



The Comparison and Analysis of Buffalo Soul Festival of Zhuang Nationality and Buffalo Racing Festival of Thai Nationality

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Abstract

The Zhuang nationality and the Thai nationality once lived together in the same area and they are closely related on the language culture, but their languages and customs have changed and have been split. However, it occurs that they have established lots of customs of farming festival which are similar with each other in the long-term agricultural industry. Used as an important implement, buffalos make huge contributions to agricultural production, which is the reason why the farming customs of the Zhuang’s Buffalo Soul Festival and the Thai’s Buffalo Racing Festival are related to them. By using the methods of documentary, comparative and utilizing induction analysis, this paper explores similarities and differences between the customs of the festivals of the Zhuang and the Thai and found out it exists that the two festivals have similarities in the property, goal and content and the differences in the time, ritual and process, which are related to the environment, culture and religion.

According to relevant records, Buffalo Racing Festival is only 147-year-old and is only held in Chunburi Province, Thailand. It cannot be further studied whether the festival is a traditional farming festival or just a branch of the Spring Festival or is created by later generations due to tourism needs, for its origin cannot be found out. Folk festivals are likely to change in the process of inheritance and development, so it may become a new point of view to do some research on the current situation of the changes and developments of society.

Keyword: Buffalo Soul Festival of Zhuang Nationality; Buffalo Racing Festival of Thai Nationality; the customs of the Zhuang and Thai’s festival; the comparison and analysis

Introduction

The Zhuang nationality is a traditional agricultural nationality. Since antiquity, its people have been lived and breathed by the field, what’s more, not only have been they worked at sunrise and resting at sunset but they also lead a self-sufficient, hard-working and frugal life of farming for generations. Agriculture has also been a traditional industry of the Thai’s since then. The Zhuang and Thai’s ancestors have formed their own distinctive farming festival customs in years of agriculture production practice. Rice Planting Culture is the representative of the Zhuang and Thai’s traditional culture, which is the most obvious common feature and is absolutely related to the farming festivals. (Qin, S.M., 2003). The farming festival customs of the two nationalities have both the commonalities and the differences.

Buffalo is the main animal domesticated by the Zhuang and Thai and the indispensable farming implement in the farming society. In Thai and southern Zhuang Language, the word "water buffalo" is pronounced as vaiz in Zhuang and as khwaai in Thai; as for the word “Buffalo”, is pronounced as mo in Zhuang and as wuaa, which the pronunciation of them are similar in their languages.

To top it off, the Zhuang and Thai’s ancestors attached lots of buffalo-raising experience to the farming proverbs, reflecting their experience of living together with buffalo and that of



emotion, which are also reflected in the farming customs. As an ancient farming nationality, the Zhuang worship the "buffalo god" very much and hold the "Buffalo Soul Festival", also known as the "Buffalo Festival". The annual "Buffalo Racing Festival" in the province of Chunburi, Thailand, is to show the gratitude for the buffalo and the local traditional farming customs which have some certain similarities in their properties, contents and forms. Studying the similarities and differences of farming customs and finding the common features between the two nationalities have a promoting effect on the national identity and leading the people to understand each other through the cultural commonality, which can carve out the bright future of the two countries' bending together.

Research Objective

Explore the commonalities and differences in the two farming festival customs of the Zhuang and Thai nationality and the reasons for them by the comparative analysis of the Zhuang farming festival "Buffalo Soul Festival" and the Thai farming festival "Buffalo Racing Festival".

Literature Review and concepts

By the methods of article and literature searching and so on, only five articles about "Buffalo Soul Festival" were searched on CNKI. The earliest one was published in "Study of Nationalities in Guangxi" (Lu Minfei) in 1998 in the "Reveal the Zhuang's Buffalo Soul Festival and Ancestor Worship Festival", which mentioned that the Buffalo Soul Festival is originated in the buffalo totem worship and in the concept of ancestor worship. Cen Xian'an (2002) made a further investigation and detailed the process of the festival in Pinghan Village, Jiazhan Town, Bama County, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Jin Qianwei and Yang Shuzhe (2012) believe that the unique "Buffalo Soul Festival" has set the pattern of the harmonious co-existence between human and nature. Jin Qianwei (2016) believes that the culture of Buffalo Soul Festival can be combined with the writing practice of college students.

On China Zhiwang, the only one article about Thailand's Buffalo Festival is Thailand's Traditional Festival: Buffalo Racing Festival by Huang Jinyan (1985) published in SOUTHEAST ASIA. This article only briefly introduces the activities of the festival without analyzing the origination and the cultural connotation. In Dynamics of Cultural Inheritance and Reproduction of the Buffalo Racing Festival in Globalization Age, Suchada Pongkittiwiboon (2018) uses the qualitative, interview and practical observation methods to do some research of the cultural heritage and the replication dynamics of the festival which show that the festival is affected by social functions and its role keep transforming and gradually adapt to the development of globalization.

Although no article is relevant to the comparison of the Zhuang's Buffalo Soul Festival and the Thai's Buffalo Racing Festival on China Zhiwang, there is an article, written by Yu Lianmeng (2020), on analyzing the cultural differences and mutual influences between the two of them. What's more, in A Study on the Cultural Connotation of the Chinese Zodiac Tiger Idioms and the Commonalities with Culture (2022), Shen Ye and Siriwan Likhidcharoentham analyze the cultural image and the different and common meanings of the idiom "Tiger – เสือ" and give the idea of focusing on the commonalities rather than the differences in the trend of the cultural blending of globalization, that is, in terms of culture, remain both commonality and individuality as advantages to boost the exchanges and corporations.

However, there is still a lot of research on Chinese and Thai folk culture. In the Integration and Comparison of Chinese and Thai Folk Culture, Lu Guangmin (2015) tried to



explore the similarities and differences between the folk cultures of China and Thailand and their mutual integration in the most similar way between the two countries. In the seminar on Chinese and Thai folk culture and folk literature, Lu Xiaoqin recorded about three sides: the history and social culture of Thailand, the folk culture of various nationalities in Guangxi and the comparison of the cultures of China and Thailand. Experts at the meeting believed that the nationalities of China and Thailand are so diverse and rich in culture that need to be made a long-term, wide and deep investigation and research.

Research Methodology

This paper uses the methods of literature research, comparative analysis and induction method.

The literature research method is not only used to collect and organize the previous studies, to summarize the previous research and to clarify the direction but also to collect and organize the materials of the Zhuang's Buffalo Soul Festival and the Thai's Buffalo Racing Festival.

The comparative analysis method is used to compare the commonalities and differences between the Zhuang and Thai's farming festival cultures and to analyze the reasons for the causes of them.

The induction method is used to summarize the comparative analysis results of customs of the two farming festivals.

Research Results

1. The introduction to "Buffalo Soul Festival" of Zhuang and "Buffalo Festival" of Thai

1.1 The Zhuang's Buffalo Soul Festival

The Buffalo Soul Festival, also known as the "Buffalo Festival" or "Rice Planting Festival", is mainly held by the Zhuang's people around the rice area of Hechi. Every April eighth of the lunar calendar, people let the Buffalo rest. Before the ceremony on that day, the elders of the family set up a low table in the doorway of the buffalo cage and place five-color glutinous rice, steamed pork with rice flour, eggs, millet wine and others on it, and put a maple branch to exorcise evil spirits and attach a small piece of square red paper to bless the buffalo.

Firstly, they will beat the copper drum in front of the Buffalo cage and gather families and friends to make a sacrifice to the Buffalo. Secondly, the householder will take out the buffalo, and the others will bath it with the soaked maple leaf water and delouse it. Then, they will stick the five-color glutinous rice to its horns, attach the wild chrysanthemums to the middle of its head and cover it with red silk and other ornaments to make it looks majestic. the householder leads the buffalo to walk around the table singing a song to show the gratitude and, after that, he will feed it with a ball of the glutinous rice wrapped in fresh grass, a piece of steamed pork with rice flour and a sip of millet wine. At this moment, the whole family will give the buffalo's back a gentle touch and celebrate its birthday. After the celebrating, the copper drum keeps beating and the buffalo will be back into the clean cage and will be fed with fresh forage since then. In the end, people will sing folk songs dancing to the celebration of rice planting, and then will hold a banquet, which is called "people and buffalo eating together". (Wu, C.Z., 2017).

1.2 The Thai's Buffalo Racing Festival

The Buffalo Racing Festival is held in Chunburi Province, Thailand on November 15 of the Thai calendar. In the early morning, people will first bring food and offerings to the



temple and then come back to bathe the buffalos. They will dress them up with colorful beads and red or pink silks, and tie bells to them.

The race mainly consists of showing figure, dressing, and running. Before the race begins, people will drink wine together to celebrate the harvest, and then free the buffalos to the streets and they won't be stopped. Finally, people will drive the buffalos to the race site to participate in the running hosted by the governor. The owner of the buffalo who wins the prize will be rewarded. In addition to that, beauty pageant is also one of the race items. (Nirachara, 2020).

2. The common points between the two Farming Festivals

We compare the similarity or the commonality of the two festivals in the property, purpose and content of the activity.

Table 1 The common points between the two Farming Festivals

Festival	Buffalo Soul Festival	Buffalo Racing Festival
The role of buffalo	Farming implement	Farming implement and vehicle
Character	Buffalo	Buffalo
Property	Traditional farming festival	Traditional farming festival
Purpose	To treat buffalo as child and give it some rest	To show the gratitude for the effort of buffalo
Content	Dress the buffalo and lay offerings	Dress the buffalo and make an offering in the temple

2.1 The traditional festivals

Since antiquity, buffalo has linked to people's life and been mostly important to the Zhuang nationality as being farming implement. However, it is used as not only farming implement but also vehicle. The two festivals are able to be remained and have been passed down from generation to generation up till now.

2.2 Show the gratitude to buffalos

In Guangxi, the early April happens to be the busy days of sowing and of the fact that ploughing buffalos make the biggest effort. In order to show the love by treating the buffalos as child, people let them rest for a day. In Thailand, while people are enjoying their labor after the harvest every year, they naturally think of the buffalos who work hard for them all year round, which makes them to be grateful. Thai people deem the role of buffalo very important. The two festivals both show their gratitude to buffalo.

2.3 Dress buffalo up

On the Zhuang's Buffalo Soul Festival, people stick the five-color glutinous rice to its horns, attach the wild chrysanthemums to the middle of its head, cover it with red silk and other ornaments to make it looks majestic. On the Thai's Buffalo Racing Festival, people bathe the buffalo, dress it up with colorful beads and red or pink silks and tie bells to it. People dress it up with red silks on both festivals.

2.4 The sacrifice before activity

On Buffalo Soul Festival, the elders lay the offerings on the table in the doorway of the



buffalo cage. On Buffalo Racing Festival, people will bring food and offerings to the temple on the early morning. Though different they are, there are some rituals before both festivals.

3. The Differences between the Two Farming Festivals

We compare the two festivals in the time, form and content of their activities.

Table 1 The Differences between the Two Farming Festivals

Festival	Buffalo Soul Festival	Buffalo Racing Festival
Time	After the spring planting, April 8 th , May 2 nd and 5 th or June 6 th of Chinese lunar calendar	After the harvest, November 1 st or 15 th or January 14 th of the Thai calendar
Ornament	Five-color glutinous rice, chrysanthemum and red silk	Colorful bead, red or pink silk
Ritual	Make offerings and incense	Make offerings in the temple
Form	Sing and dance, celebrate buffalo's birthday	Race on figure, beauty pageant and running
Content	Banquet and drink together after the rituals	Drink together before the race
Heritage and Development	The traditional activities and rituals remain	Beauty pageant is added to the race items

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3.1 The different event times

Although the two festivals are traditional folk festivals, they are held on different times and the dates of them are not the same in each part of Guangxi. The festival is held on April 8th in most parts and May 2nd, May 5th or June 6th of the Chinese lunar calendar, or people let Taoist choose the day as the date after spring farming. As for Buffalo Racing Festival in Thailand, it is held on November 15th of the Thai calendar. The times are related to the environment in which the two nationalities and the farming.

3.2 The different ornaments

On Buffalo Soul Festival, buffalo is bathed with soaked maple water and is dressed up with five-color glutinous rice, chrysanthemums and red silks; on Buffalo Racing Festival, it is dressed up with colorful beads, red or pink silks and bells.

3.3 The different rituals before activity

That the Zhuang's ancestor worship the totem more is why Buffalo Soul Festival is totem festival, and people often make offering and incense; that the Thai's people convert to Buddhism is why they make offerings in the temples before the activities.

3.4 The different activity forms

The main activities of Buffalo Soul Festival are singing, dancing and celebrating for buffalo. The householder leads the buffalo to walk around the table singing a song to show the gratitude and, after that, he will feed it with a ball of the glutinous rice wrapped in fresh grass, a piece of steamed pork with rice flour and a sip of millet wine. At this moment, the whole family will give the buffalo's back a gentle touch and celebrate its birthday.

The main activity of Buffalo Racing Festival is race and its items consist of showing figure, dressing and running. Finally, people will drive the buffalos to the race site to participate



in the running hosted by the governor.

3.5 The different Times of People and Buffalo’s Drinking Together

On Buffalo Soul Festival, that everyone enjoys the banquet after celebrating buffalo’s birthday is called” people and buffalo drink together” and it is to show their gratitude for buffalo’s hard work. On Buffalo Racing Festival, people and drink the harvest wine with buffalo to show their gratitude for its effort.

3.6 The different circumstance of heritage and development

Buffalo Soul Festival is the folk festival in Hechi. Every year it is celebrated in the same way, and the government supports the celebration and advocates the protection of intangible cultural heritage. The celebration has promoted the local tourism industry. The Buffalo Racing Festival has been counted as the one of the folk festivals of Thailand by the Thai Ministry of Tourism. Not only does it fit in the modern daily life, but it also diversifies the activity by adding the beauty pageant.

4. The reason of remaining similarities and differences

Both the Zhuang and Thai have a long history and have created splendid culture. According to the materials of anthropology, archaeology and history, they had lived together in the area from the south of the Nan Mountains to the north of the Red River until the Wei, Jin and the Southern and northern Dynasties, and then they split and moved to different places. They are farming nationalities and farming rice is the important part of their economy and the basis of the production of Buffalo Soul Festival and Buffalo Racing Festival. Thus, they worship and protest the natural customs, have similar laws and culture roots, which is the reason why the two festivals are similar as well.

On the next we are going to analyze the differences between the environment, society culture and religion of the two nationalities.

The influences on different geography

The Zhuang and the Thai are rice-farming nationalities, however, as farming rice is strictly limited by the local climate and they live in different areas which have different geography, their farming and harvest seasons aren’t all the same and result in different event times of the two festivals. Buffalo Soul Festival is usually held after spring farming which is the busiest time that buffalos work hardest. Buffalo Racing Festival is held after harvest.

The influences on different cultures

The Zhuang and the Thai live in different circumstances and are influenced by the different cultures. The Thai is mainly influenced by the Indian culture, which mostly consists of the Buddhist culture, therefore, the festival ritual is also influenced mainly by it. The Zhuang is mainly influenced by the Han culture (Qin, S.M., 2003). Thus their farming customs separately fit in the two cultures and have some differences, such as the buffalo’s ornament and the sacrifices. Before the festival’s activity, the Zhuang people make offering and incense, while the Thai people make offering in the temple.

The influences on different religions

The Zhuang worships animal gods such as the frog, the dog, the rooster and the buffalo. They deem the buffalo to be the animal that obliges to them, and it becomes the worshiped totem and was influenced by the Han culture. The Zhuang’s religious beliefs are combined with ghost beliefs, Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism.



To Thai farmers, buffalos are good helpers as they work hard and silently. The Thai people are full of gratitude for them and deem them as the animal with great kindness. Buffalo Racing Festival is to give the Buffalo a day off, not to be sacrificed as a god, so singing and sacrifices are not included in the festival activities. The festival is influenced by Buddhism, and such are its rituals.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Since antiquity, the Zhuang people of China and the Thai people of Thailand have rich traditional farming customs and festivals which are bonded to rice-farming culture, and they have a long history. Many festivals of them have also been endowed with new forms and entertainment with the development and changes of society. However, regardless of the development and change, the festival activities carry the pursuit and expectations of the people of the two countries for safe life and contain rich historical and cultural information. They have the function of enriching cultural life and inheriting national culture. In the process of modernization, strengthening the protection and inheritance of these folk festival cultures, and realizing the reconstruction and innovation of festival culture may boost the communication and collaboration between the two countries making them seek common points while reserving differences and contribute to the human community with a shared future.

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