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# A Comparative Study on the Primitive Land God Worship between Zhuang and Thai Nationalities

Zheng Huang*
College of Arts, Guilin University of Technology, Guilin, China
*Corresponding author, e-mail: 63113529@qq.com

***Abstract**: Land God worship refers to the primitive belief that people deify land because of their dependence on land in farming culture, which reflects the inseparable relationship between human and nature from material to spiritual aspects. "All things have spirit" is the foundation of Land God worship. Zhuang and Thai originally belong to the "same root nationality" (Fan, 2007). The two nationalities have similarities in many aspects. The land belief culture of Zhuang and Thai people, which mainly focuses on farming culture, has a long history. In this paper, through sorting out and comparing the worship of Land Gods between Zhuang and Thai, this paper analyzes and studies the non-religious primitive worship of traditional culture, the different forms of cultural existence, the strong and weak trend of artistic modeling and the participants, so as to promote mutual understanding and cultural identity between Zhuang and Thai.*

***Keywords**: Zhuang nationality; Thai nationality; Land God worship*

## Homology and Heterogeneity of Zhuang and Thai Culture

Zhuang and Thai belong to the same root nationality. Although there is a distance in geographical location, Zhuang and Thai are closely related in customs, language and lifestyle. Both Thai and Zhuang belong to the zhung-dai branch of the Zhuang Dong language family of the Sino-Tibetan Language Family. They share the same origin and belong to the "Na" cultural circle. Though influenced by Han culture, the essence of Zhuang traditional culture has not changed. Thai traditional culture has obvious characteristics of foreign transplantation, the main content of transplantation is similar to Zhuang culture, and later with the development of history, it is influenced by South Asian and Indian culture.

The origin of Zhuang people can be traced back to the ancient people in the south of the Yangtze River. Zhuang nationality is the most populous ethnic group in China, which is distributed all over the country. Guangxi is the main settlement of Zhuang nationality. In history, the Baiyue people in the south of The Five Ridges have repeatedly integrated with the Central Plains Chinese nation and developed into today's Zhuang and Dong languages. Zhuang people are polytheistic, among which Gnome, Frog God, Huapo God and Ancestor Spirit God are the main beliefs of Zhuang people. Taoism and Buddhism have been introduced into the Zhuang nationality area and merged with the original belief. Although there is no specific fixed Buddhist temple and Taoist temple, Buddhism, Taoism and the original belief of Zhuang people constitute the belief structure of today's Zhuang people.

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Tailand has a population of about 70 million, and the main ethnic group is the Thai nationality, accounting for about 82% of the total population. The official language of Tailand is Thai, which belongs to the Zhuang Dai language branch of the Zhuang Dong language family of the Sino Tibetan language family. Many Thai words are the same or similar to Zhuang, and the older the words, the more they reflect this feature. It is generally believed that the Zhuang Nationality in China and the Thai nationality in Tailand belong to the West Ou people among the Baiyue people in the spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period, and land worship is the common feature of the two nations. It was just thousands of years ago that Luoyue, the ancestor of Zhuang and Thai nationality, began to cultivate rice, which gradually formed the primitive land worship, which had a similar sacrificial process. In the long-term historical development, Zhuang and Thai nationalities have undergone obvious type changes, forming a "homologous and heterogeneous" relationship (Qin, 2003).

## The Phenomenon of Zhuang's Land God Worship

Land belief is the common primitive religious belief of Zhuang and Thai. The people of the two nationalities believe in the Land God. They believe that the Land God can protect the lives of villagers and livestock in the village and protect the harvest of crops. Zhuang and Thai have the same worship objects and have similar sacrificial process. Mr. Song Zhaolin (1983) once pointed out: "the land is the load of all things, the land is boundless, and the power is infinite...". The worship of nature is the basis of the formation of the earth God. Under the guidance of the idea that all things have spirits, Zhuang people have gradually formed the earth God worship with obvious characteristics. The Land God of Zhuang nationality is called the earth mother. The earth mother can produce five grains. Every year, the Land God worships the earth mother on June 6. With the improvement of male status, the Land God gradually changes from female to male.

The site selection of Zhuang villages is based on the theory of geomantic omen of the Han nationality. When building the village, the Zhuang people first delimit the construction scope of the village, build the village gate at the entrance, and place the memorial tablets of the Land God on the peripheral roads to pray for the protection of the gods. There is a popular saying that "worship the Land God before entering the village". The Land God of is the greatest protection god in the village of Zhuang nationality. The Land God has infinite power, guarding the safety of the village and protecting the weather. Every year in spring and autumn, every village has to kill pigs and chickens to solemnly sacrifice the Land God. The Spring Festival sacrifice plough circle in Ling Yun and Le Ye areas of Guangxi is a typical spring festival. At the beginning of spring every year, Zhuang people set up colorful sheds next to the fields, and then the county officials led their subordinates to spring land by sedan chairs and went into the sheds to change into costumes. Later, the ceremonial students accompanied them to the spring fields for a symbolic spring ploughing foundation laying ceremony. Autumn sacrifice is a reward for the blessing of the God of the earth. Usually, if there is a bad omen in the village, we should also prepare a sacrifice to pray for the Land God, pray for its disaster elimination, evil spirits, evil spirits, and peace of the village (Qin,2000).

There are many kinds of Land Gods in Zhuang nationality, such as the Land God, Earth Grandmother, the King of the Society, and the God of the Field who is in charge of the rice field. Some people with noble morality will also be regarded as Land Gods after their death. Zhuang people named the land with "Na" as

the meaning of paddy field. The earth Temple of Zhuang nationality, also known as temple of she, is the protection god of the village and manages the land of the village. There are 1-2 earth temples in each village, or they are built according to their surnames. The site of the earth temple is located on the road to the village, the precious land designated by the geomantic omen or in the quiet woods. The large-scale earth temple is designed according to the Architectural Regulations of the ancestral hall, with carved beams and painted buildings. A shrine is set up in the center of the temple. The "Land God's throne" is written on red paper and the statue is paid. Every year on the first day of the lunar new year, men dress formally and pray to the Land God for peace in the coming year. On the second day of the second month of the lunar calendar, Zhuang people go to the earth temple to offer sacrifices to the Land God. The Zhuang people bring glutinous rice cake and chicken to sacrifice to the land lord, often accompanied by fireworks and martial arts ceremonies. Some villages are short of funds, so the villagers will simplify the construction of the earth temple, and the facilities inside are relatively ordinary, but there are constant tributes and sacrificial activities throughout the year.

The existence of land temples in villages reflects that people are unable to resist various natural disasters under the condition of low productivity level, so they rely on primitive religion and witchcraft, trying to protect the village by shaping different Land Gods. From its starting point, the worship of earth God itself is the dependence of the farming nation on the land and people's good hope for the future. Through the creation of the earth God, the supernatural power is created and the sense of security in the heart is established. Due to the worship of the earth God, the villagers usually don't cut down the trees in the village, especially the plants near the earth temple are completely protected. Zhuang people think that cutting down trees, like shaving the hair on the body, will hurt the earth God, so it also makes the vegetation environment of Zhuang villages more complete. The ceremony of offering sacrifices to the God of land plays an important role in uniting the villagers of the village and gathering the power of the clan (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Land God worship everywhere in Zhuang Village*

## The Worship of Land God of Thai Nationality

The worship of gods in Tailand permeates all aspects of life. The gods of the Thai nationality are paid for

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three kinds of "good gods", and people will build temples and shrines for them. The three kinds of gods are the god who created the world, the earth God, the guardian God of human life and production, and the ancestor god worshipped by ancestors (2004). In Tailand, the worship of earth God incarnates as the worship of king. In Thai, the God of earth is the pronoun of the king. The king is called the Lord of the earth God in the king's Ode of Tailand.

The cultivated land area of Tailand accounts for 41% of the national land area. Land has an important impact on people's life and production, and the expression of land worship is the most obvious. The Thai nationality is also an ancient rice growing nation just like the Zhuang nationality, especially the worship of Land God. In Tailand, the guardian God was originally a gecko gecko that preys on mosquitoes. Gecko can be seen everywhere, which is related to the humid and hot climate in Tailand, which breeds a large number of mosquitoes. The earliest God of land came from Brahmanism. According to legend, the father of the God of land came from the city of Pali under the rule of King taosura. His nine princes were respectively sent to guard the houses, open spaces, cattle sheds, rice fields, barns, hills, stairs, temples and houses. They became the Land Gods believed by the Thai people since ancient times, and were worshipped in the God's house to protect the family Ann. Although more than 90% of Thais believe in Buddhism, the Land God house does not belong to Buddhism. It is a primitive belief. The custom of belief in earth God can be seen everywhere in Tailand, which is mainly manifested in the following two aspects: one is the national pillar (city pillar) of each government; the other is the Land God house of ordinary people's family.

## City Pillar and State Pillar

In the entrance or center of the village, the God column will be erected, and the city pillar will be built in the city center. The custom of establishing pillar is to invite the God of land protection, protect the urban residents and unite the people. People will hold regular sacrificial activities to worship various gods or local gods to protect the local people.

The middle of the national pillar will be hollowed out to put the star map in it. At present, there are city pillars in 76 Tailand's prefectures. For example, Ayutthaya, Bangkok and Chiang Mai, etc., must choose a good time to set up the city (state) pillar before the city is built. In 1782, King Rama I of the Bangkok Dynasty seized power from Zheng Xin, a Chinese, and moved his capital from tunwuli to Bangkok. He built pillar in the center of Bangkok city and built pillar temple near the Mekong River to pray for long-term stability of the country and people's protection from disasters (Chen, 1990).

## Spirit House

In Tailand, almost all commercial and residential buildings can see the Land God house. At the beginning of the construction of houses, markets, temples or other buildings, astrologers and professionals are invited to preside over the ceremony to build the Land God house, which is called "spirit house" in English. Thais believe that the construction of Land God house can prevent ghosts from entering the house and protect family members. It has the same function as Zhaobi in northern China and shigandang in Mount Thai to protect family safety. In Tailand, it can be said that every household has the Land God house, sometimes one

house may be more than one. Thais still believe in animism today. They believe that every place is protected by gods. They believe that all nature is a spiritual world, and that good or bad spirits can bring good or bad luck to human beings. In all things with spirits, everywhere, they have occupied this land before human beings came to the earth. In order to maintain harmony with them, they must maintain a happy life and a good place to thank every day.

The ordinary Land God house covers an area of about 1 to 2 square meters. The buildings of different styles were originally specially made by carpenters. Later, in order to prevent termites, they were also built with concrete or bricks. The Land God house is composed of three parts: the platform foundation, the pillar and the shrine. Some of them are directly built into small pavilion style. The appearance of the shrine looks like a miniature Thai temple building. The pillars are 1.5 meters above the ground, and there are statues of gods, dancers, animals and clergy in the shrine. There are also four Buddha statues or Rama V king. Every morning, people put jasmine flowers, fruits, colored cloth, incense candles, water and soft drinks on the shrine. When the owner goes out and goes home, he will worship the God's house with his hands together, and passers-by will also worship devoutly (Figure 2). In addition, the nine tier state umbrella is accompanied by the earth God house, which can be seen in Buddhist rituals in Tailand. It can be considered as a mixture of Buddhism and primitive worship (Huang, 2008).



*Figure 2. Land God house of typical Ayudhaya and Bangkok dynasties*

The construction of Land God house is divided into two steps, one is to build god house, the other is to invite God. Builders must follow certain rules, usually in the yard high or auspicious place, but also cannot be too high, otherwise it is not conducive to the daily change of offerings. It must be kept away from kitchens, toilets and garbage dumps. It should not stand in the shadow of the building. It is said that the shadow of the building falls on the earth God house, which will give the owner bad luck. In the shrine, the statue can't face the door of the house. The direction is generally East, northeast or Southeast. When the land condition is tight, it can be built on the roof. The Land God house in Tailand embodies specific cultural interaction and spiritual activities. Under the influence of primitive religious concepts such as land worship, Buddhism in Tailand is compatible with primitive religion (Zhao, 2010). The nature of the city pillars and state pillars erected in the capital of the Thai people is the same as that of the ordinary families offering Land God houses. They are all for the sake of praying for happiness and peace. At the same time, they also reflect the unique phenomenon

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of the integration of Brahmanism and Buddhism culture. Modern Thai people still have a passion for the worship of the earth God. Regardless of their age, when passing through the earth God, people will hold their hands together and worship the earth God with Buddhism, which is very persistent and devout.

## A Comparison of the Worship of Land Gods Between Zhuang and Thai Nationalities

Paul Taylor believes that "ecological ethics" mainly includes three elements: the first element is belief system, that is, the world outlook on nature; the second element is the attitude of respecting nature; the third is a set of norms and norms that have universal binding force on moral agents. We can find that Zhuang and Thai people's mild attitude towards nature is different from some powerful nations' changing the concept of nature, which implies the ecological ethics of unity with nature. The worship of the Land God of Zhuang nationality, the care for the surrounding trees and the reverence of the Thai people for the Land God show the inner restraint of the two peoples to the nature.

Professor Fan Honggui of the Institute of Ethnology of Guangxi University for Nationalities holds that the production of culture is not an isolated existence, but there are various connections between cultures. There are many similarities in cultural traditions, customs and languages between Zhuang and Thai nationalities. Due to its long history and the influence of different cultures, Zhuang Thai culture presents different features. As a sovereign state, the Thai nationality has its own characters and main culture. It has independent school education. Thai culture is closely combined with traditional culture. Zhuang nationality is an integral part of the Chinese nation. The characters of Zhuang nationality were created after 1949 combined with other national characters and pronunciation. Relying on social education, Zhuang nationality is in a passive position in culture.

### Primitive Worship with Non-religious Characteristics

Zhuang and Thai are people born from the same root and have the same culture. Due to the backward productivity in the primitive period, the two nationalities have limited cognitive ability to nature, and do not have enough technology to protect their life and production. In the face of the powerful and unknown natural phenomena, they can only rely on the protection of supernatural gods. Especially in the agricultural production related to survival, the worship of Land God is an inevitable result. In religious beliefs, there are still some primitive beliefs left in the culture of the two ethnic groups, including witchcraft. At the same time, some contents and forms of foreign religions have been absorbed. However, with the development of history, there will be some differences between the two ethnic groups. For example, the custom of burning paper money when offering sacrifices to ghosts and gods is not the custom of burning paper money. This is the influence of Han culture in Central Plains on Zhuang people and the popularity of Tailand Waiting for the heat, burning paper money is very easy to cause wood building fire. Up to now, there are professional clergymen in the worship ceremony of Land Gods in Zhuang and Thai nationalities. The main body of worship is the gods of primitive religious belief, which shows that the primitive religion still maintains the original influence in the cultural society of Zhuang and Thai (Pan, 2001).

## There are Different Cultural Forms between Zhuang and Thai Nationalities

In the history of Zhuang nationality, there is no unified religious belief. Polytheism and witchcraft coexist among the people. The diversity of Zhuang people's worship of the Land God shows that it has certain randomness, which is typical folk characteristics. The three aspects of witchcraft, Taoism and Buddhism are compatible and parallel. The content of Zhuang people's blessing is nothing more than praying to eliminate disasters and difficulties in the world, to have more children and more blessings, to have a healthy and long life, and to have a long life The secular contents such as a bumper grain harvest and The domestic animals are all thriving failed to rise to the level and height of religion. Although the religious belief of Zhuang nationality was injected by Buddhism and Taoism in the later period, the nature of polytheism has not changed, and polytheism is still very popular in today's villages.

When the Thai people came to SukhoTai Dynasty, they fully accepted Hinayana Buddhism and made it a national religion, which was deeply rooted in the ideology of the Thai people. More than 90% of Thai people believe in Buddhism and are closely related to Buddhism in all aspects of life. All boys who believe in Buddhism must cut their hair into monks at a certain age. Buddhism has become the spiritual pillar of the Thai people. The worship of Land God has been integrated with Buddhism in the hearts of the Thai people. As Tailand is a royal power country, the king naturally became the spokesman of God and appeared in the image of God. From this we can compare Zhuang and Thai people in religious concepts and Zhuang people's separation, cultural expression also tend to be different.

## Strengthening and Weakening of Artistic Modeling

In Tailand, the Land God house can be seen everywhere in the fields, roadsides, businesses, squares, and houses in front of the house. The color and shape of the house make the novice see it and ask repeatedly about the role of construction. The Land God house is perfectly integrated with architectural design and urban design, forming the landscape of Tailand's regional identity. Because of the combination with Buddhism, the shape of the Land God house designed by the Thai people is similar to the miniature Buddha Hall. It is very exquisite and has been strengthened in artistic modeling. Compared with the Land God house of the Thai nationality, the artistic modeling tends to be simple and crude, the artistic modeling is weakened, and the various Temple shapes are different, and there is no unified specific form of expression, which also weakens the national identity of Zhuang culture.

## Participants

Professor Liang Tingwang believes that with the development of human society, religion is also undergoing evolution, from primitive religion to original folk religion, and after artificial remodeling in class society, it has evolved into creative religion again. These are the three stages of religious evolution (Liang, 2009). Zhuang people are usually busy with their own agricultural production or go out to work to earn money. In the Festival ceremony of Land God sacrifice, the villagers rush home to participate in the sacrificial activity, communicate with each other and connect feelings. The main body of participation is the Zhuang people of the village. Outsiders cannot join in. The Land God sacrifice of Zhuang nationality has become the main

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festival of the nation.

The Thai people combine the Land God sacrifice with Buddhism. The Buddhist Thai people put large-scale sacrificial rites in temples, especially those to celebrate the harvest stage, and invite the temple monks to participate. The Buddhist temple has a large area of space, and various folk activities related to life will be held at the same time of offering sacrifices. Religion, folk belief and daily life are integrated into one. The sale of various delicacies, handicrafts and daily necessities drives the atmosphere of the whole activity, and the boundaries of the participants are blurred.

## Conclusion

The worship of Land Gods of Zhuang and Thai nationalities fully embodies the simple ecological ethics and the national cultural strength of harmony between man and nature, reflecting the identity of the same root culture and different development directions. With the development of the times, globalization constantly impacts on the traditional culture. Continuing to study the spiritual beliefs and national cultural traditions of Zhuang and Thai ethnic groups can further understand each other's beliefs and customs, promote cultural and economic exchanges, and facilitate the continuous development of national traditional culture. With the establishment of China ASEAN Free Trade Area, the relationship between China and Southeast Asia has been strengthened. ASEAN countries and ethnic minorities in Southwest China share the same origin and flow. The identification between national cultural identity and cultural value will promote the communication and integration of cultures.

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