

*This volume and the conference from which it resulted were supported by the Joint Committee on Chinese Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Research Council.*

# Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China

EDITED BY

STEVAN HARRELL

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
Berkeley Los Angeles London

dertaken on a clan basis. Clans unite to face natural disasters and human misfortunes and intervene to settle disputes and legal cases. Large and small clan meetings and other activities take place often, and *suyy* and *ndeggu* are busy once again with clan and community affairs. This resurgence of clans has provided the conditions for the continuing revival of religious and ritual activities. *Bimo* have begun to be active again in almost all villages. Even Nuosu cadres and intellectuals invite *bimo* to come to the cities to perform rituals. More and more boys and young men from *bimo* clans are studying the priestly vocation. In some villages inhabited by *bimo* clans, all males in these clans are either practicing *bimo* or are learning the trade, and some boys as young as four years old can already recite simple ritual texts. According to 1996 statistics from Meigu County, about sixty-eight hundred men and boys, or 8 percent of the male population of the county, were practicing or training to be *bimo*, and over two hundred types of rituals were being performed (Gaha 1996, 21–22).

The *bimo* are religious professionals who guide the spiritual life of mountain Nuosu villages. In the Nuosu language, *bi* means to recite or chant a scripture or to perform a ritual; *mo* is a person of knowledge or accomplishment. *Bimo* are the bridge between people and spirits. They perform and direct all kinds of rituals, perform ceremonies to spirits and ancestors, exorcise ghosts and evil spirits, and cure illnesses. In the course of the historical development of Nuosu religion, the ranks of the *bimo* have developed their own system of reproducing themselves and of recruiting and training new members through a combination of inheritance and education.

#### *BIMO* AND THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY

As religious professionals, *bimo* perform and direct all kinds of rituals to propitiate gods and ancestors, exorcise ghosts, call spirits, appease spirits, and cure illnesses. In traditional Nuosu belief, the human life course, wealth and poverty, peace and conflict are all the result of the influence of gods, ghosts, ancestors, and spirits. *Bimo* are the mediators between human beings and these supernaturals, representing their clients in their ceremonies and prayers to the supernaturals and even controlling people's access to health and wealth through supernatural intervention. As a Nuosu proverb says, "Where the crane flies over, the sky will be clear; where the *bimo* arrives, people will be fortunate."

As village intellectuals, *bimo* were formerly the only literate group in Nuosu areas; even today, they are the only ones who can read and understand traditional scriptures and old documents, compile historical scriptures, and write new texts relating to philosophy, literature, history, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, arts and crafts, rituals, religion, and ethics. There is a proverb that says, "The knowledge of a *bimo* is limitless." The *bimo* are the

## CHAPTER 8

### On the Nature and Transmission of *Bimo* Knowledge in Liangshan

*Bamo Ayi*

In the mountain fastness of Liangshan, the traditional clan society, which had no centralized government, adopted a slaveholding system that persisted until 1956; the efforts of successive dynasties to control the area ended in failure. Because of the geographic barriers and the special characteristics of the slave system, foreign scholars referred to Liangshan as an independent area and to the Nuosu people as the "Independent Lolo."

In 1956, Liangshan began to undergo the Democratic Reforms and the slave system was abolished. Since then, there have been great changes in politics, economy, and culture, particularly during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when traditional Nuosu culture and religion became targets of campaigns to "smash the Four Olds" and "root out superstition." Clan leaders (*suyy*), respected mediators (*ndeggu*), and priests (*bimo*) were scorned, and all were subjected to socialist reeducation. Clan meetings and other clan activities were forbidden, religious texts were confiscated and burned, and all kinds of ritual activity were prohibited. Nevertheless, in remote mountain villages in the core area where Nuosu are concentrated, Nuosu people preserved many aspects of their original way of life, and traditional religious beliefs and rituals continued in secret at that time.

Since the early 1980s, when minority policy turned away from promoting assimilation of Han ways, Nuosu people from the countryside and the cities have been spontaneously working toward the revitalization of traditional Nuosu culture. In the villages, the movement for cultural revitalization is characterized by the resurgence of the clans and the revival of traditional religious activities. With the redistribution of the land to households in the early 1980s and the administrative reforms of the 1990s, government power in the villages has been severely weakened. Agricultural cooperation is now un-

strength of traditional knowledge and the most important carriers of traditional culture.

*Suyy*, *ndeggu*, and *bimo* are like the three stones that hold up the cooking pot over the fire pit in a Nuosu household: they are the triple pillars of Nuosu traditional society. *Suyy* are secular political leaders; *ndeggu* are like judges, specialists in mediation and dispute resolution between individuals and between clans (Ma Erzi 1992). But *bimo* are both leaders and mediators. As spiritual leaders, *bimo* deal with people's faith and guide the spiritual life of mountain Nuosu villages. As religious mediators, they are the bridge between people and supernaturals. Because of their complex role in Nuosu society, *bimo* became a distinct professional stratum very early in history. Their professional activity was not subject to control by secular authorities, but they sometimes joined forces with secular authorities, using the power of gods and ancestors to help solve or deal with otherwise insoluble questions; they thus became an important bulwark of the Nuosu clan system. For example, if a clan wants to divide into two because it is too large, or so that distant clan mates may marry, it is necessary to have a *bimo* perform the ceremony called *nimu ajie*; if two clans who have divided want to combine again after their strength has been reduced by natural disasters or wars, a *bimo* must perform the ceremony called *nimu ate*. When two clans form an alliance, a *bimo* performs the ceremony called *lendu* (bashing an ox) to consecrate the alliance and emphasize its permanence; when someone who had committed a serious violation of customary law is expelled from the clan, a *bimo* will perform the ceremony of *loyyey* (expulsion from one's clan), which calls on the ancestors to witness the expulsion. And when a case is so difficult that a *ndeggu* cannot solve it, a *bimo* may be called upon for an oracular solution.

Because of the services they offer to the population, *bimo* have a distinct and honored place in society. In the past, there was a custom described as *nyy la bi a de*, or "even when a *tusi* arrives, a *bimo* does not have to get up," and even today when a *bimo* arrives the best seat is given up for him. In the course of Nuosu history, the ranks of the *bimo* have developed their own system of reproducing themselves and of recruiting and training new members through a combination of inheritance and education.

#### SUCCESSION TO BIMO STATUS

The status and social role of *bimo*, particularly in relation to religious activities, are inherited. It is a natural law that senior *bimo* will become old and eventually die. To whom will the *bimo* pass on their status and social roles? Who may qualify for the *bimo* profession to receive training and to carry on the tradition? Let us look at the principles and customary rules for the succession of the *bimo*.

#### Succession by Males Only

The *bimo* social stratum is a male social group, one whose inheritance is passed on to males only. Females have neither the right nor the opportunity to receive *bimo* education or engage in *bimo* professional activities. The notion of "polluted females" is internalized in religious beliefs of the Nuosu people, so females are prohibited from becoming priests, touching religious instruments and texts, or participating in certain religious ceremonies. Thus, the *bimo*, as sacred interlocutor between humans and supernatural beings, naturally exclude the "polluted" females. The Yi classic *The Origin of Ghosts* links the origin of ghosts to a beautiful girl. And it is said that there was only one female *bimo* in Yi history—Lazzi Shysi, a daughter of the eminent *bimo* Ashy Lazzi.

Even though Lazzi Shysi learned the highest-level magic from her father, understood the most powerful and complicated classics, had unusual talent—a horse she painted could fly; a bird she painted could sing; a dragon she painted could dance—and was able to suppress demons, banish ghosts, and rescue people from dangerous accidents, she still had to dress in male clothing when she performed as a *bimo*, so that no one knew she was female. This example shows the principle that the inheritance of the *bimo* excludes females.

#### Two Ways of Transmitting Bimo Status

*The Primary Method: Inherited Status.* Some Nuosu clans—for example, the Jjike, the Shama, the Ddisse, and the Jynyi—have produced *bimo* for many generations, as indicated in their genealogical documents, which demonstrate that their clans have practiced the rituals of *bimo* for dozens or even more than one hundred generations. In my own fieldwork, I discovered one clan in Meigu that claims to have practiced *bimo* arts for about 136 generations. According to customary rules of *bimo* succession, *bimo* status is inherited within one clan, particularly among nuclear family members, usually patrilineally from father to son. This kind of inheritance is conservative and thus has some limitations.

This type of succession within a clan that has traditionally produced *bimo* is statistically much more common than extraclan inheritance, for several reasons. First, hereditary *bimo* retain privileges when they offer services in the religion of ancestral worship. Nuosu people believe that ancestors are the source of disaster, fortune, prosperity, and disease, and thus they often require that ceremonies be performed to propitiate the ancestors. They cannot do these ceremonies themselves; the *bimo* must perform them. Usually a hereditary *bimo* will be asked to accept the honored and privileged position of performing such a ceremony. In addition, a hereditary *bimo* also dominates in other major ceremonies, such as calling souls, pronouncing curses, and ghost-cursing. In contrast, any nonhereditary *bimo*, no matter how

intelligent he is, can perform only small-scale ceremonies such as lifting curses, dealing with pollution, housecleaning, and ghost exorcism.

Second, because hereditary *bimo* are protected by their *bimo* ancestors and possess inherited ceremonial books and instruments, the Nuosu people believe them to have powerful abilities, and they trust them. They, as a dominant force in the *bimo* social group, are also very influential in Nuosu society generally.

Finally, hereditary *bimo* receive the highest compensation for performing a ceremony. They are the most authoritative, and their position in the *bimo* social class is the highest.

In order to preserve the status and the profession of the *bimo* within one's clan, a hereditary *bimo* is responsible for training younger generations; every male who is born in the nuclear family of a hereditary *bimo* is also responsible for learning *bimo* knowledge and associated skills and engaging in the *bimo* profession. Normally, if there is a *bimo* in the father's generation, there should be at least one *bimo* among the sons' generation. Thus the profession and status of *bimo* are continuously transmitted according to this customary rule.

*A Secondary Method: Apprenticeship.* Nonhereditary *bimo* are apprentices, called *zybi* in Nuosu, of hereditary *bimo*. *Zybi* means "mixed" and "impure"; *bi* means *bimo*. *Zybi* indicates that apprentice *bimo* are not pure and not authentic. There are two ways of becoming an apprentice *bimo*: the path may be determined by oneself or determined by divination. When a son is born, if his mother's rotating horoscopic compass currently points toward the east or the west, this indicates that he meets the *bimo* spirit and the *bimo*'s protective eagle spirit, and thus is qualified to become a *bimo*. In fact, he should become a *bimo*, otherwise the *bimo* spirit and *bimo* eagle might become angry with him and cause diseases and disasters. If he becomes a *bimo*, the spirit will protect him and ensure his success in learning and performing ceremonies. Some parents voluntarily send their son to a *bimo* family to study; others do so after they get sick or after a disaster occurs: these parents, by means of divining, realize that the *bimo* spirit and the *bimo* eagle have caused the disease or disaster. This seems to imply that every Nuosu male has the opportunity to become a *bimo*, but because nonhereditary *bimo* or apprentice *bimo* can perform only small-scale ceremonies and have limited income, and because these *bimo* are not protected by their ancestors and do not inherit ceremonial books and instruments, they are not completely trusted and authoritative; thus they can perform only certain ceremonies. Apprentice *bimo* do not play an important role in transmitting the *bimo* status.

What accounts for this pattern of succession by males but not by females, and of limited powers for those who learn their skills by apprenticeship? It seems to me that the system of *bimo* inheritance is determined by blood re-

lationships and their associated perceptions. As we know, in Nuosu society clan organizations and perceptions about blood relationships play an extremely important role. In such a kin-based society, agnatic relationships and their traditions have long existed and have come to pervade every aspect of Nuosu thought and behavior. These perceptions about blood relationships and their connection to Nuosu cultural identity also determine the system of *bimo* succession. For example, on the surface the rule of male inheritance indicates professional prohibition because of the perception of "polluted females." It is in fact closely related to the patrilineal system of Nuosu society. A Nuosu proverb tells us: "An egg is both meat and not meat; a daughter is both family member and not." A Nuosu girl normally gets married when she is seventeen or so. She usually does not immediately move to her husband's household, but she does become a member of her husband's family. Even if a girl is not married when she is seventeen, she will attend a fake "wedding ceremony," in which she is symbolically married to a stone or piece of wood. From that point on, she is no longer regarded as a member of her father's family—even though she still lives with them—and is not allowed to attend religious ceremonies of her father's family.

From the Nuosu point of view, the *bimo* profession is sacred: the profession and its social status can be inherited only within one clan so that the clan will maintain its respected status as a hereditary *bimo* clan. The respected *bimo* status cannot be transferred to one's affines. This is the essential reason for the rule of male inheritance.

The *bimo* social status group is partially open to those males whose do not come from hereditary *bimo* clans, but this is only possible under the condition that it does not cause any damage to the principle of agnatic relationships. There is a clear line between hereditary and apprentice *bimo*. An apprentice *bimo* cannot be in charge of ceremonies such as ancestral worship, human-cursing, ghost-cursing, or soul-directing. Furthermore, an apprentice *bimo* cannot have his own *bimo* genealogy and transform his family into a hereditary *bimo* family. In Liangshan, we can often hear hereditary *bimo* families distinguish themselves by saying, "We have proof of being a *bimo* family" or "Our ancestors were *bimo*." An apprentice *bimo* does not pass his status on to his sons. In my own fieldwork, I found that the greatest number of *bimo* generations in an apprentice *bimo* family occurs in the Hiele family in Chengmending Village, Yanyuan County, which has four *bimo* generations. Even this family, however, still lives in the shadow of inauthenticity and cannot perform ancestral worship ceremonies, and each generation must acquire priestly knowledge anew from a hereditary *bimo*. Therefore, the *bimo*—as a self-perpetuating professional stratum—are limited to blood relationships.

In sum, not only does the system of *bimo* form its own inheritance mechanism, but it also clearly shows its conservativeness and exclusiveness. This

closed inheritance system is produced on the basis of *bimo* ancestor worship, the concept of blood relationships in a patrilineal society, and the practice of the *bimo* traditional culture. The inheritance network to a large extent conditions the *bimo* social stratum and regulates the constitution and development of this group.

#### THE CONTENT OF *BIMO* EDUCATION

If the system discussed above regulates succession to the *bimo*'s social position and roles, the *bimo* education constitutes the process of transmission. *Bimo* education aims to produce qualified *bimo* to take charge of religious ceremonies in order to avoid disasters and bring fortune. As we know, Yi religion is a complicated system that focuses on ancestral worship and incorporates nature worship, spirit worship, and belief in ghosts. Because of the numerous sacrifice and magic rituals, the complicated nature of ceremonial procedure, and the difficulty of ritual texts in the Nuosu language, in order to become a qualified priest one must have specialized knowledge and the ability to communicate with supernaturals. Let us examine the *bimo* education.

*Bimo* education focuses on the specialized knowledge and skills of *bimo* practice. As a professional priest, a *bimo* is in charge of practicing sacrifice rituals, medicine, and divination. He conducts ceremonies such as peacemaking with ancestors, escorting ancestors, preventing disasters, expelling ghosts, treating disease, asking for fertility, guiding souls, praying for fortune, divining, making alliances, passing judgment in the name of the gods, and so on. As an intellectual, a *bimo* is the repository and disseminator of ancient Yi history and cultural heritage. In order to ensure that a *bimo* is able to perform his duties, *bimo* education covers the following subjects.

##### *Knowledge about Ancestors, Gods, Spirits, and Ghosts*

Nuosu generally believe that everything has a soul, or *yyhla*, and commonly believe in *apu abo* (ancestors), *mulumuse* (nature gods), *jjyukuhxo* (spirits), and *nyicy hamo* (ghosts). Belief in the ancestors is the most important. Nuosu believe that anyone, male or female, who has sons becomes an ancestor after death, returning to the world of the ancestors, where they should receive offerings of their patrilineal descendants in perpetuity and where they take on the responsibility of protecting their descendants. People who are childless or have only daughters become only ghosts after death, cold and hungry without a permanent abode. Gods are primarily the spirits of the natural world, such as spirits of heaven, earth, mountains, bodies of water, rain, cliffs, and so on. Different gods influence people's livelihood in different ways. Spirits belong to particular individuals or households, and they influence them in

different ways. For example, a *qosi* is a protective spirit; if a man's *qosi* is very strong, he is bound to be successful in war or business. One's *kepo* is a spirit of luck or fortune; if a *kepo* stays with you, you will be lucky; if the *kepo* deserts you, you will have bad fortune. Ghosts often attack people, bringing them disaster, sickness, or death. There are many kinds of ghosts; for example, twenty different kinds of ghosts cause twenty different kinds of rheumatism.

Because *bimo* mediate between humans and supernaturals, they must know great amounts about these supernatural beings, and they often portray them as having diverse images. The hero-ancestor Zhigeanu, who assists a *bimo* in treating insanity and in cursing humans or ghosts, is portrayed as wearing an iron helmet, carrying the sun and the moon on his shoulders, holding an iron bag in one hand and an iron fork in the other. The ghost Tusha, who haunts domestic animals until their death, is portrayed as having a long jaw, carrying a cutting board on the top of his head, wearing sheepskin, holding a small ax in his hand, and carrying an old bamboo basket on his back. In addition, spirits and ghosts have diverse personalities. The spirit Gefi, who is in charge of fertility, enjoys playing in forests and on lakes, which sometimes permits difficult birth and early death. Thus the ritual for directing Gefi symbolizes calling the spirit back from forests and lakes. The rheumatism ghost loves to dress up. In the ceremony of deporting the ghost, the ghost will not leave until he receives colorful clothes, a comb, hair pins, and a pretty triangle wallet. A *bimo* student should understand the images of supernatural beings, their personalities, and the disasters, diseases, and benefits caused by them in production, life, and health. As a result, a *bimo* can make his religious service smoother and control gods and ghosts in rituals when he prevents disasters and brings fortune.

##### *Knowledge about Ceremonial Texts*

The Nuosu have their own variety of Yi writing and have produced numerous classic documents. The *bimo* control Nuosu-language documents and ceremonial books. Although most books are religious, some of them deal with philosophy, literature, ethics, and morality. These books tell a *bimo* how to perform a ritual. "Narrating the origin" is an important part of a ritual, based on *The Book of Origins (Hneuo teyy)* (see Wu Jingzhong, chapter 2 in this volume). This book discusses many issues, from the formation of the universe to the creation of the sky and the earth, from the origins of objects to the origin of humans, from the development of a society to the formation of human activities, from natural phenomena to human ones, and so on.

As a key to the *bimo*'s education, his ability to understand ceremonial books is related to his cognitive ability and knowledge structure. The content of a *bimo*'s recitation in a ceremony determines how the ceremony is arranged and how it progresses. That is, a ceremony is performed during the process

of recitation by a *bimo* because reciting dominates the process of the ceremony. From the *bimo's* point of view, ceremonial books are religious instruments and have special magic power. There are rules and taboos regarding copying, binding, cataloging, circulating, and collecting ceremonial books. A qualified *bimo* should master the Nuosu script, be extremely familiar with the contents of ceremonial books, and understand how to use each book. Acquiring these skills is a major aspect of *bimo* education.

#### *Knowledge about Genealogies, History, and Geography*

A *bimo* must be familiar with genealogies of all families, lineages, and clans, the migration direction of their ancestors, and all associated important events, as well as the natural environment and topography of the Liangshan region. During a large-scale ancestral worship ceremony, a *bimo* usually has to narrate the origin of the group and its history. All *bimo* conducting ancestral worship rituals in different Yi regions have to narrate the history of their remote, original ancestor, Apudumu, and the history of the tribes of the "six ancestors." In addition, historical documents such as *The Division of the Six Ancestral Tribes* and *The Enlightenment of the Six Ancestors' Souls* are important in *bimo* education. During a death ritual, a *bimo* has to narrate the text *Soul-Directing* in order to lead the soul of the dead to pass all places the family (and their ancestors) lived and eventually to arrive at the original ancestral home. In order to lead the soul to pass places easily, a *bimo* must describe the natural environment and typology of every site the family has lived in; he also has to tell the soul of the dead about important historical events associated with each place and its name, and about achievements of ancestors. In addition, a *bimo*, in every ritual, has to narrate the text *Inviting Gods* to assist his performance. Most spirits in this text are mountain spirits, each of whom is associated with one particular natural environment.

#### *Knowledge about the Calendar and Astrology*

The *bimo* excel at controlling supernaturals in a given time and space. The Yi calendar and the Yi people's knowledge about the universe are very closely related to the cycles and rules of religious rituals. The Yi calendar is clearly shaped by the ritual calendar. When Yi people observe the universe, they in fact predict what happens in the world of humans. Knowledge about the calendar and astrology, as an important aspect of the *bimo* education, provides a powerful means for a *bimo* to communicate with supernatural beings in ceremonies.

#### *Knowledge about Medicine and Disease*

*Bimo* medical practice is characterized by a combination of treatment and divination. Nuosu believe that diseases are caused by disease ghosts. Diseases are

named after ghosts: for example, *nusi* (leprosy ghost), *nuna* (pulmonary tuberculosis ghost), *dimu* (sore ghost), and so on. Medical treatment is also part of rituals such as cursing disease ghosts and expelling disease ghosts. *Bimo* medical treatments include oral medication, acupuncture, and moxibustion. The most important medical books are *The Book of Pharmaceutical Identification*, *The Book of Making Pharmaceuticals, Treatment and Detoxification*, and *The Book of Medical Calculations*. In training his students, a *bimo* teaches about medicine and treatment, such as how to diagnose symptoms, how to gather plant and animal medicines, and how to make medicines and give a correct prescription.

#### *Knowledge about Arts and Crafts*

One important aspect of *bimo* education is arts and crafts: drawing, straw weaving, sculpture, carving, and paper cutting. Yi books usually include drawn images of ghosts and illustrate the skills of gods. In some books, drawings illustrate text, while in others text explains drawings. Straw weaving and sculpture are normally used to portray the ghost to be displayed in rituals such as escorting ghosts and cursing ghosts. Paper cutting is a basic skill used to make images of objects to be sacrificed symbolically, such as the sun, moon, stars, animals, plants, objects used in everyday life, and domestic animals. When a *bimo* makes religious instruments and ancestral totem figures, he also needs to be a skilled wood carver.

#### *Knowledge about Ritual Procedures*

The ultimate goal of *bimo* education is to train a student to take independent charge of a ritual. One characteristic of Yi religious ceremonies is the combination of sacrificing and controlling, or the combination of sacrificing and black magic. The procedure of a ritual is formalized; all customary rules must be strictly followed. Choosing the time for a ritual, for example, one must pay attention to the year, month, date, and specific time. A sacrificed animal must be chosen according to its sex, hair color, age, and quality. An animal used in a sacrificing ceremony may be living, slaughtered and cooked, slaughtered but not cooked, and with or without blood or horns. A qualified *bimo* should know all the rules and procedures of rituals.

#### *Knowledge about Folklore*

In order to perform rituals, a *bimo* should know Yi folklore and oral traditions included in rituals, such as mythology, traditional songs, epics, folktales, and proverbs. Many *bimo* in Yunnan and Guizhou, as well as in Nuosu county, are famous for their singing; they are very knowledgeable about Yi folklore and oral traditions. They absorb folklore and oral traditions in order to enrich the content of their narration in rituals.

In sum, the content of *bimo* education derives fundamentally from Nuosu rituals and includes knowledge about supernatural beings, Nuosu language and texts, genealogies, history, geography, the Yi calendar, astrology, arts and crafts, ritual procedures, and folklore. Such systematic knowledge is required for a *bimo* in conducting rituals.

#### PEDAGOGY

There is no formal institution for *bimo* education in traditional Nuosu society. A junior *bimo* is trained by a senior *bimop*.<sup>1</sup> A senior *bimop* is an experienced and knowledgeable elder who knows how to conduct a ritual, while a junior *bimo*, or *bisse*, is an inexperienced student. A *bisse* can be called *bimo* only when, after a few years, he completes his study and can independently run ceremonies. A *bimop* may teach either one or many *bisse* at one time. Whether or not one comes from a hereditary *bimo* family, one has to study under a *bimop*. The relationship between a student and a teacher or between learning and teaching has the following characteristics.

First, there are no fixed time and place for teaching and learning. The most important duty for a *bimo* is to conduct rituals. Other duties cannot interrupt religious activities. Rituals are numerous in Nuosu regions, and a *bimop*, when summoned by a host family, takes his *bisse* with him, from one family to another and from one village to another, to conduct rituals. Thus the time and place are not fixed for a *bimop* to teach his *bisse*.

Second, teaching is mixed with performing rituals. A *bimo* often has to teach his student(s) at intervals between rituals, but more important, he teaches his student(s) during ceremonies, when a student may become his teacher's assistant. As a student, a *bisse* should ask questions of his teacher, observe the procedure of a ritual, understand the meanings of a ritual, and practice it sometimes. Not only does each ritual become an opportunity for a *bimop* to teach, but it also becomes a process of learning for a *bisse*.

Third, the relationship between teacher and student is also shaped by other factors. In the Yi region, some students take the initiative to study from a particular teacher; some learn from their fathers, grandfathers, or uncles. A *bimop* teaches without being paid. A teacher takes care of his student, while students respect their teachers. The quality of a student's work affects the future of both the student and the teacher. Therefore, both teachers and students work very hard in teaching and learning.

In such a master-apprentice relationship, a *bimo* normally teaches on an individual basis; he does not have formalized pedagogy. He teaches accord-

ing to the level of his student and his schedule for conducting rituals. Thus, a teacher decides what, how, and when he teaches his student. Even if a *bimop* teaches many students at one time, he always concerns himself with individual needs. In fact, focusing on individual needs makes his teaching more effective.

*Bimo* texts are also important in the *bimo* education. Learning them starts with the Nuosu script. Each Yi character represents both one word and one sound. There are many variations for a word in traditional Nuosu writing, making it difficult to learn.<sup>2</sup> An experienced *bimop* trains his students to show interest in discovering the relationships between a written word and a sound, between a written form and the meaning, and between one written word and another. After learning some basic writing, a student begins to study *bimo* texts. The study of a *bimo* text includes reading, reciting, and copying. There is no punctuation, and there are many specialized and archaic religious words and phrases in Nuosu texts. Literary words used in texts are different from words used in ordinary speech. These make reading a *bimo* text quite difficult. Therefore, when a teacher performs a ritual he usually reads a text first, then his students follow. Recitation is very important because it makes communication between a *bimo* and supernatural beings smoother and easier. If a *bimo* cannot recite everything from a text, the ritual is ineffective. After a student can read and recite a text, he copies the text so that he can learn the format and writing style. At the same time, he also has to learn how to make a brush and ink and how to make a scroll-style notebook. Because what he reads, recites, and copies is what he will use in the future when he conducts rituals by himself, a student usually is very serious about his study. One major problem for *bimo* education today is that some teachers require their students only to recite texts and do not pay enough attention to the explanation of their contents and sociohistorical contexts. This has caused some students to learn to read and recite texts without understanding their meanings clearly.

In addition to the religious scriptures are some textbooks written especially for students, which have emerged in the course of *bimo* education. These include the *Suosi tey*, a compilation of the names, natures, and characteristics of various ghosts and spirits; the *Bijie tey*, which narrates the order of various rituals as well as the ritual instruments texts and charts use, and the *Mguwangyima*, which is a collection devoted especially to charts of the ritual space of various ceremonies. These textbooks are designed especially for students and are concerned with the effectiveness of pedagogy. Taking language as an example, religious texts are usually written in poetic language,

2. This refers to the traditional script used by the *bimo*. The new, standardized script is based on a one-to-one correspondence between the sound of a syllable and the sign used to write it. See David Bradley, chapter 12 in this volume.

1. The term *bimop* (with the last syllable pronounced *mop*, in the low tone) refers to a master *bimo* who can teach students, as opposed to *bimo* or *bimox* (middle or middle-high tone), which is a generic term.

but textbooks are written in oral language, which makes it easier for students to understand the contents. Because these newly compiled textbooks are carefully edited and more scientifically organized and precise, *bimop* and their students have taken them as the basis for knowledge. In order to ensure that these books may be preserved for learning and instruction, and to prevent damage to them, many have been written on white cloth and are therefore called "cloth books."

Some *bimo* teachers are good at using proverbs and pithy formulas in teaching. In their long history of ritual practice, the *bimo* have accumulated many proverbs and formulas of *bimo* knowledge and used them in education. For example, in selecting animals for sacrifice, we have "For exorcising ghosts, a black hen; for calling souls, a brown hen"; "For cursing ghosts, a black billy goat; for presenting offerings, a white ram"; and so forth. In these sayings, "exorcising ghosts," "calling souls," "cursing ghosts," and "presenting offerings" are all different steps in the ritual of sending off the ancestral soul; the sacrificial animals used in each stage are different species and different colors. In another example, in planting spirit branches, there are sayings such as "A spirit branch has to be peeled at the base; if you don't peel it, it can't become a spirit branch"; "In *nige ndi* [the name of a ritual], seven *bimo* [plant seven spirit branches to represent seven *bimo* ancestor spirits]; in *chy ke*, twelve *bimo* [plant twelve spirit branches] above the Heavenly God White Father, below the Earthly God Black Mother, in the middle of all the Star Ancestors," and so forth. There are also formulas for choosing auspicious days for rituals: "Sending off the ancestor in the first half of the month; wedding in the second half of the month"; "Send off the ancestor on a dragon day; conduct a wedding on a rat day"; "On a horse day, don't build a house; if you build it, don't move in"; "On a sheep day, don't perform a cure; if you perform the cure, the sickness won't be over with"; and so forth. Proverbs are also a way of educating students in the principles of *bimo* education, such as "No matter how poor the person who invites you to perform a ritual, you must still go happily"; or "The rule of a *tusi* is the same for relatives or non-relatives"; "You can kill a *bimo* who fails an appointment to perform a ritual"; and "A *bimo* should listen in back of him for three days [after a ritual]; is there really peace and content?" Using proverbs and aphorisms helps students more effectively master *bimo* knowledge and ethics.

Demonstration and practice are often a part of *bimo* education. A teacher instructs how to carve a ghost statue, cut paper, make mud figures, draw singing different tunes. During his demonstration, a teacher explains procedures. A student practices: under guidance he copies and teacher did. When a student is skillful, he will be allowed to participate in a real ceremony. Demonstration and practice are applied to what they study.

In sum, the *bimo* educational style and its pedagogy are based on the master-apprentice relation. *Bimo* education is practice-oriented. In teaching, not only does the method focus on the guidance of the teacher, but it also pays attention to the participation of the student. This method deals with both knowledge and its application. This practice-oriented, master-apprentice education is an effective way of training younger generations to succeed elder *bimo* and is essential to reach the goal of *bimo* education.

In the course of historical development, the persistence of the *bimo*—as both practitioners of a religious profession and as intellectuals among the Yi—is possible only through inheritance of the *bimo*'s religious status and social roles, and through teaching successive generations the *bimo* knowledge and skills. It is in their educational and religious activities that the *bimo* preserve and disseminate their indigenous religion and, at the same time, enrich the traditional Yi culture.