

Qiandongnan Miao Batik Craftsmanship: Historical Context and Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the historical evolution of Qiandongnan Miao batik craftsmanship in China and analyses how ecological environments, daily work, cultural beliefs, religious practices, and mythic traditions shape its motif systems. The study aims to clarify how motifs are formed, stabilised, and adapted while retaining their cultural significance. A qualitative, structured narrative review was used. Chinese- and English-language academic articles, theses, museum publications, heritage records, and documented textiles were identified through a purposive, theme-led search and screened for relevance to Qiandongnan or closely related Guizhou Miao batik, identifiable provenance, and contextual evidence. Texts were coded around inspiration, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, and myths, while eligible textile images were compared by motif type, composition, placement, scale, repetition, symmetry, abstraction, material or garment context, and historical or contemporary use. The review identifies recurring motif groups, including maple leaves, butterflies, dragons, celestial bodies, oxen, fish, and geometric forms. These motifs function not only as decorative elements but also as visual expressions of ancestry, protection, social values, ritual obligations, and cultural memory. The findings indicate that repeated making, wearing, ritual use, and communal recognition help maintain motif legibility and continuity. Contemporary adaptations often simplify or reconfigure traditional symbols for fashion and cultural-creative products, creating a continuing negotiation between innovation and cultural specificity. The study concludes that Qiandongnan Miao batik is an active cultural mechanism in which technique, narrative, belief, and social practice jointly sustain a distinctive symbolic language. The analysis further demonstrates that garment placement and pattern repetition are not purely aesthetic decisions: they respond to material constraints and to shared expectations of recognition in ceremonial and everyday settings. These findings provide a culturally grounded basis for safeguarding craft knowledge while supporting responsible contemporary design.

Keywords: cultural beliefs; motif design; myths; Qiandongnan Miao batik; religious practices

INTRODUCTION

Qiandongnan Miao batik is widely recognised as a distinctive textile tradition within Chinese resist-dye practices. Existing studies have mainly focused on stylistic description, iconographic interpretation, and ethnographic documentation of motifs and techniques. Although these studies provide an important foundation, they often treat beliefs as symbolic additions to batik imagery rather than as forces shaping textile use in cultural contexts. As a result, the social conditions through which batik motifs emerge, stabilise, and persist remain insufficiently examined.

This review re-examines Qiandongnan Miao batik through literature on inspiration, belief, ritual, and myth as cultural influences on textile production. Rather than viewing motifs as merely decorative, it highlights the material conditions of wax-resist techniques, community rituals, and the social settings in which batik is worn. It

also shows how motifs develop through repeated practice, communal recognition, and the transmission of craft knowledge.

The discussion is organised around four interconnected areas: inspiration, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, and myths. This framework explains how batik imagery grows from visual sources and becomes embedded in social values, ritual practices, and narrative memory, while also preparing for later discussion of interpretation and contemporary change.

LITERATURE REVIEW - QIANDONGNAN MIAO BATIK CRAFTSMANSHIP

Research on Miao batik has increasingly moved beyond technical description toward its cultural, symbolic, and social significance. Rather than treating batik as only a decorative process, scholars regard it as an embedded cultural system in which imagery, production, and use are closely interconnected (Liu & Young, 2021). Studies of Guizhou Miao textiles show that wax-resist techniques, motif repetition, and garment placement operate within shared systems of meaning understood by the community.

The literature repeatedly highlights several related elements. Natural environments and daily life are major sources of visual inspiration, while motifs derived from flora, fauna, and landscape are usually stylised rather than copied directly from nature, shaped by wax-resist technique and textile design principles (Liu & Young, 2021). Cultural and ritual settings also influence interpretation, especially in ceremonies and festivals where recognisability and repetition help preserve visual continuity across generations.

Mythic traditions are also central in reinforcing iconography and technical authority. Origin narratives such as the Butterfly Mother cycle connect textiles with ancestry (Bender, 2006), while museum records of craft origins symbolically explain batik procedures, such as stories of the “God of Bees” creating wax patterns and the “God of Indigo” dyeing cloth before the skills were passed to human girls (“Exhibition materials on miao batik craft traditions,” 2016). These narratives help preserve both motifs and production methods.

Studies on intangible cultural heritage further show that contemporary reinterpretations of Miao batik must balance innovation and tradition (Kang et al., 2025). Across the literature, batik is understood not merely as decoration, but as a structured visual system in which environment, belief, storytelling, and craft technique are closely interconnected.

Inspiration

In Qiandongnan Miao batik, inspiration usually comes from familiar surroundings. Artisans draw on local ecological features and daily scenes rather than inventing motifs arbitrarily. Over time, these recurring subjects develop into recognisable motif families that can be taught and reproduced through wax-resist techniques (Yang, 2017).

The natural environment is a primary source of inspiration for Miao batik. Qiandongnan’s mountainous landscape, rolling terrain, and abundant vegetation have strongly shaped motif development (Pan et al., 2023). Miao artisans observe and transform natural forms into symbolic designs. A common example is the maple leaf, whose outline and veins are abstracted into symmetrical rhythmic patterns (Luo, 2024). Because the maple tree symbolises unity in Miao culture, maple-leaf motifs often appear on hems and sleeve edges to express collective harmony (Long et al., 2023). **Figure 1** illustrates the abstraction of the maple-leaf form in Miao batik.



Figure 1. Maple leaf pattern. Source: Pan, M. (2022). Research on Visual Communication of Qiandongnan Miao Patterns under Ecological Semiotics (Master's thesis, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute).

Yang (2017) noted that mountain ridges are often rendered as zigzag lines framing batik compositions, symbolising the spiritual bond between people and homeland. This transformation of landscape into symbol reflects the Miao worldview of reverence for nature and helps sustain cultural identity through batik.

Natural forms are not transferred directly onto cloth. Because batik depends on controlled wax lines, artisans simplify shapes, emphasise clear borders, and favour symmetry and repetition, choices that support both pattern making and garment placement over time (Yang, 2017).

The symbolisation of nature also reflects the Miao cosmology that “everything has a spirit.” Myths, legends, and folktales provide important sources for batik imagery. Zhang (2016) identified the Butterfly Mother as a central ancestral figure, making butterfly motifs symbols of life continuity and ethnic lineage, as shown in **Figure 2**. The Jiangyang siblings are likewise depicted through bold archaic lines to signify kinship and cultural transmission (Han, 2002). Other stories reviewed by Tian (2004b), such as “Bang Xiangyou,” “The Orphan Becomes Emperor,” and “The Dragon Maiden and the Fisherman,” also shape batik’s visual language. In this way, myth expands the visual vocabulary of batik while reinforcing historical and cultural continuity.



Figure 2. Traditional Miao batik pattern featuring the "Butterfly Mother" deity figure with fish motifs, exemplifying the fusion of ancestral worship and natural elements in textile art. Note: Retrieved from The Paper.

When motifs are linked to familiar stories, communities expect them to remain visually recognisable. In studies of Guizhou batik and totemic legends, butterfly imagery is repeatedly associated with the Butterfly Mother tradition and becomes standardised across many local textiles, helping maintain a stable visual identity (Han, 2002).

Daily life also inspires Miao batik, especially agricultural labour, trade, and communal activities. As a farming society, the Miao often depict rice planting and harvesting through simplified symbols arranged across the fabric. Deng (2024) notes that such compositions not only represent industriousness but also express hopes for a good harvest, as shown in **Figure 3**. Market scenes also appear in batik through abstract geometric arrangements and dotted patterns suggesting lively exchange (Wu, 2025).



Figure 3. Miao batik textile depicting daily life scenes featuring traditional stilt houses, human figures, agricultural animals, butterflies, and floral motifs. Source: Retrieved from Baidu.

Community festivals likewise provide important sources of inspiration. Wen and Li (2013) describe batik motifs showing dancers playing lusheng during the Lusheng Festival. Chen (2015) further argues that festival imagery in Miao batik integrates musical performance, ceremonial dress, and communal participation into a coherent visual narrative. **Figure 4** presents a festival scene featuring lusheng players, bird motifs, and fern patterns, while Wu (2021) interprets these ceremonial representations as visual expressions of ritual identity and collective memory. These designs are not merely decorative; they preserve cultural memory and reinforce ethnic identity. Examining such sources of inspiration therefore also reveals the belief systems underlying batik patterns.



Figure 4. Miao batik textile depicting a traditional festival scene with lusheng players, phoenix or bird motifs, and fern patterns. Source: Retrieved from Baidu.

The sources of inspiration in Miao batik have also changed over time. Early designs mainly used geometric forms such as diamonds, triangles, and spirals abstracted from nature. Later, mythic and folkloric narratives enriched the symbolic content of batik. By the Ming and Qing Dynasties, techniques became more refined and included floral, avian, and aquatic motifs with auspicious meanings (Huang, 2016). In contemporary practice, some artisans simplify and reconfigure traditional symbols to suit modern aesthetics and new applications in fashion and cultural products (Luo & Zhu, 2023).

Across these studies, innovation is not understood simply as adding new decorative features. It must remain within a recognisable visual language that preserves traditional techniques, pattern conventions, and culturally specific meanings, especially when batik enters wider cultural-creative markets (Luo & Zhu, 2023).

Public life also supports the circulation of motifs. Festival performances, in particular, provide social spaces in which batik imagery is observed, discussed, remembered, and collectively recognised, helping preserve local folk art (Wen & Li, 2013).

The next subsection therefore examines how cultural beliefs, including nature worship, ancestral reverence, and shared social values, provide a normative framework for batik motifs. These beliefs influence what is considered appropriate to wear in different life events and strengthen collective identity through recognisable visual forms.

Cultural Beliefs

Cultural beliefs are often discussed through their practical effects on clothing choice, motif placement, and the expression of group identity. Among the Miao, clan symbols and identity markers embedded in costume shape both motif selection and social meaning in everyday and ceremonial contexts (Tian, 2004a).

Miao batik is a form of artistic craftsmanship that embodies cultural heritage beliefs. Its patterns go beyond decoration to express spiritual convictions, social hierarchy, ancestral reverence, and collective identity. In this way, batik serves not only as aesthetic expression but also as a medium of cultural storytelling rooted in shared memory.

Nature worship is central to Miao cultural belief and strongly shapes the symbolic system of batik. Historically living in mountainous regions, the Miao regard natural entities such as mountains, rivers, the sun, moon, and stars as spiritually charged, a worldview described by Qing (2000) as animism. This belief appears directly in batik motifs. Sun patterns often symbolise vitality and renewal and commonly appear on children's and ceremonial clothing (Hu, 2021). Moon motifs suggest tranquillity, continuity, and cosmic rhythm, especially in women's garments (Wang, 2019). Thunder motifs, often rendered in zigzag forms, carry protective meaning, while water motifs signify abundance, continuity, and purification (Ouyang, 2021), as shown in **Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8**.



Figure 5. Traditional Miao batik featuring moon pattern motifs. Source: Retrieved from Xiaohongshu.

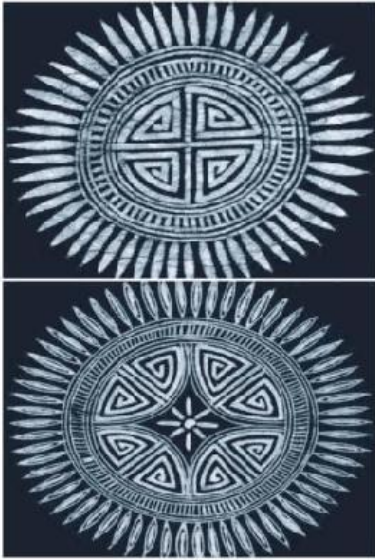


Figure 6. Miao batik featuring sun patterns integrated with bronze drum motifs. Source: Retrieved from Xiaohongshu.



Figure 7. Mountain pattern motifs in Miao batik textiles. Source: Author's personal photograph.



Figure 8. Water pattern motifs in Miao batik textiles. Source: Author's personal photograph.

Within narratives of nature worship, motifs such as the sun, moon, thunder, and water are not simple ornaments. They symbolise protection, purification, and blessing, which explains their frequent use in costume patterns associated with ceremonial dress, children's clothing, and other protective contexts.

Ancestral worship is another major cultural belief shaping Miao batik symbolism. Because ancestral spirits are believed to continue protecting descendants, many motifs function as visual tributes. The butterfly motif, representing the Butterfly Mother or mythical ancestor, is commonly rendered in symmetrical and repetitive forms that suggest continuity, inheritance, and cyclical life (Feng & Yu, 2020). Likewise, Wang and Hu (2022) note that Miao dragon motifs differ from Han Chinese dragons, often appearing as horned ancestral guardians, as shown in **Figure 9**.



Figure 9. Miao batik featuring a dragon with ox horns, distinctive from Han Chinese dragon representations. Source: Author's personal photograph.

Spiral motifs also symbolise the enduring presence of ancestors and their role in family and community life (Han, 2002). Feng and Yu (2020) further note that bronze drum motifs carry ritual significance because bronze drums are used to communicate with spirits and invoke blessings. Through such ancestral imagery, batik links past and present and keeps reverence for ancestors central to cultural expression.

Recognisability is equally important in ancestral motifs. Because such images are repeatedly used in ceremonial settings, guardian-like animal figures, including locally specific dragon forms, tend to retain stable horned or serpent-like profiles so they can be easily recognised and reproduced within the community (Wang & Hu, 2022).

Beyond nature and ancestry, Miao batik also expresses core social values such as bravery, wisdom, diligence, and unity (Riccio, 2022). Li et al. (2020) describe ox motifs as symbols of strength, resilience, and industriousness, reflecting the animal's importance in agricultural life. Bird motifs, often stylised into flowing curvilinear forms, are associated with freedom, wisdom, and kinship ties (Chen & Zhao, 2014).

Fish motifs frequently appear in wedding textiles because they are associated with fertility, abundance, and marital harmony. As Liu (2014) explains, these images do more than decorate cloth; they reinforce moral ideas

and social ideals, functioning as cultural guides for behaviour, as shown in **Figure 10**.



Figure 10. Batik patterns featuring ox, bird, and fish motifs, reflecting the agricultural and daily life of the Miao people. Source: Retrieved from Baidu.

The social structure of Miao society also shapes batik design, especially in relation to family and gender roles. A patrilineal kinship system emphasises familial cohesion and hierarchy (Zhang, 2003), and this order is echoed in geometric arrangements of diamonds, triangles, and linear patterns symbolising continuity (Li et al., 2020). Women, as the main inheritors of batik skills, also influence motif development, with flowers, butterflies, harmonious family scenes, and children appearing in imagery associated with female aesthetics (Pan et al., 2023). Marriage symbolism is likewise expressed through phoenixes, fish, butterflies, flowers, and pomegranates, which signify marital happiness and fertility (Liu, 2014). Batik thus transmits family structure, social values, and gender roles as well as artistic meaning.

The visualisation of cultural beliefs gives Miao batik both artistic richness and social significance. Historically, batik clothing marked not only everyday identity but also social status, with some patterns reserved for particular families or clans (Tian, 2004a). Feng and Yu (2020) also note that motifs were deliberately chosen to express sacred roles in ritual settings. Cultural beliefs therefore embed identity, hierarchy, and morality in batik, linking motif selection to lineage, social roles, ritual timing, and spiritual protection. This shows that Miao batik is more than decoration; it is a cultural text carrying historical, social, and spiritual narratives.

Religious Beliefs

Studies of Qiandongnan Miao communities repeatedly describe religious life as organised around time-bound ceremonies and ritual performances. In these contexts, batik textiles are used as garments, banners, or ceremonial objects, so motif meaning is tied to ritual action and community participation rather than abstract symbolism alone.

Miao batik also functions as a visual expression of religious belief. Spirituality, animism, and ritual practice shape a sacred visual language in which natural worship, totemic symbolism, ancestral reverence, and sacrificial motifs all express protection, religious identity, and communal cohesion.

The Miao belief that “all things in the world share the same root and ancestry” underpins longstanding practices of nature worship (Qing, 2000). Reverence for heaven, earth, the sun, moon, thunder, water, mountains, and other natural elements is widely reflected in batik motifs. Moon patterns often signify mystery and cyclical order (Hu, 2021), while thunder patterns, as illustrated in **Figure 11**, are regarded as protective signs of safety and good

fortune (Wang, 2019). Water ripples, mountain shapes, and cloud patterns likewise express admiration for the natural world (Ouyang, 2021). These symbols also continue into ceremonies and sacrificial practices.



Figure 11. Traditional Miao batik cloth featuring thunder cloud patterns. Source: Retrieved from Xiaohongshu.

In religious discourse, butterfly imagery is commonly linked to origin and protection, which helps explain its frequent appearance on ceremonial textiles (Feng & Yu, 2020). Dragon motifs, by contrast, often appear as local guardian figures with horned or serpent-like forms that mark spiritual protection in ways distinct from Han Chinese dragon imagery (Wang & Hu, 2022), as shown in **Figure 12**.



Figure 12. Totemic symbols in batik, including butterfly, dragon, phoenix, and serpent motifs with religious significance. Source: Author's personal photograph.

Ancestral reverence and ritual practice are also central to Miao religious belief. Because ancestral spirits are believed to influence the living, certain batik motifs function as spiritual tributes. Bronze drum motifs are especially significant because bronze drums are used in ancestral ceremonies to summon spirits (Feng & Yu, 2020). Such imagery shows that batik textiles are not only artistic objects but also sacred media of spiritual communication.

Religious rituals are important communal activities that strengthen both spiritual ties and social cohesion. During the Kuzang Festival, for example, priests wear batik with ox motifs symbolising sacrificial offerings to ancestral spirits, as shown in **Figure 13** (Wu, 2021). In heaven-worship ceremonies, motifs of the sun, lightning, and clouds are believed to carry spiritual power (Yao & Xiong, 2013), while Liu (2014) notes that some batik designs serve as protective talismans in exorcistic rites. Fish motifs, especially on children's clothing, signify prosperity and protection, and geometric forms such as triangles and rhombuses may be arranged to intensify apotropaic power (Feng & Yu, 2020). **Figure 14** further shows batik ceremonial banners used in the Kuzang Festival. These uses show that Miao batik functions as a tool of divine protection and sacred communication, not merely aesthetic display.



Figure 13. Scene from the Kuzang Festival. Source: Retrieved from Xiaohongshu.



Figure 14. Batik ceremonial banners used in the Kuzang Festival. Source: Retrieved from Xiaohongshu.

Repeated ceremonial use also shapes form. Symmetry, repetition, and rhythmic geometry persist not simply as abstract aesthetic preferences, but because they remain highly recognisable on garments and ritual textiles viewed in collective settings (Wu, 2021).

Overall, batik is described less as a passive surface than as an active ritual medium. Creation epics authorise major images, while museum-recorded craft-origin narratives explain why the sequence of waxing and dyeing matters and how this knowledge is transmitted as recognised tradition (“Exhibition materials on miao batik craft traditions,” 2016).

Many studies therefore suggest that the symbolic repertoire of Miao batik becomes stable through repeated

making, wearing, and communal recognition. Myth-based analysis is useful because it explains both the preservation of historical memory and the continued transmission of motifs and craft procedures.

Myths

In myth-centred scholarship, narratives are treated as active forces shaping the meaning and use of motifs rather than as mere background stories. The Butterfly Mother tradition, frequently documented in epic contexts, connects textiles with ancestry, origin, and cosmology, helping explain the persistence of butterfly imagery in batik design (Bender, 2006).

The Butterfly Mother tradition is extensively recorded in Guizhou Miao epic song cycles. These narratives describe origins through chains of transformation linking non-human beings, ancestors, and the living world, creating a cosmology in which life, kinship, and nature are inseparable (Bender, 2006). In batik, butterfly imagery therefore functions as a sign of ancestral origin and protection, especially on ceremonial and identity-marking garments (Feng & Yu, 2020; Grayson, 2007).

Craft-origin myths recorded in museums do more than explain where batik came from; they also narrate the process itself and define why certain procedures are considered the correct way to make cloth. In one account, a goddess asks the “God of Bees” to leave wax marks and the “God of Indigo” to dye the fabric before the technique is passed to human girls (“Exhibition materials on miao batik craft traditions,” 2016). By framing production steps as authorised narrative, such myths help stabilise both technique and teaching.

Myths also influence visual choices by supplying memorable figures and transformation stories that can be adapted into motifs. Discussions of Chinese batik connect legends of Chiyou and maple-related symbolism with early resist-dye practices and commemorative custom (Li et al., 2020). When these stories are visually referenced, they help sustain the circulation of specific motif groups, including maple-based forms as wearable signs of ancestry in Miao textiles.

Although many mythic stories circulate across Guizhou Miao communities, different local groups emphasise different figures, episodes, and moral themes. These preferences shape not only storytelling, but also motif selection and pattern convention in practice. Myth therefore links historical imagery to culturally meaningful use and helps explain regional variation in motif arrangement across Qiandongnan batik traditions (Chen & Zhou, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative, literature-based structured narrative review aligned with the thematic framework developed above. The procedure comprised four linked stages—source identification, relevance and provenance screening, thematic coding, and visual/material comparison—so that the interpretive synthesis below remained grounded in documented materials.

Source identification was purposive and theme-led. Search concepts combined the geographic terms “Qiandongnan” and “Guizhou,” the community terms “Miao” and “Hmong,” the craft terms “batik” and “wax resist,” and analytical terms including “motif,” “pattern,” “belief,” “ritual,” “myth,” “heritage,” and “contemporary design.” Chinese- and English-language academic articles, theses, museum publications, heritage records, and ethnographic studies were considered, and reference lists of relevant publications were checked for additional materials. Full texts were retrieved through the repositories or links recorded in the source set, including Wanfang Data, CNKI, and CQVIP where available.

Sources were retained when they addressed Qiandongnan Miao batik and provided attributable evidence concerning motif form, meaning, placement, production, historical development, ritual or social use, or contemporary transformation. Studies of Guizhou Miao batik more broadly were used only to contextualise the Qiandongnan case. Duplicates, studies of unrelated resist-dye traditions, brief unsourced descriptions, and records whose relationship to the analytical categories was incidental were excluded from the interpretive corpus. Materials concerning Leishan, Danzhai, and Rongjiang received focused comparative attention where they clarified local variation.

Each source was read iteratively and entered into a coding matrix recording source type, motif, attributed meaning, garment or ritual context, placement, period, and evidence type. Initial deductive codes followed four analytical categories: inspiration and environmental abstraction; cultural beliefs and social norms; religious practices and rituals; and mythic narratives and craft origins. Inductive subcodes captured recurring motif groups—including maple leaf, Butterfly Mother, dragon, sun, moon, thunder, ox, and fish—and formal features such as repetition, symmetry, abstraction, and recognisability. Interpretations were compared within and across motif groups; divergent accounts were retained and linked to their documentary contexts rather than resolved into a single meaning.

Textile images were selected for comparison when they could be linked to Qiandongnan or a named local context, showed an identifiable recurring motif or garment arrangement, and were sufficiently legible for formal comparison. Each image was recorded by source or collection, date or period when available, motif category, object or garment type, and use context. Historical and contemporary images were compared using a consistent matrix of composition, placement, scale, repetition, symmetry, abstraction, colour, material or technique, and adaptation to product dimensions. Duplicate or low-resolution images that obscured the relevant structure were not used as primary comparative evidence.

Priority was given to published, museum, heritage-record, and author-documented images with traceable provenance. Platform reposts or general web images without an identifiable original were retained only as illustrations and were not used independently to establish historical sequence or symbolic meaning. Interpretive claims were included only when a cited scholarly or institutional source linked motif, context, and meaning.

Combining the coding matrix with the visual comparison created an audit trail from each interpretation to its documentary source. The procedure allowed the study to analyse how motifs are formed, authorised, repeated, and reinterpreted without inferring fixed meanings from visual similarity alone. Because dates and provenance are uneven across the available corpus, the comparison identifies documented tendencies rather than a complete chronological sequence for all Miao groups.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Taken together, the literature indicates that batik motifs are stabilised through the interaction of environment, technique, and social use. Local landscapes and vegetation are translated into stylised outlines and rhythmic geometries suited to wax-resist production, creating motif families that can be repeated across garments and occasions (Yang, 2017), as shown in **Figure 15**.



Figure 15. Repetitive diamond geometric motif with border band in Qiandongnan Miao indigo batik textile. Source: Photograph taken by the author, 2026.

Existing scholarship also shows that motif meanings vary with context rather than remaining singular. Long et al. (2023) interpret maple-leaf motifs as expressions of unity, whereas Li et al. (2020) connect maple-based forms

with ancestry and Chiyou-related memory. Li et al. (2020) read the ox through agricultural strength and resilience, whereas Wu (2021) links it to sacrificial obligation during the Kuzang Festival. These differences are not necessarily contradictions: they show that wearer, occasion, locality, placement, and narrative setting shape how a recurring form is understood.

Daily labour and exchange activities further expand batik's visual repertoire. Planting, harvesting, market scenes, and stilt-house life are often represented through simplified figures and symbolic layouts that communicate both lived experience and collective aspirations such as prosperity and good harvests (Deng, 2024; Wu, 2025), as shown in **Figure 16**. Festival scenes, especially those related to lusheng performance, are also recurring sources of narrative composition and cultural continuity (Wen & Li, 2013), as shown in **Figure 17**.



Figure 16. Stylised human figures representing daily labour and communal life in Qiandongnan Miao batik. Source: Image reproduced from Guizhou Provincial Museum digital archive.



Figure 17. Narrative batik composition featuring festival symbolism and ritual imagery in Qiandongnan Miao textile. Source: Adapted from Wen, Y., and Li, X. (2013).

Across historical periods, scholars identify a shift from earlier geometric abstraction toward richer representational scenes incorporating folkloric and mythic content. Huang (2016) notes that by the Ming and Qing Dynasties, batik techniques had become more refined and included floral, avian, and aquatic motifs with auspicious meanings, as shown in **Figure 18**. In contemporary contexts, some artisans simplify and rework

traditional symbols for modern aesthetics and cultural-creative products, raising questions about how to balance innovation with cultural specificity (Luo & Zhu, 2023), as shown in **Figure 19**.



Figure 18. Floral and aquatic motifs in an indigo Miao batik textile reflecting auspicious symbolism. Source: Adapted from Huang, B. (2016).



Figure 19. Contemporary Miao artisan presenting a reconfigured batik design that demonstrates negotiation between tradition and modern aesthetics. Source: Photograph taken by the author, 2026.

The broader design literature provides two contemporary application categories relevant to the Qiandongnan material. Xu (2022) discusses the incorporation of Miao batik decorative art into fashion design, where motifs may be isolated, rescaled, or repositioned on garments and accessories. Lei (2023) examines batik in textile cultural-creative products, including home and lifestyle formats in which motifs are reorganised as repeat units. These examples are used as comparative application types rather than as evidence for a single Qiandongnan

lineage. For products identified as Qiandongnan Miao batik, cultural specificity is better maintained when the local motif name, place of origin, recognisable contour, and narrative or use context accompany changes in scale, colour, material, placement, and function (Luo & Zhu, 2023; Kang et al., 2025), as shown in **Figure 20**.



Figure 20. Contemporary adaptations of Qiandongnan Miao batik in apparel and Cultural-creative product. Source: To be supplied by the author.

Belief systems also shape appropriateness by determining which motifs suit particular occasions and how textiles are read in public. Accounts of Miao batik origins describe motifs as embedded in communal ritual life, where their use is guided by shared expectations rather than individual preference (Qing, 2000), as shown in **Figure 21**.



Figure 21. Ceremonial dressing and communal regulation of costume in Qiandongnan Miao community. Source: Image reproduced from Guizhou Intangible Cultural Heritage Archive.

Finally, myths allow batik to function as a medium of cultural memory. Studies of the origin and evolution of Chinese batik suggest that motif repertoires and craft knowledge are embedded in broader narrative traditions, indicating that safeguarding should focus not only on motif forms but also on narrative learning and contexts of use (Li et al., 2020), as shown in **Figure 22**.



Figure 22. Symbolic batik composition reflecting narrative memory and cosmological order in Miao textile tradition. Source: Photograph taken by the author during documentation of Miao batik textiles, 2026.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Qiandongnan Miao batik is best understood through the combined influence of inspiration, belief, religion, and myth within historically situated practice. Ecological observation, communal norms, ritual obligations, and narrative traditions all contribute to the continuity of motif families, garment use, and craft transmission. Environmental forms shape what can be rendered in wax lines, cultural beliefs guide motif selection and placement, religious practices connect motifs to ritual efficacy, and myths sustain visual repertoires and technical knowledge through narrative memory.

Within this framework, motifs such as the maple leaf, Butterfly Mother, celestial bodies, ancestral figures, and totemic animals are not arbitrary decorative choices. They function as culturally meaningful resources repeatedly activated in social and ritual settings where continuity, legibility, and shared recognition matter. The persistence of symmetry, rhythmic geometry, and prominent silhouettes in Qiandongnan Miao batik can therefore be understood through the combined effects of wax-resist technique, garment use, communal appraisal, and ritual repetition.

By grounding the discussion in documented practices and contexts of use, this review presents Miao batik as an active cultural mechanism rather than a passive carrier of meaning. Textiles become sites where belief is enacted, lineage is reaffirmed, protection is sought, and cosmological order is visualised. This literature-based account clarifies how visual forms stabilise within traditional craft systems and provides a basis for future research on interpretation, narrative symbolism, and contemporary adaptation within culturally specific continuities.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

YiXin Sun: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, investigation and writing-original draft; Basitah Taif: Conceptualisation, methodology, and formal analysis; Rusmawati Ghazali: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, and validation.

DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors declare that this research did not involve human or animal subjects. All experimental procedures were performed following the institutional Safety, Health, and Environmental (HSE) protocols of Universiti Teknologi Mara.

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