



Research Status and Cultural Value of Overseas Yao Ceremonial Paintings

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Abstract

According to the analysis of the general distribution and research status of Yao ceremonial paintings in Southeast Asia, the United States, Canada, France and other places, this paper explains the cultural functions of overseas Yao ceremonial paintings. It is believed that the ceremonial painting was an important carrier of cultural memory and cultural identity of overseas Yao people. The artistic characteristics and cultural connotation of Yao ritual painting are the most prominent among Yao folk art. The religious beliefs and ideas contained in Yao ritual paintings provide valuable evidence for us to study Yao traditional culture and its connotation. The collection of overseas Yao ritual paintings is also the material carrier of overseas Yao cultural historical memory, religious belief, national emotion maintenance and cultural identity. The Yao sacrificial paintings record the legend of Pan Wang, Long drum, Ox horn, and the historical legend and story of Yao crossing the sea. This study finds that the collection of ritual paintings overseas is not only helpful to explore the life, customs, religious beliefs and other national cultures of the Yao people overseas, but also helpful to explore the changes of the traditional culture of the Yao people overseas.

Keywords

Overseas Yao nationality, Ceremonial Paintings, Cultural function

Introduction

As an important part of Yao's Taoism, the role of Yao ceremonial painting in the development and inheritance of Yao's Taoism is obvious. Among the props of Taoist priests of the Yao nationality, the ceremonial paintings occupy a major position. The images of gods in the portraits are drawn from folk myths and legends or the heroes of the Yao nationality, which are depicted by the painters with intuitive and vivid characteristics. Compared with the mysterious and obscure scriptures, they are easier to be remembered and understood by the ordinary Yao people, become the object of worship, and subtly integrate into the daily life of the Yao people. It affects the way of thinking, the way of doing things and the living habits of Yao people. Yao ceremonial paintings were painted by Taoist priests for the needs of religious ceremonies. Under the influence of Yao Taoism, Yao ceremonial paintings were inherited and protected. Yao people's ceremonial painting contains distinct characteristics of Yao's Taoism, which vividly expresses the image, posture and dynamic of Yao people's belief in gods, which is the result of Yao people's absorption and integration of traditional Taoism, and also makes ceremonial painting the only form of Yao folk painting.

At present, the Yao people living abroad are mainly in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, the United States, France and Canada. After the middle of the Ming Dynasty, the Yao people living in the southern China crossed the border of Guangxi and Yunnan and migrated to the Indochina Peninsula, where they lived in the mountains of Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and other countries. In 1975, after the Indo-China War, the United States, France, Canada

and other countries absorbed a large number of refugees, and many Yao people took the opportunity to immigrate to the United States, France, Canada and other countries. According to relevant data, more than 700,000 Yao people live in Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and other Southeast Asian regions, and more than 50,000 people live in Oregon, Washington, California in the United States, Toulouse in France and northern Canada. Many overseas scholars or domestic scholars in their own study of Yao mentioned the ceremonial paintings in these areas. These systematic studies are important literature for us to understand the current situation of the overseas Yao ceremonial paintings. This paper makes an overview of the research status of Yao ceremonial paintings in Southeast Asia, Europe and America, and analyzes the cultural value of overseas Yao ceremonial paintings.

1. Yao Ceremonial Paintings in Southeast Asia

Ceremonial paintings basically exist in the areas inhabited by the Yao people in Southeast Asia. From the late 1960s to the 1970s, because of the war, people in the Yao area generally lived in difficulties, and people had to sell their own collections of ceremonial paintings in order to make a living, which also aroused the interest of anthropologists, and Yao ceremonial paintings began to attract people's attention.

The Yao people in Thailand mainly live in the northern areas, and the ceremonial paintings are also spread in the Yao communities in these areas. As early as 1967, Professor Shiratori Yoshiro of Japan made a preliminary survey of the mountain peoples (including the Yao people) in northwestern Thailand, which recorded the religious rituals in Jireikayao Village in Amphoe Chiang Khong, Mueang Chiang Rai, and mentioned the *18 ceremonial paintings* collected by the local people (Shiratori, 1980). In the 1970s, many western anthropologists began to carry out field investigations and ethnographic descriptions of the Yao people and their cultures in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and other places, in which recorded Yao ceremonial paintings in these areas. For example, Almentrut published *Yao Ceremonial Painting* (1971, *Direction Magazine*, December, Hong Kong), and French scholar Jacques Lemoine, who lived in Southeast Asia for 24 years, has published many articles on Yao ceremonial paintings, such as *Yao Statue* (1979, *Orientalism*, October, Paris). *Yao Taoist Paintings* (1981, *Arts asiatiques*, January, Hong Kong), etc., (Qiwang, 1986), especially the book *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* written by Jacques Lemoine in 1982 (Lemoine, 1982), analyzed and introduced the Yao statues collected by himself in Thailand, Laos and northern Vietnam. This book is a comprehensive study of Yao ceremonial paintings in Southeast Asia by foreign scholars.

The Thai Yao people believe that there is a world of ghosts and a world of living people, and that the two worlds influence each other. The *18 ceremonial paintings* constitute the gods who govern the two worlds. These portraits are enshrined on altars and displayed in hierarchical order at major ceremonies such as funerals (Tang & Dong, 1987). Takemura Takuji recorded the *18 ceremonial paintings* of the Yao people in Thailand, including Yuhuang, Shangqing, Lingbao, Taiqing, Linghuang, Marshal Li, Marshal Zhao, Dahaifan, Zhang Tianshi, Shidubao, Tianfu, Marshal Deng, Shouzu, Zhongchen, Difu, (Dawei) Taiwei, Xiaohaifan and Dadu (Du) Bridge (Takemura, 1988). When the Yao people hold a memorial ceremony for King Panhu (Panwang), they hang a whole set of ceremonial paintings, namely the "Hall Ceremonial Paintings" (Fangping, 1992). If there is a funeral, Shigong would also hang the paintings of Shangyuan, Zhongyuan and Xiayuan beside the shrine (Shijie, 1996).

In 1989, Guangxi University for Nationalities organized an academic team to investigate the Yao nationality in Thailand, and the final results of this academic activity were compiled into the book *Investigation of the Yao Nationality in Thailand* (Investigation group to Thailand from Guangxi University for Nationalities, 1992). The book records the *18 ceremonial paintings* and claims that the gods group (including the *18 ceremonial paintings* and other deities) of the Yao nationality in Thailand belong to the Chinese folk Taoist deity group system. In the book *Thai Yao People—Past, Present and Future*, published in 2006 by Thai scholar Chabo Kacha Ananda, he describes his investigation of Yao villages in eight areas of Thailand, namely, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Changwat Phayao, Nan, Kamphaeng Phet, Lampang, SuKhothai and Tak. He wrote in the book in detail the ceremonial paintings collected by people in these areas, and the author believes that the ceremonial paintings of Yao nationality serve the unique religion of Yao nationality (Chabo Kacha Ananda, 2006).

The Yao people in Vietnam live in the mountainous areas along the border between Vietnam and China, Vietnam and Laos, the middle reaches of the Red River and parts of the northern coastal areas. In Vietnam's Yao communities, there are also many ceremonial paintings, which can be divided into two sets, Xiao Sanqing and Da Sanqing. Xiao Sanqing refers to three portraits of Yu Qing, Tai Qing and Shang Qing, and Da Sanqing has 13 portraits (Nguyen Kesong et al., 1985). When the Yao people in Vietnam hold the ceremony of Dujie, they will hang different ceremonial paintings according to the different levels of the ceremony. There are three paintings as well as thir-

teen paintings (Li, 2008). *Peoples of the Golden Triangle* (Paul & Elaine, 1998), written by Paul and Elaine Lewis, published in 1998, also introduces the Yao people's ceremonial paintings in the Golden Triangle area, but there is no breakthrough in the way and depth of discussion.

There are relatively few discussions on the Lao Yao ceremonial paintings in the academic circles. Records and studies on the Lao Yao ceremonial paintings mainly come from Huang Yu and other scholars. For example, according to *International Overview of the Yao Nationality*, Lao Yao people have two altars for the ceremony of Dujie, with Shijia on the left and Taoism on the right. There are all colors of paper-cuts on the altar, and there are portraits of Sanqing hanging beside the altar (Huang & Huang, 1993). In addition, in 2002, the French scholar Jess G. Pourret's book *Yao People-"Mien" and "Men" in China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand* (Jess, 2002) mentions the Yao ceremonial paintings collected by the author in local Yao communities in Yunnan, northern Vietnam, northern Thailand and Laos, and the author explains the Yao ceremonial paintings in the context of Yao religious and cultural traditions.

Generally speaking, the study of Yao ceremonial paintings in Southeast Asia is earlier and more mature than those in China, the United States, France, Canada and other places, and monographs specializing in Yao ceremonial paintings in Southeast Asia have already been published.

2. Yao Ceremonial Paintings in Occident

After migrating to the United States, Yao people mainly live in Oregon, Washington, California and other places, and they still adhere to their own cultural traditions. Nowadays, many Yao families in the United States still have statues and shrines in their homes (Pang, 1991). Mr. Zhao Guicai, the leader of the Yao people in California, USA, and the former chairman of the National Yao People's Association, made a special trip to the Yao people's area in Guilin, China to order the ceremonial paintings and long drums for the King Panwang Festival (Liu & Li, 2011). Professor He Hongyi also learned from literature review that in 1987 and 1992, the Yao people in the United States purchased 18 color paintings for two halls from China, which all have gone through the ceremony of "Kai Guang", and they are hung during the King Panwang Festival and other important ceremonies. Shigong, who understands these ceremonial paintings, has the right to interpret the characters and functions of the portraits, and this interpretation also plays a role in cultural construction (He, 2014). In 2008, Mr. Zhao Guicai organized the local Yao Association to buy a piece of land of nearly 2,000 square meters in Oakland, California, and built the Yao Cultural Center and the Yao Association Activity Venue. In the center, a shrine hall was set up, with statues of Panwang, Taoism and Guanyin Buddha (Liu & Li, 2011).

As mentioned above, in the 1970s, Yao people in Southeast Asia began to sell their ceremonial paintings, many of which went to some American libraries. For example, the Library of Congress of the United States has a collection of Yao ceremonial paintings, and there are 15 portraits of men and women dressed in Yao costumes in the blank space of 15 pages in the Yao enlightenment material D004 *Zeng Guang Shu* in the Library of Congress of the United States. The Yao costumes worn by these portraits are very similar to the Yao costumes in Southeast Asia and the United States (Wu, 2013). Relevant achievements have been made in the study of Yao ceremonial paintings and related religious documents in the Library of Congress of the United States. For example, since 1995, the research project on Yao handbooks, jointly carried out by University of Munich and Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, has achieved important stage results. *Messengers of God: Yao Religious Manuscripts in Southern China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Burma*, and *Yao Manuscripts in Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Part 1 Catalogue Summary* have been published (He et al., 2013; Li Huijun, 2021). In addition, when holding the project "Research of Yao Manuscript Collection at the Library of Congress" of the National Social Science Fund of China, Professor He Hongyi of South-Central Minzu University mentioned the Yao documents collected by the Library of Congress of the United States (including Yao ceremonial paintings), and the project team also published a number of related research results.

There is a complete set of ceremonial paintings in Seattle Asian Art Museum, which were purchased from the Yao people in the United States. There are: the Jade Emperor, the Holy Lord, Yuanshi Tianzun, Lingbao Tianzun, Daode Tianzn, Zuokuguan, Youkushi, Batan Shuaijiang, Zhang Tianshi, Li Tianshi, Haifan Tianjiang, Ten palace Yama, Taiwei Zushi, Tianfu, Difu, Yangjian, Shuifu, Shagui Jiulang, Daodao Jinqiao (Huang, 1989). The Ohio University Library also has a collection of nearly 2,000 Yao documents and materials, including more than 1,000 ceremonial paintings used in various religious ceremonies, including Sanqing, Jade Emperor and Holy Lord, Zhang Tianshi, Li Tianshi, Four Commanders (or Six Commanders), Three Generals (Tang Hong, Ge Yong and Zhou

Wu), Gong Cao, Ten palace Yama, etc., as well as portraits of Emperor Mother and Big and Small Haifan. This is the largest collection of Yao religious paintings in Occident, among which the earliest ceremonial paintings have a history of more than 100 years (He, 2013; Wei & Huang, 2021).

The Shigong of the Yao nationality in Canada are closely related to the masters in the United States. In 1993, there were 13 Shigong in Canada and they preserved traditional religious instruments. When people had any disasters in their daily life, they had to help them. They offer to do the ancestor worship and to release the souls. They do not work all the year round but make a living by organizing ceremonies and rituals like those. The Yao people also respected them very much. If the number of Shigong in Canada is not enough at the time of a ceremony, Shigong from the United States will be invited to help (Huang & Huang, 1993).

The Yao people in France call themselves "Twelve Surnames Youmian", that is, twelve surnames Panyao (Huang & Huang, 1993). The traditional paintings of the Yao people in France are mainly the religious paintings brought to France by the Yao people when they migrated from Thailand and Laos, namely the *18 ceremonial paintings*. Paintings collected by the Yao people in France include Pangu, King Panhu (Panwang), Jade Emperor, Haifan Tianjiang, Daodao Jinqiao, etc. These ceremonial paintings are usually collected by Shigong, and are only taken out for "PanWang Ritual" (Huang & Huang, 1993).

There are also Yao manuscripts and other Yao documents in places such as the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Heidelberg University, Bodleian Library and Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, among which the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Germany has the largest collection (Li, 2016). At the *International Symposium on Yao Ballads and Rituals* held at Kanagawa University in Japan in 2015, Ms. Lucia Obi of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek presented her paper *Wu Shen in Yao Ritual Ballads*. It analyzes the cultural connotation of Wu Shen recorded in the traditional ritual ballads of the Yao nationality (that is, the three generals, four marshals and the founder of Meishan religion in the ceremonial paintings) (Zhao, 2016).

Yao ceremonial painting is the most important and the only form of Yao folk painting, and its artistic characteristics and cultural connotations are the most outstanding among Yao folk art. The religious beliefs and ideological concepts contained in the Yao ceremonial painting provide valuable evidence for us to study the traditional culture of the Yao nationality and its connotation (Zhou, 2021). The overseas Yao people's collection of ceremonial painting is also the material carrier of the overseas Yao people's cultural and historical memory, religious beliefs, national emotional maintenance and cultural identity (Tan, 2019). In the Yao ceremonial painting, we can see the legend of King Panwang, the ancestor of the Yao people; we can see the traditional long drums, oxhorns and other national musical instruments of the Yao people; we can see the historical legends and stories of Yao people crossing the sea; we can also see the spectacular scene of the Yao's ceremony of Dujie. The ceremonial paintings witness the inheritance of Yao culture and the development of Yao culture in the exchange with other ethnic cultures (Li, 2022). Therefore, the study of overseas Yao people's collection of ceremonial paintings can not only help to explore the life, customs, religious beliefs and other national cultures of overseas Yao people, but also help to explore the changes of overseas Yao traditional culture. It can be said that the significance of the study of overseas Yao ceremonial paintings has gone far beyond the scope of the ceremonial paintings themselves.

3. The Value of the Study of Yao's Statue Painting

Yao ceremonial paintings are not only precious ethnic cultural relics, but also records of Yao religious life and real life, and an important symbol of Yao culture. Foreign land is an important place to produce ethnic identity and national identity. The Yao people living overseas, especially the traditional mountain nomadic Yao people who survived in the European and American continent, produce the situational factors of identity when facing modern civilization. Therefore, all kinds of ancestral documents left by Yao ancestors, including ceremonial paintings, are the memory texts which become the material carrier of Yao cultural identity, which is also the cultural value of overseas Yao statue paintings.

3.1 Cultural memory function

Overseas Yao people have been away from their homeland for a long time, and their yearning for their homeland has been deepening and deepen. Therefore, overseas Yao people attach great importance to national historical legends and family origins. Overseas Yao people often use the collection of Yao documents such as ceremonial paintings as an important basis for seeking relatives and recognizing their ancestors and remembering their national

history.

The historical clues displayed by the Yao people's ceremonial paintings are very unique. The historical legends displayed by the images are roughly the same as those passed down orally by the Yao people, but the ceremonial paintings contain a strong religious influence. The ceremonial painting interprets the historical legends of the Yao nationality as the result of the combination of historical evolution and religionization, and combines the historical process and religious beliefs into a group of gorgeous and mysterious pictures. This is embodied in the Wuqibing-ma, Haifan, Daodao Bridge and other portraits, which not only depict the historical legend of Yao people "crossing the sea", but also inherit the memory of Yao ancestors, as well as the narrative description of Yao religious rituals. In today's traditional festival of the Yao people, "Panwang Ritual", Yao Taoists worship King Panwang as well as various Taoist gods, such as Sanqing, Jade Emperor, Holy Lord and so on. Therefore, in the course of the historical development of the Yao people, historical legends have been closely combined with religious rituals, and they both reflect the way the Yao people remember history. For example, in 2008, the Yao people in the United States built a "King Panwang Hall" in Oakland, Northern California, in which religious documents such as ancestral statues of twelve surnames were placed. The King Panwang Hall became the field of cohesion of the Yao ethnic group in the United States, a fixed place for large-scale sacrificial activities, and a fixed cultural heritage space for national memory.

It is precisely based on the memory of national history and the yearning for their homeland that some American Yao compatriots return home to participate in the Panwang Festival of the Yao people in China. They said, "This is the home of our ancestors, our home and our children's home" (He, 2014). For another example, at the 10th China Yao Panwang Festival held in Lianshan, Yao people from all over the world came to Lianshan, China from the United States, France, Vietnam and other places to worship Panwang. The unique feature of the Yao people is that although they are constantly wandering, they have a religious yearning for the legendary or historical ancestral residence, and this yearning has not diminished for countless generations, which is an eternal complex (Qiao, 1999).

3.2 Cultural identity function

Cultural identity refers to the belief of ethnic groups or individuals in the value of their own nation, their understanding and concern for the way of life and destiny of their own nation, and their understanding of ethnic relations (Deng, 2005). The core of cultural identity is the identification of the basic values of a nation, which is the spiritual bond of a nation and the spiritual basis for the continuation of the life of a national community, and expresses the common understanding, views and tendencies of a nation in culture. Most of the Yao people who have migrated abroad still maintain their traditional religious beliefs, worshipping their ancestors, worshipping King Panwang, worshipping Taoist gods such as Sanqing and Sanyuan, and having shrines in their halls. The Yao Association in Oakland, California, USA, has purchased land to build King Panwang Hall for the Yao people in the United States to come here every year to worship King Panwang. The major religious sacrificial activities include "Panwang Ritual", the ceremony of Dujie, hanging the lantern, Fatong, praying for a good harvest, praying for a good life and so on (Huang & Huang, 1993). In these religious and cultural processes, the Yao people maintain their national feelings through various cultural elements (including ceremonial paintings), so that to realize the national traditions and traditional culture.

Yao people move regardless of national boundaries, but in the spiritual world of Yao people, they have a strict belief in the fairy world. Takemura Takuji believes that the reason why the Yao people believe in the *18 ceremonial paintings* is that the Yao people believe that they can protect them after their death, so the Yao people worship them when they are alive. For example, from the traditional religious rituals and scriptures retained by the Yao people in Thailand, their religious rituals such as Qi-nan Shen, the ceremony of Dujie, offering sacrifices to ghosts, "Pan-Wang Ritual" and offering sacrifices to ancestors are more complex than those in China, and the scriptures retained by the people are more systematic and complete than those retained in China (Yu, 1993). This shows that the religious culture of the Yao nationality still retains its original state and the charm of traditional culture after its migration to foreign countries. From the perspective of historical development, the Yao people have suffered discrimination and oppression for a long time in history, but they have formed the characteristics of strong national cohesion and respect for their own traditional culture, which is also an important reason why the Yao people abroad still attach importance to and identify with their own traditional culture.

In fact, whether at home or abroad, the temples and halls with ceremonial paintings is the center of the Yao people's ceremony, the link of the Yao people's national feelings, and the important factor of realizing cultural

identity. As Jacques Lemoine said, "The national identity of the Yao people, in my opinion, is very strong and open, and can adapt to the modern world. I have participated in the traditional cultural activities of the Yao people living in France and the United States. I must emphasize that in the struggle against life, the change of environment and production tools has not brought about any significant change in their traditional culture, which binds them together and is also a powerful force to stimulate them to resist external pressures" (Qiao,1988).

4. Conclusion

Yao ceremonial painting is the most important and the only form of Yao folk painting, and its artistic characteristics and cultural connotations are the most outstanding among Yao folk art. The religious beliefs and ideological concepts contained in the Yao ceremonial painting provide valuable evidence for us to study the traditional culture of the Yao nationality and its connotation. The overseas Yao people's collection of ceremonial painting is also the material carrier of the overseas Yao people's cultural and historical memory, religious beliefs, national emotional maintenance and cultural identity. In the Yao ceremonial painting, we can see the legend of King Panwang, the ancestor of the Yao people; we can see the traditional long drums, oxhorns and other national musical instruments of the Yao people; we can see the historical legends and stories of Yao people crossing the sea; we can also see the spectacular scene of the Yao's ceremony of Dujie. The ceremonial paintings witness the inheritance of Yao culture and the development of Yao culture in the exchange with other ethnic cultures. Therefore, the study of overseas Yao people's collection of ceremonial paintings can not only help to explore the life, customs, religious beliefs and other national cultures of overseas Yao people, but also help to explore the changes of overseas Yao traditional culture. It can be said that the significance of the study of overseas Yao ceremonial paintings has gone far beyond the scope of the ceremonial paintings themselves.

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