

# Study of the Poetic Ethical Phenomenon of the Yao Ethnic Group's Marriage Customs in Dayao Mountain from the Perspective of Traditional Cultural Identity

## -- The Case of Hualan Yao

Rongxiang Cai<sup>a</sup>, Yangzhen Wang

Guangxi Normal University of Science and Technology, Laibin, Guangxi 546199, China

<sup>a</sup>1309234774@qq.com

### Abstract

From the perspective of traditional cultural identity, this article takes the Hualan Yao ethnic group living in Dayao Mountain as an example to study the poetic ethics of the Yao ethnic group's marriage customs in Dayao Mountain. From the three aspects of marriage and love ethics, gender ethics, and ethical concepts, it explores the aesthetic cultural connotation of the Yao nationality. It aims to clarify the poetic thinking, poetic logic and poetic wisdom contained in the poetic ethics of the Yao nationality's wedding customs in Dayao Mountain, and to illustrate the inner relationship between the poetic ethics of the wedding customs and cultural identity.

### Keywords

Traditional Cultural Identity; Poetic Ethics; Marriage Customs; Hualan Yao.

## 1. Introduction

Ethics is an important norm of human social life, and marriage custom ethics is an important aspect of ethics. Marriage ethics issues are still one of the vivid themes faced in human social life. The traditional wedding custom of the Yao ethnic group in Dayao Mountain reflects the traditional culture of the local Yao ethnic group, and clearly reflects the poetic ethics and traditional cultural identity of the Yao ethnic group in Dayao Mountain. We will be able to sort out and reflect on the poetic ethics of traditional Yao Nationality's marriage customs in Dayao Mountains with an objective and good attitude, which will help us clarify the ethical concepts and boundaries of right and wrong in traditional Yao Nationality's marriage customs in Dayao Mountains and gain deep ethical wisdom inspiration from them..

## 2. Poetic Wisdom: The Morality of Free and Autonomous Marriage

### 2.1. Engagement: As an Appointment for Marriage

In the Yao traditional society in Dayao Mountain, marriage and love are freely chosen by the male and female parties, and they are "something that one wants to do or can do without the interference of others" [1]. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, the traditional marriage customs of the Yao people living in Dayao Mountain were divided into three parts: engagement, trial marriage, and marriage. Betrothal did not necessarily mean marriage. The betrothal was set by the parents of the man and woman concerned when they were young, and there was even the phenomenon of a prenatal betrothal. However, "An unmarried couple whose parents contracted marriage on their behalf during their early childhood will not necessarily marry in the future, unless the person agrees, out of autonomy, to marry the spouse chosen by the parents." [2] Therefore, there is an essential difference between betrothal and arranged

marriage in the traditional Yao society of Dayao Mountain. Engagement and marriage in traditional Yao society in Dayao Mountains can be two completely different things, fully reflecting the fact that marriage is done jointly by parents' decision and children's free and independent choice. The engagement is decided by the parents, which is both a right and an obligation of the parents, and most of all as an obligation. For example, in the Dayao Mountains, the traditional society of Hualan Yao has the custom of limiting the population due to the natural environment, land resources and production environment. That is, a family generally has only two children. This custom tends to lead to an uneven gender distribution of the local population, so at the time of their children's birth, parents need to consider the possibility of their children's marriage, and their children's marriage becomes an unavoidable obligation of the parents. Betrothal, as an appointment, is a population-specific marriage allocation constrained by productivity. When children have the ability and willingness to choose their own marriages, this distribution of marriages gives way to free and independent marriages, and parents no longer dominate their children's marriage choices. It can be seen that the Hualan Yao Nationality in Dayao Mountain pursues: marriage is chosen by the cooperation of parents and children. With the aim of ensuring that marriageable men and women can marry successfully to the greatest extent possible and ensuring the demographic stability of the next generation.

In Dayao Mountain, the engagement ceremony in traditional Hualan Yao society requires the active party to invite a matchmaker after obtaining the consent of both parents. There are three characteristics of matchmakers in the Hualan Yao of the Dayao Mountains: Firstly, it is the custom of the Hualan Yao to marry a man, and here the active party may also be the woman, who invites the matchmaker. Secondly, the matchmaker hired must be male. The reason for this is that the matchmaker must have the following qualifications: be highly respected; be well versed in the history and cultural customs of the Hualan Yao; have a high level of linguistic and artistic training, such as being able to sing and speak auspicious words; have a harmonious family with many children and grandchildren; and be able to drink wine. In the traditional society of the Hualan Yao nationality, which is economically and culturally backward, almost only men have the opportunity to receive education, and they all have the above conditions. Therefore, Hualan Yao's matchmaker is also called "Matchmaker". The third is the order in which the matchmaker appears after the parents agree to the marriage. The matchmaker only needs to communicate information between the two parties, and does not need to bridge the gap between the man and the woman.

The token of engagement is usually a turban, a bracelet, a ring or the like, the number of which depends on the financial situation of the two families. The engagement does not put financial pressure on the two families, which greatly reduces the delay in the marriage age due to financial pressure and contributes to the stability of the local community.

## **2.2. Trial Marriage: The Free Choice of the Parties to the Marriage**

In traditional society, after the Hualan Yao who lives in Dayao Mountain gets engaged, the engaged party would open up their relationship and enter into a trial marriage. The betrothed party is capable of working and is required to come to the main betrothed party two to three times a month to fulfil their labour obligations. On the night of the end of the labour, the betrothed party can have sexual relations. During the week, the betrothed parties are also free to spend the night at each other's homes. To the locals, sex is an instinctive biological need that, like diet, does not need to be kept secret. "Because sex is a fundamental natural human need, it is a moral good to give proper and reasonable satisfaction." [3] The act of reasonably satisfying sexual desire "is also the deepest and most intimate expression of people's love for each other." [4] This act also tends to make it easier for those on trial to experience the freedom and joy of life, and provides a great opportunity for men and women to get to know each other better and grow closer.

Furthermore, trial marriages are in pursuit of a happy marriage with sexual harmony. Imagine, "It would be absurd to ask people to enter into a lifelong relationship without knowing whether they are in sexual harmony. It would be as absurd as a person buying a house, but not being allowed to see it before closing." [5] It is thus evident that the practice of trial marriage among the Hualan Yao serves as an accommodation, providing the parties to the trial marriage with the freedom to choose a sexually harmonious marriage partner. In addition, the purpose of the trial marriage, a locally accepted custom, was to consolidate sexual relations between unmarried couples and eradicate promiscuity. However, it is worth noting that "having sexual relations with someone other than the unmarried partner before marriage is not considered 'adultery' and therefore does not violate the 'Shih Pai rules' and is not subject to any penalties." [2] As a result, trial marriages were also seen as a form of sex education and sexual enlightenment for the Hualan Yao, enriching the sexual experience and life experience of the engaged couple, promoting the formation of mature personalities of unmarried men and women, laying a certain foundation for married life, and avoiding early marriages that could lead to marital misfortune. Therefore, trial couples are usually satisfied with the marriage arranged for them by their parents during the trial marriage process.

### 2.3. Marriage

In the traditional wedding custom of the Hualan Yao people in the Dayao Mountains, the ceremony on the wedding day is relatively simple. The matchmaker brings the marrying party to the home of the bridegroom. When receiving the bride, the marrying party needs to "bring five catties of preserved meat, five catties of rice and five catties of wine as a 'receiving meal' to the bride's home, so people call it the 'three or five marriages'" [6]. During the receiving process, the marrying party is not accompanied by parents or relatives. The ceremony on the day of the wedding is neither the worship of heaven and earth nor a wedding banquet, but this ceremony is not completed until after the newlyweds have produced their first child. The dowry is not accompanied until after the newlyweds have produced their first child, and the wedding banquet is made up on the day the first child is invited to the full moon, and the couple is introduced to the community on the day the wedding banquet is made up. Why is this so? Because in the traditional society of Hualan Yao, the basis of a couple's relationship lies in their children, and it is more difficult for couples with children to divorce. However, couples without children can divorce at any time and this relationship cannot be relied upon, so there is a need to delay accompanying the dowry and holding the wedding feast. In fact, the life of the newlywed couple after the wedding does not change much from the life during the trial marriage. Two days after the wedding, the woman has to go back to her own home alone for two or three days before returning to the new home she has formed with her husband. And only two or three days later did the newlyweds return together to the woman's family for a provincial visit. After the wedding, for the most part, the woman lived as a guest in her own home, following her own family's custom of eating whatever was available and providing the fabric for her clothes. The newlyweds continue to live apart until the wife is close to giving birth, when she returns to her husband's home, a custom known as 'Uxorilocal Custom'.

During the period when she does not live in her husband's house, the wife is free to move about and can participate in public social events such as song drives and singing mountain songs in pairs with men. The poetic-ethical character of the Uxorilocal Custom is thus particularly evident. For the weaker women, the period of non-residence in the husband's house, if the woman is satisfied with the man, further develops and deepens the marriage, so that she soon becomes pregnant and settles in the husband's house. If the woman is not satisfied with the man, she can avoid pregnancy during the period of separation, or if she is unlucky enough to become pregnant, she can decide on her own, without the knowledge of her husband's family, whether to keep the child or to withdraw from the marriage with a song and find another

husband. In addition, the marriage custom of not living in the husband's house protects the economic status of the woman to a certain extent. When a daughter was married, she remained in her mother's house to help her parents raise her younger siblings and to accumulate personal wealth for herself. At this time, daughters were generally respected by their families. In the parents' eyes, their daughters were married and their time at home was very limited. Moreover, at this time, they knew how to behave, were physically strong and were good helpers in farming and household chores. In the eyes of her younger siblings, her sister cared for them like an elder, loved them and fostered a brotherly love. In some places, while living in the mother's house, the mother's family, irrespective of wealth, is required to give the married daughter a few minutes of land to cultivate as a personal income. In addition, the woman can feed pigs, grow fruit and gather, the income from which goes to her and is called 'private property'. The woman could also take advantage of this to accumulate money and make many things (such as shoes, weaving cloth, etc.) to bring to her husband's house to show off her hard work, the generosity of her mother's family, and to make the woman decent and honourable. In this way, she would be pleasing to her husband's family and would stabilize her economic status in his family." [7]

In conclusion, after examining the practices of betrothal, trial marriage and marriage among the Hualan Yao people living in the Dayao Mountains, it is clear that the Hualan Yao of the Dayao Mountains see the birth of offspring as a cornerstone of marital stability, but also have no choice but to limit population growth, making it a question of how to balance all sides of the family. It is easy to see how local marriage ethics interfere with marriage and life in general. In its approach, this intervention is poetic, as if playing the piano to preserve the stability of the marital relationship. It allows the parents to play an important role in the betrothal, while respecting the freedom of choice of the children in the trial marriage; it creates the conditions for the newlyweds to have a sexual life, while deliberately prolonging the marriage ceremony so that the newlyweds do not live in the husband's house, in view of the instability of their relationship. All these free and autonomous acts of marriage are a vivid expression of the poetic ethics of marriage.

### **3. Poetic Logic: An Ethic of Equality and Harmony between the Sexes**

"Marxism believes that marriage is a social form of the union of the sexes" [8], "ethical love with legal meaning" [9]. In married life, the ethics of both sexes pursue "equality and harmony." Since the Hualan Yao families living in Dayao Mountain generally only have two children, one stays at home to inherit the incense, and the other marries, forming a "a single line of succession" inheritance system with national characteristics. Under ideal circumstances, the Hualan Yao people usually give birth to one boy and one girl. In non-ideal circumstances, on the other hand, families with two males must have a man who marries out, commonly known as a married man, while families with two females must have a woman who recruits a husband to their home. Thus, in terms of the forms of marriage, the main forms of marriage among the Hualan Yao people are not only living with their husbands, but also living with their wives and taking turns to live in the homes of both spouses. For example, in 2006, Professor Xu Ping led a team of postgraduate students to conduct a questionnaire survey of 50 married women in the village of Liuxiang, Jinxiu. The questionnaire showed the following forms of marriage in the 50 households: 33 households (66%) lived with their husbands; 11 households (22%) lived with their wives; 4 households (8%) took turns going to live with both spouses; and 2 households (4%) formed new homes." [10]

Such a variety of marriages provides the Hualan Yao people of the Dayao Mountain with the possibility of "equality of self-esteem, social value, legal rights, development opportunities and responsibilities for both sexes" [11] and a harmonious ethical relationship between the sexes. In a form of marriage where the husband follows his wife and alternates between living in the

couple's home, the woman of the Hualan Yao in the Dayao Mountains has the right to inherit the incense and the family property, and must also take responsibility for supporting the elderly, in effect being the head of the family. And "the son-in-law is respected by society and has an equal status in the family." [12]

However, whether it is a form of marriage in which the wife follows her husband, or a form of marriage in which the husband follows his wife and the couple take turns to live in each other's homes, the couple of the Hualan Yao occupy an important position in economic production. In traditional society, both men and women of the Hualan Yao are engaged in heavy agricultural work and are equal in social value, with a precise division of labour and close cooperation. For example, in the eyes of the Hualan Yao people, women divide the seedlings so that the rice can flourish, while men are responsible for planting the rice. Usually it is the women who pound the rice and cook it, while the men are out hunting and fishing. This division of labour based on production needs is such that without either spouse the family is difficult to maintain. As a result, it is often seen in the society of the Hualan Yao that the death of either of the spouses, the widow or widower generally chooses to re-establish a family in order to make a productive living. In summary, the Hualan Yao couple is "equal in important degrees in terms of incense inheritance, forms of marriage, and economic production, and accordingly... are equally entitled to have and enjoy the fundamental conditions of happiness and respect" [13].

#### **4. Poetic Thinking: The Ethics of Living Together in Harmony**

After getting married, the Yao couples in Dayao Mountain live in the homes of both men and women in turns depending on the conditions of labor production, labor, and seasons. This is the form of marriage of "going on both sides", which is what anthropology calls "both couples go to each other's homes to live together.". The family relationship of "both sides" couples is generally harmonious. No matter where they live, they are obliged to participate in the labor and production of both families and support both parents. This kind of family is very caring for parents and brothers and sisters, and family members can get along with each other in harmony. The Hualan Yao custom of the husband living with his wife consists of three forms of marriage: buy-out marriage, stay-at-home marriage and Zhao Lang Zhuan. Buyout marriage means that the man goes to his home and takes his wife's surname, and the children born take their mother's surname, inheriting the mother's family name and property. However, with the development and changes of the times, this form of marriage no longer requires the man to change his surname, but the children born will take their mother's surname. A stay-at-home marriage is a marriage in which a man goes to his home and takes his wife's surname, and one of his children takes his father's surname, inheriting his father's family name and property. This form of marriage is also commonly referred to as "giving up the original kinship name without giving up the offspring, and still keeping the offspring to carry on the family name"[12]. Zhao Lang Zhuan refers to a marriage in which the man comes to live with his wife for a period of time and then returns to his family with his wife and children. The Zhao Lang Zhuan form of marriage is usually used when the family "has no sons, or when the children are young and lack labour and need to recruit men to work, or when some parents cannot bear to part with their daughters and do not want to part with them... When the son or other children have grown up and have sufficient labour, the The son-in-law can then leave his wife and children to return to his own family with his own wife and children." [14]

All three forms of marriage are based on economics, with the wife taking the lead in the household. In the case of a survey conducted by a team of graduate students led by Professor Xu Ping in the village of Liuxiang, Jinxiu, "the couple married in 1980, and the man, LZS, went to the home of the woman, LQ, due to the large number of siblings in the family (five), and lived with his wife after the marriage, and the children born inherited their mother's surname.

Probably for the first ten years of their marriage, the wife was in charge of the family's affairs, and the man had relatively few rights." [10] But as the couple's relationship stabilizes and they get along well, the wife's role as head of the household is changing. "The position of the two of them in the household gradually changed, and the power to take charge of production, business and the education of the children in the household slowly shifted to the male partner." [10] This shift in the power of the head of the household occurred, ostensibly because the head of the household was overwhelmed by the complexity of his affairs, but in reality it was an inevitable result of a stable and harmonious relationship between the couple. In the family life of the Hualan Yao, working as much as possible is the basis for a harmonious relationship between the couple. Conversely, the inability to do one's job is a major cause of divorce.

Although divorce also exists among the Hualan Yao in Dayao Mountain, on the whole, the Hualan Yao people in Dayao Mountain are responsible for marriage and are very cautious about divorce. According to the survey, "among the 196 people in Liuxiang village, there were 24 people who had divorced, of whom 13 were over 60 years old, four were between 50-59 years old, three were between 40-49 years old, and four were between 20-39 years old." [10] The number of divorced people accounted for 12.24% of the total number of people. Divorce is not common. Hualan Yao believes that divorce is bad. There is a legend about divorce, which indicates that an imprudent divorce will alarm the wrath of God. A couple once sued the patriarch for a divorce. Although the reasons they gave were not valid, the patriarch was greedy for the money they were paid, so he allowed them to divorce. The next day the two trees in front of the patriarch's house suddenly withered and died. He understood that this was caused by a misjudged divorce, so he immediately returned the money and forbade the couple to divorce. Afterwards, both trees did come back to life." [2] This legend may be an exaggeration, but it links the dryness of trees with the separation and separation of marriage, and sanctions behaviors that violate marriage customs and ethics, which vividly demonstrates that the local Hualan Yao people maintain their poetic ethics in accordance with the principles of symbolism and imagination. It has the ethical practice value of guiding the local Hualan Yao people to respect nature and live in harmony. This is of great significance for understanding the moral life of the Yao nationality in Dayao Mountain, Jinxiu, and promoting the social moral construction of the Yao nationality in Dayao Mountain, Jinxiu.

## 5. Conclusion

"Ethics is not only a relationship and a rule, but also a cultural phenomenon. It is a reflection of social relations and social rules, as well as a poetic, communal and national practice. What is poetic ethics and what makes ethics poetic. In the context of traditional cultural identity, the poetic ethics of marriage is about how ethics intervenes in the process, form and life of marriage in a poetic way, so as to achieve freedom and autonomy in the choice of marriage, richness and diversity in the form of marriage, and harmony in married life. In the Yao nationality's wedding customs in Dayao Mountain, ethics maintains marriage and love ethics and behavioral norms in accordance with poetic principles such as symbolism and imagination, so it is poetic. Marriage customs and poetic ethics are involved in marriage and love in an artistic way, thus gaining the broad cultural identity of the Yao ethnic group in Dayao Mountain, the parents of the parties in marriage, the parties in the marriage and love. The poetic ethical ideas that the Yao people in Dayao Mountain actively practice in their marriage customs, as well as their reflections on issues such as sex education, sex practice, engagement, trial marriages, etc., provide useful practical experience for exploring the ethical and moral norms of the current society.

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