



**HAL**  
open science

## Agro-pastoral rituals and shaman dances of Dahongyan rock painting, Guizhou, Southwestern China, new investigations

Anne Dambricourt Malassé, Bo Cao, Qiansheng You, Pu Zhang

### ► To cite this version:

Anne Dambricourt Malassé, Bo Cao, Qiansheng You, Pu Zhang. Agro-pastoral rituals and shaman dances of Dahongyan rock painting, Guizhou, Southwestern China, new investigations. *Quaternary International*, 2019, 507, pp.43-52. 10.1016/j.quaint.2018.12.011 . hal-02169679

**HAL Id: hal-02169679**

**<https://hal.science/hal-02169679>**

Submitted on 22 Oct 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Agro-pastoral rituals and shaman dances of Dahongyan rock painting, Guizhou, Southwestern China, new investigations

Anne Dambricourt-Malassé<sup>a</sup>, Cao Bo<sup>b</sup>, You QianSheng<sup>c</sup>, Zhang Pu<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Corresponding author [anne.malasse@mnhn.fr](mailto:anne.malasse@mnhn.fr)

UMR 7194, Département Homme et Environnement, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Institut de Paléontologie Humaine, 75013, Paris, France.

<sup>b</sup> Guizhou Provincial Culture Relics and Archaeology Institute, Guiyang 550004, Guizhou, China.

<sup>c</sup> Guizhou Science and Technology Publishing House, Guiyang 550001, Guizhou, China.

<sup>d</sup> Guizhou Mountainous Resources Institute, Guizhou Academy of Science, 550001, Guiyang, Guizhou, China.

## Abstract

Guizhou was for a long time the wildest and the most enclave province of South China, its ethnographic, historical, archaeological and prehistoric researches are recent, especially that of the rock paintings (Wang and Luo, 1989; Cao, 2004; He, 2006; Yu, 2009). Dahongyan, or the Great Red Cliff, is the first rock art locality known in the Province. The research program is conducted by Cao Bo, vice-director of the Guizhou Provincial Culture Relics and Archaeology Institute. In 2012, a cooperation has developed with the Mountain Resources Institute, Academy of Sciences of Guizhou, and the Department of Prehistory of the Natural Museum of Natural History, Paris, France. The first description of the rock paintings has been presented at the IFRAO (International Federation of Rock Art Organizations) world Congress in July 2014, at Guiyang (Cao et al., 2014). The meeting was co-organized with the People's Government of Guiyang Municipality and the Rock Art Research Association of China (RARAC). The

preliminary studies of some frescoes put in light ritual shamanic practices from agro-pastoral peoples before rice cultivation, in relation with animal spirits symbolized by the buffalo and the python. Three scenes are described with new observations and interpreted in the historical context of ethnic minorities and their cultural traditions devoid of written language. They have been named "The shaman dance", "The dance lesson" and "The meeting".

Keywords: Rock paintings, Holocene, Guizhou, masks, dance, shaman

## 1. The context

### 1.1 Geology and prehistory

The Guizhou province is located on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, the largest karst system in the world formed during the uplift of the Tibetan Plateau. Two thirds of its surface area (174 000 km<sup>2</sup>) rises from East to West from 1000 meters to peaks of 3000 meters (Fig.1). The limestone rock fissured by the tectonics, and dissolved by underground rivers, has formed innumerable galleries, while the river abundantly fed by the monsoon, undergoes a height difference of more than 2000 m over relatively short distances (less than 200 km) resulting in the formation of immense cliffs and precipices. This karstic environment is favorable for the preservation of prehistoric sites, more than 300 have been inventoried with at least 40 rock painting localities (Cao and You, 2014; Cao, 2015).

The climate is subtropical and the vegetation is luxuriant, the biodiversity is extremely rich as in the Fanjingshan Nature Reserve in Northeastern Guizhou with nearly 800 species of vertebrates (reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals).

The human presence has been established since at least the Middle Pleistocene at Panxian

Dadong (300-130 ka, Liu et al., 2013), Tongzi (> 240 ka, Zhang et al., 2014, Dambricourt et al., 2018) and Guanyindong (Li and Wen, 1978). However the studies on Holocene settlements are recent and the origins of the rice cultivation, for instance, are still little investigated (Li et al., 2016). The earliest evidence in the world is in the Yangzi Jiang delta with Hemudu (7050-5050 BP) and Pengtoushan (6000 BP) (Sun, 2013) (Fig 1), whereas Dahongyan is located in the southwest of Guizhou, close to the Guangxi and the Yunnan. According to Zhang and Hsiao-Chun (2010), the rice cultivation appears much later in Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou after 2500 BC. On the other, hand the millet cultivation was practiced in southern China since Neolithic (4000-3500 BP) “Millet cannot be ignored in the subsistence of most parts of South China during the Neolithic period” (Zhenhua et al., 2018).

Fig. 1.

## 1.2 The human landscape

Peoples living in Guizhou belong to the ethnic minorities Miao (Hmong) and Bouyei (Buyi). The Miao are the descendants of the 'Chi You' tribes who lived more than 5000 years BC in the plains of Central China, north of the Yangzi Jiang, and who migrated during the 9th century AD in the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. These tribes are farmers vowing a cult to the water buffalo who symbolizes the strength and the prosperity, this bovine is often associated with the dragon, both being regarded as the most beneficial elements for the society. For instance, in the eastern region of Guizhou, near Taijiang, peoples organize a festival called “Bu Mai” during which they sacrifice buffaloes and interpret an antiphonal epics tradition with strong songs. The dances, the sacred role of the drums are well identified: “activities include dancing, singing, feasting and the staging of very involved rituals involving the making and use of sacred drums in which ancestors are said to live” (Bender, 1999, p. 88).

The Bouyei live in the south of Guizhou and are coming from the Luo Yue, one of the numerous tribes from the Bai Yue peoples, or the “hundred Viet”, known between the first millennium BC and the first millennium AD. They lived in the South of the Yangzi Jiang, or the Yangtze River, between North Vietnam and Southern China (Meacham, 1996). The Luo Ye were animists, hunters and fishermen, they cultivated rice, raised buffalo and pork. According to Sima Qian (145-87 BC), these peoples tattooed their bodies to protect themselves against the water dragon, an aquatic animal whose body was originally that of a snake before becoming mythical. Confucius (551-479 BC) reports the Luo Ye like working while singing and dancing, disguised with leaves and plants, and drinking water impregnated with a forest plant called chá, a tea. Lu Yu, the author of “The classic of the tea” (Ch'a Ching, Lu 760-780 CE in Carpenter, 1974), explained that this plant grows in the Yunnan, nearby of Guizhou. The Buiyei and the Miao are animist and devoid of written language, no tradition has been kept of the memory of a rock art culture. For this reason we are particularly interested in the agro-pastoral representations in Guizhou, especially the one of Dahongyan located in the territory of the Qianxinan Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture. The comparison between the frescoes, the recent Neolithic discoveries and the history of the cultural traditions enlighten the anthropological interpretation.

## 2 Dahongyan, "The Great Red Cliff"

### 2.1 The site

Dahongyan (25 °08 '57.6' 'N, 105 ° 51' 18.9 " E) is located near the Shizu village, in Shaping township, Zhenfeng district, at 542 meters above the sea level. The site is an impressive limestone cliff, 200 meters high and 500 meters long, overlooking the Luofan River, a small tributary of the Beipan, a river from the Xi Jiang's watershed - the Pearl River - which empties into the South China Sea between Macao and Hong Kong.

The rock art site exposed south is difficult to access and well protected by the geomorphology, it extends along the foot of the cliff, the ground is narrow and bordered by a large scree cone particularly steep (Fig. 2). The rock paintings form a dozen independent frescoes on both external sides of the Xiadong cave with more than one thousand signs in other color. Some scenes are 30 meters above the ground and have likely required bamboo scaffoldings, today they need special montage techniques for photography and observations (You, 2016), some are at man's height but the rugged morphology of the ground entails the accessibility to the wall. The cave is devoid of figuration and its use for artistic events remains to be demonstrated. The paintings are distinguished by the diversity of their themes with fauna (bear, deer, bovid, equid, snake, peacock), plants (tea leaves, millet), human and buffalo masks, dancers, positive and negative hands, arrows and curved lines.

Fig. 2.

The datings of the paintings are in progress. The low calcification of certain rock paintings contrasts with the thick crusting on handprints dated to over 6000 BP (Cao et al., 2014; You and Cao, 2014), these differences added to the agro-pastoral figurations, mean that Dahongyan was dedicated to the rock art since Early Holocene and during several millennia.

This study is an anthropological lecture of the frescoes realized on the field by the four authors. The method is the observation of the original rock paintings, the analysis of the pictures taken by the archaeophotographer You Qiansheng and decal with tracing paper to clarify the lecture of some figures. Significant technical details have been taken into account and discussed. Each fresco is described, then the interpretation is developed giving the priority to the coherence

between the details of a same rock painting and between the themes of the frescoes.

## 2.2 The rock paintings

### 2.2.1 The shaman dance

The fresco is the furthest from the cave, the graphic is rich and precise and represents four aligned masked characters, the fourth is almost erased (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3.

The first character about one meter height, is the most complete and the only one seen from the front, he is remarkable by his composition organized around a mask which goes down up to the interleg. The facial part of the human mask has two slots corresponding to the eyes, a stylized nose with two nostrils and a grinning mouth with both lower extremities pulled down (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4.

In the prolongation of the nose to the top of the head, one notes a central sheath on which are fixed on each side, two large rings decorated with grass. From this central sheath emerges a horn in frontal view, of an exceptional size as shown by the following character seen in profile with the point directed towards the back. Each of the two rings receives a smaller horn from the large masks representing two buffalo heads. The buffalo mask on the left side is held by the right hand and is easily identifiable by two horns, decorated with circles and grasses, and by the eyes, the muzzle, the two nostrils and the left ear. The one on the right side of the character is much more altered, the horns are visible as well as an ear and the nostrils.

The decal of the photography with tracing paper reveals the perfect superposition of the left buffalo's mask on the right one, when one operates a symmetry on its preserved parts (ear, horn and nostrils) (Fig. 4).

The lower part of the human mask is prolonged by a kind of U-shaped tube fixed on both sides of the human mask. The left arm wears a kind of cymbal on the wrist reminiscent of the central circle drawn on the front of the buffalo, the fingers hold a few grasses and are closed on a long serpentine form rolled up in front of the feet (Fig. 3). The legs give the orientation of the walk, the character turns on the left in the direction of the one who precedes it. He wears short pants, large fringes cover the top of each pant leg and their lower edge widens and ends in small fringes. The bare legs are perhaps the oblong forms that prolong the pants.

The serpentine form continues up to the face of the second character and ends with the head of a python recognizable in profile with the eye, the nostril, the open mouth, the bifid tongue and the upper hook (Fig. 5). Many rings underline his body and make it possible to reconstruct his path to the first character, at the level of his left hand in a fusion with a semi-circle, then until the serpentine form rolled at his feet. Two small circles are visible in association with the serpentine form near the hand and the feet of this first character (Fig. 3).

Fig. 5.

The composition of the second personage is remarkable by the perspective effect of four large horns gushing over a mask (Fig. 5). Each one is decorated with sheaves of grasses and bunches of long stems. The head is raised and shows again the central sheath fixed on the frontal part of the mask in which a very large horn is enshrine. The three other horns are much larger than those of the buffalo's masks, unfortunately their articulation with the upper part of the human mask is no longer visible. This one is seen in profile, with the eye slit, the nose and nostril underlined by a clear space, the cheek with a long comma, the lips, the chin and the neck. The rest of the body is erased with traces of enigmatic semi-circles. The identifiable clothes is the short pants with ornaments, the arms are bare. From the third character nothing remains but a grimacing mask,



two large horns and two smaller ones on the forehead, the mask's decorations including grass sheaves and an enigmatic semi-circle which resembles the one held by the first shaman.

The very rectilinear lines of the fringes, the perfect symmetry of the two buffalo masks, the regular curve of the circles or semi-circles despite the rough and irregular surfaces of the rock suggest the use of a model rather than freehand drawing.

#### The agro-pastoral data

The grasses species fixed on the horns is identifiable by the glume (hard envelope of the grain) whose apex is prolonged by a long stiff fiber (Fig. 4), these glumes evoke the *Coix lacryma jobi*, also commonly known as “Chinese pearl barley”, a native species of millet close to sorghum and originated from the wetlands of Southeast Asia. This rock painting and its agro-pastoral ritual likely predate the introduction of rice cultivation in these mountainous regions. Regarding the buffalo horns, the variety of their size is observed today with the South Asian water buffalo *Bubalus bubalis*, the swamp type may have originated in China and was domesticated about 4000 BP. Large snakes are known in Guizhou with the *Python reticularis* which can measure more than 10 meters long.

#### Interpretation

The spatial composition of the characters creates an animation that gives significance to their body language. When the first character is walking, his right hand can move on the right side. The movement becomes simultaneously that of the grimacing human mask and of the two bovines. This gesture evokes the ploughman behind his hitch with two buffaloes like today in Guizhou. In this fresco, the python connects the characters with his head at the level of a human face like the buffalo masks. This representation evokes the Chinese tradition recalled by Sima Qian and who believed in the beneficial spiritual forces from their buffaloes and a mythic snake. On the other hand, the association between the dance and the shamanic trance in agro-pastoral

cultures is well known in Chinese ethnic minorities: “In South China, mention has been made of primarily the mediums of folk religion who were able to establish contacts with spirits and gods through trance or demonic possessions. Their vocational experiences induced by specific guardian spirits, and the manner of their practices had many similarities with the shamans of ethnic minority groups, and consequently, it is not surprising when Chinese sources refer to both types of specialists as “wu” meaning witch or sorcerer” (Seiwert, 1987).

The use of the mask is attested in central China for more than 2000 years (Granet, 1919, 1926 in Beaud 2016) and their shamanic function is no doubt: “The nuo character refers to exorcism ceremonies performed by masked officiants. The ceremonies to which this term is applied refer to the expulsion of the used energies of the year and a purification to welcome the news» (Beaud, 2016).

The strong coherence of the paintings with these Chinese traditions allows to recognize the painting as one of four shamans proceeding in a ritual seasonal dance driving out the hostile spirits, for example from the crops of millet. The Dahongyan dance can be understood as an exorcist ritual, impressive by the scary human masks and perhaps by sound percussions between the cymbal on the wrist and the central circle on the buffalo’s forehead. The dating of this scene is approximate, after the domestication of the buffalo (4000 BC) and likely before the consumption of rice in west-southern China (2500 BC).

### 2.2.2 The dance lesson

Fig. 6

The fresco is two meters high from the floor and about one meter long, the paintings form a palimpsest. In the left area, a large surface is covered by a dark red color with seven negative

hands and four positive phalanges superimposed in its lower part (Fig. 6). At the right top of this red surface, a human mask appears in profile, facing to the left and painted directly on the limestone rock. The mask is below a row of eight dancers, a vertical line symbolizes each one and four downward sloping lines represent the arms and the legs, the row is crossed by a curved line associated with punctiforms (Fig. 7A). This curve extends on the red surface below a second curved trait. Right of the dancers, there are eleven traces of phalanges wiped on the limestone, and below, a thick positive right hand covers the dorsal curvature of a bovine silhouette looking towards the left.

Fig. 7.

Then, as if coming from the rump of the buffalo, is a very small bovine with his horns, the head turned to the right (Fig. 6). Above, we observe a large equid very faded, drawn in full and in a yellow color with the snout covering the large red surface. This drawing is very much dimmed. A human leg walking towards the left, is visible behind the head of the small buffalo with the calf, the knee, the ankle and the heel. Such a pattern is found again on another fresco. The most remarkable is below the profile of the large bovine despite a missing part due to a bursting of the rock. The composition is declined from top to bottom first by a row of eight positive hands, the two central are the left and the right, the others prints are the right hand like the one on the buffalo's back. Below the hands, there are prints of phalanges organized at least in twelve groups of three fingers, then, below again, several punctiforms correspond to the fingers also organized three by three. A dozen of herringbones are interposed between the punctiforms and the phalanges. The points are organized from bottom to top, first vertically, then inclined according to the orientation of the herringbones and converging towards the two central hands (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8.

To the right of this composition (abstraction made of a black modern and naive graffiti), at least sixteen positive right hands appear, then a human mask looking to the left and an arm with a hand (Fig. 6 and 7B). The two sets of negative and positive hands are distinct and do not correspond to the same hand, on the dark red color surface, the fingers are wider apart and it seems to be the one of a left hand. Unfortunately, the surface of the rock is destroyed between the two units. Just above there is an enigmatic surface with excrescences and a large oval in its center (Fig. 6 and 9).

### Interpretation

When the observer is near the rock painting, the first look is on the positive fingers, phalanges and flattened hands. The movements of the fingers are convergent towards the two central hands. The gestures of the observer on the limestone (virtually), gives a rhythm in four times that reads from bottom to top: "one", the three central fingers, "two", the three central phalanges, "three", the flat of the right hand and "four" the two hands. The gestures are repeated as shown by many sequences. The figure immediately on the left, with its excrescences and a large oval in its center, remained enigmatic until the decal of the fingers revealed their spatial and convergent organization towards the phalanges and the two central hands with a repetitive movement on the wall. The rhythm of the gestures on a stone recalls exactly the one on a drum. Yet, this enigmatic figure should be coherent with the very precise details of the fresco and should be understood as any other signs. In other extant tribes with shamanic practices, this figure evokes spontaneously a buffalo's rawhide with the pointed growths corresponding to the parts stretched by thongs, and the large oval corresponding to the future skin of a drum. A rawhide is an untanned leather but treated to lengthen its conservation. It has the particularity of softening when soaked in water and of becoming hard as wood once dried. The oval drawn on the rock covers the maximal surface of

the illustrated rawhide, this technic for the making of drum skins is still used by Native Americans (Fig. 9).

The drum is the sacred instrument that allows the communication of the spirits during the dance and this practice is clearly drawn with the masked characters of the “shaman dance”. Either this strange shape is an extraordinary coincidence without meaning among the fresco dominated by the dance, the rhythm and the necessity to communicate with the spirits, either it appears logically as part of a technical lesson with simple drawings and logical signs such as the prints of the fingers, the phalanges and the hands on the wall like on the drum. This figure can be understood as part of a figurative explanation included in a shaman culture devoid of written language and in order to transmit the technics with the meaning of the trance during the dance.

Fig. 9.

The spatial composition of the fingers, phalanges, hands, dancers, masks, rawhide and the bovine profile, suggests a lesson of the technics: take the skin of a sacrificed buffalo (the isolated and large red hand on the bovine profile), prepare a rawhide and drawing a large oval for the drum, likely drawing the expression of the masks on the rawhide before cutting them. Nearby, the rhythm on the drum is given by the sequence of the fingers, phalanges and hands. Put together, each isolated figures finds a function in association with the fresco of the “shaman dance” thanks to the grimacing human masks.

This interpretation is all the more relevant because there is no reason to doubt that shamans, devoid of written language, would not have chosen their rock art to keep and transmit their agro-pastoral spiritual traditions with the drum as their most significant and sacred instrument. An interesting question is the female and/or male identity of the shamans who drew the fresco, for

instance among the Native American, the Bison rawhide have been prepared by women and in north-eastern China, the site of Dongshanzui (4000-3500 BC), Hongshan Culture, in the Liaoning Province, provided small female figurines interpreted as accessories of witchcraft used by shamanesses for success of conception and reproduction (Liu, 2017). Snow (2013) has suggested that the sexual dimorphism of handprints could be deduced by the morphometric of the fingers.

All this coherent with observations in southwestern China: “Ritual priests are, however, responsible not only for the performance of various religious ceremonies but also for transmitting traditional knowledge and mythology. Both faculties are acquired during a lengthy period of training; sometimes the office passes from father to son. The mediums or "shamans" on the other hand, generally obtain no systematic training or education, but they must have a particular psychic dispositions which manifests itself in trance experiences and demonic possessions. Contrary to ritual priests, the mediums are often quite female » (Seiwert, 1987).

The question is open and attractive: “In China, we note that dance and invocation seem valued probably more than elsewhere. The drum of spirits favored the trance of these beings (...) some of them wore masks (...) thus associated with animals to which they were linked by protection relationships (...). It is very likely that at the origin shamanic function was assumed in China, both by men than by women. Many texts, among the oldest, distinguish indeed shamans (xi) and shamanesses (wu)” (Mathieu, 1987).

### 2.2.3 The meeting

The limestone rock has been covered by an orange fund before the scene was painted in a strong red. The fresco shows two characters seen in profile looking at each other separated by a vertical

line (Fig.10).

Fig. 10.

The left one seems backed, the face looks right, the head is covered by a headdress with a horn (or its symbol) seen in profile, he wears a flared trouser towards the bottom but the feet are not drawn, he is holding two slender objects one which evokes a bow. The second character is more extravagant with a disproportionate face looking to the left, and a headdress which ornaments are partially erased. The head seems connected to the body by a thin neck above a breast and a female dress with a long train. Nor the feet, both the arms and the hands have been painted, while a triangular shape has been drawn at the place of the belly. Behind this character, the artist represented the profile of a bird with the long plumage of a peacock. His head is above the human headdress, looking towards the first character, with a large eye and a small beak, the upper part of his wing is covered by a serpentine form which entwines the plumage and covers the train before getting lost on the rock wall.

Interpretation

The proximity of Guizhou with Yunnan favored contacts with the Dai community which extends to Burma, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand and whose famous rituals are the peacock dance with drums in python skin. Moreover at the boundary between Yunnan and Sichuan, matriarchal tribes still exist with the Moso, or Na, (Xiaowei, 2016) and with the Mnong in the highlands of central Vietnam. The choice to keep the memory of this meeting in a shamanic locality such as the Dahongyan cliff, suggests an important event such as a peace dialogue between two tribal chiefs, one could be a woman with shamanic power as suggested by the associated animals and a body with strange shapes and proportions by opposition to the first character.

Other frescoes

Two frescoes repeat the previous themes but they are especially extravagant without order. The first is very faded but the painting still shows two legs dancing on tip toes, an arm with an ornament at the wrist similar to the one of the first shaman (Fig. 4) , a buffalo head with a rolled horn and a semi-circle at the level of the legs. The second panel is on the ceiling of a small rock shelter, one part is covered by dark red, nearby, and the rock painting is a sort of pot-pourri, mixing the head of a snake prolonged by its serpentine form body, two or three human legs, a wreath of *Coix lagryma jobi* and leaves (Fig. 11). These plant leaves likely contain hallucogenic substances.

Fig. 11.

### 3 Discussion

One of the main themes of Dahongyan is the dance with the masks, the trance and the rhythm that allow the communication of the animal spirits with the shaman. An enigmatic figure of the fresco called “the dance lesson” is interpreted as a buffalo’s rawhide because its shape and details are coherent with the real technics, as well as with the order of painted fingers and hands which is similar to the rhythm on the drum to go into a trance. The paintings reveal that these peoples mastered the cut of leather necessary for the drums and also the painting technics to transmit their traditions. They were able to cut any form in rawhide when the skin was still flexible, like human masks for example. Today the Dixi masks of Guizhou are made of wood or paper mache but the Bouyei and the Miao do not practice leatherwork and tannery. These traditions disappeared.

The regularity of circular or symmetrical paintings suggests the use of a model. A hypothesis suggested by one of us (A. Dambricourt Malassé) would be the use of stencil in leather, drawn and cut in the rawhide and then fixed on bamboo before stiffening. This suggestion could be



tested by experimentation. The function of the painter could be the one of the shaman who prepared the drum, he had only to affix the hard leather stencil on the rocky wall before projecting the pigments like for his negative hands. Stencils in leather have never been discovered in protohistoric excavations but it is also true for the drums and all materials perishable in sub-tropical climate as the tools in bamboo (Bar Yosef et al., 2012).

#### 4 Conclusions

Archaeology of shamanism is a recent field of research (Dragos et al., 2017, 2018) and the study of Dahongyan provides an important contribution for the development of this anthropological science in China. The monumental cliff has been chosen for rock art for more than 6000 years BP, some scenes attest of hunt traditions but others are an exceptional testimony of shamanic practices among agro-pastoral peoples who had domesticated the buffalo prior to rice cultivation. The best-preserved frescoes reveal information about the animism of these peoples who practiced rock art in absence of writing and for whom the water buffalo, the python and the peacock were an integral part of their rituals. These agro-pastoral peoples were close to their buffaloes, not only for plowings, but also for their skin, likely for clothes, shoes and bags, this proximity was also the one of an animist relationship through the sound of the drums confectioned with the buffalo hide. The graphic of the dance with four shamans shows the kind of artistic creation they were capable of like fantastic masks, complex in their organization and monumental sizes. The painting of this dance explains how these agro-pastoral peoples symbolized their connections with animal spirits, they created masks in order to facilitate the fusion of human and animal as shown here by the grinning human face articulated with the horns of two buffalo heads. With such masks, the horns of buffaloes become the horns of the human mask, their head forms only one face animated by the hand of the shaman guiding the movements of the three masks, like the plowman who guides his hitch with the cord attached to

the nostrils of his two buffaloes. This fresco explains that during the trances of shamanic dances, the human beings, the buffaloes and the python form a community with a common spiritual language against the hostile spirits. This tradition is attested in the Chinese literature since Sima Qian (145-87 BC) and has been painted at Dahongyan for long a time likely for its teaching and transmission.

### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the China 13th five-year national key research and development project "Karst Plateau Stone Desertification Synthesis Control and Mountain Tourism Industry Technology Demonstration Project Assignment, (2016YF C0502606)", the Guizhou scientific research institution service enterprise action plan project "Guizhou Characteristic Cultural Tourism Industry Service Platform Construction (Qian Ke He [2015] 4014)" and the UMR 7194 CNRS-Department of Prehistory, National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France. Dr. Anne Dambricourt Malassé is particularly grateful to Pr. Bahadur Kotlia for his invitation to participate in the special issue dedicated to "Holocene Civilization".

### References

- Bar Yosef, O., Eren, M.I., Yuan, J., Cohen, D.J., Li, Y., 2012. Were bamboo tools made in prehistoric Southeast Asia? An experimental view from South China. *Quaternary International*, 269, 9-21.
- Beaud, S., 2016. Masques de Chine, visages du *nuo* : du patrimoine à l'art premier. In: *L'habillage des choses de l'art, Ateliers d'Anthropologie*, 43.
- Bender, M., 1999. Antiphonal epics of the Miao (Hmong) of Guizhou, China. In: Read MacDonald M. R. (Ed), *Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook*. Routledge,

Oxon, New-York, pp. 88-90.

Carpenter, F. R., 1974. *The Classic of Tea*. Little Brown Company, Boston and Toronto.

Cao, B., 2004. Study on human and animal paintings in Longli Wushan, Guizhou. *Guizhou ethnic studies*, 03.

Cao, B., Zhang, P., Shen, G., Zhao, J., Dambricourt Malassé, A., Paillet, P., You, Q., Huang, J., 2014. The rock art site of Shizhucun, Guizhou Province. IFRAO world Congress, 16-18 July 2014, Guiyang, Guizhou Province, Abstract.

Cao, B., 2015. Research and study on rock painting sites of Guizhou province. *Guizhou culture and history*, 04 : 119-122.

Cao, B., Zhang, P., Dambricourt Malassé, A., Shen, G., You, Q., 2016. Les danses chamanes du site rupestre de Dahongyan, Province du Guizhou, Chine du Sud. *Plastir, Plasticités, Sciences, Arts*, 37, 1-16.

Dambricourt Malassé, A., Zhang, P., Wils, P., 2018. A new molar in the Middle Pleistocene hominid assemblage of Yanhuidong (Tongzi, South China). *Acta Anthropologica Sinica*, 37, 1, 1-17.

Dragos, G., Pasztor, E., Bender, H., Nash, G., 2017. *Archaeological approach to shamanism. Mind body, nature and culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle.

Dragos, G., Nash, G., Bender, H., Pasztor, E., 2018. *Lands of the Shamans. Archaeology, cosmology and landscape*. Oxbow Books, Oxford & Philadelphia.

Granet, M., 1919. *Fest and old songs of China (in French)*, Paris.

Granet, M., 1926. *Dances and legends of ancient China (in French)*. Works of the year under the direction of Marcel Mauss, Librairie Felix Alcan, Paris.

Jianhua, H.E., 2006. Rock arts in Guizhou province and the tourism development. *Journal of*

Guizhou University, Art Edition, 03.

Li, Y., Wen, B., 1978. The discovery and significance of the Guanyindong Palaeolithic culture, Qianxi, Guizhou. In: Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology, Chinese Academy of Sciences (Eds), *Gurenlei Lunwenji*. Science Press, Beijing, 77-93.

Li, H., Zuo, X., Kang, L., Ren, L., Liu, F., Liu, H., Zhang, N., Min, R., Liu, X., Dong, G., 2016. Prehistoric agriculture development in the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, southwest China: Archaeobotanical evidence. *Science China, Earth Sciences, climate changes and human adaptation*, 59, 8, 1562-1573.

Liu, W., Schepartz, L.A., Xing, S., Miller-Antonio, S., Wu, X., Trinkaus, E., Martín-Torres, M., 2013. Late Middle Pleistocene hominin teeth from Panxian Dadong, South China. *Journal of Human Evolution*, 64, 337-355.

Liu, K., 2017. Study of the Dongshuanzui prehistoric female figurines and analysis of the shamanism background. In: Dragos, G., Pasztor, E., Bender, H. and Nash, G. (Eds), *Archaeological approach to shamanism. Mind body, nature and culture*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle, 132-151.

Mathieu, R., 1987. Chamane et chamanisme en Chine ancienne. In : *Du bon usage des dieux en Chine*, *L'Homme*, 27, 101,10-34.

Meacham, W., 1996. Defining the Hundred Yue. *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association*, 15, 93-100.

Seiwert, H., 1987. On the religions of national minorities in the context of China's religious history. In: Heberer T. (Ed), *Ethnic minorities in China: tradition and transform*. Edition Herodot/Rader Verlag, Aachen, 41-51.

Snow, D.R., 2013. Sexual Dimorphism in European Upper Paleolithic Cave Art. *American Antiquity*, 78, 4, 746-761.

- Sun, G., 2013. Recent research on the Hemudu Culture and the Tianluoshan site. In: Underhill, A. P. (Ed.), *A companion to Chinese archaeology*. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, pp. 555-573.
- Wang, L., Luo, X., 1989. Ancient rock art in Guizhou province: Record of survey about painted horse cliff in Kaiyang (in Chinese). *Guizhou University Journal*, 3.
- Wu, R.P., Olsen, J.W., 2016. *Paleoanthropology and Paleolithic archaeology in the People's Republic of China*, New Edition Yang, Beijing.
- Xiaowei, Z., 2016. *Handbook on Ethnic Minorities in China*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham and Northampton.
- Yang, D.Y., Liu, L., Chen, X., Speller, C.F., 2008. Wild or domesticated: DNA analysis of ancient water buffalo remains from north China. *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 35, 2778-2785.
- You, Q.S., Cao, B., 2014. *Guizhou Rock Paintings* (in Chinese, long abstracts in English). Guizhou Science and Technology Publishing House, Guiyang.
- You, Q.S., 2016. Using the montage technique to read various cave painting sites on Guizhou Plateau. In: Anati E. (Ed), *Intellectual and spiritual expression of non-literate peoples. Proceedings of the XVII UISPP World Congress (1-7 September, Burgos, Spain)*, Archaeopress Archaeology, Oxford, vol. 1.
- Yu, Z.B., 2009. On the hunting culture of minority nationalities from the perspective of prehistoric rock paintings in Guizhou. *Journal of Tongren University*, 02.
- Zhang, C., Hsiao-Chun, H., 2010. The emergence of agriculture in southern China. *Antiquity*, 84, 11-25.
- Zhang, P., Dambricourt Malassé, A., Cao, Z., Lallouet, F., 2014. Le potentiel paléanthropologique et archéologique du karst de Yanhuidong (Tongzi), Province du Guizhou, Chine du Sud. *Quaternaire*, 25, 3, 271-285.
- Zhenhua, D., Hsiao-Chun, H., Xuechun, F., Yunming, H., Houyuan, L., 2018. The ancient

dispersal of millets in southern China: New archaeological evidence. *The Holocene*, 28, 1, 34-43.

## Captions of the figures

Color should NOT be used for any figures in print

Fig. 1. Physiographic map of continental China with the location of Dahongyan site.

Fig. 2. View of Dahongyan with the mouth of the Xiadong cave, the rock paintings are scattered along the foot of the cliff devoid of vegetation (photo Q. You).

Fig. 3. The fresco with four shamans dancing (photo Q. You).

Fig. 4. The first character of the “The shaman dance” (photo Q. You) and the decal of the photo with the reconstitution of the right buffalo’s mask by symmetrical application of the left mask (A. Dambricourt Malassé).

Fig. 5. Left: the python connecting the first and second characters of the “Shaman dance”. The serpentine form is underlined by dotted lines on the picture. Right: the third shaman (photo Q. You).

Fig. 6. “The dance lesson”, the hands give the scale (photo Q. You).

Fig. 7. Parts of “The dance lesson”. A: a human mask, eight dancers with punctiforms, the profile of a buffalo and a right positive hand on his back. B: positive hands, a human mask and an arm (photo Q. You).

Fig. 8. Part of “The dance lesson”. The first character. A: the fresco (photo Q. You), B: the decal of the picture (A. Dambricourt Malassé).

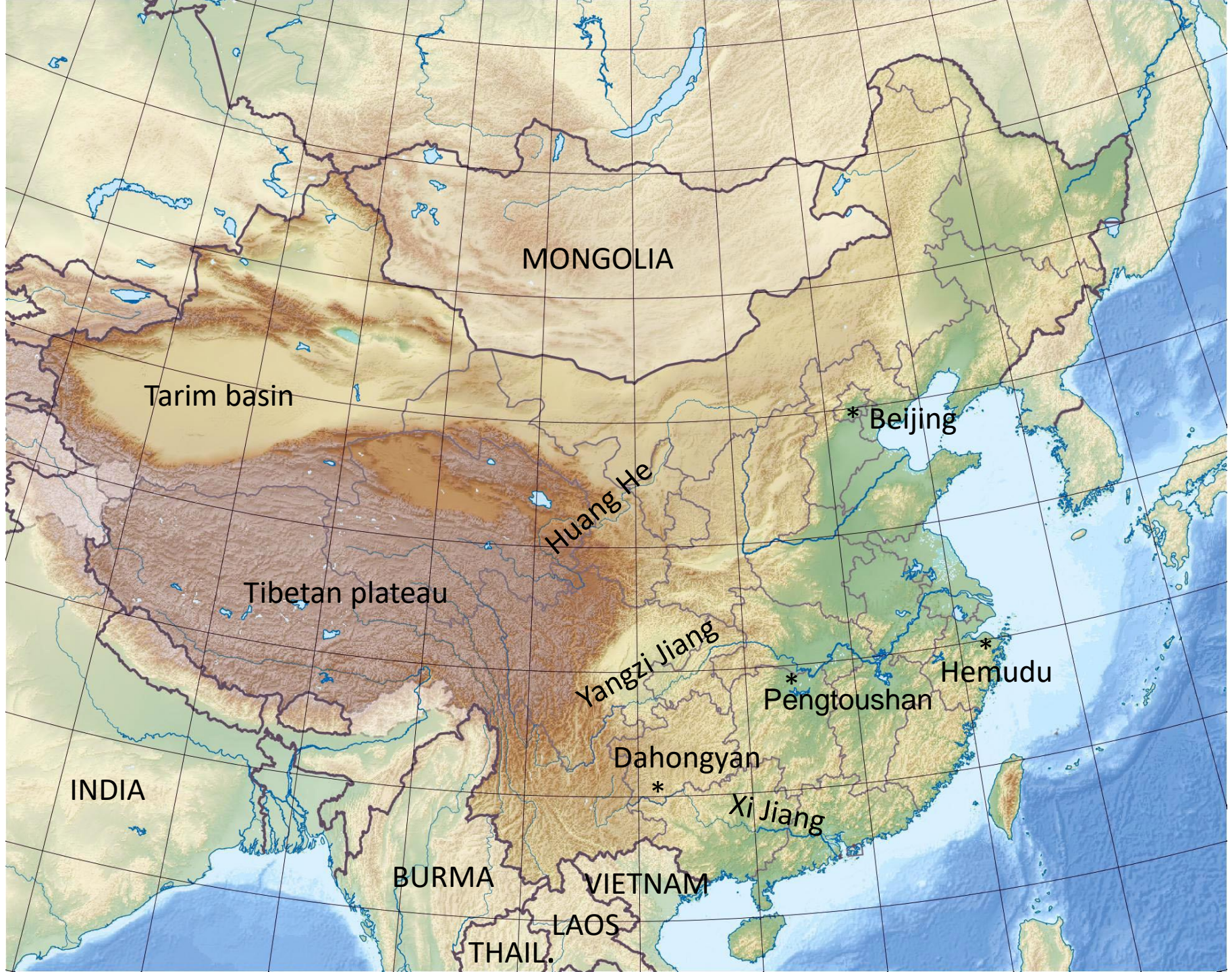
Fig. 9. Part of “The dance lesson”. Comparison between the enigmatic figure and the technics to make a shaman drum. A: Elk skin rawhides (photo Buckskin Fur and Leather Co), B: enigmatic rock painting of Dahongyan, C: two wood circles on a rawhide before the cut

(photo Jenwytch).

Fig. 10. “The meeting” rock painting, the height of a character is about 80 cm (photo Q. You).

Fig. 11. Vestiges of two frescoes: A, 1: an arm with an ornament, 2: two legs in tiptoe, 3: buffalo horn. B: “pot-pourri” on the ceiling of a rock shelter. 1: a *Coix lacryma jobi*, 2: three plant leaves, 3: snake head, 4: one pair of human legs and one isolated leg (photo P. Zhang).





MONGOLIA

Tarim basin

\* Beijing

Huang He

Tibetan plateau

Yangzi Jiang

\* Pengtoushan

\* Hemudu

Dahongyan

\*

Xi Jiang

INDIA

BURMA

VIETNAM

LAOS

THAIL.









A



B











A



B

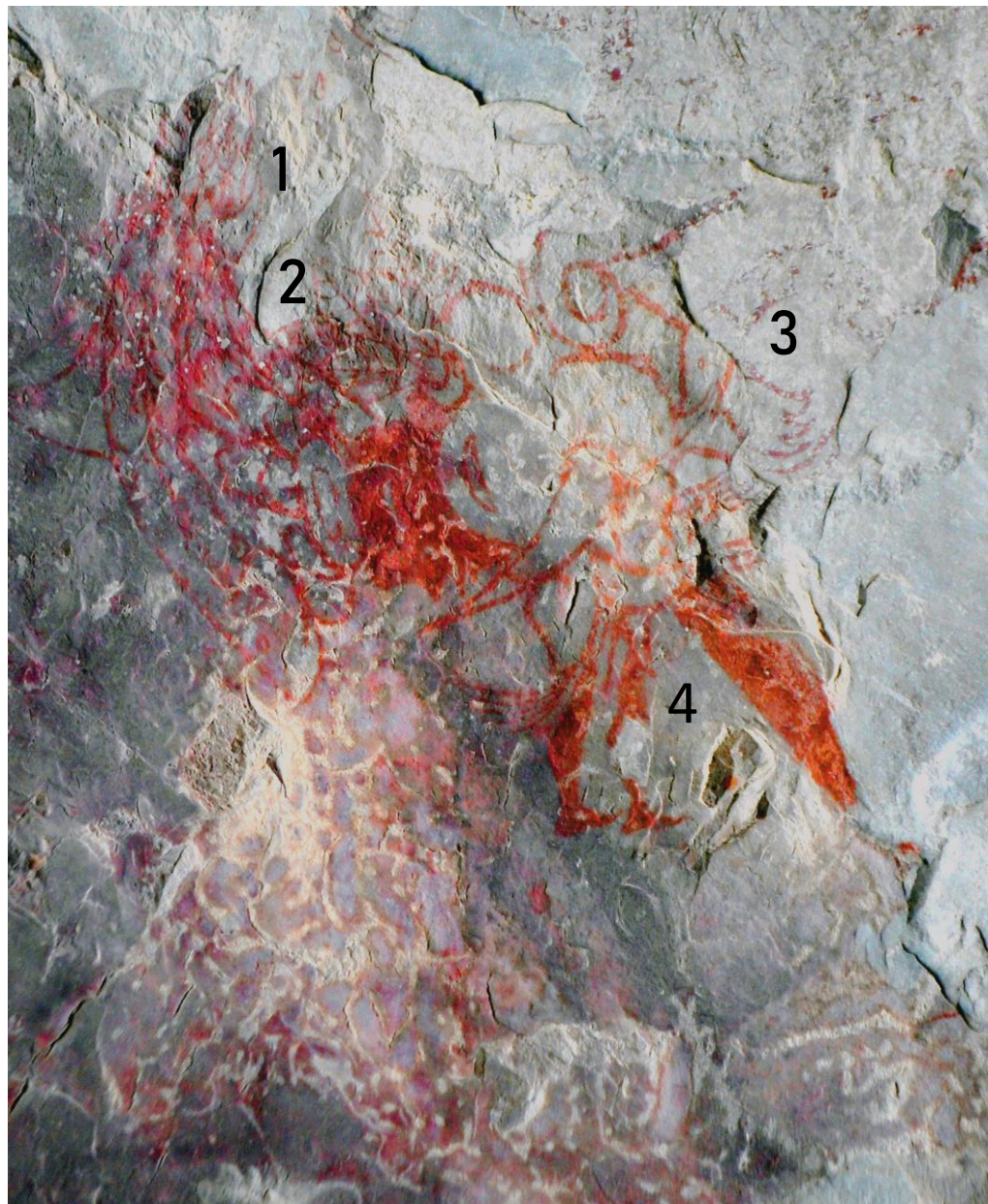


C





A



B