

# Studies on Ceremonial Paintings of the Guoshan Yao People

— In Southern Hunan Province and Northeastern Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region —

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The Guoshan Yao people who call themselves Mien are the most mobile of the Yao tribes (Yoshino 1994: 94). The Mien live mostly in southern Hunan Province, Guangdong Province, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Guizhou Province, and Yunnan Province. They also live extensively outside China, such as in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and the mountainous area in northern Myanmar. This study deals primarily with the Mien settling in the Jianghua Yao Autonomous County of southern Hunan and the neighboring Gongcheng Yao Autonomous County of northeastern Guangxi.

Studies on Mien ceremonial paintings are believed to have begun in the early 1980s, but extremely few documents have been published so far. Jacques Lemoine, a French ethnologist, is the only researcher who has written books on this subject. In his book *Yao Ceremonial Paintings* (1982), he introduces approximately 200 religious paintings of the Yao people collected by him and eight others. He also briefly describes Mien rituals with photographs he took during field surveys of their communities in Thailand and Laos. Ceremonial paintings are classified into the following chapters: Fam Ts'ing, the Three Pure Ones; The Jade Emperor and the Master of the Saints; The Celestial Masters; Tai Wai, the High Constable; Hoi Fan, 'The Sea Banner'; The Governors of this World and the Waters; The Governors of the Sky and the Underground; The Lords of the Ten Tribunals of Hades; The Marshals; The Three Generals; The Ancestors; The Forebears; The Dragon Bridge of the Great Tao; The Enforcers of Fasting and Chastity; P'an Hu's Five Banners of Knights; and Masks. In addition to the vast number of iconic images, Lemoine illustrates the characters of gods depicted in the paintings, such as their attire, postures and accessories. Unfortunately, these are mere brief explanations with no comparisons, analyses or examinations of the same religious paintings owned by the Mien residing in different areas.

This study focuses on unexplored aspects of Lemoine's research to examine the content of Mien ceremonial paintings, while analyzing similarities and differences between the paintings in southern Hunan and northeastern Guangxi. Based on the findings, it further explores the characters of gods worshipped by the Mien, the influence of Taoism on ceremonial paintings, and the characteristics of the Mien reflected in the paintings.