

# The Anxiety Writing in *Ode to Marriage*

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## ABSTRACT

*Ode to Marriage*, as a valuable piece of oral literary work, is a typically representative narrative poem created by Lisu. It portrays Lisu people's comprehension towards love and marriage in details and conveys their mode of thinking about marriage. This paper aims at analyzing the reflection of the protagonists' anxiety that constructs an exceptional narration integrated with cultural, psychological and philosophical contexts. The anxiety about arranged marriage is exhibited in three aspects. Physical reaction, spiritual reaction and solution-seeking action reflect their anxiety combined with loneliness, weakness, depression, determination, fear and sense of guilt. Secondly, the separation anxiety includes two sides, namely, the temporary separation between lovers and the separation from parents. Thirdly, the survival anxiety is involved with hindrances on the way and the land issue. Finally, the philosophy of anxiety reveals anxiety is not a complicatedly psychological process but an integrated reflection of neurological symptoms anxiety, reality anxiety and existence anxiety.

**Keywords:** *Ode to Marriage, the arranged marriage, the separation anxiety, the survival anxiety, the philosophy of anxiety*

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Ode to Marriage*<sup>1</sup>, as a representative piece of orally literary work, is the representation of wisdom created by Lisu people who mainly lived in Nujiang prefecture located in the northwest of Yunnan Province. In 2014, it was, collected, collated and translated by He Yongxiang, published as one of books belonging to Nu Jiang regional intangible cultural heritage, which attracted great attention. Basically, *Ode to Marriage* is a long narrative poem sung in man and woman duet tradition with a form of question and answer. This newly published version is regarded as a comparative complete one along with 13 sections including 130 chapters. The poem depicts a couple of lovers struggle for free choice in their own marriage with the arranged marriage by parents, and their process of escape for the happy life. It portrays Lisu people's comprehension towards love and marriage in details, which presents their mode of thinking about love and marriage. By now, the rapidly developing and changeable times makes it more valuable both in reservation and sustainability. The former research about the poem until now can be divided roughly into five dimensions. They

are about the metre or the rhyme scheme, the social function, narrative features, the varied interpretation in natural context, or in historical context. However, a considerable part of description in this poem is marked as the reflection of the anxiety that constructs an exceptional narration integrated with cultural, psychological and philosophical contexts. The anxiety writing not only reflects the process of psychological change that roles experience, but it upgrades the anxiety itself to the semiology level, which constitutes a vital means to accomplish self-expression for individual and even for the whole ethnic group. (Oatley 1987)

## II. THE ANXIETY ABOUT THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE

Basically, most of Lisu people live in the Nujiang Prefecture where it is relatively isolated from the urban areas. Adverse natural environment and lower production level, to some extent, promote the emergence of a uniquely traditional marriage mode. (Chen Yeqiang2012) In details of survey, before 1960s, the mode comprises monogyny, polygyny, intra-gens marriage, arranged marriage involved with bride-price, and so on. (1981) The arranged marriage is generally involved with higher bride-price that is the payment for parents' upbringing. The groom side should provide with "dry cattle", live cattle, cloths, pigs, wine and so on. The "dry cattle" refers to the substitutes such as kitchenware that equal to the real cattle by number. Due

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<sup>1</sup> The title and the verse mentioned here are the version translated by the author.

to the high expense, some poor families had to pay the bride-price step by step, even to pay off until they had children. (Chen 2012) As the matter of fact, the arranged marriage prevails in the old times. Some young females had been given marriage to someone before they were born. Their parents took solely them as the “money tree”. (Survey 1981) As the result, some lovers chose to escape from the arranged marriage running to a place far from home at time. (Chen 2012)

In *Ode to Marriage*, the couple of lovers are typical victims of the arranged marriage. The hero has his forced marriage when he was very young. When he grows up, he is aware of his unfavorable situation where he has to face an elderly girl whom he couldn't communicate with, let alone live with. He gets to make it clear that the arranged girl is just the embodiment of standards from his parents' perspective but not his. Then, he is lost in struggling between yielding to arrangement and following his heart. Also, the heroine is arranged by her parents by receiving the bride-price when she was a little baby. She expresses sorrowfully her complaints about parents' hasty decision: “My father was foolish enough to arrange my marriage when I was a baby / married when my mother carried me on her back / I, too young to voice my disagreement / just felt pushed out of the home.” (He Yongxiang 2014) In that way, their experiences have become the catalytic agency that drives the growth of anxiety to solve the arranged marriage to obtain freedom.

Their anxiety is exhibited in three aspects, namely, their physical reaction, spiritual reaction and their solution-seeking action. Firstly, on a wedding where they encounter occasionally and fall in love, they unveil their detailed physical reaction to anxiety. Repeatedly, they narrate “no sleep”, “no appetite”, “snivel”, “eyes full of tears”, “running nose”, “no water can quench thirsty”, and “no food can make belly full”. (He 2014) These words signal their sufferings stressing the symptom that caused by their deep anxiety. In that way, their eagerness to extricate themselves from arranged marriage is highlighted. In addition to eagerness, the worries follow suit. Worries about proper solution-seeking make them fall in dilemma and unable to pull themselves from struggling. Anxiety leads to a circulation in which physical reaction is caused by complicated worries and increasingly worse physical condition aggravates their anxiety. That state of growing anxiety is prominent in the interrelationship. Therefore, anxiety is presented in a complex combined with stress, eagerness, worries, and struggling.

Secondly, their spiritual reaction includes loneliness, weakness and depression. On the wedding, the man is accompanied with loneliness inextricably. On that occasion, He, at first, is eager to express his sadness by sing songs but no one responds to. He finds himself helpless in searching for outlet to discharge his negative

emotions but everyone else appear so busy to chat with him for a whole day. Then, gradually, he gets caught in self-blame for not behaving as other guests do and self-deprecation for losing his family's face. He describes “the sorrow is higher than the mountain / for I climbed to the peak / it deeper than the valley / for I to the bottom.” (He 2014) He choose to be silent weakly and finally he sits in a corner to submerge himself in the world of depression. That makes his mind full of sorrow and shame, which constructs his anxiety. On the other side, the heroine mentions her “suffering grows one-meter day by day / Disconsolation is full of my chest / no matter how broad the heart is / too hard to bear all sadness /..... / no platform to express the heart-broken depression.” (He 2014) She projects her sorrow on the concretized utterances which shape a vivid and dynamic simile of melancholy, which portrays her lonely, weak and depressed status. Faced with the issue of abolishing arranged marriage, she has nobody standing by. Her solitude provides her with chance to reflect on arrangement. Her hidden desire to get her understood is always repressed, which makes her despondent in a predicament between her wish to stop her arranged marriage and the traditions. She suppresses her rebellion and refuse to follow the arrangement, which causes her encountering with a complicated emotion coupled with anxiety. Both man and woman suffer mental torture. They digest their own suffering by making psychological construction continuously. They wander between desire and reality, which leads to growing anxiety that is made up of incurable loneliness, weakness and depression.

Thirdly, the payment off bride-price implies their determination to escape, awe to the tradition, and sense of guilt to parents. After they decide to escape from arranged marriage, they have done many things including payment off the bride-price. Firstly, they recalled the quantity carefully and calculated in detail how many cattle and kitchenware should be given, and how much wine to be brought. For the debt, the hero has to go far away from home to do toilsome gold-washing job. He undergoes unimaginable hardship to make money but, at the same time, he feels happy that he is unable to contain constantly for their future. No matter how difficult, they are determined to change their destiny. What's more is the act of payment off the bride-price reveals their awe to the marriage tradition that lasts so long time. Since the arranged marriage is based on the bride-price, they come up with the idea of payment off at the first time. They plan to expound the reasons why they refuse their arranged marriage and hope to have parents' forgiveness because they know they will be blamed rigidly and even punished seriously once they escape stealthily. Their awe to tradition makes them hope to deal with their arranged marriage perfectly and feel guilty to their parents in meantime. They, finally, paid off the bride-price by doubled

objects. One half for payment off the debt, the other is for the heroine's parents. By means of making compensation, they think they can acquire the comfort of conscience. But actually, they are still uneasy about escape, reluctant to leave and shamed to face parents. Their determination to escape, awe to the marriage tradition and sense of guilt are interwoven with each other in a networking, in which they experience the anxiety caused by the gap between anticipate and reality.

### III. THE SEPARATION ANXIETY

The separation anxiety covers two aspects, namely, the temporary separation between lovers caused by geographical distance, and the separation from parents. The geographical distance is one of main reasons leading to the lovers' anxiety. In virtue of transportation that day, according to the survey, it is difficult for people to get familiar with others living in a distance and harder to marry someone who is from different gens. (1981) At the beginning of poem, the couple of lovers emphasize repeatedly they are living different places that belongs to two gentes. Between them, high mountains and deep valleys are the natural barrier that seem to be insurmountable. But the wedding puts them together and they fall in love ultimately. So they marvel the spirits arrange their meeting and they believe something supernatural makes them fall in love. However, they need to confront the difficulty courageously by taking consideration about the planning to escape to deal with their respective arranged marriage. As a result, the escape is definitely a long-term on account of payment off the bride-price. The temporary separation between lovers is meant to a kind of ordeal, so the lovers are talking over the matters related to their commitment. Only the commitment seems to remove their concerns. According to the historical records in *Fugong County Annals*, Lisu people made commitment between lovers by carving names on the woods and dying them black. (2001) In their utterances, they spared no trouble discoursing where to carve, coupled with their complex emotions. The hero advises to carve on the threshold or the end of corridor, but the heroine opposes for these places are the only access for people go into or out of home. The final result would incur someone admiring and telling out the secret. The man continues to propose curving on the bamboo chord<sup>2</sup> or inside the box of chord. Still, the woman refuses since the melody would attract the ghosts or some spirits' attention. From the end of crossbow made of mulberry wood, the back of walking sabre, the loom, the spinning rod,

<sup>2</sup> It is a traditional musical instrument with three narrow and thin slices made of bamboo.

the bronze bracelet, the necklace, the headscarf<sup>3</sup>, the waistband<sup>4</sup>, the stone on the cliff, to the old tree, the man makes suggestions patiently, but these are not satisfactory ones to the woman so she turns down one by one. Her excuses are focused on avoiding others' peeping, curiosity, jealousy or evil intentions. Their talks are full of caution that leads to be anxious state to think over how to conceal their plan without any trace. Their anxiety is revealed in their fear of divulging the secret by behaving carelessly. In addition to that, the anxiety is due to their commitment that can remove the suspense of love, which was caused by their temporary separation. It seems only the commitment by carving names could console their anxiety. With the growth of anxiety, finally, they reached agreement that is to carve on their hearts and lungs invisible to anyone. Only in this way, their anxiety could be relived.

Furthermore, the escape is bound to the separation from parents. The harmonious relationship, the gratefulness of parenting and the sense of guilt are three dimensions to present their anxiety. Although the lovers are unwilling to make their commitments about the respective arranged marriage, they still depict a harmonious and warm relationship with their parents. The hero stresses, more than once, he is the future owner or the heir of the family, which signaled his status and his parents' caring. In addition, confronted with the girl, he shows his confidence in persuading his parents to accept her as his wife "spinning and weaving at the end of corridor / cooking for parents / farming with them", because of his "parents always treat me well". (He 2014) From his articulating, it is undoubted that his parents and he are at the state of harmony in general. On the other side, the heroine, despite of her grief and complaints about the arranged marriage, often seeks for comforts from parents. The love for parents is self-evident and makes it hard for them to leave homes. Moreover, the parenting is another reason to intensify their anxiety. Parents not only bring them up but get them learn some skills like knife-usage, hunting, farming, housekeeping, spinning. When they recall how parents teach them, they express no hatred but appreciation. Fathers' strictness and mothers' love illustrate how to be a man and how the philosophy of life is at work. Consequently, their escape, to some extent, is meant to be a betrayal for their parents. Before they left for a new place, they are tortured by the sense of guilt to

<sup>3</sup> It is a traditional headwear for Lisu man made of a long black cloth.

<sup>4</sup> It is a traditional attire made of a long black loth decorated with a few little conch.

parents. First of all, they pay off the bride-price with double service. On that occasion, the man worries about what the girl's parents would say to oppose their secret engagement. But the father says nothing only lowering his head and also the mother keeps silence with tears full of eyes, which implies parents' acquiesce in their daughter's choice. Furthermore, on the day they leave, the girl says with a sigh: "my father would fall into disrepute like cicadas chirping / my mother would be disgraced as birds calling." (2014) And she feels reluctant to leave. In her eyes, the fireplace, the brandreth, the threshold, the ladder and the yard are persuading her to stay. So she requires her lover to put some silver or even gold on the threshold, the ladder and in the yard making up for parents' love. Their active performance to ruin the harmonious relationship with parents or their selfish decision to seek for their own happiness despite of what parents would think intensifies their sense of anxiety mixed with sense of guilt and conscience torture.

#### **IV. THE SURVIVAL ANXIETY**

Separated from home, the couple of lovers should confront their own survival that is involved with hindrances on the way to new places, house building and the land issue. The hindrances on the way consist of the atrocious weather, unadaptable natural environment, threat from wild animals, food deficiency and temptation from other people. The atrocious weather like storming, snowing, continuous raining and scorching sun always torture them on their way. In that circumstance, they have to stay away from too cold or too hot weather by finding proper ways to keep healthy. Sometimes, they are not tired of complaining about the terrible situations the weather brings about. Apart from the weather, the unadaptable natural environment, including river-crossing without bridge, snow mountains and forests, must have been the obstacles on their way. After sunset, the woods are filled with flies, mosquitos, leech and unknown insects getting them awaken all night long. Meanwhile, tigers roared in the valley loudly enough to make them trembling and even sometimes the leopard haunted making them lose their soul. The fears and worries lead them to be more anxious, so they always keep cautious enough to be safe.

In addition, they meet people different from their gens. These people might bring threats or temptations. For safety's sake, they need to deal with people tactically. When meeting Han people, the man speaks Han dialect pretending to be one of them; when meeting Nu people, he follows Nu's tradition to get along with them. In that way, they don't provide the lovers with any obstructions. On the other hand, dealing with the relationship with strangers, it is necessary for the lovers to resist some temptations. The time they

arrive in the area in which Yi people live, the man is attracted by the pretty ladies in beautiful skirt. His girl warns him not to be overwhelmed and to remember their original intentions. Also, the time they arrive in the region in which the Bai people live, the man is indulged in musical instruments and songs. He seems to lose his soul and put their intentions out of his mind totally, then he refuses to go on the journey. At that moment, the girl persuades him patiently to be a man making his promise true. The threats and the temptations when dealing with people construct their constant anxiety about their survival and original intentions.

Thirdly, the land issue is the key concern to the couple. Every time they arrive in a new place, they are so lucky to get a piece of land from the local government official. At first, they start building up a simply equipped house to settle down. Besides house, the food, fowl-feeding and livestock-feeding are dependent on the farming. But the land is invariably less than satisfactory. The man, merrily and diligently, sharpens his knife and ox preparing for opening up the land. And yet, when he finishes, the cuckoo call is over and the rats have delivered babies. They frequently miss the farm timing. Again, they come to another place to start life. Although they offer efforts to cultivate the land by burning, the land is still too barren to be productive. The wheat sprout is shorter than finger, the taro leaf narrower than palm. In this way, they live in a half-full caused by crop failure and a wakeful state by anxiety. Furthermore, they pin their hope on the pray that cover gaining crystal-seeming corn and plentiful pumpkin. However, the reality runs counter to their wishes. Abundant goat weed and horse weed grow vigorously on the land. Therefore, their hopelessness and depression push them in a more anxious condition. They become obsessed with loss of appetite and sleep owing to the worries about the field mice and the birds who would destroy the farming. Gradually, their wishes are reduced to a minimum level, that is to make their half-full belly full.

#### **V. THE PHILOSOPHY OF ANXIETY**

Anxiety is a complicatedly psychological process that caused by the estimation or anticipation of the future. It is also a state of emotion for people when he is unable to accomplish the goals. (Power 2007) Furthermore, it is an integrated reflection of physical reaction, personal trait and social influence. (Davison 1998) According to the categories of reasons, anxiety can be divided into three categories, namely, neurological symptoms anxiety, reality anxiety, and existence anxiety. Reality anxiety refers to a state of emotion reacting to the potential threat at some moment in the future. It is related to people's mental state, personality, reaction or childhood experience. Existence anxiety is from the process of biological evolution,

connecting with nature, existential experience. Neurological symptoms anxiety, mostly, is regarded as an early warning signal.

Anxiety is not only an emotion complex, but a driving force which is projected on physical changes. From the perspective of neurological symptoms, the people in a state of anxiety have exterior representation covering some physical changes which are mainly included in worry, nervousness, fear, impatience, presentment and so on. In *Ode to Marriage*, the couple of lovers tend to be overwhelmed by the worries about arranged marriage and then they fall into a state of no sleep, no appetite, snivel, easily running tears and nose. These reactions are typical driving force led by their negative emotions. They worry about presence and future but they seem to be unable to solve the problems by now, so they are immersed into a circulation between exasperated physical reaction and increasingly worsened anxiety.

More than physical changes, anxiety reveals their dilemma in reality. Their reality anxiety, finally, has turned to their loneliness, weakness, and depression caused by a state of being isolated. That isolation, or so-called separation anxiety, is an existence of being thrown without any reason. (Heidegger 1996) The protagonists in *Ode to Marriage* experience that kind of being thrown constantly. Their parents arrange their respective marriage when they were very young. When they grow and are able to understand the meaning of marriage, they are aware of they are at a difficult position that gets them trapped in a situation of being isolated. They feel lonely since no one would stand at their side, helpless for they seem to be unable to change the fate, and depressed because parents control all things. That isolation generates separation anxiety that is inevitable to them. According to the interpretation proposed by Freud, the separation anxiety is the original one that created essentially by a state of trauma. (Anthony 2008) The original anxiety uncovers when their desire emerges, they are too weak to satisfy the needs of libido, which build up a conflict unable to be identified by the couple of lovers. When they realize their circumstance, there is no powerful defense mechanism to suppress the separation. Then, they are resulted in a passive situation that manifests their incapability, which make them feel painful strongly and anxious intensively. The being thrown have already been a factual state to the protagonists.

In addition, the anxiety is a certain existential phenomenon, or uncertainty, at the time they are confronted with making choice. (Kierkegaard 1969) On the road to grow up, people have to acquire new experience and meet fresh opportunity, which urges people to make choice. But that movement of making choice always bring about new anxiety that contains uncertainty along with the unpredictable future.

(Scherer 1979) At that moment the lovers in *Ode to Marriage* are confronted with making choice in deed, they perform their strong determination to escape for their happiness on one hand. The determination itself conceals their rebellion against the marriage tradition. But their awe to the tradition and sense of guilt present their worries about uncertain future on the other hand. Moreover, that uncertainty is the result of self-consciousness that is shaped on the process of their growth. (Power 2007) With their growth or self-development, they are inclined to experience more, which facilitates the formation of self-consciousness. Radically, that is accompanied by pain and fear which can be regarded as the cost of making choice. The while of making choice, definitely, makes them undergo anxiety. In other words, their extent of anxiety depends on how uncertain about future, which gets them stuck in the world of pain and fear. Although they have determined to escape, they, still, cannot free from being mindful of personal gains and losses. The more conscious they are the more anxious they would experience. Making choice brings about uncertainty about future and that makes them painful and anxious. The series of movements, to some extent, extrudes their annoyance that is considered as a basic status while people are confronted with making choice. Something obscure is suspending in an incomplete psychological structure that is open to possibilities and to uncertainty at the same time. (Frederickson 1993) Annoyance must be the inevitable outcome from the eternal contradiction between the satisfactory desires and lamentable reality. That suspending and discomforting annoyance is undoubtedly an expression of anxiety.

Apart from aspects discussed above, anxiety is exposed to the social influences. In their respective arranged marriage, the couple of lovers are bonded with the marriage traditions. That society prevents them from being a free and capable man to decide their own business. But situated in the restriction, the more restrains they are forced to carry, the more feelings of struggling with they would have. (Fromm 2001) People are doomed to have loneliness and sense of crisis along with their freedom from social influences and their development of characters. (Amstadter 2008) The couple of lovers terribly eager to have rights controlling their own destiny, but meanwhile, once they obtain the freedom to make choice, they is bound to the double meaning of freedom. In one respect, they've acquired freedom and independence extricating themselves from the external authority, but their loneliness is daily on the increase. Freedom provides them with not sweets, but simultaneously bitters. Therefore, freedom and loneliness or freedom and anxiety are twin sisters. Every step forward in the process of being individualized, they are encountered with newly emerged uncertainty that bring potential threats. (Cowie 2001) If the social conditions cannot be taken as the

basis, and they lose the relationship that provides them with sense of safety as well, that disconnection would lead to a kind unbearable burden. (Ekman, Leveson, Friesen 1983) In this case, freedom has become the substitute of doubt that infers meaninglessness and loss of direction. The process the couple of lover seek for freedom is filled with dilemmas between to obey and to resist marriage tradition, between to stay with parents and to escape for happiness, and between to persist in and to give up. Their eagerness to have freedom is created by the social influences. Also, the loneliness and uneasiness is the result from society.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The paper is, from the perspective of cultural, psychological and philosophical contexts, composed by the analysis of anxiety the protagonists have experienced in *Ode of Marriage* as a valuable representative narrative poem created by Lisu. The reflection of their anxiety that constructs an exceptional narration integrated with the arranged marriage traditions, separation and survival. The arranged marriage is typical mode of marriage for Lisu before 1960s. That mode leads the couple of lovers to fall in a dilemma between their freedom and the traditions. The anxiety about arranged marriage is exhibited in three aspects. Physical reaction which contains wakefulness and inappetence, spiritual reaction and solution-seeking action reflect their anxiety combined with loneliness, weakness, depression, determination, fear and sense of guilt. All these reactions and emotions constitute their complex anxiety about the cultural traditions. Secondly, the separation anxiety includes two sides, namely, the temporary separation between lovers and the separation from parents. For this part, the geographical distance and the bride-price play vital factors to upgrade their anxiety. Their continuous talks about the way to present their commitment provide them with endless concerns about their longevity of love. And on the other hand, the harmonious relationship, the gratefulness of parenting and the sense of guilt make them much more anxious about their escape. Thirdly, the survival anxiety is involved with hindrances on the way as well as the land issue. The hindrances are included in terrible weather, environment, threats from people and animals, food deficiency and temptations from people. Besides, there is the land issue at a less than satisfactory state exacerbating their survival status. Their deteriorating situation are apparent in both of two aspects. Finally, the philosophy of anxiety reveals anxiety is not a complicatedly psychological process but an integrated reflection of neurological symptoms anxiety, reality anxiety and existence anxiety by conceptualizing the anxiety about arranged marriage, separation anxiety and survival anxiety.

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