

CEREMONIAL CANOPY

Liuhe Township, Guizhou
 Early 20th century
 102.8 x 92.6 cm
 930227011

CANOPY Replaced by common umbrellas, canopies with symbolic frog motifs are now very rare. Light and dark blue cotton bands surround the central panel of silk thread embroidery containing abstract frogs. Beaded tassels with diamonds of folded cloth hang from the corners. The skipped counted-thread stitching¹ is exquisite. Like most Miao embroidery, it is executed from the back of the cloth by a repeated crossing of several warps. The stitch must be done with extreme dexterity to keep the base cloth from wrinkling.²

The Liuhe Miao especially embrace the frog motif. Their ancient folk tale of a frog prince is commemorated during the Drum Festival, when offerings are made to ancestors and young men and women seek marriage partners. According to legend, an old Miao woman discovered in her basket a frog croaking with a sound like “mother, mother.” She nursed the frog and then took him to the Drum Festival. There, a young maid saw a handsome man amongst the crowd and fell in love with him. When she told the old woman about her love the frog laughed and said it was he. The next day the young lady saw the man in the crowd and secretly followed him. As he crossed the bridge he disappeared and a frog appeared and hopped towards the old lady’s home. The maid married the frog and he came to be adored by the villagers for his magic powers. One day, when he went to the market, he shed his frog skin and transformed into a handsome man. Hoping to stop her husband from changing back to a frog, his wife burned his frog skin, whereupon he fell ill and never recovered.

During the Drum Festival, to protect the Liuhe people from evil spirits, a young man holds the canopy with one hand and a bunch of hay and a knife in the other.³

¹The stitch saves embroidery thread and is rendered by counting the warps and skipping them when piercing the needle through the fabric. Thus, the front displays the embroidery thread parallel to the weft and skips coverage on the back.

²Fan, “Zhakan yishuhua, xikan huazhonghua” [A Bouquet at a Glimpse, A Flower at Close-up], 108–19.

³Fan.



WOMAN'S COURTING ENSEMBLE

(PAGE XI?)

Shidong Town, Guizhou

Mid-late 20th century

SILVER ORNAMENTS

HORNS

46.5 x 30.5 cm

940224012 (FRONT)

24.7 x 22 cm

940224013 (BACK)

HEADBAND WITH MAN ON HORSE

10.5 x 49 cm

940224014

PHOENIX HEADDRESS

8.5 x 31 cm

940315015

DRAGON HEAD CHAIN HAIRPINS

7 x 34 cm (A)

7.2 x 32 cm (B)

940224015AB

SEMI CIRCULAR HAIRPIN

16 x 17 cm

940224016

FLORAL SPRAY HAIRPINS

9.9 x 25.5 cm (A)

9 x 20 cm (B)

940224017AB

DRAGON HEAD HAIRPIN

7.8 x 25.5 cm

940224018

LOCKET

50.5 x 19 cm (including chain)

940224019

NECK RINGS

46 x 29 cm

940224020

5.5 x 24 cm

940224023

4.5 x 20.8 cm

940224024

8-SHAPE NECKLACES

2.8 x 93 cm (length)

940224021

2.1 x 82 cm (length)

940224022

**UPPER GARMENT**

DETAIL (ABOVE AND PAGE 160)

76 x 102 cm

931103035

SKIRT

66 x 96 cm

931029005

SOCKS

28 x 21.5 cm

931102013AB

SHOES

7.8 x 24.5 cm

931102014AB

Shidong, an important village community in Taijiang County in southeast Guizhou, lies among the mountains along the north bank of the Qingshuijiang, a major navigable tributary of the Yangtze River. Due to its central role as a port town for the area's rich quarries and timber industries, Shidong has prospered since the Qing dynasty.¹ The residents' comparative affluence is amply reflected in the luxurious and flamboyant choice of materials and their creativity and exquisite craftsmanship.

UPPER GARMENT The style of this ensemble is characteristic of that worn in courting ceremonies in nearly 50 Miao villages scattered in Shibing and Taijiang counties. The red home woven cotton cloth that forms the base for the ornate silver plaques, along with the profusion of silver jewelry, indicates the young woman's availability for marriage. The fine and lavish embroidery in her garments and the quantity of silver jewelry she wears enhances her chances of attracting a suitable husband.

Although the garment has a central front opening, when worn, the left panel crosses to the right as do Manchu-styled garments characteristic of the Han Chinese in which

¹ Bianxiezu [Writers/Editors Committee], *Qiangdongnan Miaozu Dongzu zizhizhou gaikuang* [Survey of Miao/Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Southeast Guizhou], 13.





SILVER ORNAMENTS

LEFT TO RIGHT

HOLLOW DRAGON HEAD BRACELETS

1.3 x 9 x 9 cm

940224026AB

MILLET BRACELETS

(PAGE Li?)

3.6 x 7.7 x 7.7 cm

940224025AB

DRAGON HEAD BRACELETS

1.2 x 8.3 x 8.3 cm

940224027AB

CHILD'S HOLLOW DRAGON HEAD BRACELETS

7.6 x 7.6 cm

940224058AB

CHILD'S TWISTED BRACELETS

7.6 x 7.7 cm

940224057AB

the large neckband curves to the right and buttons under the arm. The sleeves are exquisitely embellished with fish-dragons of lustrous flat stitch embroidery—*poxian*, a spliced silk floss technique—over paper-cut patterns that create a three-dimensional effect. Ornately cut-out square and round plaques with auspicious motifs typical of the repertory of Han jewelry of the period are sewn on the front and back—dragon, phoenix, lion, crane, butterfly, pomegranate, fish, and boy riding a *qilin* (a Han symbol of success in the civil examinations). An exception is a plaque depicting a monkey riding an elephant. While the elephant makes an occasional appearance in Han visual culture, usually associated with Buddhism, it is not one of the usual motifs of Han silver jewelry.² The rows of plaques are bordered with silver bosses. Silver pendants with butterflies and bells hang from the bottom edge. Together, all express the wearer's aesthetic sense of “more is more beautiful” and enhance her dream of happiness.

SKIRT Twenty-five pieces of double-layered home woven plain weave cotton create this minutely pleated skirt that is divided into top and bottom sections, 28.5 and 19.5 centimeters respectively. Fourteen centimeters from the bottom a one-centimeter wide dark blue and red band encircles the skirt.

SOCKS AND SHOES The indigo-dyed plain weave cotton and blue silk satin socks have flat stitch embroidery on their bottoms. The embroidered shoes, of black plain weave cotton cloth, have thick cotton soles sewn with a dense running stitch.

²Kate Lingley, e-mail to Li Lundin, October 21, 2008.



UPPER GARMENT Married women wear dark indigo-dyed festive garments. The embroidered sleeve patches exhibit several generations of work and underscore the preservation of family heirlooms. They are composed of four sections, the main pieces of spliced silk floss embroidery and the smaller ones in counted-thread cross-stitches. Couched gold foil wrapped thread and copper sequins further embellish the patches.

UPPER GARMENT
Shidong Town, Guizhou
1930s
85 x 113 cm
931027012





**UPPER GARMENT**

(PAGE DENG, DETAIL)
SLEEVE DETAIL (LEFT)
Shidong Town, Guizhou
1950s
93 x 116 cm
931021007

UPPER GARMENT

SHOULDER DETAIL (ABOVE)
Shidong Town, Guizhou
Late 19th–early 20th centuries
97 x 109.4 cm
931021017

UPPER GARMENTS AND SLEEVE PATCHES Families revere and treasure the generations-old embroidered patches that they stitch to their festival garments. By tradition the shoulders and sleeves of Shidong upper garments are ornamented with embroidered patches used only during important festivals. The rest of the year the patches are removed and stored in trunks. The main piece with a border at the top covers the sleeve, while a small strip of layered folded appliqué and embroidery covers each shoulder. The motifs convey messages of the folklore of the Miao and are associated with wishes for posterity and happiness.

The lustrous effect of the embroidery occurs from densely stitched spliced silk floss made by separating the floss into multiple single filaments, threading the filament through a needle, and then passing it through a paste of chewed locust bean. The process provides the sheen and protects the silk floss.



The most common motifs are the centipede-dragon, birds, butterflies, and mythical animals.³ Often the dragon appears infused with children inside its body. The dragon has its genesis in Miao folklore. One legend popular in the villages along the middle reaches of the Qingshui River recounts that a man was fishing when the water dragon killed his young son. In revenge the fisherman burned the dragon's den, but the dying dragon's vindictive spirit unleashed a horrendous rain and flood. Soon thereafter, a child was playing with cloth beaters as his mother washed clothes by the stream. At the sound of the beating, the sky cleared, the sun appeared, and the dead dragon rose from the water. That night, the dragon sent a message to the people in their dreams. He requested that a canoe be made from cedar wood in the shape of his body and that it be paddled once a year to revive the pleasant time he had before his death. For this, the dragon vowed to protect the people and their crops.⁴ Thus, in Taijiang County on May 25th of the lunar calendar, the Miao celebrate the annual Dragon Boat Race.

SLEEVE PATCHES

(PAGE DENG, DETAIL)
 Shidong Town, Guizhou
 Late 19th–early 20th centuries
 22.1 x 29.5 cm (a)
 23.9 x 30 cm (b)
 A01a112a,b

SLEEVE PATCHES

DETAILS (ABOVE AND RIGHT)
 Shidong Town, Guizhou
 Late 19th–early 20th centuries
 31.5 x 26.5 cm
 A01a120a
 31.5 x 31 cm
 A01a143b

³ According to Huang Ying Feng the motif of paired birds facing the sun has a parallel in a 5000–300 BCE ivory pendant from the Hemudu culture found in Zhejiang Province. This coincides with Miao oral history that attributes their ancestors came from the banks of the Eastern Sea.

⁴ He Zhaohua, "Lishi yu shenghuo" [History and Life], 20.





**APRON**

LEFT
Shidong Town, Guizhou
1950s
76.8 x 66.5 cm
931029006

APRON

ABOVE
Shidong Town, Guizhou
1930s
74 x 60.9 cm
931029011

APRON A hybrid dragon that integrates the centipede, ox, and fish constitutes the dominant embroidery motif of the 35-centimeter wide central panel of white home woven cotton. A butterfly, fish, man, and smaller dragon are minor motifs. Fish, dragons, birds, and peonies flank Chinese characters for “peace” at the bottom. According to Miao folklore, the dragon came into existence from one of the twelve eggs laid by the butterfly mother. Thus, he is revered as a symbol of ancestry. Miao dragons epitomize “transcendence” or the “ultimate.” Hence, living things, such as fish, oxen, or birds, that assume the form of a dragon, rise above their original rank and significance.⁵

APRON Blue silk satin borders the central home woven plain weave cotton fabric with its elaborate and colorful patterns of discontinuous supplementary weft weave. Mythical birds and animals surround double snakes. Below, fish flank a frog and archaic human figures inhabit the lowest register.

⁵Yang Yuan, “*Long chong bai xin jiedu*” [New Readings of Dragon Worship], 54–63.



UPPER GARMENT Traditionally, Miao children did not wear the spectacular outfits and silver jewelry reserved for young women ready for marriage. Beginning in the 1980s families began to provide similar attire for young girls and they were allowed to dance at the Lusheng Festival; however, their presence is simply an expression of their enthusiasm and a display of the family's wealth.⁶

SKIRT Seventeen panels of double-layered home woven cotton were sewn together to make the skirt. A subtle band of blue and red silk threads encircles the skirt eleven centimeters from the bottom edge.

GIRL'S ENSEMBLE

Shidong Town, Guizhou
1980s

SILVER ORNAMENTS

HEADDRESS

23 x 20.1 cm (A)

36 x 7.6 cm (B)

35 x 4.1 cm (C)

34 x 4 cm (D)

32.7 x 3.6 cm (E)

34.8 x 3.5 cm (F)

940224050A-F

LOCKET

34 x 7.2 cm (including chain)

940224051

**HOLLOW NECK RING
WITH DRAGON MOTIF**

32 x 21.5 cm

940224052

CHAIN NECKLACES

54.2 x 1.5 cm (8-shape)

940224053

62.2 x 1.6 cm (lantern shape)

940224054

TWISTED NECK RINGS

18 x 17.5 cm

940224055

17.1 x 16 cm

940224056

UPPER GARMENT

DETAIL (RIGHT)

62 x 66.7 cm

931103037

SKIRT

56 x 71.2 cm

931029004

⁶ See Li Qianbin's essay in this publication.







BOY'S UPPER GARMENT

Shidong Town, Guizhou
1940s
54.3 x 71.6 cm
931102022

CHILDREN'S HATS

Shidong Town, Guizhou
1950s–1980s
7.8 x 15 cm
940110008
13 x 15.5 cm
940110009
29.5 x 17 cm
931102032 (LEFT)
15.3 x 15 cm
931102033 (BELOW)



UPPER GARMENT Butterflies and sun motifs in spliced silk floss technique embellish the front, back, and sleeves of the black hand woven cotton garment. Woven bands enhance the shoulders and front opening.

HATS Children's hats provide a creative outlet for an expression of profound love for offspring. Consequently, they are colorful and playful in design. In a charming hat (940110008) from the 1950s, conjoined fish with eyes of black cotton flannel edged in chain stitch terminate in tails with colorful tassels that hang before the child's ears. The fish are attached to woven silk bands decorated with flat gold foil wrapped threads and embroidered fish scales.

Another hat (940110009) from the 1950s appears like the petals of a flower and is adorned with a butterfly at the front and an embroidered rat, dragon, butterfly, flora, and fauna. It is decorated with couched copper sequins and gold plastic strips, knot stitches, raised embroidery, and layered silk satin folded cloth. Colorful silk tassels hang above the ears.

Example (931102032) from the 1960s is adorned with copper sequins and couched gold plastic edging in addition to the silk floss embroidery. However, perhaps for political correctness during the Cultural Revolution, this hat has embroidered patriotic slogans: "the sun rises from the east," "red heart for the party," "committed to revolution," along with butterflies, birds, flora, and fauna.

A playful hat (931102033) from the 1980s has ox horns, leaf-like ears, and a tiger's mouth with tassels hanging as a beard. It includes raised silk satin, flat, and knot stitch embroidery, and couched sequins.



UPPER GARMENT The garment, originating from the border area of Baojing and Shidong townships, utilizes the embroidery techniques of spliced silk floss and chain stitches that closely resembles the work of Shidong. The difference lies in the artistic expression and the use of gold silk thread. The imagery appears to be a humorous interpretation of a traditional Miao wedding celebration. Mythical birds fly about, musicians play the *lusheng* (reed pipes), a monkey-like figure rides a horse, another is carried in a sedan, and jesters entertain viewers. However, the representation of habitat, mode of transportation, and daily activities, such as fetching water, reflects the need to record and transmit the stories of their lives.

The left front, embroidered with figures and a two-story pavilion, is pulled over the unadorned right side in the manner of Shidong upper garments. Both types imitate a typical Han Chinese garment with right opening.

CLOUD COLLAR The dark indigo home woven cotton collar, embroidered in spliced silk floss and chain stitches, shows a ruling figure flanked by dragons on the front. A hierarchically placed central pavilion and two smaller ones with attendant birds and figures occupy the back.

UPPER GARMENT
 Baojing Township, Guizhou
 1980s
 76 x 121.6 cm
 940110020

CLOUD COLLAR
 Baojing Township, Guizhou
 1980s
 47 x 53 cm
 940110021





MIAO WOMAN

Geyi Township, Guizhou
Photo by Huang Ying Feng.

WOMAN'S ENSEMBLE

Geyi Township, Guizhou
Mid 20th century

SILVER ORNAMENTS

c. 1985

EARLOBE PLUGS

1.4 x 2.9 x 2.9 cm (A)
1.5 x 2.2 x 2.2 cm (B)
940224002AB

BRACELETS

0.8 x 7 x 7 cm (bead head)
940224010AB
1.6 x 10 x 10 cm (hollow)
940224009AB

OX HORN HEADDRESS AND HAT

White copper
47 x 43.5 cm (headdress)
970520001
32 x 26 x 26 cm (hat)
970520002

NECK RINGS

71 x 49 cm (dragon)
940224004
2.5 x 26.5 x 26.5 cm (filigree)
940224005
3 x 24 x 24 cm (bread-ring)
940224006
5 x 31 x 31 cm (twisted)
940224007
2.7 x 116 cm (length) (8-shape)
940224008

UPPER GARMENT

92 x 114 cm
970520003

SKIRT

73.5 x 105 cm
930209008



ENSEMBLE Attire of this type is found in the townships of Geyi, Datang, and Taipan of Taijiang county and Kaitang, Diwu, Wangxiang, and Panghai of Kaili City in southeast Guizhou. The silver-colored ox horn headdress, hat, and plaques on the upper garment are made of white copper, a material that has become popular due to its low cost and non-tarnishing nature. Young women wear the earlobe plugs with the fine silver work facing the front, whereas older women wear the coarse side to the front.