



Ba-Shu Totem and Chinese Cultural Symbol — Cultural Interpretation of the White Tiger Motif on the “When the Five Planets Appear in the East, It will Benefit the Central States” Brocade

Jingyi Lin^{1,*}, Yuxin Li², Weigang Feng²

¹School of Literature, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

²School of Chinese language and literature, Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu, China

*hhhappylin@163.com

Abstract. Since the excavation of the brocade inscribed with “When the Five Planets appear in the East, it will benefit the Central States”(五星出東方利中國), remarkable achievements have been made in multi-angle research and interpretation. However, the cultural interpretation of the brocade patterns still needs to be enriched, and in particular, the relationship between the White Tiger motif itself and the Great Unity (大一統) requires further exploration. The White Tiger motif on this brocade is an integral part of the Chinese cultural symbol and image system. It can demonstrate the exchanges, interactions and integration between the Han Dynasty and the Ba-Shu region at that time, thereby reflecting the process of territorial construction of the Great Unity (大一統) in the Han Dynasty. Taking the White Tiger motif on the “When the Five Planets appear in the East, it will benefit the Central States” (五星出東方利中國) brocade as the entry point, this paper sorts out the relationship between the White Tiger on the brocade and the local White Tiger motifs in the Ba-Shu region, expounds the fact that the Chinese cultural symbol and image system was established in the Han Dynasty, and then attempts to examine the evolution and formation of the pattern of the unity in diversity (多元一體) in the Han Dynasty.

Keywords: When the Five Planets appear in the East, It will benefit the Central States, White Tiger motif, Chinese cultural symbols, Cultural interpretation

1 Introduction

The brocade inscribed with “When the Five Planets appear in the East, it will benefit the Central States” (五星出東方利中國) is a Shu brocade of the Han and Jin dynasties unearthed at the Niya Ruins (尼雅遺址) in Xinjiang in 1995,¹ and it is one of the

greatest archaeological discoveries in China in the 20th century.

Since its excavation, the “Five Stars” brocade has attracted extensive attention from the academic community due to its rich cultural connotations.

At present, the remarkable research achievements on this brocade are mainly concentrated in two aspects: first, analyzing the colored brocade and woven inscriptions, and investigating the ancient people's pattern and astral worship on the basis of confirming the pattern images and the content of the woven inscriptions; second, interpreting the brocade in relation to the pattern of unity in diversity (多元一體) of the Chinese nation around the woven inscription “When the Five Planets appear in the East, it will benefit the Central States and campaign against the Southern Qiang” (五星出東方利中國討南羌).

However, as a polychrome brocade armguard that embodies the ideal of unity in diversity (多元一體), the relationship between its decorative program, particularly the individual animal motifs, and the Han articulation of the Great Unity (大一統) invites closer scrutiny.

By situating the White Tiger motif of the “Five Stars” brocade a critical semiotic tension emerges: Why does this particular piece of Shu silk feature the White Tiger as a codified emblem of Han imperial orthodoxy, rather than reflecting the indigenous cosmological or zoomorphic traditions inherent to the Ba-Shu region?

Starting from this question, this paper sorts out the convergence trend between the Ba-Shu White Tiger motifs and Great Unity (大一統) in the Han Dynasty.

2 A Study on the Pattern Relationship Between the White Tiger on the “When the Five Planets appear in the East, It will Benefit the Central States (五星出東方利中國)” Brocade and the Local White Tiger in the Ba-Shu Region

Four animal figures are woven on the “Five Stars” brocade. Among them, the tiger figure located below the two characters “Zhongguo” (中國) on the left side of the brocade surface presents a high-spirited posture with its head lowered and tail raised, standing proudly and looking back. Most existing studies identify it as the White Tiger. In addition, combining the patterns, craftsmanship and production time of the “Five Stars” brocade, researchers have confirmed that it is a Shu brocade.

Drawing upon this premise, the present study traces the iconographic trajectory of the White Tiger—both as a constituent of the Four Divine Beasts (四神) and as a localized motif within the Ba-Shu region—to facilitate a rigorous comparative analysis. By interrogating the ancient Ba-Shu tradition of the White Tiger motif alongside its artistic manifestations, this paper examines the structural relationship between these regional motifs and the “Five Stars” brocade. Ultimately, it seeks to elucidate the process by which Ba-Shu's indigenous imagery was subsumed and homogenized by the Han imperial paradigm of the Great Unity (大一統) before its eventual dissemination into the Western Regions.

First, we focus on the origin of the White Tiger image among the Four Divine Beasts (四神) in the Han Dynasty. The Four Divine Beasts (四神) are closely related to astral phenomena, among which the White Tiger corresponds to the stars in the west. As stated in *The Great Summons from Chu Ci · The Great Summons* (楚辭大招):

With pig's heads and vertical eyes, unkempt hair flowing long, long claws and jagged teeth, they laugh mockingly and rage. ^[1](魂乎無西！西方流沙，漭洋洋只。豕首縱目，被發鬣只。長爪踞牙，諛笑狂只。魂乎無西！多害傷只)Wang Yi commented: "This is likely the appearance of the god Rushou"^[2](此蓋蓐收神之狀也。)

Wei Zhao also noted in his annotation to *Guo Yu · Discourses of Jin* (國語晉語): "Rushou is the official of the White Tiger and the Metal Element in the west"^[3](蓐收，西方白虎金正之官也。) From this, we can see that the White Tiger image corresponds to Rushou, the god of punishment and killing, and possesses fierce and powerful characteristics.

Among the pre-Qin records of the White Tiger's form, the most representative is Mao Heng's annotation to *The Book of Songs · Shao Nan · Zou Yu* (詩經召南騶虞), which states: "Zou Yu is a righteous beast, a white tiger with black stripes, which does not eat living creatures and appears in response to the highest virtue."^[4](騶虞，義獸也，白虎黑文，不食生物，有至新之德則應之。) Second, from the perspective of physical images: a large number of tiger-shaped jades have been unearthed in the Central Plains region from the Neolithic period to the Shang and Zhou dynasties. From the development trend of the motifs, as time went on, the jade tiger images evolved from simple to complex, with gradually decreasing realism and increasing decorativeness.

Tiger motifs on cultural relics from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods further developed along this trend. The horns, eyes and mouths were rendered more vivid and exquisite, with extremely fierce and lifelike facial expressions. Although the postures of the tiger bodies were not greatly different from those of previous jade tigers, the tiger claws were clearly depicted more distinctly. Thus, tiger images showed a trend from crawling to standing, and their stripes further approached those of real tigers.

It is noteworthy that a subset of material culture from this period already manifests distinct transcultural aesthetics, serving as tangible evidence of the robust inter-ethnic synthesis and cross-regional engagements then unfolding.²

With the development of ideology and politics in the Han Dynasty, the images of the Four Divine Beasts (四神) were more widely used. Although there were variations

² The gold tiger unearthed at the Liujiawa site in Shaanxi is consistent with jade tigers from the Shang and Zhou dynasties in overall form: its head and body are well-proportioned, its four legs crouch forward, its tail rests on the ground, and its decorative patterns, though clear and discernible, are not overly ornate, following the natural contours of the body and tail. Notably, the craftsmanship of this gold tiger was significantly influenced by the crafting traditions of the northern nomadic peoples.

in whether the White Tiger had wings, the general trend was toward gradual standardization.

A tiger image from the early Western Han Dynasty appears on a portrait brick unearthed at the Han Yangling(漢陽陵) Mausoleum. This tiger is in a running posture, with a thin tongue protruding, sharp teeth, V-shaped stripes covering its body, and a raised tail. Compared with previous dynasties, tiger images on cultural relics from the Western Han to the Xinmang period showed increased uniformity, relatively stable forms, and mostly appeared together with the other three Divine Beasts. The White Tiger motifs depicted on mirrors with four nipples and confronting dragons and tigers, hollow bricks from Xianyang, hollow bricks with murals from Luoyang, and the west wall of the tomb mural at Qianyang Han Tomb are all similar to the White Tiger on the Han Yangling(漢陽陵) portrait brick.

There is another type of White Tiger with stronger dynamism and more vigorous posture, often in leaping positions with more flowing tails, but with less distinct facial expressions and relatively less ferocity. The White Tiger motif from the Han Tomb at Tanghe Knitting Factory in Henan is an example of this type. The subsequent development of White Tiger motifs followed this trend.

Of course, the White Tiger motif in Han Dynasty did not have a single uniform image. Alternative White Tiger images were used in different occasions and regions. For example, White Tigers used as tiger tallies or tiger weights mostly adopted a squatting posture with a round and simple appearance, embodying the meaning of power and calmness, with thick and solid limbs.

Viewed as a whole, the evolution of the White Tiger from the Neolithic period through the Han Dynasty represents a process of gradual iconographic stabilization. By the Han era, its visual characteristics had become clearly defined, marking its formal establishment as a foundational symbol of Chinese culture.

The White Tiger as a belief in the Ba-Shu region also had profound and rich manifestations. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas · The Fourth Western Mountain Classic* (山海经·西次四经):

Two hundred and twenty li further west is Mount Niaoshu Tongxue, which abounds in white tigers and white jade.^[5] (又西二百二十裏，曰鳥鼠同穴之山，其上多白虎、白玉。)

Chronicles of Huayang · Records of Ba (華陽國志) notes: Annals of Ba states: “During the reign of King Zhaoxiang of Qin, white tigers caused disasters”^[6] (秦昭襄王時，白虎為害，自秦蜀巴漢患之。) This indicates the presence of white tigers in the Ba-Shu region. *Book of the Later Han · Biographies of the Southern Barbarians and Southwestern Yi Tribes* (后汉书·南蛮西南夷列传) specifies the origin of the White Tiger belief in the Ba-Shu region: “When Linjun died, his soul became the White Tiger”.^[7] (廩君死，魂魄世為白虎)

The Ba people, believing that tigers drink human blood, therefore offered human sacrifices to him. This theory is mutually corroborated by “his essence and soul transformed into a white tiger”^[8] (精魂化為白虎) in *Commentary on the Water Classic* (水經注) confirming the origin of the Ba people's White Tiger belief to the mythological period

Relevant documents and artifacts record the Ba people's interpretation of this belief. *Manshu* (蠻書): “The Ba people sacrifice to their ancestors by beating drums, for they are descendants of the White Tiger.”^[9] (巴氏祭其祖，擊鼓而祭，白虎之後也。) also cited that *Kuicheng Tujing* (夔城圖經) Illustrated Gazetteer records a scene of Ba-Shu people dancing: “At funerals, drums are beaten to express mourning.....This is the bravery of Panhu and the White Tiger.”^[9] (初喪，擊鼓以為道哀.....此乃盤瓠白虎之勇也。) This demonstrates the profound nature of White Tiger motif in the Ba-Shu region.

A large number of cultural relics unearthed in the Ba-Shu region depict tiger forms, and the laws of their morphological development are worth tracing. Multiple tiger-shaped artifacts have been unearthed at the Sanxingdui (三星堆) Site. Among them, the tiger-shaped vessel has a square head, round eyes, triangular ears, a rectangular mouth and bared teeth. The tiger on the bronze dragon-tiger zun vessel is described as “a tiger with a huge head, fat ears, a drooping tail with an upturned tip”,^[10] (虎，巨頭，肥耳，尾下垂，尾尖上翹) in a man-eating posture. Both were unearthed in Pit No. 1, indicating their high status.

The tiger-shaped gold foil has a relatively simple form, with a winding body, uniform proportions, a high and coiled tail, folded limbs, and rounded ears and horns. Another bronze tiger belongs to the same stylistic category as the tiger-shaped gold foil, but is in a standing posture with a downward-hanging tail, and its body is cast with concave patterns resembling auspicious clouds.

The bronze tiger unearthed at the Jinsha (金沙) Site has basically the same form as the Sanxingdui (三星堆) bronze tiger. However, the stone tiger is in a simple sitting and lying posture, with its head and neck slightly raised, open mouth and clear teeth. The bronze tiger has a vigorous body, prominent ears, a huge mouth, slightly bent limbs in a walking posture, and a drooping, curved tail.

Overall, the tiger-shaped artifacts unearthed at the Sanxingdui (三星堆) Site are more ornate and abundant than those at the Jinsha (金沙) Site. This trend was not synchronized with, but rather opposite to, the development trend of jade tiger images in the Central Plains during the same period.

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the stylistic characteristics of tiger images on Ba-Shu cultural relics gradually became prominent. Liu Yu conducted a classification, periodization and regional study of tiger patterns on Ba-Shu bronze weapons, concluding that tiger graphics with Ba-Shu cultural characteristics were particularly creative and dynamic from the transition between the early and middle Warring States period to around the late Warring States period when Qin conquered Ba-Shu.^[11]

A batch of early Warring States bronze artifacts unearthed at sites such as Jinyu Village in the western suburbs of Chengdu, Chengdu University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Emei Fuxi No. 1 have exquisitely styled tiger patterns. The tiger heads are emphasized relative to the bodies, combining the ferocity of real tigers with protruding tongues and open mouths, and various decorative engravings. The bronze ge (戈) dagger-axe unearthed in Pixian County has tiger patterns cast on both sides, with huge heads, coiled bodies, bent and leaping limbs, olive-shaped open eyes, and

elaborate patterns. Bronze artifacts unearthed at Dayi Wulong, Shifang Chengguan and Yunyang Lijiaba are engraved with highly distinctive local tiger-shaped decorations, unique in their diverse images and exquisite craftsmanship, often combined with other symbols. In terms of the tiger forms themselves, some tiger bodies are decorated with wings and feathers, making their shapes more mysterious and colorful.

In general, during the Warring States to Qin period, tiger images on Ba-Shu cultural relics had a magnificent style, complex lines and extremely strong decorativeness. Some tiger images were characterized by prominent huge heads and slender bodies, with great emphasis on the fierce features of the mouth, eyes and face. For example, the tiger-head bronze spear unearthed in Yingjing, Shifang, Ba-Shu, has a clearly visible tiger face with round eyes and fangs, forelimbs positioned sideways as slender as snakes, and folded, crawling limbs. Notably, the two characters “Chengdu” (成都) are engraved on this spear, which is the earliest direct evidence of the name “Chengdu” (成都) discovered to date.

During this period, although both Ba-Shu and Central Plains tiger images developed toward elaborate styles, the tiger images on Ba-Shu cultural relics were more vibrant and diverse. Gorgeous lines, complex symbol combinations and majestic tigers complemented each other, appearing more like totems than mere patterns, strongly embodying regional characteristics.

After Qin conquered Ba-Shu until the Western Han Dynasty, a clear trend of simplification and realism in Ba-Shu tiger patterns can be observed—a trend that basically coincided with the development of Central Plains White Tiger images. The tiger-base bird-frame drum unearthed in Hubei has a crouching tiger on each side, and the bronze axe unearthed in Bijie, Guizhou, has a crouching tiger on each of its two edges. These two tiger forms are extremely similar: graceful bodies in a half-crouching posture with the front lower than the back, powerfully curved and raised tails, upright bearing, and patterns on the bodies, but their ornateness is far inferior to the tiger patterns on bronze artifacts from the early and middle Warring States period.

In addition, bronze *chunyu* (鐃于) musical instruments with tiger knobs have been unearthed in many places in Ba-Shu. Most are in a forward-facing standing posture, with open mouths and bared teeth, proportionate and grounded limbs. The sword unearthed in Zigui, Hubei, has a clear side view of a tiger, with limbs seemingly crouching, a drooping tail, and proportionate head and body. All these tiger images are highly similar to Western Han White Tigers. It is worth noting that around the time Qin conquered Ba-Shu, i.e., the middle and late Warring States period, two overlapping trends existed in the development of tiger images in the Ba-Shu region: while tiger images with local regional characteristics flourished and produced many variations, patterns influenced by Chinese civilization also became increasingly prominent along with Qin's unification.

In summary, during this period, although some tiger graphics on Ba-Shu cultural relics bear similarities to tiger patterns on artifacts unearthed in other regions such as Henan, Shaanxi and Gansu, overall, the tiger-patterned cultural relics unearthed in the Ba-Shu region have distinct and diverse styles and forms, possessing a uniqueness that is inextricably linked to Ba-Shu culture.

Chang Qu stated that Qin's annexation of Ba-Shu “benefited from its local customs and products”, and the political, economic and cultural systems of the Ba-Shu region were thus gradually incorporated into the Great Unity (大一統) system. *Records of the Grand Historian · Biography of Zhang Yi* (史记·张仪列传) records:

Finally, troops were raised to attack Shu. In the tenth month, it was captured, and Shu was pacified.”^[12] (卒起兵伐蜀。十月，取之，遂定蜀)

During the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, the Ba-Shu region underwent comprehensive further development. Against this background, the influence of Chinese civilization on Ba-Shu tiger patterns increased significantly, and their scope of application expanded from bronze artifacts to brocades, furniture, portrait bricks, tomb brick decorations, etc. By the Eastern Han to Han-Jin period, most tiger images on Ba-Shu cultural relics had basically converged with the White Tiger image as one of the Han Four Divine Beasts (四神). For example, the tiger on the Eastern Han portrait brick of the Queen Mother of the West has bright eyes, a protruding tongue, distinct claws and clear body stripes.

The evidence presented above suggests that the White Tiger iconography of Ba-Shu has maintained a distinct and pluralistic character since antiquity. While never entirely decoupled from the Central Plains tradition, the Ba-Shu White Tiger underwent a definitive convergence with the broader Chinese cultural canon following the Qin annexation and, more significantly, during the Han Great Unity (大一統) era. The circulation of the “Five Stars” brocade serves as a concrete manifestation of this transition; it reflects not only the iconographic evolution of the White Tiger but also the strategic imperatives of the Han imperial state and the ascending economic significance of Shu silk.

3 Observing the Territorial Construction of the Great Unity (大一統) in the Han Dynasty through the White Tiger Motif on the “Five Stars” Brocade

In the Han Dynasty, the White Tiger appeared in a relatively unified form on various objects such as tomb stones, furniture and brocades. The “Five Stars” brocade presents precisely this type of image.

The tiger on the left door leaf at Kuaihualing, Housijiagou, Suide, Shaanxi, has outstretched limbs in a galloping posture, a raised tail, an upright neck, and an open mouth with bared teeth. The tiger on the left door leaf of Tomb M5 at the Dabaodang Stone Tomb Site in Shenmu, Shaanxi, has unrestrained and flamboyant limbs, a tail held high like a long whip, a long body and an open mouth. The White Tiger on Han Dynasty Four Divine Beasts (四神) tile ends has round eyes, a deep mouth, a body curving around the sun, and both limbs and the powerful tail are straight, raised and curved. The brocades “Yongchang” (永昌) and “Changshou Mingguang” (长寿明光) also feature the White Tiger with wings, standing with its tail raised, roaring and gazing back. This iconography appears on brocades such as the “Anle Embroidery” (安樂綉) and “Yizi Sun” (宜子孫) found at the Niya Ruins (尼雅遺址), illustrating the

convergence of faith and belief systems. Combining the characteristics of tigers recorded in literature: “the leader of all beasts, capable of seizing and subduing the fierce, and devouring malevolent spirits”^[13] (百獸之長也，能執搏挫銳，噬食鬼魅) “fierce crouching”^[7](猛據), and “sinuous and imposing in appearance”^[2](虬蚘有威容也). we can extract the image characteristics of the Han Dynasty White Tiger: high-spirited posture, valiant and powerful, dynamic and galloping, baring its teeth and brandishing its claws, with a long tail swinging high.

The White Tiger image on the “Five Stars” brocade precisely conforms to these characteristics. That is, it is consistent with the image features and style of most Han Dynasty White Tigers, being a typical Han White Tiger image symbolizing auspicious omens such as bravery, power and victory. This shows that the influence of the White Tiger as an official belief was sufficiently strong that the Shu brocade “Five Stars” brocade presents the White Tiger image as one of the Han Dynasty Four Divine Beasts (四神), rather than the White Tiger image as a folk belief or other local exotic beasts depicted in folk historical materials of the Ba-Shu region.

In other words, by the time the “Five Stars” brocade was produced, the White Tiger totem believed in by the Ba-Shu people had already shown a trend of convergence with the White Tiger motif as a Chinese cultural symbol, and this convergence was manifested through the White Tiger image on this brocade. That is to say, the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade has become integrated into the Chinese cultural symbol and image system.

As Li Zehou stated: “Human conquest of the world and the dazzling array of objects are expressed in concrete images, scenes and artistic conceptions as power, movement and speed, which constitute the basic aesthetic style of momentum and simplicity in Han Dynasty art.” The process by which Ba-Shu White Tiger images shed their ornateness and merged into the Chinese cultural symbol system ran parallel to and mutually confirmed the path of territorial construction of the Great Unity (大一統) in the Han Dynasty. First, the fact that the White Tiger as one of the Han Four Divine Beasts (四神) was woven onto the “Five Stars” brocade provides a new perspective for examining the connections between the Western Regions and the Han Dynasty in the Han Dynasty. The “Five Stars” brocade was unearthed at Niya (尼雅) making it an important evidence for observing the exchanges, interactions and integration between the Western Regions and the Han Dynasty. The academic community holds that the “Five Stars” brocade with Han Chinese inscriptions is a historical silk artifact. Its appearance in the Western Regions confirms the historical facts of the Han Dynasty Silk Road^[14]. Some scholars, combining the woven inscriptions on the “Five Stars” brocade, argue that “the ‘Five Stars’ brocade clarifies that Xinjiang has been an inalienable part of China and a multi-ethnic inhabited region since ancient times, and that all ethnic groups in Xinjiang are important members of the big family of the Chinese nation, bound by blood and sharing a common destiny”.^[15]

However, if we focus on the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade itself, we can also draw an important conclusion: the White Tiger entered the Western Regions as a pattern conforming to the imagination and norms of the Great Unity (大一統). The White Tiger on the “Five Stars” brocade, as “graphics and images that can be

perceived by visual sense to directly obtain information and interpret meaning”^[16], can be included in the category of visual culture. Compared with text, the content presented by patterns is more intuitive and vivid, and people's mental encoding and transformation of them is less restricted by region, ethnicity and culture. “Every message is composed of symbols”.^[17] The transmission of the White Tiger symbol to Xinjiang through the “Five Stars” brocade means that its corresponding information and cultural connotations were presented to the people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Observing the demeanor of the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade—its fierce roaring, galloping with raised tail, and vigorous turning back—is vivid and lively, capable of stimulating people's associations and interpretations. Through the visual experience of the White Tiger's posture, people can achieve an understanding of the demeanor of the Han Dynasty.

Furthermore, by scrutinizing the “typicality” of the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade, one can further delineate the developmental trajectory connecting the “Ba-Shu totem” to the broader “Chinese cultural symbol.” This particular motif serves as more than mere evidence of the mediation and synthesis between the Western Regions and the Han imperial center; it represents a deliberate act of artistic creation that—through a process of “typical construction”—was strategically integrated into the overarching cultural discourse of the Han Dynasty.^[18]

The White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade has a “condensing” significance. Combining historical facts, a fragment unearthed together with the “Five Stars” brocade bears the woven inscription “to campaign against the Southern Qiang”, which mutually corroborates the record in *The Book of Han · Biography of Zhao Chongguo* (漢書·趙充國傳):

Now the Five Stars rise in the East, bringing great benefits to China; the barbarians are defeated.^[19] (今五星出東方，中國大利，蠻夷大敗。)

The White Tiger motif symbolizes bravery in battle and conquest of all directions, being the embodiment of the “Western God of War”. Moreover, *Records of the Grand Historian · Book of the Heavenly Offices* (史記·天官書) records:

The five stars divide the heavens; when they gather in the East, China benefits.^[12] (五星分天之中，積於東方，中國利。)

It can be said that the White Tiger motif woven onto the “Five Stars” brocade is the “spokesperson” for the historical process of the Han Dynasty expanding its territory through warfare and pursuing unification. In addition, “When the Five Planets appear in the East, it will benefit the Central States (五星出東方利中國)” recording the Central Plains Han Dynasty's campaign against the southwestern barbarians connects the Central Plains, Ba-Shu and Western Regions. The brocade thus becomes a witness to the Silk Road, and the significance of spatial linkage and exchange is thereby condensed in the White Tiger motif.

Furthermore, for the Ba-Shu people, the White Tiger motif, in addition to carrying their long-standing emotional attachment to the White Tiger itself, also serves as a symbolic cultural symbol that promoted the Ba-Shu people's gradual understanding of the Han Dynasty.

The spread of the White Tiger motif to the Western Regions along with brocades produced in Shu was based on the background that

Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, Shu brocade rose to such prosperity that it nearly replaced Xiang brocade; as a result, Xiang brocade transformed its weaving methods, and Shu came to dominate the brocade market^[20] (魏晉以來，蜀錦勃興，幾欲奪襄邑之席，於是襄邑乃一變而營織成，遂使錦綾專為蜀有)

Compared with Xiangyi brocade, which flourished before the Qin and Han dynasties, Shu brocade was relatively late to be called “brocade”. *Records of the Grand Historian · Biographies of the Southwestern Barbarians* (史記·西南夷傳) records:

When the Bowang Marquis Zhang Qian returned from his mission to Daxia, he said that while in Daxia he had seen Shu cloth.....^[12] (博望侯張騫使大夏來，言居大夏時見蜀布)

The History of the Former Han Dynasty · Biographies of Upright Officials · Biography of Wen Weng (漢書·循吏·文翁傳) states that Wen Weng, the governor of Shu, “reduced the expenditures of the imperial treasury, purchased Shu goods such as knives and cloth, and sent them to scholars as gifts”^[19] (“減省少府用度，買刀布蜀物，齎計吏以遺博士”). Yan Shigu annotated: “The cloth refers to the fine and dense Shu cloth”^[19] (布，蜀布細密也). According to Huayang Guozhi (華陽國志) notes, after Qin conquered Ba-Shu, it established a “Brocade Office” in the region. Shu textiles thus came to the attention of the Han Dynasty and were gradually incorporated into its tribute and trade systems.

From the late Western Han Dynasty onward, Shu textiles gradually came to be called “brocade” instead of “Shu cloth”. In *Shudu Fu* (蜀都賦), Yang Xiong praises Shu brocade as ‘embroidered silk unfurling in waves, dazzling from afar’^[21] (“若揮錦布繡，望芒兮無幅”). This shows that the status of Shu textiles gradually rose during the Han and Wei dynasties, and their importance to the Han Dynasty increased as the Ba-Shu region was incorporated into the Great Unity (大一統) territory. This reflects the changing and shaping of concepts and definitions within the Han Dynasty. As historical processes advanced, “power relations are concretized, developed, asserted, expressed or disguised through symbols (including symbolic forms and patterns of symbolic behavior)”^[22]

As discussed above, the White Tiger motif inherently carries the meaning of conquest and annexation, and its image evolved along with the construction of the Great Unity (大一統). Therefore, using the White Tiger as a pattern on the “Five Stars” brocade provided a basis for demonstrating and interpreting the Han Dynasty's control and development of the Ba-Shu region. In other words, the people inhabiting the Ba-Shu land could develop an understanding and imagination of the Han Dynasty through the White Tiger motif on the brocade.

“Land provides habitation; art transforms the earth into a medium leading to a perceptible world”^[23] The Ba-Shu people lived on the “land” of Ba-Shu, and the White Tiger motif on the brocade, as an artistic creation, transformed the Ba-Shu land that was being integrated into the Great Unity (大一統) process into a medium for understanding the Han Dynasty. This made the geographically distant Central Plains Han Dynasty “culturalized” and “perceptible”—that is, for the Ba-Shu people, it was a political, economic and cultural reality rather than a myth or legend. A deeper understanding, identification and sense of belonging to the Han Dynasty thus formed

among the Ba-Shu people. One of the important links through which human artistic creations are incorporated into the overall cultural process is typical construction.^[18] The White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade, through its “cohesive power”, was incorporated from an “artistic creation” on brocade into the Great Unity (大一統) cultural process of the Han Dynasty. Yuri Lotman connected the temporal and spatial dimensions of culture, pointing out that “culture is collective intelligence and collective memory, a supra-individual mechanism for preserving, transmitting certain information (texts) and generating new information (texts). In this sense, cultural space can be defined as the space of certain shared memories”^[24] The White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade is more than just a decorative motif; it “preserves” the ancient Ba-Shu White Tiger belief and “transmits” the “information” of the Great Unity (大一統). It is a “condensation” of time and space, historical facts and people’s emotions, constructing a space of “shared memory” for people. Its significance and value have been continuously and greatly extended and enriched with the accumulation of time and space, further expanding its “typicality”. The White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade is a cultural symbol that transcends time and space, with both “bearing” and “expressive” functions. The campaign against the Southern Qiang and the gradual establishment of the name “Shu brocade” demonstrate that the Ba-Shu region became part of the national territory, and the Great Unity (大一統) became a reality in the country’s political, economic and cultural symbols.

From “Ba-Shu totem” to “Chinese cultural symbol”, the “White Tiger” motif, as a “carrier”, “condenses” this dynamic process from both diachronic and synchronic dimensions. What it expresses and reflects is the exchanges, interactions and integration between the Han Dynasty and various regions including the Western Regions and Ba-Shu, through which the Great Unity (大一統) territory was constructed. Thus, the “bearing” and “expressive” functions of the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade are integrated, and the “Ba-Shu totem” and “Chinese cultural symbol” are thereby coupled.

4 Conclusion

The White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade is an important window into exploring the relationship between the Ba-Shu region and the territorial construction of the Great Unity (大一統) state in the Han Dynasty.

Starting from the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade, we can observe the establishment of the Chinese cultural symbol and image system in the Han Dynasty, tracing the evolution from the White Tiger totem of the Ba people’s belief to its integration into the cultural symbol system of the Great Unity (大一統) in the Han Dynasty.

The convergence of the White Tiger as a Chinese cultural symbol and the “tiger” images of Ba-Shu presents the trend of dialogue and mutual penetration between Ba-Shu beliefs and the belief in the Four Divine Beasts (四神) through unified patterns, confirming the fact of exchanges, interactions and integration between the Han Dynasty and the Ba-Shu region.

Combined with historical facts, the interaction between the White Tiger belief in the Ba-Shu region, the White Tiger motif on the “Five Stars” brocade and the cultural symbols of the central Han Dynasty reflects the dynamic process of exchanges, interactions and integration. It is a vivid embodiment of the diversity and unity of Chinese culture, and also an important historical witness to the formation of the sense of community for the Chinese nation.

References

1. Lin, J. (Ed. & Trans.). (2015). *Chuci [Ode of Chu]*. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 3rd century BCE by Y. Qu) ISBN: 9787101106824
2. Wang, Y. (Ed.). (2017). *Chuci zhangju [Chapters and verses of songs of the south]*. Shanghai Guji Publishing House. (Original work written c. 2nd century CE) ISBN: 9787532585885
3. Xu, Y. (2002). *Guoyu jijie [Collected annotations of the Discourses of the States]* (S. Wang & C. Shen, Annot.). Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 5th century BCE by Q. Zuo) ISBN: 9787101026009
4. Ruan, Y. (Ed.). (2009). *Shisanjing zhushu: Maoshi zhengyi [Annotations and Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics: Correct Meaning of the Mao Odes]*. Zhonghua Book Company. ISBN: 9787101068443
5. Fang, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Shanhaijing [The classic of mountains and seas]*. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work compiled c. 4th century BCE–1st century CE) ISBN: 9787101079005
6. Peng, H. (Ed.). (2023). *Huayang guo zhi [Records of the states south of Mount Hua]*. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 347 CE by C. Chang) ISBN: 9787101161359
7. Zhonghua Book Company. (Ed.). (1965). *Houhanshu [Book of the Later Han]*. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 445 CE by Y. Fan, annotated c. 675 CE by X. Li et al.) ISBN: 9787101003062
8. Li, D. (2022). *Shuijing zhu: Juan 37: Yi shui [Commentary on the Water Classic: Volume 37: Yi River]* (Q. Chen et al., Trans.; Q. Chen & D. Wang, Annot.). Zhonghua jingdian mingzhu quanben quanzhu quanyi congshu [Complete translations and annotations of Chinese classic masterpieces]. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written ca. 515 CE) ISBN: 9787101148053
9. Xiang, D. (Ed.). (2018). *Manshu jiaozhu [Annotated book of the barbarians]*. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 863 CE by C. Fan) ISBN: 9787101131963
10. Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. (1999). *Sanxingdui jisikeng [The sacrificial pits of Sanxingdui]*. Cultural Relics Press. ISBN: 9787501010325
11. Liu, Y. (2004). *Bashu wenhua qingtong bingqi de hu tuxing chubu yanjiu [A preliminary study of the tiger pattern on bronze weapons of Bashu culture]* (Master's thesis). Sichuan University, Chengdu, China.
https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=tjV0JOkNcjDNjdvhvGEqoM7r6-434FF6h7OJfa_7LQXrwqXH_yffRWQstf43cJExS5lTKj23Ftv5pE_NkwcqGTDMM2LB2TgRXK0BTiKnpSAQKNIScPt-BGH04jl1tpW0OuUmOzHhJbyKmhZ_qUOL1kWUTmDYne_TVqepSZGPONBPwu4XbSxgXmwXAZh0LJCaom&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS

12. Zhonghua Book Company Editorial Department. (Ed.). (1982). *Shiji* [Records of the grand historian]. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 94 BCE by S. Qian) ISBN: 9787101003048
13. Wang, L. (Ed.). (2022). *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* [Comprehensive meaning of customs and popular rituals annotated]. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 2nd century CE by S. Ying) ISBN: 9787101073850
14. Zhang, X., & Zhang, G. (2007). “Wuxing chu dongfang li Zhongguo” jin jianzheng sichou zhi lu de changtong [The “Five stars rising in the East benefiting China” brocade witnesses the smooth flow of the Silk Road]. *Sichuan Silk*, (2), 50–52.
https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v_geoMpAfPfjTezBgiwQcf98usvFwbHjTXNXJleI_1sk88SKWXp7D7zOQjVAkOhgKQX_G2WTakukLRwXM9dQJCBZN9shlOgjos5jDtfCbGp4Md39iOobtkOQ9ao28wA53R5UtpMCBAVSZ7Cyzcd_vQ-bllulZac-DiG76llFRkGbH4TS8faTg==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
15. Yu, Z. (2023). Duoyuan yiti de shengdong jianzheng: “Wuxing chu dongfang li Zhongguo” zhijin hubi xiaoji [A vivid testimony to unity in diversity: A note on the “Five stars rising in the East benefiting China” brocade armguard]. *Zhongguo Minzu*, (5), 76–77.
https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v_geoMpAfPdZCYrUlXkYWHxYpyFFGdoAa0B3uK9QNhaPPEDAjs-7q2i2xgrjvPVQeHprC7QfY3t53WwJPEwlQ7BZx29Qn6bHtEaNibrCrIci-HOV6ltLN-B89oCRzNFw0RzLYZ8laR9ByFYwrDKasgOEPhsAjU-WQ0uAc7AtBhAiCI G7jpA5aaA==&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
16. Zhang, S. (2003). *Shijue wenhua gailun* [An introduction to visual culture]. Jiangsu People’s Publishing House. ISBN: 7214037270
17. Hawkes, T. (1997). *Jiegou zhuyi he fuhaoxue* [Structuralism and semiotics] (T. Qu, Trans.). Shanghai Translation Publishing House. (Original work published 1977) ISBN: 9787532720323
18. Li, Z., & Li, M. (2021). Dianxing jiangoulun: Cong yishu xingxiang dao wenhua fuhao [Typical construction theory: From artistic image to cultural symbol]. *Zhongguo Wenyi Pinglun*, (7), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.19324/j.cnki.zgwypl.2021.07.001>
19. Zhonghua Book Company. (Ed.). (1962). *Hanshu* [Book of Han]. Zhonghua Book Company. (Original work written c. 1st century CE by G. Ban, annotated c. 7th century CE by S. Yan) ISBN: 9787101003055
20. Zhu, Q. (2019). *Sixiu biji* [Notes on silk embroidery]. Zhejiang People’s Fine Arts Publishing House. ISBN: 9787534072055
21. Liu, L., & Wang, X. (2022). *Quan Shu yiwen zhi* [The complete literary collection of Shu]. Sichuan University Press. ISBN: 9787569052022
22. Cohen, A. (1979). Political symbolism. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 8, 87–113. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.08.100179.000511>
23. Collot, M. (2021). *Wenxue dilixue* [Pour une géographie littéraire] (X. Yuan, Trans.). Fujian Education Press. ISBN: 9787533490720
24. Lotman, Y. M. (2000). *Semiosphera* [The semiosphere]. Iskustvo-SPB, Saint Petersburg, Russia. ISBN: 9785210014887

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

