

## **The Gu: An Anthropological Viewpoint on the Stigmatization of the Miao-Yao People**

by

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**Hmong Studies Journal Editor’s Note:** International scholars generally identify the 9 million person Miao population in China as consisting of four major subgroups in terms of ethnicity – the Hmong, the Ah Hmao, the Kho Xiong and the Hmu. The current estimate of the Hmong population in China is around 4 million. (Sources: Gary Yia Lee and Nicholas Tapp, “Current Hmong Issues: 12 Point Statement”, accessed from <http://garyyiale.com>, December 16, 2019; Jacques Lemoine, “What is the actual number of the (H)mong in the World”, *Hmong Studies Journal*, 2005, 6: 1-8.). The Yao, also known as Mien, are classified as a separate ethnic minority category from the Miao by the government of China. The 2010 estimate of the Yao population was 2.8 million in China. (Source: “Yao Ethnic Group and Their History.” Facts and Details, accessed from <http://factsanddetails.com/china/cat5/sub30/entry-4372.html>, July 6, 2020).

### **Abstract**

The Gu in Chinese “蛊”, is a kind of witchcraft. There are still some unfounded rumors that the keepers of the Gu gather hundreds of worms and perform magic arts in order to murder for gain. However, as it coincided with the southern environment, local diseases and regional culture, from the Sui and Tang dynasties on, it came to be regarded as an evil custom peculiar to some areas of southern China. With the gradual development of the South, the scope of the legendary “Gu” moved south as mainstream culture expanded into the southern regions of China; as far as Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian and the Southwest, the south of the Yangtze River. Rather than being a simple matter of witchcraft, “Gu” embodies the self-centered, beggar-thy-neighbor way in which the ruling clique imagines and constructs the other. Consequently, the ruling group imagined and constructed the boundary between mainstream society and the marginalized society of “Gu”, in order to maximize national resources and power and the high integration of its own society, while excluding those societies who still practiced the “Gu”. Step by step, the ethnic group accused of having the “Gu” thus internalized and absorbed the stigma imposed onto them by mainstream society, reflecting the subtleties that exist, such as stigma, within marginalized cultures who must confront the dominant culture.

**Keywords:** the Gu, the Miao-Yao People, Stigmatization

## Introduction

Every year when I spent my winter holiday for the new year in my grandmother's home, I would always remember the pasts of my childhood. Her home is in a small village of the Zhuang, Yao Autonomous County of Du'an, Guangxi Province, China. When I was a child, there was one thing that I always remembered. Because I grew up in the city, I am not familiar with my ethnic group, the Yao, too well. I remembered once I asked my grandmother casually: "Is there any difference between the Zhuang and the Yao People?" She answered miraculously: "Yao people live in deeper mountains and forests than the Zhuang, who can put Gu poison to others." Then I wondered what is the Gu, "If you walk on the road and see a small crab in the river climbing up the road with colored ropes, especially red color, wrapped around the body, you cannot touch it on account of such evidence of the Yao or the Miao poisoning you, or you'll be poisoned." she explained. I then went on to university and talked with Miao students and friends about our respective lives and interests, I found that there were still many stories and rumors about Gu. What exactly is the Gu? Why is the Gu understood as something that can exist among some people in a specific region, yet, someone else from outside that region might be a potential victim of the Gu? Why have the Miao-Yao people been made so mysterious? Why in the memory of the Zhuang, the Yao is imagined to evoke the Gu to poison others, yet the Zhuang are not able to evoke the Gu? Because I am Yao, the matter concerns me. In this paper, I try to sort out some knowledge and solve the puzzle about the Gu from the perspective of anthropology.

## Historical Changes of the Gu

What is the Gu? Firstly, the Gu in Chinese “蛊” is related to witchcraft. Thus, we should trace the origin of witchcraft. Though some academics stress the differences between witchcraft and religion, and regard them as two different social facts, others relegate witchcraft to the sphere of religion. (Evans-Pritchard, 2001) Indisputably, however, many academics define witchcraft as one type of black witchcraft. According to anthropological and sociological research, black witchcraft exists in stressful social relations. Frequently, no other than in inharmonious relationships, dominant or powerful ethnic groups imagine the weaker powered ethnic groups as those having special and mysterious skills that can harm them, such as the Gu. Thus, according to two dimensions of time and space, I wish to examine the Gu more deeply using the framework whereby a dominant ethnic group to a sub ethnic group may use explanations such as black magic to differentiate or legitimate the sub ethnic group's social status.

In *Ci Yuan* (《辞源》), the meaning of Gu has six different explanations: 1. a parasite in the human abdomen; 2. a kind of legendary insect by artificial cultivation; 3. a worm born in old millet, which turns into moth in cereal; 4. to allure, seduce; 5. the disease of mental confusion; 6. a method of harming others with a magic curse. (Revision Group of Guangdong, 1915)

The first explanation is a parasite in the human abdomen, which is well explicated in *Origin of Chinese Characters* (《说文解字》), “Gu, a worm in abdomen”(蛊, 腹中虫也。) (Zhang, 2012). In the imagination of our folk, once a man is poisoned by Gu, his internal organs will be poked many holes, which is considered a very unusual phenomenon but relevant to this meaning.

In *Rites of the Zhou* (《周礼》) this word appears. This book recorded that “the beadle” (庶士) has the duty of mastering poisonous Gu (掌除毒蛊) in Zhou Dynasty (Liu X. , 1980). “Poisonous Gu” refers to “a worm doing harm” (虫物而病害人者) , which is also the first meaning.

The second explanation is a kind of legendary insect by artificial cultivation, which in the folk imagination, five highly poisonous insects are placed in a closed urn and a big stone is pressed on it so as to let them bite each other. Finally, the insect that survives is extremely poisonous, becoming a carrier of the Gu (取百虫入瓮中, 经年开之年, 必有一虫尽食诸虫, 即此名为蛊。), consistent with what is recorded in the medical book of Tang Dynasty *Supplement to the Herbal* (《本草拾遗》) and also explicated in *Ci Yuan* (Li S. , 2016).

The third explanation has nothing to do with the Gu mentioned in this article. The fourth “to allure, seduce” is used as a verb, and the fifth is just a disease of mental confusion.

The sixth explanation is a method of harming others with a magic curse. *Waiqi Empresses and Their Claims of Shiji* (《史记·外戚世家》) records: “Empress Chen blazed with anger and attempted suicide many times since she heard that Weizifu was spoiled by Emperor Hanwu. The Emperor was also even more angry because Empress Chen had put sorcery on Weizifu after he was quite aware of the matter. And then he discarded Empress Chen and ordered Weizifu to be the Empress.” (闻卫子夫大幸, 恚, 几死者数矣。上愈怒。陈皇后挟妇人媚道, 其事颇觉, 于是废陈皇后, 而立卫子夫为皇后。) (Si, 2016). The case of Gu

and witchcraft (巫蛊之祸) during Emperor Wu of Han Dynasty caused one of the most serious unjust situations in Chinese history. In the laws and decrees of successive central dynasties, the Gu became listed as one of the unforgiven charges, involving an extraordinarily severe punishment and sorcery being strictly prohibited and eliminated.

Faced with crisis, the growing anxiety about the Gu is addressed with the Nuo ceremony, an exorcism ceremony, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, while the Gu was said to exist and travel in dogs spreading rabies in the Wei, Jin, the Northern and Southern Dynasties. In addition, stories existed of sorcery through a curse to call a ghost cat of the Gu in order to steal money in the Sui Dynasty, and particularly absurd was when Emperor Yang of Sui used the Gu to steal beautiful women. What is more, the imperial court officials liked to secretly plot against each other via the Gu during the Tang Dynasty.

The historical changes of the Gu have been recorded from Rites of the *Zhou* in the Pre-Qin Period to the present, where a large number of documents are involved. It can be said that while there is no shortage of books, there are rumors from generation to generation. What is the specific geographical scope of the Gu?

*Geographical Indications* (《輿地志》) of Gu Yewang (顾野王) in Liang Dynasty recorded: “There were a number of counties concealing the Gu among areas south of the Yangtze River, and masters put it in food and drink to render it imperceptible. If the families who kept the Gu were extinguished, the Gu would run away. If anyone met the Gu by chance, he would die.” (江南数郡有蓄蛊者，主人行之以杀人，行食饮中，人不觉也。其家绝灭者，则飞游妄走，中之则毙。) (Li S., 1977). This is a specific description of the Gu in the place

that it appeared during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. When I consulted more literature, I found that all kinds of literature focused on the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, Fujian and Yunnan, areas in which the Gu was said to be rampant. In the social and historical surveys conducted by the Chinese government in the 1950s, the records of the Gu were in fact broader than the description found in *Geographical Indications*, probably including Guangdong, Gguangxi, Fujian, Hunan, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guizhou and Tibet and Hainan.

Historically, we have seen that the central dynasty's prevention and punishment of the Gu was first mentioned in the article entitled "*The Systems of Kings*" (《王制》) in *Liji* (《礼记》) : "Those who under the guise of the spirits of the gods, often using the superstition of yarrow divination to deceive the public must be killed." (假于鬼神、时日、卜筮以疑众, 杀。 ) (Liji·The Systems of Kings, 1980). Actually, the "divination" (卜筮) here included such a kind of witchcraft belonging to the Gu. So, one may conclude that the Gu started in the pre-Qin period, during which time, it was initially incorporated into punishments doled out by the state. During the Han Dynasty, the Gu was extremely and severely banned so much so that one could be placed in "Gu and witch prison" (巫蛊之狱) . The "extermination of humanitarianism" (不道) in "Ten Laws" (十恶) in "*The Laws of Tang Dynasty*" (《唐律》) also includes "the sin of making the Gu to poison people and cause death with evil ways" (造蓄蛊毒及魇魅罪) , for all of which one should be executed (Zhangsun, 1983). In the Qing Dynasty, there were also disciplinary rules concerning the handling of poisonous Gu in addition to *the Qing Laws*. "Anyone who makes or hides poisonous Gu to confuse or kill others will be beheaded." in "*The*

*Laws of Qing Dynasty*” (《大清律例》) means that Gu killings and murder are the same charges (凡造蓄蛊毒堪以杀人, 及教令造蓄者, 并坐斩) (Tian & Zheng, 1999). Why did the state make such harsh criminal laws in response to the Gu? Perhaps peoples' fears came from the following: Firstly, there is an important clue here. From the above Chinese literature, we can find that Han people were involved in using poisonous Gu. It can be seen that in ancient times, those who resorted to poisoning, and adjudicated in the court, were mostly the Han. Secondly, the Miao, the Yao, the She, the Li, the Dai, etc. were all involved using the Gu. In addition, there is a very important time node: The Gu had been getting more and more attention by society since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, as reflected in the Ming and Qing Dynasties' official documents, local history, unofficial history, and personal notes which generally referred to the Miao-Yao people poisoning others.

While, on one hand, documents indicated that many Han people were worried about bereavement and victimization by the Gu in ethnic areas, on the other hand, within the minority ethnic groups, are there any memories and statements that indicate that the Han would put the Gu on other ethnic groups?

### **Discussion of the Gu**

The Gu is often associated with the sexes in society, discriminately. Generally, men were not considered culpable of sorcery nor poisoning, only women had this skill. Women were considered to have a wide range of applications to control their lovers, to control their husbands, to treat unfriendly neighbors, and so on. Other than gender, what characteristics were attributed to the kind of individual likely to be accused of using the Gu? During the Republic of China, Li Zhiren researched in Guizhou, including Lin Yaohua's investigation in western Hunan. Both

found that those individuals who lived in seclusion and did not like dealing with others too much, those who were sick, those who had redness of the eyes, or those who had scratchy skin were more likely to embody the Gu more easily. These conclusions were found to be perpetuated through beliefs among ethnic groups and finally among individuals regardless of sex. There seems to be a basic and logical relationship between Gu and humanity.

In fact, many people have investigated the Gu and completed studies including field surveys such as:

Ling Chunsheng and Rui Yifu devoted themselves to this issue in Chapter VIII of *The Miao Investigation in Hunan Province Report* in the 1930s (Ling & Rui, 2003).

Chen Guojun's "*Miao Society in Guizhou Study*" had an article titled "*Miao good at putting Gu*", on how people put the Gu, who will put the Gu, and the reaction and performance after being poisoned by Gu(Chen, 2004).

Li Zhiren wrote "*The story of Miao putting the Gu*" it was also included in "*Miao Society in Guizhou Study*" (Li Z. , 2004). In the book, he raised questions, saying that if the Miao people were capable of putting the Gu, and those women who were identified and arrested were capable of putting the Gu, why did they give up so easily? If Gu was so powerful, why would they not use the Gu to protect themselves, but instead, were willing to be caught and jailed? He was trying to reflect on the phenomenon that people who were considered weaker by society were often accused of putting the Gu on others. He thought it was impossible that such so called weak individuals would possess something so powerful as the Gu. Those so-called poisonous people, especially as deemed by their physical appearance, were actually the most abject women within their communities, as well as the least culpable, and most marginalized individuals within society. Li Zhiren was the only scholar who conducted a field survey of the Gu during the period

of Republic of China and the only one who explicitly questioned and put forward a critical analysis of social perceptions of the Gu.

Shi Qigui was also a Miao intellectual who was active in fighting for the rights and interests of ethnic minorities at the National Assembly in 1946. He accompanied Ling Chunsheng and Rui Yifu to do research as a translator in Xiangxi, Hunan. After this research was completed, he continued to do his own investigation. Some of his achievements were recorded in *the Report on the Investigation of the Miao People in Western Hunan Province*. In chapter 11, he specifically wrote a section titled “*witchcraft absurd*” (Shi, 1986). It was an important milestone to have a Miao intellectual and investigator from a large number of field surveys, combined with his own experience, and the relationship between the Gu and Miao people, criticize the authenticity of the Gu.

In addition, in Deng Qiyao’s “*An investigation into the Gu: the Cultural Psychology of Chinese Gu*”, the author used scientific methods of fieldwork and even tried to eat the Gu himself (Deng, 1999); Zang Zhen’s “*Unwise Wisdom: Witchcraft in China*” took the ancient sorcery culture as his research subject and discussed the development and content of Chinese witchcraft and the influences of Witchcraft on Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism (Zang, 1994); Gao Guofan’s “*Chinese Witchcraft History*” contains a lot of information about the Gu from the beginning of the pre-Qin period until the Qing Dynasty (Gao, 1999); another study is Liu Liming’s “*Song Dynasty Witchcraft Research*”<sup>1</sup>, of which Chapter V of the first section also talks about the Gu and witchcraft (Liu L. , 2004).

From the survey reports and the theoretical works above, the basic research conclusions about the Gu can be roughly divided into the following three categories:

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<sup>1</sup> Liu Liming. *Song Dynasty Witchcraft Research*. Bashu Publishing House, 2004.

The first, no attitude or conclusion. The reports by Ling Chunsheng and Rui Yifu were very influential, but there are no conclusions about the Gu among the records and anecdotal information that were collected. Song Zhaolin is also a scholar who has studied Chinese witchcraft and folk beliefs. He also does not give a very definite conclusion about the Gu.

The second, answering with an unhesitating negative. Li Zhiren and Shi Qigui are the only two scholars who have really provided their conclusions and reasons in the above-mentioned documents.

The third, cautious. Deng Qiyao did not provide a very definite conclusion of the existence of the Gu and witchcraft in his study.

It can be seen that this phenomenon of the Gu has existed for a long time. However, the conclusions of Li Zhiren and Shi Qigui seem to offer a critical lens to the existence and purpose of the Gu in Chinese society. Consequently, future research may continue to further this discourse, as there are no conclusions set in stone.

### **The Gu: Imagination and Allegation of the Other**

In my opinion, from the time of the pre-Qin period, the state cracked down on the Gu severely. We can then observe the process of time, space and objects continually migrating southward, especially among specific ethnic groups and their ethnic activities.

We can divide the process of the legendary “land of the Gu” into four stages: 1. The stage of both North and South, from the Han Dynasty to the end of the Sui and Tang Dynasties; 2. The middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, Fujian, Mid-Tang Dynasty; 3. Lingnan (Guangdong and Guangxi), Bashu, the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, Fujian, the middle of the Tang Dynasty to the late Ming Dynasty; 4. Some areas of Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou, Fujian, Hunan, the late Ming so far (Yu, 2006).

The Gu was not originally within a geographical area; the legend of the Gu existed within the entire country of China. Since the late Ming Dynasty, especially since Wanli (万历), there have been more obvious changes in the scope of the Gu. Yunnan and Guizhou have been included in the “land of the Gu”. Records of the Gu in Guangxi began to be obviously more than those in Guangdong. Although there were still related legends in Fujian, the area was shrinking; specifically, rare records indicated legends of the Gu were to be found in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River, especially in the lower reaches of the region.

My inference is this: during the Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, with the gradual southward movement of the central dynasty and the southward shift of the imperial economic and cultural centers, the agricultural population in the interior moved southwards on a large scale, gradually expanding to the regions south of the Yangtze River. Conflicts occurred among the mountainous areas in the southern part of the country where ethnic minorities gathered. These conflicts between the government and the people, immigrants and indigenous peoples were very complicated. From this period up until the records of the Republic of China, such conflicts took place frequently among the people. Since the implementation of poisonous black witchcraft has always been forbidden by national laws, the central dynasty stigmatized the Miao and the Yao who were bullied and labeled as evil ethnic groups who have the Gu. This was an alternative strategy to provide the legitimacy for the clearance operations and the day-to-day operations of the Chinese government to push the ethnic groups further south. As a consequence, under the social background of ethnic tensions in the ethnic areas south of the Yangtze River, the Miao-Yao people were stigmatized as possessing the Gu, which may be related to the immigration conflict that began in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties. At the time, historically, it was beneficial to slander the Miao-Yao people as the evil people having the Gu in

order to avoid normal political, economic and cultural and social exchanges between the Han people and the Miao-Yao peoples. In this way, on the one hand, mainland businessmen could be prevented from entering the Miao-Yao people's areas, since there was widespread economic exploitation and fraud in the name of trade. Using the Gu as a social stigma helped the government avoid the intense conflicts between civilians. On the other hand, the Miao-Yao communities became isolated from the outside world, resulting of a slow down in their ability to advance their culture, society, and productivity in accordance with the rest of China. This meant that the Miao-Yao areas remained in a closed and backward state for a long time which then weakened their resistance.

In my opinion, the concept of purity in anthropology has become an important social barrier and constitutes a boundary of society. Social elites tend to think that the general public is dirty and that an ethnic group, in order to show its superiority over another ethnic group, is usually illustrated by thinking that “we” are cleaner than “them”. In fact, in addition to the Gu, our imagination of the ethnic groups in the southern region still has another dreaded term——malaria (瘴病) . It is said that malaria refers to the hot, foggy and easily lethal weather in the South, thus people refer to these places as the “malaria area”. *Sui Shu* (《隋书》) recorded: “More than 20 counties in Lingnan, low-lying terrain, high heat and humidity, epidemic damage, to the area known as the malaria area.” (岭南二十余郡, 地势低湿, 暑热, 湿气交蒸, 疫疠为害, 向被称为瘴病之区。) (Wei, 1998) *Chaoshan Fuzhi* (《潮汕府志》) also said: “Before the Tang and Song Dynasties, mountains and rivers with more malaria, were considered a relegating area.” (唐宋以前, 山川之间多瘴病, 被视作贬谪的区域。) Until the Tang

Dynasty, Lingnan was still regarded as a place outside of the province, known as the hometown of malaria. Guangdong was also classified as “barbarians” (蛮夷) and chosen by the emperor as a place to punish and relegate ministers. Han Yu was delegated on the way to Chaozhou and felt that he would die in such a “malaria area”, so he made a poem: “I know you come from afar on purpose. In the miasma filled river, please collect and bury my body.” (知汝远来应有意, 好收吾骨瘴江边。) (Han, 1995) Today, many are willing to travel south of the Yangtze River and have not been victimized by malaria. Therefore, I think that historically, the official orthodox documents in the central plains have had political intentions in such imaginations and renderings of the ethnic areas and the south. In the past, the scope of the Gu was very wide, many counties in the South also had the Gu, and the geographic locations of ethnic groups were very broad. Yet, why was there such a charge and stigma placed on the Miao-Yao people since the time of the Ming and Qing dynasties?

In fact, the central dynasty severely exploited and developed the southern region from the time of the Song Dynasty; not including today’s Guizhou, western Hunan, western Hubei, Chongqing. As the Yuan and the Ming Dynasties came along, and as China’s political center moved southward gradually, and the population moved more and more southward, the development of the south became more and more intensified, resulting in more intense and frequent uprisings of the ethnic minorities in the south against the central government and encroachment on their villages.

Moreover, during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the Yao and the Miao ethnic groups were the most fiercely opposed. The Yao in the Ming Dynasty Hongwu years launched a large-scale resistance: the Datengxia Uprising (大藤峡起义) resulting in numerous deaths and

injuries among the Yao people caused by the central government. By the time of the Qing Dynasty, however, ethnic uprisings and conflict were concentrated among the Miao people. After the reign of Emperor Qianlong and Emperor Jiaqing, the Miao people continued their resistance and suffered heavy casualties, reflected by a famous saying: “The Miao people like rebellion, ten years a big rebellion, five years a small rebellion.” (苗族好发风, 十年一大风, 五年一小风。 ) Due to the conflictual nature of the relations between the central and local governments, and between ethnic groups and the nation, the Miao-Yao people continued to launch massive protests in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. The Miao-Yao people were increasingly being accused of putting the Gu while other ethnic groups were able to avoid this stigma such as the Dong, the Tujia, and the Zhuang people living in this same area at the time. The groups believed to have the Gu were concentrated in Raw Miao (生苗) and Raw Yao (生瑶) .

A review of the historical literature reflects the value that all different people or groups who have their own culture are considered heretics, barbarians, or animals and must be wiped out or assimilated quickly. The South Great Wall, located in Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Hunan Province, is the boundary between Raw Miao and Cooked Miao (熟苗) . The defense of the South Great Wall was not aimed at resisting the nomadic invasions. Instead, it was to isolate Raw Miao and Cooked Miao in order to prevent the Raw Miao from resistance.

Elements of the Tujia language today can be seen in use in Yongshun, a local small village in Hunan Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture. However, the Tujia people no longer have their own ethnic language, and their customs have not been well preserved. Since the

Southern Song Dynasty, during the process of the immigration of the central dynasty, the Tujia people lived intermingled with the immigrants and were largely assimilated. Their language and most cultural traditions were lost. From the ruler's point of view, the places set up by the central government were more densely populated in the Tujia area, where the Tujia were basically assimilated into docile residents. Only the Miao and Yao people who were hiding in the mountains had the power to fight back. The Miao and Yao people were able to stay in hiding because the La'er Mountain in Hunan Province, the Moon Mountain in Guizhou and Shiwan Mountains in Guangxi Province were located in remote mountain ravines and formed large-scale agglomerations.

The Miao-Yao people are widely distributed throughout the country, but those who have such an imputation, are concentrated in the limited areas of Huaihua, Guizhou, northern Guangxi and western Hunan, and no other ethnic group has ever faced such a stigma. The concept proposed by the sociologist Goffman: stigma refers to the process by which a group imposed and maintains the inferiority of humanity in another. The concept of stigmatizing reflects a one-way "naming" power relationship between two social groups. In my opinion, the Gu is related to the social background discussed above in both dimension of time and space. It has a stigmatized logic. Goffman divided the stigmatized population into three categories: the first is a person with a physical defect, such as a disabled person or an AIDS patient; the second is a person who was flawed in character or has a mental illness; and the third involves certain ethnic groups and religions (Tang, 2011). Today there are many stigmatized people in our society, such as AIDS patients. People living with HIV suffer so much and the disease can be passed on to others by the way of sexual, blood, and childbirth. In our history of human beings, there are not many diseases that have the same lethal effect as AIDS. As an example, when we stigmatize AIDS, we pay

more attention to promiscuity rather than the suffering or humanity of the patient. To further complicate the stigma, poverty makes AIDS particularly contagious in China. Therefore, the stigmatized person is deprived of the possibility of morality and sympathy- often blamed for their disease, and deemed immoral and unworthy of compassion. The state has the legal guarantee of “nonforgiveness” (杀无赦) . As a result, this stigma is utilized in social life, causing conflicts among the people, whereby those with higher status hold a negative perception of those with the stigmatized identity; while those stigmatized have no way to shed the stigmatized identity. Therefore, the Miao-Yao People have been slowly slandered by larger society in the process of stigmatization.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that I have consulted the broader literature and have found that in the Miao and the Yao’s customary laws, such as Stone Tablet (石碑制) and Yi Lang System (议榔) , there is no record of the Gu. If the Gu really exists such as is stated in folklore, I believe there must be customary laws among the Miao and the Yao society to punish the evil acts that are harmful to their society. Instead, it seems that the Central Dynasty has formed very strict laws to punish the Gu since the time of the pre-Qin period.

## **Conclusion**

According to the American anthropologist Daiman, “Chinese belief in the Gu and the Miao’s witchcraft” is “not based on an ethnographic fact but on the irreconcilable culture of a different argument”, and “the bizarre imagination of the Han people on the Miao people” (Weng, 1996). In fact, the Miao-Yao people also have a set of traditional methods of regulating their own lives, integrating the human mind, regulating disputes and morality. Nevertheless, rituals and

punishments of witchcraft principles (such as the law of similarity and the law of contact) associated with the Gu have never been proven in evidence.

In the book *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas mainly talks about her understanding of “purity” (Douglas, 1966). She believes that things of purity or filth have nothing to do with real cleanliness or lack thereof, instead these depend on their positions in the classification system created by humans. Cleanliness and filth are part of a classification system and principles that separate different groups of people in terms of religion, identity, etc., building social boundaries that distinguish “I” from “the other”, “good” from “bad”, “order” and “chaos”. Nonconformities or violations of the culture are often considered “dirty” and “unclean”. In consequence, the concept of cleanliness can be regarded as a boundary symbol that distinguishes different social groups, and each culture and ethnic group has its own set of concepts of “cleanliness” and “filthiness”. The emergence, change and existence of these concepts are closely related to the geographical environment, religious beliefs, production, lifestyle, ethics and the understanding of the world. Different ethnic groups and cultures have different divisions and criteria for “cleanliness” and “filthiness”: while an article, a behavior or a social phenomenon is considered “filthy” in one culture, in another culture it may be considered “clean”. The concepts of “cleanliness” and “filthiness” are ubiquitous in social life. As conceptual systems of value and symbolism, they construct ethnic, social and cultural boundaries that separate different groups of people and society and subjectively define the boundaries between “us” and others.

American anthropologist Marvin Harris reveals in his book *The Cow, Pig, War, and Witch* that in the Middle Ages, the gradual decline of the decimated Catholic Church involved finding “scapegoats” to persecute others, liberate themselves, and transform from corrupt and fallen sinners to saviors (Harris, 1989). Following Harris’s arguments from an etic perspective,

the Gu involves nothing more than a self-centered way of imagining the other by the ruling group, constructing the boundaries of “my group” and “other groups”, classifying the “cleanliness” and “uncleanness”, and realizing the stable utilization of resources and power within the group and a high degree of integration of society. From an emic perspective, the Miao-Yao societies have their own cultural logic and are accused of having the Gu. This violates the rules of the local culture and is identified as an “alternative” existence.

Hence, at last, in my opinion, the Gu does not exist, no matter how seriously it has been argued otherwise.

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