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A SEMIOTIC COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TUJIA AND MIAO WEDDING ATTIRE PATTERNS: ICONOGRAPHIC AND SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

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Abstract:

This study employs the semiotic theory to examine the cultural expressions of two distinct ethnic minorities, the Tujia and Miao peoples. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, which combines case study analysis with symbolic interpretation, the research analyses the wedding apparel decorations of the Tujia in western Hunan and the Miao in south-eastern Guizhou. The investigation evaluates the symbolic importance and value of their respective cultural representations. By conducting a comparative analysis of the pattern motifs and their underlying cultural implications in Tujia and Miao wedding attire, the paper elucidates the cultural factors contributing to the divergence of symbolic expressions across different ethnic minority wedding costumes. The findings contribute to the advancement of intangible cultural heritage and the development of creative cultural products specific to ethnic minorities, thereby enhancing the protection and promotion of these communities' traditional cultures and associated etiquette.

Keywords:

Semiotics, Tujia Group, Miao Nationality, Wedding Attire Ornamentation, Comparative Analysis

Introduction

Clothing traditions are integral to the intangible cultural heritage of humanity, with their production and evolution influenced by both regional environmental conditions and historical cultural contexts. Chinese ethnic minority garments are not only deeply connected to the distinctive natural and geographical features but also meticulously adapted to these communities' lifestyles and production activities, thereby embodying unique regional identities. Moreover, these costumes eloquently reflect the rich tapestry of religious convictions, customs, and the pervasive influence of Chinese cultural elements, intertwining with the nation's heritage across various historical epochs, thus manifesting an extensive and profound cultural legacy. In an era of swift economic advancement, members of ethnic minorities are increasingly exposed to modern modes of dress, which often displace traditional, hand-crafted garments. This shift is partly due to the substantial labor and resources required for traditional clothing production, which has led to the perception of such garments as luxurious items reserved for festive or ceremonial occasions. Following China's reform and opening-up policy, the nation's economy has surged forward, breaching geographical barriers and fostering heightened communication among diverse ethnic groups. Amidst this profound transformation, minority costume traditions have transitioned from functional daily attire to more decorative and festive ensembles, thereby risking the erosion of their original ethnic and cultural essence. This paper explores strategies for preserving the cultural integrity of minority wedding attire within this evolving landscape. How to preserve and advance the cultural significance of minority wedding dress in this era has become an urgent issue that needs to be addressed. Drawing on field research conducted in Pingsha Township, Baojing County, Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture, Tai Jiang County, Qian Dong Nan Miao, and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, this study employs semiotic theory to conduct a comparative analysis of the symbolic meaning embedded in Tujia and Miao wedding dress patterns. The aim is to uncover the ceremonial culture underlying these patterns as well as their profound symbolism. This research offers a broader scope for safeguarding and promoting traditional ethnic minority wedding dress patterns through further development and innovation.

Development of Tujia and Miao wedding attires

A Historical Perspective On Tujia Wedding Costumes

Since antiquity, the Tujia ethnicity has been characterized as a minority group imbued with a rich repository of wisdom and distinct ethnic attributes. This ethnicity was historically dispersed across several counties and cities in the convergent regions of Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, and Guizhou provinces. During the ethnogenesis of this community, the Cuban inhabitants, the indigenous ancestors of northwestern Hunan, the Wu of Guizhou, and other ethnic minorities, along with the Han nationality, were progressively integrated into this social fabric. Archaeological evidence suggests that the progenitors of the Tujia hailed from the indigenous population of the Wuxi area over two millennia ago. The impoverished mountainous terrain and relative isolation facilitated a protracted period of primitive societal development. Subsequently, after five generations, the onset of feudal political, cultural, and economic influences during the Western Zhou Dynasty, particularly with the migration of the Peng family from Jinhua in Jiangxi Province into Tujia territory, ushered in a transformative era for Tujia society. During this period, the Tujia people transitioned from a primitive state of self-sufficiency to a feudal society characterized by tribute and taxation, concurrent with the gradual consolidation of the Hunan and Hubei Tujia communities into distinct national entities. The marital customs of the Tujia culture represent an extensive historical legacy, integral to

the traditional fabric of Tujia society and a multifaceted reflection of elements including folkways, socio-cultural phenomena, and ethnic identity. The Tujia wedding attire is a quintessential element of daily Tujia life, notable for its intricate fabrication, distinctive silhouette, vivid ornamental embellishments, and profound folkloric significance. It encapsulates a wealth of values about ethnology, anthropology, religious beliefs, and societal structures.

Refined Ornamental Elements In The Tujia Ethnic Wedding Attire

Refined decorative elements of Tujia wedding attire are characterized by the utilization of the "cross-stitch" technique, where the fabric is punctured to create identical "ten" patterns, which are subsequently linked to form lines or squares, ultimately merging to produce designs of flowers, birds, fish, and insects. This composition skillfully employs color transition to convey a sense of rhythmic fluidity. The women's shoes are crafted with elegance in mind, featuring a "dog tooth" trim along the edges, predominantly made from blue and pink silk. The shoe tips are adorned with multicolored silk threads intricately embroidered with various flowers, plants, butterflies, and bees. The headdress, measuring 1.7 to 2.3 meters in length, is made of blue silk or green cloth, with a high front and a large, low left front sleeve, devoid of collar edges, and secured without binding. There exists a pair of green edges between the front and the sleeve, yet no edging elsewhere. The silver hook is of a low collar design, with the skirt and cuffs adorned with a wide green border; an additional three rows of colorless plum borders are added behind the green edge, and the chest area is embellished with a green border interwoven with colorful threads. The three-strand tendon clothing features large sleeves, with the cuffs adorned with a 16.5 cm wide border and a collar height of 1.65 cm, inlaid with three thin borders. On their nuptial day, brides prefer to wear "dew clothes," which are long and ample. Tujia wedding attire ornamentation manifests the Tujia populace's reverence for happiness and prosperity. (Figure 1) The epitome of this ideology within the garment's design is the RuYi motif, which encapsulates the profound yearning of the bride's family for bliss and an everlasting existence. The combination of expressive significance with its structural embodiment is a key characteristic of Tujia nuptial dress patterns.



Figure 1: Tujia Wedding Attire

Source: Tujia Clothing and Dress Museum

A Historical Perspective On Miao Wedding Costumes

The Miao people, an integral part of China's ethnic minorities, possess a rich cultural heritage that spans millennia. Historical accounts indicate that over 5,000 years ago, the Miao ancestors, belonging to the 'Jiuli' tribe, were already inhabitants of the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers. By the time of the Han Dynasty, the Miao, along with other ethnic groups in the southwest, were renowned for their 'colorful garments' and 'fine five-colored clothing.' The designs adorning Miao attire serve as tangible representations of their totemic heritage. The ingenious Miao women have traditionally preserved their history and mythology through the medium of clothing, a practice that underscores the Miao people's adeptness at embracing innovation while remaining steadfast to the legacies of their ancestors. In the absence of a written script, Miao embroidery has emerged as the quintessential medium for chronicling the history and civilization of the Miao nation. The Miao wedding gown, brimming with motifs of life, provides an invaluable resource for the exploration of Miao traditional culture. Among the Miao's dress culture, the wedding attire of females, post-marriage, stands as the epitome of national customs, encapsulating the bittersweet emotions of a mother bidding farewell to her daughter and imbued with heartfelt blessings. This garment is not only a symbol of transition but also a bearer of profound cultural heritage.

Characteristics Of The Miao Nationality Wedding Gown

The Miao people's wedding attire, rich in cultural symbolism, exemplifies the tribe's traditional way of life and cultural etiquette. It not only encapsulates the distinctiveness of Miao's musical and dance traditions but also reflects the essence of Miao's hospitality culture. As a rite of passage, every Miao woman is tasked with embroidering her bridal gown, a skill imparted by mothers and community members through a process that spans years. The intricate embroidery and lavish silver ornaments adorning the Miao wedding dress serve as visible markers of the family's socioeconomic status, with the weight of silver often correlating with wealth. For instance, the silver headgear can weigh several kilograms or exceed ten kilograms. The Miao nationality's wedding ensemble is derived from the tribe's traditional costume, with designs drawing from the local topography of Miao settlements, showcasing the community's refined aesthetic preferences. The groom's attire typically features three styles: the left-skirt blouse, the front blouse, and the left-skirt robe, with the front blouse being the most prevalent. The groom's trousers are characteristically wide-legged and extend approximately one foot in length. Meanwhile, the Miao bride is clad in a pleated skirt, a blouse adorned with silver sequins, a collar embellished with silver flowers, and a chest adorned with crossed black or fine-inlaid lace, complemented by a satin-embroidered coat or an embroidered floral apron.



Figure 2: Miao Wedding Attire

Source: Miao Nationality in Western Hunan

Methodology

Exploring the comparative analysis of ethnic ornamentation adhering to William Morris's rule method. All facets of human life can be encapsulated through symbolic representation, which not only encapsulates the essence of a civilization but also reflects the underlying cultural implications of that era. The symbolic significance of ethnic wedding attire and decorations is intrinsically linked to the national habitat, traditions, and conventional culture. Consequently, an anthropological approach to field investigation is imperative to dissect the local ethnocultural nuances and examine the folk symbols inherent in ethnic wedding dress decorations. The Tujia and Miao wedding dresses, respectively, represent the quintessence of China's ethnic dress heritage, showcasing a rich tapestry of symbolism and diversity. Despite the impact of contemporary societal and temporal progression, both the Tujia and Miao cultures continue to preserve the fundamental stylistic attributes of their traditional attire. Building upon prior scholarly inquiries into the historical, cultural, customary, and etiquette aspects of the Tujia and Miao peoples, this study provides an in-depth examination and categorization of the symbols and their meanings embedded within the wedding costumes of these two ethnic groups. The exploration into the symbolic resonances of the wedding dress decorations for these communities offers an anthropological and sociological lens through which to promote and safeguard the traditional cultural heritage of ethnic minorities. This manuscript synthesizes the potential etiologies of the decorative motifs, presents a comparative matrix, and conducts a comparative analysis of the underlying causes for the two ethnic minorities, Tujia and Miao, as delineated in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Tujia and Miao Wedding Dresses

Object analysis	Nationalities	Patterns	Idol	Living environment
Tujia dress wedding	Tujia	Bees, butterflies	Ru Yi	Stilted building
Miao dress wedding	Miao	Flowers, trees	Fish	Bamboo tower

Source: Own Elaboration

Morris categorizes semiotics into three domains: semantics, pragmatics, and structuralism, highlighting the application of semiotics in the realm of clothing pattern design. Semantics encompasses explicit and implicit semantics. Explicit semantics originate from a comparative analysis of the external forms, such as shape and color, of Tujia and Miao wedding decorations, asserting the presence of distinct differences between the two ethnic decorative arts. Implicit semantics primarily investigates the etiquette culture and national customs underlying the wedding dress patterns of these two ethnicities, analyzes the social values represented by wedding culture and customs, and showcases the national spirit and character traits of minority nationalities. A direct comparison of the semantic implications of the wedding dress patterns from both ethnicities is essential to reach more precise conclusions. The Tujia people hold a reverent attitude towards the dragon, perceiving it not only as a divine right and a fortunate symbol but also embodying favorable weather and the peace of the country and its people. Interestingly, the serpent, sharing similarities with certain dragons and possessing a high fertility rate, is perceived as a token of fruitful progeny within the Tujia culture. The Tujia people, with a deep-rooted legend associating the phoenix with their ancestors, regard the phoenix as a sign of both fortune and aesthetic perfection. Additionally, birds are considered emblems of joy and amorousness. In the traditional Miao ethos, water is deemed the purest element. Thus, fish, dwelling in its pristine depths, are believed to dispel adversity and usher in blessings, making fish motifs indicative of prolificacy and favorable fortune. According to Miao ideology, spiders are symbols of tranquility, happiness, and love, while the diligent honeybees, engaged in the profitable task of honey collection within Miao society, epitomize prosperity and contentment. The design elements incorporated into Miao wedding attire embody the Tujia people's zest for life and serve as the essence of their national spirit, as exemplified in Table 2.

Table 2: Semantic Significance of Miao Nationality Dress Patterns

Representative	Ornamentation	Meaning
Water	Fish pattern	Many children and good fortune
Jungle	Spiders	Peace, happiness, love
Animals	Bees	Live a rich and happy life

Source: Own Elaboration

Results

The aforementioned discourse alludes to the examination of pragmatic inclinations among two ethnic groups, which is discernible through the distinctive features and thematic content inherent in wedding dress patterns. From a pragmatic standpoint, these patterns encapsulate the

singular ceremonial, cultural functions specific to ethnic minorities. Case in point, the prevalence of Ru Yi motifs signifies the ethnic minorities' yearning for a secure life and their acknowledgment of the value of diligent labor. A comparative analysis within the realm of pragmatics facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the varying application contexts of diverse patterns, thereby providing significant reference for the development of cultural creative products tailored for different scenarios associated with wedding attire designs. Within Tujia folk culture, the dragon motif is the most prevalent and is reflected across a myriad of garments. Conversely, the phoenix motif is predominantly utilized in Tujia women's attire, featuring decorative elements in silverware, wedding apparel, and the like. The bird motif frequently appears in Tujia brocade and embroidery, serving as a visual expression of the Tujia populace's aspirations for an improved life. In Miao culture, the fish motif is commonly encountered in embroidery, brocade, and jewelry. The butterfly motif, characterized by its aesthetic appeal and elegance, is often coupled with floral designs and employed in Miao women's wedding attire, footwear, headgear, and associated bridal accessories. The bee motif is prominently featured on the belts of Miao wedding dresses, while horse motifs are favored by Miao men and frequently incorporated into their wedding attire patterns. Through a pragmatic lens, an analysis of Miao patterns reveals the Miao people's deep-seated love for life and the attendant formation of a unique national culture.

Morris's semiotic perspective posits that construction in sign language is epitomized by the conformational relationships among the various components of symbols. This perspective enables an analysis of the structural attributes within Tujia and Miao wedding attire embroidery patterns, elucidating their interrelatedness. Textures, on the other hand, explicate design motifs through the lenses of craftsmanship, typology, color harmony, configuration modes, and formal aesthetics. Such a structural examination allows for the decoding of aesthetic sensibilities and cultural reflections imbued in the creation of these bridal garment patterns by the Tujia and Miao peoples. Through a meticulous analysis of structural meaning, one can dissect the decorative elements within wedding dresses and appreciate the distinctive compositional and design philosophy of ethnic minorities. Notably, Tujia patterns are characterized by distinct roles, with certain motifs such as the dragon often assuming a central position, connoting auspiciousness, while showcasing diversity in pattern modeling, precise hues, and exaggerated expressive forms. In contrast, the snake pattern commonly serves as an accessory within a tapestry of other patterns, seldom assuming a lead role and predominantly presented in abstract, monochromatic configurations. Within Miao wedding apparel, the phoenix figure is frequently paired with the dragon and avian motifs, symbolizing the august conjunction of the dragon and phoenix, as well as the resilience of the wind-facing white bird. Each pattern boasts its unique silhouette and a palette of vivid simplicity. The bird motif in Miao wedding dresses typically exhibits a symmetrical, opposing pairwise composition, favoring a realistic representation of the subject. As an autonomous pattern, the bird image takes flight, embodying intelligence and vividness. Conversely, as a continuous pattern, the design elements are characterized by their brightness and simplicity. The fish motif, often allied with the dragon motif, showcases refined imagery, resplendent colors, and an elegant simplicity. The spider motif, when paired with the moon, presents diverse shapes, each unique in simplicity and characterized by tranquil, subdued colors. The butterfly motif is commonly associated with floral patterns, depicting a scene of flowers competing for scent, renowned for its lifelike form and vibrant hues.

Discussion and implications

Tujia Wedding Dress Pattern

The ornamentation of Tujia wedding attire is characterized by a multipurpose packet embroidery technique. Initially, the design employs a fish scale pattern, which is subsequently overlaid with cut patterns onto the clothing fabric. These cut patterns are then delineated with threads, resulting in a heightened three-dimensional visual effect. Although this design approach is more intricate, it effectively showcases the grandiose and festive decorative characteristics of wedding attire. The decorative design of Tujia wedding attire places a greater emphasis on freehand portraiture, with patterns that tend to be abstract, and primarily extols the ancestors and the nation's production and lifestyle. In contrast to the modern fast-paced lifestyle, the Tujia people lead a more liberated existence, and their wedding attire decoration mirrors the historical evolution and etiquette culture of the Tujia nation. During the primitive era, the Tujia people not only addressed the necessities of food and clothing but also cultivated a sense of ritual in their daily lives. Moreover, the folk cultural connotations of these ethnic beliefs and totem worship are also represented through the patterns on their wedding garments and daily utilities.

Dragon Pattern

The wedding attire of the Tujia ethnicity features an overlapping arrangement of textured fabric pieces, which signifies the dragon's presence. Within the traditional folklore of the Tujia culture, the dragon is a symbol of auspiciousness. This aligns with the Chinese self-identification as descendants of the dragon, a belief that has been deeply rooted in ancient legends. The Tujia people venerate dragons as blood-related ancestors, perceiving them as the progeny of the dragon. In Tujia culture, the dragon embodies supernatural capabilities and is the subject of numerous mythological accounts. The dragon, as the primitive totem of ancient China, holds a significant place in the Han nationality, representing imperial authority with its majestic and fierce depiction, showcasing sharp teeth and claws, and is revered as a spiritual divine entity. In contrast, the dragon motif on the Tujia wedding dress exhibits naive, straightforward, and endearing characteristics, closely resembling human and natural elements, and demonstrating variability. It reflects the locals' heartfelt wishes for the dragon's blessing, praying for favorable weather and bountiful harvests year-round.



Figure 3: Dragon Pattern

Source: Chinese traditional patterns codex

Swirl Pattern

Semiotically, the Tujia people continuously endeavor to generate and employ symbols, i.e., they utilize forms of expression and communication alternatives to language. Such symbolic thinking and activities constitute the fundamental distinction between humans and animals. We can construe these symbolic endeavors as the outcome of the metamorphosis of human experiences within the biosphere, with the symbol of the Tujia wedding attire being a product of this conversion. Following the symbolic transformation, the Tujia wedding garments and paraphernalia can convey national aspirations, reverence, preferences, and societal standings through symbolic cues, concurrently harmonizing subjective emotional yearnings, ideology, and objective apparel, thereby establishing a nexus between content and form. The cloud roll and swirly patterns are frequently incorporated into Tujia wedding dress motifs. The progeny of these patterns, namely the cloud roll and swirly designs, is intrinsically linked to the local fishing and hunting lifestyle and religious convictions. The Tujia population has a prolonged history of aquatic habitation, with their sustenance and shelter being intrinsically intertwined with fishing. The cloud roll pattern primarily mirrors the climatic conditions of nature, and as the Tujia community relies on the agricultural bounty provided by the natural environment, they harbor profound respect for nature.



Figure 4: Swirl Pattern

Source: Chinese traditional patterns codex

The whirlpool pattern, on the other hand, underscores the Tujia populace's veneration for water bodies, evincing their profound emotional attachment to water. Both the cloud roll and swirl patterns are symmetrical in nature, with some manifesting simple lateral symmetry and others showcasing strong individualized and stylized attributes. This is exemplified in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison Of Morphological Characteristics Of Cloud Roll And Swirl Pattern

Species	Sources	Morphological Characteristics
Cloud Roll pattern	Fishing and hunting life	Centre symmetry
Swirls	Religious belief	Left-right symmetry

Source: Own Elaboration

Fauna Pattern

After thousands of years of evolution, the wedding attire of the Tujia ethnicity has developed into a distinctive symbolic system, which embodies the material culture of the Tujia people as its carrier and expresses the yearning for an improved life through the decorative symbols inherent in the wedding garments. The ornamental motifs of flora and fauna adorning the wedding dresses reflect the harmonious relationship between the Tujia ethnicity and nature. By

examining the symbolic decorations on these wedding dresses, one can catch a glimpse of the living habits and etiquette culture of the Tujia people, and to some extent, appreciate the social and cultural structure of the Tujia ethnicity. From a semiotic perspective, the symbols of Tujia attire encompass both the signifier and the referenced entity. The signifier in this context pertains to the wedding attire itself, which serves as a medium, a tangible entity capable of conveying specific information or significations. The incorporation of animal and plant patterns is intricately linked to the geographical environment where the Tujia ancestors resided in their formative years. It is evidence of their early utilization of tools for fishing and the bark of plants for creating everyday utensils. These animal and plant patterns predominantly serve as authentic representations of the diligent lifestyle of the Tujia people. For instance, the representation of leeks within the patterns reflects the Tujia people's affinity towards plants and vegetables. Leek has emerged as a staple crop among the Tujia population, valued for its high yield, drought, and cold resistance, robust vitality, and nutritional content. It embodies connotations of amplified happiness, longevity, and fecundity.

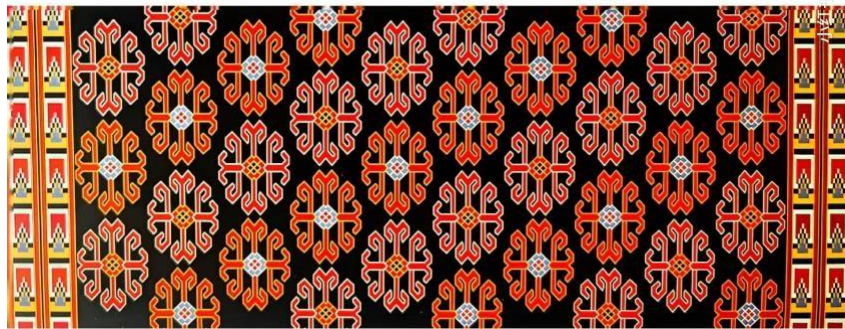


Figure 5: Fauna Pattern

Source: Chinese traditional patterns codex

Miao Wedding Dress Pattern

Miao wedding attire is adorned with motifs such as birds, butterflies, frogs, pomegranates, flora, and geometric designs. These embellishments serve not only an aesthetic purpose but also embody a rich tapestry of folk culture and humanistic symbolism, including totemic veneration, marital values, and ancestral reverence. This symbolic system, imbued with cultural and textual significance, is fortified by communal celebrations and rituals in which the Miao populace actively participates, embedding itself within the collective subconscious of the ethnicity. Animal, plant, and geometric motifs predominate in Miao nuptial dress ornamentation. Semiotically, the Miao people attribute a profound interpretation of natural phenomena and lifestyles, utilizing natural symbols as the medium for expressing their national spirit in dress design. The pattern elements, including avian and animal forms, celestial and terrestrial motifs, agrarian scenes, floral and faunal representations, and mountainous and arboreal imagery, are intrinsically intertwined with the natural world. The Miao people consider these patterns as protective emblems of their faith, frequently incorporating them into their garments. These patterns in Miao clothing can be conceptualized as a living art form that enriches the continuation of national traditions, pays homage to ancestors, and preserves ancestral wisdom. Semiotically, the essence of the Miao dress lies not in the garment itself but in the encoded information within the patterns and the significance generated through festival engagement and ceremonial participation.

Bird Pattern

The bird motif predominates in the Miao ethnic group's apparel, embodying the veneration for their ancestral lineage, as they consider birds to be their progenitors. This motif is not merely an ornamental embellishment but a reflection of the Miao's profound spiritual reverence for their ancestors. The variety of bird designs, each with its distinctive form and animated demeanor, underscores the multifaceted nature of this symbol. Although the decorative styles of bird motifs on Miao clothing evolved through different periods and regional variations, the representation of birds remains a consistent theme in their creative expression. Regardless of the specific reasons behind the incorporation of bird motifs, these designs inherently evoke sentiments of awe, nostalgia, and gratitude. It is, however, axiomatic that the Miao ancestors revered birds as totems in antiquity. This totemic bird worship encapsulates the Miao people's unique belief system and their adoration for the primitive aspects of life. The silver Phoenix crown, an epitome of beauty among Miao women in Guizhou, is a three-part ornament. Comprising the crown is a representation of phoenixes, poised for ascent, and an abundance of silver flowers in full bloom. The middle section typically features an arrangement of silver butterflies, flowers, and birds set against a backdrop of silver inlays on the front, complemented by silver bells and dangling earpieces along the lower brim.

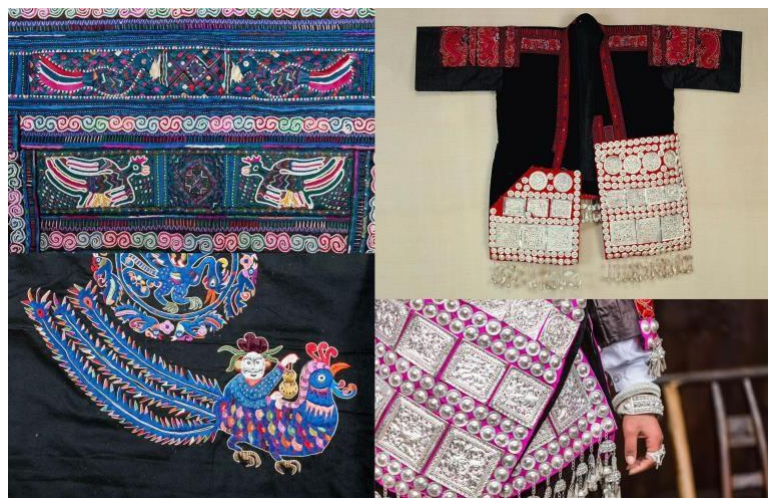


Figure 6: Bird Pattern

Source: Nationalities University Folklore Museum

Miao silver-crowned headpieces are donned during formal events and are also worn by unmarried women during weddings, floral processions, or festive celebrations. Elderly members of the community meticulously dress the adult girls, adorning their wedding attire with a phoenix crown, necklaces, silver cloud-shaped shoulders, and other embellishments, thus completing their ensemble from head to toe. The Miao ethnicity is renowned globally for its appreciation of silver, which transcends mere adornment to function as a marker of identity and marital status, signifying the presence of unwed women. The conventional Miao silver Feng crown typically weighs around 1,500 grams and is crafted from pure snow silver, a material beyond the financial reach of the average household. Despite the Miao lacking a rigorous political hierarchy, silver jewelry has emerged as a symbol of social standing. Typically, a family's collective economic resources are allocated towards the procurement of silver wedding decorations.

Table 4: The Characteristics of the Silver Feng Gua Wedding Dress

Location	Ornamentation	Shapes
Crown of a hat	Phoenix bird honeysuckle	Spread their wings to fly
Midlands	Silver chip	Butterfly
Lower parts	Farming patterns	Silver bells and hangers

Source: Own Elaboration

Peach Blossom Pattern

The pick pattern, a distinguished embroidery motif within Miao ethnic wedding attire, is highly esteemed by designers for its singular cultural, economic, and collectible values. Characterized by its vibrant hues, stark contrasts, and a kaleidoscope of textures, Miao cross-stitch exemplifies symmetrical and harmonious composition, along with patterns that are vivid and lifelike, resulting in each piece being a repository of fantastic colors. In the creation of pick patterns, Miao women exhibit a unique ability to design without preliminary sketches, with the patterns emerging organically during the embroidery process. Also known as double-sided cross-stitch, or Reply Needlework, with terms like the two-sided flower, this technique is favored among Miao women for its even, symmetrical patterns on both sides. The common practice involves lines radiating from the center to the margins, often selecting two or four squares of continuous patterns interwoven with a variety of designs, showcasing distinctive craftsmanship, simplicity in color palette, and richness in technique, making it an integral component of Guizhou Miao folk art. The artistic worth of the Miao cross-stitch is immeasurable, as it embodies the unique culture of the Miao, their religious convictions, and national aesthetics. Through historical accretion, it has assumed its present artistic form.

Geometric Pattern

In the design of Miao ethnic wedding attire, a symmetrical structure is predominantly employed, exemplified by the Qian Dong Nan Miao geometric cross-stitch brocade women's garments in Guizhou province, which are ornamented with symmetrical geometric motifs along the median line of the clothing to enhance the garment's sense of stability. Despite a minority of Miao embroidery patterns incorporating color and structural elements in a balanced manner, these wedding dress patterns remain realistic. However, Miao clothing patterns typically integrate symmetrical and balanced motifs, creating an equilibrium of stability and dynamism. Geometric patterns primarily manifest the ancient Miao inhabitants' comprehension and interpretation of natural and societal survival laws. The ancestors of the Miao people appreciated the aesthetics of nature and embellished their garments with representations of the sun, mountains, and other grandeur, reflecting their affinity for the natural world. The abundance and regularity of these geometric patterns suggest that the Miao people mimicked and translated their natural environment for inspiration, subsequently abstracting and summarizing these motifs, thus mirroring migration routes and offering insight into the Miao perception of life and their environment. It is not merely a pattern but also a distinctive and intuitive recording method of the Miao people, reflecting their comprehension of life and their environment.



Figure 7: Geometric Pattern

Source: Nationalities University Folklore Museum

Conclusions

The Tujia and Miao ethnic groups articulate their distinctive interpretations of life rituals and life symbols through their distinct ethnic wedding attire designs. These two ethnicities have distilled their national spirit and beliefs into symbolic representations, which are seamlessly integrated into their wedding apparel patterns, thus showcasing a captivating array of folk art and culture. This study employs the wedding attire patterns of the Tujia and Miao as subjects for comparative analysis, highlighting the disparities in wedding dress patterns among various ethnic minorities as well as the nuanced etiquette cultures that underpin them. Through the lenses of semiotics, specifically the main movement semiotics theory and the anthropological field investigation method, the article delves into the social and cultural significance encoded within the wedding attire patterns of the Tujia and Miao. By conducting a comparative exploration of the wedding dress patterns of the Tujia and Miao, the research scrutinizes and analyzes the cultural information conveyed by these ethnic wedding dresses, thereby contributing to the preservation of the traditional garments of minority nationalities and the etiquette and culture they signify. The future progression of minority costume designs should align with contemporary lifestyle changes while ensuring the continuity of traditional cultural vibrancy. A thorough comprehension of the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities is imperative to decipher the ritual essence and cultural implications embedded within costume traditions, thereby informing costume innovation with substantial evidence to better resonate with the minority populations.

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