

# Interpretation of Primitive Worship of Maogusi Dance of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality

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## 상서(湘西) 토가족(土家族) 마고사(毛古斯) 무용 원시숭배(原始崇拜)의 해석

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**Abstract** Maogusi dance is an ancient ritual dance of the Tujia, a Chinese ethnic minority living in the remote region of the western Hunan Province of China. With characters, dialogues, simple story plots and unique performance procedures, it expresses ancient people's devout worship of nature, totems, ancestors, and reproduction in the uncivilized age. With the advancement of human civilization and the opening to the outside world, many dances of the ethnic minority gradually have faded out, while the Maogusi dance is still popular among the Tujia people and its spiritual symbols have been passed on through the generations. It is recognized by experts in dance and drama circles as the original source of Chinese dance and drama. From the perspectives of philosophy, religion, anthropology and folklore, this paper tries to remove the mysterious veil covering the Maogusi dance of the Tujia to explain how its ancient spiritual symbols have survived and why the original ecological consciousness has been preserved. These aims would help in understanding the deep connotation of this ancient Chinese art with its long history and profound culture.

**요 약** 토가족(土家族) 마고사(毛古斯) 춤은 상서(湘西) 토가족의 오래된 하나의 의식무(儀式舞)이다. 이는 인물, 대화, 단순한 스토리와 일정한 연출의 격식을 갖춘 일종의 원시적 춤이다. 또한 이는 중국 무용계와 연극계 전문가들로부터 중국 무용, 연극의 가장 원초적이고 살아있는 화석으로 인정받고 있다. 본고는 철학, 종교학, 인류학 및 민속학 등 다각도에서 마고사(毛古斯) 춤의 원시 숭배 표상 뒤에 담긴 상고 시대에 남긴 여러 가지 정신 기호와 문화적 함의에 대해 해독하도록 하고자 한다. 이 여러 가지 정신 기호는 즉 자연 숭배, 토tem 숭배, 조상 숭배와 생식 숭배이다. 그 강렬한 원시 숭배의식은 모구스춤의 공연과정의 시종에 내포되어 있으며, 그 행위와 정신 이념은 결코 미신과 봉건적인 행위가 아니라, 토가족의 풍부한 역사문화, 풍속과 정신내용을 진실하게 반영하고 있다. 이러한 원시적 생태의식이 살아서 번성해온 진정한 원인을 탐구하고 마고사(毛古斯) 춤에 덮인 베일을 벗기려 함으로써 우리에게는 이 두터운 역사를 담아낸 예술 형식의 깊은 내면을 더 잘 이해할 수 있도록 도와준다.

**Keywords** : Maogusi dance, Natural worship, Totem worship, Ancestor worship, Reproductive worship

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## 1. Introduction

Maogusi dance<sup>1)</sup> is a kind of ancient ritual dance of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality, as well as a primitive drama dance with characters, dialogues, simple plots and certain performance programs, spread in Longshan, Yongshun, Baojing, Guzhang and other counties of Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture ; It takes "hunt units", "fetching dew", "celebrating the hunting victories", "sweeping out and in" and primitive farming lives as the main performing contents. The costumes and props have always maintained the original colors. The straw clothes and skirts, simple movements and rugged linellae make the dance have a sense of "wild"; On every occasion of "Tiaonian", Tujia people dance the Maogusi dance with primitive images of "Mao people", so as to show their respect for their ancestors.

Maogusi dance was primitively discovered in the 1950s, and its researches are mainly classified into the following three aspects: The first aspect is the research on the origin and the generation of art, such as Peng Jikuan's Brief discussion on the original drama of Tujia nationality "Maogusi", Luya's Preliminary investigation on the mystery of Maogusi, Li huaisun's Maogusi and the reproduction worship, Zhang Ziwei's Maogusi of Tujia Nationality in Western Hunan, Jin Juan's Primitive genesis of Maogusi dance of Tujia nationality, Lu Qun's Anthropological study on the historical evolution of "Maogusi's" dramatic form and so on; The second aspect tries to move towards the study of

paying attention to the inheritance and protection in the cultural confidence from the cultural consciousness formed in the context of globalization, such as Xiong Xiaohui's Protection and research of Tujia Maogusi dance, Qin Li's On the protection and inheritance of the original drama "Maugusi", Xiao Xige's An analysis of the living status of Maogusi dance in the perspective of cultural ecology and so on; The third aspect mainly takes the perspective of dance science as the starting point, starting from the dynamic image, analyzes the artistic characteristics and cultural connotation of Maogusi dance, such as Chen Tingliang's and Wang Qing's Discussion on Maogusi dance of Tujia nationality, Tan Jianbin's Historical evolution and characteristics of Tujia Maogusi dance forms, Xie Yang's master thesis of The art form characteristics and re-creation of "Maogusi dance" of Tujia Nationality in Western Hunan, Jin Juan's master thesis of Investigation and Research on Maogusi dance of Tujia Nationality in Shuangfeng Village, Western Hunan and so on.

Throughout the above studies, they are mostly confined to the historical and cultural deposits, artistic forms, and art categories of the origin of the Maugusi dance. Most of the study content stays at the description stage, and does not explore in-depth into the inherent meaning of the dance itself.

As an important connotation in the custom culture of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality, Maogusi dance still has primitive worship factors left in the performance. The essay interprets a variety of spiritual symbols of nature, totems, ancestors, and reproduction implied from the original worship of Maogusi dance in ancient times, from multi-perspectives of philosophy, religious study, anthropology, and folklore, and explores the real reason for the existence and propagation of this primitive ecological consciousness, trying to reveal the mysterious veil covering the Maogusi dance, which help us better understand the

1) Maogusi, Tujia language for "Gu Sibaba pei", which means ancient Mao people.

In 1959, maogusi dance was recognized as "the source of Chinese dance" by the Central Folk Folk Dance Investigation Group, and later as "the living fossil of Chinese drama" by experts in the theater circle.

In 2006, maogusi was included in the first batch of national intangible cultural heritage lists.

in-depth connotation of this art form with a heavy history.

## 2. the body part of a treatise

### 2.1 Natural Worship of Animism

The district of Xiangxi Tujiazuo is located in Youshui drainage basin of Wuling mountainous area, with steep mountains and lush forests. In Chieftain Era, there was also an unwritten custom of "no entry of people of Han Dynasty, no exit of people in ancient southern china"<sup>2</sup>). The tough living environment and the historical battles among military strategists in ancient China made them suffering a lot, which created hardworking, pragmatic, harmonious and friendly characters of Tujia people who could defy brute force.

The Maogusi dance takes advantages of straightforward dialogues, dances and virtual scenes to intersperse in the traditional hands-waving and sacrificial rituals of the Tujia Nationality, so as to reappear the primitive production and living styles of the Tujia people. During the period of primitive society, the ancestors of Tujia people felt powerless faced with the powerful nature, and generated fear and reverence of the mysterious nature. Driven by primitive thinking, people's natural worship emerged at the right moment. The Maogusi dance begins with witchcraft (respecting Gods, inviting Gods), as well as ends with it (Sao Tang). From the perspective of religious anthropology, natural worship is the product of practical activities in order to achieve its own survival and reproduction under the pre-historical situation of imbalance or asymmetry between human subjects and natural objects. The ancient

ancestors lived and prospered in the conquest of nature. The desire for survival required the help of religious concepts to transcend ourselves. Under the universal belief Animism, witchcraft and religious rituals were often the spiritual support for ancient ancestors. In primitive societies with very low productivity level and inclement natural environment, the need for survival often guided human's producing activities, for example, the growth and harvest of crops depended directly on the effects of natural phenomena such as geographical locations, weathers, and astronomical phenomena. Governing by the primitive people's ignorance of natural phenomena and the thoughts of Animism, the Tujia people generated reverence and worship from the heart for the physical heritages that affected "Yangchun", and regarded them as inviolable gods to worship and pray for a good harvest. In the Maogusi ritual held in Shuangfeng Village, Daba Township, Yongshun County, there are actions such as worshipping "Wu Fang" and the sun, aiming to pray for the gods to bring good harvest to people. When dancing Maogusi dance, Tujia people will set fire in the "Sheba field" in front of the Hands-waving hall, which is called "divine fire". This pile of divine fire must be lit all night and cannot be extinguished. This folk custom means that the God of fire has the power to protect the family's descendants, to prosper agriculture and to expel evil spirits.

Tujia people believe that all things have spirits, and there are gods in the world, no matter the sun, moon, stars, mountains, plants or trees all have gods, which are inviolable. The quality of the grain harvest depends on the God of land, the God of the sun and the God of thunder, which all reflect Tujia people's natural worship. Up to now, there are still many sacrificial rites related in natural worship in Tujia people's daily life. Among the Maogusi dances are the hunting sacrifice to the god of

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2) Liu Donghai. Reclaimed Land Flow in Western Hubei during the Yongzheng Dynasty [J]. Journal of Western Hubei University (Social Science Edition),1987,(04):92.

Meichang, the cultivation worship to the god of land and so on, indicating that these natural worships have been passed from generation to generation and have affected the production and life of the Tujia people for a long time.

## 2.2 Holy and August Totem Worship

In the primitive era of human society, people often thought that the people of the clan were derived from a specific species which was the oldest ancestor of the nation. As a symbol of worship of a nation or tribe, totem embodies the spiritual source of the nation, and it is the soul's sustenance of the nation's deities and nature. Among the totem worship of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality, the most sacred and influential is the worship of white tigers. The hands-waving dance of Maogusi dance in the hands-waving sacrifice event is evolved from the tiger dance in white tigers worship. When primitive ancestors worshiped totems, they mostly simulated totem movements for dancing. Tujia ancestors had similar totem dances, and their dance movements mainly mimicked white tiger movements. The Tujia people call themselves as "the white tigers' descendants". According to legend of ancient times, the ancestor of the Tujia people "Bawuxiang" was selected to the chieftains of the five-named tribes, called "Lin Jun". Yunjun led the tribe members along the river in a soil-made boat to Yanyang, killing the ferocious saltwater goddess and settling down. The people lived and worked in peace, and Lin Jun was deeply loved by people. It is said in Book of Later Han·Biography of the Southern Barbarians that "After the death of Lin Jun, his soul had changed into a white tiger for generations. Because the tiger drank human blood, Tujia people used the living people to sacrifice to Lin Jun."<sup>3)</sup> After the death of Lin Jun, his soul turned into a white tiger and

ascended to heaven. From then on, Tujia people took the white tiger as their ancestral God and never forgot to worship him. This may be the earliest record of Tujia people's transformation from natural worship to totem worship. "Eight tribal gods", the most revered ancestor of Xiangxi Tujia people, are believed to have been raised by drinking tiger milk and have consanguineous relationships with tigers. In a sense, the White Tiger God has the function of consolidating Tujia people of various clans, and the image and spirit of the tiger penetrate into many folk customs of the Tujia people. Nowadays, the white tiger worship of the Tujia people can be seen everywhere. Many houses, utensils and costumes of the Tujia people are engraved with tiger patterns, even their eating habits are affected by this as well, which have become the symbol of white tiger worship in Tujia Nationality. The reason for the ancestors of the Tujia people regarded the white tigers as totems was not for carnivorous animals. White Tiger is a symbol of strength and courage in Tujia culture. As a totem of clan or tribe, white tiger will play a great spiritual function of protecting ourselves and conquering the double enemies in nature and society, in the social life in which clans or tribes fight more and more frequently to capture the living environment, and in fighting with various large beasts in hunting. Taking animals or fantasy animals as objects of worship is a reflection of the social consciousness of the primitive Tujia ancestors during the hunting period.

Totems are symbols of sublime (masculine) beauty, whose majesty and mystery have aroused the ancestors' longing for supernatural divine power. At the same time, they represent the majesty and omnipotence of the gods, and play a magical role to frighten evil and turn calamities into blessings. Collective unconsciousness is stored in totems and various types of witchcraft rituals. These spooky monsters and abstract symbols with strong life consciousness and

3) Zeng Chao. Study on the martial spirit of Ba people [D]. Minzu University of China, 2005 : 21.

profound moral meanings are actually symbols of the beauty of national character. Through totem worship, the Tujia Nationality explains nature in an illusory form, trying to please the gods in order to liberate the soul, so that their helpless feelings in the face of nature can be comforted. Through the concept of totems and ancestral gods, their voices and actions can be imitated so as to obtain comfort and security. Therefore, even if this "rough consciousness" has not yet risen to the aesthetic emotion in the modern significance, the descendants will hold the same psychology when performing sacrifice etiquette. As the collective representation of the nationality, the aesthetic implication of Tujia Nationality to totem is immersed in the deep structure of aesthetic psychology of the generations, flowing in the blood of Tujia people, passing down the thousands of years old clan myths and sacrificial activities through ritual dances without words. It is not only due to the worship of nature and the remembrance of ancestors, but also Tujia Nationality's sense of identity and belonging to the primitive ecological culture under the collective unconscious aesthetic psychology. Totem worship integrates utility and aesthetics, and plays an important role in cultivating the aesthetic ability and emotion of the nationality in childhood.

### 2.3 Ancestor worship of the interaction of human and God

Ancestor worship is the product of the combination of ghost worship and national concept, which is formed on the basis of ghost worship. It emphasizes the consanguineous relationship between ancestral spirits and believers, believing that ancestors and gods have the function of protecting and punishing their descendants. On the one hand, it is to obtain the blessing of ancestors and gods, on the other hand, it is also to strengthen the blood affection

among clans. Therefore, in addition to the souls of the people who have made great contributions to the clan, the ancestors that people sacrifice may also be extended to the cultural heroes of the clan. These objects are all regarded as their own ancestors to worship, thus to form a relatively large and complex group of ancestors and gods, which later exist in the concepts and behaviors of Tujia people, which are mainly reflected in these concepts and behaviors in the worship of female and male ancestors. The oral and psychological instruction of Maogusi dance made it know the history and the heroic deeds of Tujia ancestors. From the consecrated evolvement of Maogusi sacrificial ritual and "Sheba hall", the ancestor worship of Tujia reflected in Maogusi ritual and Maogusi dance performance has a process of evolution from female ancestor to male ancestor, from remote ancestor to near ancestor. When proceeding the ritual of ancestor worship, Tujia people regard Maogusi was their ancestor. Through the ritual, people completed the communication with the gods to obtain the protection from them. In Tujia people's mind, Maogusi is the bridge between human and God, secular world and sacred world. The Tujia people who attended the ritual believes that through the pious Maogusi ritual, people can play the role of ancestor god or embody them with the help of the visible actors. In the interacting of human and God, people can not only communicate with ancestors, but also realize their inner desire with the help of gods.

#### 2.3.1 Female ancestor worship

In the early primitive society, the matriarchal clan society was in the position of "knowing mother, not knowing father", so the original ancestor worship of human beings was matriarchal female ancestor worship. In many villages of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality, female ancestor worship is an essential part of Maogusi ritual. Just like a section of offering sacrifices to

the God of hunting "Mei Chang" in the Maogusi dance of 《Shi Jie》, the old Maogusi put the grass mark made of thatches in the center of gravity of the flat dam, and pressed it with stones for the pig leg and other living sacrifices, so as to pray for "Mei Chang" to protect the hunters to "chasing meat" into the mountain for harvest. In Longshan County, when performing "scattering ashes", a Maogusi was dressed as a female ancestor, who carried the grey yellows on his back in a basket and walked through Pingchang, shaking his body from time to time, and scattering the grey yellows all over the ground. The performance of this primitive fertilization method is a memorial to the primitive farming life of Tujia's female ancestors. The goddesses worshipped by the Tujia Nationality during the Maogusi ritual include Sanyuan female ancestor, Yongni goddess, and "Rong" goddess. These goddesses of the Tujia ancestors have all experienced the portrayal of the primitive matrilineal clan society, and are the reaction to the worship of the ancestors of the Tujia people. Advances in social productivity have brought prosperity to matriarchal clan society. However, with the further growth of productivity and the remarkable development of agriculture, animal husbandry and handicraft industry, matrilineal clan system has become a shackle of productivity development gradually.

### 2.3.2 Male ancestor worship

With the improvement of primitive productivity and production technology, male's labor gradually occupied the main position, and the ancestors changed the former female ancestors worship gradually to the male ancestor worship in maternal clan society. In the Maogusi ritual, there were abundant contents about the worship of male ancestors, such as offering sacrifices to "Eight tribal gods" or "Eight tribal kings", that is to say, the eight tribal leaders of Tujia Nationality, who were the remote male

ancestral gods of Tujia Nationality.

In the performance of Xiangxi Maogusi dance of Tujia Nationality, almost all places have reflected the worship of male reproduction of Tujia ancestors. This is obviously an expression of Tujia ancestors' praying for "the reproduction of species", and an artistic display of Tujia primitive male reproduction worship. Mr. Sun Jingchen, a famous Chinese Dance theorist, pointed out that: "taking the sexual organ as the direct object of worship is a special form of early human worship of reproduction, and it is the conscious reflection of primitive people's attention to sexual behavior and reproduction... In the primitive dances of all nationalities in the world, sexual worship is also one of the important performance contents." As Mr. Zhao Guohua said, "the evolution of human beings from matriarchal society to patrilineal society is accompanied by the gradual dominance of male in production activities and the worship of male reproduction." In addition, some "Sheba halls" in villages worships the three near ancestral gods "Penggong Juezhu", "Xiangguan old man" and "Tian Haohan" when Tujia Nationality entered the late feudal society. From the evolution of ancestor worship from female ancestor to male ancestor and then to male near ancestor, we can clearly see that the ancestors of Tujia Nationality, like any other nationality, have experienced the long historical development process from primitive group to matrilineal clan commune to patrilineal clan commune and then to class society.

### 2.4 Reproductive worship reflected by male genitalia

In primitive society with extremely low productivity, people were the most important symbol of tribal prosperity. Natural disasters, man-made disasters and animal disasters were the biggest threats to human reproduction, and people's cognition of the physiological

phenomena of sex, conception and procreation was still in the stage of ignorance. For the sake of the continuation and expansion of the species, the vigorous fertility became the concentrated desire of the Tujia ancestors.

Tujia people's reproductive worship behavior is more intuitive. The performers of Maogusi dance tie a 30 cm long wooden stick between their legs, symbolizing the male reproduction, and called "Rude stick" by local people. The sticks, which symbolize the phallus, are wrapped with straw ropes, with the top either smeared with earthy red or wrapped with straw ropes in the shape of glans; in some places, they are wrapped with flesh colored silk cloth, with the top wrapped with red silk cloth. When Maogusi performed in the solemn and sacred Hands-waving hall or the shrine, people of all ages and both genders who gathered to watch the performance are extremely revered and devout. In such an atmosphere, the appearance of "Rude stick" is not vulgar. The generation of reproductive worship is accompanied by primitive religion. Tujia people embody this primitive religion and reproductive worship in the burgeoning Maogusi dance. For example, eliminating the evils and pestilences is the most sufficient embodiment. When reading 'eliminating the disaster and praying for a good harvest', all the performers hold their stomachs and their crotch and raise the "Rude stick" together, in order to express their reverence for the gods of heaven and earth.

Swinging torch expresses the procreation desire of Tujia ancestors incisively and vividly. Through the basic actions of "showing male charm", "turning arm", "swinging", "twisting waist and swinging", "holding belly and crotch", "shaking left and right" and "fetching dew", the performer holds the "Rude stick" in hand, and swings up and down and left and right with different rhythm, fully showing the strength and power of the rude stick. When the performance

reached its climax, the Maogusi are like cows in rut, touch the audience at will, and the women are willing to accept the mysterious touch, for they thought they could get the fertility given by God. In Meishan Worship, the performers line up as well as hold belly and crotch, raising the "Rude stick" high, so as to embody the respect and gratitude of the goddess Meishan after the hunters obtained the prey. In this way, the Tujia people respect the goddess with penis, and seek the harmony of Yin and Yang, the reproduction of human beings, and the prosperity of the clan. In Grabbing and Marrying, the crowd repeatedly curl up the "Rude stick" to the bride and make sexual attraction, taking these as a way of courtship. Beating the harrow shows our sincerity for children by imitating human sexual behavior. The "Rude sticks" in Beating iron are used as "hammers" to forge on the "anvil" repeatedly to make pieces of iron used by Tujia people. The magic "Rude sticks" are not only a symbol of power, but also full of creativity... The above worship of male reproduction is the requirement and appeal of "reproducing the species" of Tujia ancestors in the environment of the beginning of the world, and the beasts and humans are in an environment of mutual disability.

Worship of procreation is a direct manifestation of Tujia people's inner concept of attaching importance to life. Worship is not an individual behavior, but a group behavior of tribes or clans. Because "according to materialism, the decisive factor in history is the production and reproduction of direct life. However, there are two kinds of production. On the one hand, it is the production of means of living, such as food, clothing, housing and necessary tools for this purpose; On the other hand, it is the production of human beings, that is, the reproduction of species."<sup>4</sup>) The ritual of

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4) Engels. *The origin of family, private ownership and*

procreation worship comes from the social needs of "human production". In the primitive period, the fundamental aim of all human activities was to seek survival, reproduction and development, which were closely combined and complemented each other. That is to say, the survival of human beings must wait for their own reproduction, so as to strengthen the power of clans, as well as to win in the struggle with nature, that is, the struggle for survival environment between clans. In other words, the reproduction of the clan is actually a necessary condition for the survival of the clan itself. The emergence of Maogusi dance and even "Rude stick" is the combination of primitive human vitality and beauty.

### 3. Conclusion

Through the essay's(paper's) combing and researching, it is not difficult to find that the Tujia people can survive and reproduce indefatigably, for they must have their own strong spiritual supports to sustain. The primitive worship of Maogusi dance is the hotbed and media of unconscious embryo generation of Tujia ethnic group, and Maogusi dance is the historical book and carrier of this primitive ecology, which makes the Tujia ethnic group survive and reproduce through various hardships. In the primitive and wicked natural conditions, the ancestors of Tujia had to pray for the protection of gods in order to survive, so the Maogusi dance came into being in the Tujia sacrifice ceremony. Therefore, the initial feature of its manifestation is to worship and please the ancestors and gods, which is a kind of primitive religious sacrificial dance with mystique and sanctification, being reflected in the spiritual

supports of Tujia people and the sacred believes of uniting and striving of Tujia people. From the perspective of religious studies, Maogusi dance retains various spiritual symbols left in ancient times, such as natural worship, totem worship, ancestor worship and reproduction worship. Its strong primitive worship consciousness is contained in the whole process of Maogusi dance performance. From the perspective of historical materialism and anthropology, the development process of Tujia Nationality is not superstitious and feudal, but reflects the rich historical culture, customs and spiritual connotation of Tujia Nationality. The ancestors of the Tujia people presented the mysterious primitive worship in various forms of dance one by one. The profound cultural connotation contained in it is a living specimen in which we explore the primitive state of human beings, providing a theoretical reference for the inheritance and promotion of the Tujia Maogusi dance.

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