

On the National Symptoms of *Boar Crossing the River*: One Hundred Years of Solitude in a Malaysian Chinese Village

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After the famous “Rainforest Trilogy” such as *Monkey Cup* and *Elephants*, Zhang Guixing, a Malaysian Chinese writer in Taiwan, recently published another Nanyang story *Boar Crossing the River*, in the background of anti-Japanese War, focusing on the massacres and resistance of the Chinese in Krokop, a Malaysian Chinese village in Borneo from 1941 to 1945 according to a list of “Committee for the Relief of Refugees of the Motherland”. In this novel, Zhang Guixing changes the accustomed narrative mode of individual family history, expands the description to the group images of the Chinese in Krokop, highlights their patriotic sacrifice, and saves the reality of the slaughter of the compatriots by magic means such as the myths and legends of Borneo and masks in children’s imagination. It is also noteworthy that the novel talks about the relationship between individual freedom and national identity in depth, and describes the tragic fate of cross-national love in the period of national opposition. These nation-state discourses in *Boar Crossing the River* are Zhang Guixing’s biggest transitions when missing in the literary world for 17 years, which indicate a landmark progress in his spiritual history.

Keywords: *Boar Crossing the River*, Zhang Guixing, national symptoms, Malaysian Chinese literature

Introduction

Zhang Guixing wrote in the beginning of one chapter in *Boar Crossing the River*,

Yafeng remembers the afternoon when the sun hung high, as he first saw He Yun’s birthmark in the shape of pig liver on her face. She held a thin pole that seemed to could lift the cyan clouds, walking behind two Holstein cows. (Zhang, 2021, p. 75)

Guan Yafeng, the hero throughout the novel, hanged himself under a jackfruit tree at the start; hence the standpoint of narrative has shifted among the range of the present, the past, the past of the past, the future of the past, and other time states. Therefore, finding out the exact time when this memory generated becomes an ambiguous question, associated with the hero’s complex psychological condition. Like the influential opening in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez, “Many years later as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice” (Marques, 1970, p. 1). The story which is both magical and realistic takes place not only on the land of Latin American, but also in the villages covered by rainforests in Southeast Asia, with the similar unfixed narrative of time, tangled generations of families and eerie humans as well as animals, and additionally develops a new feature about conflicts of different ethnic identities due to the rapid exchange of colonial power.

Zhang Guixing (1956-), the author of *Boar Crossing the River*, was born in Negeri Sarawak, Malaysia. His ancestral home is Longchuan, Guangdong Province. After graduating from middle school in 1976, he went to Taiwan for further study. In 1980, he graduated from English Department of Taiwan Normal University. In 1982, he gave up his Malaysian nationality. In 1989, he began to teach in middle school. Most of his works were published in Taiwan. Two early short story collections, named *Crouching Tiger* (1980) and *Ke Shan's Children* (1988), focused on the university life in Taiwan and initially involved the confusion of personal identity as well as the longing for the hometown of the rainforest. Furthermore, in his later novels, the myth of identity, nationality, hometown, and history became more and more tangled. Zhang told that in the preface of *The Funny Family*,

My ancestral home is Guangdong. I was born on a big island in Nanyang. When I was 19 years old, I left my birthplace and went to Taiwan to continue my poor student career. Sometimes when I heard some wordy pop songs, the singer sang "where my hometown was," and groaned a few words of self pity, and suddenly I began to wonder where my hometown was. Guangdong, which I have never met before, is not my hometown. Taiwan, which I have lived in for more than 19 years, is not. Undoubtedly, it is the tropical island under the equator. (Zhang, 1996, p. 4)

When his sight returned to Borneo, although the pain of struggle had not been eliminated, his narrative shifted from expressing individual emotions to thinking about the common destiny of ethnic minorities, provided a shelter for overseas Chinese to cherish the collective memory, and consequently became a unique writer in the Sinophone world. *Monkey Cup* (1998), *Elephants* (2000), *The Sleeping Southern Princess I Miss* (2001), restating the dark side of Chinese pioneers through their personal family history, have been highly praised by several scholars as "the Rainforest Trilogy". David Wang believes that the former two established the status of literary classics, making their author one of the most important novelists in the contemporary Sinophone world (Jia, 2018; Zhang, 2001; Wang, 2021).

After 17 years of dormancy, Zhang Guixing returned to the literary world with the fourth novel of rainforest legend, named *Boar Crossing the River* and won many representative awards of Chinese literature, such as the first prize of *Dream of the Red Chamber* award, the *Lianhe Daily* literature award, and the Taiwan Literature Golden Book award. In the preface of the novel, Professor Gao Jiaqian commented that, "Zhang Guixing's superb strategy of displaying pains and violence helps it become the acme of Malaysian Chinese novels and the peak of Chinese novels in recent years" (Zhang, 2021, p. 17). For Zhang, the novel is also a breakthrough. On the one hand, he continues his previous language style, using complicated images as well as gorgeous words and follows the ontology of desire. On the other hand, compared with the "Rainforest Trilogy", which considers all of the themes of contradiction between men and nature, legend in Nanyang of Chinese reclamation, the crimes of Chinese persecuting Dayak natives, and the massacres of Chinese committed by Japanese colonists, *Boar Crossing the River* focuses on the last one more specifically, depicting a story about the massacres and resistance of the Chinese in Krokop from 1941 to 1945 according to a list of "Committee for the Relief of Refugees of the Motherland". This committee does have a historical prototype. In 1938, overseas Chinese patriotic groups in Nanyang held a meeting in Singapore, established the Nanyang Overseas Chinese Federation for the relief of motherland refugees (Nanyang Overseas Chinese Federation), and elected Tan Kah Kee as chairman. It had over 1,000 branches all over the Nanyang, which donated considerable supplies to the Chinese mainland in the anti-Japanese War, sent overseas Chinese back to fight, and organized consolation corps. Therefore, the committee in Krokop is a fiction, but also probably a historical fact, inherited by Zhang as the collective memory. In short, the image of the committee is attached intensely patriotic and historical

meaning. Meanwhile, the title *Boar Crossing the River* is only an overview of the background, because Krokop, where the story happens, is once a boar nest before the land reclamation. When faced with the Japanese invaders, boars, monkeys, and Borneo aborigines have become the allies of Chinese to help them escape and fight against Japanese army. It is definitely the ideal of the author, but reflects the comprehensive cohesion of the Chinese ethnic group in the novel. If it is said that in his previous novels, Zhang started trying to metaphor the whole history of Malaysian Chinese immigrants in Borneo through the narrative of individual family history, with some initial symptoms of recognizing the national identity but overshadowed by the feature of autobiography, in *Boar Crossing the River*, his ethnic symptoms are irrepressible, expressed by the strong sense of confrontation between Chinese, including overseas Chinese and citizens in the mainland China, and the Japanese invaders. Zhang's identification and attribution of nation-state identity also symbolize the discrete Chinese people. This time, the author no longer appeared as a lonely Malaysian Chinese individual, nor was he a bystander and fleeing person who helped his grandparents tell the history of evil reclamation, but participated in the specific history. Animals, plants, myths and legends, character images, and love relations were all shrouded in the theme of the Chinese people versus the Japanese invaders.

Images of Groups: An Expanded Family History

Personal family history is Zhang Guixing's accustomed narrative method, such as the four generations in *Monkey Cup* and *Elephants*. The grandparents were sold to Nanyang as "piggies" of cheap labor. After that, they reclaimed land, worked hard, and oppressed the indigenous people to expand their primitive accumulation. From grandfathers to fathers, they continued this tradition, but the last generation is often a traitor of the family, who re-examines the hard history and deep-rooted bad habits of Chinese pioneers. *Boar Crossing the River* connects three periods in Krokop: before, during, and after the Pacific War with three generations of Guan family: Guan Gengyun, Guan Yafeng, and Guan Baiyang. To begin with, Krokop is a small coastal fishing port, "because villagers raised a large number of wild boars, it became a well-known boar colony, and this place got a unified name as Krokop over time" (Zhang, 2021, p. 35), which is located in the northwest of Borneo and now belongs to Sarawak, Malaysia. In 1838, the British adventurer James Brooke helped to calm the civil strife in Brunei, so he forced the king to cede territory. In 1841, he established the Sarawak Dynasty. One hundred years later, the Pacific War broke out; Sarawak was occupied by Japan and became a British colony after the war. In 1963, Sarawak and other regions formed Malaysia to achieve independence. In the narration of the novel, the earliest Chinese in Sarawak immigrated from 1830, with Liu Shanbang as a leader to mine gold, while the earliest Chinese settled down in Krokop due to the discovery of petroleum in 1911, when Guan Gengyun appeared. However, the novel does not intend to trace back how this person's ancestors reached the island, neither their occupations nor their histories. It is not clear that whether Guan Gengyun settled in Krokop was related to oil exploitation. But it is clear that he was a hunter, who appeared when he was 30, fishing in the river at the moment of thunder and flood. He met a woman named Ye Xiao-e, who was wandering and unconscious, and they had a son named Guan Yafeng. Finally, Gengyun was killed by revenge Yamazaki after Japan surrendered. Guan Yafeng, the main character of the novel, was also an excellent hunter, and the main force of boar hunting as well as anti-Japanese guerrillas. He had a son named Guan Baiyang with the Japanese Emily who lurked in the Chinese group. Bai-hai, the brother of He Yun who was caught as a comfort woman by the Japanese army, cut off Guan's arms because he did not reveal Emily's identity as a spy. In the end, Guan Yafeng committed suicide since he was overwhelmed by the mental torture caused by the trauma of the war.

Unlike the generations in *Monkey Cup* and *Elephants*, family members of Guan did not inherit the experience to reclaim land, accumulate wealth, and rule the Borneo natives, but to listen the sounds of various animals, connect with the nature, and become a brilliant chaser.

When the father took Yafeng, who was nine years old, to the thatched bushes, he pointed to a field littered with puddles, streams, shrubs and fruit trees, mumbling that if you hear the chirp of birds, you will know that there are birds flying there, but it is not enough, you have to think about the situations. Are they catching the food, nesting or courting? If you smell the strong fragrance or the odor of decay, you will know that the fruits are ripe and there are several monkeys on the trees. If you feel that the earth is trembling, you have to estimate the number, sizes and weights of the wild boars. If there is smell of urine or blood in the air, you should be aware of that the eggs of crocodiles and giant magpies have hatched. The father smiled mysteriously and said, “after a long time of training, there are more experience and these skills can only be regarded as insignificant”. (Zhang, 2021, p. 29)

Before committing suicide, Yafeng took his son Baiyang to the grassy ridge for a similar transmission of the experience, teaching him how to watch, listen, and smell, and how to sensitively perceive and judge about animals and plants in natural signs. When this kind of warm intergenerational transmission took place, Zhang Guixing always replaced the specific name with the word “father” and switched to the naive child perspective, surprised and confused about the experience and the skills. Immediately, there are grown-up children in the next page, becoming fathers to impart the experience to their sons. Time is squeezed dramatically while the perspective changes. In addition, compared with Zhang Guixing’s obvious self projection of the image of the latest generation of Chinese in his previous works, whose cultural psychology is apparently different from his parents and grandparents, in *Boar Crossing the River*, Guan Gengyun, Guan Yafeng, and Guan Baiyang do not have distinct personalities, but appear as opaque and similar consanguine relatives in the same tradition.

In fact, the three generations of Guan family are only one of the clues. In *Boar Crossing the River*, Zhang Guixing breaks through his model of individual family history and expands to the images of groups in Krokop in the period of 30 years, mixing the synchronic perspective and diachronic perspective. On the one hand, the synchronic perspective depicts the life of several characters, including Guan Yafeng and three significant females for him (Hui Qing, He Yun, and Emily), Emperor Zhu, Zhou the Snub Nose, Zhong Baoyou, Qin the king of hunting turtles, and Jin the king of hunting crocodiles. Each of them has around one chapter, telling the prehistory before arriving at Krokop, the lives in peacetime, and experiences in the anti-Japanese war. Among these figures, Emperor Zhu is undoubtedly a spiritual symbol. Firstly, the surname Zhu has the same pronunciation as the original ruling animal boar in Krokop in Chinese and his appearance has been integrated with the tribal symbol of the boar king for many times. Secondly, the name of emperor (Dadi in Chinese) implies his leading position in the activities of boar hunting and defending against Japanese invaders. Thirdly, he has extraordinary vitality, composed of the ability to make sensible decisions, the unbeatable fighting capacity, and vigorous sexual desire. In 1911, he led the ambush of boars when they were crossing the river, which really expelled them, so that residents of Krokop could build houses and live a stable life. In 1941, when he was about 70 years old, he remained his predominance in the anti-Japanese guerrillas, organized the transfer of the Chinese people and equipments, and fought in the front line. When he returned to Krokop as the only survivor of the founders of “Committee for the Relief of Refugees of the Motherland”, he had the supreme appeal and fame among the villagers. But in a word, he is a person difficult to distinguish between good and evil, the embodiment of the rainforest, primitive, bloody, and untamed. He killed Qiu Maoxing secretly in order to monopolize the scarce opium after the war, and intended to rape his 16-year-old daughter while others were

ambushing wild boars crossing the river, but beheaded finally by Emily. On the other hand, the diachronic perspective depicts the founders and supporters of the committee, divided into several groups according to gender, age, and other criteria, all slaughtered by the Japanese invaders. The description of the five founders is very brief, but they are portrayed as national heroes. “These five people are either rich businessmen or vulnerable scholars, but have hard spines. No matter what torture is used and how near to the death, they said no words, only moan like flies” (Zhang, 2021, p. 165). They would rather die than surrender, not disclose the whereabouts of Chinese compatriots, and shoulder their national responsibilities silently, which are similar to the images of martyrs in Chinese mainland literature. However, David Wang did not pay much attention to the nation-state discourse in the novel, and he believed that the committee was vague and the motherland was also unreachable (Zhang, 2021, p. 3). It is true that Zhang Guixing did not express his homesickness through the Chinese style story which usually described the process of Chinese people scattering away from the mainland, the novel covered no imagination of the mainland, and the characters said little words about missing the hometown. But the fact that Chinese individuals in a foreign country agglomerated into a Chinese ethnic group itself was the extension of the life in mainland; in other words, they represented China in another place. There were Hakka, Cantonese, Minnan, Hainan, Chaozhou, barbecued pork buns, fried rice sticks, Chinese ceramic coffee cups, and so on. These dialects, foods, and patriarchal relations mean that Chinese in Krokop remained their lifestyle like their mainland compatriots. Moreover, they connected each others’ fates again due to the Japanese invasion all over the Asia, which was chosen by the author as the background of the novel. And it is hard to say that he did not make the decision out of the intention to bring the local and discrete Chinese ethnic group to the broader Chinese national identity. In *Boar Crossing the River*, the motherland had varied from the physical land located in the east of Asia and the west bank of the Pacific Ocean, occupying 9.6 million square kilometers, which was also the distant and haunting origin for the Chinese immigrants, to the significant spiritual connection between Chinese individuals with others and the world. Thus, it also becomes the most powerful support for Chinese in Krokop to survive or die without regret.

National Tragedy: Saving Reality with Magical Methods

In *Boar Crossing the River*, the bloody and violent scenes are mostly about Chinese in Krokop hunting boars and Japanese invaders brutally killing Chinese. The latter event mainly happens in the two chapters, “Pontianak” and “Headless Knights”, where the founders and participants of the committee were slashed, their pregnant wives’ stomachs were open with knives, and underage children were defiled. Later their bodies were divided into parts and burned, with debris everywhere and the river turned red. The cruelty of the killing scenes challenges the readers’ psychological acceptance ability and ethical boundary all the time. And the scenes of national tragedies highlight the powerlessness and helplessness of Chinese resistance. When discussing Chinese realistic novels, C. T. Hsia put forward a concept of “hard-core realism”, believing that it would touch the dialectic of psychological sadomasochism.

When revealing the reality honestly, the writer challenges the limits of human suffering, also challenges himself and readers to bear or imagine the misery. The explicit description of torments can stress the inhumanity in the world, and form a spectacle of physical pain, possibly seducing the masochism desire of people. (Hsia, 1980, p. 240)

This kind of “hard-core realism” does exist in *Boar Crossing the River*, but Zhang adds some fictional techniques, such as myths and legends of Borneo and masks in children’s imagination to save the reality of

Chinese being slaughtered, partially alleviating the horrible and shocking effect on readers brought by the description of cruelty and ferocity, reducing the abnormal psychology to the normal level and making people regain the hope of national salvation.

The insertion of Borneo myths and legends is related to the special structure of the novel. There are 25 chapters in total, of which 10 chapters have a short preface before the narration. Some are introductive, like the type of knife which is commonly used by the aborigines, natural disaster in Borneo and the particular name of Japanese fighters or reconnaissance aircrafts during World War II. Some are quoted, such as the legend of a Japanese knife, the Malay proverb of “there are crocodiles in still water” and the content of fly sheet thrown down by the Japanese army in the Pacific campaign. These two kinds of prefaces supplement the narration of the novel with knowledge, but they are dispensable as a sub text, which affect slightly on the context and expression if deleted. The third is vital, playing a guiding role of the narration, that is the insertion of Borneo myths and legends. For example, in “orang minyak” which describes thieves and rapists, although its surface meaning refers to Malaysian witchcraft, it actually implies that Emperor Zhu raped Guan Gengyun’s wife secretly when men left for boar hunting, indirectly causing her dystocia and death. If the hint in the preface is omitted, it is difficult to know the authentic reasons why she died through the obscure description in the text.

There is a Malaysian legend about “Pontianak” in front of the main body of the chapter, referring to the female vampire in Malay, who changes from a pregnant woman after death and she sometimes turns into a beauty to seduce men, sometimes attacks pregnant women, eats embryos, or becomes a head, a giant owl, etc. In this chapter, the legend coincides with the image of Ma the grandmother (Ma Po-po), a tomb keeper of Krokop’s Chinese cemetery. She was over 90 years old and ugly, living in a high-foot house near the cemetery with thousands of peacock fishes in 11 big iron buckets. She was abandoned by a British officer and aborted in a young age. From then on, she became unsocial and irritable. Later, there were legends that she was skilled in Malay witchcraft and that she could turn into flying heads to take the lives of animals and people, and could drive the scattered ghosts of the cemetery to carry iron buckets, adding much magical features to the character. Actually, she was just a kind-hearted ordinary old woman. When children in the village stole her fish and hit her house with slingshots, she easily forgave them and took in six kids during the massacre. She hunted animals and made meat dishes for them with difficulty, and suffered torture without revealing their hiding place. After humiliated and burned together with the house,

Ma the grandmother jumped up from the ground, pulled the sickle under the window, held the bodies of six children in her arms, flew out of the house, crossed the bamboo fence, and disappeared into the jungle with the noisy white parrot; (Zhang, 2021, p. 187)

later they became vengeful ghosts and killed many Japanese invaders with their avatars. Undoubtedly, it is an optimistic imagination of the narrator. Faced with the Japanese invaders with guns, the unarmed old people and children are unable to resist and can only accept the end of being tortured and killed. However, in fiction, they are given the power to bully the Japanese invaders and save other Chinese compatriots who are unable to save themselves. This technique is similar with the “*deus ex machine*” in ancient Greek drama, helping to resolve problems through unexpected means like miracles (Rehm, 1992, pp. 69-72). Therefore, the native Malaysian legends and Chinese stand in the same camp in the novel.

The attempt to save the reality with magical methods also arrives in the chapter “Headless Knights”. Before the narration, there is description about the head hunting faith of the Dayak and Iban, natives of Borneo.

They believe that it can display their masculinity, prestige, and bravery, stimulate women's lust, and make the land as well as family prosperous since the heads can be on call like Aladdin's magic lamp. In this chapter, when Mr. Xiao, an elderly teacher, separated from the children and the main force of the anti-Japanese guerrillas and stayed in the rainforest, waiting for Guan Yafeng and Emily who tried to find the lost children, he met a large number of Japanese troops on patrol. While the children were being slaughtered, Mr. Xiao saw the Dayaks who came to help when he was dying. "Each of the 20 people was holding a Japanese head, dripping with blood, staining their legs and feet" (Zhang, 2021, p. 277), and all the heads of these Japanese invaders were cut off. At this time, the indigenous people of Borneo temporarily dispelled their hatred for the Chinese reclamation people and became the assistants of the them to defend Japanese, although in the other works of the author contradiction between the Chinese and the indigenous people was endless. Corresponding to the preface, "during the World War II, with the encouragement of the coalition forces and anti-Japanese guerrillas, the Dayak warriors hunted thousands of Japanese heads" (Zhang, 2021, p. 302). The word "warrior" discloses an attitude of the narrator; in other words, he appreciates them. In a word, it is a feature of the novel that the primitive magical legends are integrated with the realistic description of fighting against the Japanese invaders. In desperation, aborigines who are once enemies can also be imagined as saviors.

The strategy of "dues ex machine" can not only beckon female vampires "Pontianak" to take away the dead and turn the bloody headhunting custom of Borneo aborigines into a righteous act to save the Chinese ethnic group, but also make children who have heard of the tragedy fantasize that they will become the traditional Chinese gods represented by masks. Cao Dazhi and Gao-jiao Qiang are of the same age and they regard each other as imaginary enemies to be the king the children in Krokop. They respectively played the leading roles Sun Wukong and Yang Jian, two with boundless supernatural power in Chinese legends in the fund-raising activities. And their favorite masks are also the two immortal figures. When Gao-jiao Qiang heard that Lin Xiaoting, the girl he secretly worshipped, was raped, he "grasped the trident, rode a holy eagle with Howling dog (Xiao-tian Dog), took a crossbow and arrow, controlled the wind and held a huge flag of love confronting with invasion and national crisis" (Zhang, 2021, p. 220). He imagined himself as the character Yang Jian that the mask represented. There are two reasons behind the illusion: The one is the sheer gap between the ideal of saving the crisis and the reality of massacre impossible to cross; the other is the mental vertigo caused by smoking opium: "Cao Dazhi, Gao-jiao Qiang and Hui the red hair drunk Milo mixed with opium juice from Ma the grandmother, later they found their speed and strength became as extraordinary as Sun Wukong, Yang Jian and Nezha" (Zhang, 2021, p. 156). Opium was a necessity of life for villagers in Krokop, and men, women as well as children were all addicted to it. In the context of children, opium, mask, and desire were associated and could not be separated. Opium that brought physical illusion and masks that brought psychological illusion were two tools to satisfy their desire of becoming heroes, helping to convince themselves. When the girls were outraged, the author stressed the reaction of their woovers:

"Sun Wukong," Gao-jiao Qiang asked suddenly, "what is your exact age?" "Twelve", Cao Dazhi answered that, "My mother lied about my age. Yang Jian, you are the real king of children." "No difference, my mom also lied that I was two years older, do you like En-ting?" Gao-jiao Qiang said. "Yes", Cao Dazhi answered. "I won't compete with you. I'm going to follow Lin Xiaoting, and please tell Zhu the grandfather that he owns me 20 yuan", Gao-jiao Qiang said and used the gun under his ass, shooting two Japanese down in front of the campfire. "He also owes me 10 yuan," Cao Dazhi said and pulled out a hidden knife, stabbing it into a Japanese neck. (Zhang, 2021, pp. 301-302)

Emperor Zhu told the children that they would be rewarded with 10 yuan if they killed a Japanese, so when the two kids resisted, they both had the determination to die and were proud. Moreover, they addressed each other with the name of the mask character rather than their real names. It means that they understand each other's desire and fantasy, which is not understandable for other people except kids. Finally, when they no longer relied on opium and masks, they really became and even surpassed their dream roles, the traditional Chinese immortals. In this scene, their courage is impressive and touching. It's better to save yourself than wait for others. Magic and reality are considerably fused in this plot, pulling readers out of the mud of despair and horror and firing with inspiration; hence national tragedy has another approach of narration and expression. In conclusion, cruel and ruthless reality can never erase the hope of individuals to save the nation; although the fire of hope is weak and easy to be extinguished, it will be newborn as soon as the wind blows.

Relationships: Contradictions Between the Nation and Individuals

In *Boar Crossing the River*, Zhang Guixing created groups of patriotic Chinese characters and highlighted their resistance as well as sacrifice; meanwhile he applied the method of magical fiction to express the thirsty and burning aspiration of the elderly and children who were incapable to change the national tragedy, reflecting the obvious ethnic symptoms. Besides, the relationships of three couples in the novel were also shrouded in the shadow of ethnic confrontation between China and Japan under the intentional design of the author. The first couple is He Yun, a girl arrested as a comfort woman together with a Japanese soldier. The second is Xiao-jin, a member of the anti-Japanese guerrillas with a Japanese prostitute named Giant Crocodile (Jü-e). The third is Guan Yafeng with Emily. It is noticeable that all of them had opposed national identities, so their love stories were doomed to failure, but also entitled with moving tension and deviant sentiment because of the contradiction between national identity and personal feelings at the same time.

He Yun, with a birthmark in the shape of pig liver on her face, was created according to the real person that Zhang Guixing's father dated, and was also the initial inspiration for the book. He Yun could not get married because of her birthmark, a symbol of being unfortunate and making her ugly. She always felt inferior for this. But when she was forced to be a comfort woman of the Japanese army, "it was the first time that she completely ignored the existence of the birthmark. When Japanese soldiers pulled her into the thatched and raped her, they didn't notice the birthmark at daytime, let alone at night" (Zhang, 2021, p. 199). She gained a sense of equality because the sexually assaulted Japanese armymen ignored her defect, and she even fell love with a silent soldier in the process of being violated. Although it was not her fault, she had always had a distorted self abasement for being violated so many times, thinking that she is not chaste—"she had no private and precious things at all", but when getting along with this unknown Japanese soldier, "she couldn't help being shy", and "under his gaze, she felt that the small universe once regarded as a treasure was no longer dirty and chaotic, but full of warm, colorful nebulae and stars" (Zhang, 2021, p. 201). The universe is a hazy indication of the sex and love. Since then, He Yun possessed sexual pleasure and secret love; she always observed the silent man in the crowd, calculated the time of his coming, filled with compassion for his lost arms, hugged him during sex, and acted as his hands, "she hasn't smiled like this for a long time, revealing dimples" (Zhang, 2021, p. 204). To a large extent, He Yun empathized with the soldier as a substitute of Guan Yafeng, because she distinguished him through the same body odor of Guan, but she undoubtedly felt happy with him. Before she acquainted him and after she left because of pregnancy, she was in a state of walking dead and losing self-awareness. She usually unconsciously untied her clothes and opened legs for the coming

violation. The experience of the comfort woman has seriously damaged her mentality, and her ambiguous emotions for the Japanese soldier are her only comfort when she could not see the light of being rescued.

When Chinese came to Borneo to exploit oil and gold, Japanese also seized the business opportunities. Japanese businessmen and prostitutes (Chinese in Krokop called them Nanyang-jie) arrived in this primitive rainforest.

The colonial banknotes that Xiao-jin and Emperor Zhu spent on prostitutes such as Huge Crocodile (Da-e) and Little Crocodile (Xiao-e), the Fuji bicycle loan of Yafeng's father, as well as pocket money of Cao Dazhi and other children to buy monster masks and toys made Japanese invaders' weapons powerful. (Zhang, 2021, p. 20)

Although the sentence implied that transactions between Chinese and Japanese helped the latter invade and provided them with strong economic foundation objectively, the author did not exude much national hatred when describing their relationships before the war. Nanyang-jie is a special group in the novel. They do not have names, because they could not speak Chinese, and only the salesman Kobayashi could call out their real names. Following Xiao-jin, who had abundant experience in hunting crocodiles, Chinese in Krokop divided these Japanese prostitutes into groups according to their heights. These were Infant Crocodile (Ru-e), Little Crocodile (Xiao-e), Teenage Crocodile (Shao-e), Huge Crocodile (Da-e), and Giant Crocodile (Jü-e). There is only one Giant Crocodile over 170 cm, closely related to Xiao-jin. She blinded one crocodile with her metal hairpin and when Xiao-jin killed the crocodile and "inserted the hairpin into her black hair, he saw her tears". After that, every time Xiao-jin came, he would bring pickled pork, canned fruit, soup, and other food, and watched her eat. "Giant Crocodile kept silent during sex, except with Xiao-jin. Although they didn't know each other's languages and names, their groans and pants nurtured their bodies and spirits like a deformed fetus" (Zhang, 2021, p. 18). They cared for each other, satisfied sexual desires, and relieved their isolation together. They were each other's confidants. Therefore, when Japanese occupied Krokop and Emily deliberately delivered Giant Crocodile's hairpin to Xiao-jin, he fell into the trap and impulsively ran into the encirclement of the Japanese army as expected. What was unexpected was that he tried to hide his identity as a member of the anti-Japanese guerrillas, bowed to the Japanese army, and pretended to be an ordinary villager, but "he saw Giant Crocodile said something to the Japanese around her, then the armyman glared at him and whistled his teeth. A dozen Japanese shot him" (Zhang, 2021, p. 247). It is hard to know whether the words of Giant Crocodile are in purpose of intercession or disclosure, but Xiao-jin's behavior like a moth darts into a flame which demonstrates that the gaps between opposed national camps are insurmountable.

Emily, the beloved of Guan Yafeng, was the only surviving adult woman with a name in the novel. She was definitely the heroine, accounting for a large proportion of the group portraits description and was the most complicated character in the book. She was the daughter of Japanese salesman Kobayashi Jiro and Nanyang-jie Hanahata Nami, raised by Chinese Catholic priest Zou and sold groceries in Krokop. Her adoptive father was a good man who worried about running over ants when riding a bicycle. He was afraid that Chinese in Krokop would discriminate against her because she was Japanese, so he concealed her identity. Emily was deeply loved and cared for by people which she lived among; once she was molested by Java technicians in a café, Emperor Zhu and many Chinese technicians protected her, saying that, "When there was plague in Krokop, she donated money to build the temple like us villagers, so we won't look on indifferently if others bully her" (Zhang, 2021, p. 84). This triggered two fights, and five Chinese were killed by the border defense forces. The Chinese community in Krokop obviously regarded Emily as a member of them, and they fought for safeguarding

national dignity and protecting their compatriots. Unfortunately, Emily was the main accomplice in the slaughter of the Chinese. She was the only Japanese intelligence agent in Krokop, and when she overheard the process of Emperor Zhu's killing his father, she was determined to take revenge. She leaked the list of "Committee for the Relief of Refugees of the Motherland", secret base of Emperor Zhu, whereabouts of the children hidden by Ma the grandmother, refuge location of Bai-hai's family, and the place where Emperor Zhu and children rested in the forest. As a result, the relevant personnels were almost slaughtered, and Emperor Zhu, the spiritual leader of Krokop, also murdered by Emily. However, she saved Guan Yafeng who was dying because of the Japanese armyman Yamazaki, told him her identity, gave birth their child (Guan Baiyang), and left him to Guan Yafeng. She was guilty when she met with Bai-hai, and let him to ask Guan Yafeng her identity. Although she loved Guan Yafeng deeply, felt extremely guilty for the Chinese in Krokop, and convulsed among the body mountains of slaughtered children, she persisted in her duty as an intelligence agent. National responsibility and family hatred overwhelmed her conscience and love. Guan Yafeng helped her hide her identity out of love, but at the same time, he also carried the crime of Emily betraying Chinese. There was always "combats filled with gunsmoke, swords and blood and bones, happening in jungles" (Zhang, 2021, p. 9) in his eyes, and the confession and guilt to his compatriots tortured him to death.

The descriptions of the three couples make *Boar Crossing the River* more profound on the relationship between the nation and individuals. No place that individual identity belongs to will lead to the loneliness of being *szabadgyalog* and when it belongs to a large community, it assuredly gains the happiness of self-identity and mutual identity due to the harvest of spiritual connections, but meanwhile there is an invisible shackle on individual freedom. Zhang Guixing was obsessed with how to obtain the belonging to the ethnic group in his previous novels; he had successful transition to a deeper stage in *Boar Crossing the River*, thinking about the individual freedom in the ethnic group. To a certain extent, tragic endings of all three cross-ethnic relations in the novel show his conclusion: Individuals can never get rid of ethnic identity, and their freedom is limited. Xiao-jin could die for a hairpin of Giant Crocodile, but he would not reveal the locations of other compatriots. Emily saved Guan Yafeng from a Japanese soldier, but she would not give up her revenge for the Chinese. The fact the Japanese soldier who was loved by He Yun let her go was the result agreed by the leader. In *Boar Crossing the River*, there is no individual freedom beyond national identity.

Conclusion

Zhang Guixing contributed the long epic *Boar Crossing the River* to the Sinophone world with irrepressible ethnic symptoms, in which he changed his traditional narrative mode of individual family history, expanded the description to the group images of Chinese in Krokop, and underlined the patriotic sacrifice of them against the Japanese invaders. While sparing no effort to write the scenes of bloody violence, he saved the national tragedy with the magical primitive Borneo legends and fantasy of the children about masks. In addition, he connected individual freedom with national identity, writing the inevitable fate of cross-ethnic love in the period of national opposition. The nation-state discourse in *Boar Crossing the River* is Zhang Guixing's biggest transition of thinking when missing in the literary world for 17 years, making the novel different from all his previous works, and indicating a landmark progress in his spiritual history. A hundred years ago, because of oil exploitation, Chinese gathered in Krokop and during the last a hundred year ethnic contradictions continued, while wild boars were still crossing the river. "One hundred years of solitude" in this Malaysian Chinese village drove its descendant to write national stories and Nanyang legends of the past, the present, and the future.

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