



杨利美 著

Contact & Exchange:
Historical Perspective on Yunnan's
Ethnic People and Their Culture

接触与交流：
历史视域中的云南民族历史文化



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Introduction

Yunnan, a multi-ethnic province located on the southwestern frontier of China. Geography, national and cultural diversity makes Yunnan so unique that the history and culture of the ethnic groups always attract outsiders such as both academic and tourists. To try to give the people who have interest in an easily-got and understood data about the history and culture of Yunnan's nationalities, we wrote this book called *Contact & Exchange: Historical Perspective on Yunnan's Ethnic People and their Culture*, and hope that you'll find something interesting and valuable.

For your ease to understand the topic on how the history and culture of Yunnan's nationalities originate from and develop before the opening-up policy, here we just briefly introduce the location, geography and other background like ethnic groups in Yunnan, and the framework of this book, etc.

1. Yunnan's Location and Geographical Characteristics

Located between 97. 31 ' 39" to 106. 11. 47" longitude and 21. 8 ' 32" to 29 ' 1 ' 58" latitude, Yunnan is situated on the southwest border of the

People's Republic of China. It borders on Guizhou Province and Guangxi Autonomous Region to the east, Sichuan Province to the north, the Tibetan Autonomous Region to the northwest, and the Southeast Asian countries such as Burma, Laos and Vietnam to the south and west. It has an international border of 4,060 kilometers long. Northeast India and Thailand are both not far from Yunnan's borders and the province has close historical ties with south and Southeast Asia, Tibet, Sichuan and other parts of inland China.

Yunnan has particularly mountainous terrain; 94% of its area is mountains or semi-mountainous terrain. The province is dotted with mountain valleys, many quite small and most cut off by mountains and rivers from other valleys. Most of the mountain regions here were formed simultaneously with the formation of the Himalayan Mountains; the northwest, with the highest elevation in the province as well as its highest range (the Hengduan Mountains Range, 横断山区), is connected with the Tibetan Plateau, while both the altitude and the size of Yunnan's mountains steadily decrease as one goes south. Mei Li Snow Mountain County (德钦梅里雪山) in the northwest is the province's highest peak, while He Kou County (河口) in the southeast has an altitude of only 76.4 meters, altitude drop of 6,663.6 meters. But regardless as to elevation, one rule holds throughout the province; flat, arable land is extremely scarce and even the largest valleys are hemmed in by mountainous terrain.

Yunnan Province is also the place where several important rivers in East Asia run through their way from their sources among mountain peaks to their exits on the sea. The six major rivers of Yunnan are the Irrawaddy (独龙江-伊洛瓦底江), Nu-Salween (怒江-萨尔温江), Lancang-Mekong

(澜沧江-湄公河), Jinsha(金沙江), Yuan(元江) and Nanpan(南盘江) Rivers, they are all parts of major regional or international rivers. The Irrawaddy is, of course, the major river of Burma, while the Nu is also called the Salween or Thalween once it flows across Yunnan's borders and is the second major river of Burma. The Lancang flows into Peninsular Southeast Asia to become its major river, the Mekong River. while Jinsha is the name of the western stretch of the great Yangtze River itself. The Yuan River is known as the Red River as it flows through Northern Vietnam, while the Nanpan becomes the Hongshui in Guangxi and is in fact a part of the western branch of Guangdong(Canton) Province's major river, the Pearl River. Three of these rivers—the Nu, the Lancang and the Jinsha—run through the northwest of Yunnan Province, The Se region being promoted today as the Three River Scenic Region. The six rivers have a total length of 5,000 kilometers and between them have more than 180 tributaries.

It is no wonder then that H. R. Davies, writing in the late 19th century, referred to Yunnan as “the link between India and the Yangtze River” . Yunnan is indeed at an important geographical junction, a fact that places it be at a cultural crossroads with important implications for its nationality history and culture, as we shall see in this book. Indian, that is to say South Asian Culture, has continuously flowed into Yunnan, whether directly, or by way of Indianized Southeast Asia, mixing with cultural influences from the Han regions of inland China to different degrees in different parts of the province.

At the same time, Yunnan's geographical diversity has made it a place of tremendous ecological diversity and an astonishing array of natural resources, a province which is referred as “The Kingdom of Animals” ,

“The Kingdom of Plants” and “The Kingdom of Nonferrous Metals” in China. Geographically isolated and often dealing with very different natural environments, Yunnan’s nationalities have responded in different ways, creating what might be described as a rich cultural tapestry, with all the unities and diversities that a truly magnificent tapestry implies.

2. Formation and Development of Nationalities in Yunnan

According to the standards for defining and categorizing nationalities that have been used since the 1950’s, China has 56 different nationalities, among which 26 nationalities with a population of over 5000 live in Yunnan. In reality, the situation is much more complex. Of the five minority nationalities with a population of a million or more—the Yi (formerly known as Luoluo), Bai, Hani (Akha), Zhuang (Chuang) and Dai (Tai or Thai)—the Yi, the Hani, the Zhuang and the Dai are all divided into myriad subgroups, while even the Bai are by no means completely uniform. A large number of Yi people can be found in several provinces in Southern China as well as (admittedly small numbers) in parts of Peninsular Southeast Asia, while the Dai and the Zhuang are part of a complex of related ethnic groups spreading throughout South China and Peninsular Southeast Asia as well as a small corner of Northeast India. 16 nationalities are cross-border, meaning that they can be found in at least one Southeast Asian county, while about a dozen can be found in at least one province besides Yunnan. Aside from those already mentioned, Yunnan’s minority nationalities include the Miao, Lisu, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Lahu, Wa (Va; known in Thailand as the Lawa), Naxi (Nakhi), Yiao, Jinbo

(Chinpo), Zang (Tibetan), Bulang (Blang), Buyi (Puyi), Pumi (Primi), Nu, Achang, Deang, Jinuo, Menggu (Mongols), Shui, Man (Manchurians), and Dulong (Drung).

During the Ming (1368—1644) and the Qing (1636—1911) Dynasties, as Han people immigrants increased in numbers, large numbers of other nationalities were assimilated into the Han and the Han eventually became by far the largest nationality. A situation came into being where a patchwork of minorities was spread throughout most of Yunnan, sometimes forming a concentrated majority or at least a major group within a certain region.

The origin of this situation goes back much earlier. At least 16 nationalities dwelling at different altitudes are believed to have originated in Yunnan itself; these include the Yi, Bai, Hani, Zhuang, Dai, Lisu, Lahu, Wa, Naxi, Jinpo, Bulang, Nu, Ahchang, Deang, Jinuo and Dulong. The Zang (Tibetans) people entered the province during a wave of Tibetan expansionism beginning of the Tang dynasty, while the Menggu (Mongols) came during the 13th and the 14th centuries, when a branch of the Mongolian ruled China as the Yuan Dynasty (1271—1368). The earliest ancestors who would become the Hui of Yunnan province followed the Yuan troops into Yunnan, as did the Pumi. The Miao and Yiao migrated to Yunnan during the Ming and the Qing Dynasties, while the Man came over during the period when they ruled China—the Qing Dynasty. The Shui and Buyi are in fact offshoots of the Zhuang. Clearly, the history of Yunnan can not be separated from the history of the formation and development of its various ethnic groups.

Yunnan's special geography has resulted in the following three special characteristics of its nationalities:

Firstly, geographic isolation and lack of contact with other parts of the province means that some nationalities in some parts of Yunnan have kept a lot of their traditions. To this day, many nationalities Bai, Yi, Naxi and Dai have preserved their own languages, traditional costumes, domestic architectures, festivals, religious beliefs and practices as well as folk customs (especially the latter one). Some even have their own ancient scripts.

Secondly, aside from nationality culture, different nationalities living together in the same area—that is, in the same natural environment—may form a common “regional culture”. That is, while they may be divided in terms of ethnic identity, language and a few distinct customs, they will, at the same time, share a common economic mode (or complement each other as part of a greater regional economic system), have similar lifestyles and even share certain non-material aspects of culture. The other side of this picture is that a single nationality, or even a single branch of a nationality, may differ significantly in different parts of Yunnan with different natural environments.

Finally, looking at nationalities and culture from the perspective of the entire province, we find that in most of Yunnan nationality co-habitation exists, while, paralleling to this but limited in extent, there is dominance by a single nationality or even settlement by a single nationality. In the province, different nationalities may live at different ecological levels (high up in the mountains, lower down in the mountains and in the valleys), but each ecological level may be interdependent with the other within a single region, and this is only to be expected. At the same time, however, there are obvious differences in climate and therefore in general ecological

conditions from one part of Yunnan to another. This type of duality, creating a corresponding diversity of human culture from one part of the province to another, is known as a phenomenon that “there are four seasons(at once) on a single mountain, and it’s a different world every 10 li(five kilometers) ” .

It’s little wonder then that anthropologists refer to Yunnan as “ an anthropologist’s heaven ” . Yunnan began to attract anthropologists, ethnologists, archeologists, historians and other scholars as far back as the late 19th century. The interest of western scholars in Yunnan began in the mid-19th century as Western imperialism began to seep in from India, Burma and Vietnam. Inland Chinese having interest in Yunnan nationality history and culture went back as far as Contact with Yunnan itself, but systematic researches dates mainly from the 20th century, while really extensive research into what we now call “nationalities” did not begin until the 1950’s.

3. Content and Bibliography of Main Resources Consulted

This book is principally a result of course concerning the history and cultural development of many nationalities living in Yunnan Province, People’s Republic of China. As Yunnan is an inalienable part of China, it could be said that the historical development of Yunnan mainly depend on the Dynasties in Central China. In Chinese academic world, scholars used to do division of historical periods of Yunnan determined according to Chinese Dynasty system. So in this book, we divide the history of Yunnan into 6 parts:

Part 1, Yunnan’s Geography and Other Background;

Part 2, Ancient Civilization in Yunnan before Han Dynasty;

Part 3, From Han to Early Tang Dynasty;

Part 4, Nanzhao & Dali Kingdoms;

Part 5, Yuan Dynasty;

Part 6, Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Additionally, Part 2 will be referred in two chapters: the Beginning of Human Civilization in Yunnan, and Yunnan's Bronze Culture; Part 4 will be separated into Nanzhao Kingdom and Dali Era; and Part 6 will discuss Political Development in the Ming and Qing Dynasties at first, and then the Cultural and Economic Development. As you see, firstly, the book is a general introduction to the situation in Yunnan province, its geography, history, nationalities and culture. Parts from 2 to 6 focus on a period by period discussion of the history and cultural dynamics of Yunnan's nationalities from a macro-cosmic perspective.

The history and culture of Yunnan's nationalities has attracted the interest of scholars in Yunnan and of the Chinese academic world in general for many decades. As of 1940's a great deal of research concerning Yunnan nationality history and culture has been done by members of minority nationalities, and the trend seems to only increase as time goes on. Numerous works have been published and considerable progress has been made in understanding the subject. Below is a list of books that may be useful to the students to get a general background.

Chinese Works:

Fang Guoyu: *Lectures on Yunnan History*, Yunnan TV University, 1984.

Ma Yao: *A Concise History of Yunnan*, Yunnan People's Press, 1991.

You Zhong: *A History of Yunnan Nationalities*, Yunnan University Press,

1994.

Wang Ningsheng: *Yunnan Archeology*, Yunnan People's Press, 1981, 1992 Revised.

Jiang Yingliang & Lin Chaomin: *A History of China's Nationalities*, Nationalities Publishing House(Beijing), 1986.

Wang Jianming: *The History of Ethnology in China (Two Volumes)*, Yunnan Education Press, 1997.

Lin Chaomin; Dian: *A Cultural History of Yunnan*, Inner Mongolia People's Press, 1999.

Gan Xuechun, ed. : *The Best of Yunnan Culture*, Yunnan People's Press, 2000.

Li Donghong: *Azhali: Bai Tantric Buddhism*, Yunnan Nationality Press, 2000.

Foreign Works:

Bo Xiho: *Crossroads Between Guangdong and India*.

Davies, H. R. : *Yunnan: the Link Between India and the Yangtze River*.

Ting, V. K. : *Native Tribes of Yunnan*.

Downer, G. B. : *A Note on the Ethno-Historical Study of Ethnic Groups in South and Southwest China*, 1964.

4. Archaeological discovery and research results play an important role

Archeology developed in China primarily as a means of understanding Song Dynasty because written sources are so abundant after the pre-Yuan Dynasty that archeology is felt to be largely unnecessary. On the other hand,

due to the absence of written resources and the little records in Yunnan province, we rely a lot on archaeological discovery to study the history and culture of Yunnan's nationalities after Song dynasty. That means we'll talk more about archaeologies and the study of artifacts when we explore the history and culture in the whole process.