

Parallelism in the *Hanvueng*,
a Zhuang Verse Epic from West-central Guangxi in Southern China

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Parallelism is ubiquitous in Zhuang poetry and song, and hence also in ritual texts and in a range of written genres. Curiously, this salient fact has generally escaped the notice of scholars writing on the subject of Zhuang versification. Discussion has generally been concentrated on line length, rhyming patterns, and stanzaic structures as found in Zhuang traditional song genres.¹

The present article will look specifically at the phenomenon of parallelism in one particular ritual text from west-central Guangxi. This is the *Hanvueng*, a long verse narrative that is recited at rituals intended to deal with cases of unnatural death and serious family quarrels, especially feuding between brothers. The plot in brief involves the old king and his son by his first wife, Hanvueng. After his wife dies, the king remarries a widow from a commoner family, who brings her son with her. She and her son Covueng then set out to disenfranchise Hanvueng and drive him out. Hanvueng goes away into exile, but the old king becomes ill and has him recalled. The struggle continues with Covueng attempting to kill Hanvueng while hunting. He finally succeeds in having Hanvueng sent down a well, and murders him. Hanvueng flies off into the sky and establishes a realm in the sky, from which he rains down pestilence upon his former domain. Covueng sends an eagle and a crow up to the sky to resolve the dispute. In the end, Covueng retains the earthly domain, but pays an annual rent to Hanvueng in the sky.

Meng Yuanyao and I have recently published an annotated edition of a *Hanvueng* manuscript.² With a total length of 1536 lines, this text is quite long for a Zhuang vernacular ritual text. For our purposes here, it provides a reasonably close parallel in both form and content to the forms of epic poetry discussed elsewhere in this issue. It also serves as a useful platform for analysis because the manuscript is undamaged (there are no missing lines), the plotline is clear, and any difficulties in interpretation have either been resolved or at least fully explored in an extensive set of textual and ethnographic notes accompanying the text in the published edition.³

‘Zhuang’ is the official designation for the most populous Tai-speaking nationality in the province of Guangxi in southern China. With a population approaching 15 million, the Zhuang are concentrated in the western two-thirds of the province, and are found also in contiguous provinces. Zhuang as a language is predominantly monosyllabic and tonal, although in ritual language there are also some binoms and traces of earlier prefixes. Zhuang is now classified by Ethnologue as a ‘macrolanguage’, meaning a language grouping with large numbers of disparate and mutually non-intelligible dialects.⁴ The northern dialects are very close to the Bouyei language of Guizhou province and Sha in eastern Yunnan, while the southern dialects form a linguistic continuum with the Tày and Nùng languages of northern

¹ The classic studies are by Huang Yongsha 黃永劼. See esp. his *Zhuangzu geyao gailun* 壯族歌謠概論. Also a useful summary is Wei Xinglang 韋星朗, ‘Zhuangzu shige gelü’ 壯族詩歌歌律, in *Shaoshu minzu shige gelü* 少數民族詩歌歌律, ed Zhongyang minzu xueyuan Shaoshu minzu wenzue yishu yanjiusuo Wenxue yanjiushi 中央民族學院少數民族文學藝術研究所文學研究室, Lhasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1986, pp. 280–307.

² David Holm and Meng Yuanyao, trans. and ed., *Hanvueng: The Goose King and the Ancestral King, An Epic form Guangxi in Southern China*, Leiden: Brill, 2015.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 283–469.

⁴ Ethnologue Languages of the World: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/zha> (accessed 8 June 2015).

Vietnam. The present text, from the region of the former chieftaincy of Tianzhou in west-central Guangxi, is in the Youjiang ('Right-hand River') sub-dialect of northern Zhuang.⁵

While a generic category corresponding to 'epic' is not found in Zhuang culture, the *Hanvueng* text otherwise appears to exhibit the social and cultural significance considered characteristic of epics.⁶ The textualization of the narrative also exhibits formal characteristics common to epic texts such as the repetition of lines, conventional epithets, and formulaic composition. It equally exhibits thematic content familiar from epic traditions such as its central theme of 'enmity', which for Western readers will be strongly reminiscent of the theme of 'wrath' (*menis*) in Homer's *Iliad*. As we comment in the Introduction:⁷

Many of [the] key characteristics of epic are found in the Hanvueng. The Hanvueng is not just a chiefly chronicle; it involves interactions between human beings and gods; character and incident are sufficiently well developed to invoke emotional involvement in the fate of the hero; there is a fateful struggle between the two protagonists, leading to a war of words and exchange of dire threats; and the themes are of central importance in the Tai-speaking stratified societies in the south of China.

This does not mean that the text in its present form is a product of oral composition purely and simply. Internal evidence in the manuscript suggests that certain sections of the text were imported from elsewhere after having been written down – that is, the text shows signs of having been put together from disparate sources.⁸

However, the Hanvueng text is also a liturgical scripture, recited by vernacular priests during ritual in order to effect ritual purposes, such as rescuing the souls of people who died violent deaths, obviating outbreaks of smallpox and other disasters, and resolving intractable family quarrels. While the central portion of the text is devoted to the narrative of Hanvueng and his step-brother, the beginning of the text includes an introit which is cosmogonic in nature (lines 1–14), an account of the origins of enmity (lines 19–38 and 52–76), an invocation of the demons of enmity (lines 39–49), who are summoned to be present in the ritual arena, and similar invocations and announcements. Towards the end of the text but within the narrative there is a passage giving ritual instructions, that news of the ritual just conducted be despatched to the heavenly deities (lines 1402–1424). The overtly ritual portions of the text are clearly intended as "speech acts", whereby saying something has the force of making it happen,⁹ but it is also clear that the cultural logic of the ritual process requires us to understand the narrative portions of the text not just as a story, but as an invocation and a re-enactment.¹⁰ This is part of a wider dispensation whereby the social and natural order are subject to entropic forces, and need to be periodically renewed (re-charged, as it were) through the performance of prescribed rituals.

Song and Versification

⁵ Zhang Junru 張均如 et al., *Zhuangyu fangyan yanjiu* 壯語方言研究, Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1997, pp. 62–65. See also Holm and Meng, pp. 34–47.

⁶ Lauri Honko's often-cited description of epic is "great narratives about exemplars, originally performed by specialised singers as superstories which excel in [...] power of expression and significance of content over other narratives" (Honko 1998: 28). In the East Asian area, poems in the category corresponding to epic are known as *shishi* 史詩 'historical poems'.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁸ Holm and Meng, p. 22.

⁹ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975.

¹⁰ To quote Webb Keane on the function of ritual narrative: "Their linguistic form remains the same, but their function shifts. Rather than being construed as accounts of actions that were carried out in the past, the words are taken as reports on and directives for the action they themselves carry out in the moment of speaking." Webb Keane, 'Religious Language', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 1997, 26:51.

Until very recently, song was ubiquitous in Zhuang social and cultural life. In rural areas, boys and girls of marriageable age would congregate with their friends once a year at customary times, usually in springtime, troop out to a designated spot – an open area outside the village such as a river bank, the mouth of a large cave, or an open hillside –, and there would engage groups of the opposite sex in antiphonal singing contests. These gatherings went by a number of names, the most widespread of which was ‘song markets’ (Zh. *hawfweng*). Singers would form first groups of four or eight boys or girls, and then groups of two, and finally, if there was serious interest, boys and girls would sing antiphonally one-on-one. The lyrics were mostly traditional but partly extempore, and allowed young people to test out the cultural knowledge, temperament, and degree of mutual interest of their song partner. These singing contexts often led to more serious liaisons, including love-making and long-term relationships.¹¹ Up until well within living memory in these areas, it was unusual for boys and girls not to be able to sing in the local style by the time they were in their teens, and not to have ready a stock of song lyrics and some ability to extemporise. Particularly for the boys, who might be worried about being bested in song by clever young women, there were little chapbooks of song lyrics, written in a variant of the Chinese script, that could be tucked up a sleeve and pulled out and quickly consulted when at a loss for words.

Songs were not confined to these wooing songs: there were ritual songs and also ceremonial songs for almost any occasion, such as wedding songs, funeral songs, house-building songs, drinking songs, songs for particular festivals, calendrical songs, and songs commemorating historical events.¹² Even in everyday life there was a tendency in rural Zhuang society to use song where other cultures would use speech. If strangers met on the road, they would often burst into song, asking the other party where they were from and where they were going.¹³ All these practices formed the cultural and social basis for pervasive parallelism in versifying and song-making in Zhuang traditional society, including the widespread ability to sing and make up songs for any occasion. Even now, a person who is able to sing well in the traditional style and make up song lyrics extempore is regarded with great respect.

It is obvious, as soon as one hears them, that Zhuang songs and lyrics are radically different from those of the Han Chinese.¹⁴ Most Zhuang can also sing in the Chinese style, but distinguish between the two activities by giving them different names. Zhuang singing in the traditional style is called *eu fwen* (‘sing + Zhuang airs’), while Chinese singing is called *ciengq go* (‘sing + Chinese songs’).¹⁵ Not only the noun but the verb also is different. Zhuang singing uses different modes and cadences, has different musical phrase structures, and employs two and even three-part harmony. By contrast, traditional Chinese singing typically lacks harmony altogether.

The structure of lines of verse, including song lyrics, is also Tai rather than Han Chinese. While both Chinese and Zhuang have five-syllable lines, the Zhuang have waist-rhymes and lack a mid-line caesura.¹⁶ Waist-and-end rhymes (*yaoweiyun* 腰尾韻) are rhymes in which the last syllable in one line rhymes with one of the first few syllables in the following line. Whereas five-syllable lines in most Chinese poetic genres have a caesura after the third

¹¹ See Pan Qixu 潘其旭, *Zhuangzu gexu yanjiu* 壯族歌墟研究, Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991.

¹² See esp. Nong Minjian 農敏堅 and Tan Zhibiao 譚志表, eds., *Pingguo liaoge* 平果嘹歌, Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 5 vols., 2005.

¹³ Xin Gu 辛古, ‘Shange wenlu’ 山歌問路, in *Zhuangzu fengqing lu* 壯族風情錄, ed. Nanning diqu wenlian 南寧地區文聯 et al., Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1990, p. 8.

¹⁴ D. Holm, ‘The Tao among the Zhuang: Imported and Indigenous Aspects of Zhuang Ritual’, *Minsu qiyi* 117 (Jan 1999), 371–88.

¹⁵ The words for Chinese-style singing are themselves Han loan-words, from *chàng gē* 唱歌.

¹⁶ Wei Xinglang, op.cit.

syllable, dividing the line into a pattern of 3 + 2 syllables,¹⁷ Zhuang verse lacks this, and simply has five syllables arranged seriatim, often with line endings marked by elongation of the final syllable or, in some song genres, the insertion of a brief interlude filled with extrametrical vocables. Similarly, in seven-syllable verse, Chinese lines of verse are typically divided by a caesura into groups of 4 and 3, whereas Zhuang seven-syllable lines lack such a caesura. Finally, in Chinese versification there is a binary distinction between *ping* 平 (level) and *ze* 仄 (deflected) tone-categories, with – depending on the genre – a word in one or the other tone-category is obligatory at certain positions in the poetic stanza. In Zhuang, however, there is a four-way distinction in tonal categories, with words that rhyme normally required to correspond in tone category. As it happens, these four tone categories correspond to the four tone categories reconstructed for Proto-Tai.¹⁸

Zhuang verse is often organized in the form of stanzas, most typically of four lines. The Hanvueng text, however, like most ritual song, is set in a verse form called *fwen baiz* ‘songs lined up’, in which there is no stanzaic structure and no fixed line length.¹⁹ Most lines are five syllables long, with an admixture of couplets with lines of seven or occasionally nine syllables.

These features of the verse structure are instantiated in the opening lines of the Hanvueng (the words that rhyme have been underlined):

三	盖	三	王	至。	1
ʃa:m□	ka:i□	ʃa:m□	βuəŋ↓	ci:□	
sam	gaiq	sam	vuengz	<u>ciq</u>	
Three	Worlds	Three	Kings	Establish	

The Three Realms were established by the Three Kings,

四	盖	四	王	造。	2
ʃi:□	ka:i□	ʃi:□	βuəŋ↓	ca:u□	
<u>seiq</u>	gaiq	seiq	vuengz	<u>caux</u>	
Four	Worlds	Four	Kings	Create	

The Four Realms were created by the Four Kings.

王	造	立	造	連。	3
βuəŋ↓	ca:u□	lɛp□	ca:u□	li:n ↓	
vuengz	<u>caux</u>	laep	caux	<u>lienz</u>	
Kings	Create	darkness	Create	light	

The Kings made the darkness and made the light

王	造	天	造	地。	4
βuəŋ↓	ca:u□	tien□	ca:u□	ti: >	
vuengz	caux	<u>dien</u>	caux	deih	
Kings	Create	Heaven	Create	Earth	

The Kings made Heaven and made the Earth.

¹⁷ On Chinese versification see James J.Y. Liu, *The Art of Chinese Poetry*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962.

¹⁸ See Holm and Meng, op.cit., pp. 30–31. Proto-Tai A tones correspond with modern tones 1 and 2 (syllable endings nil (-Ø) and -z in Zhuangwen transcription, B tones with modern tones 5 and 6 (endings -q and -h), C tones with tones 3 and 4 (-j and -x), and D tones with consonant stop endings (-p, -t, -k, and -b, -d, -g).

¹⁹ See Holm and Meng, loc.cit., and Huang Yongsha, op.cit., pp. 74–91.

Here, *ciq* at the end of the first line rhymes with the first syllable *seiq* in the second line, *caux* at the end of the second line rhymes with the second syllable in the third line, and *lienz* at the end of the third line rhymes with the third syllable *dien* in the fourth line.²⁰ The tone categories are in correspondence: *ciq* and *seiq* are both 5th-tone syllables, Proto-Tai category B, *caux* is a 4th-tone syllable, Proto-Tai category C, and *lienz* is a 2nd-tone syllable rhyming with *dien*, a 1st-tone syllable, both Proto-Tai category A.

Parallelism

As can be seen above, the opening lines take the form of two couplets which exhibit strict parallelism. By ‘strict parallelism’ I mean that each word in one line corresponds in word class and semantic field to the corresponding word in the parallel line, syllable by syllable, and that the syntactical relations between words in one line are replicated in the parallel line.²¹ I use this term in contra-distinction to ‘canonical parallelism’.²²

We would of course expect to find parallelism in the opening lines of a Zhuang ritual text. The fixed formulaic lines mark off the sacred recitation that follows from the essentially different character of whatever ritual business was being conducted previously. Parallel members of each of these couplets are both semantically and grammatically parallel: each word in the first line is matched to the word in the corresponding metrical position in the second line by word class (noun, verb, and so on) and semantic field. Thus *sam* ‘three’ in the first line is parallel to *seiq* ‘four’ in the second line, and *ciq* ‘establish’ in the first line is matched with *caux* ‘create’ in the second line; the other words are identical. In the second couplet, *caux* ‘create’ is found twice in each line, in the second and fourth places, and *laep* ‘darkness’ and *lienz* ‘light’ are paired with *dien* ‘Heaven’ and *deih* ‘Earth’ respectively. We can identify these four opening lines as two parallel couplets, rather than four parallel lines, because lines 3 and 4 have a different basic pattern from lines 1 and 2.²³ In these lines, the rhyme carries through from one couplet to the next, but further on in the main body of the narrative, rhyming is frequently confined to the parallel couplets themselves or concatenations of parallel lines.

A Typological Overview

In this ritual text, parallelism is pervasive, with the parallel couplet as the most frequent form. However, parallelism is not confined to simple couplets; other more elaborate forms of parallelism are also found. This is a statement to which we can put some numbers. Table 1 reviews the examples of line-based parallelism that I counted in a text totalling 1536 lines. These examples have been distinguished according to typological categories labelled

²⁰ Readers will note that the words *vuengz caux* at the end of line 2 are repeated at the onset of line 3 (anadiplosis). This repetition does not violate constraints of the meter and thus completes the metrically required rhyme in position 2 of line 3.

²¹ The fact that most morphemes in Zhuang are monosyllabic makes this strict parallelism particularly salient. By contrast, if some of the words in otherwise parallel lines are displaced forwards or backwards, or if there are additional elements in one line, then we would say that the lines are not strictly parallel (see further below). By word class, we mean basic categories such as noun, adjective, transitive verb, and so on. Parallelism in semantic fields, by the way, does not entail that words used in parallel will necessarily be synonymous, in a dictionary sense; often, it is sufficient if two words are understood locally as referring to “the same kind of thing”.

²² On canonical parallelism see James Fox, *To Speak in Pairs: Essays on the ritual languages of eastern Indonesia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, ‘Introduction’, pp. 4, 6–11. Parallelism is ‘canonical’ if strict parallelism is obligatory according to the conventions of the speech or poetic genre. In the present text, as we note below, parallelism is pervasive but not required.

²³ On another level, we can say that lines 3 and 4 continue the same thematic line as lines 1 and 2, viz. the creation of the world. In other ritual texts within the same tradition, such sequences of lines form fixed assemblages. See e.g. Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls*, Text 3, pp. 102–103, and Text 5, pp. 146–147.

alphabetically A–F. These different formal categories are only summarily described in this section for the sake of offering a general overview. Each type of parallelism will then be discussed more fully in relation to illustrative examples in the sections that follow.

Table 1. Typological categories and number of examples in the *Hanvueng* text.

A. Parallel couplets, Quasi-parallel couplets, and Augmented couplets

A1. Parallel couplets	371 examples	742 lines
A2. Quasi-parallel couplets	15 examples	30 lines
A3. Augmented parallel couplets:		
parallel couplets + 1	10 examples	30 lines
1 + parallel couplet	3 examples	9 lines
1 + parallel couplet + 1	1 example	4 lines
B. Three lines parallel	22 examples	66 lines
3 lines parallel + 1	1 example	4 lines
C. Four lines parallel	2 examples	8 lines
4 lines + 2	1 example	6 lines
D. Special patterns:		108 lines
Parallel lines ABAB	10 examples	40 lines
Parallel lines AABB	2 examples	8 lines
Parallel lines ABCD	1 example	50 lines
Parallel lines with 1 line between	5 examples	10 lines
E. Lines with repetition of line head, coda, or mid-section:		93 lines
repetition of line head	5 examples	49 lines
repetition of line coda	3 examples	40 lines
repetition of mid-section	1 example	4 lines
F. Lines without parallel lines		441 lines

We will discuss most of these categories further below. First, by way of clarification:

A1. Parallel couplets are couplets which are strictly parallel, not preceded or followed by quasi-parallel lines or other strictly parallel lines.

A2. Quasi-parallel couplets are couplets which are in parallel relation to each other, usually for part of the line (for example 3 out of 5 syllables). They thus fall short of being strictly parallel.

A3. Augmented parallel couplets are strictly parallel couplets either preceded or followed by a line or lines partially parallel in structure and meaning to the parallel couplet.

B. Three lines parallel: three lines in parallel relation to each other. The augmented 3 + 1 example is a tryptich followed by a line which is partially parallel.

C. Four lines parallel: a series of four lines, all in parallel relation to one another. The augmented 4 + 2 example is a quadruplet followed by two lines which are partially parallel.

D. Special patterns: strictly parallel lines are also found in special patterns, more or less elaborate.

E. Lines with repetition of a line head, coda, or mid-section are parallel lines which include a repeated phrase. Typically, this is a two or three-syllable phrase, found either at the beginning, end, or middle of the line.

F. Isolated lines without a preceding or following parallel line, and not incorporated in any wider special pattern.

It is interesting to note the total numbers and percentages of lines in the following broad categories.

Table 2. Total numbers of parallel lines in the *Hanvueng* text

category	no. of lines	%
strictly parallel lines ²⁴	1049	68.2
lines in parallel couplets ²⁵	770	50.1
lines in special patterns ²⁶	201	13.1
lines in couplets parallel but not strictly	30	1.9
lines parallel but not strictly	48	3.1
lines not parallel	441	28.7

For a text of this length, recitation of which takes well over two hours, 68.2% is a very high percentage of lines in strictly parallel relation to each other. On the other hand, parallel couplets predominate, but not to such an extent that the result is boring or predictable.

Other more elaborated forms of parallel lines are also used for heightened rhetorical effect: to increase narrative tension, to provide extended lists and inventories, and to increase the moral force of praise and blame. These elaborated patterns and extended runs of parallel lines – the longest being some 50 lines long – are not evenly distributed throughout the text, but are used for special effect at particular points in the narrative. The narrative power that is generated through these devices is quite considerable: I have seen people moved to tears at the pathos of Hanvueng’s fate. These rhetorical devices and their powerful effects, by the way, would seem to have no direct parallels in Chinese narrative verse.

We will now turn to some examples, in order to illustrate the above points.

A1. Parallel couplets

The main features of parallel couplets have been discussed above, in the section ‘Song and Versification’.

A2. Quasi-parallel couplets

²⁴ The number of strictly parallel lines is the number of strictly parallel couplets, triptychs, quadruplets, parallel lines in special pattern formations, and lines with repeated segments, taken together, i.e. the parallel couplets in A1 and A3, triptychs in B, quadruplets in C, and parallel lines in categories D and E.

²⁵ Category A1 above, plus the strictly parallel lines in category A3.

²⁶ Category D plus category E.

Couplets in which the words are partly in correspondence are not uncommon throughout the scripture. The following example is taken from the hunting episode. In it, *heuh* ‘call to’ at the beginning of the first line has no counterpart in the line following. The lines are thus not grammatically parallel, but the parallelistic structure of the couplet allows the verb to be omitted but inferred in the second line. The noun head for male animals *daeg* in the middle of the second also lacks any counterpart in the first. Thus the numbers *sam-cib* ‘thirty’ and *caet-cib* ‘seventy’ correspond semantically, but are mutually displaced by one syllable.

<i>Heuh sam-cib ma maeg</i>	He called to his thirty ink-black dogs
<i>Caet-cib daeg ma daeuq</i>	His seventy male hunting dogs.

(H 714–15)

Attributive adjectives follow nouns in Zhuang, so *maeg* ‘ink-black’ and *daeuq* ‘hunting’ correspond semantically. Here there is a rhyme between *maeg* ‘ink-black’ at the end of the first line and *daeg* ‘male animal’ in the second; in addition, both of these words happen to form alliterations with other words in their respective lines. In recitation at normal speed, the overall effect of such lines is hardly different from those of lines more strictly parallel.

A3. Augmented parallel couplets

There are ten examples in which a parallel couplet is followed by a semi-parallel line which echoes and continues the train of thought.²⁷ In the following lines, Covueng is reporting to his brother Hanvueng that their father is gravely ill:

<i>Boh raeuz gwn raemx lwt</i>	Our father drinks water from a small bamboo cup
<i>Boh raeuz swd raemx rong</i>	Our father drinks water through a rolled-up leaf
<i>Boh raeuz fuz mbouj hwnj</i>	Our father even if supported cannot stand up.

(H 666–668)

It will be observed that in this example, the couplet rhymes (*lwt* ‘small bamboo container’ and *swd* ‘sip’), but the rhyme does not carry through to the appended third line. The beginnings of the three lines are the same, but in the third line the grammatical structure is different, with *boh raeuz* ‘our father’ as topic rather than subject.

Parallel couplets are also found with a quasi-parallel line leading in, rather than following the strictly parallel lines. These passages exhibit a range of variations in line structure similar to those with a quasi-parallel line following. Here is an example from the matchmaker’s visit to the widow’s house:

<i>Raeuz fw x rox raeuz raeuz</i>	Are they barking at someone else or barking at us?
<i>Raeuz fw x cit ma haeb</i>	If it’s barking at someone else send the dogs out to bite [them],
<i>Raeuz raeuz gyaep ma dauq</i>	If it’s barking at us then chase the dogs back.

H 197–199)

In this highly alliterated passage the first line presents alternatives, which the following couplet repeats and expands upon. *Raeuz* ‘us’ at the end of the first line rhymes with *raeuq* ‘bark’ at the beginning of the second line, and *haeb* ‘bite’ at the end of the second line

²⁷ This can also be regarded as semantic parallelism complemented by additive information. This sort of parallelism is conventional to the semantic parallelism of Karelian laments as discussed by Eila Stepanova in this issue. Frog notes this sort of parallelism frequently entails reference to a single image or motif at a higher order of representation (rather than semantic parallelism at the level of lexica or the propositional structure of individual lines of verse).

rhymes with *gyaep* ‘chase’ in the middle of the third line. The second and third lines are strictly parallel syntactically, while the preceding line poses a question to which the lines in the couplet are the response. This particular example comes from a fixed sequence of lines.

B. Three lines parallel

There are 22 examples in which a triptych of parallel lines appears. Here there are three lines which are fully parallel, and typically, as in the following example, the rhyme as well as semantic correspondences run through. This example is from the same speech by Covueng:

<i>Boh raeuz get mbouj ndaej</i>	Our father is in pain and not recovering
<i>Boh raeuz gyaej mbouj nyinh</i>	Our father is sick and not coming round
<i>Boh raeuz bingh mbouj ndei</i>	Our father is ill and not getting well.

(H 663–665)

Here *ndaej* ‘get (well)’ rhymes with *gyaej* ‘sick’, and *nyinh* ‘regain consciousness’ rhymes with *bingh* ‘sick’.

There is one example of a tryptich followed by an additional quasi-parallel line. Again, the same kinds of variations and displacements are found.

For reasons of space I will pass over the examples of Category C (four parallel lines).

D. Special patterns

There are altogether 108 lines which exhibit various special patterns, in which strictly parallel lines are incorporated in more complex patterns.

Parallel lines ABAB

There are altogether 10 examples totalling 40 lines that conform to this pattern. It is often found where more complex sets of relationships are being discussed, or when an analogy is drawn between two realms of experience. The following example is a comment on the functions of chiefly governance, serving as a transition from a disquisition on the dangers of enmity to the beginning of the story proper, which is about a particular chieftain (‘king’):

<i>Lag cib soem gouj soem</i>	For a wicker fence ten spans long or nine,
<i>Aeu diuz ndeu guh dongh</i>	One takes a piece of wood to serve as a post.
<i>Biengz cib boux gouj boux</i>	In a realm with ten men or nine,
<i>Aeu boux ndeu guh saeq</i>	One takes one man to serve as the chieftain.

(H 88–91)

The analogy of fenceposts and chiefly functions is a commonplace in Zhuang society.²⁸ Here, it should be noted that the ABAB pattern here is syntactically motivated; that is to say, these lines could not also appear ‘For a wicker fence ten spans long or nine / In a realm with ten men or nine // One takes a piece of wood to serve as a post / One takes one man to serve as the chieftain’).

²⁸ The same analogy is found in a scripture on the origins of chieftaincy. See Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls*, pp. 251–260. This too is part of a wider pattern of discourse in Zhuang society, rather than an isolated metaphor.

Another example of this pattern appears in the speeches of the old king's prospective father-in-law and mother-in-law, explaining to the matchmaker why it is unthinkable to allow their daughter to marry the king:

Baz vuengz baenz baz vuengz Only the wife of a king can be the wife of a king,
Boux biengz lawz ndaej ciemq How can a subject of the realm usurp [this position]?
Byacoeg vanz byacoeg Only a green bamboo carp returns to a green bamboo carp,
Byandoek lawz ndaej ciemq How can a pond-corner fish usurp [its place]?
 (H 269–272)

The reference is to a well-established practice of status endogamy among Zhuang chiefly lineages. Commoners were generally not allowed to marry into chiefly families, and if they did, the children of such unions were themselves regarded as commoners and had no rights of inheritance.²⁹ In this set of lines, commoners and royal families are set in metonymic juxtaposition with different fish species, the *byacoeg* 'green bamboo carp' being highly prized as a fine eating fish and the *byandoek* 'pond-corner fish' being a common and not particularly tasty fish. The green bamboo carp and the pond-corner fish, of course, do not mate.

In some cases the ABAB pattern is used to link Zhuang conceptions of the social order with Chinese Taoist-style categories of cosmic powers.

Doengfueng ien roengz daeuj Let the Enmity of the Eastern Quarter come down,
Ien beix-nuengx doxdwk The Enmity of older and younger siblings who hit each other.
Namz fueng ien roengzdaeuj Let the Enmity of the Southern Quarter come down,
Ien boh-lwg doxndoiq The Enmity of father and son who club each other.
Saefueng ien roengzdaeuj Let the Enmity of the Western Quarter come down,
Ien gvan-baz doxndaq The Enmity of husband and wife who curse each other.
Baekfueng ien roengzdaeuj Let the Enmity of the Northern Quarter come down,
Ien yah-bawx doxceng The Enmity of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law who quarrel with each other.

Cunghyangh ien roengzdaeuj Let the Enmity of the Center come down,
Ien da-daiq baihnaj The Enmity of father-in-law and mother-in-law on the husband's side.
 (H 39–48)

This passage is found at the point in the text at where the Enmities of the Five Cardinal Directions are summoned down into the ritual arena and installed in their spirit-seats, prior to the inception of the narrative proper. The five cardinal directions, listed in this particular order, are a Chinese ordering mechanism, and in Chinese Taoist texts one frequently finds sets of five deities ruling over the East, South, West, North, and Central directions, listed in that order. Here, this framework has been imported into a Zhuang-language scripture, through the collaboration of local vernacular priests with Maoshan Taoists, and the Enmities have been linked to discord between specific sets of Zhuang family members. Here, the ordering principle is Taoist and Chinese, but the kin categories themselves remain indigenous.

Parallel lines AABB

This is not a common pattern, with only two examples and 8 lines altogether in this formation. Like the ABAB formation, it is often found where more complex comparisons are drawn between two realms of experience. The following example is a series of lines spoken by the

²⁹ See James Wilkerson, 'The Wancheng Native Officialdom: Social Production and Social Reproduction', in David Faure and Ho Ts'ui-p'ing, *Chieftains into Ancestors*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013, pp. 195–202.

matchmaker to the parents of the widow-woman as she tries to persuade them to allow her to be married off to the king:

<i>Bouxlawz ndaem haeuxfiengj</i>	“Whoever plants foxtail millet,
<i>Bouxlawz ciengx lwgmbwk</i>	Whoever raises daughters.
<i>Lwgmbwk haq bae rog</i>	When daughters are married off they leave the house,
<i>Haeuxfiengj doek bangxbaq</i>	When foxtail millet is sown it falls on the wild slope.”

(H 283–286)

Here the poetic structure is double-layered, with the first and second lines in parallel relation and the third and fourth lines likewise. However, the focus is on ‘foxtail millet’ in the first line, and then again in the fourth line, with the comment on ‘daughters’ sandwiched in the middle. These lines instantiate a form of chiasmus, which we could label $A_1A_2B_2B_1$. Rhyme is found throughout, going from *fiengj* ‘foxtail millet’ to *ciengx* ‘raise’, and then from *lwgmbwk* ‘daughters’ to *lwgmbwk*, and finally from *rog* ‘outside’ to *doek* ‘drop’. Agricultural analogies with sex and marriage frequently appear in this text, and would seem to be part of a wider pattern of discourse in these matters.³⁰

E. Lines with repetition of a line head, coda, or mid-section

Sometimes long series of parallel lines with persistent repetition of a line segment are used for special purposes, and often to great rhetorical effect. The following example on the origins of Enmity is 22 lines long. The first three words are mostly in subject-verb-object formation, and the lines end either with *baenz ien* ‘created enmity’ or *goj ien* ‘also [created] Enmity’. The rhyming pattern is the third syllable (the ‘end rhyme’) rhyming with the first. In the following passage, I have underlined rhyming syllables.

<i>Ndwi mbouj miz maz ien</i>	Originally there was no Enmity at all,
<i>Vaiz dangh <u>gyaj</u> baenz ien</i>	The buffalo trod on the rice-seedlings and created Enmity,
<i>Max haeuj naz <u>baenz</u> ien</i>	The horse got into the wet-field and created Enmity.
<i>Yiengz roemx lag goj ien</i>	The goat barged through the fence and likewise created Enmity.
<i>Euj rangz <u>ndoek</u> goj ien</i>	Breaking off bamboo-shoots also creates Enmity,
<i>Ngoeg rangz <u>faiz</u> goj ien</i>	Wiggling loose the shoots of sweet bamboo also creates Enmity.
<i>Lai coenz <u>hauq</u> goj ien</i>	Too many words also create Enmity,
<i>Gauq beix-nuengx goj ien</i>	Suing your elder or younger sibling also creates Enmity,
<i>Laeg bya daemz goj ien</i>	Stealing fish from the pond also creates Enmity.
<i>Guh laux vunz goj ien</i>	Being a village elder may also create Enmity,
<i>Caux guh swq goj ien</i>	Acting as a go-between also creates Enmity,
<i>Baz bae youx goj ien</i>	Wives going to their lovers also create Enmity.
<i>Buengq lwg <u>vaiz</u> goj ien</i>	Peddling buffalo calves creates Enmity,
<i>Gai lwg vunz goj ien</i>	Selling other people’s children creates Enmity.
<i>Cuengq caengh <u>mbaeu</u> goj ien</i>	Selling things with a balance that weighs light creates Enmity,
<i>Aeu caengh <u>naek</u> goj ien</i>	Buying things with a balance that weighs heavy creates Enmity.
<i>Laeg haeux yiu goj ien</i>	Stealing rice from a granary creates Enmity,
<i>Daeh bak lai goj ien</i>	Putting forth wordy arguments creates Enmity.
<i>Lingz sing <u>mak</u> goj ien</i>	Monkeys quarreling over fruit create Enmity,
<i>Nag sing <u>bya</u> goj ien</i>	Otters quarreling over fish create Enmity,
<i>A sing <u>gaeq</u> goj ien</i>	Crows quarreling over chickens create Enmity.
<i>Saeq sing <u>biengz</u> goj ien</i>	Chieftains quarreling over domains create Enmity,
<i>Vuengz sing <u>inq</u> goj ien</i>	Kings quarreling over Seals of Office create Enmity.

(H 53–74)

³⁰ See also lines 272–273 and 294–295.

Here, the tight formation with rhyming syllables suggests that this passage is a fixed segment. However, lexical repetition is evidently given precedence over metrically motivated rhyme in this series.³¹ Discursively the passage begins as an origin myth, but then is transformed quickly into a list of reasons for enmity in present-day village society. The purpose of this passage is not just to explain but to warn.

An example of an extended series of parallel lines later on in the scripture is an instance of the opposite pattern: here, it is the two syllables at the beginning of the line that are repeated. This passage, totalling 18 lines, describes the murderous enmity between Hanvueng and his step-brother Covueng, and their struggle over the inheritance:

<i>Dox sing biengz gaem inq</i>	You struggle over the realm to grasp the seal.
<i>Dox sing inq roeg venz</i>	You struggle over the seal with the lark-shaped handle,
<i>Dox sing cienz ciuh boh</i>	You struggle over the money of your father's forebears.
<i>Dox sing mboq bya raiz</i>	You struggle over the springs with their spotted murrel,
<i>Dox sing ngaenz ciuh boh</i>	You struggle over the silver of your father's forebears.
<i>Dox sing mboq ngaenz caw</i>	You struggle over the springs of silver and pearls,
<i>Dox sing re sam hoih</i>	You struggle over the fishnets three turns in size.
<i>Dox sing hoiq bingz daeuz</i>	You struggle over the slaves with their flat-topped hair,
<i>Dox sing maeuz ningx nauh</i>	You struggle over the royal bonnet with its crown of red jasper.
<i>Dox sing cauq seiq rwz</i>	You struggle over the cooking pot with its four handles,
<i>Dox sing ruz cib cauq</i>	You struggle over the boats with their ten oars.
<i>Dox sing mbauq coengmingz</i>	You struggle over the smart young men,
<i>Dox sing rin baenz cax</i>	You struggle over the stone on which to grind the knives.
<i>Dox sing nangz byoem baij</i>	You struggle over the young ladies with their hair that sways,
<i>Dox sing naih fwed lungz</i>	You struggle over the women with their hair like soaring dragons.
<i>Dox sing vunz lingzleih</i>	You struggle over the people who are quick and capable,
<i>Dox sing gyu daengx gaen</i>	You struggle over the salt by the pound.
<i>Dox sing ngaenz daengx bak</i>	You struggle over the silver by the hundred.

(H 539–556)

Here, the opening two syllables *dox sing* ‘mutually contend’ are followed in each line by a noun phrase, with a noun as the third syllable and the next two syllables following adjectively. Waist-end rhyming is quite pervasive, and falls on the 5th and the 3rd syllables. Here as elsewhere, lexical repetition is acceptable for rhyming syllables. This passage, by the way, is fascinating for the insight it provides into the royal inheritance and the material and social bases of chiefly power. Even modest chiefly domains could be quite rich, with wealth and power concentrated in the hands of the chiefly lineage. This wealth extended to people (slaves, commoners, women, and young men) as well as natural resources. This litany provides as it were an inventory of this chiefly wealth.

A very similar list is found near the final resolution of the conflict toward the end of the scripture, where Covueng is told to return all of the old king's inheritance to Hanvueng. In that passage (lines 1466–1476), however, the first two words are *Nuengx doiq* ‘Younger brother return’ (various items). Most of the items listed are the same, and in the same order.

Single parallel couplets beginning with repetition of one or two words are also found, as we saw in section A3, where there is a couplet beginning with the words *Boh raeuz* ‘Our father ...’. Rather than seeing such couplets as a variation on the textual strategy discussed here, it makes more sense to see such extended series of lines as a development from such couplets.

Series of lines with repeated words in the middle of the line are also found. Here is one example, with an adjective in the first syllable position, the next three syllables repeated, and

³¹ Absence of rhyme is otherwise not uncommon in parallel verses in this text, and the proportion of non-rhyming lines would not seem to be noticeably higher than average..

different verbs as the final syllable. The context here is that the old king has been widowed, and is living all alone without a wife to care for him. The topic of these lines is the king's clothes:

<i>Lengq mbouj miz boux fong</i>	When they were worn out there was no one to mend them,
<i>Mong mbouj miz boux saeg</i>	When they were dirty there was no one to wash them,
<i>Ndaek mbouj miz boux dak</i>	When they were wet there was no one to dry them,
<i>Nwk mbouj miz boux sah</i>	When they were filthy there was no one to rinse them.

(H 102–105)

Here the rhyme pattern is quite regular throughout, with the last word in each line rhyming with the first word in the next line.

F. Non-parallel lines

Typically a series of lines in parallel couplets is brought to an end by an isolated line that is not in parallel relation with the following line, and does not rhyme with either the preceding or the following line. This isolated line (or lines) can be viewed as a marked variation that serves as a kind of punctuation. The effect of this is significant. Whereas we would usually think of strictly parallel couplets as marked, and isolated poetic lines as unmarked, in this particular context, rhetorically, the reverse can be true.

There is a definite relation between isolated non-parallel lines and their actual semantic content and narratological function. Important turning points in the narrative, and lines containing information of salient importance, are often found in the form of isolated lines or a series of isolated lines. In certain sections of the narrative, where there are passages of direct speech, the beginning of the speech and also sometimes the end point of the direct quotation are marked by isolated lines. The effect is to heighten listeners' attention: when the normally expected second half of a parallel couplet fails to follow on, listeners are alert to the abnormality and, one would imagine, pay particular attention to what follows.

One or more single non-parallel lines, often also without rhyme, are often found at the end of long sequences of parallel couplets or parallel lines with special rhetorical patterns. Such single lines are used to insert a sonic break from the regular and insistent sonic patterning of what went before. Typically at these points, there is either a succinct summing up of the situation at that point, or an important transition. Changes of scene or scope are frequently signalled by a series of staccato single lines, and single lines are also used frequently in the second half of the text to signal a change of speaker. Sometimes longer runs of parallel couplets are brought to a close by one or two isolated non-rhyming lines, but often there are longer passages consisting of non-parallel lines. The following passage describes an incident during Hanvueng's sojourn in the land of Geu, when his father ordered two youths to find him and bring him back to his own domain.

<i>Hanquengz cingcaux hauq</i>	Hanvueng thereupon spoke:
<i>Gou mbouj dauq biengz laeng</i>	“I will not return to the domain that is my own,
<i>Gou mbouj un biengz boh</i>	I will not covet the domain of my father.”
<i>Song mbauq dauq daengz ndwi</i>	The two youths returned empty-handed
<i>Boh caux hauq dih-danz</i>	The father then spoke emphatically:
<i>Sou bae raen rox miz</i>	“Did you go to see him or not?”
<i>Song mbauq lwnh cih-cangz</i>	The two youths told him all a-chatter,
<i>Raen Hanquengz doengh-naz</i>	“We saw Hanvueng in the midst of the fields,
<i>Bak maeq lumj doq-cingz</i>	His mouth was as pink as a hornet's,
<i>Caen lumj vuengz liux-nauq</i>	He truly was the image of a king entirely.
<i>De mbouj dauq biengz raeuz</i>	He is not returning to this domain of ours,

De mbouj aeu biengz boh
(H 630–641)

He is not taking the domain of his father.”

There are only two parallel couplets in this passage, the first one being the second and third lines (631–2) and the second one being the last two lines (640–1). Rhymes are also sparse: the first one is *hauq* ‘speak’ at the end of line 630 rhyming with *dauq* ‘return’ in the middle of line 631, then *laeng* ‘one’s own place’ at the end of line 631 rhyming with *un* ‘covet’ in the middle of line 632. After that we have to wait until *nauq* ‘altogether’ at the end of line 639 rhyming with *dauq* ‘return’ in the middle of line 640 before waist-end rhyming is restored. There are also two single lines announcing the beginning of direct speech, with mimetic words at the ends of the lines (634 and 636); neither of these is followed by the anticipated second line. In this short passage we have three separate direct quotations, and a change of scene from the land of Geu to the home domain. The youths’ journey is not described. The long series of single lines provides a change of narrative pace, and the lack of rhyme creates an effect which is quite stark compared with the sonic landscape of end-waist rhymes before and afterwards.

Concepts in Tandem

Apart from a classification of the various forms taken by parallel lines, we can also point out at least some aspects of a typology of the words or phrases in parallel relation to each other. These concepts include:

- numbers
- kinship terms
- personal names or titles
- mimetic phrases
- natural kinds (father and mother, crow and eagle)
- Chinese-native parallels

All of these categories are culturally significant. However, some of them tend to be semantically less full than others. Numbers, for example are often chosen for the sake of the rhyming requirements, and do not necessarily refer to actual specific numbers with ritual significance. Pairing and alternation of numbers, in other words, can be one of the more mundane devices for generating parallel verses. The same can often be said of the two-syllable mimetic phrases frequently found at the ends of lines of verse.

Beyond these, the subject matter and narrative line of the poem themselves generate a set of pervasive paired oppositions, most notably between the two protagonists Hanvueng and Covueng. Because the two protagonists are step-brothers, the terms for older and younger siblings (*beix* and *nuengx*) are also frequently in parallel opposition. Other kin terms such as father and mother, mother-in-law and father-in-law, patrilateral relations and affines, also appear, since the plot includes the narrative about the old king’s re-marriage to a widow woman, conflict between the mother-in-law and her son-in-law Hanvueng, and Hanvueng’s subsequent death at the hands of his step-brother Covueng. Hanvueng’s ascent to the sky and his installation as a sky god generates a further set of parallel relations between the earthly domain of his step-brother and the heavenly realm he governs above. Before his death, Hanvueng’s sojourn in the land of Geu (Jiaozhi, present-day northern Vietnam) generates a horizontal geographic opposition between Geu and his father’s old domain.

Mimetic phrases

Two-syllable mimetic phrases are a characteristic feature of parallel couplets in the poetic tradition of this locality. How widespread this is in other regions remains to be investigated. Mimetic phrases of two connected syllables are often used in pairs at the end of a line. Such syllables alliterate, and typically the first syllable is the same in each line. Mimetic phrases, usually called expressives in the linguistic literature,³² are phrases which by their sound pattern are understood to be directly expressive of the *Gestalt* of some situation or some aspect of it, such as prominence in the visual field or general shape (like a mountain), perceived weight (like a boulder), the quality of sound emitted (like animal noises), speed and overall pattern of movement (smooth or jerky), heightened emotion, effort, tactile qualities, or any combination of these. The following example describes the match-maker as she hastens back to the widow-woman's village, in order to finalise the widow-woman's marriage to the king:

<i>Gvaq doengh daeuj lih-laz</i>	Crossing the open fields she came in a hurry,
<i>Gvaq naz daeuj lih-langh</i>	Crossing the wet-fields she came in haste.

(H 374–375)

Here the mimetic phrases are *lih-laz* and *lih-langh*, with the final syllable *laz* in the first line rhyming with *naz* 'wet-field' in the second line. While I have translated these phrases here as in a way which is context-dependent and makes it seem as if they were fully lexicalised, in fact both terms refer to the *Gestalt* of a person walking in a hurried fashion: the hurried gait, the flapping of loose clothes (both visual and acoustic, as well as tactile), and the intensity of effort and concentration. Elsewhere in the *Hanvueng* scripture, the same pair of line endings is used to express the haste and flapping of wings with which the eagle and crow ascend to the sky.

Mimetic phrases are also typically used to signal the beginning of a speech:

<i>Yahdaiq hauq dih-danz</i>	The mother-in-law spoke deliberately,
<i>Goengda han dih-dad</i>	The father-in-law answered emphatically.

(H 267–268)

In this text the paired phrases *dih-danz* and *dih-dad* are frequently found together in successive lines, as in this example, and always in this order. These words actually have some lexical content, indicating that someone is speaking insistently, so they are translated here and elsewhere as 'deliberately' and 'emphatically'. However, elsewhere in this text these lexical meanings are often either very attenuated or inappropriate. Used in this way, they are reminiscent of the way in which epithets are frequently used in Homeric verse, that is, in a formulaic fashion. In this text, however, their main function seems not so much to suggest ironic distance, but simply to signal the beginning of direct speech by a different speaker.

Natural kinds

To what extent do we find paired concepts in the *Hanvueng* text in which, metaphorically, there is a relation of identity between two concepts or entities, as is well documented for some Austronesian areas? Zhuang texts seem to lack the kinds of 'double names' found in Austronesian ritual languages, that is, paired names referring to the same entity.³³ What we do find is natural kinds with overlapping semantic fields. We have room here for only one

³² Alexandra Aikhenwald, 'Typological distinctions in word-formation', in Timothy Shopen, ed., *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, Volume III, 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 43.

³³ On double names see Fox, op.cit., p. 168.

example: the parallelism between the crow and eagle. The crow and eagle are recruited by Covueng to serve as messengers up to his step-brother Hanvueng in the sky realm, make their first appearance in the text on lines 1034–35, and they remain part of the narrative until almost the final resolution near the end of the scripture (lines 1349–50). *Langzyiuh* ‘eagle’ and *lang’a* ‘crow’ are found in parallel relation a total of 9 times, while *yiuh* ‘eagle’ and *a* ‘crow’ are paired a further 21 times. The puzzle is how birds which are so seemingly different in size and habits can be regarded as ‘the same’.³⁴ Both are carnivores, but crows are black and eat carrion, while eagles soar and seize live prey. Part of the explanation has to do with Zhuang ethnobiological classifications, and part to do with the identification of the species involved. It is interesting that *langz* is used with reference to both crows and hawks. This head noun seems to be connected with the Buyang word for ‘hawk’, a word which is also found widely in the languages of mainland Southeast Asia.³⁵ Its use here is poetic, and it is not usually found in the Zhuang spoken register. The Zhuang word for ‘crow’, *a*, however, is also used for large black raptors such as kites, even though the primary referent is crows.³⁶

The Zhuang word which is usually glossed as ‘eagle’ is even more interesting. *Yiuh*, a Han loan from 鵟 *yào*, ‘hawk’, is usually used in Zhuang to refer to short-winged hawks such as sparrow-hawks. As a generic noun-head for compound bird names, however, *yiuh* has a coverage which is much wider, including vultures and kites. Among the raptors found in the Guangxi area are a number of large, black or dark-coloured species, including eagles and kites. While it would be out of place to make a specific identification, it is worth noting that among these, the Black-eared Kite is said to be the most common raptor in China, and is particularly salient because it is large and black.

Both eagles and kites have the habit of soaring high above the ground, and it is perhaps to this habit that they owe their mythical prominence. Crows, by contrast, are mythically salient because they ‘announce funerals’ – unlike magpies, which ‘announce weddings’. Elsewhere in Zhuang verse, *a* ‘crows’ and *yiuh* ‘hawks’ are found in parallel relation. In the ‘daytime songs’ (*fwenngoenz*) of Pingguo county, crows and hawks appear in their role as messengers:³⁷

<i>Geiq saenq hawj duz a,</i>	Entrust a letter to the crow,
<i>Geiq sa hawj duz yiuh,</i>	Entrust a piece of paper to the hawk,
<i>Yiuh lawz rox daeh sa,</i>	Which is the hawk who knows how to carry paper,
<i>A lawz rox daeh saenq?</i>	Which is the crow who knows how to carry a letter?

The role of messengers is, of course, the role the crow and eagle play in the present text, as well as that of intermediaries between earth and sky.

Chinese-native parallels

Finally, let us look briefly at the question of parallelism between native and Chinese-derived words and concepts. An ‘inter-ethnic’ dimension to parallelism is also found in other cultures in the Southeast Asian area. In the Indonesian archipelago, James Fox noted the pairing of

³⁴ There is an extensive note in the Textual and Ethnographic Notes section of the book (note to line 1034, pp. 337–338), which I summarise here.

³⁵ Buyang is a Kadai language related to Gelao, Lachi, and Laha. On the Buyang presence in Zhuang areas, see Holm, *Killing a Buffalo*, pp. 160–1.

³⁶ In Bouyei the usual word for crow is *al* or *duezal*, but the word *al* is also used for kites, as in the phrase *al daz saic* ‘The kite seizes the chickens.’

³⁷ Luo Hantian 羅漢田, ed., *Pingguo Zhuangzu liaoge: Rige pian* 平果壯族嘹歌: 日歌篇, p. 51.

words from the eastern and western divisions of the island of Roti within dyadic sets.³⁸ Further afield, comparable pairings of terms from local and dominant languages have been documented.³⁹

Sometimes such pairings are not immediately obvious. Let us return here to our first example, the opening lines of the text:

<i>Sam gaiq sam vuengz ciq</i>	The Three Realms were established by the Three Kings,
<i>Seiq gaiq seiq vuengz caux</i>	The Four Realms were created by the Four Kings.
<i>Vuengz caux laep caux lienz</i>	The Kings made the darkness and made the light,
<i>Vuengz caux dien caux deih</i>	The Kings made Heaven and made the Earth.

(H1–4)

The point of interest here is that lines 1 and 2 both refer to cosmological schemata, but to schemata which are different in origin and reference, the first Chinese or Buddhist and the second indigenous.⁴⁰ Likewise, the ‘darkness’ and ‘light’ of line 3 refer to macrocosmic phenomena, as do the ‘Heaven’ and ‘Earth’ of line 4, but these pairs of concepts belong to different cosmogonic traditions, *laep* and *lien* being indigenous categories and *dien* and *deih* being Chinese. It seems as if here in each couplet we have not two statements that can be said to represent metaphorically a single meaning, but rather two statements that are ‘about’ ‘the same’ category but represent separate traditions in dialogic relation to each other.⁴¹

This, however, is to view the matter from a scholarly, philological viewpoint. Different folk interpretations circulate locally, and also among Zhuang scholars. According to one interpretation that finds its way into print, the word *gaiq* in the first two lines is not a Han Chinese borrowing meaning ‘world’ (Standard Chinese *jiè* 界), but the generalising classifier *gaiq* meaning either ‘lump’ or ‘kind of stuff’.⁴² There is ample evidence elsewhere in the *Hanvueng* text that local people, including the priests, who were literate after their own fashion, were often not able to tell which words were Han borrowings and which were native words. On this level then, lines 1 and 2, and lines 3 and 4, could indeed be understood to be ‘about’ the same thing.

Elsewhere in Zhuang ritual texts, these Chinese-native parallels are more salient. As I noted in an earlier study on a cosmogonic scripture on buffalo sacrifice:⁴³

A particularly interesting feature of the parallelism in these texts is the way in which indigenous Zhuang concepts are frequently brought into parallel relation with terms borrowed from Han Chinese. Thus the Han terms *dien deih* ‘Heaven and Earth’ in one line are followed in the next line by the Zhuang terms *mbwn ndaen* ‘heaven and earth’; the Han borrowing *bek singq* ‘the Hundred Surnames’ (i.e. the common people) is followed by *bouxminz* ‘the people’, *nienz* ‘year’ (from Ch. 年 *nian*²) is used in parallel with the indigenous word *bi* ‘year’, *gangj* ‘to speak’ (from Ch. 講 *jiang*³) matches *naeuz* ‘to say’, *loh* ‘road’ (from Ch. 路 *lu*⁴) matches *roen* ‘path’, and so on.

³⁸ James Fox, ‘Our Ancestors spoke in pairs: Rotinese views of language, dialect and code’, in R. Bauman and J. Scherzer, *Explorations in the ethnography of speaking*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 80–81.

³⁹ In the present issue, see Kerry Hull on Spanish terms in Ch’orti Mayan ritual discourse and Eila Stepanova on Russian terms adapted into the register of Karelian laments.

⁴⁰ The Three Realms of the first line are a reference either to the Buddhist Triloka or to the Taoist Three Realms, while the Four Realms refer to the Sky, Earth, Seas, and Forested Mountains, each with its spirit owners. For full discussion, see Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls: The Baeu Rodo Scriptures, Tai Cosmogonic Texts from Guangxi in Southern China*, Bangkok: White Lotus Publishing Co., 2004, pp. 69–70.

⁴¹ See e.g. Stan Lewis Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

⁴² Zhang Shengzhen 張聲震, ed.-in-chief, *Bu Luotuo jingshi yizhu* 布洛陀經詩譯注, Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1991, p. 41 (note 10); tr. Holm, *Recalling Lost Souls*, p. 64 (note 8).

⁴³ Holm, *Killing a Buffalo for the Ancestors* (2003), pp. 36–7.

I went on to say (p. 37):

The incorporation of Han borrowings into the Zhuang lexicon – and the incorporation of Taoist concepts into the language of the *bouxmo* – affords a poetically useful wealth of synonyms, but one suspects something more deliberate at work here. It suggests the inter-ethnic dimension of such pervasive grammatical and rhetorical parallelism was constitutive of a relational conception of their own cultural identity.

Such pairings are also found in the Hanvueng, but their importance seems to be much less obvious than in the buffalo sacrifice scripture from Donglan. The purpose of the latter, not explicitly stated, was to draw a continuous line of connection between the narrative of successive Chinese sage kings who created the world and civilisation, and the chronicle of the succession of native chieftains who ruled the domain of Donglan – in other words, by narrative juxtaposition, to turn a southern barbarian chiefly house into the legitimate inheritors of a Chinese line of descent.

With the Hanvueng scripture, we are not much concerned with the Chinese state, but rather with the chiefly domain itself and its governance. The essential point is the nature of chiefly political power and position, which are seen as stolen, with present incumbent chieftains permanently in the debt of the rightful rulers in the sky and under obligation to pay rent and send sacrificial gifts. To draw out the implications in terms of current scholarly paradigms, this scripture is not about ‘the Chinese state and local society’; nor does it describe a trajectory of ‘Chieftains into Ancestors’, as the title of a recent book by Faure and Ho puts it. Rather, what we have here is a trajectory of ‘Chieftains into Sky Gods’. Sky gods, it must be noted, are altogether different: ancestors can be assimilated, and can be understood as Chinese, or as retrospectively Chinese, but the sky gods remain fundamentally and irretrievably Thai. If the Hanvueng scripture is to be read as a charter myth, it is a charter myth for the institution of annual royal sacrifices to the sky gods, as practiced until recently by the Thai-style polities in mainland Southeast Asia.⁴⁴

Conclusion

This brief article has surveyed some characteristics of parallelism in the Hanvueng text, and given some examples of the way in which canonically parallel couplets and more complex poetic formations are employed for rhetorical effect, along with lines which are not parallel. Examples also have been given of the categories of words which are brought into parallel relationship with each other. Finally, examples of parallelism between Chinese and vernacular mythic models were discussed. These, taken together with evidence elsewhere in the text, suggest that underlying the surface phenomena are pervasive patterns of dialogicality in Zhuang semantics, religion, and cultural life.

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⁴⁴ The fullest description of such rituals is Charles Archaimbault’s *Le sacrifice du buffle à S’ieng Khoang (Laos)*.

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