

COMPARATIVE STUDY ON PATTERN CHARACTERISTICS AND CULTURAL CONNOTATION OF ZHUANG, MIAO, AND DONG ETHNIC BROCADE IN GUANGXI, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

In order to promote the more active protection and inheritance of ethnic minority brocade culture in Guangxi, and to address the issue of existing theoretical achievements mainly focusing on single ethnic brocade research and the relative lack of comparative research on multi-ethnic brocade, this study explores the similarities and differences in the pattern characteristics and cultural connotations of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocade in Guangxi through literature research, in-depth interviews, field research, and comparative analysis. A systematic comparative analysis is conducted on the weaving techniques, raw materials, selection, expression forms, totem worship, cultural connotations, and color combinations of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocade patterns. The research results indicate that there are commonalities in the weaving process, weaving materials, and expression forms of the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocade patterns in Guangxi, while maintaining ethnic individuality in totem worship, cultural connotations, and color matching. The core culture that explains the mutual exchange and integration of the tapestry cultures of different ethnic minorities while maintaining individuality.

Keywords: Zhuang brocade, Miao brocade, Dong brocade, Patterns, Comparative study

INTRODUCTION

Guangxi's various ethnic groups have a long history of weaving brocades, with exquisite craftsmanship, brilliant colors, and rich connotations. The patterns of Guangxi ethnic brocade are mostly derived from life and nature, from totem worship of various ethnic groups, and from memories and reminders of history, ancestors, wars, migration, beliefs, and so on. The pattern of ethnic brocade is one of the keys to exploring the development of ethnic society and culture. The brocade of various ethnic groups in Guangxi records and presents the historical culture, ideological concepts, customs and habits of ethnic minorities in Guangxi, which is an important way to study and inherit traditional ethnic culture.

Due to the interwoven distribution pattern of "large mixed and small settlements" among different ethnic groups, various ethnic groups have been communicating and learning from each other for a long time. The brocade culture of various ethnic groups in Guangxi has blended, resulting in the brocade patterns of each ethnic group not only expressing their own

totem worship, ethnic memory, historical and cultural characteristics, but also having many common aesthetic needs, natural worship, and other content.

This paper selects the brocade patterns of the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi as research samples to study the similarities and differences in brocade cultures of different ethnic groups. Mainly because the Zhuang and Dong ethnic groups both belong to the Zhuang Dong language family, with a homologous relationship and similar ethnic cultural customs, the pattern of "large settlement and small dispersion" between the two ethnic groups has created the characteristics of Zhuang and Dong ethnic cultures with their own characteristics but similar habits; The living habits of the Miao and Dong ethnic groups are similar, mainly living on mountain slopes. The pattern of "large mixed communities and small settlements" formed between the two ethnic groups has led to the integration of many traditional cultures. Due to the characteristics of their residential areas, cultural exchange and integration between the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi are more frequent compared to other ethnic minorities.

Research Objectives

Research the characteristics and cultural connotations of the brocade patterns of the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi, laying a solid foundation for the protection and inheritance of the brocade culture of the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Zhuang brocade

Lu Qiong systematically sorted out the patterns of Zhuang brocade, treating it as a "living carrier of culture". He believed that the generation of Zhuang brocade patterns "cannot be separated from the care of" people", is constrained by "skills" and "materials", and has an inevitable connection with "skills" and "materials", reflecting the close relationship between Zhuang brocade patterns and the daily life of Zhuang people (Lu, 2019).

Traditional Zhuang brocade has formed its own four major pattern systems, including geometric patterns, floral patterns, animal patterns, and human patterns. The geometric pattern is the earliest pattern in the Zhuang brocade pattern, and the "swastika" and "ten" patterns symbolize light, indicating worship of the sun god and praying for light; Water ripple patterns, well-shaped patterns, cloud and thunder patterns, etc., represent the worship of water and express the beautiful expectations of the agricultural nation for favorable weather conditions; Most animal and plant patterns express the worship of totems by Zhuang ancestors, such as phoenix patterns, bird patterns, dragon patterns, snake patterns, and frog patterns, which are the aspirations of Zhuang people for a certain power of animals; The patterns in Zhuang brocade come from the worship of the Zhuang flower totem, which is the belief in the Flower God, expressing the Zhuang people's desire for a prosperous population and continuous descendants (Bin & Pan, 2022).

Scholars had provided their own research conclusions on the cultural connotations of Zhuang brocade patterns. For example, the phoenix pattern in Zhuang brocade is a totemic worship of birds by the Zhuang ethnic group. There are many records in ancient books that birds are the "ancestors of Yue Zhu". In the animal patterns of Zhuang brocade, there is also the "sun bird" pattern, which is a trace of bird totem worship. The primitive phoenix totem was derived from the bird totem as its prototype. The dragon pattern of the Zhuang ethnic group is an imitation of the python and other snake like reptiles that appear in their living environment

by Zhuang brocade artists. The emergence of this pattern originated from the recognition, fear, and worship of the power exhibited by "snake like" animals by Zhuang ancestors (Zhang & Zhang, 2018). The patterns often used in Zhuang brocade are the worship of "Hua Po" by the Zhuang people, because in Zhuang mythology and legends, humans are composed of flowers, and the god in charge of human reproduction is "Hua Po". Zhuang ancestors worshipped Hua Po very much, so various floral patterns are often seen in Zhuang brocade (Bin & Pan, 2022). The water ripples in Zhuang brocade represent the floods that plagued ancient times. The ancestors of the Zhuang ethnic group used their wise minds to lead their descendants to survive, allowing the nation to thrive. The use of water ripples in Zhuang brocade by the Zhuang people is to commemorate their great ancestors (Sun, 2020). The feather pattern is the earliest character pattern in Zhuang brocade, reflecting the primitive bird worship and divination customs of Zhuang ancestors (Lu, 2017; Yang, 2019). The Zhuang people's love for gourd patterns comes from the homophonic sound of gourds, and is also related to the ancestor's worship of gourds and reproduction. "Hu" sounds homophonic with "Fu", and "Hu" sounds homophonic with "Fu Lu". Therefore, gourds are considered to have complete "Fu Lu Shou" and are considered as the mascot of the Zhuang people (Lu, 2017). Different historical stages have produced different ethnic beliefs, and the representative significance of Zhuang brocade patterns reflects the thoughts and concepts of the Zhuang people in different historical stages of the environment and society at that time.

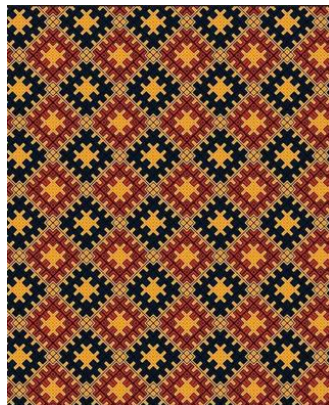


Figure 1 Geometric pattern Zhuang brocade
Source: Jianyun Yan (2023)



Figure 2 Double Snake Wrapped Frog Pattern Brocade
Source: Jianyun Yan (2023)



Figure 3 Chrysanthemum pattern Zhuang brocade
Source: Jianyun Yan (2023)

2. Dong brocade

Chen Xiaoling proposed that the emergence of Dong ethnic patterns mainly stems from two aspects, one is primitive worship. The sun pattern and circular pattern originate from the worship of the sun; Water ripple and vortex patterns originate from the worship of water; Spider patterns originate from the worship of reproduction; the second is life itself. Like the well-shaped pattern, water is the source of life. Dong people regard wells as the foundation of survival and embroider the well-shaped pattern on fabrics to seek the protection of the water god. Through the change and precipitation of the times, these adoration, legends, life forms and other beautiful objects have been transformed into fabric patterns. This long-term nature worship and survival activity has gradually formed Dong brocade patterns with regional and national characteristics (Chen Xiaoling et al., 2021).

The cultural connotation of Dong brocade patterns conveys the primitive totem worship and religious beliefs of the Dong people, as well as their psychological desire and pursuit for a better life, such as avoiding disasters and seeking good fortune. The patterns of cedar, spider, and phoenix reflect the main economy of Dong people's agriculture, as well as their natural values of valuing and harmoniously coexisting with nature (Yao Shuqi et al., 2022). The Dong people have always believed that birds can bring happiness and peace. They weave bird patterns into brocade, wear them on their bodies, pray for their protection, and preserve the legacy of bird worship culture to this day. As the ultimate manifestation of bird shape, the phoenix pattern with colorful wings and long tails holds a special position in Dong brocade and is deeply loved by the Dong people. However, in the hearts of embroiderers, the name of the phoenix is not commonly seen. Dong women in Sanjiang Tongle, Guangxi refer to it as "Golden Rooster" (Qi, 2009). The "ten" character pattern symbolizes the sun and is an important component of Dong ethnic brocade patterns, as well as an important component of Dong ethnic geometric patterns. The "Wan" character pattern reflects people's worship of the sun totem and reproductive reproduction, representing a cycle of endless growth. This type of pattern is often seen in the backpacks and clothing of Dong children, with the aim of praying to the sun god to protect them and bless their health and growth. Spider patterns are very common in the Dong ethnic area because in the Dong people's concept, spiders are their ancestors. Spiders have given birth and reproduction to the Dong people, and due to their tenacious vitality and reproductive ability, they are regarded as totem worship by the Dong people.

The "human" character pattern in Dong brocade is an abstract representation of human form. The human shaped pattern in Dong brocade is also known as the Duoye pattern or the stepped hall pattern, which vividly describes the scene of Dong people holding hands and dancing Duoye dances or holding sacrificial activities. Fish are important animals worshipped

by the Dong ethnic group and its ancestors. Dong people believe that fish in water not only serve as food to raise Dong children, but also symbolize longevity and reproduction due to their tenacious vitality and strong reproductive ability. Therefore, fish patterns are also commonly seen in Dong brocade, symbolizing longevity and reproduction (Liu, 2018). In addition, the Dong ethnic group is a rice growing ethnic group with a long history, living a self-sufficient pastoral life for a long time. Therefore, they have a deep emotional attachment to the grains, fruits, livestock, and poultry that are closely related to their daily lives. They also abstract and beautify related objects, and weave them vividly and concisely on Dong brocade to express their rich emotions (Cai, 2004).



Figure 4 Dong brocade with spider web pattern
Source: Jianyun Yan (2023)

The main difference in color between Dong brocade and other ethnic brocades is that the brocades of other ethnic groups are complemented by various colors, appearing colorful and colorful; The second is that the pattern is displayed on one side. Traditional Dong brocade is mainly made of plain brocade woven from black and white yarns, and the patterns woven have a unique effect of double-sided display. The main reason for the popularity of plain brocade among the Dong ethnic group is due to the limitation of dyes. After the liberation, the colorful brocade of the Dong ethnic group began to appear (Cai, 2004).

3. Miao brocade

Miao brocade can be classified into four categories: geometric patterns, plant patterns, animal patterns, and natural form patterns. Geometric patterns are mostly abstract symbols and characters derived from traditional pattern formats or ancient shapes, such as palindromes, sun patterns, diamond patterns, etc. (Yunning & Ludan, 2016). The Miao brocade pattern has a wide range of themes, mainly derived from the birds and animals, flowers, birds, insects, fish, and mountains, rivers, sun, and moon in the labor and life of the Miao people. Through these objects, it expresses good wishes such as auspiciousness, celebration, love, harvest, longevity, friendship, and expresses the Miao people's warm longing for a happy life (Fang, 2013). Miao women like to reflect the objects around their lives, such as flowers and fruits, scenery, birds and animals, on their brocade. The commonly used patterns in Miao brocade include various patterns, which reflect the optimistic emotions of the Miao people towards life and their hope and enthusiasm for the future (Song, 1980). The main totems believed by the Miao ethnic group in Guangxi are butterflies, golden roosters, cows, dragons, and drums. The butterfly pattern not only provides protection for ancestors, but also expresses the Miao people's longing for reproduction and their desire for vitality (Ye, 2022). The cow pattern on Miao brocade is a totem worn on the body, with the meaning of hoping to receive the protection of cows, have more children and grandchildren, and have good weather, reflecting the Miao ancestors' pursuit of the consciousness of life itself. The clothing of women and babies mainly features butterfly patterns, expressing their desire for reproduction and reproduction. Copper drum is a musical

instrument of the Miao ethnic group. During traditional festivals and festivals, young men and women like to gather in groups to play drums and make music at homes with copper drums. The bronze drum is owned by the people of the tribe, expressing joy and celebration. It is a symbol of harvest and prosperity. The pattern of the bronze drum is embroidered on the Miao brocade to express the longing for harvest, the desire for celebration, and the prayer to the gods (Yun & Lu, 2016).



Figure 5 Butterfly pattern Miao brocade
Source: Jianyun Yan (2023)

In terms of color application, Miao brocade patterns prefer to use colors such as peach red, pink green, lake blue, and cyan purple, and are particularly skilled at alternating black and white with various colors. The use of black and white as a blending color for the surface of Miao brocade is a prominent feature (Song, 1980).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article mainly uses qualitative research tools such as literature review, interview, and observation to study the weaving techniques, pattern characteristics, and cultural connotations of brocade made by the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi, China.

1. Research on relevant literature and materials. The scope of research literature mainly includes the weaving techniques, weaving materials, pattern characteristics, and cultural connotations of traditional Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades. The sources of literature materials include publicly published academic monographs, journal papers, doctoral dissertations, news reports, and other materials.

2. Conduct in-depth interviews with the inheritors of brocade weaving skills. Interview relevant inheritors of Zhuang brocade, Miao brocade, and Dong brocade through face-to-face and telephone interviews. Considering that brocade is often used for decoration of traditional ethnic costumes and is closely related to ethnic costumes, the inheritor of ethnic costume production is also listed as the interviewee. Specific interviewee information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic Information of Interviewees

Name - surname	Ethnicity	Gender	Identity	Region	Knowledge level of ethnic brocade
Liang Xiaozhe	Miao nationality	Female	Provincial inheritor of Miao costume making skills	Xiangfen Township, Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi	Quite knowledgeable
Tang Qiaoying	Miao nationality	Female	Provincial inheritor of Miao brocade technique	County seat of Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, Guangxi	Knowledgeable
Wu Shuanglin	Dong nationality	Male	City level inheritor of Dong ethnic clothing production skills	County seat of Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, Guangxi	Moderate knowledgeable
Wang Dongmei	Dong nationality	Female	Inheritor of Sanjiang Dong Brocade Technique	Laoba Village, Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, Guangxi	Quite knowledgeable
Tan Xiangguang	Zhuang nationality	Female	Provincial inheritor of zhuang brocade technique, Chinese Brocade Craft Master	Binyang County, Guangxi	Very knowledgeable

Source: Jianyun Yan (2024)

3. Conduct on-site inspections and research at relevant ethnic museums and inheritance bases in Guangxi region, such as Guangxi Ethnic Museum, Rongshui Miao Autonomous County Museum, Sanjiang Dong Museum, Rongshui Brocade Inheritance Base, Binyang County Zhuang Brocade Base, etc.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Through literature research, in-depth interviews, and field research, the following research results were obtained in this article:

1. The "commonality" expression of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades

1.1 Weaving process is similar to weaving materials

Due to the coexistence and exchange of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups in Guangxi, as well as the mutual influence of living customs and culture, Zhuang brocade, Miao brocade, and Dong brocade share similarities in weaving techniques and raw material usage.

1.1.1 Weaving process

The traditional process of Zhuang brocade includes spinning, dyeing, sizing, twisting, warp drawing, threading, machine installation, and weaving brocade. There are two types of weaving methods: one is through warp and weft, which is relatively simple and mainly used to make monochromatic brocade; another method is to cut the warp and weft according to the pattern changes of Zhuang brocade, which is mainly used to make colored Zhuang brocade.

The traditional production process of Miao brocade includes: cotton - wooden twisting machine twisting cotton thread - spinning - dyeing - pulling wire - upper weaving machine - weaving brocade. Similar to Zhuang brocade, Miao brocade also has two weaving methods: full warp and full weft weaving and pick warp and cut weft color changing weaving.

The traditional Dong brocade production process includes more than ten processes, including cotton selection, ginning, spinning, dyeing, sizing, winding, drawing and sand removal, combing, weaving, and weaving. There are also two types of Dong brocade weaving methods, one is the jacquard weaving method with full warp and full weft woven on a loom with bamboo cages, and the other is the full warp and full weft with color and broken weft and flower digging weaving method woven on a loom without bamboo cages. The former is mostly plain brocade, and can also be appropriately decorated with colored weft on the brocade surface, while the latter is colored brocade.

1.1.2 Weaving materials

The original raw material for Zhuang brocade was hemp, which was woven into brocade. The hemp used for Zhuang brocade was mainly hemp, ramie, jute, and banana. In the Song Dynasty, cotton began to be woven into brocade. In the Qing Dynasty, there was a significant development in the breeding of silkworms in Guangxi, and silk was also used for weaving brocade for the Zhuang ethnic group, leading to the widely circulated saying that Zhuang brocade uses cotton yarn as the warp and various colored silk threads as the weft. Nowadays, many Zhuang brocade weavers directly purchase dyed polyester cotton thread, colored acrylic, and other brocades with low cotton content.

The traditional materials of Miao brocade mainly include ramie, hemp, and cotton. It was not until the Qing Dynasty that a large amount of silk was produced that silk was applied to Miao brocade weaving. Modern Miao brocade is mainly silk cotton interwoven brocade, which uses cotton yarn as warp and weft, weaving weft with various colored synthetic fibers, or arranging various silk threads and cotton yarn into colored warp, and weaving weft with single colored synthetic fibers or cotton yarn.

The economic crop cotton planted by the Dong people provided raw materials for the development of Dong's textile technology, and the initial raw material for Dong brocade weaving was cotton. Nowadays, colored polyester thread and acrylic thread have become more commonly used brocade materials by Dong people.

1.2 The source and expression of brocade patterns are similar

The patterns of Zhuang brocade are mostly derived from animals and plants in nature, extracting their natural characteristics, processing and refining them for further creation. Its forms of expression include geometric patterns, animal patterns, plant patterns, character patterns, and so on in terms of content themes;

The Miao brocade decoration has a wide range of themes, including birds and animals, flowers, plants, fish and insects, mountains, rivers, sun and moon. There is everything. It has rich forms of expression, including regular geometric patterns, classical diamond shapes, square shapes, and decorative patterns between geometric patterns and natural patterns.




The formation of Dong brocade patterns is closely related to the working forms, habits, beliefs, and ways of thinking of Dong people. The content covers a wide range of topics, including wild flowers, animals and plants, as well as daily necessities. The patterns mainly include animal patterns, plant patterns, geometric patterns, etc. Among them, prominent patterns include dragon and snake patterns, phoenix patterns, spider patterns, sun patterns, and ten thousand character patterns.

1.3 Similarity of Pattern Appearance

The living environment of various ethnic groups in Guangxi, characterized by mixed and small settlements, has led to the mutual borrowing and learning of their brocade patterns, resulting in some very similar patterns. For example, the bird pattern in the brocade of Zhuang,

Miao, and Dong ethnic groups (Table 2), as well as the Chinese character glyph pattern in the brocade of the three ethnic groups. The glyph pattern is a reflection of the integration of Zhuang, Dong, Miao and Han cultures. These patterns not only have decorative visual significance, but also inherit profound auspicious meanings and social values in culture, and are a manifestation of the beautiful life vision expressed by ethnic minority brocade people.

Table 2 Bird patterns of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades

Name	Zhuang bird pattern	Miao bird pattern	Dong bird pattern
Brocade picture			

Source: Jianyun Yan (2024)

2. The "personality" characteristics of Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocade weaving

2.1 The connotations of totem worship among different ethnic groups are the same, but the patterns of brocade weaving are different

The multi-ethnic settlement has created many identical or similar brocade patterns among different ethnic groups. However, due to the differences in their living habits, cultural traditions, and totem worship, each ethnic group has its own unique "personality" brocade pattern. For example, totemic worship patterns related to reproduction, the Zhuang people have frog patterns, which originated from the rice farming ethnic group - the Zhuang people's worship of frogs, because frogs symbolize harvest and offspring in Zhuang culture. The butterfly pattern of the Miao ethnic group is a representative pattern in their totem worship belief. The Miao people believe that butterflies are the ancestor of all things in the world and the embodiment of reproduction and beauty. The most representative related pattern in Dong brocade is spider pattern, which is one of the ancestral worship beliefs of the Dong ethnic group. Because Dong people believe that the Dong ethnic group was nurtured by their physical spider ancestor "Satianba", the spider pattern in Dong brocade has cultural connotations of ancestor protection and multiple children and blessings.

2.2 Similar patterns, but different cultural connotations given by different ethnic groups

For example, in Zhuang brocade, flower patterns represent flower totems, which are totemic worship related to reproduction, while in Dong brocade, flower patterns are only a symbol of beauty; The swastika emblem symbolizes radiance in the Zhuang ethnic group, mainly representing worship of the Sun God; In the Dong ethnic group, it is reflected in people's worship of the sun totem and their worship of reproductive reproduction.

2.3 Differences in color matching

Color, as one of the prominent features of ethnic brocade culture, is also an important aspect of studying traditional ethnic brocade culture.

The commonly used colors in Zhuang brocade are closely related to the living environment of the Zhuang people for generations. The Zhuang people like to use bright yellow and red as large area colors on black and blue backgrounds, embellished with green to create a strong visual contrast, and the overall color is bright and vibrant.

Due to the limitations of dyes, traditional Dong brocade is mainly a plain brocade woven from black and white yarns. After 1949, with the improvement of transportation, the contact and communication between the Dong ethnic group and the outside world gradually increased, and the colorful brocade of the Dong ethnic group began to appear. Dong brocade has a soft contrast in color, with clear priorities and elegant colors.

Miao brocade likes to use colors such as peach red, pink green, lake blue, and cyan purple, and is particularly skilled at alternating black and white with various colors. The use of black and white as the blending color of the brocade is a prominent feature of Miao brocade. The color scheme of Miao brocade is more free and bold compared to Dong brocade.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The patterns, colors, and materials of ethnic brocades have become the "nameless historical records" worn by the Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic groups, reflecting the cultural characteristics and diversity of ethnic minorities. This article conducts a comparative study of Guangxi Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades through literature review, visiting research, and comparative analysis, starting from various aspects such as weaving technology, weaving materials, pattern selection, expression forms, totem worship, color matching, etc. It is found that Guangxi Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades have commonalities in weaving technology, weaving materials, pattern selection, and expression forms, while maintaining their individual characteristics in cultural connotations, color matching, and other aspects of weaving patterns. These features showcase the rich traditional cultural connotations and aesthetic tastes of ethnic minorities in Guangxi, China. By studying these commonalities and personalities, we can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural connotations of Guangxi Zhuang, Miao, and Dong ethnic brocades, and provide broader reference ideas for the cultural inheritance and innovation of Guangxi's various ethnic minority brocades.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Researcher would like to express her sincere to the thesis advisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Chanoknart Mayusoh for her invaluable help and constant encouragement throughout the course of this research. In addition, the researcher has to give thanks to all lecturers for their assistance: Asst. Prof. Dr. Akapong Inkuer and Asst. Prof. Dr. Pisit Puntien. At the same time, the researcher gratefully thanks to Miss Kanyanee Phangsua, Miss Sasanant Rattanapornpisit, Miss Vistha Chintaladdha, Mr. Chat Sukarin, etc. for their strong support.

Finally, the researcher would like to express her gratitude to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University School of Fine and Applied Arts for their support in all aspects.

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