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Yang Yuan, Wang Qiuyu

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Analysis of the Relationship between Frog Patterns and Human Patterns in Prehistoric Colored Pottery

Yang Yuan, Wang Qiuyu

Abstract

Images of the frog pattern and the human pattern in the prehistoric period are different and were influenced by each other. Yangshao culture's and Majiayao culture's early frog pattern and human pattern are more realistic: the frog pattern focuses on highlighting the features of the back, limbs, and toes, and the human pattern highlights the facial features or reflects the movement of the characters; both patterns have their distinctive characteristics. Developed during the middle and late Majiayao culture, the two present a relatively close relationship, and variants of the pattern appeared during this time, presenting a unique region and period and showing the general characteristics of the frog pattern and the human pattern through the art of pattern integration. We believe these variant patterns result from cultural exchange and integration during the evolution and development of frog patterns, where human elements were incorporated into some frog patterns. Moreover, the frog pattern and the human pattern, in the connotation of allegory, are embodied in forms of worship, including reproduction, totem, and sun and moon worship.

Key Words

Prehistoric colored pottery, frog pattern, human pattern

Introduction

Painted pottery patterns, i.e., images of objects in the form of colored paintings on pottery, are pretty distinctive in terms of both the content of the subject matter and the artistic style of the patterns on the pottery. Frog and human patterns, the two patterns unearthed more often, have been found in the prehistoric Banpo, Miaodigou, Majiayao, Shilingxia, Banshan, and Machang types. The relationship between the two has been a hotly debated topic in the academic community, and the images of frogs and human figures portrayed are also different, especially the variant decorations of Banshan-Machang types, which have brought the academic debate on frog and human patterns to a fever pitch. These colored pottery patterns reflected the observation and expression of nature and human beings when ancient human beings were creating pottery, making prehistoric pottery a precious cultural heritage that provides valuable clues to our understanding of ancient societies and cultures. By combing through the frog and human patterns in prehistoric colored pottery and conducting a categorization study, as well as analyzing the variant patterns in Banshan-Machang, we try to run a preliminary discussion on the characteristics and reasons for the creation of these two types of artistic patterns, as well as the relationship between the two.

1. Overview of the Discovery of Frog and Human Figure Patterns in Prehistoric Colored Pottery

So far, the earliest known occurrence of the frog pattern was found on the colored pottery at the Shaanxi Lintong Jiangzhai site (陕西臨潼姜寨遺址). Belonging to the Yangshao culture Banpo type of a fish and frog pattern of colored pottery pots,[1] the frog's head is semicircular, with a bulging belly, the abdomen has black dot embellishment, and the limbs have a curved shape. Then, in Jia County, Henan Province (河南陝縣), Miaodigou[2] unearthed colored pottery debris with the frog pattern and Banpo-type clay pots where the frog pattern composition style is similar, but began to pay attention to the rules: the frog back texture is more orderly, the back of the point of the form follows the rules of unity. In addition, frog-patterned pottery found at the Linru North Liuzhuang site

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(臨汝北劉莊遺址), the Huayin Xiguanbao site (華陰西關堡遺址), the Xixiang Hejiawan site (西鄉何家灣遺址), the Hua County Quanhucun site (華縣泉護村遺址), and the Gansu Qin'an Dadiwan site (甘肅秦安大地灣遺址) Phase IV are all fragments. In Gansu Province, Lintao County (甘肅省臨洮縣),[3] Majiayao unearthed colored pots with Lanzhou City, Yan'er wan (甘肅省蘭州市雁兒灣)[4] excavated colored pots with the frog pattern tend to be the same. The division of the fifth phase of the Shi Zhao Village (師趙村五期遺存) unearthed the Majiayao type of frog-patterned colored pottery bowl,[5] which is also highly vivid (figure 1).

Prehistoric painted figure pattern image development is more prosperous and was throughout the prehistoric period, which is most prominent in Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province, and Qinghai Province. Yangshao culture in the Banpo type of pottery unearthed the human face fish pattern, usually a combination of the human face and the image of the fish. This kind of composite pattern with the combination of people and other objects has been unearthed in other places, such as in Gangu County at the Xiping site (甘谷縣西坪遺址) with the human face of the salamander fish pattern of painted pottery bottles, and Wushan Fujiamen (武山傅家門) with the remains of salamanders and fish people bottle;[6] the head looks like the face of the human, five senses vivid. In addition to this pattern, there are depictions of their images and scenes of humanoid ornamentation, which also include different postures and movements of the human figure. A Majiayao culture dance pattern colored pottery basin was unearthed at the Shang-Sunjiazhai site in Datong County, Qinghai Province (青海省大通縣上孫家寨遺址),[7] pots painted with a circle of humanoid pattern, and a group of five people hand in hand. The Tongde County, Zongri site (同德縣宗日遺址) also unearthed Majiayao culture dance pattern colored pottery pots;[8] pots are also painted with two groups of dancing portraits with eleven people and thirteen people respectively, separated by dotted arcs. The same site unearthed two-person lifting pattern colored pottery pots,[9] painted with four groups of two people lifting the ornamentation of two people relative to each other with both hands lifting a round object, with the body slightly bent; faces are decorations painted on pottery that appear to be human faces. The early Yangshao sphinx pattern painted jar with a pointed bottom was unearthed in 1983 at the Longgang site in Nanzheng County, Shaanxi Province[10] (陝西省南鄭縣龍崗遺址) was painted with twelve black-colored sphinxes on the surface; the sphinxes were divided into upper and lower layers of two layers of six each, with similar sizes, corresponding to the top and bottom, but the expressions of the upper, lower, left and right neighboring sphinxes were not the same. The ceramic pots at the Bianjialin site[11] (邊家林遺址) were painted with three smiley faces in the middle of the pots' walls. The human face pattern fragments found at the Dongxiang Linjia site (東鄉林家遺址)[12] feature human face patterns that are primarily painted in black with oval thick dots in the human face for the eyes, nose, and mouth, with water waves or swirl as the intervals between the pattern or seeming to represent the hair. In addition, more carved ceramic figures, such as human faces and bodies, have been unearthed in prehistory, which are not analyzed in this article (figure 2).

When the Yangshao culture developed into the Majiayao culture, a kind of variant pattern appeared, and this kind of pattern was mostly unearthed in Gansu Qinghai and Ningxia and has been found at the Ledu Liuwan site (樂都柳灣遺址), the Donggoumen site in Kangle County (康樂縣東溝門遺址), the Tugutai site in Lanzhou City (蘭州市土谷台遺址), the Hetan Dayuan plateau site in Dongxiang Autonomous County (東鄉族自治縣河灘大塬遺址), and the Baidaogouping site in Lanzhou City (蘭州市白道溝坪遺址). The motifs of this period mostly replace the head with a large circle, the torso is more concise and generally straight, and the evolution of the limbs is more varied (figure 3). Some scholars call it the "God and Man Pattern (神人紋)" while others refer to it as the "Frog Man Pattern (蛙人紋)" "Human Frog Pattern (人蛙紋)" "Variant Frog Pattern (變體蛙紋)" "Frog God Pattern (蛙神紋)" and so on. Academics have different views on understanding this pattern, and other scholars support different views, so the connotation of its name has also generated a further understanding.

2. Characterization of Frog and Human Patterns

The different ware types and periods of colored pottery frog patterns and colored pottery human patterns have other characteristics, reflecting the prehistoric culture, social structure, aesthetic concepts, religious beliefs, and technology of the era. It is essential to analyze the detailed features of the frog and human patterns to understand their differences, similarities, and relationships.

2.1 Frog Pattern

In terms of stylistic features, the frog pattern generally consists of multiple lines, sometimes accompanied by embellishments with black dots. The frog pattern can be interpreted in the following parts.

First, the frog's head features. The frog pattern's head

is primarily semicircular, oval, round, and individual diamond-shaped heads. There are two black dots for the frog's eyes, some separated by vertical lines. Second, the frog's back features. The back texture of frogs in the Banpo period featured irregular points and dots of different sizes. The development of the Miaodigou frog back texture is more orderly, with the back of the points of the form following the rules of unity where more than a vertical straight line will be divided into two areas of the back; in the Majiayao early stage, the frog back was filled with the grid pattern. Third, the limbs and toes characteristics. Limbs are curved, frog limbs and toes open, with a " w " shape. Frog limbs are thick and thin and can be divided into three categories: 1) forelimbs and hindlimbs curved and extended toward the head; 2) forelimbs to the head extension, the line curved to the head, the hindlimbs curled up in the body on both sides of the backward curve to the tail; 3) less frequently, the forelimbs and hindlimbs curved and extended toward the tail. Most frog forms are tailless, although some have a tail.

2.2 Human Motifs

From the stylistic characteristics, the humanoid decoration can be broadly divided into human face patterns, figure-shaped body patterns, composite decoration, and other objects combined with the decoration.

Currently, unearthed human face patterns focus on the portrayal of human facial features; there are open and closed eyes, and open and closed mouths, both of which are not lacking in scholars to analyze the character demeanor and facial expression characteristics. Character body pattern shows the overall attributes of human appea-rance, clothing, posture, and movement; the ancestors portrayed their image on the pottery, things seen and heard daily, the ancestors in ritual scenes, or ancestors in field labor scenes. Composite ornamentation is mostly a combination of human and animal patterns in the image, in which people and fish or people and frogs form the majority of combinations. One may be related to the reproductive worship at that time, and the second is probably associated with the witchcraft at that time.

2.3 Variant Frog (Human) Patterns

From the stylistic features, we have sorted out four types of patterns. First is the whole frog (human) pattern. The basic structure of these decorations is similar, generally with the head and limbs in the style of a round head (semi-circular head), straight body, four feet, toes or no toes, upper and lower limbs with or without zigzag. Second, the half-body headless frog (human) pattern. It features the omission of the head and retains the style of the limbs, with the pottery mouth taking the place of the head, while most of the upper limbs have a zigzag, and the lower limbs have several zigzags. Changes in these decorations are mainly reflected in the zigzag upper limb and lower limb areas of the individual; an increase in the number of limbs and toes of the decoration may represent the ability to superposition and beyond.[13] The third is half of the body with a limb pattern. This pattern belongs to the whole shape of the frog (human) and is generally only two limbs. It's divided into no zigzags or folding zigzags, and the limbs with folds generally have toes. Fourth, the folded limb pattern. This only retains the style

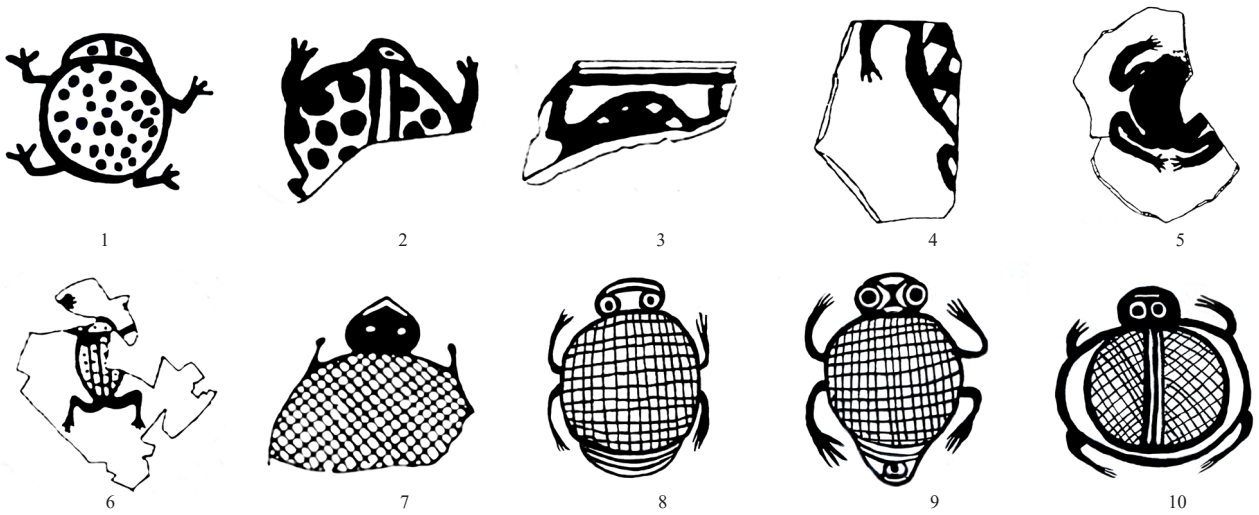


Figure 1. Frog motifs found in prehistoric colored pottery: 1. Lintong Jiangzhai site (臨潼姜寨遺址) 2. Jia, Miaodigou site (郟縣廟底溝遺址) 3. Linru Beiliu Village site (臨汝北劉莊遺址) 4. Huayin Xiguanbao site (華陰西關堡遺址) 5. Hua, Quanhu Village site (華縣泉護村遺址) 6. Xixiang Hejiawan site (西鄉何家灣遺址) 7. Dadiwan IV site (大地灣四期遺址) 8. Yan'er wan site (雁兒灣遺址) 9. Lintao Majiayao site (臨洮馬家窯遺址) 10. Shizhao Village site (師趙村五期遺址).

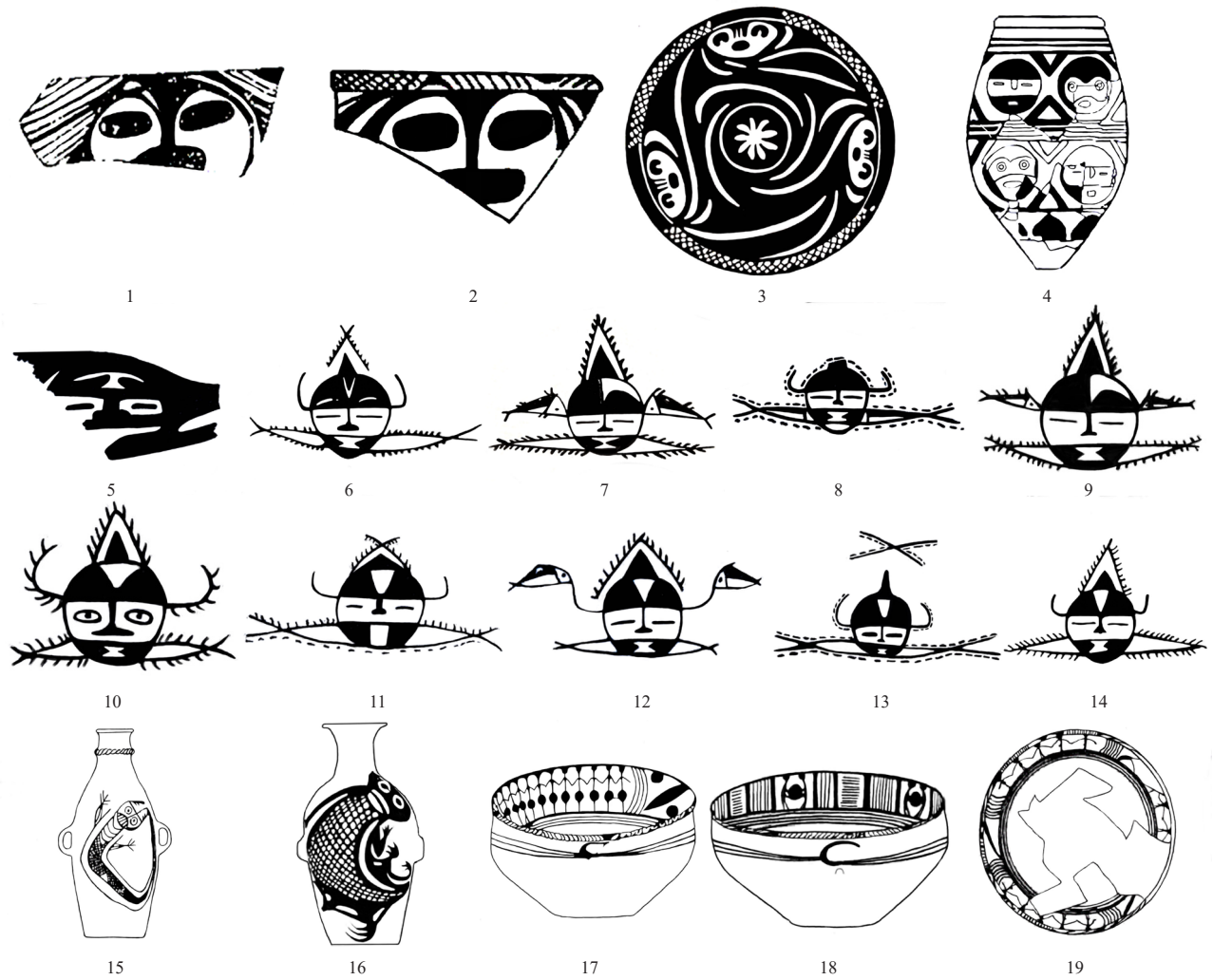


Figure 2. Human motifs found in prehistoric colored pottery: 1-2. Dongxiang Linjia site (東鄉林家遺址) 3. Bianjialin site (邊家林遺址) 4. Nanzheng, Longgang site (南鄭縣龍崗遺址) 5-9. Shaanxi Banpo site (陝西半坡遺址) 10-14. Lintong Jiangzhai site (臨潼姜寨遺址) 15. Gangu, Xiping site (甘谷縣西坪遺址) 16. Wushan Fujiamen site (武山傅家門遺址) 17-18. Tongde, Zongri site (同德縣宗日遺址) 19. Shang-Sunjiazhai site (上孫家寨遺址).

of folded limbs, mainly in the period Machang type. There are also frog (human) patterns of the elbow and knee, plus an awn pattern.

Judging from the above analysis, the frog pattern focuses on the back and limb-toe features; the human pattern highlights facial features or embodies the figure's movement. The prehistoric variants of the pattern show the general characteristics of the frog pattern and the human pattern art pattern blend. Whether the variants that appeared in the middle and late Majiayao period were frog or human patterns, compare the frog's growth chart (figure 4) with the analysis of the developmental sequence of frog patterns. The frog's growth and developmental period is generally divided into six stages: from the egg to the tadpole, development of the hind limbs to the forelimbs, and then continuing to develop into the image of a frog. The realistic pattern of figurative frog patterns in the Yangshao cultural period is similar to the maturity period of frogs; the variant whole frog (human) pattern in the Majiayao cultural period is identical to the image of frogs in the twelfth to sixteenth week or so. The pattern of the bust with limbs can be said to be the expression of the image of frogs growing up to the sixth week when frogs develop the hind limbs. Based on analyzing the frog pattern and the development sequence of the frog, we can speculate that in the Yangshao culture period, people did not understand nature. When they saw the image of the frog, they had a realistic figurative frog pattern. In the Majiayao period, people had a deeper understanding of nature and the frog pattern and no longer unquestioningly worshipped it as before; people observed it and discovered the growth sequence of the frog, and variations of the frog pattern developed. Looking at the frog's growth

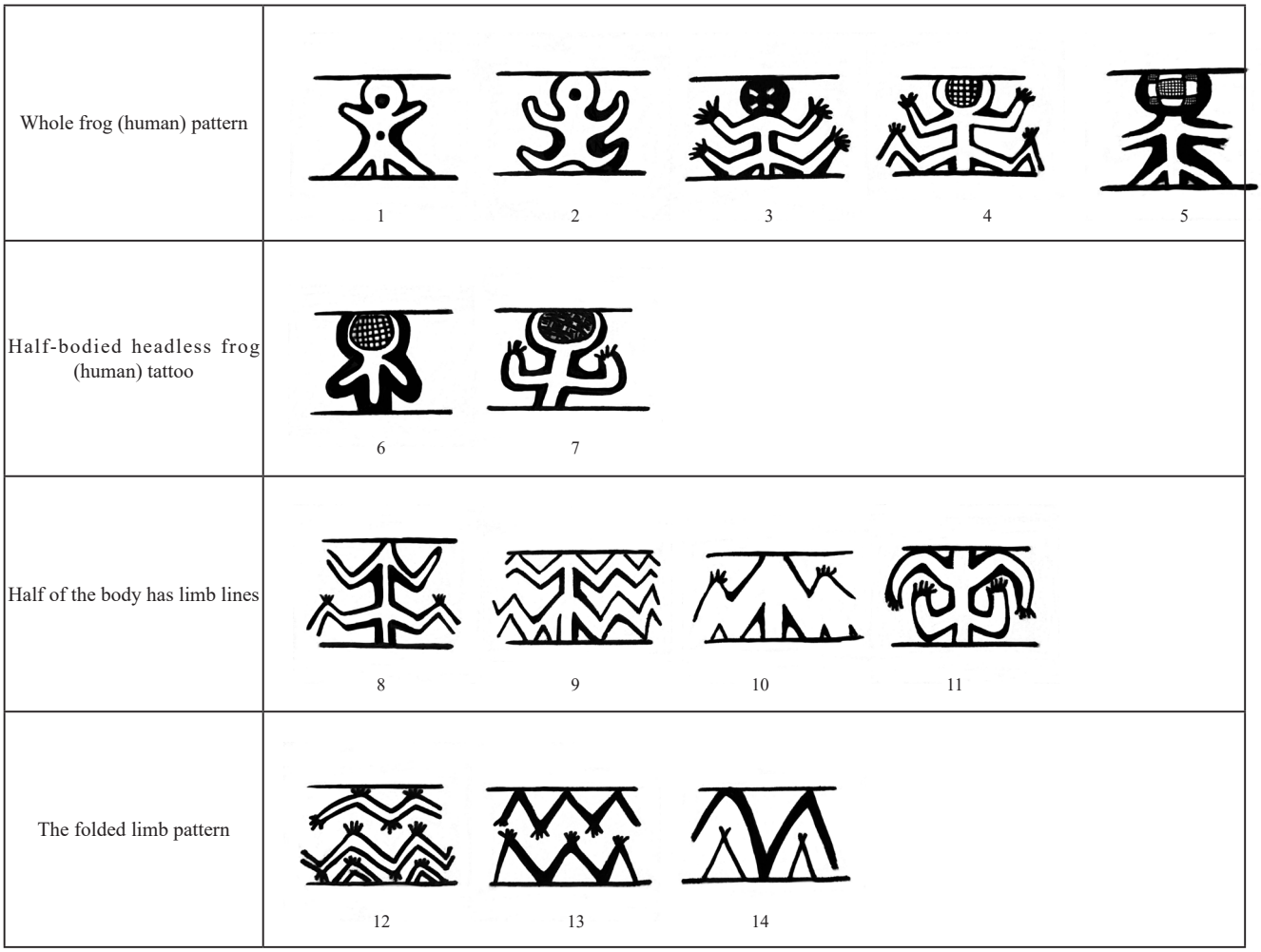


Figure 3. Comparison chart of variant frog (human) decoration styles in the Majiayao period: 1-3. Lintao site (臨桃縣遺址) 4. Donggoumen site (東溝門遺址) 5-7. Tugutai site (土谷台遺址) 8. Liuwan site (柳灣遺址) 9. Hetandayuan site (河灘大塬遺址) 10. Shidongsi site (石洞寺遺址) 11. Baidaogouping site (白道溝坪遺址) 12. Yongjing site (永靖縣遺址) 13-14. Hongqucheng (紅古城遺址).

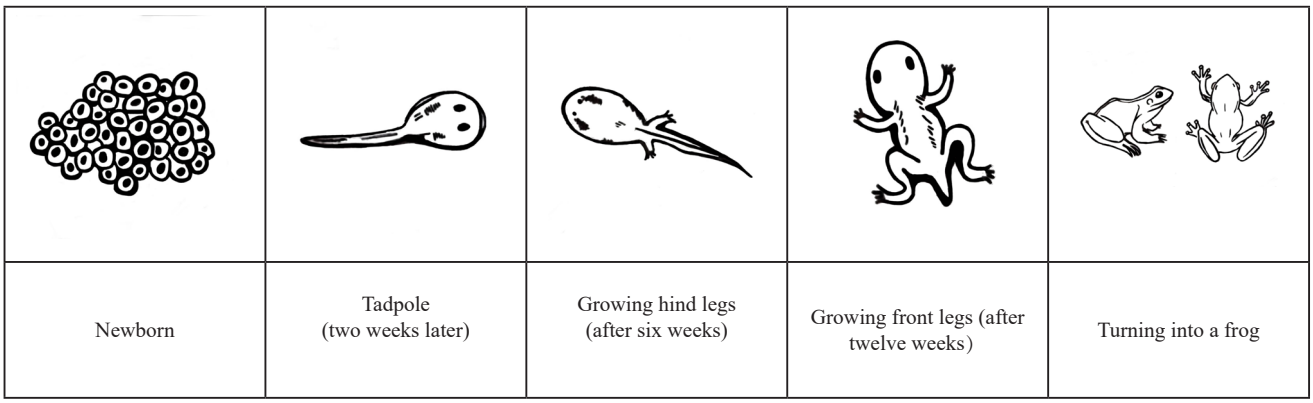


Figure 4. Diagram of frog growth and development.

and development chart to see the Yangshao culture to Majiayao culture development sequence, most of the variants of the frog pattern focus on highlighting the limbs and the head, and there is a clear continuation of the image of the frog image characteristics. By analyzing the chart, many simplifications and variations can be seen in the colored pottery patterns, but most of the frog limbs are emphasized in the characteristics of the frog. From

the folds and curves of the limbs' and toes' composition, we think this variant pattern is the frog pattern in the evolution of the development process; cultural exchanges and integration make part of the frog pattern into the human element. The development and evolution of the relationship between the frog and human patterns in prehistoric pottery reflects the close connection between man and nature and mutual influence.

3. The Cultural Connotations of the Frog Pattern and the Human Pattern

Colored pottery patterns occupy a critical position in prehistory, with deep cultural connotations, not only the embodiment of natural life but also the reflection of the primitive worship of the ancient ancestors, the rich spiritual world, and the artistic expression and thought of the times.

3.1 Cultural Connotation of the Frog Pattern

3.1.1 Reproduction Worship

In primitive societies, due to changes in the natural environment, outbreaks of disease, and social conflicts, the phenomenon of children dying young was widespread, so the ancestors in primitive societies were highly concerned about fertility and reproduction; frogs had a strong reproductive ability so frogs, as the ancestors prayed for reproduction and prosperity, were painted on daily utensils with a self-evident and robust purpose of reproduction worship. In the book *Reproduction Worship Culture* written by Zhao Guohua,[14] the colored pottery frog pattern is analyzed as follows: "The frog pattern was produced in the Chinese matrilineal clan society, and it was the second basic pattern in the cultural relics at that time; in terms of modeling, the frog's abdomen is similar to the abdomen of a pregnant woman, which is the same as the puffed up and rounded, and the frog's mouth is similar to the female's pubic region; in terms of physiology and the clan society and culture, frogs can reproduce, and can give birth to hordes of young overnight." Therefore, the frog pattern, like the fish pattern, symbolises having many children and praying for reproduction in primitive society.

3.1.2 Totem Worship

In primitive clan social life, totem worship symbolised spiritual life and primitive beliefs.[15] Prehistoric humankind living near the water faced natural disasters like droughts and floods. People in early agricultural collection societies, looking forward to a good harvest of crops, were also concerned about the climate but did not understand the natural causes of climate change. Frogs can predict rainfall, and in the face of flooding, they also showed a solid ability to survive, so people mistakenly thought that this was the influence of frogs and began to fear and worship this natural object. In the primitive period, the frog pattern was also used as a totem symbol and was carved on pottery to pray for the blessing of the tribe members. Moreover, in the process of evolution, the frog pattern conveys a particular belief of ancient humankind, which is connected with the traditional concepts and beliefs of the nation. The Li people (黎族) worshipped frog patterns, and the custom of tattooing with frog patterns has long been famous. To this day, geometric frog patterns can be seen in the traditional costumes of the Li people, which tells us about the profound relationship between the people and the frogs.

3.1.3 Moon Worship

Frog patterns also believe that the moon god, primitive ancestors, believes that frogs' bellies rise and fall, similar to the moon's change phase. Yan Wenming thinks that the bird and frog patterns reflect "the worship of the sun god and the moon god,"[16] and Lu Sixian also mentions that "the moon is the essence of water, and the moon has a close relationship with aquatic animals, and as the ancestors did not understand the laws of nature, they thought that the cool wind and frosty dew at night were the tears of the moon spirit scattered in the universe." This moon spirit was the frogs that accompanied the bright moonlight. In ancient mythology, Chang'e is the embodiment of the moon god; Zhang Heng's *Lingxian* (《靈憲》) mentions that "Chang'e then entrusted herself to the moon as a toad," and frogs are affected by the temperature—when the temperature drops to a certain level, they will burrow into the earth to escape the cold. In the spring of the following year, they will come out of the mud to mate and lay their eggs, which was considered to be "resurrected from the dead (死則有育)" in the consciousness of the forefathers.

3.2 Cultural Connotations of the Figure Motifs

3.2.1 Reproduction Worship

Prehistoric humankind attached great importance to life. The population survival rate was meager, people were very eager for the birth and growth of new life, and reproduction was considered a sacred duty. Zhao Guohua[17] said that the people of The Banpo thought of the fish as a symbol of the vulva, and the image of the human face fish patterns shows an implementation of the allegory of the worship of reproduction, the purpose of which is to pray for the population to flourish. This also appeared in a small portion of human sculpture in

the middle and late Neolithic period, where people also had the allegory of fertility worship, such as small sculptures of pregnant women and pottery vessels in the form of human figures. The emergence of this human figure on behalf of the allegory of reproduction also reflects the reverence ancient society had for fertility and reproduction and the understanding of the natural cycle and the force of life.

3.2.2 Witchcraft Activities

Witchcraft activities accompanied the emergence of primitive religion.[18] People in the manufacture of painted pottery depicted dancing figures and two people carrying object patterns, and the depiction can be said to be people showing their daily behavior; it can also be said to be witchcraft or ritual activity. Li Zehou noted that the dancing people's pattern is "to the human body dance standardized realism, a direct expression of the day of the serious and important rituals of sorcery. It was never just a casual dance 'under the tree' or 'on the grass'."[19] Tang Huisheng[20] speculates that the images of the double-carrying pattern are "scenes of primitive 'public' rituals," i.e., rituals in which many people are engaged simultaneously. It can be guessed that witchcraft activities were already every day in the daily activities of the ancestors in the Neolithic period.

3.2.3 Totem Worship

"The Banpo-Primitive Clan Settlement Site in Xi'an"[21] proposed in the presumption of Banpo colored pottery on the human face fish pattern that it may also be associated with Banpo's totem worship and that "human-face Pattern seems to impart human thoughts to fish or imply that fish evolves into humans, or convey the implication of human-headed fish" and can be interpreted as a totem worship object. In response to this view of totem worship, Wang Yitao holds the view that "'Banpo human-face Pattern with two fish-shaped ears' bears the feature of 'fish going through ears' which presents a fish-headed human face, belonging to the half-man and half-fish type of totem, this pattern belongs to the half-human, half-fish, human face, fish head of the totem[22]. Qian Zhiqiang[23] and He Xingliang[24] also wrote articles depicting the rationale of the human face fish totem worship.

Judging from the above analysis, the reasons for the generation of frog patterns and human patterns involve ancient human cognition, religious beliefs, aesthetic concepts, etc., reflecting human life, labor, entertainment, etc., which is not only a kind of decorative expression but also demonstrates the aesthetic concepts and cultural characteristics of the society at that time through different images and shapes. Through the rationale for the generation of frog and human patterns, the two have more convergence, which can be presumed to be that the development of the human pattern and the frog pattern crosses over to a certain extent along with the development of sorcery sayings, totem sayings, and reproduction sayings, etc.

4. Analysis of the Relationship between the Frog Pattern and the Human Pattern

Analyzing the frog and human patterns, we found that the two patterns in the Yangshao culture period have distinctive modeling characteristics and constitute their independent cultural groups. The human pattern in the shape of deformation, but more realistic in copying the human facial features, focuses on highlighting the head of the five features: the mouth, eyes, and nose are complete, and the portrayal of characteristics of the physical pattern of the character is more important to the character's dynamic characteristics, reflecting the character's action. The development of the frog pattern gives more importance to the back, limbs and toes features; the frog pattern sequence experienced by realistic depiction features adjustments of the frog pattern to the shape, back, and movement features to the head, back movement features into a more orderly frog pattern, and then to the back of the frog pattern ornamentation of the limbs. By the development of the late Majiayao culture, the two patterns were not completely isolated, and the connection between the two presented a closer relationship. The variants of the pattern that appeared during this time give a unique region and period and show the general characteristics of the frog pattern and the human pattern of the art pattern, and of the fusion of these variants, we think is the frog pattern, in the evolution of the development process, cultural exchange, and integration of some of the frog pattern into the human element. Moreover, the frog and human patterns have embodied various forms of worship, such as fertility worship, totem worship, sun and moon worship, etc., in terms of their connotation and symbolism. Therefore, from the point of view of their decorative features and cultural connotations, prehistoric frog patterns and human patterns have the same nature. The development and evolution of the frog and human patterns in prehistoric pottery reflect the close contact and mutual influence between man and nature.

Zhengzhou University of Light Industry

YANG YUAN (1975-), Ph.D, Professor and Master of Art and Design School at Zhengzhou University of Light Industry. Research focuses on ancient Chinese art history and the theory of arts.

WANG QIUYU (1997-), a graduate student at Zhengzhou University of Light Industry. Research focuses on ancient Chinese art history and the theory of arts.

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淺析史前彩陶中蛙紋與人紋的關係

楊遠，王秋玉

摘　要：史前時期出現的蛙紋與人紋圖像各有不同，又互為影響。仰紹文化與馬家窯文化早期的蛙紋和人紋較為寫實，蛙紋重點突出背部特徵與肢爪特徵；人紋多突出面部五官特徵或體現人物的動勢，兩個紋樣都有著各自的造型特徵。發展至馬家窯文化中後期，兩者呈現的關係相對密切，而這時期出現的變體紋樣，呈現出獨特的地域性和時代性，表現出蛙紋與人紋藝術紋樣交融的總特徵，這類變體紋樣我們認為是蛙紋在演變發展過程中，文化的交流與融合使得部分蛙紋中融入了人的元素。而且蛙紋與人紋在內涵寓意上，均體現了生殖崇拜、圖騰崇拜、日月崇拜等多種崇拜形式。

關鍵詞：史前彩陶；蛙紋；人紋