

HEAVENLY FLOWER GARDEN, EARTHLY FLOWER PATTERN: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION INTO THE SYMBOLIC AND STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF THE EMBROIDERY SAMPLERS OF THE QINGSHUI RIVER BASIN OF QIANDONGNAN

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Abstract

An embroidery sampler is a collection of embroidery motifs that are stitched on plain fabric in units of individual repeating patterns. These motifs are then embroidered onto clothing. Put simply, an embroidery sampler is an object that collects and displays different patterns. The patterns on the sampler, comprised of different motifs, can then be reproduced on another object, such as a garment. In addition to embroidery samplers, samplers of paper stencils can also be found in areas influenced by Han Chinese culture. Paper stencil samplers record patterns by drawing or tracing them on paper. The paper is then pasted onto fabric and embroidered along the paper's patterns, ultimately integrating the pattern on this paper onto garments. This shows that samplers are a remarkable vehicle for passing down traditional weaving and embroidery patterns in human societies.

How do the Miao people of the Qiandongnan Qingshui River Basin area view their embroidery samplers (*benx hmud*)? Are they just a method to preserve embroidery techniques, a mere educational tool for teaching embroidery? Do they value them as cultural capital passed down maternally through the family line? Or are they understood as a symbolic transformative medium that connects the abstract values of the Miao with the tangible material world? This paper will take the sampler out of its native context; it adds new layers of meaning and describes the same Miao embroidery sampler could represent different things to different people.

Are samplers an instructional manual for Miao clothing culture, or a collection object to be preserved in the Miao garment and textile section, or an educational tool that can help non-

Miao peoples comprehend and take part in the Miao system of patterns and embroidery? This paper argues that the embroidery samplers of the Qiandongnan Qingshui River Basin Miao encompass all these potentials. The complex characteristics of the embroidery sampler means that cultural knowledge and symbolic meaning are concentrated into one object, which is then passed down and used to complete the work of embroidery, linking it to garments. The meaning behind the patterns is thus not limited to the objects themselves, nor to the patterns and techniques used; they extend to the completed garment. Therefore, embroidery samplers are an excellent medium to help us explore the complicated and diverse world of clothing and culture of the Miao.

Introduction

This article aims to point out that the embroidery samplers in Miao people of Qingshui River Basin act almost like a handbook that explains the three layers of symbolisms and how they interconnect. Without the explanation of the samplers, of how they act as a medium for practice and conversion into actual constructed garments, without patterns from different places that signify the source of fertility, the Miao would not be able to combine patterns, techniques, clothes, and fertility under their cultural system. This article acts as a preliminary discussion of the samplers of the Qingshui River Miao; we may need to put in a great deal of effort just to scrape the surface of the ways and mechanism by which they connect and transform abstract concepts with the real world. Hopefully, the preliminary discussion in this article can provide a starting point for research about Miao embroidery samplers, as the content we discuss in this article about Miao clothing culture is merely the tip of the iceberg.

What Are Embroidery Samplers?

An embroidery sampler is a collection of embroidery motifs that are stitched on plain fabric in units of individual repeating patterns, but in the Miao of Qingshui River Basin, this system of sampler for clothing mainly consisted by embroidery technique but also contains few weaving techniques. These motifs are then embroidered onto clothing. Put simply, an embroidery sampler is an object that collects and displays different patterns. The patterns on the sampler, comprised of different motifs, can then be reproduced on another object, such as a garment. In addition to embroidery samplers, samplers of paper stencils can also be found in areas influenced by Han Chinese culture. Paper stencil samplers is a kind of sampler that use paper stencil to make embroidery on cloth. Paper stencil record patterns by drawing or tracing them on paper. The paper is then pasted onto fabric and embroidered along the paper's patterns, ultimately integrating the pattern of paper onto garments. Indigenous peoples in Taiwan also possess woven samplers, used to record and pass down the weaving patterns of plain and twill weaves. This shows that samplers are a remarkable vehicle for passing down traditional weaving and embroidery patterns in human societies.

How do the Miao people of the Qiandongnan Qingshui River Basin area view their embroidery samplers (*benx hmud*)? Are they just a method to preserve embroidery techniques, a mere

educational tool for teaching embroidery? Do they value them as cultural capital passed down maternally through the family line? Or are they understood as a symbolic transformative medium that connects the abstract values of the Miao with the tangible material world?

Taking the sampler out of its native context adds new layers of meaning. The same Miao embroidery sampler may represent different things to different people. Is it an instructional manual for Miao clothing culture, or a collection object to be preserved in the Miao garment and textile section, or an educational tool that can help non-Miao peoples comprehend and take part in the Miao system of patterns and embroidery? The embroidery samplers of the Qiandongnan Qingshui River Basin Miao encompass all these potentials. The complex characteristics of the embroidery sampler means that cultural knowledge and symbolic meaning are concentrated into one object, which is then passed down and used to complete the work of embroidery, linking it to garments. The meaning behind the patterns is thus not limited to the objects themselves, nor to the patterns and techniques used; they extend to the completed garment. Therefore, embroidery samplers are an excellent medium to help us explore the complicated and diverse world of clothing and culture of the Miao.

The embroidery samplers themselves hold three layers of meaning for Miao women. First, as their name shows, they are a kind of ‘sample’, recording all sorts of patterns and designs for Miao women to reference while constructing their garments. The second layer of meaning is that creating the samplers acts as practice for embroidery techniques and pattern arrangement. As practice objects, every Miao woman will inevitably, while making garments throughout their lifetime, own more than one sampler. The different samplers, then, record how each Miao woman improves and makes changes to the embroidery patterns.

The main purpose of the Miao embroidery samplers is to provide women with a reference for the different patterns they can embroider on the sleeves, collars, and the backs of the garments that they make for themselves and their daughters. This does not mean that these women copy the designs from the sampler wholesale; some conversion is required. The motifs used by Qingshui River Basin Miao are mostly geometric, except for those from the Shidong region who favor more concrete figures and animals. For this reason, the designs on the samplers are usually only a small component of the finished design, and these individual components need to be replicated, via mirroring or other symmetric methods. These designs are repeated, via horizontal repeats or quartet continuous patterns and placed into a system, producing a series of pattern types, before they end up on Miao dress. Therefore, while Miao women reference the designs in the sampler, when they are constructing and decorating their garments, the designs need to be converted multiple times, arranged, and laid out before they form a complete pattern system.

We have now observed two attributes of the embroidery sampler: as an object and as a tool for practice. These two features combine to bring out the third, wherever the patterns come from, or whether it is used for reference or for practice, Miao women are instructed by their mothers to make embroidery samplers. For Miao women, most of the samplers that they start are obtained from their mothers or other female family members. Mothers and female family members may teach patterns from designs used on clothes, or they may bring out their own

embroidery samplers (self-made or inherited), for the younger generation to learn from and study. Only when these Miao women—along with their skill—have matured, may they learn new patterns from friends or female relatives outside their home. Regardless, most of the patterns in an embroidery sampler come from the owner's mother or female family members. The designs in a sampler thus help solidify female inheritance of these patterns, forming the third characteristic of the embroidery sampler as an object. By comparing the patterns in the samplers with garments or other samplers, outsiders such as us can not only get a good look at the region's patterns and the village's style, but also witness the passing down of patterns from mother to daughter (or other female relatives).

The Patterns in an Embroidery Sampler

We will discuss a special feature discovered over the course of motif classification. The Miao of the Qingshui River Basin region have two kinds of motif-naming logic. One is to name motifs after the embroidery technique used to complete them; the other is to name them after the abstract symbolic meaning of the motif. We can view the first method of naming after the embroidery technique as an embodiment of procedural knowledge, meaning this is a kind of knowledge that recalls the steps, methods, and techniques used, helping pass down these unique techniques through the generations. An example is the thirteen-stitch pattern (*hxiangb jiu fbieb jiub*), named for the thirteen stitches that it takes to complete this motif. In the Miao language, *jiu fbieb jiub* literally means thirteen stitches, while *hxiangb* denotes the appearance of the motif. The second naming method, which uses the abstract symbolic meaning of a motif, is a kind of propositional knowledge, establishing a relationship between an object or concept by defining and explaining it. A clothing example is the little horse motif (*ghab dab mal Haox mongl*), named for its resemblance to a horse. The little horse motif has the dual purpose of both organising components and tying different motifs together, just like the real-life horse who serves both as a form of transportation and a way for the Miao people to connect to the outside world.

These two naming methods show that on an intellectual level, these motifs represent different meanings to the Miao, and their importance to Miao clothing and culture also varies. Although both are represented on the material level by embroidery on fabric, linguistically, one method helps preserve techniques in the Miao language via their names, and the other preserves the symbolic meanings of objects and creatures. On one hand, these naming methods show that while embroidery motifs may look similar materially, they may have different meanings in the Miao culture when viewed through a linguistic lens. On the other hand, these two kinds of patterns are indispensable to the Miao women when making a complete set of garments. Two motifs which may be similar on the material level may be placed into different categories via language, but ultimately re-integrated on a garment.

Beyond the Embroidery Sampler: Its Use and Application

We have answered the question of what an embroidery sampler is by studying its features, observing how it connects abstract concepts with concrete techniques, and how the material form of the sampler connects it to familial and societal relationships. If we extend our scope outside the embroidery sampler itself, we can observe how the sampler converts to clothing and back, as well as how the patterns on the finished clothes affect Miao women's view of clothing and humans. Thus, we may be able to answer the question of what, precisely, does the Miao woman do with the embroidery sampler. We will start by discussing how the conversion of pattern to garment is executed with the embroidery sampler and move on to how the patterns generate meaning for Miao women at different stages of their lives.

To embroider, a Miao woman passes her needle through the fabric to form dots, which are then combined to form lines. Executed with colorful polychrome threads, the different configurations of dots, lines, and blank spaces combine to form the basis of patterns, culminating in a complete basic pattern unit. After extensive practice on the sampler, a Miao woman gains a good grasp of this process, and so when she makes embroidered patches for clothing, she can visually consult the basic units in the sampler and transform them into the final versions used on clothes using the same techniques she practised in the sampler. The basic units in the sampler are made from repeats of embroidery and blank spaces, designed to emphasize the shapes formed by embroidery thread and the lack thereof; then the different colored threads are later layered above, completing a basic pattern unit via fixed repetitions of polychrome thread. We could say that the contrast between the embroidery and the blank space construct the bones of the motif, and the opposition of the different colors completes the pattern. The contrast between the embroidery and the blank spaces can be understood through the lens of the familiar binary 0 and 1 that make up computer programming language. When a Miao woman references the sampler to make embroidered patches for clothing, technically she is repeating the contrast of embroidery and blank space. The process of making the patch and the sampler is a faithful recreation of the contrast of embroidery and blank space, the most basic unit of the sampler. When the basic units need to be copied, flipped, or mirrored, the technique remains the same, but the arrangement of the motifs involved, the spatial distribution and compositional logic extend beyond that of the sampler.

Even for samplers used for weaving, the basic units of the motifs are depicted with embroidery, so the patterns similarly consist of the contrast between embroidered and blank space. Unlike when the sampler is used for embroidery, while weaving the pattern, the ground is produced simultaneously. The act of weaving the base fabric itself is also composed of interweaving warp and weft threads, where the contrast of the warp and the weft threads on the surface form the basic weave pattern. Woven patterns weave the coloured threads and ground together, and the coloured threads are then picked through with a tool to display the desired colors. The appearance of picked threads complete the pattern. In short, Miao women are faithfully repeating the contrast of embroidery and blank space when they embroider basic pattern units, but when they are weaving the basic units, they need to deal with two layers of contrast. The first layer is the contrast of warp versus weft, and the second is the contrast of visible picked colors and unpicked colors. Instead of exactly repeating the contrast of embroidered thread

versus blank space, they must convert the patterns on the sampler into picked threads and unpicked blank space. Samplers can be helpful to reference during weaving, but the embroidered samples in the sampler are not a direct practice exercise, as embroidery and weaving are executed differently.

Lastly are the paper stencil samplers used exclusively for embroidery. This kind of sampler is made by first cutting out the design in paper and then tracing it on another piece of paper before selling it. Geyi locals refer to them as paper stencils (*hmub bangk xid*) or Han patterns (*hmub diel*). After purchasing these patterns, Miao women place the paper onto the fabric or patch they will use for embroidery, then stitch the outline of the motifs directly through the pattern and the fabric, before using polychrome threads to fill in the spaces with embroidery. Since paper stencil samplers are usually purchased from the market and not drawn by the Miao women themselves, these samplers only serve as references, not as practice objects. During embroidery, they follow the outlines drawn on the patterns, but they must decide how to color in the spaces themselves. Therefore, the process of transforming sampler to embroidery is not accomplished through the contrast of embroidery and blank space, but through direct imitation of the paper pattern. Of course, while stitching, the embroidery thread and blank space still contrast each other, but this is no longer a part of the intellectual conversion of sampler to embroidery, but rather a purely technical action.

Patterns and Clothing

The Miao women of the Qingshui River Basin record, practise, and pass down sampler patterns, which they then embroider onto or weave into clothing, transforming their clothes from a material object to cover the body into something that is rich in cultural meaning, and which conveys the social life of a culture. Now, we will investigate the different categories of dress of women in the Shidong and Geyi area in the Qingshui River region, explaining how their clothing marks the different life stages of a woman, and how the different motifs used on their clothing work to symbolize the idea of ‘fertility’ that is so important in Miao culture. The clothing of the women of the Shidong area can be divided into three categories based on formality: formal dress, casual dress, and children and young women's dress. Formal and casual dress are worn by adult women, while children and young women dress in children's dress.

There are four types of patterned dress in the formal category:

1. The festival jacket with satin stitch (*hongb mongl*);
2. The jacket made with satin stitch on all decorative strips (*pub duk*);
3. the jacket made with satin stitch and counting-stitch on all decorative strips (*jiaf duk*);
4. The jacket with counting-stitch (*khait mongl*).

Casual dress includes three types:

1. Visiting jacket (*deis dengb*);
2. Jackets that young women wear with stem stitch (*hox jiux*); and
3. Jackets that girls wear with twisted thread embroidery (*gangb jiaf*).

The four types of patterned formal dress are what Miao women wear when they host weddings; the festival jacket with satin stitch (*hongb mongl*) is worn by the bride herself. The jacket made with satin stitch on all decorative strips (*pub duk*) and the jacket made with satin stitch and counting-stitch on all decorative strips (*jiaf duk*) are the same kind of dress, both have a vertical pattern on the center of the sleeve decorations, but the *pub duk* uses satin stitch on the entire jacket, while the *jiaf duk* uses counting-stitch in the center. Therefore, the jacket made with satin stitch on all decorative strips (*pub duk*) is regarded as equally precious as the festival jacket with satin stitch (*hongb mongl*), both worn by brides and newly-wed women. The jacket made with satin stitch and counting-stitch on all decorative strips (*jiaf duk*) is worn by the wedding host, as is the jacket with counting-stitch (*khait mongl*). The difference is that younger women would wear the *jiaf duk* while older women would wear the *khait mongl*. As casual dress, the visiting dress (*deis dengb*) is worn when Miao women take part in events outside their home, such as visiting others, going to the market, attending other weddings as guests, attending funerals, and so on. The patterns used on the visiting dress (*deis dengb*) differ as the wearer ages, with elderly people wearing simpler patterns in darker colors, decorated with blue silk thread. The younger the wearer, the brighter and more lavish the design, with red and blue as the main colors, while fuchsia, orange, green, and light blue thread would be used as complementary colors. In the formal category, the *jiaf duk* and the *khait mongl* also differ with age, but they differ from the visiting dress (*deis dengb*) which differentiates between wearers by using different colors and patterns to embellish it, while the two kinds of formal dresses, made from different techniques, are used on different occasions, together with patterns and colors that specify age.

When we dig deeper into the origin of the patterns used on the Shidong Miao women's clothing, we can find another method of categorization: samplers that have been passed down through the family and samplers that have been purchased from the marketplace. The samplers for the festival jacket with satin stitch (*hongb mongl*) worn by the bride at her wedding, the jacket made with satin stitch on all decorative strips (*pub duk*) worn by brides and newlyweds, the jackets with stem stitch (*hox jiux*) worn by young women, and the jackets with twisted thread embroidery (*gangb jiak*) worn by little girls are all purchased from the market. The patterns on the jacket with counting-stitch (*khait mongl*) worn by older women past childbearing age when hosting a wedding in their home, as well as the visiting dress (*deis dengb*) worn by adult women out and about, may come from embroidery samplers passed down through the family. The patterns for the jacket made with satin stitch and counting-stitch on all decorative strips (*jiaf duk*), worn by young women hosting weddings in their families, may come from family samplers or those bought on the market. To the adult Miao woman, the contrast between family samplers and purchased samplers combine the distinction between different types of dress and different occasions, and may show how the patterns, clothing, and life stages of Miao women are connected. Starting with age, elder women have mostly completed the child-raising stage, while younger women and brides are still in the middle of a highly fertile life stage. Consequently, samplers bought from the market symbolize fertility brought from the outside into the home, while using family samplers indicate the family has already used up the fertility they possess. When the young lady of the house is able to don the *jiaf duk*, she can use purchased samplers to indicate her fresh fertility, and she can also use her family sampler to indicate that

fertility is a feature that has belonged to her family for generations. The origins of the patterns in the sampler and connecting the inside of the home and the outside largely come to a head when the Miao woman hosts a wedding, as weddings are a ritual combining time, space, and people, welcoming the new bride from another family into one's own. As a result, fertility is emphasized and taken seriously in wedding rituals. When the Miao woman visit someone else's home, it is not an occasion that requires the emphasis of bringing fertility into the home, but one of participating in activities or rituals as a member of one's home, hence the use of samplers that indicate one's family heritage.

Lastly, like the visiting dress (*deis dengb*), the formal dress worn by the wedding hosts help differentiate the different women in a family (outside of the bride) by assigning different types of clothing and patterns to illustrate the different life stages they are at. During the wedding, the bride is in a unique category. She is yet to belong to the family she is marrying into, but is not a complete outsider, so she cannot use the sampler patterns of her husband's family, instead using patterns she purchased from the market. Wearing clothes decorated with patterns from purchased samplers, the bride formally joins her new family during the wedding ceremony, symbolizing how this family accepts external influence from the bride's family and the market into their home. During the wedding, the bride occupies a liminal space that is neither inside nor outside, so unlike the adult women wedding hosts, her age is not demarcated by the cut and decoration of her clothing. The patterns from the market perfectly encapsulate how the bride have yet to be categorized into a family at the time of the wedding. She exists in a state of being exchanged with another family, where she bears the highest exchange rate.

When a Shidong Miao woman passes away, she is buried in her visiting dress (*deis dengb*), as the Shidong Miao believe that up in heaven, she is a guest of Leigong, not a host, and for her ancestors to recognise her, she must wear clothing made from the embroidery samplers of her family. Although the Shidong Miao believe that their fertility comes from Leigong's garden in heaven—Leigong is the god designated by the Chinese emperor to administer over the Miao people—this fertility needs to be converted before it can be realised. By the logic of the Shidong Miao, patterns from the marketplace symbolize an exchange and interplay of fertility from inside and outside the home, so it can only happen on Earth, like the clothing made from patterns on the samplers; heaven, like the samplers, symbolizes the source of fertility, not the practice of completing the patterns.

Moving up the Qingshui River from Shidong to Geyi, their clothing is likewise categorized into adult formal wear, adult casual wear, and clothing for children. Adult formal clothing includes the fully embroidered grand jacket (*ux hlieb*) worn by brides at their weddings and the grand jacket with six embroidered decorations (*ux diud dal*) worn by women in the wedding host family. Casual wear for adults is called the visiting dress or the visiting jacket with four embroidered decorations (*ux dluob dal*), while children wear woven clothes (*ux dlilx*). The collar, sleeves, and lapel of the fully-embroidered grand jacket (*ux hlieb*) are all embroidered; the grand jacket with six embroidered decorations (*ux diud dal*) has one line of embroidery on the sleeves, while the collar has woven trim and the area around the collar is woven, but the rest is all embroidered; the visiting jacket with four embroidered decorations (*ux dluob dal*) have

embroidered sleeve-heads, treetops (shoulder pieces), valleys (front lapels), back collars, while the rest are woven. Paper stencil samplers, which can be bought from the market, are used for the embroidery, and are also called paper stencils (*hmub bangk xid*) or Han patterns (*hmub diel*), while woven patterns are made by consulting family embroidery samplers.

We may recall that Shidong women use different types of garments to distinguish between older and younger women of the wedding host family, and they also use patterns from the market to symbolize ongoing fertility, while the embroidery samplers passed down the family represent consummated fertility that belongs to the family. Geyi Miao women use dress distinctions, such as the ratio of embroidery to weaving, to highlight the bride, wedding host family, guests visiting another family, as well as the different life stages of underage children. The higher the ratio of embroidery, the more fertile, and the more valuable. The bride during her wedding, who represents future potential fertility, is dressed in an entirely embroidered ensemble, as she is the most fertile and most valuable member of her new family. Standing in for the wedding host family's current or family fertility are women wearing grand jackets with six embroidered decorations, which figure six patches of embroidery, while the rest of the garment is decorated with woven trim. Childbearing women not of the host family wear visiting jackets with four embroidered decorations, which figure four patches of embroidery, while the rest of the garment is decorated with woven trim; children, infertile, wear entirely woven clothes (*ux dlix*). Geyi Miao women also refer to embroidery as paper stencils (*hmub bangk xid*) or Han patterns (*hmub diel*) and purchase embroidery samplers from the market.

In this aspect, the meaning of their embroidery is like those of the Shidong Miao: as the new bride is the most fertile symbol in the entire wedding ceremony, the patterns used on her clothes must come from the market, supplementing and renewing her new family's fertility by bringing in external fertility. The difference between the grand jacket with six embroidered decorations and the visiting jacket with four embroidered decorations represent how the Geyi Miao women have gradually increased the number of woven trim patterns in their family samplers, using less paper stencil samplers from the market, which marks the decrease of external fertility, as the no-longer-new brides become subsumed into their new families and are no longer regarded as outsiders. However, it should be noted that when all the patterns used on clothes come from woven trim patterns from the family sampler, they transform into a way to describe someone who is no longer able to bear children. Simply put, the clothing of the Geyi Miao label women at different stages by labelling them on a continuum of whether they wear embroidery patterns (from external sources) or woven patterns (from internal sources), unlike the Shidong Miao who rely on placing women in several binary structures to categorize them.

The Geyi Miao have drastically different traditions regarding burial clothes. When a Geyi woman passes, her family would dress her in the formal clothes she wore when she got married, in the kind of fully embroidered grand jacket worn during weddings. According to several elderly Geyi women, the kind of visiting jacket worn by women in their later years are too plain and too dark, which means that when they are in heaven it will be too dark for them to find their way. They also consider clothing with checked patterns unsuitable, as they may block the dead from returning to the heavens. If we were to lay all the clothes a Geyi Miao woman wore from

womb to tomb, we would see an alternating cycle of woven and embroidered clothes. Before they come of age, young women would wear clothing that is entirely woven, but after they become of age and marry, they would switch to the fully embroidered grand jacket. When acting as wedding host, they wear the grand jacket with six embroidered decorations, which has more embroidery than woven trim, and when they take part in activities outside the home after they are married, they wear the visiting jacket with four embroidered decorations, until, when they pass away, they put on the fully embroidered grand jacket from their wedding. For the Shidong, the patterns for the clothes of children, young women, and brides all come from the marketplace, but after marriage the clothes are divided into those worn within the home and those worn without. Clothes worn outdoors bear the traditional sampler patterns, and those worn inside the home are differentiated according to one's age (fertility level). Younger women in the house can wear patterns bought from the marketplace or made from their family samplers, while older women are restricted to designs from the family sampler. When it is time to go, the Shidong Miao dress the deceased in the visiting jacket that she used to wear to attend activities outside the home, to accompany her on her journey to the heavens.

If we were to say the Geyi viewed a woman's life as a continuous process, then we would see that they use the proportion of embroidered versus woven decorations on their clothes to construct a continuous cycle of pattern changes that aligns with their life. The Shidong, on the other hand, pay more attention to distinction and separation, their most basic distinction is whether the pattern comes from the marketplace or from their family embroidery sampler. The samplers from the marketplace represent young women yet unable to bear children, as well as the pinnacle of fertility symbolize, the bride. The second layer of distinction concerns married women, marking whether something is worn inside or outside the house, however only the younger women of childbearing age have the choice to use patterns from their family or purchased from the marketplace, while older women past childbearing age can only use the family sampler. The third layer concerns the opposition of what to wear inside and outside the home. Inside the home, younger women of childbearing age are still able to choose between marketplace patterns and those from their family samplers, while for events outside the home, they can only use designs from the family sampler, regarding of age or fertility status. After death, going to heaven is considered going outside the home, thus they should only use designs from the family sampler.

The Shidong Miao use the embellishment on their clothing to demarcate the different stages of a woman's life, with an emphasis on her fertility and her status inside or outside the home, as well as how the family has to convert the fertility from the outsider bride into their own. What has not been converted by the family is, on one hand, regarded as incredibly fertile and thus is in the process of conversion. On the other hand lies potential fertility that has yet to blossom, and so cannot be converted yet. Only fertility that has been converted into the family is regarded as stable and controllable. The differences in how the Geyi and Shidong Miao depict fertility and the internal/external divide via their embroidery samplers may stem from the difference in human geography. Shidong is located midstream in the Qingshui river, relatively close to the riverside, thus it has long been enmeshed in the regional trade that the river brings. They are familiar with how the external force of the market integrates with their village and into their

home, and this has even become a fixed part of Shidong culture and how they engage in social reproduction. The Geyi, however, live upstream of the Qingshui river, away from the trade center of Qingshui River valley, therefore there is less integration of the market into their culture compared to the Shidong. This may be why the Geyi place a larger emphasis on the continuum of change between inside and outside regarding fertility, instead of emphasizing that vital external fertility must be converted before it belongs to their family, like the Shidong.

Conclusion

Starting from the material properties of the embroidery sampler, we have discussed how it records patterns, how it aids in the practice of embroidery and weaving, and how the naming of the patterns is rooted in two different kinds of ideology. Next, we have discussed the thought process behind converting the patterns in the sampler into concrete technical objects. Lastly, we have connected the clothing worn at different stages of a woman's life to how different patterns and colors, fabrication techniques, and source of the patterns represent her childbearing status. The embroidery samplers of the Qingshui River Basin Miao are much more than just an object that records embroidery patterns, they reveal a unique way of thinking. The Miao women combine symbols and practice, mobilizing symbols to create a mechanism that connects abstract concepts with the real world. Linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein (1976) once proposed a concept of 'metapragmatics', which similar to metalanguage, both use descriptive language to describe the meaning of another language. However, in metalanguage, the language used to describe a language is a separate practice from the meaning of the language, while in metapragmatics, descriptive language may be combined with the language of meaning, the two integrating into one language practice. This article has found that the intellectual conversion that the women of the Qingshui Miao engage in regarding their samplers play a similar role to metapragmatics, linking together patterns, clothing, fertility, the internal/external dichotomy, and the connection between people and heaven.

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