

# Analysis of Dragon Decoration in Liao Dynasty

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**Abstract:** *China's long history has given birth to many splendid cultures, among which ornamentation culture occupies a very important position. Among many ornamentation cultures, the ornamentation culture of Liao Dynasty has attracted people's extensive attention because of its diversified types and complex dragon patterns. The study of Wen's culture in Liao Dynasty can explore its inner connotation of grassland nomadic culture through phenomena, and analyze its integration and absorption of Tang Dynasty culture and Qidan culture, which is of great help to the study of the cultural core of ancient China, especially the Qidan nationality. Based on this, this paper analyzes the historical background of the emergence of dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty, and makes an in-depth analysis of the specific categories and characteristics of dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty.*

**Keywords:** *Liao Dynasty; Ornamentation; Dragon pattern style; study*

## 1. Introduction

The Chinese nation has a long history. During the five thousand years of development, several dynasties and nationalities were born. Different nationalities created splendid art and splendid culture in the process of development and integration. Among them, decorative modeling has attracted much attention in ancient people's lives because it can be attached to various daily necessities, and it is also one of the important reference ways to study ancient culture today. Specifically, the types of ancient ornamentation include, but are not limited to, the Eight Diagrams pattern, the Lotus pattern, etc., and the most prominent dragon pattern has attracted people's unanimous attention. The so-called dragon pattern mainly combines the special historical environment, grassland nomadic culture, unique national customs and religious beliefs of the Qidan nationality, and then makes the dragon pattern of Liao Dynasty become a bright pearl in the development of decorative culture in China. Through the analysis of dragon pattern modeling in Liao Dynasty, we can find the comprehensive cultural quality and grassland cultural characteristics behind it, which has made certain contributions to the exchange of diverse national cultures and the inheritance and development of traditional culture in China.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2. The historical background of dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty

Liao Dynasty was a political power established by a minority in the history of our country. Most of the people in this dynasty were Khitans, and in the process of development, it organically integrated its own grassland culture characteristics with the local culture of the Central Plains, thus endowing Liao Dynasty culture with certain simplicity and diversity. Specifically, as for dragon pattern modeling, the main reason for the development of this ornamentation culture is that some skilled craftsmen of the Han nationality entered Qidan to live, and their ornamentation skills were mastered by Liao Dynasty, and some new features emerged in the subsequent development process.

Dragon pattern modeling in Liao Dynasty has very important cultural value. From the current excavation and historical research, dragon pattern modeling in Liao Dynasty is mostly attached to the daily life utensils of the ancient Qidan people, such as bronze mirrors and other bronzes. Although the relevant scholars have not excavated a large number of bronzes at present, the existing utensils have very diversified decorative patterns. At the same time, along with the development of the times and the gradual prosperity of Buddhism and other religions, the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty has also undergone certain changes due to the influence of some foreign cultures. The integration of Tang Dynasty style, local nomadic culture and religious belief culture makes the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty more culturally valuable.

### 3. An analysis of dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty

#### (1) Dragon pattern category

Due to the special historical background of Liao Dynasty, it had to fight with neighboring countries for years, which led to the fact that most bronzes owned by Liao Dynasty could only be used for weapons manufacturing, and few bronzes were used in daily life utensils, and some bronzes were of low quality. However, the dragon pattern contained in bronze devices of Liao Dynasty also showed diversified and unique national characteristics. Specifically, dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty are mainly divided into double dragon pattern, dragon pattern and cloud dragon pattern, etc.

First of all, Shuanglong pattern is mainly shaped by high relief, which occupies an irreplaceable position in the development of decorative patterns in Liao Dynasty. At present, the double dragon pattern is generally excavated in the tombs of Song Dynasty and Liao and Jin Dynasties, so although it is a part of the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty, it also contains a certain type of cultural layout in the Central Plains. This type is characterized by symmetrical arrangement. The direction of the tap is downward, and the body of the dragon is spreading upward, and the surface is depicted with many clear lines, which mainly show irregular octagonal and regular circular shapes.<sup>[2]</sup>

Secondly, Panlong pattern and Yunlong pattern are also very common in chatting with dragon pattern. Compared with Shuanglong pattern, these two patterns pay more attention to the image depiction of dragon pattern, rather than the expression depiction of thread, so they may lack certain vitality and strength. Usually, the main purpose of these two dragon patterns is to pray and express the expectations of Liao people for a better life. Therefore, some auspicious clouds and other patterns are often added to the dragon patterns.

Through the research and analysis of dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty, it can be seen that these patterns and designs, on the basis of the national culture of the Qidan nationality, combined with a certain content of local culture and religious belief in the Central Plains, thus making the cultural connotation behind dragon patterns deeper, and making the research of dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty more historic and practical.

#### (2) Characteristics of dragon pattern

First of all, the overall shape of the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty has some similarities with the local culture of the Central Plains. This is mainly because from the appearance, the dragon pattern on some bronzes in Liao Dynasty can more or less see the shadow of the dragon pattern in Tang Dynasty. For example, the ornamentation of Shuanglong mirror in Liao Dynasty is similar to that of Qianqiu dragon mirror in Tang Dynasty, both of which show the dynamic characteristics of Shuanglong connected end to end. However, it needs to be realized that the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty also has its own uniqueness. For example, the dragon pattern on the double dragon mirror mentioned above is rich in the "wildness" unique to the Qidan nationality. The dragon whiskers on the mirror are intertwined and elegant, which makes the image of the dragon more vivid, thus realizing the innovation and breakthrough of the dragon pattern in the Tang Dynasty to a certain extent. It can be seen that although the dragon pattern in Liao Dynasty absorbed the relevant contents of the Central Plains culture, at the same time, it also added the unique content of advocating freedom and unrestrained national spirit in nomadic grassland culture, which made the dragon pattern more national.

Secondly, the decoration of Shuanglong is exquisite. Due to historical reasons, the number of bronze devices for daily use in Liao Dynasty was small, and they lacked a certain texture and luster, but the dragon carvings on them showed very high quality. The research shows that the dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty are mostly double dragon patterns, and the characteristics of these double paper patterns are that the trunk and limbs of the dragon are more vigorous and vivid, with a vivid feeling. At the same time, the pattern of Long Lin is also very clear and exquisite, and compared with the dragon pattern on bronze devices in the Tang Dynasty, the dragon's mouth in this dragon pattern is wider, and many details in the dragon's mouth are also very clear. This means that the dragon pattern modeling in Liao Dynasty can inherit the advantages of the dragon pattern modeling in Tang Dynasty, and integrate the related contents of the local culture of Qidan nationality, so that the advantages of the two can complement each other, thus making the double dragon pattern in the dragon pattern modeling in Liao Dynasty more vivid and vivid, which also provides high-quality materials for later studies on ornamentation.<sup>[3]</sup>

Finally, the flame bead pattern faith feelings. Bronzes in Liao Dynasty have various forms and combinations of dragon patterns, and many dragons chase after them. Besides, Khitan's belief in various religions adds many decorative patterns to the dragon patterns of Liao Dynasty bronzes, and its

characteristics are far more complicated than those of Tang Dynasty. Among the bronze mirrors with double dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty, 12 ruyi moire patterns in the outer area and 6 ruyi moire patterns in the inner symmetry set off the dragon pattern rich and full, echoing the dragon pattern in the mirror, which is beyond the reach of the tang dynasty bronze mirror. The bead pattern in the double bead pattern of Shuanglong Opera in Inner District is the flame bead pattern that often matches the dragon pattern in bronze mirror pattern of Liao Dynasty, hence the name of Shuanglong pattern of "Dragon Opera Flame bead pattern". The existence of flame bead pattern in bronze wares of Liao Dynasty proves that the Khitan nationality was influenced by Buddhist culture at that time. The combination of dragon pattern and flame bead pattern is a new attempt and breakthrough of Khitan people in bronze ornament, which enriches the development of bronze ornament, and also reflects the result of the integration of minority culture with Han culture and religious belief.<sup>[4]</sup>

#### 4. Example Analysis of Liao Dragon Mirror

Since 916 AD, Yelubaoji unified the Khitan ministries and established a powerful Khitan state, which was changed to Liao state in 947 AD and destroyed by Jurchen nationality in 1125. During its existence for more than 200 years, Liao confronted the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song Dynasty successively, which made the contacts between the Khitan nationality, Han nationality and the surrounding ethnic minorities more frequent and deepened their economic and cultural exchanges. Influenced by the historical habits of the feudal dynasty in the Central Plains, Liao Dynasty also liked to use dragon patterns as decorative patterns, which were widely used in decorative fabrics, murals, stone carvings, bronze mirrors, gold and silver wares, etc. So far, the earliest dragon pattern of Liao Dynasty was found, which was the "Long Live Taiwan" silver inkstone box of the tomb of Yeluyu in the fourth year of Emperor Taizong (941). The Khitan worshiped the dragon for a long time. As early as before the founding of Liao Dynasty, Khitan ancestor Qi Shou Khan called his residence "Dragon Court" and later changed it to "Longhuazhou". It is recorded in historical documents that before the death of Liao Taizu, "the Yellow Dragon winds up in Zicheng, and it can grow for a mile. It is dazzling and enters the palace." The dragon pattern decorated on the bronze mirror contains the moral of avoiding all evils and learning from all things, so the dragon pattern mirror is one of the favorite bronze mirrors of the Khitans. Here are a few dragon mirrors of Liao Dynasty, so as to get a glimpse of leopards.<sup>[5]</sup>

##### (1) Monolithic dragon mirror

In the early Liao Dynasty, due to contact with the Central Plains and frequent wars, Han craftsmen were plundered to Shangjing, near Huangfu and other places, thus Liao developed its own handicraft industry and its bronze mirror manufacturing industry. The dragon pattern in the early Liao Dynasty inherited the style of Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties, and it was beautifully made and magnificent. The most typical one is a single dragon mirror unearthed from the tomb of Yeluyu, Liao, in Arukeerqin Banner, Chifeng City, Inner Mongolia, in 1992, which was buried in Datong for four years (941). It is a round button. 28 in diameter and 1 cm thick. The back of the mirror is embossed with a four-claw Panlong, full of dragon shape, with its head held up, and its mouth open with beads, which are the mirror buttons. The dragon's body is fat, with layers of scales, its claws are vigorous and powerful, and its tail is intertwined with its hind legs. The dragon pattern is gilded with gold and has a beautiful shape. From its expression, the figure of the dragon pattern in the Tang Dynasty can be seen faintly. The more than 70 years from the early Emperor Shengzong of Liao to the late Emperor Xingzong of Liao were the most prosperous period in the history of Liao, and also the "golden age" in the history of Khitan nation development. An important historical event that marked the prosperity of Liao in the middle period was the signing of the "alliance of Wuyuan" between Song and Liao in 1004, which ended the state of war between the two countries and made the northern border of China peaceful for more than one hundred years. With the economic exchanges between Liao and Song dynasties, the cultural influence is inevitable, so the bronze mirrors in the middle Liao dynasty have the characteristics of those in Song dynasty. At this time, the single dragon mirror, the bronze mirror unearthed in Majiagou, Kangzhangzi Village, Wanyuandian, lingyuan city, Liaoning Province, is typical, and its age should be later than that of the Holy Emperor. This dragon mirror is round, wide and flat, with a diameter of 25 and a width of 1.5 cm. The button is embossed with a dragon's mouth elongated, with a mane behind the short neck, three pointed feet, a long tip and an inner hook, and its tail is under the hind legs. The dragon body is winding and circling, which is longer than that of the early dragon pattern, with flowing moire between the head and tail and around it.<sup>[6]</sup>

##### (2) Shuanglong tattoo mirror

Shuanglong grain mirror began to appear in the middle of Liao Dynasty. During this period, the

dragon grain mirror was made finely, depicted delicately, the mirror composition was full, and the mirror body was enlarged and thickened. It can be said that at this time, the mirror industry in Liao Dynasty reached its heyday just like the social situation in Liao. In 1994, in Xiaolagou, Balipu Village, Lingyuan Town, lingyuan city, Liaoning Province, a double dragon tattoo mirror with 9 circles and small buttons was unearthed from the Liao Tomb. The central relief of the dragon was two glittering dragons. The dragon body was vigorous, and the two dragons were connected with each other head and tail, which seemed to be walking on the clouds and fog, and it was very dynamic. On the edge of the mirror, there is a bead pattern and a bead pattern for a week, which sets off the theme pattern dragon pattern rich and full, echoing the two dragons from afar. On the other hand, the excellent work of Liao Mirror was unearthed from the tower base of Tazi Mountain, Hongmaozi Township, Fuxin County, Liaoning Province. This tower was built in the Daozong period, and the mirror was produced at the time of the Holy Emperor, 10 with a diameter of 38.5, a width of 1.4 along the edge and a thickness of 0.4 cm. Semi-spherical button, with thick iron bars in the mirror button, may be used for hanging. The back of the mirror is carved with thin lines, with symmetrical and delicate lines, full picture and wide and flat mirror edges. This mirror is decorated with four auspicious clouds on the outside of the button. The main part of the mirror is two dragons playing with beads. Double dragons are chasing each other end to end. The dragon body is cleverly bent to avoid the auspicious clouds in the middle, and it seems that the clouds can see the sun. The gap between the dragon body and the auspicious clouds is carved with triangular assorted patterns. The whole ornamentation has the grandeur of Liao Dynasty, without losing the agility and delicacy of Song Mirror, which is the essence of the cultural integration of Song and Liao dragon motifs. Buddhism and Taoism prevailed in the middle and late Liao Dynasty, and the dragon pattern also showed religious color, with the idea of transcending the secular world, but it lacked vitality and vitality on the whole. Shuanglong grain mirror unearthed in Xibaba Village, Tayingzi Township, Fuxin County, Liaoning Province, was popular in the middle and late Liao Dynasty.<sup>[7]</sup>

### (3) Capricorn tattoo mirror

A special pattern in Liao Dragon Mirror is Capricorn pattern, also known as fish dragon pattern. Dragon pattern is a common pattern in Liao culture and art, and it has been eclectic since Buddhism was introduced into China, forming a Chinese Capricorn. The Khitan people are also interested in Capricorn pattern, and have integrated their own characteristics. This fish dragon mirror, 12.5 cm in diameter, has a bridge-shaped button, a Capricorn with a dragon head outside the button, two outstretched wings on the front fins, a curly and strong tail, and neat and fine sea water lines on the back of the mirror. Eight-petal flower shape, sub-shaped inner edge, plain wide edge, unique shape.<sup>[8]</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The development of culture is inseparable from the influence of social politics and economy, and the social politics and economy in a specific historical period can be obtained by snooping on the culture and art in that historical period. The research on the dragon pattern of bronzes in Liao Dynasty can deeply analyze the integration process of ancient Chinese national cultures to a certain extent, which is of great significance to the dynamic development of Chinese national cultures. The national characteristics and the worship of the Qidan nationality for dragons make the dragon patterns in Liao Dynasty freer, the detailed textures more obvious, and the overall feeling of the dragon is rough and bold. Although the domineering of the dragon patterns in Tang Dynasty and previous dynasties has been weakened, the dragon patterns of bronzes in Liao Dynasty are similar to those in subsequent dynasties, laying a foundation for studying the evolution of dragon patterns in subsequent dynasties, enriching the structure, shape and style of decorative patterns, and providing valuable reference for the development of dragon patterns in later dynasties.

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