

An Introduction to the Culture of Zhuang's Mo Religion Scriptures

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Like all the religions in the world, Mo religion is a classic one believed by all Zhuang people. It believes in and worships the gods, having truth in a thing that life and death are manipulated by the gods, that life and death can be reincarnated, and that human beings can be recreated. It has a set of systematic interpretations of the universe, celestial bodies, life and death, misfortune, fate, soul, salvation, etc. It has the omnipotent, omniscient and the infinitely wise. The first Patriarch Bulotuo appeared as the supreme god and master. His professionals are called “pumo” and religious scripture of Mo religion is called “su³⁵mo³⁵”! Mo religion’s activities are known as “hok⁵⁵mo³⁵”.

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The Origin of Mo Religion of Zhuang People

During the Palaeolithic Age, there were many groups living in the coastal area south of the Yangtze River, which were called “Baiyue¹” in the historical books of the Central Plains, or called Yue people or Ancient Yue people. There were many branches of Baiyue, including Wu Yue, Yang Yue, Dong Ou, Min Ou, Nan Ou, Xi Ou, Luo Yue, etc., among which the Xi Ou and Luo Yue tribes which distribute in present-day Guangxi are the ancestors of Zhuang Dong language. Mo religion as a Zhuang folk religion is a national folk religion developed from Yuewu², which is the most primitive form of folk belief of Zhuang ancestors. In ancient times, Yuewu experienced a long period of clan social development and change in the Zhuang area, until Zhuang entered the threshold of civilization. Then it gradually approached the direction of prescribed religion, which is equivalent to the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period of the Han people in Central China. Its characteristics are: A unified supreme god, Bulotuo, has been established; there are its own basic doctrines and rules; there are more systematic scriptures of Maoism; more fixed religion rituals have been formed; and there are semi-professional followers of the religion. Bulotuo is the ancient ancestor of the Zhuang ancestors and even the original inhabitants of the Pearl River Basin, and is found in Zhuang myths, epic stories, religious rituals, songs and proverbs, customs, and other cultural forms.

Mulojia [Mo⁴⁴lo³³kja:p³³] is evolved from the creator in Zhuang mythology and legend. The name is based on the original meaning of the Zhuang language “Mu” [mo⁴⁴], that is, chanting, conjuring; for example, those who specialize in

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¹ Baiyue refers to the area where the ancient Yue people distributed along the southern coast of ancient China, with many branches.

² Witchcraft of the ancient Yue people.

spell casting, commonly known as Bumo; “lo” [lɔ³³] originally meant to peel off, peel away, the word “lo” [lɔ³³] originally means to peel off, to separate the two, and this means to avoid spells; “jia” [kja:p³³] means something like scales and nails; “mo” [mɛ⁴²] means grandmother, goddess; The word Mulojia [Mo⁴⁴lo³³kja:p³³] means grandmother, goddess. In the Mo religion, Mulojia appears side by side with Bulotuo, and is the corresponding secondary god with Bulotuo. Whenever there is a calamity or a strange situation, they will pray to Bulotuo and Mulojia for relief. (Huang, 2003, p. 3)

The Basic Meanings of Mo Religion's Culture

The Zhuang Mo scripture culture has a long history, a long origin, and rich connotation. From the past to the present, it has an extremely wide and profound influence on the social life and folk culture of the local people, and is the original traditional ethnic religion and culture in which the Zhuang people generally believe. Bumo is a person who specializes in the activities of the Zhuang religion. “Bu” is the Zhuang word meaning “ancestor”, which is also a respectful name for the elders; “mo” is the religion of Bumo, which can also be interpreted as the classical explanation. When “bu” and “mo” are combined together, the word “bumo” is born, meaning that the elders who specialize in the Mo religion or the elderly who chant the scriptures, commonly known as “Bumo” or “Mo Gong”. Being generally proficient in Zhuang language, Bumos not only know ancient Zhuang characters, but also master simple calendar and arithmetic, and they even know sets of religious rituals such as divination and witchcraft. They are knowledgeable in ancient and modern times, and are familiar with various myths and legends. The scriptures they use are called “Mo scripture” and their culture is called “Mo culture”.

The Zhuang Mo scripture is rich in categories, diverse in form and self-contained, and its content covers politics, economy, philosophy, law, history, religion, military, literature, art, language and writing, geography, astronomy, calendar, and medicine. Based on the ideology of nature worship, reproduction worship, ancestor worship, hard work and creation, wisdom and welfare, goodwill and harmony, and retribution for good and evil, and under the light of the supreme gods of the Zhuang religion, Bulotuo and Mulojia, the rituals are based on the conflicts between man and nature, man and man, and man and society, and natural and man-made disasters, and include ancestor worship, blessing, teaching, exhortation, soul redemption, redemption of grievances, disaster avoidance, and the reincarnation of the dead. The rituals include ancestor worship, blessing, teaching, exhortation, soul atonement, injustice relief, disaster relief, and transcendence of the dead. It reflects the good wishes of the ancestors who relied on divine power to harmonize the relationship between man and nature, man and society, and man and man, begging for the elimination of disasters and a happy life, and reflects the development of Zhuang society. There are a lot of Mo scriptures preserved in Zhuang folklore, but they are not stored scientifically, and many of the originals have different degrees of damage. If they are not rescued and translated in time, some of them will be lost. In the long run, the excellent national culture will surely die out in spacetime of history, which prompts us to pay attention to the rescue, translation, research, and summary of the linguistic and cultural laws and characteristics of the Mo scripture, so as to contribute to the cause of national protection of intangible cultural heritage.

The study of the Zhuang Mo scriptures has a high research value and is valuable for the study of Zhuang social history, economy and culture, religious customs and ethics, etc. For this reason, the academic community is conducting in-depth investigation, translation, collation, and research of the Zhuang Mo scriptures. For instance, Yu Shijie's “Religious Culture of Zhuang Folk” and Huang Guiqiu's “Study of Zhuang Mo Culture” analyze the primitive form of Zhuang Mo religion, its distribution characteristics, the main gods and accompanying gods of

Zhuang Mo, Mo scriptures, ceremonious funeral activities, Gexu activities³, and the relationship between Zhuang Mo culture and contemporary society. Related papers include Huang Guiqiu's "Zhuang Folk Mo Religion and Bulotto Culture", "Zhuang Mo Religion and Its Current Situation", and "The Restoration and Reconstruction of Zhuang Folk Beliefs in Guangxi", which reflect Zhuang Mo religion culture.

The Supreme God—Buluotuo

According to the explanation of the doctrine of Buddhism, the supreme god Buluotuo created all things in the world and had eternal life in the universe. He knows everything that happens on the earth. When people encounter unsolvable problems, they will "have to ask Buluotuo and Mulluojia for help" and when people are desperate or in distress, Buluotuo and Mulluojia will "be guiders and provide directions", which help people answer their doubts and change their fatality. He rewards the good and punishes the evil, and is just and fair. Anyone who obeys his admonition will have all things go well, and have a prosperous life and family. Otherwise, they will suffer from retribution. Bulotuo, the all-wise and all-powerful noble deity, is also the old ancestor of the Zhuang nation—"Bu"; he is a kind old man, with whole white hair, righteous face, holding a walking stick, carrying a cloth bag. He usually lives in the village of the mountains. When people ask him to Bu Mo in addition to burning incense and chanting, he will come at any time. In Zhuang Township, both adults and children have the obligation to respect Buluotuo faithfully.

However, because China was in the midst of continuous social criticism movements, the belief in Buluotuo was constantly attacked as a secular superstition and seemed to be silent on the surface. For a long time, scholars had not paid much attention to it and were mainly engaged in collecting and organizing the stories of Brotas, and most of the research articles were focused on mythology and literature. Since the reform and opening up, the situation has changed radically. As the state and society pay more attention to the national cultural heritage, and as people's awareness of the pluralistic pattern of Chinese national culture and their spirit of tolerance have increased, the activities and research work on Buluotuo culture have taken a new turn since the 1960s. Professional scholars began to excavate Buluotuo's epic poems and songs praising Buluotuo creation performance. In the 1980s, the collection, collation, composition, and Chinese translation of the Buluotuo epic and the ballads praising Buluotuo's achievements in creation were officially launched. Until now, the work has been continuing, and two books have been published, namely, *Buluotuo Scripture Poems* and *Zhuang Mo Scripture Photocopied and Translated*.

Since its publication, scholars have conducted multi-faceted studies on the book of *Buluotuo in the Mo Scripture* and have made fruitful research results, including the cultural system of Buluotuo that has been improved and enhanced, the value of language and script that has been gradually highlighted, the field and connotation of folk religion that has been expanded, some textual documents that have been collated and examined, and the exploration of literature and art, ethnic folklore, and foreign language translation that has opened up a new process of Brotas research. In the article "The Fruit of Ancient Zhuang Characters: A Preliminary Study of Zhuang Mo Scripture Photocopied and Translated", Liang Tingwang (2005) gives a comprehensive introduction to the book *Buluotuo in the Mo Scripture*, which reflects the evolution of Zhuang

³ Gexu activities generally refer to Guangxi Gexu, a traditional folk activity popular in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, one of the national intangible cultural heritages. "Gexu" is a kind of festival gathering and singing activity held by Zhuang people at a specific time and place.

society from natural religion to man-made religion, and the change from the primitive era of obscurity to civilized society. The book reflects the moral philosophy of the Zhuang ancestors who preached the "ancient rules" and the original philosophical thinking of exploring the mysteries of the world, and shows the original appearance of the Zhuang language and script and the long-standing traditional culture. One can interpret the connotations and values of *Buluotuo in the Mo Scripture* from 10 aspects: mythology, planting rice culture, class society's formation, religion, Chinese cultural influence, ethics, ancient customs, simple philosophical outlook, language and writing, and Zhuang poetics.

Other Mo Scriptures in Addition to Buluotuo

In addition to the scriptures on Buluotuo, there are other scriptures in Zhuang Mo scriptures, which contain rituals for the redemption of souls (rice, buffalo, cattle, pig, chicken, duck, etc.), and rituals for the redemption of injustices (redemption of injustices between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, sisters-in-law, etc.), and then trivial and complicated aspects of social production and family life, including building new houses and dragons, sweeping the bad things from the cottage, ancestor worship rituals, funeral rituals, weddings, avoiding ghosts and driving away evil spirits, etc. Most of them are used for children and pregnant women when they are frightened or suffer from inexplicably sick. In that case, people will invite the Bumo to come to their homes to burn incense and light wax on the altar, and chant the corresponding words to eliminate the disaster according to what the host family needs. For instance, *The Book About Singing Twelve* tells the story of a woman who walked all the way to find gods in order to seek peace for her family and to eliminate disasters for herself. As she searched all the way, she found 12 ponds separately, and every time when she passed one pond, an animal would give her a hint and tell her where the god that she was looking for was and her sickness and misfortune would be lessened. When she arrived at the 12th pond her plea, recounting the hardships and difficulties, she had overcome along the way.

The plot of the Zhuang Mo scriptures "Renmin" has chapters about: religious rites of body preservation, performing religious rites, religious rites of killing animals and of breaking the heads of 12 fowls, etc. All aspects are about Zhuang's funeral rites, life, taboos, etc., and about the process of creating human beings and all things together with the ancestor god of Zhuang and other gods, including the plot of opening up the sky, finding water, making the emperor tusk, eliminating disasters, and solving difficulties. The book *Chanting of the Old Scripture* is specially used in the mourning of the deceased when they are carried out going mountains when the day time comes. In the first half of the book, the main purpose is to evaluate the life of the deceased. The main parts and content are in the second half. After the deceased has passed away, Bumo guides the deceased' spirit step by step from the human world to the heaven by reciting scriptures until his spirit is settled.

Characteristics of Zhuang Mo Scripture

Phonetic Characteristics

When using the scriptures, the overall pronunciation was chanted in Zhuang language, except a small number of individual words interspersed with Chinese phonetics. Among them, there is some ancient sounding vocabulary. And only Bumo knows the pronunciation method of the vocabulary and its connotation which is no longer seen in people's daily communication.

Textual Characteristics

The Mo scripture has been developed by the Zhuang dialect characters. In the process of its development, its script has formed a unique and complete system influenced, integrated by Chinese block characters. Since some of the characters are ideographic and some are phonetic, it is not feasible to interpret the text of the book of Mo scripture purely in terms of the literal meaning of the Chinese characters. The only way to reach the connotation is to further search for the conjugation method and pronunciation pattern of the corresponding characters.

Ideological Content and Cultural Connotation

The Zhuang ancestors prayed for divine power to alleviate the conflicts between man and nature, man and society, and man and man in order to survive and develop better. As a medium of communication and dialogue between man, god, and ghost, the Mo scriptures recited by the Bumo when they do religious rites are naturally the best historical witness of the development and evolution of the nation. The ancient scriptures are the fruits of the collective creation of the Bumo over the generations and are rich in folk wisdom and knowledge of life. The simple, vivid, and imaginative language expression shows the spirituality, wisdom, and talent of the Zhuang people in artistic creation, which has precious folklore value and is a precious Mo scripture documentary material in local living form. It also has certain educational and penitential functions for social moral behavior, production, life, folk customs, and so on. It also deals with ethics and morality, the harmonious development of man and society, man and nature, explaining the continuation of life and ecological balance and religious beliefs, etc. It is a classic work of Mo culture transmission.

The Value of Zhuang Mo Scripture

Cultural Value

Historical and cultural value. The ancient scriptures have a high historical and cultural value. The Zhuang ancestors prayed for divine power to alleviate the conflicts between man and nature, man and society, and man and man, in order to better survive and develop. As a medium of communication and dialogue between man, god, and ghost, the Mo scriptures recited by the Bumo when they do religious rites are naturally the best historical witness of the development and evolution of the nation.

The value of phonetic marks. The ancient scriptures are chanted in the voice of the Sha branch⁴, with a few ancient sounds interspersed. At the same time, the influence of the ancient Zhuang dialect characters in the text on the modern dialect characters compiled nowadays is also an excellent example in terms of the composition of the characters and the combination of interspersed strokes.

Artistic value. The ancient scriptures were handed down by Bumo master and apprentice, and were generally not hereditary. They were handwritten in the form of minuscule manuscripts copied with a brush. Both the texture of the lines of the ancient square characters and the special patterns attached to them reflect the aesthetic characteristics of art, which is a form of folk art.

Literature and folklore value. It has precious literary and folk culture value. The scripture is the fruits of the collective creation of successive generations of Bumos, with rich folk wisdom and knowledge of life. The simple, vivid, and imaginative language expression shows the spirituality, wisdom, and talent of the Zhuang people in artistic creation, which has precious folklore literary value.

⁴ The Sha branch is one of the branches of the Zhuang nationality.

Social Value

1. Zhuang Mo scripture declares non-genetic inheritance and non-genetic inheritance projects, gets in touch with non-genetic heritage centers at all levels, strives to apply for non-genetic inheritance, and declares non-genetic heritage projects for the Bumo gentlemen in the area, if conditions permit, to give the folk Bumo gentlemen an official name, to stimulate and encourage their interests and responsibility in passing on the Bumo culture.

2. It declares the establishment of non-hereditary inheritance points in the village committees where Zhuang people live in the area, and asks the Bumo gentlemen to hold regular online and offline Bumo scripture transmission activities to explain the cultural connotation of the square Zhuang characters and Bumo scripture to people, so as to increase the sense of national cultural identity and cultural heritage.

3. It uses self-media technology to widely publicize Mo culture, choosing a professional team to shoot a documentary film of Bumo to spread Mo culture as an excellent traditional culture, and to lean towards the community consciousness of the Chinese nation's pluralistic unity.

Conclusion

Culture is the spiritual bond that holds people together. The Zhuang Mo scripture has attracted much attention not only because it revolves around various things in daily life such as marriage, mourning, marriage and farming which are closely related to people, but also has great academic value. The large number of ancient Zhuang characters preserved in it have the countless values of function as a record to witness the historical ring and falling and have accumulated and embraced rich national historical and cultural connotations. The fact that a state made greater efforts to protect and inherit, which can promote the culture of ethnic minorities, which will help all ethnic groups forge the homeland for the excellent Chinese culture and promote the great unity of the nation. Furthermore, the most important reason for the rescue of the folk scriptures is that they are very rare, and their scarcity itself can easily lead to endangerment and loss. Additionally, the transmission of the Mo scripture is generally carried by the older generation who transcribed and passed on to their own disciples or the disciple who borrowed the original from their own master to take their own transcription. After the transcription of the original, it will be returned to the master, and because it is generally poor paper quality, it is easy to suffer from corrosion, not conducive to long-term preservation. There are some reasons that resulted in the loss of a large number of historical manuscript including the changes of people's way of life leading to a situation in which people did not pay enough attention to manuscript, and the ancient manuscript being not easy to be read, etc.

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