

Bimoist Rituals of Epidemic Prevention and Ethnic Health Communication in Liangshan of Southwest China

Qiangchun Wang

School of Fusion Media, Sichuan University of Media and Communications, Chengdu, China

Email address:

emsn@qq.com

To cite this article:

Qiangchun Wang. Bimoist Rituals of Epidemic Prevention and Ethnic Health Communication in Liangshan of Southwest China. *Social Sciences*. Vol. 11, No. 5, 2022, pp. 291-297. doi: 10.11648/j.ss.20221105.15

Received: August 22, 2022; **Accepted:** September 2, 2022; **Published:** September 8, 2022

Abstract: In the *bimoist* culture, the origin of the epidemic of gods, ghosts, and nature construct a triple epidemic prevention system supported by *bimo* (or *bimoist* priest), the public, and the community in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Southwest China. From the perspective of the *bimoist* culture of Yi ethnic minority people (also known as *Nuosu* or *Nosu*), this paper investigates the significance of symbolic interactive ritual chain in ethnic memory, ethnic identity, and ethnic epidemic prevention for understanding health transmission during the COVID-19 pandemic. The flexibility of the primitive *bimoist* culture makes it a positive force for epidemic prevention in local society. Studying the *bimoist* rituals of epidemic prevention in Liangshan of Southwest China in the light of symbolic interaction benefits health communication in the post-era of the coronavirus pandemic. The *bimoist* culture is a self-contained system. The *bimo* plays a crucial role in connecting the gods, ghosts, nature, and animal kingdoms in *Nuosu* rituals in the *bimoist* culture. Ethnic epidemic prevention and health communication in the Yi communities play an essential role in collective cognition, memory, and identity. In formulating and implementing the policy, it is crucial to value the *bimoist* culture while providing modern medical treatment and epidemic prevention conditions for the Yi community.

Keywords: *Bimoist* Culture, Animism, Ethnic Epidemic Prevention, Ritual Communication, Health Communication

1. Introduction

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture is the country's largest inhabited area of Yi nationality. Up to the end of 2021, the prefecture's population is 4.874 million, and the population of Yi nationality is 2.9365 million, accounting for 54.56% of the total population of Liangshan. Most of them reside mainly in the most isolated and economically deprived regions. In recent years, the construction of medical infrastructure and primary medical care has increased, and the medical security level and coverage rate have significantly improved [1]. Despite this, the Liangshan Yi *bimoist* culture (*bimoism*) and its disease treatment methods still hugely influence the Yi society.

The *bimo* (or *bimoist* priest) is a transliteration of Yi's native language, “*bi*” means “scripture recital,” and “*mo*” refers to “knowledgeable elders,” an approximate Shamanistic priest who specializes in praising, praying, and offering sacrifices. The *bimo* has vast magical power and

extensive knowledge; his primary roles are priests, medicine, divination, and other activities. The *bimo* is in charge of both divine power and culture. The Yi culture survives depending on the preservation and diffusion of the oral and written lection mastered by the *bimo* generation after generation.

The *bimoist* rituals constitute the backbone of the social life of the Yi ethnic people. The *bimo* is the depositary of the sacred books and is responsible for ceremonies, exorcisms, and medical cures. The *bimo* draw their authority from their knowledge of the written rituals, and these written rituals possess efficacy. Conjuring rites call for help from other spirits and powers to restore a person's soul to its original position and integrity. The soul is seen as a kind of flesh to protect against the danger of being unduly eaten. The soul can be gobbled by ghosts or illness.

“Ritual communication (RC) is an integral part contributes

to shaping the experience and transformative potential of an event, within and beyond the event itself.” [2]

A research contributes new analytical insights of Yi ritual specialists and examines how the Yi communities in Liangshan conceive and organize their world through a vehicle of the *bimoist* rituals:

The Liangshan Yi adhere to a long-held religious tradition with the conceptualization of various spirit-powers, ancient ancestors, body-souls, and animate beings and things as constitutive occult agents in the formation and transformation of the socio-cosmos, and with the legitimacy of various magical ritual practices featuring traditional ritual specialists, the *bimo* (“priest-shaman”) and the *sunyi* (“shaman”), whose powers of directly engaging in and controlling the spirit world have established themselves a central place in local assertions of knowledge, order, and representation. [3]

The Yi ethnic people have formed the concept of the origin of the epidemic of gods, ghosts, nature, and animals and built a triple epidemic prevention system that consists of the *bimo*, the people, and the community. From the perspective of the *bimoist* culture, this paper investigates the significance of the symbolic interactive ritual chain in ethnic memory, ethnic identity, and ethnic epidemic prevention for health communication. Yi people believe that the *bimoist* ritual protects the health and safety of the family. The *bimoist* culture of the Yi minority in Liangshan is a self-contained system that plays a vital role in ethnic epidemic prevention and health dissemination.

The ancient culture of the Yi ethnic group concentrates on *bimoism*. The *bimo* plays a crucial role in connecting the gods, ghosts, nature, and animal kingdoms in *Nuosu* rituals in the *bimoist* culture. Understanding the *bimoist* culture is helpful for epidemic prevention and health communication in ethnic communities. The culture plays a nonnegligible role in collective cognition, memory, and identity. It is crucial to treasure the *bimoist* culture while providing modern medical treatment or epidemic prevention conditions for the Yi community.

2. The *Bimoist* Culture: A Mysterious Primitive Medicine in Liangshan

According to the animistic ontology, the core of the *bimoist* culture is the belief, worship, and manipulation of these characters with souls or vitality, establishing and consolidating the ongoing relationship between these spiritual beings and living communities. The *bimo* plays a crucial role in connecting the gods, ghosts, nature, and animal kingdoms in rituals.

The disease classification pedigree of Yi nationality in Liangshan relates to infectious diseases based on long-term practice and recognition. The Yi nationality collectively refers to all diseases with “*na*” in Yi’s native language, and “*na*” can also refer to a particular type of disease or the classification of a specific type of infectious disease. The Yi people often classify foreign diseases in the “*na*” system.

In the disease classification system of the Yi people, the god *Entiguzi*, the ghost ancestor *Zizi Nicha*, and wind, cloud, thunder, lightning, monkey, snake, and frogfish can all be the source of the plague. The Yi people in Liangshan classify severe lung diseases as tuberculosis and whooping cough. Accordingly, COVID-19 belongs to a severe lung disease similar to tuberculosis and whooping cough. In the face of the coronavirus epidemic, the national prevention and control policy has been implemented orderly in the Yi ethnic region.

Plagues descend from the ghost ancestor world and produce twelve types of diseases, including gray, red, flower-colored, and black diseases. Diseases first infest livestock and then turn into wild evil spirits entangling people. Evil diseases infect the sun, moon, and stars; mountains, clouds, wind, and rain are infected with diseases; diseased winds pollute rivers; sewage infects humans. It shows that human disease is transmitted indirectly in nature, and the way to relieve disease is to perform ritual treatment, purify pollution, expel evil spirits, and isolate them from human beings [4].

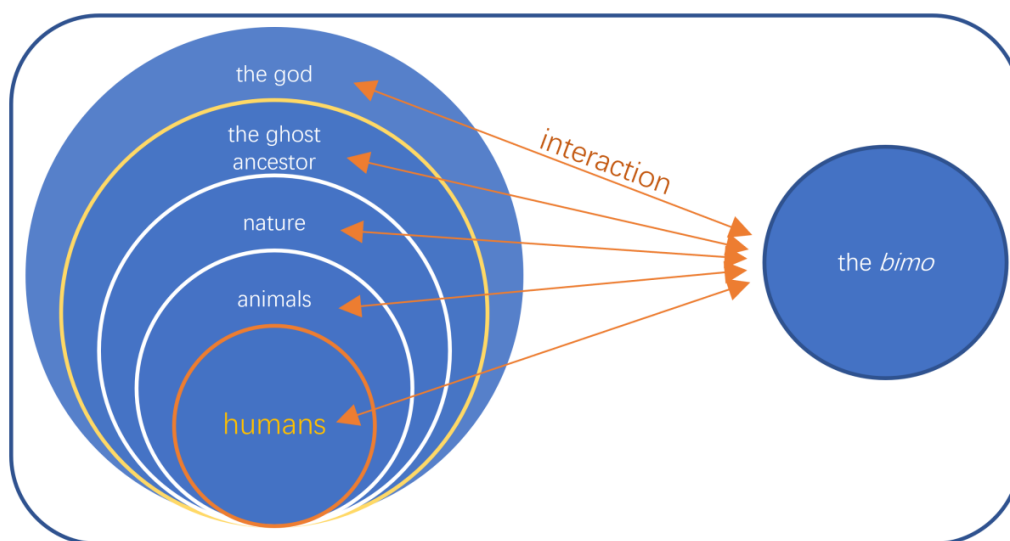


Figure 1. The *bimo* interacts with four primary sources of viruses and plague to protect humans.

In *bimoist* culture, there are four primary sources of viruses and plagues, including the gods, the ghost ancestor, nature, and animals (See Figure 1). The *bimo* plays a role in reconciling the relationship with the god in the primitive ritual, praying for blessings, and with the help of god and ancestors' souls, fighting disease, eliminating viruses, and protecting the health of patients and their families [5]. Thus, the *bimo* serves as the medium between the human and the spiritual realm to mediate blessings and prevent the cursing of the family. *Bimo* is a religious professional who mediates the relationship between man and gods and ghosts, man and ancestors by reciting scriptures [6].

2.1. The God Brought the Plague to the Earth

Enti Guzi is the creator god of the Yi people. However, in the people's collective memory, the relationship between man and god is the conflict, which is also the direct cause of the plague sent by gods to the world. The origin legend of the Torch Festival of the Yi nationality reflects the disaster narrative of the gods descending the plague. The core ceremony of the Torch Festival revolves around coordinating the relationship between humans and the gods to eliminate pests and plagues.

2.2. The Ghost Ancestor Is the Source of Diseases

In the Yi people's view, the ghost ancestor *Zizi Niza* is the source of the spread of all diseases in the secular world. The scriptures for cursing the ghost ancestor trace the origins of ghosts and viruses in detail: "Twelve germs all originate from here; all infectious diseases originate from here. It carries infectious germs transmitted by the red goat. Oh, *Zizi Niza*, she has become a ghost of disease; Oh, *Zizi Niza*, it is she that spreads the virus."

2.3. The Plagues Come from Nature

Natural phenomena such as wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning are essential sources of plague spread. The wind is considered the origin of all diseases. The *bimoist* literature "*Leo Teyi*" wrote: "Blowing wind turns into vapor, blowing wind turns into force, blowing wind turns poisonous, and it turns into ten million poisonous gas, and all diseases and evils come from here." Thunder, electricity, and rainbow can also be brought to the plague. If people burn trees struck by lightning or drink water from rivers where rainbows have just appeared, they will suffer from severe skin diseases such as "*Cuna Xina*."

2.4. The Plagues Come from Animals

It is a tradition of the Yi people to recognize diseases in terms of animals, and people often associate certain types of diseases with animals. For example, dysentery comes from a variety of animal sources. The chapter *Expelling Dysentery* in the *bimoist* Sutra *Anti-dysentery* put it like this, "Prevent 99 cases of poultry dysentery and 88 cases of animal dysentery from invading." "Prevent worrying dysentery ghosts, monkey

dysentery, bear dysentery, snake dysentery, frog dysentery...from infection."

The traditional treatment of disease of the Yi people is a combination of herbal medicine and ritual, and it is believed that the various diseases are caused by dirt or ghosts. The Yi medicines are divided into four categories: one is the herbs made from the roots, stems, leaves, and flowers of various plants; the second is medicines made of various minerals; the third is the gallbladder, liver, blood, bones, and meat of animals; the fourth is the medicine for the heart, that is, the sacrifice of pigs, sheep, chickens, etc. to soothe the hearts of the patients in the ritual of offering medicine to cure illness.

Most of these rituals are conducted by the *bimo*. However, certain rituals, especially in case of illness, can be conducted by the *sunyi*, whose status is lower than the *bimo*, for the *sunyi* has no prestigious access to the written rituals with efficacy. When cooperating with the government's request to prevent the epidemic, they also held some plague or disaster prevention rituals with the family as the smallest unit. Almost every village made a simple ritual of *nro mu* by making *tofu pudding* to prevent disease and plague conducted by the *sunyi*.

Many ancient cultural genes of the Yi people are embedded in *bimoism*, such as the healing tradition, the totem of the eagle, heroism, the philosophy of life and death, and solidarity. During the Cultural Revolution from May 1966 to October 1976, *bimoism* was labeled as "*mixin*" (superstition) and banned officially until the 1980s. Today, having a *bimoist* ritual is still called "*zuo/gan mixin*" orally in daily chatting. The *bimo* culture has been recovered as one of the "Intangible Cultural Heritage" in Sichuan Province, attracting many tourists to the mysterious realm.

3. Reset the Cosmic Order: Symbolic Interaction Healing Rituals

The primitive ritual is indeed creative. It is more wonderful than the strange caves and palaces of mythology. "The magic of primitive ritual creates harmonious worlds with ranked and ordered populations playing their appointed parts. So far from being meaningless, it is primitive magic that gives meaning to existence." [7]

Many studies tend to regard ritual as a fixed signifying practice or merely indexical of the tradition of the Yi minority. Therefore, the dynamic nature of ritual performance and practice among the Yi people remains to be analyzed anthropologically.

3.1. The Bimoist Rituals Are Very Traditional in Form

The *bimoist* rituals are very traditional in form, but the relative importance of the various ritual performers has all changed during various periods. The local knowledge of epidemic prevention of the Yi nationality integrates the collective memory of the plague disaster into myths, legends, and folk stories and performs them in rituals. It constantly

inspires, maintains, or reshapes the knowledge and memory of disease prevention and control in the ethnic group, showing unique wisdom and courage to fight the new coronavirus pandemic. The epidemic prevention ritual often evokes a sense of collective tradition in the Yi people.

In Liangshan, the Yi people's household may hold three or more small and medium-sized rituals yearly. When the *bimo* goes out to work, he wears a robe, a dharma bamboo hat, and a dharma fan or bell, making him look taller and more powerful than usual. At the end of the mantra is an artistic genre that combines folk literature and unique music of Yi style. It has an infinite variety of tones, such as simplicity, innocence, fear, and high-pitched, in which the people immerse in mysterious airs.

The ritual reset the socio-universal order through specific symbolic interactions. The *bimo* plays the role of a "spiritual master," awakening and controlling the sacred world of various creatures and things through intertextually connecting his poetic ritual discourses with mythological narratives. The *bimo*'s power of recasting order is manifested in his creation and utilization of various ritual materials and the process of controlling mystical forces. When dealing with almost all forms of symbolic behavior in daily life, the *bimo* reconsidered the ritual symbols such as landscape, forest, house, fire pit, food, tools, livestock, and clothes. The *bimo* coexists with god, ghost ancestors, nature, and animals in harmony in the rituals.

In contrast to modern biomedicine, magical and religious medical knowledge is primitive medicine. Although the performance is not modern biomedicine, it has a set of self-consistent medical beliefs to support its entire system and has high cultural value. Primitive medical practices, beliefs, and worldviews are interconnected with cultural ensembles and provide a research framework for medical anthropology.

3.2. *The Role of Symbols in Primitive Medicine – The Bimoist Ritual*

Do the spiritual and material symbols in the *bimoist* rituals positively relieve or eliminate the patient's pain? Claude Lévi-Strauss believes that human communication and healing rituals contain incredible potential. Symbolic behavior and language in many healing rituals will achieve the intended purpose and promote the relief of physical pain or remove and relieve patients and their relatives of the fear of the disease. Lévi-Strauss once analyzed a song by the Cuna shaman, which was chanted to relieve a problematic delivery in childbirth. Instead of touching the patient's body, the doctor relieved the patient's pain by reciting the mantra.

Geertz believes that culture is not the values, concepts, beliefs, and other things enclosed in people's minds but exist in the symbolic system, which consists of things, relationships, activities, and rituals representing or constructing worldviews, values, and ethnic identity. Through the systems, members of society inherit and exchange world views, values, cultural spirits, and other concepts, forming a general worldview of the ethnic group.

The role of symbols in primitive medicine attract Turner's attention. He pointed out that symbolic activity begins with simple symbols. Symbols have two poles; one is derived from the material, the body; the other is from the mind, such as the moral force of society, clans, ancestors, ghosts, and gods. The mysterious symbols' power comes into play in the rituals.

In the eyes of anthropologists, the empirical world, including diseases, is not a purely objective reality. However, a cognition produced by people through a unique cultural lens rather than scientific knowledge is utterly unrelated to the core of culture and values.

The way everyone thinks, speaks, and behaves is influenced by the culture and identity of the group. Ethnic groups create and reshape culture through emotional connection, belonging, customs, regulations, etiquette, and language. Ethnicity is also a collective cognition and identity.

These symbols act on the central figure, the patient, mentally and physically, changing their attitudes, and the model of the village's social status is formally changed sociologically.

4. The *Bimoist* Anti-epidemic Ritual: A Model of Plague Prevention and Control

Modern society pays more attention to acquiring knowledge from technology, dominated by experts rather than personal knowledge. In health communication, the body's dysfunction is prioritized over the emotional connection as a person, a sense of belonging, ethnic memory, and the native language in which to speak. The cold technology of modern society has not acquired a permanent psychological place in the symbolic world of the Yi group.

In the *bimoist* culture of the Yi nationality, various creatures in the world can be understood as living or active parts of social life. These living beings include gods or spirits, ghosts or evil spirits, ancestral spirits, animal and plant spirits, and objects and materials capable of exhibiting a certain degree of personality or personality. Vitality is conceived as socially relevant subjectivities that can exert forces on the creation and transform the physical and social world to varying degrees.

4.1. *How the Ritual Protect People and Animals from Epidemics*

In epidemic prevention ceremonies held for families and communities, the *bimo* generally uses ritual forms such as epidemic prevention, enclosure, guarding, and blocking to protect people and animals from epidemics. For example, the "Nan Ye" ritual deals with animal epidemics such as chicken and swine fever in the community or acute infectious diseases such as whooping cough, measles, and dysentery. To perform rituals "Wayedang" (chicken guard), "Chiye" (goat guard), "Youye" (sheep guard) to prevent leprosy. To perform "Wagenggu" (circle measles) for those who have not suffered

from measles. When dysentery and typhoid fever were prevalent in the community, the “*Wuri Nanzexi*” (anti-typhoid dysentery) prevention ritual was for healthy children. Moreover, the ritual of “*Ayi Mogen*,” meaning “children’s assembly,” prevents or treats infectious diseases.

Occasional *bimoist* purification, prayer, or healing rituals are held when family members are reunited. Other occasions include engagement ceremonies, wedding or funeral life cycle events, traditional festivals, or feasts for distinguished guests. One of the most striking aspects of the Yi ethnic society is how family or interfamily interactions are influenced by various ritual practices and the kinship and ethnic memory involved in these ritual practices. For example, the *bimo* held a “*Cunimu*” ritual for lepers to expel leper ghosts, a “*Cuji*” ritual for those struck by lightning and may suffer from leprosy, a monkey plague expelling ritual for patients, and a ritual for patients with tuberculosis disease and the ritual for expelling the evil spirits for tuberculosis patients.

4.2. Held a Purification Ritual for the Dead of the Disease

“Purification” is an essential concept in the *bimoist* culture. The souls of the deceased who suffered from leprosy, dysentery, monkey plague, and other diseases during their lifetime will be considered unclean unless the *bimo* perform a purification ritual before sending their souls back to their ancestors. In the “*Sutra of Ancestors and Sending Spirits*,” the *bimoist* purification rituals include expelling dysentery ghosts, leprosy ghosts, monkey plague, and tuberculosis ghosts.

As mentioned above, the *bimoist* rituals are a symbolic interactive ritual chain. The summoning of gods and ancestors once again strengthens the solemnity of loving health and purity, and in the performance of expelling ghost ancestors and plagues, has gained the experience of overcoming difficulties. The beliefs and physical symbols have solid ethnic collective characteristics, which tightly connect the hearts of Yi compatriots and form a community.

The *bimoist* rituals are a glue that connects group members, strengthening group memory and sense of belonging. As Barry Stephenson put this:

In the absence of these ritual knots, society would be formless and individuals disconnected from one another. Cutting off from natural goodness and harmony, we can only devise, regulate, and maintain “Modest Prosperity” through ritual action. Ritual is a device and technique for generating and maintaining order, goodwill, and a sense of belonging. [8]

4.3. The Magic of Primitive Ritual Creates Harmonious Worlds

The Yi people deeply believe in the *bimoist* culture, but it does not reject modern medical care. Villagers living in remote areas often seek help from the *bimo*. Modern medicine has not replaced Yi ritual treatment, and a situation of coexistence of traditional Yi medicine, western medicine,

and the *sunyist* or the *bimoist* rituals have been formed in the Yi area of Liangshan. The *bimoist* rituals are more like reverence for gods, ghosts, nature, and animals while adapting to spiritual purification and psychological adjustment. The participants in the ritual carry a sense of family obligation to persist, pray together with family members and draw strength from the ancestor narratives or libretto content.

Bimo tradition culture could promote well-being among the Yi indigenous community who perform the rituals [9]. We respect scientific and technological knowledge, and we also actively participate in communicating with families, public institutions, and cultural communities. The *bimoist* rituals were not merely a healing process but also a socializing event because they could mediate the family members’ relationships and improve the family clan’s unity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, public organizations face various strategic communication challenges. Finland utilizes social media influencers to affect social norms [10]. Moreover, some countries try to employ public opinion leaders to persuade people to keep a social distance and adhere to other precautionary behaviors with different strategies in public health communication. In Liangshan, *bimo* is the most authoritative opinion leader in the Yi civil society. Studying the *bimoist* culture contributes to understanding this mysterious nation and plays a vital role in fighting the epidemic.

5. Health Communication: The *Bimoist* Culture Value of Epidemic Prevention

“Disease is both a pathological reality and a social construction.” [11] Epidemic awareness, ritual anti-epidemic, collective awareness of epidemic prevention, and local knowledge of epidemic prevention are all components of an essential interactive ritual chain. The social and cultural function is crucial for local knowledge of ethnic epidemic prevention. It not only avoids the social neglect of people and communities by a single prevention measure but also avoids cultural resistance to epidemic prevention conflict. In Liangshan Yi society, the disease is not just physical pain; it is endowed with *bimoist* culture, which affects people’s thoughts and behaviors, and is embedded in Yi’s ethnic disease cognition system.

5.1. Keep All the People Away from and Isolate the Infectious Source

The local knowledge of epidemic prevention of the Yi nationality recognizes the infectious characteristics of epidemic diseases. Faced with the threat of epidemic diseases, the people mainly take care of the health of the ethnic group by staying away from the source of infection, physically and socially isolating the plague and patients. For example, in the face of malaria, the Yi people realize that the disease occurs in places with abundant aquatic plants and hot climates, and when malaria is prevalent, they migrate to cold mountains.

When an infected person dies in a house, people will move to a new house because the house is unclean to avoid the disease.

The *bimoist* ritual is enduring because the community is of blood, geography, and spirit. The people communicate with each other on how to keep healthy in daily life too. Family, village, nature, and the supernatural are integrated to form a unique health and epidemic prevention system. All epidemic prevention practices aim to maintain a harmonious and healthy relationship in the community. The perception that a problem affects the individual in the same group can stimulate the members to consider the problem and take preventive action [12].

5.2. *The Balance of the Relationship Between Modern and Primitive Medicine*

In the Yi concept, the health maintenance of the community is mainly achieved by balancing the relationship between man and nature. The manifestation of the imbalance between man and nature is the “conflict between man and god,” and the direct consequence is the plague of gods. The cultural metaphor lies in the conflict and disharmony between man and nature. The Yi nationality realizes the healthy maintenance of the community by balancing the relationship between man and nature and the supernatural, which provides some inspiration for us to think about the cross-border symbiosis between humans and nature and other species in the Anthropocene era.

The *bimo* and the villagers do not object to the medicine. From September 1987 to January 1988, Bamo Ayi went from Beijing to do a field investigation in Yinchang Township, Xichang. She finds that the villagers believe in gods and ghosts and modern medicine. She distributed medicines to local villagers during the *bimoist* rituals [13].

In modern medicine, doctors spend less time with their patients. Technology becomes the interface that separates healthcare workers from patients and leads to blind obedience. Modern medicine emphasizes allopathic therapy, seeing as many patients as possible in a limited time. Every five to seven minutes, a patient will be issued an inspection and test order, and the patient will be handed over to the inhuman machines. Allopathic therapy focuses more on crisis intervention than prevention and emotional connection with patients. It cuts off the patient's group memory recalled and strengthened in the ancient rituals. The patients have to face experts who may not speak the Yi language, making it difficult for them to convey their feelings and relieve the pain.

Modern medicine, which seeks quick success and instant benefit, shields the benign interaction between medical workers and patients, and there is a power asymmetry in the doctor-patient relationship. This treatment method is cold and crude in the eyes of the Yi minority. This symbolic world is full of uneasy feelings and incomprehensible fears when the epidemic comes. By reshaping the relationship between gods, god ghosts or evil spirits, ancestors' spirits, and animal and plant spirits and people, the ritual participants obtain a

superpower to eliminate the plague – Psychologically, it brings great comfort to patients and their families. The *bimoist* ritual strengthens the ethnic identity, the collective memory, and the awareness of epidemic prevention.

Although some patients are satisfied with telehealth, most Yi people also miss the in-person connection with health care providers. Research shows that “Electronic communication can limit the spontaneity of interaction and nonverbal cues necessary when clinicians are trying to establish rapport, be compassionate, reassure, and show empathy.” [14]

5.3. *Epidemic Prevention Awareness and Cultural Adjustment*

The *bimoist* ritual of the Yi people reminds the public not to break through the cultural regulations of man and nature by offering sacrifices to the gods *Enti Guzi* and the mountain god *Muer Mu*. Otherwise, it will lead to the plague of god by linking the plague with natural phenomena such as wind, clouds, thunder, and lightning, and animals such as monkeys, horses, snakes, frogs, etc. It reminds the public of the multiple sources of the plagues and helps the public to stay away from possible sources of the disease in their daily lives. By keeping away and isolating the plague patients and performing the soul purifying ritual for them, the awareness of the contagion and danger of the plague was communicated to the ethnic group.

In the face of the COVID-19 epidemic, the collective awareness for epidemic prevention is automatically stimulated, and an invisible line of defense has been built. The people will not be at a loss when dealing with new epidemics, deepening the collective identity, which increases their confidence in fighting against the epidemic. The *bimoist* culture is of animism, which considers fate is universally applicable to all people, rather than the fate of some particular outstanding people concerned by the gods. The fate of all is under the control of the gods. The Yi people believe everything in heaven and earth is a colossal symbol. For example, the lexical items for “picture,” “image,” “figure,” and “shadow” are all related to the notion of “soul.” In this sense, they do not operate in a geographical area but in a personified field full of symbolic meanings.

“The increasing recognition of culture as an important factor in public health and health communication has the potential to contribute to developing new and more effective strategies to help eliminate health disparities.” [15] This symbolic world is full of uneasy feelings and elusive fears when the epidemic comes. The spiritual power of the *bimoist* rituals can be helpful to mobilize the ethnic groups to take protective and isolation measures and bring great comfort to patients and their families psychologically.

In modern medicine, there is a phenomenon of unequal status in the doctor-patient relationship. Under some circumstances, modern medicine seeking quick success and instant benefit has abandoned the benign interaction between medical workers and patients. The treatment method lacking humanistic care is not conducive to preventing and controlling the COVID-19 epidemic.

6. Conclusion

Based on this research, we see unique local knowledge and practices for epidemic prevention in Yi society. This set of local knowledge and practice of epidemic prevention continues the whole group's thematic understanding of health and builds a collective awareness of epidemic prevention in the group. In a certain sense, the local knowledge of the Yi nationality's epidemic prevention is the survival strategy and survival wisdom developed by this group in the long-term struggle against the epidemic, which provides an essential guarantee for the survival and development of the people in the age of lack of doctors and medicines.

Due to the highly contagious nature of the epidemic, gatherings of people should be minimized to prevent and control the epidemic. The *bimoist* ritual is also well adapted to this need. In places where the infection rate of the epidemic is zero, a small *bimo* ceremony is held on a family basis. Based on the unique ethnic and cultural background of the Yi people, although the ritual cannot be used as the primary means of epidemic prevention, it plays an irreplaceable role in emotional comfort, group memory, and community mobilization in epidemic prevention and control.

How to find the best meeting point between the *bimoist* ritual and modern medicine, so that modern medicine and epidemic prevention and control in Yi areas can be combined with the Yi humanistic feelings? How to combine the essence of the *bimoist* culture with modern medical facilities, products, education, and services people like to hear and see, and realize the rational combination of Western medicine and *Bimo* culture. Doctors and medical personnel in the Yi community should understand the *bimoist* treatment ritual, coordinate the relationship between doctors and patients, improve the health of patients psychologically and physically, and improve the level of epidemic prevention and control.

The *bimoist* culture still has positive significance in the treatment of diseases and epidemic prevention. In formulating and implementing the policy, it is critical to value the impact of the *bimoist* culture while providing modern medical treatment or epidemic prevention services.

References

- [1] Statistical Bureau of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. (2021). *Statistical Bulletin on National Economic and Social Development of Liangshan Prefecture in 2021*. http://tjj.lsz.gov.cn/sjfb/lstjgb/202205/t20220512_2218837.html
- [2] Hoëm, I. (2009). Ritualized Performances as Total Social Facts: The House of Multiple Spirits in Tokelau, in *Ritual Communication*, p. 203. New York, USA: Routledge.
- [3] Liu, J. (2019). *Animating Knowledge: Ritual, Power, and Relatedness among Liangshan Yi in Southwest China*. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
- [4] Ding, M. (2020). *Purity and Filth: A Case Study of the Ritual of Removing Dirt and Purifying Spirit in Nipmu Cobi of Yi Ethnic Group in Liangshan*. Southwest Minzu University of China.
- [5] Tang, Q. (2022). Cultural Capital of Epidemic Prevention: Anthropological Reflection on Cognition and Response of Epidemic in the Yi Ethnic Group of Liangshan. *Journal of Ethnic Culture* (China), p. 24, (1): 99-109+105.
- [6] Bamo, A. (2000). *Bimo* in the Yi society of Liangshan, China [J]. *Journal of Xichang Normal College*, (02), pp. 1-10.
- [7] Douglas, M. (1984). *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, p. 73. London and New York: Routledge.
- [8] Stephenson, B. (2015). *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction*, p. 102. New York, Oxford University Press.
- [9] Ting, R. S. K., Zhang, K., & Huang, Q. (2019). An inclusive indigenous psychology for all Chinese: Heeding the mind and spirit of ethnic minorities in China. In *Asian indigenous psychologies in the global context*, pp. 249-276. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- [10] Pöyry, E., Reinikainen, H., & Luoma-Aho, V. (2022). The Role of Social Media Influencers in Public Health Communication: Case COVID-19 Pandemic. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 16 (3), pp. 469-484.
- [11] Hays, J. (1998). *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and Human Response in Western History*. Revised Edition. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, p. 1.
- [12] Weinstein, N. D., & Sandman, P. M. (1992). A model of the precaution adoption process: Evidence from home radon testing. *Health Psychology*, 11 (3), pp. 170-180.
- [13] Bamo, A. (2001). Return to Liangshan. *National Art* (China), (01), pp. 179-190.
- [14] Street Jr, R. L., & Finset, A. (2022). Two years with COVID-19: New-and old-challenges for health communication research. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 105 (2), p. 261.
- [15] Kreuter, M. W., & McClure, S. M. (2004). The role of culture in health communication. *Annual review of public health*, 25 (1), pp. 439-455.

Biography

Qiangchun Wang, Master of Arts, an associate professor at Sichuan University of Media and Communications, mainly engaged in literary theory, digital media, and media culture studies. ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5309-2103>