Natural Cycle, Sacred Existence, the Source of Power: A Study on the Mo Religion’s View of Time

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Abstract: The Zhuang people, a significant ethnic minority in China, practise a unique Mo religion that profoundly shapes their spiritual and daily lives. Although the theology and rituals of the Mo religion have been extensively studied, its temporal perspectives still need to be explored. This study addresses this gap by comprehensively analyzing how the Mo religion integrates natural, cultural, calendar, and theological elements to create a sacred temporal framework central to the Zhuang people’s social life and material production. Drawing from primary sources such as religious texts, a rigorous text-based research approach is employed to gain a profound understanding of the Mo religion’s temporal perspectives. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to enriching our knowledge of the Mo religion’s sacred temporal frameworks, providing valuable insights for interdisciplinary research, and fostering mutual respect and appreciation among diverse cultures.

Keywords: Mo religion; view of time; Zhuang people; natural cycle; sacred existence; the source of power

1. Introduction

The Mo religion, a vital folk belief, was once widespread in the Tai language clusters in southern China and Southeast Asia. It continues to be practiced by some ethnic groups in countries and regions such as China, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and the Shan State in Myanmar (Holm 2017a). During the Ming and Qing dynasties in China, a significant development occurred with the textualization of the oral recitation of the Mo religion in the Zhuang-speaking areas of the Hongshui River and Youjiang River basins in Guangxi, using ancient Zhuang characters (Holm 2013). These ancient Mo texts, a testament to the intellectual and cultural prowess of the Zhuang society, serve as rich documentation of their daily life, death, and funeral rituals, as well as their belief systems and survival wisdom. They also provide insights into the Zhuang people’s interactions with surrounding ethnic groups, making them a treasure trove for research and practical applications.

Existing scholarship on the Mo religion has primarily focused on theological and ritual dimensions, emphasizing the clergy’s crucial role in maintaining this sacred temporal system through religious rituals to preserve social harmony and mitigate transgressions against temporal deities (Holm 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Holm and Meng 2015; Kao 2002, 2011; X. Li 2005; S. Li 2018; Lin 2012; Lu 2016). However, limited attention has been paid to the perspective of time within this context.

The concept of time, as a central topic of human cognition and philosophical reflection, holds a prominent place in academic history. Many scholars have approached the nature and significance of time from different perspectives (Heidegger 1962; Levinson 1983; Ortony 1993; Langacker 1987; Pinker 1994; Husserl 1950; Sartre 1943; Lévy-Bruhl 1928; Gadamer 1975; Yamazaki 1984; Naito 1992). In his research, Mircea Eliade emphasized the cyclical nature of time, standing in contrast to the dominant linear time narrative in the
West. He argued that the cyclical view of time is deeply ingrained in numerous ancient religions and myths, challenging the traditional Western understanding (Eliade 1959, 1964, 1969, 1987). Furthermore, Eliade’s perspective on time has influenced scholars in various fields, such as religion, anthropology, and cultural studies, providing new perspectives for research in these areas (Turner 1967; Geertz 1983; Cardinet 1995; Ruderman 2005).

This study, drawing from previous research methods and findings, fills a significant gap in our understanding of the Mo religion’s view of time. It does so by meticulously examining the intricate interplay between the cultural, calendar, and theological elements. Our aim is to explore a question of profound significance: How does the Mo religion’s perspective on the natural cycle of time seamlessly integrate these elements, creating a sacred temporal framework that profoundly influences social life and material production among the Zhuang people? This paper proposes a rigorous text-based research approach, drawing from primary sources like religious texts, mainly in the Photoprinted and Annotated Translation of Zhuang Ethnic’s Mo Scriptures of Buluoatuo1. We strive to gain a profound understanding of the Mo religion’s perspective on time through a comprehensive text analysis lensed through three perspectives: natural cycle, divine Presence, and fountainhead of Power. The answers to this question could reshape our understanding of religious and cultural studies.

This study’s outcomes can significantly enrich our understanding of the unique temporal perspective of the Mo religion. Moreover, it offers valuable insights into integrating cultural, calendar, and holy elements within the sacred temporal framework of the Zhuang people. This enhanced comprehension holds immense potential to inform multiple disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, history, and theology. It contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Mo religion and its profound influence on the cultural landscape of China, fostering mutual respect and appreciation among diverse cultures.

2. The Time of the Mo Religion as a Natural Cycle

The perception of time initially manifests in the text of the Mo religion as a natural cycle, a rhythmic pattern they observe in their daily activities. This natural cycle encompasses the alternation of day and night and the progression of the four seasons.

The diurnal cycle, the first facet of Zhuang’s understanding of natural time, is rooted in the observed temporal changes brought about by the sun’s rise and fall. The scriptures of the Mo religion elaborate on this concept, stating the following:

“Lauxgun establishes Yin and Yang. Lauxgun visits the six nations, entering diverse territories and giving birth to the sun and the moon. Night descends in the morning and rises again. He organizes the cosmos, and humanity witnesses the profound darkness of the night.”2 (Zhang 2004, pp. 24–25)

This passage and similar quoted sentences and paragraphs in the following text are excerpted from more comprehensive texts of the Mo religion. Throughout their contexts, these texts expound the Mo religion’s creation theory. The purpose is to construct a worldview and cosmology in the sense of religion while paving the way for establishing the sanctity of the Mo religion’s creator god.

This passage presents the genesis of time, attributing the alternation of day and night to divine creation. The deity Lauxgun, whose name bears resemblance to Laojun (老君), a prominent figure in Daoism, is credited with this creation. Lauxgun not only brings about the Earth, the sun, and the moon, but also establishes the solar system with the Earth as its center. This spatiotemporal structure predates the deity who initiated the day–night cycle. The existence of day and night is thus a result of a pre-existing creator and celestial bodies. This fundamental understanding of time is intricately tied to creationism and Taoist principles. In the context of the gender division of labor in Zhuang society, where men are primarily responsible for external affairs and women for internal affairs, it is not surprising that most of the Mo religion’s clergy are male. What is interesting, however,
is that many of them also practice Taoism, incorporating the Taoist imagery of Laojun into Mo texts, thereby showcasing the cultural and religious integration in their beliefs.

The Zhuang people’s perception of natural cycle time is multifaceted, with the lunar months’ cycle being a significant component. As stated in the text,

“Thirty days shall constitute a month, and twelve months shall constitute a year.”

(Zhang 2004, p. 1716)

Based on the lunar cycle, each month encompasses 30 days, symbolizing the moon’s waxing and waning phases. This lunar cycle intersects seamlessly with the seasonal cycle, thus forming a complete year. The Genesis creation narrative concisely encapsulates and expands these lunar phases.

The Mo religion’s view of time is rooted in the regular motion of celestial bodies. Humans have discovered these motion laws through observation, assigned numerical values to them, and created various scales for calculating their motion.

Another crucial aspect of the Zhuang’s understanding of natural cycle time is the cycle of four seasons. The text eloquently describes,

“The King labored in the dry fields during March and the paddy fields during April. Sow your seed in the fields and play amidst them; divide the land between a quarter for seedlings and a quarter for sowing.”

(Zhang 2004, pp. 1716–17)

These scriptures offer a vivid social portrayal of Zhuang society’s agricultural practices. Dryland farming begins in March, whereas paddy farming is initiated in the fourth month of the lunar calendar. The primary focus of these agricultural practices revolves around sowing and nurturing seedlings in drylands and paddy fields. These practices suggest that the temporal structure of the solar-year month is also the product of observing human agricultural activities, and the Zhuang people organize their labor practices around this created time structure. The temporal structure serves as a benchmark based on experience, whereas agricultural practice represents the temporal structure’s order. The Classic of Mo’s chronological sequence encapsulates the author’s observations and practical experiences in an agricultural society.

The Mo religion’s perspective on natural cycle time comprises three elements: the day and night cycle, the 12 lunar months’ cycle, and the four seasons’ cycle. The Lauxgun indirectly created the day, night, and lunar calendar by forming celestial bodies like the sun and moon. These cycles form the foundation of the time structure, where people, society, and nature operate independently within these three time systems, engaging in daily or annual production and life activities. Ultimately, this view of time is rooted in the creator’s creationism, emphasizing that time has a triple periodicity essentially established by the chief. According to this belief, time began with the creator’s actions. Therefore, the view of time based on natural cycles is rooted in the daily production and life of the Zhuang people and has strong ethnic and original cultural characteristics. However, the insertion of Taoist vocabulary, such as Laojun, indicates that Han culture has begun to penetrate Zhuang society. Therefore, this view of time also vibrantly exhibits characteristics of Han culture.

In a comprehensive analysis, the ritual chanting orientation of the Mo religion’s texts mirrors Eliade’s interpretation of periodic time. Drawing from the rich tapestry of ancient Greek mythology, he explored the circularity and eternity of time. He argued that ancient Greek mythology unveiled the characteristics of time’s circularity and eternal recurrence through the exposition of ‘prototype’ and ‘repetition’, thereby infusing time with profound meaning and symbolism (Eliade 1949). The Mo texts echo this perspective on periodic time. With each ritual chanting, time commences a new cycle after the ritual, and the destiny and fortune of the ritual object are reformatted and upgraded. This practical logic of the Mo religion’s prayer ritual not only enriches our understanding of religious practices but also offers insights into the practical application of religious beliefs in daily life.
3. The Time of Mo Religion as a Sacred Existence

Ordinary time is discontinuous and heterogeneous, with festival time and time of different densities. The essential difference between this and holy time is that the intervals have a completely different structure and origin. They are the time of origin, which is sanctified by the gods and becomes present again in the ritual activities of festivals (Eliade 1987).

Delving into the texts of the Mo religion, we encounter a remarkable narrative that elevates time to the status of a sacred entity. The view of time is deeply influenced by three distinct cultural threads: the celestial chronometry of the Heavenly Stems (天干), the Jian-chu calendar, and the Tongshu (通书), a traditional guidebook prevalent among southern Chinese folk customs.

Firstly, the perspective of time in the Mo religion is significantly shaped by the temporal traditions of the Heavenly Stems. The text states, “Observe the days of Bingj and U” (Zhang 2004, p. 370), echoing the corresponding days of Bing (丙日) and Wu (戊日) in the Heavenly Stems chronology. This system encompasses ten elements: “Jia” (甲), “Yi” (乙), “Bing” (丙), “Ding” (丁), “Wu” (戊), “Ji” (己), “Geng” (庚), “Xin” (辛), “Ren” (壬), and “Kui” (癸). Each of these elements represents a unique unit of time in the ancient Chinese calendar (Fan 2009).

When integrated with the Earthly Branches, this system forms a unique chronology that reflects the profound ancient Chinese understanding of the harmonious relationship between time and nature. This temporal framework was integral to daily life in ancient China, guiding farming activities, shaping living habits, and influencing diverse fields such as traditional medicine and divination (Granet 1982). Although modern society has adopted more precise timekeeping methods, the Heavenly Stems chronology remains a significant component of Chinese culture, finding its way into literature, art, and folk customs. Moreover, the texts’ incorporation of Earthly Branch elements illustrates the profound influence of Han Chinese cultural traditions on the ancient Zhuang people’s perception of time.

Secondly, the religious texts describe the time view incorporating the “Jian-Chu” time system. This ancient system, which forms the backbone of Han Chinese society, mainly focuses on the auspiciousness of each lunar day. Specifically, the text reads as follows:

“Build the day of Gienh, shape the day of Cwz, fill the day of Muenx, and balance the day of Bingz.” (Zhang 2004, p. 369)

Here, the time system deeply rooted in Han Chinese culture is built upon the four stages of Jian (建, building), Chu (除, cutting), Man (满, filling), and Ping (平, equaling), each corresponding to the days of gienh, cwz, muenx, and bingz. This system also encompasses the 12 lunar days, with each day designated as Jian, Chu, Man, Ping, Ding (定, stabilizing), Zhi (执, persisting), Po (破, breaking), Wei (危, in danger), Cheng (成, becoming), Shou (收, collecting), Kai (开, opening), and Bi (闭, closing). What is remarkable is the meticulous arrangement of these designations in the lunar calendar’s columns, a testament to the precision and detail of the system.

Understanding the guiding significance of each lunar day is crucial, as it dictates the appropriate and taboo activities for daily life. Take Jian Day, for example. It is considered auspicious for activities such as marching, venturing outdoors, seeking financial gains, offering homage, and writing. It is also the most favorable day for job hunting, visiting superiors or relatives and friends, and submitting resumes. However, it is equally important to respect the cultural and astrological beliefs by refraining from certain activities, like digging the ground or opening warehouses, on this day.

More than a tool for tracking time, the calendar wields a significant influence in Zhuang society. The Zhuang people, acutely aware of its power, fear the potential losses in life and property that may arise from the words and actions of inauspicious days. Yet, they also hold onto a glimmer of hope, praying that actions performed during auspicious times will bring them fortune and prosperity. As a fundamental time system in Chinese Han society, the Jian-Chu system has not just influenced but permeated Zhuang society...
through the interactions between the two cultures. Its profound influence shapes social
members’ behavioral norms and daily practices.

Thirdly, Mo’s text’s narration regarding the perspective of time seamlessly intertwines
with the star culture of Tongshu. Tongshu, an almanac book, is renowned for its ability
to present diverse calendars, including the Gregorian, lunar, and dry branch calendars.
But it is not just about the calendars. Tongshu integrates these calendars with numerous
rules and auspicious and auspicious-avoiding contents, creating a complex and compre-
hensive tool for guiding daily life and agricultural activities in traditional Chinese culture.
Its popularity is particularly evident in southern China (Kong 2014; Feng 2018).

The star narrative in Tongshu, a central theme in the General Book, delves into the
realm of astronomical stars and their profound influence on human life. This narrative
asserts that each day is governed by a deity, embodied by a unique star. The deity’s influ‑
ence guides the conduct and customs of individuals on that day. Furthermore, the intricate
interplay between a person’s birth details—year, month, day, and hour—and the celestial
realm dictates the auspicious and inauspicious decisions made by the corresponding cele‑
stial beings.

Tongshu constructs each unit of time using a “Star deity + Day” model. The text
mentions, “Create a Daihbaih day and a Begfuz day” (Zhang 2004, p. 369) and “Make a
Ujfu day and a Yau’nganh day.” (Zhang 2004, p. 370). These four days—Daihbaih, Begfuz,
Ujfu, and Yaunganh—correspond to the Mandarin Chinese days of Dabai (大败日), Baifu
(白扶日), Wufu (五富日), and Yao’an (要安日). This model assigns a profound single star’s
meaning to a related unit of time, significantly influencing the construction of the Zhuang
people’s perception of time (Ding 2018).

Wang Dan illuminates this concept through the example of the day of loegconz. He
cites the text, “To build a house on the Day of Loegconz, one will reside in a house con‑
nected by wooden bamboo strips.” (Zhang 2004, p. 46). He further discovered that the day
of loegconz corresponds to the Lucun day (禄存日), a day often found in Tongshu. Lucun,
a deity in Chinese popular religion, is also a star name in astrology, belonging to the Big
Dipper. Similarly, in the traditional Zhuang calendar, the day is considered inauspicious,
especially when building a house (Wang 2017). It is believed that constructing a house
on such a day would result in a structure made of wooden planks and bamboo slices—a
symbol of death in Zhuang culture. Therefore, a Lucun day is one of the prohibited days
for building a house or construction in Zhuang society.

The example underscores the intricate connection between the text’s mention of sa‑
cred stars, holy deities, special meanings, and human activities. The precise timing of
these actions holds profound significance for their ultimate outcomes. Disregarding cal‑
endrical regulations in the Mo religion, such as the Mo religion establishing a divine tem‑
poral framework, can lead to dire consequences. On the other hand, adhering to these
time-honored practices guarantees beneficial results. When human actions align with or
conflict with these temporal units, they trigger a response that individuals perceive.

Ze Jin (2015, p. 2) elegantly encapsulates this sentiment: “The duration of individual
life remains consistent, yet the momentous transformations that occur at distinct junctions
vary greatly among individuals.” These disparities are intricately linked to ethnicity, habi‑
tat, and survival, but more importantly, they carry distinct meanings and values that pro‑
foundly influence the lives of individuals and communities. The Mo religion integrated
the astrological cultural narratives of Tongshu, thus crafting a unique perspective on time.
By combining time units with astrology, time was endowed with the value meanings of
auspices and evils, subsequently enforcing cultural discipline among the belief groups.

In summary, the construction of the Zhuang people’s sacred time concept is not just a
theoretical construct but a practical system that incorporates the heaven branch culture of
the Han Chinese, the Jian-chu calendar, and Tongshu. Time is imbued with sacred signifi‑
cance through each temporal unit, abstracting into every star god. Within Zhuang society,
the practicality of selecting auspicious days from the calendar and avoiding inauspicious
days for individual and collective endeavors is evident. This practice not only guarantees
the smooth operation of activities but also ensures the safety of the family unit. These sacred time units, in turn, dictate the standardization of Zhuang social life and production, creating a distinctly sacred temporal sphere within their society. In this context, individuals and groups maintain a sacred relationship with time, forging a reciprocal bond by personifying time units as gods. The clergy of the Mo faith, armed with the knowledge of this divine calculus, utilize corresponding religious rituals to alleviate potential personal losses, maintaining the seamless functioning of this sacred system and fostering a strong bond with the Zhuang society.

As manifested in its textual construction, the Mo religion’s sacred time perspective diverges from Mircea Eliade’s view. Eliade’s (1964) comparative analysis of religions underscored the sanctification and transcendence of time in religious contexts. He argued that religion demarcates time into sacred and secular spheres, each with distinct meanings and values. In contrast, the Zhuang Mo religion’s sacred time perspective constructs a time external to secular society. This time, despite its apparent separation, profoundly shapes its adherents’ daily practices and productivity, thereby challenging Eliade’s binary view of time.

4. The Time of the Mo Religion as the Source of Power

The culmination of the Zhuang people’s perception of the natural cycle of time is the profound symbolism of power embedded within it. This power manifests when the ruling class perceives time as a cultural asset bestowed upon the governed, through which they acquire political authority and establish ideological dominance. Consequently, the conferral of time upon the ruled class transforms into a narrative of power and becomes an instrument for the discipline of political ideology. In the texts, this power is delineated into two facets: temporal amnesia within Zhuang society and the process of granting time as cultural capital.

Firstly, the texts delve into the societal landscape of the Zhuang people amidst the absence of temporal markers. As stated in the text,

“In ancient times, the concept of years, months, or days was nonexistent. Age was a mystery, and the year of one’s birth remained a mystery. The meanings of ‘years’, ‘months’, and ‘days’ had to be elucidated. The notion of time was unknown.”

This citation portrays a period of ignorance where people lacked any comprehension of time. During this era, human life did not utilize time as a metric for organizing communal life and activities. The concepts of years, months, and days were foreign, and there needed to be awareness of calendars or the political intricacies of dynastic reigns.

Secondly, time is utilized as cultural capital, bestowed upon the ruled class by the ruling class. From a historical perspective, the Mo ceremony, as an essential religious means for praying for blessings and averting disasters, was once famous in the chiefdom regime of the Zhuang-Thai language families. This situation has influenced relevant text producers’ understanding and writing power relations (Holm 2017a). As described in the given text,

“The King declared in the temple: ‘The King leans from the upper chamber to inquire of you, your son, to inquire of your people, what is your pressing concern?’ His words echoed throughout the land, causing all the inhabitants of the unseen realm to kneel and kowtow in unison. They pleaded, ‘We comprehend not the cycles of years, the turns of months, or the flow of days … Born into this world, we have heard no word of … who serves the King for the sake of the people … Speak it, from upstairs.’”

This quotation reveals that ordinary people seek wisdom from the chief palace, vividly portraying the interaction between the chief and his subjects. This interaction echoes Giddens’s (1984) view that social structure is constantly constructed through individuals’ daily practices. Ordinary people seeking knowledge suggest that they need
more understanding of time. This view is similar to Polanyi’s (2009) emphasis that implicit knowledge is essential in daily life and work. However, it also indicates the value orientation of time knowledge. As Bourdieu (1986) pointed out, various forms of capital can affect an individual’s social status and choice of opportunities. Knowledge monopolized by some group members is vital for establishing group subjectivity. Therefore, this prompts them to seek wisdom from the chief palace. This viewpoint is similar to Habermas’s (1979) assertion that knowledge is closely related to human interests, emphasizing the importance of discourse and communication in social change. However, due to the sharing of knowledge, class differences are bridged to some extent, thereby maintaining the rationality of the existence of the ruling structure and transcending the deconstructive aspects of knowledge. As the text impresses upon us, there are double differences in both sides’ spatial position and the material expression of time knowledge dissemination. It is worth noting that the spatial position of these individuals symbolizes unique power relations.

Moreover, both citations echo the phrase “learn from the hall”, a potent symbol of the tribal chief’s knowledge transmission. This symbolism underscores the king’s nonchalant attitude and highlights his dominant position in the power structure. In contrast, references to “going upstairs” or “in the temple” underscore the king’s noble status, symbolizing the power hierarchy through spatial disparities between the king and his subjects. The Mo texts employ physical images and spatial orientation as symbolic markers, delineating the king’s and his subjects’ identities and thereby unraveling their power dynamics.

Furthermore, the citations above delineate two classes with unequal access to information. As Dyer (1992) observes, visual culture portrays power and identity differently. Media and advertising categorize and mold people’s identities and power dynamics. The knowledge dissemination relationship presented by the text is that the king monopolizes this knowledge, while the ignorant masses depend on him for it. This stark contrast not only underscores the king’s derision of those who seek this knowledge, labeling them as “foolish” and “ignorant of secular affairs”, but also their limited understanding of temporal structures such as days, months, and years. Secondly, the paragraph underscores the importance of “telling the masses”, “telling the virtuous”, and “telling the common people”, implying that those receiving these messages are perceived to have lower status.

The academic community holds different views on the complex relationship between knowledge and power. Weber (1947) emphasized the role of social and economic organizations as by-products of power and interest, focusing on authority, bureaucracy, and rationalization processes. However, he should have paid more attention to the power implications of knowledge, focusing on the static relevance of knowledge and class. Foucault (1977) recognizes the scientific nature of the development of knowledge and the archaeology of thought to criticize the subtle operation of power in contemporary society, emphasizing the critical role of discipline and punishment based on knowledge in shaping individuals. Power (1997) criticized modern society’s knowledge audit and verification system, believing it limits personal freedom and creativity. Unlike Power’s negative interpretation, Senge (2004, 2010) explored the relationship between knowledge and power in organizations from various perspectives, including the role of information asymmetry, the impact of knowledge sharing, and the dynamics of knowledge creation, discussing how knowledge is transformed into a source of power and authority. The research results on the relationship between knowledge and power have profoundly impacted this study—the study of the relationship between time, knowledge, and power.

Just as there are variations in academic views on the relationship between knowledge and power, the emphasis on temporal wisdom and hierarchical frameworks further complicates this already intricate web, offering a unique perspective. The crux of the unilateral dissemination of temporal wisdom lies in accentuating the hierarchical framework that governs temporal knowledge. This approach brings to the fore social disparities, with knowledge holders perched atop and the knowledge-deprived at the bottom. This one-sided diffusion of wisdom, deeply entrenched in preconceived power structures, attains
an unassailable sanctity and becomes an ideological benchmark within that power’s influence. The act of chiefs imparting knowledge to the general populace starkly illustrates this hierarchical structure’s deep-rooted nature, laying bare the entrenched hierarchy and its associated power dynamics. The drive to monopolize knowledge and its ideologization and classification are inherent demands of the ruling class in Zhuang society, which is based on agricultural super-stable production methods. This demand finds expression in the knowledge transmission method of the texts of the Mo religion.

5. Conclusions

Masakazu Yamazaki (1984), a Japanese philosopher and thinker, shared his profound understanding of time. He underscored the relativity, subjectivity, and objectivity of time and its intimate connection with the meaning of life. These discussions carry significant implications for how we comprehend and manage time, offering practical strategies for achieving our life goals within time constraints. This perspective is undeniably reinforced and elaborated upon in the Mo religion’s texts on time.

The Mo religion’s perspective on natural cycle time is multifaceted and rooted in the creator’s creationism. It maintains a sacred relationship with time, fostering a strong bond between individuals and groups. This sacred temporal sphere reflects the hierarchical frameworks and power dynamics within Zhuang society, with clergy utilizing religious rituals to maintain social harmony and mitigate potential losses caused by offending temporal deities.

The Mo religion’s perspective on natural cycle time is multifaceted, encompassing the day–night cycle, the 12 lunar months, and the four seasons. This understanding is firmly rooted in the creator’s creationism, where the Emperor establishes the triple periodicity of time. Central to this concept is the sacred significance attributed to each temporal unit, with stars and gods abstracting time’s essence. This sacred time construct integrates the heaven branch culture of the Han Chinese, the Jian-chu calendar, and Tongshu, thereby shaping the Zhuang people’s social life and production.

Individuals and groups within Zhuang society maintain a sacred relationship with time, personifying time units as gods. The clergy of the Mo faith utilizes religious rituals to maintain this sacred system, ensuring social harmony and mitigating potential losses caused by offending temporal deities. This sacred temporal sphere within Zhuang society fosters a strong bond between individuals, groups, and time.

The unilateral dissemination of temporal wisdom within the Mo religion’s texts highlights the hierarchical frameworks of mastery over temporal knowledge. This hierarchical structure is deep-seated and reflects the entrenched hierarchy and associated power dynamics within Zhuang society. The King’s imparting knowledge to the common folk further illustrates the importance of this structure, serving as an ideological benchmark within the sphere of its influence.

Although the Mo religion’s perspective on natural cycle time is well understood, this research has limitations. First, the exclusive focus on the Zhuang people’s sacred time concept restricts comparisons with other cultures or religions, impeding a comprehensive grasp of temporal beliefs across varying communities. Second, this study relies heavily on textual analysis, lacking empirical evidence from fieldwork or interviews with Zhuang practitioners. This shortage limits the depth and authenticity of the findings.

Future studies should broaden the scope of comparison, examining temporal beliefs across cultures and religions, especially those sharing similar cosmological frameworks. Qualitative research methods, including fieldwork and interviews, can offer deeper insights into the practical application of sacred time in Zhuang society, revealing how temporal beliefs shape daily life and cultural practices.

Furthermore, future research should delve deeper into the Mo religion’s historical development and social context, exploring temporal belief evolution in response to external influences. This research would provide a comprehensive historical perspective on
the Zhuang’s sacred time construct, enhancing contemporary understandings of temporal practices within the community.

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### Notes

1. *Photoprinted and Annotated Translation of Zhuang Ethnic’s Mo Scriptures of Buluotuo (Zhang 2004)* is an essential work about Zhuang culture. The original materials of this book come from 29 manuscripts collected from Zhuang villages in Youjiang District, Tianyang, Tiandong, Napo of Baise City, and Bama, Donglan, Dahu of Hechi City in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, as well as Xichou County in Yunnan Province. These manuscripts are all precious versions handed down from generation to generation by the single Mo Gong family, and each manuscript is self-contained. It took eight years from collection and project establishment to publication. This work, edited by Zhang Shengzhen, was published in Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in China by Guangxi Ethnic Press in 2004. *Photographic Reproduction of Buluotuo Mogong Scriptures of the Zhuang: An Annotated Translation* is not only a work of scholarly research but also a testament to the beauty and intricacy of the original manuscripts. The book’s design is a tribute to the original format of the manuscripts, with the photoprint of the original manuscript arranged vertically and turned from right to left, and the translation and annotation of the original manuscript arranged horizontally and turned from left to right. The two parts are bound into a book with a double-cover design, symbolizing the unity of the original text and its interpretation. In addition, this book is also one of the basic data projects of the *Zhuangxue Series*. The list of editors, preface, and General Rules of the series are placed before the translation and annotation part of the first volume. The Epilogue of this book is placed after the translation and annotation part of the eighth volume. The texts of the Mo religion are important carriers and core content of Buoluotuo culture, known as the encyclopedia of Zhuang culture and its profound history and unique composition are significant for the protection and inheritance of Zhuang culture.


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