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**SEVERAL THOUGHTS ON THE INHERITANCE AND PROTECTION OF
BAIMA PEOPLE'S FOLKLORE**

**НЕКОТОРЫЕ РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ О НАСЛЕДОВАНИИ И ЗАЩИТЕ
ФОЛЬКЛОРА НАРОДА БАЙМА**

**БАЙМА ЭЛИНИН ФОЛЬКЛОРУН МУРАСТАП КАЛУУ ЖАНА КОРГОО
БОЮНЧА АЙРЫМ ОЙЛОР**

Abstract: *Living in the intersection area of Wen County, Gansu Province, and Pingwu and Jiuzhaigou in Sichuan Province, there is a special ethnic group – the Baima people. They have no written language but possess their own language, costumes, and unique religious beliefs and folk customs. This article introduces the “Chigezhou” Nuo dance folklore, which has the greatest impact among them, and proposes four suggestions for the inheritance and protection of Baima people’s folklore.*

Keywords: *Baima people’s folklore, Chigezhou, inheritance and protection*

Аннотация: *На стыке уезда Вэнь провинции Ганьсу, а также Пиньгу и Цзючжайгоу провинции Сычуань проживает особая этническая группа – народ байма. У них нет письменности, но есть свой язык, костюмы, уникальные религиозные верования и народные обычаи. В данной статье рассматривается танцевальный фольклор нуо «Чигэчжоу», оказавший наибольшее влияние на народ, и предлагаются четыре предложения по наследованию и сохранению фольклора народа байма.*

Ключевые слова: *фольклор народа байма, Чигэчжоу, наследие и сохранение*

Аннотациясы: *Ганьсу провинциясынын Вэнь уезди, ошондой эле Сычуань провинциясынын Пиньгу жана Цзючжайгоу аймактарынын кесилишинде өзгөчө этникалык топ — байма эли жашайт. Алардын жазуусу жок, бирок өз тили, кийимдери, уникалдуу диний ишенимдери жана элдик үрп-адаттары бар. Бул макалада элге эң чоң таасир эткен "Чигэчжоу" ("Chi Ge Zhou") нуо бий фольклору каралып, байма элинин фольклорун мурастан калуу жана сактоо боюнча төрт сунуш берилет.*

Ачык сөздөр: *байма элинин фольклору, Чигэчжоу, мурастан калуу жана сактоо*

I

Longnan, located in Gansu Province, China, lies in the western part of the Qinba Mountain range and the upper reaches of the Jialing River. Bordering Sichuan and Shaanxi to the southeast, it is the only region in Gansu that belongs to the Yangtze River basin.

In the southwestern mountainous areas of Longnan’s Wen County—specifically in Tielou, Shijiba, and Zhongzhai townships—and neighboring areas of Sichuan such as Baima, Huangyangguan, Muzuo, and Mupi in Pingwu County, as well as Wujiao, Majia, Caodi, and Anle townships in Jiuzhaigou County, there lives a unique ethnic group. They are concentrated in over twenty villages, with a population of about 20,000. Though they have no written script, they possess their own spoken language, distinctive clothing, and unique religious beliefs and folk customs. While commonly referred to as the "Baima Tibetans," they refer to themselves simply as the "Baima people."

Their beliefs do not align with Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism) but rather center on the worship of ancient deities such as the Mountain God, Water God, Thunder God, Fire God, and the God of Grains. The most revered deity among the Baima people is the "Baima Laoye" (Lord Baima).

During the 4th to 6th centuries AD, corresponding to the Jin and Northern and Southern Dynasties period in Chinese history, a branch of the Di people with the surname Yang established several local regimes centered around Chouchi Mountain, collectively known as the Chouchi Kingdom. These regimes lasted for 284 years, at their height controlling areas including today’s Longnan region, as well as Lueyang and Ningqiang in Shaanxi, and Pingwu and Nanping in Sichuan.

According to the research of many scholars and DNA sampling tests, the Baima people who are now settled in Wen County (Gansu), Pingwu and Jiuzhaigou (Sichuan), and Songpan are likely descendants of the ancient Di people.

The history of the Di people is extremely long-standing. As early as Sima Qian’s *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*, “Biographies of the Southwestern Barbarians”), there is a

description stating: “From Ranmang to the northeast, the local lords numbered in dozens; among them, the Baima tribe was the largest—all were of the Di group.” It also records, “To the west of Guanghan, the Baima area became Wudu Commandery.” Similar accounts can also be found in various historical texts, including the *Book of Han*, *Book of the Later Han*, *Northern History*, *Huayang Guozhi*, and *Treatise on Customs and Etiquette*, among others.

The Baima people have long inhabited the mountainous gorges of the Baima River valley. Due to the region’s remoteness and poor transportation links, they have preserved a great deal of cultural information passed down from ancient society. This is vividly reflected in the Baima ethnic epic *Ani Gasa*, compiled over many years of fieldwork and interviews by local cultural scholar Liu Qishu. From production and daily life to life-cycle customs, seasonal festivals, and spiritual beliefs, the folk culture of the Baima people has been faithfully transmitted across generations, retaining a rich and primitive ethnic character. Among these traditions, the most influential is likely the *Chigezhou* of Wen County in Gansu. In 2008, *Chigezhou* was included in the first batch of the National List of Representative Works of Intangible Cultural Heritage (Extended). A brief introduction to *Chigezhou* is offered here to highlight the simplicity, uniqueness, and priceless value of Baima folk culture.

II

Every year during the first lunar month, the sound of joyful gongs and drums echoes through the mountain villages inhabited by the Baima people in the southwestern part of Wen County. Along with the vibrant music, high-pitched and melodious songs drift through the air. Anyone familiar with Baima customs knows that this marks the beginning of the Baima people's annual celebration known as *Chigezhou*.

The Baima people are known for their singing and dancing talents. *Chigezhou* is a dance performed during religious rituals and is often referred to as the "mask dance" because the dancers wear wooden masks. The origins of *Chigezhou* are lost to history; both the ceremonial procedures, song lyrics, and dance movements have been passed down orally from generation to generation by the elders. Since it has not been influenced by external artistic traditions, *Chigezhou* retains a highly original and unadulterated form, preserving its primitive and ancient aesthetic.

Chigezhou is a form of ancient *Nuo* dance, originally meant to expel evil spirits and disasters and to pray for a bountiful harvest and good fortune in the new year. Over time, elements of entertainment were added. The annual *Chigezhou* reflects the Baima people's wishes for the coming year and expresses their joy from deep within the mountains. The event usually begins on the 13th day of the first lunar month and ends on the 17th, with most villages performing *Chigezhou* from the 14th to the 16th. It can also be regarded as the Baima version of the traditional Chinese “shehuo” (community festival), and it doubles as a collective New Year’s greeting ceremony. From morning till night, performers sing and dance through every village and household, and the day’s festivities often continue into the late night.

The performance troupe consists of three main roles: *Zhi Ma*, *Chige*, and *Chaomu*, along with several gunners and percussionists. The *Chige* is the central character, portrayed by four dancers believed to represent the four sons of the Baima ancestor Dama. They wear their fur coats inside-out, carry copper bells on their backs, and wear grotesque wooden masks with fierce blue faces, adorned with golden pheasant feathers and paper flowers in red and yellow. They trail long tails made of rolled sheepskin. The eldest *Chige* wears a three-eyed deity mask, holding a sacred sword in the right hand and a yak-tail fly whisk in the left; the other three carry machetes in one hand and fly whisks in the other. During the performance, the *Chige* spins every three steps, their masks swinging naturally, exuding a dignified and commanding aura. At turning points, they leap back and forth—a movement called *Magouni* in the Baima language.

Chaomu are two female figures, wearing traditional women’s attire and wooden masks of

bodhisattvas. They carry no props and follow the *Chige* closely, hands together in prayer, swaying their hips gracefully. *Zhi Ma* are a comical monkey couple, faces smeared with soot, wearing ragged blankets, followed by a little monkey. Their role is largely improvisational, guiding the procession with humorous and auspicious banter. In some troupes, there are only three *Chige* dancers, with an additional character portraying a wild boar.

The festival begins on the 13th day of the first lunar month, presided over by the village chief. Around 10 a.m., the gunner fires three shots from a handmade three-barrel gun filled with homemade gunpowder to summon the dancers and villagers to kneel and pray. Once the crowd gathers, three more shots are fired, and with three loud shouts from the comical *Zhi Ma*, the *Chigezhou* officially begins.

The dance is divided into two parts: “Amusing the Sheep,” performed by six dancers, and “Vajra Exorcism,” performed by two. After the dances, the entire village joins the deities in parading through fields and alleyways to banish evil. Then the *Chige* characters visit each household to offer blessings and drive away misfortune. At each home, the hosts light firecrackers and incense at the door to welcome them. Inside, the host offers a ladle of fermented wine mash from a wine jar. The eldest *Chige* and the *Le Wai* (inheriting master) sing to honor the gods. After circling the table in dance, *Chige* sits at the head seat, *Chaomu* at another table, and *Zhi Ma* remains by the door cracking jokes. The host treats the troupe with great hospitality and delight. The performers sing toasts and blessings, offering different types of wine songs based on the recipient—such as *Chaozhe*, *Leyi*, *Chaodai*, and *Chaoxi*. As the singing and toasting continues, gongs and drums resound, and the lively atmosphere is filled with laughter and song.

When leaving the household, the sword-bearing *Chige* burns paper money and cypress branches, striking around the hall, kitchen, and courtyard with force, sweeping with the fly whisk to symbolically dispel all demons, misfortunes, and impurities from the past year—bringing hopes for prosperity, good health, and peace in the year to come.

By the time every household in the village has been visited, it is often past midnight. Yet the ceremony is not over. The villagers, after a day of festivity, light torches and climb the mountain to welcome the "God of Grains." Upon returning, the *Chige* and villagers—young and old, men and women—join hands to dance the joyful "Fire Circle Dance," which continues until the last torch burns out.

The Baima people have a traditional reverence for fire. Starting from the 8th day of the twelfth lunar month, villagers begin collecting firewood to prepare for “street fires” and the Fire Circle Dance. By the 15th day of the first month, most villages will hold a torch-welcoming ceremony. The final rite of *Chigezhou* is the “Sending Off the Deities,” usually held at the edge of the village or an open space along a ravine. At this point, the *Chige* remove their masks and costumes. All villagers kneel as the village chief lights incense, candles, and paper offerings, praying to the gods of the five directions to bless the village with a bountiful harvest, good health, prosperous livestock, and success in all endeavors.

After sending off the deities, the *Chige* return to the village with their masks in hand to rest. Once the entire *Chigezhou* ritual is completed, all villagers gather at the chief’s house to drink, sing, and discuss matters of the event. The outgoing and incoming village chiefs conduct the handover of responsibilities for the coming year. [Luo, 2004]

III

Baima culture is both ancient and rare—a unique and indispensable component of the diverse and unified fabric of Chinese civilization. Its significant value is self-evident. In an era where modernization is accelerating and agrarian civilization is rapidly declining, the urgent question arises: how can Baima culture be effectively preserved and passed on to future generations?

Since the beginning of China’s reform and opening-up, especially in the new century, research on Baima culture has achieved a number of important breakthroughs. Notable progress

has been made in studies of ethnic identity, the excavation and documentation of Baima cultural resources, and the application, protection, and utilization of intangible cultural heritage projects. However, the tasks of protecting and transmitting this cultural heritage remain extremely challenging.

This discussion offers several perspectives specifically on the ecological preservation and inheritance of Baima culture.

1. Establishing Principles and Mechanisms for Holistic Protection

The Baima people primarily inhabit more than ten townships across Wen County in Gansu Province and Pingwu and Jiuzhaigou counties in Sichuan Province, collectively forming a distinctive Baima folk cultural sphere. Although these areas fall under different administrative jurisdictions, they constitute a unified cultural whole. Therefore, protection efforts must begin with a holistic awareness that views the Baima cultural region as a natural cultural heritage zone, and accordingly develop comprehensive plans and strategies for the ecological protection of Baima culture across the entire area.

Baima culture is a rare and precious heritage that has endured the vicissitudes of over 2,000 years, demonstrating remarkable resilience. However, in the context of profound changes in time, space, and modes of production and life, it has also become extremely vulnerable. Efforts to preserve the ecological environment of Baima culture must not be taken lightly or approached carelessly. A thorough registration and cataloging of the natural and human environments, cultural resources, intangible cultural heritage projects, and their inheritors must be conducted to ensure a clear understanding of the cultural landscape. Practical and effective protection measures must be developed and implemented to ensure comprehensive, integrated protection.

This necessitates the establishment of a flexible and responsive joint protection mechanism involving the two provinces and four counties. At the same time, each county must formulate its own plans for cultural inheritance and protection, ensure the effective implementation of concrete actions, and establish a long-term, sustainable framework for the preservation of Baima culture.

2. Cultural Inheritance as the Core Element in the Preservation of Baima Culture

Baima culture is a living ethnic culture as well as a historical cultural legacy. Its continuity depends on human transmission, making cultural inheritance the most critical component in Baima culture preservation, with the inheritors being the central figures of this inheritance. Intangible cultural heritage is a rare resource imbued with both historical and cultural significance, and its protection carries an important historical responsibility.

When it comes to the protection and utilization of intangible cultural heritage, we must respect culture, nature, and the inheritors. First and foremost, we must adhere to the principle of prioritizing protection and strictly guard against the emergence of counterfeit or fake "heritage." At the same time, we must carefully manage the relationships between "inheritance and innovation," "tradition and modernity," "authentic culture and sub-ecological culture," and "protection and utilization."

Intangible cultural heritage is formed over a long historical process and is generally non-renewable. Therefore, it must be treated with great care, with rescue and protection being the top priorities. The implementation of intangible cultural heritage protection projects must emphasize protection first, followed by utilization. We must guard against excessive "development" that could distort the heritage, turning it from a legacy of the past into a product of the present.

The authenticity of transmission must be emphasized. It is crucial to protect the original essence of various folk traditions in the birthplace of Baima folk culture and to preserve the "authentic flavor" of these precious heritages as much as possible. Even if innovation is necessary, the original form must be thoroughly documented first. In this regard, digital technology provides us with convenient tools.

Many folk customs related to agriculture and animal husbandry, especially those with ritual characteristics, are closely tied to the local people's folk beliefs and form an organic whole.

These customs have a psychological basis and spatial-temporal context in which they grow. However, today that psychological foundation has weakened, original meanings have been lost, and the ecological environment has changed. This has led to a separation between material form and spiritual content, pushing these customs into a "post-functional period." [Peng, 2006]

Baima folk culture is no exception. Many customs have become mere performances, lacking vitality. Change is inevitable, and the primary function has shifted from entertaining the gods to entertaining people. Adaptation for performance or publicity purposes is acceptable and may even be necessary, but the adapted "works" become "sub-ecological culture" and are no longer intangible cultural heritage in the strict sense.

In developing the cultural industry, it is important to distinguish between authentic and sub-ecological culture. We must neither allow authentic culture to disappear due to inadequate protection nor ignore the need to adapt to modern times. Instead, we should create a supportive social environment that ensures the continued transmission of culture while expanding its space for survival and promoting the inheritance and development of outstanding ethnic and folk cultures. The core authenticity of ethnic culture must be safeguarded. It must not become a "genetically modified" culture — on this point, there can be no ambiguity.

So, how can we effectively protect intangible cultural heritage resources? There are many methods and approaches, but two are essential: first, adhering to the principle of living preservation; and second, implementing digital protection.

The Principle of Living Preservation. regardless of the type, intangible cultural heritage usually exists in a vivid and dynamic form within folk society. "In terms of preservation methods, there is a fundamental difference between intangible cultural heritage and tangible cultural heritage. Tangible cultural heritage can be preserved in a static, fixed state, whereas intangible cultural heritage must be preserved in a living, dynamic form. If we compare all heritage to fish, then the preservation of tangible cultural heritage is like making a specimen of the fish—as long as it doesn't decay, the goal is considered achieved. In contrast, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage must not turn it into a specimen; rather, it must allow it to grow freely and thrive like a living fish in a pond." [Yuan & Gu, 2009, p. 60] the vitality of intangible cultural heritage lies in its transmission, and at its core, transmission itself implies a living existence and ongoing continuity..

Digital Protection. electronic technology provides highly effective tools for the protection of intangible cultural heritage. It enables relatively authentic and comprehensive documentation of these resources and offers convenience in storage, post-processing, and dissemination. This represents a new form of protection in the field and has become an inevitable trend.

Cultural inheritance is a comprehensive endeavor requiring the joint participation of inheritors, government bodies, scholars, and the media. Among them, the inheritors are the bearers and primary agents of intangible cultural heritage, occupying a central role in its transmission and protection. A truly outstanding inheritor is often someone with a high degree of cultural awareness. Enhancing public awareness and commitment to intangible cultural heritage is the most fundamental guarantee for its transmission.

The protection of intangible cultural heritage is a systematic project that touches many aspects of society. In addition to the proactive role of inheritors, governmental support and leadership, as well as scholarly guidance, are crucial. The media, meanwhile, plays a vital role in promotion and advocacy.

3. Deepen, refine, and systematize research on Baima culture

Significant achievements have already been made in the documentation and study of Baima culture. The Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) of Longnan City has carried out extensive, meticulous, and highly effective work in preserving, studying, and utilizing Baima folk culture.

In 2009, two major works were published by Gansu People's Publishing House: *Research on the Folk Culture of the Baima People in Longnan (Survey Volume)*, edited by Qiu Zhengbao, Zhang Jinsheng, and Mao Shulin, and *Research on the Folk Culture of the Baima People in*

Longnan (Papers Volume), edited by Qiu Zhengbao, Qiu Leisheng, and Tian Zuo. Since 2014, the Longnan CPPCC has included the documentation and research of Baima folk culture as a key item in its annual agenda. Dedicated personnel were assigned to the effort. On one hand, emphasis was placed on rescuing and collecting the endangered Baima ethnic language, gathering extensive linguistic data, and initiating the compilation of the *Comprehensive Chinese–Baima Dictionary*. On the other hand, even more in-depth, systematic, and comprehensive work has been undertaken to collect and organize materials on Baima folk culture.

In 2015, under the chief editorship of Ren Yuezhong, with Gu Yuanzhang, Zhang Jinsheng, and Qiu Leisheng as deputy chief editors, the *Cultural Series on the Chinese Baima People* was published. The series consists of nine volumes in ten books, covering intangible cultural heritage, clothing, stories, miscellaneous songs, folk songs, dance, beliefs, prose, and scholarly articles. In 2018, the *Comprehensive Chinese–Baima Dictionary*, edited by Sun Hongkai, Wei Lin, Zhang Jinsheng, and Qiu Leisheng, was published. These two landmark publications have provided detailed and reliable foundational resources for the study of Baima culture.

However, from an overall perspective, much of the current research remains fragmented, and lacks sufficient depth, refinement, and systematization. It is advisable to develop a series of comprehensive research topics that can cover various aspects of Baima culture, in order to encourage local cultural scholars to engage in further research. For more challenging topics, public tenders can be issued to attract participation from high-level scholars across the broader academic community.

4. Moderate Development and Utilization of Baima Cultural Resources to Promote the Tourism Economy

Integrating Baima cultural resources with the tourism economy and transforming cultural resource advantages into cultural development advantages has already proven to be a successful strategy. In terms of guiding principles, emphasis should be placed on culture as the soul of tourism, and efforts must be made to deeply explore and refine the cultural connotations of Baima heritage. Tourism culture is an essential part of the cultural industry, and the focus should be on developing in-depth tourism and cultural tourism—using culture to attract, move, and influence visitors.

Modern media tools should be utilized to incorporate Baima cultural elements into locally themed performances that portray regional history and culture. The use of modern audiovisual technologies and physical exhibitions can effectively showcase the charm of Baima culture. Local folk arts and customs with distinct characteristics should be invigorated, and engaging cultural venues should be built where visitors can participate and experience the culture firsthand, making their visit both enjoyable and immersive.

In terms of formats, there are two primary approaches: festival tourism and daily tourism. Festivals, as special time nodes, best represent the ethnic cultural characteristics and naturally hold strong appeal for tourists. In this regard, some Baima cultural heritage areas have already accumulated valuable experience. At the same time, it is important to open up access, improve transportation and accommodation facilities, and build platforms for everyday tourism. These improvements will attract more visitors to learn about and experience Baima culture, thereby boosting the local economy and increasing villagers' income.

While the tourism economy has revitalized some cultural heritage projects by turning them into valuable tourism resources, overdevelopment can strip these projects of their authenticity. The inevitable result would be a cultural disaster. Therefore, it is essential to remain highly vigilant against such risks.

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