

"Wu" and "Yi"—The Naxi Ethnic Medicine of Divine and Medicinal Dual Interpretations

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, ethnic medicine, as a part of traditional medicine, has been greatly affected in terms of its continuity and diversity. With the changes in the Naxi ethnic society and economic environment, the traditional Dongba culture has also undergone continuous transformations. Naxi people, facing physical and mental discomfort, have turned to the combination of "wu" (shamanism) and "Yi"(ethnic medicine, as well as the role of doctor), emphasizing the importance of the Naxi ethnic medicine culture that interprets the divine and medicinal aspects. Developing specific policies for the protection and inheritance of ethnic medicine culture and adapting strategies to local conditions are crucial steps towards the dynamic preservation and development of Naxi ethnic medicine.

1. Introduction

The field investigation for this study was conducted in the Naxi ethnic enclave in Lijiang City, Yunnan Province, China. The Naxi minority is one of the 56 ethnic groups in China, and they are a unique ethnic group in Yunnan, with the majority residing in the northwestern region of Lijiang City. Some are also distributed in other counties and cities in Yunnan, as well as in Yanyuan, Yanbian, and Muli counties in Sichuan, and a small number can be found in Mangkang County, Tibet. The Naxi people adhere to the Dongba religion, where "Dongba" represents the wise, and they are considered all-knowing and all-powerful. The Dongba scriptures are a rich collection of texts that have been handed down through generations by Dongba priests, covering a wide range of subjects including philosophy, history, religion, medicine, astronomy, folklore, literature, and art, earning them the title of the "encyclopedia of the Naxi people." According to incomplete statistics, there are tens of thousands of ancient Dongba scriptures and documents preserved by institutions and individuals worldwide, many of which contain extensive information on diseases and medical practices. Representative works on Dongba medicine include the "Late Ensong Lu" (the only surviving ancient Naxi pictographic medical book) and the "Chongren Pandi Zhaoyao"[1].

2. "Impurity" and the Naxi Ethnic View of Disease Causation

2.1 Impurity

In Naxi ethnic medicine, "impurity" is a core concept. "Impurity" is not limited to infectious

diseases; all illnesses and abnormalities are related to "impurity," symbolizing inauspiciousness and uncleanness. Naxi people believe that "impurity" can arise through several pathways:

- a. Climate anomalies caused by environmental changes beyond human control.
- b. Environmental anomalies influenced by human will.
- c. Abnormal deaths of animals.
- d. Abnormal behaviors resulting from changes in people's emotions (a concept not found in modern medicine but described in the Dongba scriptures).
- e. The spread and diffusion of impure "Qi" (the transmission and spread of infectious diseases)[2].

The Naxi people have a profound understanding of infectious diseases, and their principles for dealing with infectious diseases are as follows: firstly, controlling the source of infection; secondly, interrupting the transmission route; and thirdly, protecting susceptible individuals. Similar principles can also be found in the Dongba scriptures. They further categorize infectious diseases into two types – "duan" (fast-spreading with a high mortality rate) and "zhuo" (fast-spreading with a low mortality rate).

Impurity not only encompasses what the Naxi people consider as physical uncleanness but also includes non-standard marital relations (incest, blood relations, unstable marriages). Anything that deviates from the norms is considered impure. In the Dongba scriptures, there is a pair of rule divinities: Lu Shen and Shen Shen. In the Dongba scripture "Inviting Lu Shen," it is written that any behavior that violates the rules established by a pair of rule divinities (natural and societal rules) is considered "impure."

2.2 Naxi Ethnic View of Disease Causation

The Naxi ancestors believed that only when the spirits and the body are in harmony can a person live a healthy life. When a person's mental or body was disturbed and not in the right place, illness or even death can occur. In the "Complete Collection of Translated Annotations of Dongba Scriptures," there are also records of various illnesses. For instance, headaches, eye ailments, and skin diseases, was considered "disorder". This demonstrates that Naxi Dongba medicine recognized that affecting the "heart" (mental) could lead to physical illnesses. Although this mystical understanding cannot be explained scientifically in terms of how psychological factors influence the physiological functions and organs of the body, it undoubtedly laid the foundation for the formation of the "psychosomatic medicine" theory in Naxi Dongba medicine [3].

3. Dongba Healing Rituals and the Removal of "Impurity"

3.1 Dongba Healing Rituals

The Naxi people hold "impurity removal ceremonies" to eliminate "impurity," believing that this will lead to health and well-being. When someone falls ill, Dongba priests perform divination to determine what has caused the "shu" (unfavorable events). The Dongba scriptures contain records related to disasters and diseases, such as rice crops being afflicted with blast disease, wheat suffering from rust, lands being struck by mudslides, houses being pelted with stones, people experiencing muscle pain, insomnia, colds, eye pain, stomachaches, and livestock failing to reproduce. All of these are attributed to the presence of "impurity," and according to the Dongba scriptures, Dongba priests are responsible for conducting "impurity removal" rituals to address these issues.

There are more than thirty different types of rituals, and impurity rituals generally include the aforementioned disasters. Dongba priests consult divination tools known as "gua ci" and then

inform you of the specific rituals required. Before each ritual, a purification process is carried out while reciting scriptures. "Impurity," once generated, can transform into malevolent spirits, bringing calamities.

3.2 The removal of "impurity"

One of the ceremonies documented in the Dongba scriptures is the ritual to worship the natural deity "Shu," known as the "Shu Worship Ritual." According to the Dongba's description, the traditional Shu worship ritual used to span three days. The first day involved preparing the sacrificial wood, the second day was dedicated to the impurity removal ritual, and the third day was reserved for the Shu worship ritual. However, this modern Shu worship ritual is planned to be condensed into two days, with the recitation of 44 volumes of the Dongba scriptures. After a meticulous impurity removal ritual involving rhododendron branches, the formal worship ceremony begins.

Firstly, following the main ceremonial rules, a divine altar is constructed. Dongba priests lay white sheep's wool felt on the ground and place rice as an offering in the center, along with incense. On the altar, they arrange a symbolic iron plowshare representing Mount Kunaro, as well as the spirit masks corresponding to deities, a vessel of pure water (symbolizing holy spirit medicine), conch shells, and ritual objects like incense burners, alcohol, tea, fruits, and fried pancakes. Once the divine altar is set up, Dongba priests begin reciting scriptures to invite the deities.

Secondly, a "Shu village" is established. Positioned to the east of the divine altar (Shu villages must be in the eastern direction), Dongba priests encircle the area, inserting wooden plaques that represent offerings to Shu, wooden plaques for repaying Shu-related debts, and wooden plaques for summoning spirits. A Shu village gate is set up in the south, adorned with sprigs of pine, poplar, and hazel, and adorned with colorful flags. The entire Shu village is enclosed with a long canvas. After the Shu village is prepared, Dongba priests place a basin of milk in the center and sprinkle it around with milk-dipped cypress branches, symbolizing the healing of Shu and inviting Shu to partake in the feast. This process is known as "administration of medicine." According to the Dongba scriptures, Shu is a deity that particularly favors purity and enjoys milk but does not consume other foods.

Thirdly, a "purification ghost village" is established to the south of the divine altar, separated from it by bamboo sticks. Compared to the detailed description in the Dongba scriptures, the purification ghost village is relatively simple. It includes a young willow tree, symbolizing impurity spirits, and under the tree, there are three stones with ceramic pieces soaked in water and wood charcoal. Nine handless wooden puppets and one wooden puppet with hands, all made from young willow branches, are inserted into the ground. A puppet horse made from young willow branches is also constructed, with nine "wai ken yi lai" wooden pieces that can be bent left and right. At the front of the puppet horse, a square-shaped grand deity gate, made from pine wood, is erected, featuring statues of Lu Shen and Se Shen.

After all of these preparations, Dongba priests proceed with various small rituals in sequence, including purging all kinds of "impurities", offering sacrifices to natural deities, escorting the foolish Shu, sacrificing Mengeon ghosts, and inviting Shu to rest in the Shu village. During these rituals, a goat and a rooster are used as sacrificial offerings.

After dinner, the Dongba priests return to the ritual site and continue reciting scriptures, performing rituals such as escorting the foolish Shu, administering medicine and healing Shu, and inviting Shu to rest in the Shu village while locking the Shu village gate. This ensures that the Shu spirits spend the night peacefully within the village. When these rituals conclude, it is already 10 o'clock at night, and everyone sets up tents to rest at the ritual site."^[4]

The combination of "Wu and Yi" is one of the characteristics of Naxi ethnic medicine. It comprises two core elements – healing "mental" and "body." Healing "mental" refers to Dongba performing rituals to remove impurity and treat illnesses, while healing "body" refers to the herbal knowledge passed down through Naxi families for alleviating ailments. The early understanding of diseases among the Naxi people went through an animism stage. As they battled diseases and the natural environment, they accumulated and summarized a relatively rich knowledge of herbal medicine. While not forming a comprehensive theoretical system, this contributed to the distinctive feature of Naxi ethnic medicine culture – the fusion of "Wu and Yi" where "Wu" and "Yi" work in tandem to address health issues.

4. Deeply Rooted Herbal Knowledge in the "Combination of the Wu and Yi"

4.1 Specific herbal knowledge of the Naxi ethnics

According to interviews conducted during this survey, there are roughly 2,010 common medicinal herbs distributed in the Lijiang area, accounting for 34.9% of the 5,767 medicines listed in the "Chinese Materia Medica Dictionary." Some of the medicines used by Naxi ethnic doctors do not even appear in the national pharmacopeia. The Naxi people's use of animals and plants for medicinal purposes has developed into a unique form of Naxi ethnic medicine that combines the strengths of various ethnic groups.

The local medical association has developed a series of clinically effective and ethnically distinctive clinical formulations based on over 5,000 classic Naxi prescriptions and clinical practices. As shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Naxi clinical formulations

Name	Ingredients	Effects
Lung-Clearing Cough Relief Formula	Tu Huangqi (Naxi traditional medicine), Da Longdan (Naxi traditional medicine), Huangqin, Banxia	Clears the lungs, relieves cough, and dissolves phlegm.
Heart-Clearing Blood Circulation Formula	Zi Danshen (Naxi traditional medicine), Chuan Xiong, Xie Bai, Ji Li	Clears the heart, promotes blood circulation, and dispels stasis.
Liver and Stomach Soothing Formula	Xiang Zhangzi (Naxi traditional medicine), Ge Shanxiao (Naxi traditional medicine), Jin Zhongyin Chen (Naxi traditional medicine), Foshou	Soothes the liver, regulates qi, and alleviates stomach pain.
Mass Dissolution and Stagnation Relief Formula	Ge Shanxiao (Naxi traditional medicine), Ku Qiaotou (Naxi traditional medicine), Di Yu (Hua Shi Dan) (Naxi traditional medicine), Yantuo (Naxi traditional medicine), Muxiang	Strengthens the spleen and stomach, promotes qi circulation, and relieves pain.
Kidney Tonification and Essence Consolidation Formula	Jiucui Zi (Naxi traditional medicine), Gu Sui Bu, Jiuxiang Chong	Tonifies the kidney, enhances essence consolidation, and strengthens yang.
Blockage Resolution and Turbidity Removal Formula	Zhujie Cao (Naxi traditional medicine), Lychee Kernel, Huang Bo	Clears heat, detoxifies, diuretic, and promotes urinary flow.
Abscess Resolution and Diuresis Formula	Cishen (Naxi traditional medicine), Didingcao, Yuxingcao, Da Xueteng, Chonglou	Resolves abscesses, drains pus, diuretic, and promotes urinary flow.
Blood Circulation and Menstrual Regulation Formula	Da Hongpao (Naxi traditional medicine), Zi Danshen (Naxi traditional medicine), Shayuanzi, Wu Zhuyu	Promotes blood circulation and regulates menstruation.
Depression Alleviation and Menstrual Regulation Formula	Tu Huangqi (Naxi traditional medicine), Chong Lian (Naxi traditional medicine), Huang Jing, Ji Li	Blood tonic, menstrual regulation, and fertility assistance.
Pangdi Mother Rescue Formula	Xiongdan Fen, Shexiang Fen, Niu Huang Fen, Tianzhu Huang, Zhenzhu, Xionghuang, Lijiang Xiaohongshen, Zhuzi Shen, Xueshan Huangqi, Qingcigu, Bingpian, Qianhuo, Zhusha, Gegen, Medicinal gold foil, etc.	Clears heat, detoxifies, calms convulsions, restores yang, and rescues from reversal.
Uric Acid Reduction Formula	Qi Ka (Naxi traditional medicine), Cheqiancao, etc.	Clears heat, promotes diuresis, and reduces uric acid.
Blood Stasis Resolution and Pain Relief Formula	Tusanshi, Lanhuagen, Wild Ginger, Gu Sui Bu, Yanxuejie, Da Hongpao, etc.	Promotes blood circulation, dissolves stasis, reduces swelling and pain, relaxes tendons, and removes dampness.

These formulations reflect the deep-rooted herbal knowledge in the "Combination of the Divine and Medicine" among the Naxi people, showcasing the unique blend of traditional medicinal practices and their own distinct cultural heritage.

5. The Inheritance and Transformation of the "Combination of the Wu and Yi" in the Globalization Context of Dongba

5.1 Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in the Face of Modern Challenges: Nurturing Ethnic Medicine Cultures and Promoting Innovation

In recent times, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has faced challenges amidst the influence of Western medicine and the ravages of war. Over the past two centuries, with the gradual dominance of Western medicine, the national TCM industry has been impacted like never before. Major pharmaceutical companies and multinational corporations, leveraging advanced technology and medicines, have left domestic ethnic enterprises far behind, leading to a decline in the development and innovation of traditional ethnic medicine. The Naxi ethnic medicine culture, characterized by the "Combination of the Wu and Yi" - the fusion of "Wu" (dongba) and "Yi" (ethnic medicine, as well as the role of doctor) - embodies the spirit of dedication and practice in the Naxi ancestors' determined struggle against diseases. It fully reflects the traditional Chinese medical ethics and style of "benevolence and skill," deserving of further exploration and preservation.

5.2 An interview with a professional Dongba

Existing Dongba practitioners are not uniformly skilled in all aspects. Some are proficient in Dongba script, some inherit family medicine knowledge, and others perform exhibitions in tourist areas. Among the Dongba individuals I interviewed, one is a researcher of Dongba script, while another works at the Lijiang National Traditional Medicine Technical Inheritance TCM clinic.

The Dongba doctor He Xuecheng working at the Lijiang National Traditional Medicine Technical Inheritance TCM clinic is a family-inherited Dongba who introduced the job duties in this clinic. During daytime working hours, just like a hospital in a modern medical system, the patients need to register through clinic system, then he check pulse for patients, then make a prescription. While during off work time, there are some Naxi local people who need him to perform some impurity rituals, he donned the traditional custom of Dongba.

These Dongba practitioner began learning medicine at the age of 5-6, identifying herbs while also studying rituals. By the age of 16, he was capable of treating patients. Currently, the practitioner possesses 16 volumes of scriptures containing medicinal content, and his two sons are able to perform smaller rituals while working and learning about Dongba herbal medicine. Outsiders also come to learn Dongba medicine and rituals, and currently, the clinic employs 8 staff members. While the clinic is equipped with some medical instruments, Dongba practitioners do not rely heavily on them for diagnosis and treatment. Most patients receive traditional herbal medicine. Additionally, they use Traditional Chinese Medicine techniques such as acupuncture, massage, and cupping. Cupping, in particular, is notable, as they use pine resin to create the flames for cupping. Due to the resin's high terpene content, the burning resin provides additional therapeutic heat, effectively relieving pain.

6. Conclusion: Returning to the Essence - Healing the "Mental" and Healing the "Body" in Ethnic Medicine

6.1 The Impact of Globalization on Traditional and Western Medicine in China

Globalization, as a fundamental feature of modern society, has had profound effects on various aspects of the economy, politics, culture, and society. Under the backdrop of globalization, the development environment of global medicine has undergone fundamental changes.

During the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Christian missionaries brought Christianity to China and, along with it, modern Western science and medicine. After the Opium Wars, missionary hospitals spread from coastal areas to the entire inland region of China. Over a few decades, these hospitals became prominent institutions, as notable as churches. However, traditional medicine, despite its resilience through modern times, did not gain widespread recognition. Its growth rate and scale lagged far behind comprehensive Western medical hospitals. The number of county-level TCM hospitals is a basic indicator of the total resources of TCM hospitals. Research shows that the number of county-level TCM hospitals in China is roughly half that of county-level comprehensive Western medical hospitals, and the total income per hospital in comprehensive Western medical hospitals is much higher than that in TCM hospitals [5].

6.2 Preservation and Transformation: The Evolution of Ethnic Medicine and Lijiang Ancient Town

As a part of traditional medicine, ethnic medicine has been seriously affected by the continuity and diversity of globalization. Some unique and effective diagnostic and treatment techniques and methods have not been well-preserved, and some are on the brink of extinction. Ethnic medicine cultures among some ethnic minorities are experiencing a decline and are in danger of disappearing.

Lijiang Ancient Town, with a history of over a thousand years, has entered the national list of historical and cultural cities and the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list due to its rich historical and cultural characteristics. With the development of tourism in Lijiang Ancient Town, which was historically known for its production of tea, fur, and medicinal herbs, it has now transformed into a 5A-level tourist attraction primarily focused on tourism and cultural products. By 2019, the number of visitors had exceeded 50 million, accelerating its pace to become an international boutique tourist destination and a world cultural city. Lijiang Ancient Town is the only World Cultural Heritage site in China's ethnic minority areas, and its transformation has made a significant contribution to the economic and cultural development of ethnic minority areas.

Dongba, meaning "wise person" or "philosopher" in the Naxi language, is an important part of Naxi traditional culture. Throughout its thousands of years of history, Dongba culture has relied on an economically self-sufficient agrarian society. However, with changes in social, political, cultural, and economic environments, Naxi Dongba culture has also evolved. Traditional Dongba culture no longer suits the changed Naxi social environment and must evolve with the changing social landscape. Dongba practitioners from remote mountain villages have had to seek work in the cities to make a living. Some Dongba individuals perform for tourists, creating a new group that relies on showcasing Dongba culture for their livelihoods. The Dongba culture they present no longer retains the traditional spiritual beliefs. The role of Dongba ceremonies has shifted from traditional folk rituals to small-scale ceremonies serving individuals, such as fortune-telling, divination, and rituals for dispelling illness and calamity.[6]

6.3 The combination of Dongba religion and Naxi ethnic medicine

Dongba culture has nurtured the traditional spiritual character of the Naxi people and embodies the cultural innovation spirit and noble moral qualities of many generations of Naxi knowledge elites. In the rapid impact of globalization, the Naxi people need treatment for both their "bodies" and "psyches" The combination of "Wu" and "Yi"—the integration of spirituality and medicine—in Naxi ethnic medicine culture is once again being emphasized and passed down. Yunnan's ethnic medicine development faces issues such as regional imbalances, a shortage of talent, a need to enhance clinical service capabilities, and inadequate research institutions. [7] The situation for Naxi ethnic medicine development is even less ideal, with few researchers focused on it, and a lack of a

complete theoretical system.[8]

6.4 The Cultural Significance and Future Prospects of Naxi Ethnic Medicine

In conclusion, Naxi ethnic medicine, as an important component of Chinese medicine, contains profound philosophical wisdom, humanistic spirit, and contemporary values. It is worth further exploration, compilation, research, inheritance, and promotion. The combination of "Wu" and "Yi"—healing the integration of psyche and body—in Naxi ethnic medicine culture, which is carried by Dongba culture, has contemporary value and needs further excavation and protection. The formulation of specific policies for the protection and inheritance of ethnic medicine culture, guided by the situation and tailored to local conditions, is an important measure to promote the dynamic inheritance and development of Naxi ethnic medicine culture.

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