

A survey on the ritual of the Gepo Yi people

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Keywords: The Gepo; Ritual; Investigation

Abstract: The Gepo subgroup of Yi people took animism and ancestor worship as the basis of their original belief concepts and formed a whole set of ritual behaviors. In the alternation of the cyclic sequence, the original folk custom ritual activities have been constructed, which have been passed down till now. Based on field survey data, the article analyzes the harmonious coexistence between man and nature and the human ecological order between people in the activities of mountain worship, torch festival and ancestor worship of the Gepo Yi people.

The Yi group is a member of the large family of ethnic minorities in China. Affected by the natural geographic environment and the level of social and historical development, the Yi group has many subgroups and presents the characteristics of cultural diversity. The Gepo subgroup of the Yi nationality in Luxi, Yunnan, is one of a smaller subgroup of the Yi nationality. They mainly live in Santang, Xiangyang and Baishui in Luxi, Yunnan. Their distribution features as mixed settlements in both of small and large groups, all of which maintains traditional ritual activities. They believe that everything in the world has a soul and exists in a form that is invisible to the naked eye. The mountain sacrifice ritual is precisely the way they form a regular reciprocal relationship with the gods by offering food; Meanwhile, after the demise of a person's vital signs, the human souls will not go away, but will return to the birthplace of the ancestors. Therefore, regular worship ceremonies ensure the intergenerational transmission of the Gepo's ancestor worship. The ritual is not only a behavioral display of conceptual consciousness, but also the attitude of the Gepo towards their productions and lives. The article takes the ritual life of the Gepo Yi people in Luxi, Yunnan as the subject of investigation, discusses that they rationally arrange agricultural production according to the cycle of the four seasons, and realize the harmonious coexistence of man and nature in the life order, and the spiritual order built on it, namely Humanities and ecological ethics between people.

1. Introduction

British anthropologist Taylor put forward the theory of animism, which holds that there are souls in different forms but related to the body. The soul can not only be independent of the body, but also deduced to natural objects and natural forces. The soul is "Among all kinds of spiritual existence, there is one that should first attract our attention, because it is the archetype for constructing other spiritual existence." With the continuous construction of the soul conception, Durkheim believes that the soul is an eternal topic in the world of ideas and emotions. The soul also has a spiritual personality, forming a soul with ability and territory, and ancestor worship is the embodiment of the continuous sublimation of spiritual personality.

The Yi people believe in the primitive religion of animate and ancestor worship, and it has also formed cultural characteristics with local uniqueness. The Gepo language calls the soul 𐄎𐄎 𐄎𐄎 (transliterated as "Yimu"), and the Chinese translation is "ying yan". It can be seen from its literal meaning that the nature of the soul is invisible, and its form is erratic and vague. Ancestor worship is the belief that after a person's death, the soul lives in another world in an intangible way, and in

another world the soul also has the same life as it had before. When a person's body has vital signs, the soul attaches to the body; when the body's vital signs disappear, the soul attaches to plants or animals, which is also an embodiment of Gepo people's ancestor worship. The soul is constantly reciprocating with people, gaining more power and space at the same time. After the death of Gepo people, they must recite the "Guiding the Way" so that the soul of the deceased will return to the ancestral world according to the guidance of Bimo. Otherwise, the soul will not find peace and become a wandering lonely ghost without belonging, and even hurt the soul of the living person in order to continue to wander, make it unwell, or get sick, or even die. Therefore, the Gepo people's concept of animism and ancestor worship inherited and in accordance with the Yi people's ancestral belief system.

2. Type of ceremony

If all things are animism and ancestor worship are the sustenance of the spirit and emotion of the Gepo, the ceremony is the concrete expression of emotions. "Rituals are defined as symbolic, performing, and a set of behaviors prescribed by cultural traditions." The social appearance of the group is presented in a symbolic way through beliefs and rituals. The Gepo people believe in a certain supernatural power as a basis. In a specific time and space, they symbolize the supernatural power through a series of media to pray for the basic necessities and for avoiding malevolent spirits. Therefore, the alternating cycle of material life and spiritual life is the characteristic of the production and life of the local Gepo people. This feature follows the law of the four seasons, which were called busy farming and slack farming seasons by the Gepo people. The busy farming time is busy with crop planting and management, while the slack season is their ritual time and thus the spiritual life time of Gepo people. The three most important rituals of The Gepo in a year include: mountain worship, the torch festival and ancestor worship.

2.1. Sacrifice to the mountain

Mountain worship is an important ceremony for the Yi people to respect nature and value production. The Gepo hold a mountain worship on the second day of the second month of the lunar calendar, praying for the whole village and the whole people to have a good year, good harvest and prosperity of the "six animals" (Cow, horse, sheep, pig, chicken, and dog). The traditional mountain rites are held any selected time during the end of the first month of the lunar calendar to the beginning of February. A man from each family would participate, and women and children are not allowed to participate. A legend about the local mountain worshipping goes: "According to legend, a Gepo ancestor made a living by hunting. One day, when he was walking through the forests alone, he heard the sound of talking and stones colliding. He thought that he had encountered a tribe, so he followed the sound and the trails. At that time, it was discovered that two rocks were talking, as if they were fighting, bumping into each other to make noises. Suddenly, two stones found someone approaching, and immediately stopped moving and lay quietly on the ground. The ancestor believed that this was a protective sacred stone. He knocked three heads on the two stones, took them back to the village, and told the tribe that worshipping them would bless everyone with a good harvest. As a result, the tribe sent it to the mountains to enshrine it, and to worship them every year, praying for a year of good weather, abundant crops and prosperity of six animals." This piece of oral information shows that the Gepo's mountain sacrifice ceremony is essentially a sacrifice to the god stone; and the author learned during the investigation that there is another way of saying sacrifice to the mountain, that is, sacrifice to the dragon tree. The dragon tree refers to a well-growing tree selected in the nearby mountains and forests as the dragon tree of the village where the Gepo people live, and worshipped by the villagers every year. Women are forbidden to approach the dragon tree, and the branches fallen from the dragon tree cannot be picked up for burning woods. However, whether it is to worship the god stone or the dragon tree, the local Gepo usually call it "mountain worship."

The procedure of the "Mountain Sacrifice" is: on the day of the mountain sacrifice, an adult male from each household in the village, under the leadership of the patriarch, brings sacrifices such as

pigs, chickens, rice, wine and other sacrifices to the mountain. On the way, Bimo set up "zie55 khɿ 33" (Chinese meaning: "jingshen gate"). When offering sacrifices, you must pass through "zie55 kh ɿ33" to remove the filth before you can carry out the birth sacrifice. Cooked Sacrifice", Bimo reciting the scriptures, praying for the protection of the gods, hoping that the coming year will be smooth and there will be no disasters for people and animals. After the sacrifice, everyone has a meal on the mountain. After the end of the former patriarch or village head's announcement of the village rules and folk agreements, they promise not to deforest and jointly maintain the natural environment. In the three days after the end of the mountain worship, the men in the village started hunting activities such as "throwing out the finches". After that, everyone started spring planting.

2.2. Torch Festival

The torch festival of the Gepo people is extremely grand. It is held on the 24th of the lunar month every year. On this day, the Gepo family will gather together to eat the lamb soup pot and discuss the most important thing in the family—ancestor worship ritual. On this day, the family must set the exact time for the ritual, and the participants and the host family make various preparations for it. At the same time, many families will perform small disaster rituals, which are aimed at the loss of souls. The Gepo believe that humans have three souls, and when healthy souls are invaded by external evils, they cause physical discomfort and the loss of appetite. From the beginning of the second month of the lunar calendar to half a month before the Torch Festival, the local people will restore their health by suffocating the soul, and squeezing the soul, which requires people to use the blue thread to call the soul and wear the blue thread on the wrist for at least two weeks. Since there is no age and gender distinction for the soul-dropping, similar family disaster rituals are common on the day of the torch festival. They believe that torches are more sacred. Nowadays, the six generations of local residents follow the example of the Gepo people, usually on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar during the Dragon Boat Festival, and burn them off at the Torch Festival, especially for children and the elderly, which is believed to bring people good health. In addition to discussing family matters and family disasters, the Torch Festival has also become an opportunity for the local people to maintain and expand their social network. Everyone invites relatives and friends to gather together to eat the lamb soup pot and build a social platform by sharing food.

2.3. Ancestor worship

Ancestor worship is the most important content of the Gepo people's ritual life and is the most direct way of expressing ancestral beliefs. Proverbs about ancestor worship, such as "passing ancestors in September, and worshipping ancestors in October", "two sacrifices in three years", "a big sacrifice in three years, and a small sacrifice in two years" are widely spread among the people. Traditional ancestor worship began in the ninth month of the lunar calendar. The patriarch relied on his footsteps to measure the area where the Gepo people lived, and went from house to house to inform family members of the time for ancestor worship. With the popularization of communication tools and the development of transportation, the ancestors have been notified by telephone, and the families who participated in the ancestor worship were invited to go to the ritual place by van. Although the time for ancestor worship is not long, it relates to the peace and success of the family in the next two to three years. Every family in the family regards ancestor worship as an important duty and responsibility, even members who work in the town or city have to return home. Members who are unable to return home to worship their ancestors must ask their brothers to bring sacrifices to the sacrifice venue to show their respect and sincerity to their ancestors. Family members participating in the ancestor worship must arrive at the place one day in advance. On the same day, they must "invite the spirit" and "show the spirit" so that the family spirit will be soaked in dew outside the house overnight, and go to the mountain and send it to the ancestral tube.

3. The life order and spiritual order of Gepo people

"Each ritual is held in a certain time and space, so the ritual behavioral symbols in the field are given sacred meanings, and the function of the ritual can be generated and realized." The Gepo's mountain worship, torch festival, and ancestor worship are all held at the specific time and in certain spaces and environment. The time and space of the rituals not only have conventional meanings, but also convey profound cultural thoughts, which endow the ritual activities liveness and sacredness. At the same time, the activities have strengthened the publicity and holiness of the space-time environment, thereby highlighting the significance of the ceremony, realizing the function of the ceremony, and thus constructing its own life order and spiritual order.

3.1. Life order

The time of the Gepo's mountain worship, torch festival and ancestor worship are at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the year respectively. People arrange the livelihood time and ritual time according to the traditional Chinese seasonal solar terms. The reasonable arrangement of livelihood time is an important guarantee for the survival data of them.

The time of the mountain sacrifice is usually after the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar calendar and before the second day of the second month of the second month of the lunar calendar. Therefore, the time in each village is not fixed, as long as it is held within this period of time. The location of the mountain worship is usually on the mountain near the village, and the objects of the mountain worship are mountainous areas and dam areas, which are distinguished by dragon trees and white stones, but the ultimate goal is the same-pray for a year of good weather, peace in all seasons, and grains and thrive. In some areas, the object of worshipping the mountain is the dragon tree, while in some villages, there is no specific object for the mountain worship, and the ceremony is simpler, like a gathering in the village before the beginning of spring plowing.

The time of the Torch Festival is on the 24th of June in the lunar calendar. This time happens to be the middle of the year. It is called the Year of the Buckwheat in some Yi districts, because the Gepo people began to harvest spring buckwheat, and after the festival they will prepared for planting winter buckwheat. The harvested buckwheat is also an essential delicacy for the Torch Festival. In the past, every village during the torch festival, every family would prepare for the torch festival one week in advance, and in June of the lunar calendar, there were already torches for sale on the market, and every family would buy torches in advance. The custom of eating lamb soup pot for men and women of all ages stems from the climate. They live in a higher geographical environment, between 2227 meters and 1767 meters above sea level, with an average annual temperature of 14.6°C. The vertical difference in climate is significant, which is why Gepo people are warm-tempered. On the other hand, lamb is helpful to withstand the cold.

The Gepo ancestor worship rituals in the tenth month of the lunar calendar. According to traditional customs, they choose to hold a ceremony for the pig or snake. Due to various kinship and limited time for the traditional ceremonies, some families choose to do the rituals on the day of the dragon or the tiger in order to stagger the rituals of different families. When the rituals were passed on in the ninth month of the lunar calendar, the patriarch once again informed the family members of the specific time for ancestor worship and asked them to participate in the ceremony on time. From the farming periodic table of the Gepo, it can be seen that the harvest begins in July of the lunar calendar and ends in September and October, that is, from busy farming to the slack season, thus enabling locals to have more time to participate in various ceremonies. Therefore, the Gepo also enter spiritual life from natural life. The ancestor worship ritual follows the custom of "three large sacrifices for three years and one small sacrifice for two years". Every family member has to participate in one sacrifice for three years, while a small sacrifice for two years usually only requires male members to participate. According to Gepo tradition, family members take turns to undertake ancestor worship ceremonies, and family members with good family finances are willing to undertake it all the time, thereby enhancing their reputation and prestige in the family, and can also obtain the identity of the patriarch through successive ceremonies. Therefore, the ancestor worship ceremony usually takes place in front of the ancestral cave, and the family members often

undertake the preparatory work before the ancestor worship.

Table 1. The Gepo's Farming Periodic Table

Lunar time	Item	Traditional farming
Lunar New Year (Beginning of Spring, Rain)		Slack
February (startling sting, vernal equinox)		(End of February) Planting potato; planting spring buckwheat (sweet buckwheat)
March (Ching Ming, Gu Yu)		(Qingming) plant corn, (guyu) harvest smoke; harvest wheat, plant hemp
April (Lixia, Xiaoman)		Manage corn and potato
May (Mango species, summer solstice)		Collect potato and scatter winter buckwheat (tartary buckwheat)
June (small heat, big heat)		Harvest sweet buckwheat, (end of June) harvest hemp
July (Beginning of Autumn, End of Heat)		Harvest sweet buckwheat and hemp
August (white dew, autumnal equinox)		Harvest corn, grow wheat, peas
September (cold dew, frost)		Harvest corn
October (Lidong, Xiaoxue)		Harvest buckwheat (tartary buckwheat)
November (winter moon) (heavy snow, winter solstice)		Slack
December (the twelfth lunar month) (small cold, big cold)		Slack

From the farming periodic table of the Gepo people, it can be seen that the material basis for the Gepo's survival originates from nature. While fearing nature, Gepo people also pray for the gifts of nature, which is the first period of their adaptation to nature, and then comes to their utilization and transformation of the nature. This is also the "Taoist Nature" and "The Doctrine of the Mean" advocated by Taoism and Confucianism in traditional Chinese culture. It follows the overall concept of harmony and unity of heaven, earth, and man. The development of human civilization depends on the timing order, constraints and rationality between man and the nature.

3.2. Spiritual order

Three important ceremonies of the Gepo throughout the year are held in certain time and space. The ritual behaviors and symbols in each field are given a sacred meaning, not only following the laws of natural seasonal solar terms, but also showing Gepo's statute on spiritual order. Therefore, Kanazawa believes that "ritual is a symbolic, programmed and standardized behavior based on a specific combination of belief system."

In the mountain worship ceremony, each family sends a male member to participate, and women are not allowed to attend. The purpose of the ceremony is to pray for good weather and good harvest in the coming year. Local elders believe that women are forbidden to participate in mountain worship because women's uncleanness will affect the efficacy of the mountain worship ceremony. After the age of 15, male members can represent the family to participate in the ceremony, and play a role in the ceremony, assisting in some preparations for the ceremony. Through continuous acquisition, the generational inheritance of traditional culture has been realized. From a female perspective, on this day when male members go to the mountain to participate in the ceremony, women also have free time at their disposal without being tied to family life, and they prefer to enjoy some leisure activities like visiting friends.

The Torch Festival is in the middle of the year. It is not only a reward for production and life in the first half of the year, but also a discussion on the important ancestor worship ceremony of the family in the coming half of the year. The tribes gather together to eat sheep soup and buckwheat, which is why it is called "Qiao Nian" around the Torch Festival in some Yi districts. Building and maintaining social relationships with food as a bond is an important social activity for the local people. On every torch festival, locals make appointments with relatives and friends in advance to gather together to have lamb soup. It can not only consolidate blood relationship and in-law

relationship, but also get new interpersonal relationships to gain more helpful resources in life. In addition, social activities associated with the banquets boost local public and commercial activities. The government and local authorities organized cultural activities to increase local cultural awareness and promote sales of various products.

As for the related work of the ancestor worship ceremony, people undertake different jobs and cooperate as a team. From adulthood to marriage, men and women play the dual roles of son and son-in-law, daughter and daughter-in-law in blood and marriage relationships. The main participants of the two-year small festival are mainly men. Although women can also participate, but they are not the first choice as participants. For the three-year large festival, the daughters who are married should also bring their son-in-law back to their original families to participate in the ceremony. For the completeness of the ceremony, the eldest daughter-in-law is supposed to supply water and meals for the ancestor spirit. If there are more sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, the ceremony is performed in the order of from the elder to the younger. At the same time, young couples usually bring their underage children, so as to cultivate their cognitive and behavioral awareness about the ceremony, enabling the individuals to inherit the words and deeds of the ceremony from generation to generation. In addition, ancestor worship is also a chance for the weak and small families to seek help and asylum. Some small families with fewer people and less power, so when large families worship ancestors, they would apply to co-hold the ancestor worship ceremony with those big and powerful families of the same clan family with the same surname.

In summary, the rituals of the Gepo Yi people in Luxi, Yunnan are compatible with the production cycle throughout the year and are passed down in a relatively stable way. They are a manifestation of respect for natural solar terms and conform to the laws of natural ecology while constructing and maintaining the human ecology. In the ceremony, the individual represents the family, and the individual's behavior determines his identity and status in the family. The manifestation of the rights of the son, the irreplaceability of the status of the elder son-in-law, the stress of the obligations of the daughters-in-law, the two-way nature of the responsibilities of the daughter, and the division of labor between men and women in the yearly sacrificial activities have shown that women are not only the expanders of the horizontal family relationship, but also the breeder of the extension of the vertical relationship. According to personal opponents, it is not difficult to find that the family organization and operation mechanism of Gepo people have a set of internal rules, and this set of rules has been strengthened and fixed in repeated behavioral practices. This kind of reinforcement is the attachment of the Gepo people to their ancestors on the surface, but it also entails Gepo people's attachment to their families as individuals. The activities of the family ancestor worship not only show the highly dependency of the family to the kinship and clan relations, but the internal order of the Gepo people's social structure. As the bond of kinship organizations, women have promoted the connection of families with different surnames, and the marriage of different families has promoted the continuous development and growth of the kin groups.

Acknowledgement

2019 Honghe University Scientific Research Fund Doctoral Special Project: project name: A Survey on the Rituals of the Gepo Yi People in Luxi, Yunnan, Item Number: XJ19B07

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