

# Marriage Taboo and Order Reconstitution: A Cross-Civilizational Comparison of the Yi Hero Zhige Alu and the Javanese Founder Ken Angrok — A Structural Analysis Based on the “Taboo–Medium–Order” Triadic Model

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## Abstract

This paper presents the first systematic comparison between the Yi epic hero Zhige Alu and the Javanese state-founder Ken Angrok. Employing structuralist myth analysis and ritual theory, we propose a triadic model—“marriage taboo triggered → instrumental medium disabled → paradigmatic order reconstituted”—to uncover deep cultural coding distinguishing agrarian mountain civilizations from littoral polities. The study demonstrates that the Yi narrative translates marital transgression into ecological crisis resolved through the hero's naturalization as a perpetual cosmic force, while the Javanese narrative converts the same transgression into a crisis of political legitimacy resolved through the ritualization of dynastic succession. Quantitative indices of ecological dependence (Ec) and political centralization (Pc) corroborate these divergent outcomes. The findings broaden the comparative scope of Asia-Pacific non-systemic myths and provide a new typological framework for civilizational analysis.

**Keywords:** Zhige Alu; Ken Angrok; marriage taboo; instrumental medium; order reconstitution; comparative mythology

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## I. Introduction and Research Questions

Southwest China's “ethnic corridor” and the Indo-Malaysian archipelago have been linked by millennia of demographic and ideational exchange. However, comparative mythology has long been constrained by linguistic boundaries—Tibeto-Burman versus Austronesian—and the disciplinary separation of Sinology and Southeast Asian Studies. The Yi creation epic *Hnewo Teyy* recounts the life, transgression, and death of the hero Zhige Alu, while the thirteenth-century Javanese chronicle *Pararaton* narrates the rise and fall of Ken Angrok. Superficially disparate, the two stories share a deep-structural homology: both heroes violate a marriage prohibition, suffer the disabling of a crucial instrument, die violently, and thereby initiate a new cultural order. Existing scholarship, however, has treated these narratives in isolation. Yi studies have focused on clan genealogies or ecological ethics, reducing the marital conflict to a “polygynous tragedy.” Javanese historiography has been preoccupied with Ken Angrok's historicity, relegating the marriage violation to a footnote in court intrigue. Neither tradition has interrogated marriage taboo as a cross-civilizational generative grammar, nor situated the post-mortem re-ordering within a macro-typology of civilizations. This paper therefore poses two interlocking questions: First, how does the disabling of the instrumental medium translate the violation of a marriage taboo into the reconstitution of order in each civilization? Second, how do the divergent ecological and political bases of agrarian mountain and littoral polities shape the symbolic allocation of the hero's death?

## II. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The study integrates three theoretical strands. Lévi-Straussian structuralism enables us to treat “taboo → punishment → compensation” as a transformable mythologem beneath superficial ethnographic detail. Victor Turner's ritual process theory guides the analysis of the hero's death as a liminal phase re-aggregating society. Civilizational typology supplies quantifiable variables—ecological dependence (Ec) and political centralization (Pc)—linking symbolic outcomes to macro-structural constraints. Methodologically, the paper combines close textual analysis, ritual ethnography, and symbolic metrology. The Yi text analyzed is the 1986 Yi–Chinese bilingual edition of *Hnewo Teyy*; the Javanese text is Phalgunadi's English translation of *Pararaton*. Both were coded line-by-line for the sequence “marriage taboo → instrumental failure → order reconstitution.” Between

2019 and 2022, participant observation and semi-structured interviews (n = 47) were conducted during the *Yi Migha hat* rain-invocation ritual in Weining, Guizhou, and during *wayang kulit* performances of the Ken Angrok cycle in Malang, East Java. The functional load of each instrumental medium was calculated as the ratio of descriptive lines to total narrative length.

### III. Comparative Analysis of Narrative Structures

#### 3.1 Construction of Sacredness: Ecological versus Institutional Axes

Zhige Alu's sacredness unfolds along a chain—"eagle blood → dragon milk → bronze bell → regulation of rain and wind"—foregrounding exchange between human and non-human agencies. His body extends natural media: eagle blood grants the language of thunder, dragon milk attunes him to hydrological rhythms, and the bronze bell transduces ritual sound into meteorological effect. When marital strife severs this chain, drought and flood manifest as ecological symptoms of ethical rupture. Ken Angrok's sacredness, conversely, is negotiated through a political covenant—"Brahma descent → bandit fosterage → cursed kris → overthrow of dynastic order." The kris is acquired through regicide and sealed by a blood-curse locking royal succession into a cycle of violence. Thus, one construction of sacredness anchors in a natural contract, the other in a theopolitical contract, foreshadowing divergent vectors of taboo transgression.

#### 3.2 Triggering Mechanisms of Marriage Taboo

In the Yi narrative, Zhige Alu weds two celestial sisters on the condition of rotational cohabitation. Jealousy leads one wife to sever the wings of the cosmic horse, his means of sky-earth communication. The wings are not merely transport but a bio-medium regulating meteorological exchange; their mutilation transposes conjugal conflict into ecological crisis. Fieldwork in Weining reveals the *Migha hat* rain ritual still obliges quarrelling spouses to reconcile before ringing the bronze bell, indicating the taboo's enduring symbolic force. In Java, Ken Angrok assassinates the regent Tunggul Ametung and forcibly weds the pregnant Ken Dedes, claiming her unborn child. This transgression targets bloodline purity, violating the *dharmic* hierarchy of *kshatriya* legitimacy. In *wayang* performances, the usurper's red-and-black mask signifies mixed blood, and audiences shower the stage with petals when the foster son drives the cursed kris into Ken Angrok's heart, dramatizing blood-debt settlement. Thus, Yi taboo transmutes into ecological crisis, Javanese taboo into political crisis.

#### 3.3 The Disabled Instrument: Biological Organ versus Cultural Artifact

The cosmic horse's wings are a renewable biological organ; their severance can be symbolically repaired through ritual regeneration. The kris, however, is an irreproducible cultural artifact whose fracture initiates an irreversible curse. Symbolic metrology confirms this: descriptions of the wings occupy 12.3% of the Yi narrative and cluster with rain-wind semantics; descriptions of the kris occupy 28.7% of the Javanese narrative and cluster with blood-revenge semantics. The biological medium channels death into ecological apotheosis, the artifactual medium into institutional ritualization.

#### 3.4 Ritual Reproduction of Re-Ordered Worlds

Following Zhige Alu's death, the *Migha hat* ritual recites: "His left eye becomes the sun, his right eye the moon, his blood becomes rivers." Participants insert feather wands into fields as surrogates for the horse's wings, completing the passage from tragic rupture to comic renewal. Ken Angrok's cremation disperses ashes into a volcano, and each Javanese king must re-enact the kris-curse investiture to claim legitimacy. The volcano's red cloth eruption in *wayang* marks the terminus of seven generations of blood debt and inaugurates a new dynastic cycle. One ritual enshrines ecological perpetuity, the other institutional succession.

### IV. Theoretical Model and Civilizational Calibration

To quantify these differences, the paper proposes two synthetic indices. The Order-Reconstitution Coefficient (O) is defined as  $O = (Ec \times St) / Pc$ , where *Ec* is ecological dependence, *St* is sacred-type weight, and *Pc* is political centralization. The Medium-Irreversibility Index (MI) is defined as  $MI = (P_{artificial} / P_{natural}) \times (Pc / Ec)$ . Inputting field-derived values yields  $O_{Zhige} = 3.02$  and  $MI_{Zhige} = 0.04$ , indicating an ecological vector;  $O_{Angrok} = 0.38$  and  $MI_{Angrok} = 17.48$ , indicating an institutional vector. These indices demonstrate that civilizational macro-structure governs symbolic allocation at the micro-level of myth.

### V. Discussion: Deep Grammar of Cross-Civilizational Narrative

Treating the sequence "marriage taboo → instrumental failure → order reconstitution" as a *deep grammar* reveals the Yi and Javanese variants as alternative realizations of a single generative schema. Its surface manifestations are calibrated by ecological and political variables: agrarian civilizations translate marital transgression into ecological crisis, absorbing death into cyclical cosmology; littoral polities translate the

transgression into political crisis, absorbing death into linear dynastic succession. This finding corroborates Bellwood's hypothesis of a pre-Austronesian interaction sphere while adding a mechanism—civilizational calibration—that accounts for structural divergence within shared narrative templates.

## **VI. Conclusion and Prospects**

This paper has provided the first systematic comparison of Zhige Alu and Ken Angrok, empirically validating a triadic model linking marriage taboo, instrumental failure, and order reconstitution. The introduction of quantifiable indices (O and MI) bridges civilizational macro-structure and mythic micro-symbolism. Limitations include the colonial mediation of the *Pararaton* text and underrepresentation of northern Yi variants. Future research will extend the model to the Karen hero U Tha and the Dai epic *Lipeng* to test its Southeast Asian applicability, and integrate archaeolinguistic and aDNA data to trace the prehistoric diffusion of taboo motifs.

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