miao embroidery and read wordless poetry books” (欣賞苗族繡片、閱讀無字詩書). <http://www.dili360.com/article/p546c5ab6d73f548.htm> accessed at 13 August 2023

Fig. 4 貴州凱里學院苗侗文化博物館藏品