An Imagery Reading of Zhuang People in *The Epic of BaeuqloxDoh*

Yuande ZHU, Rongzhen GUAN
Guangxi University

Introduction

In *The Epic of BaeuqloxDoh*, the image of the Zhuang people is reflected as one who loves peace, hardworking, and with harmony as the first principle, whether in a relation within the ethnic group, beyond the ethnic group, or with the environments. As the story gradually unfolds itself, we could see the Zhuang people developing from infancy towards maturity. Some activities are quite unique for the Zhuang people, for example, the way to plead with gods or spirits to release one's disastrous situation on purpose of grudge resolution between human relations and the act of recollecting the fled souls, are two ways with strong features of the people to regulate human relation and relation with the environments, the former is through a ritual ceremony, the latter, also through ritual ceremony, usually by setting up a flower shrine in the house.

There are, no doubt, war and other adventures for the ancient Zhuang people. Lin Anning insists that 'Ancient Zhuang people would often fight between tribes'.
However, according to what has been sorted out by Lin Anning, the major part of the war listed is between Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz, which is, heated as the fighting may be, more a conflict between brothers for rights rather than fighting the monsters or conquering the unknown or strange enemies. The lesson for the war between Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz is more a moral one in handling relationship between brothers than glory in war, and the original of the Zhuang people to resort to grudge resolution for solving conflicts between family members and between relatives.

II. Grudge Resolution: the Way to Solve Human Conflicts with Each Other

Grudge resolution is used in the epic to solve problems between human beings, more often than not, between family members, such as father and son, brothers, parents-in-law and daughter-in-law, etc. It is a kind of ritual ceremony appealing to certain god or goddess or even certain spirits for the solution of the grudge or hatred between family members or between relatives. The origin of hatred between brothers has come from Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz, as the former was the son of the king’s second wife, married after the death of his first wife who gave birth to the latter. Relying on his mother, Cojvueugz deprived his elder brother of his rights to the throne and to properties of the royal family. There has been heated fighting between the two brothers, involving God of Thunder and others gods. At last, Prince Hanqvengz was killed by Prince Cojvuengz, not through fighting, but through means of deception. With the help of gods, Prince Hanqvengz became a god in the Heaven, and Prince Cojvuengz, by means of a ritual ceremony to release his brother’s hatred, achieved grudge resolution with Hanqvengz. However, in the English version, *The Epic of Baeuqloxgdoh*, the story ends when Hanqvengz runs away from home and refuses to return, none of the war between the two brothers is involved. In the epic, the emphasis is laid, rather than in heroic adventures and war, in the lesson of remarriage of the king and how to adjust the relation between wife and the son born by his ex-wife, and how to handle the relation between brothers.

To stress harmony as the first principle, there are two culture phenomena to regulate relations between various parties; the grudge resolution is used to regulate relation between human beings, and recollecting of lost souls to regulate relation between human and their environments.
Grudge resolution in the epic, as has been mentioned above, is not used in its ordinary meaning, but in a special situation after grudge, or even hatred has been formed and consequent disaster is afflicting as retaliation, a special ritual ceremony has to be performed by some Mo priests or Taoist priests to resolve the grudge, so that the disaster can be warded off. In the epic, it is often the improper behavior or words of the younger generation that invokes curses from the older generation, and when disasters visit as retaliation, the younger generation has to get council from Baeuqloxxgdoh, the almighty God in the epic who would then offer suggestion of a ritual ceremony for the grudge resolution.

In the epic, four cases are narrated under the subtitle of ‘Grudge resolution’, namely, the grudge resolution between father and son, between mother and daughter, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and between two brothers. In fact, the grudge resolution between brothers may be viewed as the continuous story of Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz, and, of course, it can also be meant for any brothers having grudges towards each other.

Grudge arises between father and son because the son would not obey his father, he would talk back, fight back. When father tells him to go to plough the field, “The son would fish out his penis to insult his father.” To talk back, even fight back against one’s father is already regarded as very bad behaviors not in conformity with the filial principle widely acknowledged among Chinese people, Zhuang people alike. The act of using the penis to insult another person is simply something not to be done at all, all the worse to insult one’s father. No wonder the father would spell a curse upon his son. The consequence is that all the curse being realized and the young man badly afflicted by various disasters. Harmony resumed only after a ritual ceremony to plead with the spirits, upon the advice of Baeuqloxxgdoh and performed by some Mo priests.

If the fault is all on the part of the son in the conflicts between father and son, the fault can be said to be double-sided in the case of the conflicts between mother and daughter. The daughter was not content to her parents as they took too much from her husband and gave too little in return in her marriage, so she decided not to return to see her parents or pay homage to her ancestors. When she at last came back to her parents, things got worse because she was not there to see her parents, but to struggle for properties. The father’s remarks showing favor on a son while contempt on the daughter obviously added fuel to the fire. A quarrel arose between mother and daughter, and very soon developed into fighting and that invoked the
mother to spell curses on her daughter. And when the curses realized themselves, the daughter had to seek advice from Baeuqloxygdo, and ritual ceremony had to be performed pleading with gods and spirits for the situation to return harmonious.

In this case, the fault is on the part of the parents first, but when the conflict intensified, and consequent disasters visit the daughter to realize the curses, the solution Baeuqloxygdo suggested is the same for the young to admit having done wrong and tries to do something to amend the situation, which points to a male chauvinism moral value for a harmonious household and society. It may not seem quite fair in today’s view, but historically, it is necessary for the people at that time to establish social order on basis of male chauvinism, on basis of respecting the old from the younger generation.

The case of the conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is similar to that between father and son, with the daughter-in-law hiding the rice she got from her parents in return to the gift from the husband’s family. When the parents-in-law ate up the hidden rice, the daughter-in-law became mad in fury, and a lot improper words were exchanged, resulted in the curse from the mother-in-law, and the solution is roughly the same: ritual ceremony performed and the household becomes harmony again.

The case of the conflicts between brothers is a struggle for property and for rights in the household. Brothers, in any country, may face similar problems. For example, in the Holy Bible, Jacob gets his father’s blessing by deceiving his brother Esau, to give up the rights and he pretended to be Esau to get his father, Isaac, who was blind then, to give him blessing. Esau, angry with his brother, claimed that he would kill Jacob once their father died, forcing Jacob to run away from home. It is similar for the story of Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz. Hanqvuengz is the king’s son with his first wife, when she died and the king remarried, Cojvuengz is born by his second wife. With the backup of his mother, and mute consent from his father, the king, Cojvuengz claims all rights to himself, depriving his brother of everything, forcing the latter to run away from home. It is the younger brother that has to run away in Bible, while it is the elder brother that has to run away in The Epic of Baeuqloxygdo.

In all the stories in the epic, not only the curse itself that matter, almost everything broken by the people would turn out some spirit or other to afflict the persons concerned, this reflects, on the one hand, the idea that everything has its soul is prevailing among Zhuang people, on the other hand, it reflects how
important those matters are, say, a pot, a grain container, a water jar, all playing very important part in the life of Zhuang people.

From what has been explored above, the moral principle of harmony is achieved through conflicts between family members or relatives and the subsequent solution of the conflicts to retrieve peace and harmony. In summing up this part of the Zhuang myth text, Lu Jingbao says, “the text accounts conflicts between father and son, between mother and daughter, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and the consequent disasters they suffer, aiming at telling people what is advocated as moral and what behavior is immoral, giving lessons to people from the negative cases that unharmonious family or relative relation would result in sufferings, so that people are warned of what is not to be done. Only by following laws and regulations Baeuqloxdoh has set up for them, can they have a peaceful life, and their household would become prosperous.”[3] Possible sufferings include having no children, death of existing children, or even having no luck to adapt a child from others; the grains won’t grow, and thus having no harvest; domestic animals will die, etc. To make things return to normal, as Lu also points out, the young should be more active to take the responsibility, dare to admit having done wrong. Grudge resolution here may sometimes mean the grudge resolution between the living and the dead, a case in point is the grudge resolution between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law, for when the young woman finally repent, her parents-in-law were already dead. The same is true of the grudge resolution between Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz. The grudge resolution of the brothers in the epic, without giving the name of the persons so that it may be generalized to anybody, may also be taken as the continuous story between Prince Cojvuengz and Prince Hanqvengz.

III. Recollecting of the Fled Soul: Human in Relation with Other Creatures and Environments

Almost every nation believes there is soul of some sort. According to Frazer, the soul is a mini self in a person, giving the person vitality to act. The soul can leave the person temporary or forever, the former happens when the person is asleep, the latter happens when the person dies.[4] He pointed out that the ancient magic is believed to be able to work upon the soul, as they believe in “like produces like”. If a person’s soul can be damaged, then this person would die. “An image in the
likeness of the enemy, and given in enemy’s name, can be worked upon, stuck with
pin, etc. and the enemy will die."[5]

That is exactly what the Chinese is doing in a story in *Investiture of Gods*. Yao
Tianjun, a heavenly god, set up an altar, made a straw figure with Jiang Ziya’s name
on it, and put three lamps on the figure head and seven lamps under the figure feet,
twice a day he would pray to it, and soon, Jiang Ziya’s soul would come out of his
body. While people of other nation believe the soul to be a wholesome entity like
mini self, the Chinese believe the soul can be sub-divided into 10 parts: three hun
(soul) and seven po (auxiliary soul). Jiang Ziya was then the general commander of
the army of Zhou, the uprising group to replace Shang Dynasty to rule the country.
Yao Tianjun was helping Wen Zhong, Prime Minister of Shang Dynasty, in an
attempt to suppress the uprising. Upon Yao’s prayer, two hun and six po had fled
Jiang’s body to be captured by Yao at the altar, and the 1 hun and 1 po left were also
prayed out of Jiang’s body, but they would not go to Yao’s altar, instead, they drifted
to Mount Kunlun where they were captured by God of South Pole, who was a
friend of Jiang, and they were taken back to Jiang’s barracks by Chi Jingzi, another
god and Jiang’s friend. That evening, Chi Jingzi went to Yao’s altar, took the straw
figure by force, and put the hun and po into a guard. With all the hun and po of
Jiang, he went to see Jiang who was lying as dead, he ‘put the mouth of the guard
on Jiang’s head, knocked at the guard three or four times, and all the hun and po
went into Jiang’s body.’[6] In this way, Jiang was finally saved. Later on, Lu Ya used
the same trick to kill Zhao Gongming, whose soul was later on got the investiture as
God of wealth.

The recollecting of souls in *The Epic of Baeuqloxgdoh*, to be sure, is not a heated
fighting by means of capturing the enemy’s soul, it is rather an act of collecting the
souls that have fled away and become astray, and, in some cases, turned into spirit
to afflict the people concerned. Liu Yumei and Lin Lan, in their paper sorting the
research on Baeuqloxgdoh, point out that the English version “redeeming” is not
quite proper to be used in translating the term “赎魂”, as “redeeming” connotes the
meaning of recovering something by payment or expenditure, but the term in the
original does not need a payment, it is “by a ritual ceremony on the part of the
owner to guide the fled souls of the creature or grain to return to its body”,[7] so that
it can grow normally. But they just content by pointing out the improperness of the
term in English, would not go so far as suggesting a proper term to be used here. I
agree with them about the improperness of using ‘redeeming’ here, and I would go
farther to point out the term “lost soul” is not very proper here either, as the soul of the creature or grain is not “lost” through some negligence, but rather has fled away for some reason or other. My suggestion is to translate the whole term into “recollecting the fled soul”.

By “recollecting”, it means the souls are away and got lost as to how to return home to their bodies, through the efforts and skills of the Mo priests, they would be recollected and directed their way to return. This needs a ritual ceremony, but not any payment in return, and the souls are not in possession of any alienate owner that would ask for money in return to redeem them. As has been pointed out, the souls are not lost, but they have fled away because some interference from outside, often from the abuse of the people. For example, when the buffalo broke into a chieftain’s field and the chieftain chased and killed it, “The heads are thrown on the field ridges, /and the guts are abandoned around the field, /The buffalo souls are scattering all over,/ And fleeing away in all directions.”[8] As for other creatures and for rice, souls flee away in similar manner, all due to the abuse from human beings. Once they run away, they could not find their way back to their own bodies, consequently, the creature or the grain will not grow normally.

The culture symbol of the story about recollecting the soul is quite profound. First of all, the stories in the epic are recollecting souls for creatures and grains rather than for human beings, which is quite contrary to many other cultures that would have to do with human beings rather than creatures or grains. Frazer mentions the recollecting of souls in Africa, Asia and in Australia, showing that recollecting the soul is not unique for the Zhuang people. What is unique is that the Zhuang people would do it for creatures and rice rather than for human beings. The Han people in China would also recollect the soul for human beings rather than for creatures or for a crop as rice.

Unlike the helpless fled soul of Jiang Ziya, the fled soul of the creature or grain can turn into evil spirits to bring disaster to people, for example, the fled soul of the buffalo could make the owner lose all his buffalos dropping dead everywhere. As a result, there is no buffalo to plough the land and human beings have to do it instead, of course, they suffer a great deal by so doing.

In The Epic of Baeuqloxo, five cases are accounted for recollecting the fled souls, namely, recollecting the rice soul, the buffalo soul, the pig soul, the chicken soul and the fish soul, all of them either creatures or crops rather than human beings.
The accounts of those stories reflect Zhuang people’s wish to maintain a harmonious eco-system.

To maintain harmonious eco-system, people have to view all members in the eco-system equally, respect them rather than conquer and abuse them. To be on equal footing, they view everything having souls like human beings themselves. The soul will flee away if a kind of creature is abused by people, and turn into evil spirits to afflict human beings. In that case, human beings have to perform a ritual ceremony to recollect the fled soul, directing them back to the body, so that harmony will resume and the creature would grow normally. So the ritual ceremony to recollect souls can be viewed as the right measures with efforts to restore the eco-system. Ancient people did not have the knowledge about ecology we have today, but for their pure consciousness, they knew that they should maintain a harmonious eco-system, not only for the creatures or crops concerned, but also for the sake of human themselves. In reality, they put to practice that “man maintains the interest of the nature is to maintain the interest of their own.”[9]

On the other hand, if measures not taken to redress the abnormal situation, things will not change even attempts be made to raise the creature that is afflicted, for example, in the story of recollecting souls for buffalos, after all the buffalos died, the chieftain bought some from far-away buffalo fair, but the buffalos he bought refuse to grow or to breed. Only after a ritual ceremony performed, did things return to normal. It would be much easier for ancient people to redress the eco-system to gear it to normality, but it would be much more difficult for us today to redress the abnormal eco environments. The methods here are similar to the part of grudge resolution stories, the text would show abnormal situation as a consequence of abuse from human beings, and the human beings would suffer from the consequent disasters, and than, advice is sought from Baeuqloxiqgdox, who would suggest a ritual ceremony to redress the situation to return to harmony.

From the discussion above, it is clear that *The Epic of Baeuqloxiqgdox* is without doubt a canon text of the Zhuang people, and it tells stories quite unique to the rest of the world. Both grudge resolution and recollecting the fled souls are symbolic, reflecting the characters of the Zhuang people who would put harmony as very first principle, harmony not only among the people, but also between the people and its environments, showing unconscious sense of maintaining a harmonious ecological system between human beings and the environments in which they live.
Notes:
[1] 林安宁：《论壮族神话 “捕捉” 神话中的布洛陀》，《民族文学研究》，2012 年第 5 期，第 151 页。
[2] 韩家权等译著：《布洛陀史诗》，南宁：广西人民出版社，2012 年，第 152 页。
[3] 卢静宝：《壮族布洛陀文化经典崇尚和谐社会的生态审美意识研究》，《名作欣赏》，2013 年第 5 期，第 36 页。
[4] （英） 詹・弗雷泽著，刘魁立等编：《金枝精要》，上海：上海文艺出版社，2001 年，第 163 页。
[5] Joseph Campbell, 《Myths to Live by》，Toronto-New York-London-Sydney: Bantam Books, 1972. p.11.
[6] （明）许仲琳：《封神演义》，上海：上海古籍出版社，1991 年，第 300 页。
[7] 刘玉梅、林巍：《布洛陀诗经研究综述》，《广西社会科学》，2013 年第 2 期，第 133 页。
[8] 韩家权等译著：《布洛陀史诗》，南宁：广西人民出版社，2012 年，第 225 页。
[9] 卢静宝：《壮族布洛陀经典崇尚自然的生态审美意识析》，《学术前沿》，2012 年第 24 期，第 157 页。

Yuande ZHU, Ph.D., and currently dean of Foreign Languages College, Guangxi University, China. His academic interests cover comparative literature, English and American literature, translation studies. His major publications include The Call of the Other—A Study of the Construction of the Others in Joseph Conrad's Fictions, and some translation of Zhuang canonic books, including Liao Songs of Pingguo Zhuang and some articles involved in the similar fields.

Rongzhen GUAN, Ph.D., she now serves as professor and vice dean of Foreign Languages College of Guangxi University, China. Her academic interests cover comparative literature, English and American literature, translation studies as well as linguistics. Her publications include Study of English Variations in Ten ASEAN countries and some twenty articles involved.