

Dirk Kuhlmann (Monumenta Serica Institute, Sankt Augustin)

Approaching the Numinous in Literature – Religious motives in the Sinophone novels of the Taiwanese Indigenous Authors Neqou Soqluman and Badai

Abstract

This paper will reflect upon this conference's topic of "humanities, religion, and literature cross-cultural processes" in a wider context, by analyzing in which ways religious motives may feature in contemporary Sinophone works of Taiwanese Indigenous authors which rooted in their respective peoples' mythology. My focus will be on the novel *Donggu shafei chuanqi* 東谷沙飛傳奇 / *Palisia Tongku Saveq* (The Legend of Tongku Saveq) by the Bunun author Neqou Soqluman 乜寇·索克魯曼 and the novel *Wulü* 巫旅 (The Journey of a *Wu* Practitioner) by the Puyuma author Badai 巴代. From a certain angle, the two novels correspond to the global, transcultural phenomena by sharing elements from the genres of high fantasy and young adult urban fantasy novels. However, considering these works within genre labels such as "fantasy" (or "magical realism") rather serves to highlight that they are a distinctly modern phenomenon as retellings of original Indigenous myths that underwent a creative process of appropriation by the authors. What sets these novels in particular apart is that both Neqou Soqluman and Badai tap deeply in the resources of their Indigenous cultures and the related religious concepts – their respective religious traditions are vitals elements in telling and unfolding these specific stories: Neqou Soqluman is a writer and teacher rooted in Protestant Christianity – he is also a preacher. Badai is an ex-soldier turned full-time writer with a strong interest in continuing the *wu* practice of his people, the Puyuma. His master's thesis compared early religious thinking as outlined in James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* with Puyuma rituals. My presentation will aim at a fruitful comparison between the two different approaches, that of a novel which retells Bunun religious tradition and myths within a Christian framework and one which places Puyuma religious tradition, in particular the role of the *wuxi*, female religious experts and practitioners of rituals, in a modern context. Both novels will also be discussed as examples for reclaiming and introducing Indigenous identities vis-à-vis a predominately Han-Chinese audience.