

**Sounding Minority Beliefs: The Dialogic Soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad Festival of the Bai in Yunnan, Southwest China**

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# **Sounding Minority Beliefs: The Dialogic Soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad Festival of the Bai in Yunnan, Southwest China**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2023

This project is the first in-depth study to investigate the pluralistic soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad, one of the most important religious festivals of the Bai in the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan, southwest China. “Guerx Sal Lad” is the name of the festival in the Bai language, which means “visiting three places.” Held annually (from the twenty-second day to the twenty-fifth day of the fourth lunar month), the Guerx Sal Lad encompasses a variety of practices—the worship of tutelary deities, pilgrimage, and antiphonal singing, among others—that are related to people’s religious beliefs, wishes for prosperity, and maintenance of intra-community relations. As a festive space, the Guerx Sal Lad presents a desired situation by the state regarding China’s religious policy, in which folk beliefs are accessible and even celebrated as cultural heritage but, at the same time, with the strong regulatory presence of the state ideology and policies implemented by local governments. It is within the Guerx Sal Lad that these different interests intersect.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in Dali city from 2020 to 2022 and analysis of documentary sources including government documents and scholarly writings, I theorize that the soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad is composed of a polyphony of overlapping and intersecting sub-soundscapes that represent the voices and ideologies of several key actors involved in shaping the festival: rural villagers, local government institutions, and mediators in between (basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local scholars). By looking into various sounding events



closely related to the Guex Sal Lad and discourses around them, this dissertation explores the negotiation and contestation between these “voices” with unequal “volumes” at the intersection of minority folk beliefs, China’s minority politics, and state projects of cultural heritagization, especially since China’s engagement with UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in the early 2000s. Informed by ethnomusicology, sound studies, religious studies, and the large body of scholarly research on ethnic minority groups in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), this dissertation offers a new approach to understanding minority politics and religious practices in contemporary southwest China.

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## List of Audio and Video Examples

The accompanying examples contain audio and video tracks which are referred to by number in the main text. All tracks were recorded by the author. All examples can be accessed at:[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1g2uc1Z86i9aCu9Hc\\_MWtrGPYrYvbunVT?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1g2uc1Z86i9aCu9Hc_MWtrGPYrYvbunVT?usp=sharing).

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## Notes on Romanization, Chinese Names, and Translation

In this dissertation, I follow the Hanyu Pinyin system of romanization used in the PRC for all Chinese (Mandarin) names, terms, and phrases, except in instances when a different spelling system exists (e.g., personal names from Hong Kong and Taiwan) or names and terms already well-established by another spelling (e.g., Chiang Kai-shek).

For terms commonly used in the Bai language, I use the widely used Bai phonetic writing system devised in the mid-1950s. This writing system adopts Roman characters, and its alphabetic order, writing, and pronunciation follow the Hanyu Pinyin system. My spellings are based on the pronunciations of the southern dialect, which is spoken in Dali city. The following tables show all the consonant and vowel symbols used in the southern dialect with IPA equivalents, as well as their linguistic tones. The tones of the Bai language are signified by consonants which are placed at the end of the syllables and words. In “Guerx Sal Lad,” for example, letters x, l, and d denote the tones of three characters.

### Bai Consonants

Bai	Pinyin	IPA	Bai	Pinyin	IPA
b	b	p	hh		ɣ
p	p	ph	ng		ŋ
m	m	m	j	j	tɛ
f	f	f	q	q	tɕh
v		v	x	x	ɛ
d	d	t	y	y	j
t	t	th	ni		ŋ
n	n	n	z	z	ts
l	l	l	c	c	tsh
g	g	k	s	s	s
k	k	kh	ss		z
h	h	h			

## Bai Vowels

Bai	Pinyin	IPA	Bai	Pinyin	IPA
a	a	a	iou	iu	iou
o	o	o	ie		iɯ
er		e˥	ier		ieɿ
i	i	i	ui	ui	ui
u	u	u	uai	uai	uɛ
ei		e	ua	ua	ua
e		ɯ	uo	ɥ	ɥ
v		v	uer		ueɿ
iei		ie	ao	ao	ɔ
ia	ia	ia	ou	ou	ou
iao	iao	iɔ	ŋ	ŋ	ŋ
io		io			

## Bai Tones

Tone Name	Tone Mark	Numeric Tone Value
x tone	x	33
tone without mark		44
l tone	l	55
t tone	t	31
p tone	o	42
f tone	f	35
d tone	d	21
z tone	z	32

Following the Chinese convention, all Chinese names are denoted in Chinese order—the last name followed by the first name. In in-text citations for Chinese authors, I use both their last names and first names. I use the English-language convention of a first name followed by the last name for scholars who have published and are recognized as such (for example, Philip Huang).

Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own.

## Notes on Musical Notation

In this dissertation, I choose to use Western staff notation for two main reasons. First, the readership of this dissertation will be mainly composed of English speakers working in related academic fields. Unfortunately, the fact that this dissertation is written in English has greatly decreased its accessibility to a lot of the people for whom this research is written. As I plan to translate this work into Chinese and publish it in China in the future, necessary changes in the Chinese version will be made according to the needs of inclusiveness, such as adding cipher notations that are conventional in Chinese folk music teaching. Second, my aim is to demonstrate important points about melody, structure, rhythm, and the relationships between these elements and the lyrics, and Western staff notation is an effective way to illustrate these particular elements. In this dissertation, all transcriptions are based on recordings made during my fieldwork. In practice, the keys of these musical examples are not fixed and left to the performers' discretion. Musical phrasing corresponds to the syntax of the lyrics. Because singing on pitch is not a core criterion of the various types of vocalizations included in this project, notes in all musical examples only indicate a rough approximation of the pitches to show the basic melody instead of a standard highness or lowness of the notes. Similarly, rhythmic notation is approximate as well.

Unless otherwise noted, all musical transcriptions are my own.

The symbols used are as follows:

↗ or ↘                      upward or downward glide with unfixed pitches

⚡                              wide vibrato

↑<sup>x</sup> or ↓<sup>x</sup>                      vocal delivered close to spoken tones

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The research and writing processes of this dissertation transpired side by side with a chaotic period in China. The breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, government control and surveillance, and a myriad of censored or conflicting information exhausted people's grounds for hope. Amid all the anxieties, fears, disappointments, and confusions, the people at the heart of this dissertation, especially rural Bai villagers, the ways they held on to their traditions and routines day after day, and their strength to light up their lives with joy and diligence, had become such a powerful demonstration of the vitality of life, as well as the most precious comfort for me to maintain a sense of hope and peace of mind. My deepest gratitude goes to every person whom I had a chance to meet and talk to in Dali and who showed me their ways of life.

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of everyday practices of the Bai. I thank Zhang Yahui and A Si for generously taking me as their *sanxian* student without asking anything in return.

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## 1.0 Introduction

The Guerx Sal Lad (Raosanling 绕三灵) is one of the most important religious festivals for the Bai people living in the Dali basin to worship their village deities, make pilgrimages, enjoy celebratory activities, and relate to one another as a community.<sup>1</sup> The first time I attended the Guerx Sal Lad was in 2018. In the early morning of June 6 (the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month), I arrived at the Shendu 神都 (the Capital of Gods) temple, a key destination of the pilgrimage during the festival. Standing at the center of the open field in front of the temple, I was overwhelmed by the bustling soundscape filled with waves of chanting, bells ringing, and drum beating from elderly women scattered around the empty spaces; the sonorous and piercing sounds of the double-reed instrument *dilder* (also called *suot luof* according to the pronunciation of *suona* in Mandarin 唢呐); the deafening speaking voice of two hosts giving introductions of public performances during the festival through microphones on a stage built by the local ICH Center; singing voices amplified by portable sound systems from far and near; street vendors advertising their products through low-quality loudspeakers of different street vendors; crowds talking and shouting in a mixture of local dialects and Mandarin; the honking horns and booming sound of cars from the traffic far away; and the clinking of kitchenware as people cooked surround the open field. All these sounds overlapped, responded, and competed with one another, together creating the inclusive soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> “Raosanling” is the official name of the Guerx Sal Lad in Mandarin. In this dissertation, I choose to adopt its name in the Bai language since it’s widely used by the Bai as well.

Who are making these sounds? What does the Guerx Sal Lad mean to them? Are these sounds all sounding with equal volume? To what extent do they permeate each other? How do various sub-soundscapes demarcate the festival space and temporality? What can the co-existence of these sounding events tell us about the interplay between different social actors shaping the changing meaning, value, and experience of the festival and of the Bai as an ethnic minority group? By answering these questions, this dissertation examines the dialogic relationship between people's sounding practices at the Guerx Sal Lad and in everyday life, the state project of nation-building, and various agents that act as mediators between the subaltern voices and hegemonic ideology.

The Guerx Sal Lad is a religious festival, a national intangible cultural heritage, as well as a contested site of different voices. As a cultural-social space displaying the Bai people's understanding of sound, folk belief,<sup>2</sup> gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, the Guerx Sal Lad embodies the continuous cultural exchanges, assimilations and acculturations among different communities that lived in and crossed the Dali basin, as well as the changing status of the ethnic identity of Bai and its relationship with the state. Adopting Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) notion of *dialogism* and *heteroglossia*, I argue that these multiple identities entail a larger soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad that is formed by a polyphony of dialogic, overlapping sub-soundscapes shaped by various social actors that are crucial for the making of the festival. This dissertation addresses two central questions: how do these intersecting sub-soundscapes represent and mediate the dialogic relationship between the voices and ideologies of different social actors in constructing the

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<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I use "folk belief" instead of "popular religion" following the conventions in Chinese scholarship. Many scholars employ the term "belief" (*xinyang* 信仰) to indicate religious practices that are not institutionalized and often do not operate within an organized system, while "religion" (*zongjiao* 宗教) refers to religious practices that the government recognizes and administrates as legitimate and often with institutions, rituals, sites, and clergies (Liang Yongjia 2016, 8; Zhou Xing 2017, 152–54).

meaning of the Guerx Sal Lad? In what way do Bai people reinscribe their social past and religious knowledge into its changing social-political environment through music and sound?

In this dissertation, I specifically focus on the sounding events and related narratives formed by three groups of social actors—rural villagers, government institutions, and key mediators in between (basic-level cadres, representative transmitters [*daibiaoxing chuanchengren* 代表性传承人] of Intangible Cultural Heritage [ICH] projects, and local scholars)—since China’s engagement with UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH in the early 2000s. These groups across the social spectrum form the main body of participants that have a decisive influence on the practice and meaning of the Guerx Sal Lad.<sup>3</sup> Their interrelations can be understood through the concept of “the third realm” (or the third sphere) proposed by Philip Huang (1993, 2019) in his research on the disjuncture between the binary state-society model in Western theories and China’s reality (see also Wakeman 1993, 1998; Rankin 1986).<sup>4</sup> The third realm, according to Huang (1993, 237), refers to an in-between space between the state and society in which both “state-ification” from above and “societalization” (Habermas 1989, 142) from below occur. It is where “the state joins with society for public activities beyond the capacity of the formal bureaucratic apparatus.”

The framework of the third realm is specifically raised for the context of state-society interrelations in contemporary China, where state and society, instead of being opposite from each other, “interact with, mutually penetrate, and mutually shape one another” (Huang 2019, 356). Huang’s argument resonates productively with Bakhtin’s conceptualization of dialogism, which I

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<sup>3</sup> Other social groups, such as the news media and tourists, have a relatively small or little impact on the shaping of the festival, therefore, they’re not included in this research’s discussion.

<sup>4</sup> Eiko Ikegami (2000) also discusses the problematic method of applying Habermas’ theory on the idealization of the public sphere onto East Asian experiences.

will explore in detail below. In this research, the four social actors that I will analyze represent members of the third realm and the society. While rural villagers constitute an important part of the society, the other three groups—basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local scholars—all serve as crucial mediums in the third realm. As I will demonstrate, the state, members of the third realm, and the society continuously exercise their agency to interact with, negotiate with, and influence one another in defining the Guerx Sal Lad.

In addition to the sub-soundscapes individually, it is also crucial to examine the frictions and intersections between these sub-soundscapes which have critically engaged, competed, and negotiated the meaning of the Guerx Sal Lad and the Bai in general. I will demonstrate that while having distinct aspirations and agendas, these sub-soundscapes are closely interrelated, overlapping, and inseparable from one another. That is why, in this dissertation, even though there are three chapters separately dedicated to the sub-soundscape of different social actors, the voices and practices of each one of them often appear in the discussion of other social actors as well. As I will show, it is often the ambivalences in the reciprocations and boundaries between them that shape the significance and multiple identities of the Guerx Sal Lad.

By examining the shaping of the plural sub-soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad as well as the dialogic interplay between them, this dissertation attempts to provide an alternative way of examining the interrelationship between different social actors involved in the politics of minority folk beliefs in contemporary China. The polyphonic soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad presents a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of contestations over the multiple meanings of the festival as an expression of the Bai people's folk beliefs, a cultural product, and a representation

of ethnic identity.<sup>5</sup> I seek to go beyond the model of repression-resistance and the binary state-society dichotomies used in Anglophone literature on minority politics in China (Feuchtwang 2000; Madsen 1998) by looking into the agency of people at different social levels within their conditioned social-political environment and looking for the hope and fundamental day-to-day practices that drive people to hold their beliefs and to live a better life. Moreover, bringing sounds and sounding events of the Guerx Sal Lad into the discussion of minority politics, in this research, I examine the ways that music and sound are embraced, under control, or excluded by social actors with varying volumes and social status. I will show that a perspective on music and sound, as an enabling and generative force, may offer new insights into the negotiation, interaction, and accommodation between the will of the people, the state, and other agents involved in legitimizing and enforcing religious practices of ethnic minority groups.

This dissertation is the first English-language music ethnography on the Bai people and written from the perspective of a Bai scholar/subaltern voice. It is also the first in-depth study to investigate the plural soundscapes of an ethnic minority festival in China in both English and Chinese literature. I extend soundscape studies into the contested festival space of southwest China, where complex negotiations among social groups from different levels of modern Chinese society take place on issues of minority religions, the heritagization of minority culture, and ethnic identity. It also echoes recent discourses in the discipline of sound studies which advocate for “situating sound in and from the [global] South not as a unified, alternative notion of what sound is but as diverse sonic ontologies, processes, and actions” (Steingo and Sykes 2019, 4). This project attempts to show the heterogeneity of understanding of sound outside the dominant culture or,

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<sup>5</sup> For studies on contestations over multiple meanings of musical phenomena, see Guilbault 2007; Weintraub 2004; Madrid 2008; Dwyer 2015.



more specifically, the heterogeneity of “sonic ontologies, processes, and actions” (ibid.) within the same culturally and ethnically defined festival space.

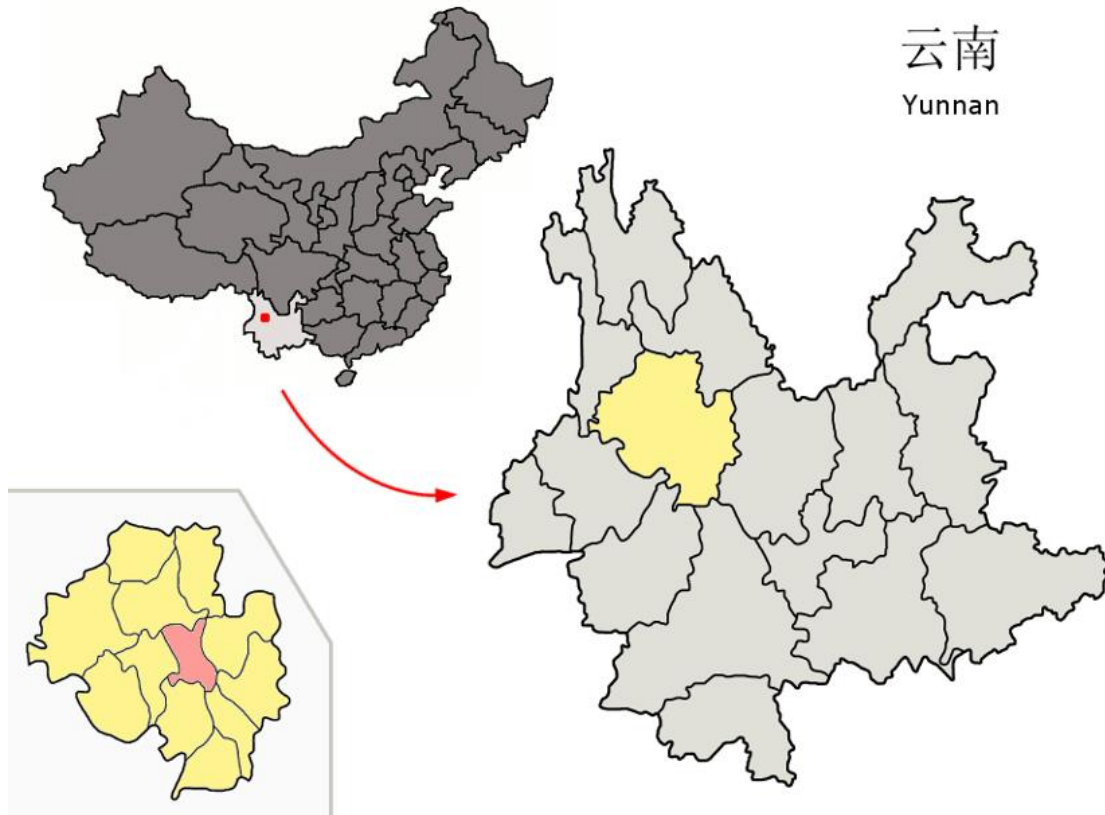
### **1.1 The Bai of the Dali Basin**

The Bai are an ethnic minority group centered in the Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture (hereafter the Dali Prefecture),<sup>6</sup> an autonomous prefecture of northwest Yunnan province, southwest China (Map 1).<sup>7</sup> With a population of over 1.2 million, the Bai is the largest minority group in the prefecture, where they constitute around one-third of the prefecture’s population of 3.6 million (Dali Baizu zizhizhou renmin zhengfu 2022). Other than the Bai, the Dali Prefecture is also home to ethnic groups of Han, Yi, Hui, Lisu, Naxi, Zhuang, Zang, Bulang, Lahu, Achang, Dai, and other groups. In contemporary China, around eighty percent of the Bai dwell within the Dali Prefecture, while other Bai communities are scattered over other parts of southwest and south China, including Hunan and Guizhou provinces.

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<sup>6</sup> In 1956, the administrative region was officially designated as the Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture, which was named after the predominant minority group who live there.

<sup>7</sup> The term “Dali” can refer to an administrative prefecture, a county-level city, an alpine basin, and a historical old town.



**Map 1 Location of Dali city (pink) and the Dali Prefecture (yellow) within Yunnan Province. Public domain image by Croquant, Wikimedia Commons.**

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location\\_of\\_Dali\\_City\\_within\\_Yunnan\\_\(China\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Location_of_Dali_City_within_Yunnan_(China).png).

The prefecture has an area of 29,460 square kilometers. It is a frontier zone that has long bordered Southeast Asia, India, and Tibetan regions, which makes this area a meeting place of different cultures and social forces. The capital city, also named Dali, is subdivided into three subdistricts (*jiedao banshichu* 街道办事处), nine township-level districts (*zhen* 镇), and one ethnic township (*minzu xiang* 民族乡) (Map 2).<sup>8</sup> The center of the city is the Dali Old Town (Dali Gucheng 大理古城) built in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). This historic old town separates the

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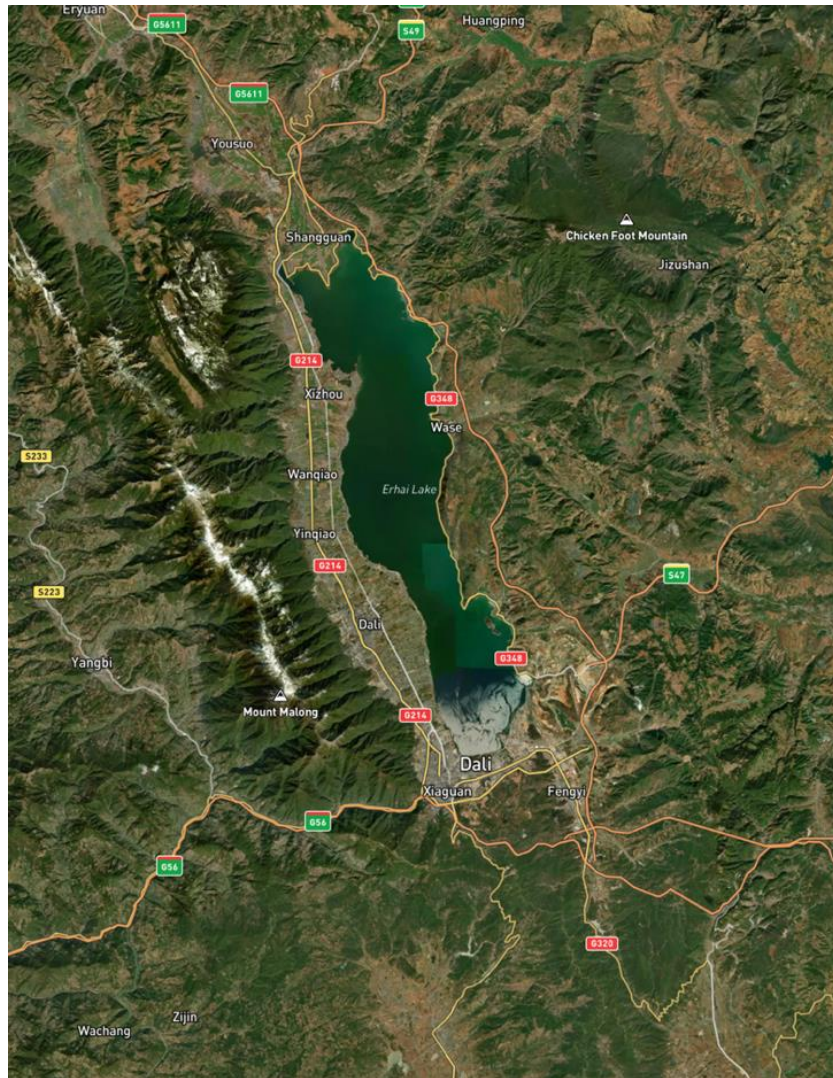
<sup>8</sup> Ethnic townships are the fourth-level administrative units designated for ethnic minorities of the PRC, but they are not considered autonomous and do not enjoy the same laws pertaining to larger ethnic autonomous areas.

modern urban area and the rural region of the Dali basin. The Dali basin, one of the most important cultural, political, and economic centers of western Yunnan, is where most of the events in the Guerx Sal Lad take place. At an elevation of more than 6,500 feet, this long and narrow floodplain centers around the inland Er Lake (Erhai 洱海) with the Diancang Mountains (Diancangshan 点苍山) to the west and the Mountain Jizu (Jizushan 鸡足山) to the east (Figure 1). Er Lake, with a storage capacity of 2.5 billion cubic meters, is the second-largest highland lake in China. The snow-capped Diancang Mountains are a mountain range of nineteen peaks with an average height of 3,800 meters. The melting snow from the mountains provides the never-ending streams flowing down from the intersecting gullies. This subtropical area with a high altitude gives the Dali basin a pleasing environment that supports people's agricultural life. However, the seasonal monsoon rains in July and August also bring floods and cause the Er Lake to rise.



Map 2 Administrative divisions of Dali city. Made by the author adapted from

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps\\_of\\_Dali\\_City\\_-\\_media/File:大理市行政区划图.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_Dali_City_-_media/File:大理市行政区划图.svg).



**Figure 1** Satellite image of the Dali Basin. Satellite image © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap.

The Bai people are Sino-Tibetan speakers who speak the Bai language. There are two major writing systems of the Bai. The first is the old Bai script (*lao baiwen* 老白文) developed during the Tang dynasty (618–907). This writing system creates characters by modifying or imitating Han Chinese characters. It also borrows Han Chinese characters to represent sounds or meanings in the Bai spoken language, which is still used in the texts of certain local music genres (Wang Feng 2014, 9–12). Another writing system is a phonetic writing system devised in the mid-1950s by

scholars at the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Zhongguo kexueyuan 中国科学院) in Beijing (McCarthy 2009, 123). This writing system adopts Roman characters. Its alphabetic order, writing, and pronunciation follow the Hanyu Pinyin system. This later-developed system has been revised several times to be more consistent with the spoken vernacular and is currently being implemented in local school education and the creation of new folk music and literature.

## 1.2 The Dialogic Soundscape

In this dissertation, theories concerning sound, soundscape, and sounding are crucial. They highlight sound as a significant lens through which sound experiences, including music, are situated in a broader and interrelated web connecting people's sensory experience with other social, cultural, and political discourses. The investigation into sounding and listening as a relational approach to experience and know the local sense of place and social world is grounded by the seminal work of Steven Feld (1996, [1982] 2012a, 2015) around his concept of "acoustemology." Feld (2015, 13) addresses that sounding, "as simultaneously social and material," is a significant index and feedback of a relational world that is also felt and performed. He contends that it is through "the relational practices of listening and sounding and their reflexive productions of feedback" that one develops knowledge about the world through sound (16). In *Hearing Cultures* (2004), Veit Erlmann calls for the turn of anthropology research toward an "ethnographic ear" that engages in more dialogic and sensorious research. This call does not mean a total rejection of and replacement of vision; instead, it asks for attention toward people's auditory practices alongside all other sensory and embodied ways of being. This conjunctural approach can also be seen in the work of Jonathan Sterne on the challenges of sound studies. As he (2012, 3) writes, sound studies'

challenge is “to think across sounds, to consider sonic phenomena in relationship to one another—*as types of sonic phenomena rather than as things-in themselves*—whether they be music, voices, listening, media, buildings, performances, or other paths into sonic life” (italics in original).

### **1.2.1 Sound and Soundscape**

Following these profound propositions, in this research, I define the notion of “sound” as both a sonic and social experience. It includes all the physical sound productions: instrument playing, chanting, singing, laughing, and speaking, among others. And, importantly, it embraces the cultural and social effects of these sound productions within culturally and historically specific contexts. I analyze music and sound in the Guerx Sal Lad as an embodied phenomenon that links material practices with subjectivity and collectively recognized meanings and a crucial site of contestation over shared discourses and values. Therefore, the definition of “soundscape,” extended from R. Murray Schafer’s ([1977] 1994) notion of “sonic environment,” encompasses not only different types of music and sounding practices that take place during the Guerx Sal Lad, but also the ideologies, negotiations, and social practices enacted and emplaced through these sounding events. Soundscape can be both inclusive and subjective, both static and moving, and both temporary and reverberative. In the shaping of the Guerx Sal Lad, some sounds become representations of the voice of a social group and the assertion of its identity, agency, beliefs, and power. And some sounds are considered dissentient noise and become muffled or even silenced within official narratives, turning into inaudible sounds.

In using the notion of inaudible sound, I draw on Chinese ethnomusicologists’ research on Chinese ritual soundscape (*yishi yinsheng* 仪式音声) to expand Schafer’s idea of soundscape and Feld’s conceptualization of acoustemology as they concentrate only on “events heard,” exploring

the existence of unheard sounds in the soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad as well.<sup>9</sup> The notion of inaudible sound is rooted in the Chinese belief system. From the perspective of ritual soundscape, Chinese belief system, according to Tsao Penyeh (2009, 27), consists of belief, ritual,<sup>10</sup> and ritual sounds. *Yin* 音 and *sheng* 声 are both key categories of early Chinese musical thought. There are no perfect equivalents in the English language to them, but they are usually translated as “music” and “sound.”<sup>11</sup> In the research model suggested by Tsao Penyeh, *yinsheng* includes both audible and inaudible sounds within the ritual process. While audible sounds contain mainly the sound of humans and objects, inaudible sounds indicate the inner sound or inner enactment of the ritual that exists within practitioners’ sensorium and cannot be “observed” (or heard or understood) by the researcher. In some cases, the inaudible sound is more important (than the audible sound) to the practitioner and has specific meanings for them (ibid.). In China’s cultural context, this kind of inaudible sound can range from the silent chanting in Taoist ritual to the silent singing of the witch in south China and the sound she hears when she learns from the ancestor during her possession (Xiao Mei 2010, 348–73).

In this dissertation, in addition to the sensory enactment in ritual experiences, the notion of inaudible sound also points to people’s religious sounding practices or voices of a social group that are silenced or eliminated by others. I theorize that the larger soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole is made up of and formed by a polyphony of dialogic, overlapping sub-soundscapes that are shaped by multiple actors involved in the process of regulating and framing the festival. During the shaping process, certain sounds, often important ones representing the subaltern, might

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<sup>9</sup> For works on Chinese ritual soundscape, see, for example, Tsao Penyeh and Xue Yibing 2000; Yang Minkang 2005; Tsao Penyeh 2010; Xiao Mei 2012; Qi Kun 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Here, “ritual” indicates both religious ritual and folk custom because many religious rituals in China combine both elements (Tsao Penyeh 2010).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed examination of the scope, meaning, and structure of yin and sheng, see Jeong 2013.



be found absent in other sub-soundscapes formed by those in power. This does not mean, however, that these missing sounds do not exist or have been removed. Instead, while they are inaudible in certain discourses and spaces, they continue sounding vigorously in people's everyday life, as ethnomusicologist Louise Meintjes (2019, 71) suggests, "'Untexted' is not an absence, not a loss of voice; it is not an absence of proper language. To the contrary, it is the means of gaining recognition by means of being voice rather than logos." Moreover, as this dissertation will demonstrate, actually, these inaudible sounds never disappear from other sub-soundscapes either, but exist in precisely those absences.

### **1.2.2 The Plurality of Soundscapes**

In recent years, the notion of plural soundscapes has been proposed by scholars of music and sound studies (Hill 2016; Sykes 2015; Eisenberg 2013). Megan Hill (2016, 39) addresses the heterogeneity of soundscapes within urban cities in her research on the dense Tokyo neighborhood of Asakusa. She defines soundscape as "all of the audible sounds experienced in a *place* that are perceived by the social actors in that site as contributing to its social meaning" (italics in original), which means that each meaningful place has a corresponding soundscape enacted by the human agency of listening. This understanding challenges the conventional use of soundscape as an all-inclusive sounding environment by intentionally isolating certain sounds to form a selected soundscape. Within the merging and juxtaposing soundscapes of Asakusa, the hearer has the agency to attend to or ignore certain sounds which might result in a shift or transformation of the sense of place they experience. Hill describes these overlapping soundscapes as "soundscape montage," which enables Asakusa to be understood "both as a conglomeration of its variety of parts, and as a cohesive whole within larger Tokyo" (58).

In another study focusing on Hindu processional drumming in Singapore, Jim Sykes (2015, 381) criticizes current sound studies of urban soundscapes that mostly focus on sound reproduction technologies and overlook the fact that soundscape can be “a contested affair, forged through debates about what sounds are allowed when and where, and the legal status of sounds that serve to strengthen or threaten the dominant sonic ethics.” As a contested space, a society’s soundscape “may consist of multiple, overlapping soundscapes, containing contrasting definitions of sonic efficacy, of the characteristics and possibilities for sacred sounds in public space, and of personhood” (382).

Both Hill and Sykes’ ideas of overlapping soundscapes challenge past research which looks at soundscape as “discrete, all-inclusive, and homogeneous” (Hill 2016, 31). While Hill’s interpretation of soundscape is mostly in accordance with the understanding of soundscape in this research, instead of concentrating on the process of meaning-making of separate individual soundscapes (places) within the sound montage, I choose to analyze multiple sub-soundscapes of the same site—the Guerx Sal Lad. Moreover, I address both the all-inclusive soundscape of the festival and its constitutive parts. It is the coming together of several sub-soundscapes and their complex interrelation completes the meaning of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole. Further, in this dissertation, other than actively listening to, selecting, and ignoring sounds, human beings also have the agency to create, experience, and embody them. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, social actors such as the state and local governments actively regulate and even create the festive soundscape in order to construct their ideals of the festival. Sykes’ approach of examining the contestation over religious sound in overlapping soundscapes is especially instructive to this research on the discussion of interplays between the governing power and festival practitioners over religious sound practices. His study engages sound studies with marginalized groups in urban

soundscapes of Asia. I extend the scope of sound studies to the rural soundscape of southwest China, asking what can perspectives on soundscape contribute to our understanding of the negotiation between religious practitioners and ruling ideologies in a different but not less intense social, political, economic, and cultural context.

### **1.2.3 Dialogic Soundscapes**

The idea of dialogic soundscapes in this dissertation is inspired by the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia (polyphony) introduced by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>12</sup> In his well-known essay “Discourse in the Novel” (1981), Bakhtin argues for the sociality of novelistic discourse and literary language. He defines the novel as composed of “a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (262). For Bakhtin, it is the combination of these “subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous” (ibid.) voices and styles that define the uniqueness of the novel as a literary genre. He sees language as always made up of heteroglossia, which refers to the situation that any single discourse is socially stratified into a multiplicity of voices interacting with, and often ideologically competing with, one another (261–62). As “language is ideologically saturated” (272), every voice has its own conditions and accented ideology, a meaning that it seeks to accentuate. Central to Bakhtin’s theory of the novel is that heteroglossia is fundamentally in a dialogized relationship, within which each voice acts as a rejoinder to one another (ibid.). Meanwhile, heteroglossia goes alongside the “centripetal forces” that “serve to

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<sup>12</sup> Bakhtin developed the notion of polyphony, borrowing the musical term to highlight the multiple independent layers of consciousnesses in the novel apart from the author’s authoritative viewpoint (Bakhtin 1984).

unify and centralize the verbal-ideological world” (270). While centripetal forces constantly stand opposed to heteroglossia and create barriers for it so different voices constituting heteroglossia can eventually be unified, simultaneously, heteroglossia is always in a process of disrupting and dismantling centripetal forces. The dynamics and intersection of these two embattled tendencies carry on the continuity of “the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification” (ibid.).

In recent music scholarship, Bakhtin’s dialogic concepts have been applied in the field of musicology (Ardrey 2017; Winzenburg 2018) and popular music studies (Currie 2017; Mosobalaje 2018; Lieberfeld 2017) as frameworks for analysis, especially textual analysis of individual musicians’ work. Within the field of ethnomusicology, however, compared to his notion of “carnavalesque” (1984),<sup>13</sup> dialogism and heteroglossia are rarely mentioned in recent scholarship other than some short discussions (Johnson 2013; Roberts 2018) or sparse citations (Politz 2018; Appert 2016; Alexander 2018). In Steven Feld’s (1987) earlier work, he adopts the idea of dialogism to underscore the approach of “dialogic editing” as a means of negotiation, a process of reciprocal exchanges and feedback between the author and the depicted subjects that disrupt the author’s authority. Later, Feld (1998, 2012b) develops this perspective on dialogic relationship in his many studies on the polyphony of listening and voicing. He uses the concept of “intervocality” to describe the juxtaposition and “pileups” of different voices, vocal encounters, and stories. These voices converge and engage with each other in dialogues. They feel and embody their (and others’) existences in each other’s cumulated resonance. In Feld’s conceptualization of acoustemology, he points out the “polyphonic” and “dialogical” nature of sonic knowing. Through understanding

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<sup>13</sup> For ethnomusicology research applying Bakhtin’s concept of “carnavalesque,” see Packman 2012 on the intensification of carnivalesque sensibilities in festivals and McCoy-Torres 2017 and MacIntyre 2017 on boundary-pushing aspects of music performance or events.

sounding as “an experiential nexus of sonic sensation” (2015, 16), Feld implies the possible co-existence of plural acoustemologies within a situated social setting. This idea of polyphonic acoustemologies continues in Andrew Eisenberg’s (2013) research on the soundscape of the quotidian symbolic struggle of coastal Muslims in Kenya and their subjectivity formation. By adopting Valentin Vološinov’s notion of “multiaccentuality” (1973), an earlier version of Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia,<sup>14</sup> Eisenberg considers the public space of the soundscape in Mombasa Old Town deeply “multi-accentual” (Eisenberg 2013, 190), presenting in the broadly epistemological disagreement of the public/private space as well as the ontological politics about the very nature of space (188).

Nancy Guy (2002, 98–99) addresses the value of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogic discourse in discussing music communication. She borrows Bakhtin’s term “utterance” to indicate the singing of the “Republic of China National Anthem” which has led to various reactions representing different attitudes and discourses about Taiwan’s cultural identity. Through examining this utterance and the various discourses it involves, Guy demonstrates the effectiveness of Bakhtin’s framework in illustrating “the complexity of meanings and intentions” in the long dialogic process of the performance and in the complex political and social context of Taiwan (ibid.). In her extensive literature review on the issue of voicing, Amanda Weidman (2014, 42) also highlights Bakhtin’s work on heteroglossia as a destabilization of the dominant Western conceptions of linking a voice with an identity or a single person, which “overlooks the fact that speakers may have many different kinds of relationships to their own voices or words or that a single ‘voice’ may in fact be collectively produced.” Following Guy and Weidman, I contend that Bakhtin’s dialogic framework offers an interconnected way of understanding human

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<sup>14</sup> It is widely believed that Vološinov was the pen-name of Bakhtin (see Williams 1977, 35).

consciousness and social-cultural relations that avoids treating social groups separately or in a dualistic relationship. This viewpoint is especially valuable for examining the plurality of soundscapes in the Guerx Sal Lad and the interplay and negotiations between them.

In this dissertation, the Guerx Sal Lad is a “playground” of different voices that is charged with “tensions embedded in social expectations, political claims, religious passions, individual emotions, and so on” (Testa 2014, 61). Therefore, I theorize the Guerx Sal Lad as dialogic heteroglossia, a dialogue among voices of different social groups. Each group has its own accented ideology, which is the understanding that the group seeks to emphasize and promote about the meanings of Guerx Sal Lad and what kind of soundscape it should have. While the state and local government institutions aim to regulate and shape the festival into a coherent identity that serves their political ideology and economic needs, the Bai rural communities present voices rooted in their sounding experiences with the festival and with religious practices in their everyday lives, interrupting and complicating the single dominant narrative.

As these contrasting tendencies interact, they impart multiple meanings to the same festival and sounding event. The implementation of different voices and ideologies into various sounding events at the Guerx Sal Lad creates multiple intersecting sub-soundscapes that co-exist in the same festive space. Each of them represents a social group’s definition of the festival and ways of experiencing music and sounds within it. Some sounds that are important in one sub-soundscape might be disposable in another. These sub-soundscapes are constantly in a dialogic relationship, weaving in and out of their interrelationships. They sometimes merge together, as the same music and sound could belong to multiple soundscapes, and at other times they separate, remediating each other and responding to each other’s existence and alterations. It is this dialogue and all the sounds within form the larger soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole.

### 1.3 The Guerx Sal Lad, Soundscape, and Religious Practices of the Bai

This dissertation is important in opening spaces to bring ethnomusicology and sound studies into the discussion on the discrepancy between ethnic minority groups' everyday lived experiences and the governance of their cultures and traditions in southwest China. Many studies have focused on ethnic minority music and the negotiation between the party-state and ethnic minority groups (Jones 1999; Baranovitch 2001; Davis 2005; Diao Ying 2018), modernity in minority music-making (Komlosy 2008; Wong 2013), minority music's involvement in different ICH projects (Falk and Ingram 2011; Ingram 2012a, 2012b; D'Evelyn 2021; Harris 2018), and detailed studies of specific minority music genres (Arrington 2015; Rees 2000; Ingram 2007),<sup>15</sup> but studies on sonic dimensions of ethnic minority religious practices and festivals in China (Harris 2020) are long overdue.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the Guerx Sal Lad, a relatively small number of published articles and research papers present ethnographic studies on general events of the festival (Xing Li and Zhang Cuixia 2022; Bai Zhihong 2010) and related folk legends (Zhang Cuixia 2019; Lv Yuejun and Xiao Wen 2020). Several research works center on social aspects of the festival, such as the process of its heritagization (Liang Yongjia 2013, 2017; Yang Xiongduan and Xiong Zhongqing 2015; Zhao Yuzhong 2013), or join the debates around the interpretation and propriety of extramarital relationships among people (Zhao Yuzhong 2008; Shen Haimei 2009; Bryson 2017a). Otherwise, only a handful of studies have included an in-depth discussion of the Guerx Sal Lad.

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<sup>15</sup> Some studies examine the politics and identity construction in the music making of transnational ethnic groups in China's neighboring regions, see Lonán 2013, 2018; Lu 2019; Fairfield 2017; Ferguson 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Harris' pathbreaking *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (2020) is the first book-length study devoted to the sounded and listening practices of marginalized ethnic minority groups in China.

Chinese anthropologist Zhang Ju (2017, 2019) draws attention to the social communication of elderly participants in the Guerx Sal Lad and their everyday emotional expressions. She argues that the Guerx Sal Lad provides a cultural space for elders to construct a new collective identity through ritual participation and group performances. Of particular relevance to the scope of this dissertation is Zhang Yunxia's (2017) thorough research on the Guerx Sal Lad from the perspective of historical anthropology. She presents a detailed ethnographic account of the Guerx Sal Lad and its associated events over three months, tracing the folk narratives on their content, participant groups, legends, and historical transformations. In other literature, the Guerx Sal Lad is often presented as part of the general observation or an example of other aspects of Bai culture and folk belief (Fitzgerald [1941] 2005; Hsu [1948] 1967). And, in these studies, the Guerx Sal Lad is regarded as a synthesized whole, whereas the rich and complex components and the intertwined relationship between them are less examined. In a chapter of Beth E. Notar's (1999) Ph.D. dissertation on the popular culture of the Bai, she depicts the multi-staged pilgrimage of Bai women in relation to the Guerx Sal Lad (which she refers to as Guersala). According to her, people's pilgrimages and the Guerx Sal Lad are crucial ways for the Bai to emplace and represent their own history and culture through bodily practices (200).

Amidst a small number of in-depth scholarly publications on the music practice of the Bai people, several studies informed the basis for my work. Focusing on the history, distribution, and different music genres of Bai, Chinese musicologist Wu Guodong (1992) offers the first scholarly monograph in China that specifically centers on ethnic minority music from a cultural perspective. Even though the monograph was written in a format similar to an encyclopedia with relatively general and simple descriptions of different aspects of Bai music, Wu established the foundation for ethnographic studies of Bai music in China. Chinese ethnomusicologist Zhou Kaimo's (2005)



research explores the female role in the ritual music of the Bai as a gender-cultural symbol and discusses its relationship with the Bai people's musical behavior and folk beliefs. In another collaborative research with Tsao Penyeh, Zhou and Tsao (2005) apply the research framework of ritual sounds from Chinese ethnomusicology, presenting a detailed examination of music and sounds in the ritual of *benzhu* 本主 (*vuxzex* in Bai language, meaning village tutelary deity) worship during the Dragon Boat Festival in Dali, as well as their integrated relationship with Bai people's *benzhu* belief.<sup>17</sup>

Recent scholarship on the Bai, both in China and abroad, has mostly focused on non-sonic and non-musical aspects, including issues in history (Lin Chaomin and Li Jing 2019; Lian Ruizhi 2007), modernity (Notar 2008a; Bai Zhihong 2007), religious practice (Zhao Yuzhong 2016; Liang Yongjia 2018; Bryson 2013, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Yang Yuexiong and Yang De'ai, 2020; Li Donghong and Zhao Yuanliang 2021), and ethnic identity (McCarthy 2009). Among these non-music topics, religious practices of the Bai have received great attention. Some of these studies offer valuable perspectives and descriptions on the history, as well as the social and religious practices of the Bai.

In his valuable monograph *Religious and Ethnic Revival in a Chinese Minority: The Bai People of Southwest China* (2018), Chinese anthropologist Liang Yongjia examines the religious and ethnic revival in China since the 1990s. By drawing on Martin Riesebrodt's theory on the precondition of religious practice as "human communication with superhuman powers" (Riesebrodt 2010, 92) and Marshall Sahlins's (2008) theory on alterity, Liang argues that defining religious and ethnic revival as "contacts with alterity" is particularly useful in the context of China

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<sup>17</sup> In this dissertation, the term "benzhu" can be either singular or plural.

(Liang Yongjia 2018, 9). Therefore, it is possible to understand the religious and ethnic practices in the PRC as a process of “imagining and institutionalizing alterity” (11). During this process, the religious and ethnic revival of the Bai constantly attempted to contact with the alterity, which can indicate “the gods, the ethnic past, the political center, the utopian future, or the mythic origin” (ibid.).

Taking the relationship between religion and gender as the main focus, anthropologist Megan Bryson’s book *Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China* (2017b) is the first scholarly research focusing on Baijie, an iconic female deity of the Bai people’s folk belief. Bryson follows the transformation of Baijie’s meaning beginning with the Nanzhao 南诏 kingdom (652–902) and examines her changing images as a gendered reflection of transregional forces that negotiated in Dali on the Bai ethnic identity. Another one of Bryson’s (2017a) articles looks at historical literature writing on sexuality surrounding the Guerx Sal Lad and the cult of Baijie. Focusing on writings from the late Republican period (1911–1949) to the early years of the PRC, Bryson examines intellectuals’ representation of Bai culture by analyzing the interrelationship among concepts of ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. She argues that the Guerx Sal Lad and the cult of Baijie were both affirmed as ethnic representations only when elements and discussion on sexuality or religion were left out.

Through examining contemporary religious practices and festivals of the Bai people, including the Guerx Sal Lad, Jeffery Howard Schmitt’s (2007) Ph.D. dissertation explores how these practices are informed by people’s historical consciousness about Dali’s historical and legendary past as an independent kingdom before the thirteenth-century conquest and eventual integration into the Chinese empire.

Among Chinese-language scholarship, several studies particularly concentrate on women's religious practices of Lotus Pond Societies (Lianchi hui 莲池会), a village-based religious association composed of middle-aged and elderly women. They provide important information for this research. Zhang Cuixia's (2015) folklore study focuses on the crucial value of Lotus Pond Societies and village women's religious practice in constructing and regulating Bai social and moral etiquette. According to Zhang, it is the same process that endows women with significant power in both private and public spaces as educators of family rules and social regulations. Focusing on the same research subject, Zhang Yunxia (2013) explores the practices of Lotus Pond Societies in various contexts such as religious activities, folk events, and festivals, examining the role of female members in moral education in Bai society.

#### **1.4 Minority Politics in Contemporary Southwest China**

The Guerx Sal Lad provides a typical example of Chinese minority religious festivals under different levels of intervention from state agents to the growing cultural heritagization of folk beliefs. With the state and local governments' support and recognition as a national ICH, the Guerx Sal Lad has been through a process through which the religious practices of the Bai gradually transformed from a superstitious belief to a "cultural" product of the state's nation-building project. Meanwhile, this process is not unidirectional. The heritagization of the Guerx Sal Lad also acts as an important site of negotiation among the state's dominant social-cultural ideology, local governments' flexible implementation, and people's discrepant participation, which sheds light on the discursive narrative and material practices of current minority politics in southwest China.

Key to my research project is to examine the plural soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad in the juxtaposition of the specific social-political context of southwest China and the negotiation between minority cultural and religious practices and the state's intervention in southwest China since the cultural and religious revival in the 1990s. In comparison to the officially recognized religions and more controversial circumstances in other parts of China, folk beliefs in southwest China present a "relatively desirable" situation for the state's regulation on minority religions, in which rituals and beliefs are accessible and even celebrated but, at the same time, monitored and regulated by state authority. In southwest China, while minority groups are expected to be exotic for the construction of a multi-ethnic nation and accept the regulation and assistance of the Han majority along the way (McCarthy 2009), one can also find a large number of narratives and representations that stress their belonging to the Chinese nation. Dali, for example, is a region with no perceived danger to the state, where minority groups have a more relaxed space to enjoy and even revive their religious practice and ethnic diversity. From the perspective of the state, Dali is considered a potential resource for cultural development.

Among scholarship regarding China's politics of minority religions, the mode of the power dynamic between the state and people's religious practices in an ethnic region like Dali is largely underrepresented, especially in comparison to more controversial circumstances in Tibet and Xinjiang (Kohn 2001) and officially recognized religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism) (Gladney 1991; Ashiwa and Wank 2009; Nedostup 2009). Moreover, in this pool of literature, the state government is often centered as the analytical figure, while subtle political issues, such as people's agency and the "micro-freedoms coexist with illimitable political power" (Zhang and Ong 2008, 11), are downplayed and even ignored. As Liang Yongjia (2018, 6) points out, scholarly research on the contestation of "religion" in China has often oversimplified

the social-political context in China “for the sake of religious freedom based on individualist choice in a way similar to customers choosing in a shopping mall where the state is nothing but a negligible security guard.”

Anthropologist Koen Wellens (2009, 434) presents a similar attitude toward current minority religious politics in southwest China. He addresses the importance of looking beyond the more publicized cases of religious suppression for a fuller picture of the heterogeneous conditions of religious freedom for ethnic minorities in China, as “religious policy differs throughout China’s vast territory, and it varies over time.” To present a more nuanced picture of ethnic minorities’ religious freedom, Wellens looks at the day-to-day conditions of northwest Yunnan, related laws and policies toward minority religion and ethnic autonomy, and the public discourse accompanying them, such as issues on minority culture, superstition, or ethnic tourism. He argues that some ambiguities in laws and regulations contribute to “a grey zone of implementation” (443) in which minority cadres and intellectuals can mediate the negotiation between the state and the people. As a result, certain ethnic minority groups might “enjoy a relatively high level of religious freedom, not in opposition to the party-state but with its full blessing” (436).

Joining this train of thought, this research challenges the oversimplified view of the current social, political, and cultural context of minority religions in China that pervades much of the scholarship on Chinese minority politics. This dissertation looks at the interplays among the state, local governments, rural communities, and other social agents in-between (basic-level cadres, local intellectuals, and representative transmitters) during the process of reviving and heritagizing the *Guex Sal Lad*, especially the various sounding events and musics involved in it, in order to contribute to an understanding of the elastic nature of minority politics in southwest China. I argue that, while the state has continued to reinforce its ideology at all social levels and insert it into all

social and cultural practices, there are also state agents in local government institutions who flexibly implement states' regulations and local scholars who endeavor to legitimize people's folk beliefs as significant cultural capital, so that spaces and certain freedom can be left for people's religious practices.

Moreover, this research aims to question the reductive dichotomy of ethnic minority groups versus the state and the construct of ethnic minorities as a homogenous group of people subjected to state control without any agency. Addressing the sounding of the Bai people's folk beliefs as a gentle but powerful expression, I argue that the ways people survive to carry on their religious and non-religious sounding practices in their everyday life and make sense of the participation in their own ways can be read as an important form of resistance against the everchanging political environment for ethnic minorities and their religious beliefs in China. As this dissertation will demonstrate, the shaping of the general soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad has involved encounters, interactions, and negotiations among multiple stakeholders up and down the social ladder. During these processes, the intersectionality of class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, and other identity categories becomes pivotal in blurring and complicating the conventional boundaries between the state and minorities.

## **1.5 Methodology**

### **1.5.1 Hometown Fieldwork**

In this research, it is crucial to discuss my own positionality, not only because it is one of the most important rationales that drove me into this research, but also because it highly influenced

the interactions I had with the people during my fieldwork. On my identity card (*shenfen zheng* 身份证), I am classified as a Bai, and the place of my origin (*jiguan* 籍贯) is the Dali Prefecture, but, I had never lived there before until I started my fieldwork. Instead, I was born in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan province, and grew up in Beijing, the political center of China where the dominant culture is Han. Neither of my parents speaks the Bai language or has any features and habits related to Bai culture. One might think that I must have no connections or emotional bonds with my ethnic identity. However, quite the opposite, I grew up knowing and identifying myself as an ethnic minority and being aware that Dali is my hometown. The reason is mainly two-fold.

First, I grew up experiencing my status as a minority. I have to admit that, when I was a child, I felt special being an ethnic minority. Whenever I needed to fill out a form involving information on ethnicity, I always had a different answer from my classmates who were mostly Han. Because of the preferential policies directed at ethnic minority groups in China, I got extra points on my university entrance exam.<sup>18</sup> As the Chinese saying goes, “the rarer, the more expensive” (*wu yixi weigui* 物以稀为贵). I was one of the few ethnic minorities among the people around me. Back then, I knew nothing about having all these “privileges” was because ethnic minorities are considered “different,” “less educated,” and “backward,” even though I often encountered people joking about my ethnicity. For example, whenever I told people that I was Bai, which in Chinese also has the meaning of “white” or “light-skinned,” they often said, “Oh, no wonder you look *bai* (light-skinned)” or “Does it mean that the Bai people are all very bai?”

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<sup>18</sup> Since the establishment of the national unified university entrance exam system in 1977, the state government has implemented preferential policies that authorized higher or lower exam scores and enrollment cutoff points for minorities (Sautman 1998). But the policies varied by province and by time.

Meanwhile, and more importantly, the attachment to Dali, especially Xizhou township (Xizhou zhen 喜洲镇), is part of my family heritage and an important element that constructed and sustained the connections between me, the Bai, and Dali. My paternal great-grandfather was an entrepreneur who started as a poor itinerant trader from Xizhou and, together with a few other shareholders, expanded his trading firm into a transnational business. Later, he became one of the most influential non-Han elites in the region of western Yunnan during the first half of the twenty-century. My paternal grandfather, the youngest son, was the first person in Dali who had the chance to attend Harvard Business School and devoted himself to the economic and educational development of Yunnan. Other than his business practices, I often heard from my father and other elders in my family stories of how my great-grandfather and other local merchants in Xizhou had sponsored and donated funds to local schools, libraries, medical clinics, temples, and other facilities for the public wellness of Xizhou, which had once transformed this small town into one of Yunnan's most wealthy townships offering good education and economic opportunities. In today's Dali, these people and their stories become the brand of Xizhou. Their old mansions have been turned into touristic sites and hotels as an exhibition of the brilliant past of this remote town. Local residents, at least the older generation, recognize and often have personal stories to tell about their relationship with these noble names. Moreover, my great-grandfather and grandfather's seriousness about education also accompanied my experiences growing up. My father has frequently used their life stories and words to address the tradition of emphasizing education in my family, such as in the first letter my father wrote me when I turned eighteen. My family history and the ties my family had with Xizhou and Dali have long become part of my personal memories and part of me as well. Therefore, my research is both academically and personally charged.



My positionality demonstrates the complexity of doing fieldwork in one's home/hometown (Stock and Chou 2008; Chou 2002; Madden 1999). The intersection of my study experiences in the United States (US), my life in Beijing, and my fieldwork in Dali has raised questions for me such as: What is home? What is a hometown? What is the field? When am I an insider, outsider, or "inside-outer" (Jairazbhoy 1996/1997)? Home can be many different things at once. To call "(a) place(s), (a) space(s), feeling(s), practices, and/or an active state of state of being" (Mallett 2004, 62) home, one needs a reference point to compare or to speak from. This reference point can be geographical. When I am in China, I consider Beijing as home, a place where I spent most of my life. The reference point can be my identity. When I speak from my identity as an international student studying in the US, China is my home, because that is where I was born and raised. To me, home provides me with solace and a feeling of belonging. This raises the question: is hometown home? In the context of China, hometown can indicate the place where one was raised. More importantly, hometown is the home of ancestors, a place that is not one's home, but rather a place that one feels close to. Therefore, the meaning of hometown and home share a sense of familiarity and belonging, but hometown carries a feeling of distance at the same time. As Chinese anthropologist Wang Mingming (2018, 90) expresses, "the reason why people often feel the sense of hometown is usually that they are away from the hometown." While Dali is my hometown, I do not call Dali my home. Although I have deep emotional bonds with Dali based on my family history, I do not have great knowledge and cultural familiarity with this place. I do not share the same language and history with the Bai. Therefore, instead of claiming that I did fieldwork at home, I can only say that I conducted my fieldwork in my hometown. But, after spending a long time living there and connecting with people during my fieldwork, Dali, my field and hometown, is becoming my home. For this research, my simultaneous closeness and distance with Dali and the

Bai have constantly positioned me at various points in the spectrum between insider and outsider and participated in the shifting power relationships that existed between me and people in my field site.

I am a Bai who grew up in Han culture but has a deep family background in Dali. I am also a young female scholar who is pursuing a Ph.D. in the US. During my fieldwork, I have been pushed to keep acknowledging and understanding my multi-layered identity throughout the process (Kondo 1990; Anderson 2021; Finchum-Sung 2018). The interactions I had with people and the levels of access I received to local knowledge varied greatly according to which facet of my identity people chose to look at, and how I told others about myself. For example, my identity as a young Bai scholar studying abroad and an heir to my family greatly helped with my contact with government agents and local elites. They were very willing to open up to and help a young scholar who came back to her hometown to learn. However, in addition to an academic scholar, they also regarded me as a Bai with the responsibility of protecting ethnic pride and a representative of my family's reputation, therefore, I was also bestowed high expectations to promote Bai culture. Being a young female allowed me to get close to and participate in the religious and social lives of female members of the rural community, but I was also more than once refused by local musicians and representative transmitters for interviews because I am a young scholar who doesn't have a relatively high social status. A representative transmitter once told me after our interview, "You know, I wouldn't have agreed to meet with you had you not been introduced by the director (of the Dali Prefectural ICH Protection Center)."

### 1.5.2 Fieldwork Methodology

My ethnographic work comprised an assemblage of data collected through participant observation, ethnographic interviews, textual analysis, copious audio, video, and photographic documentation, note-taking, and informal discussions with friends, acquaintances, and community members on a regular basis. Participant observation was surely a primary tool for my fieldwork, during which I strived to pay attention to “the democracy of the senses” (Forsey 2010, 562). Other than visual experiences, I emphasized the practice of attentive listening (ibid.), or what Andrew J. Eisenberg terms *listening in* (2009, 4). I listened to the soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad and immersed myself in the amalgamation of various sensory stimulations rooted in people’s religious and social lives: the strong smell of incense, the taste of people’s food offerings, the sense of intimacy from the welcomed embrace of elder grannies, and the tears from the sting of smoke. I listened to and with my interlocutors to share and circulate the affect generated by sound (Gill 2020). I listened to both people’s everyday sound making and sounds that were eliminated or unable to sound by structures of power (Appert and Lawrence 2020).

The formats of interviews I utilized in my fieldwork included semi-structured open-ended interviews and oral history interviews. While the former provided the most important foundation for information-gathering, the approach of oral history was crucial for understanding the past and changes in the Guerx Sal Lad according to people’s memories. Meanwhile, the questions and content of my ethnographic interviews overlap and complement each other to provide a fuller understanding of the festival and its soundscapes. In some of the interviews, with practitioners of different sounding practices, I presented my interlocutors with both audio and video recordings of the festival that I made during fieldwork as the starting point, asking them for their insights on the meanings of different components and their understandings of music and sound in contexts.

In this research, my interlocutors are from various social positions and engage with different social networks and communities. Therefore, I combined the approaches of going to the field alone and making connections by interacting with different people I encountered with what Kai Tang (2020, 189) describes as a convention of the fieldwork approach of Chinese ethnomusicologists, that is to “self-report their presence (*da zhaohu*) to local culture bureaus, on or before arrival in the field. The cultural cadres provide scholars with basic information about local culture and society, introduce local musicians they can meet, and recommend musical activities they can observe.”<sup>19</sup> In this way, I obtained access to both government-recommended individuals, such as artists and experts, as well as people who live and practice outside the institutional system.

In this dissertation, there are five different social actors—the rural community, local government institutions, basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local scholars. Because each group has a different relationship with and understanding of the Guerx Sal Lad, I needed to adjust my fieldwork methodology for each of them accordingly. With the rural Bai community (Chapter 3), I attended and made audio/video recordings of all the activities they participated in during the Guerx Sal Lad, as well as three other related religious events during the year, including the trip to Weishan 巍山 county to pick up Jingu 金姑 (the Golden Princess), the event of picking up *fuma* 驸马 (emperor’s son-in-law), and the birthday of *guomu* 国母 (mother of the country). I witnessed and participated in people’s religious activities, life rituals, and entertainment activities in their day-to-day social lives, such as temple fairs, funerals, weddings,

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<sup>19</sup> The need to receive permission from local governments is common in other countries, as demonstrated by scholars conducting fieldwork in Vietnam (Turner, Bonnin, and Michaud 2015, xi; Briain 2012, 19), Malaysia (Shamsul 2007, 157), and Indonesia (Weintraub 2004, 42).

and antiphonal singing competitions, among others. For the religious practices of Lotus Pond Societies, I followed the routine practices and special events of Lotus Pond Societies in six villages. I conducted interviews and daily conversations with community members, especially elder members who had witnessed the changes of the Guerx Sal Lad throughout their lifetimes and practitioners who had closely engaged in different activities at the festival, including pilgrimage group leaders, temple administrators, Lotus Pond Society members, ritual experts, singers, and band musicians. In my daily conversations and informal discussions with people I encountered during my fieldwork, I always brought up the topic of the Guerx Sal Lad and asked them to share their impressions, knowledge, and memories of the festival. These stories and narratives have become fundamental to my exploration of rural community's varying perspectives on the festival.

With local government institutions and basic-level cadres (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5), I conducted interviews with officials from the Dali Municipal ICH Protection and Management Office, the Dali prefectural ICH Protection Center (Dalizhou feiyi zhongxin 大理州非遗中心, hereafter the Prefectural ICH Center), as well as leaders of the Dali Municipal Cultural Center. I also conducted interviews with leaders of the village committee in Qingdong 庆洞 and Heyicheng 河矣城 villages. I was granted permission to attend a few government-organized events, such as training courses for representative transmitters and scheduled recording of transmitters' group performances. From my interactions with local government officials, I was kindly given some important documents on the ICH application of the Guerx Sal Lad, video recordings of government-organized performances, and internal publications, such as a government report on different ICH projects around the festival. These materials have provided significant insights into the regulations and actions that local governments took on shaping the soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad.

With representative transmitters (Chapter 5), I interviewed eleven transmitters of the Guerx Sal Lad and related music and dance genres at the national, prefecture, and municipal levels. I attended their transmission courses, rehearsals, and public performances on different occasions. I also observed their activities regularly through social media platforms, such as WeChat (*weixin* 微信) and TikTok (*douyin* 抖音), where they promote their expertise and reach out to a broader audience. To better familiarize myself with their practices and transmission methods of music/sound, I received both one-on-one and group lessons from two different transmitters, one works at a local university, and the other offers classes through word of mouth.

In my contact with local scholars (Chapter 5), I conducted interviews with both official and non-official scholars who are based in Dali and specialize in Bai culture and history. By “official scholars,” I refer to scholars who are affiliated with local universities and research institutions, as well as social elites who work for or retired from local government institutions, whereas “non-official scholars” indicate amateur scholars who are active in the local intellectual scene. For official scholars, I interviewed several scholars working in local research institutions, such as Dali University and the Dali Prefectural Research Institute of Bai Culture (Dali baizu wenhua yanjiu yuan 大理白族文化研究院), and government institutions, such as the local cultural bureaus of culture. I also conducted interviews with non-official scholars and local intellectuals who are active and well-respected in the local intellectual scene. Another important source for my examination of scholarly discourses on the Guerx Sal Lad was local scholars’ published research on the history, legends, religious activities, and other aspects of the festival. As a crucial type of utterance representing scholarly voices, conducting analysis on and making conversations with these narratives have been a highly productive process of understanding the significance of local scholars in shaping the official image and oral history of the Guerx Sal Lad.

To facilitate my interviews and other ethnographic work, I began to participate in group lessons on the Bai language provided at Dali University as soon as I arrived in Dali. I also attempted to learn more by having simple conversations with my local Bai friends whenever possible. However, I still failed to become a fluent speaker of Bai because of the limitations of time and the huge differences between the spoken language of Bai and Mandarin. Luckily, most of the interlocutors I encountered in my fieldwork, even elders, were able to speak either Mandarin or the official dialect of Yunnan province, which I am fluent in. Yet, occasionally, I had to ask for help from bilingual Bai speakers to assist with the translation and transliteration of lyrics or speeches in the Bai language. My lack of language proficiency has definitely impacted the depth of my investigations and communications with the locals, especially non-literate elder members of the rural community. When I talked to them, I sometimes had to rely on people around them to help me with translations.

My fieldwork was supplemented by archival research for primary and secondary sources. I conducted library research on primary sources on the history and local legends related to the Bai and the Guex Sal Lad at the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefectural Library, Yunnan Provincial Library (Kunming), and the Ancient Town Library in Dali. Through internet searches, I was able to locate a large amount of information including Chinese language news, government policies, and important talks given by state leaders. I also acquired several now out-of-print publications on the history, music, and folk culture of the Bai through online purchases.

## 1.6 Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 2, I provide important information on my research and a detailed overview of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole. First, I present a detailed survey of the current religious beliefs of the Bai people, especially the benzhu worship, which is central to the religious core of the Guerx Sal Lad. Then, a brief history of the geo-political changes in the Dali region and the formation of Bai identity from the time of the Nanzhao kingdom to the period after the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The current syncretic religious practices and social recognition of the Bai are to a great extent a result of the long-standing cultural, social, political, and economic interactions between indigenous populations and other cultures, including both Han culture from the regions of central China and other neighboring powers from Tibet, India, and Southeast Asia. This long-term reciprocity also shows that the notion of Bai and the boundaries of the territory of Dali are never fixed, but constantly subject to negotiation and reconfiguration according to their varying social-political contexts and the gazes under which they are examined. This section is followed by the most important two parts of this chapter, which include a thorough overview of the legends, itineraries, and primary activities of the Guerx Sal Lad, as well as an exploration of the descriptions of the Guerx Sal Lad in past literature. By integrating the histories and activities of different participants, this section presents a general picture of the festival in its larger, inclusive soundscape.

The next three chapters constitute the main body of this dissertation. Each chapter focuses on the sub-soundscape of different yet related social groups involved in the shaping of the Guerx Sal Lad. Chapter 3 examines multiple musics, sounds, and bodily and multi-sensory practices that are crucial to rural Bai practitioners' understanding of the Guerx Sal Lad and their significant values for rural Bai communities. The main discussion of this chapter is divided into three sections, exploring the sub-soundscape of rural Bai people as an overlap of a religious space, a gendered



space, and an intimate space. These three spaces are coexistent and often interpenetrated and interdependent.

In the religious space, I analyze the collaboration of sound, sight, body, and embodied mind in people's worship, the sound of the instrument *dilder*, and the pilgrimage as a mobile performance during the festival. As sound moves between physical territories and between humans and the gods, I demonstrate the ways sound, body, and other senses create and maintain a relational and hierarchical web among people's households and their deities involved in the *Guex Sal Lad*. As a gendered space, women comprise the majority of participants in the *Guex Sal Lad* and are the main actors who worship deities for the protection and prosperity of their villages and families. In this section, I explore Bai women's religious agency and bonding by looking into the bodily and sounding practices of the Lotus Pond Society, a village-based religious association composed of middle-aged and elderly women. Applying Louise Meintjes' (2019) concept of "body-voice" and Mayfair Yang's (2020) concept of pious women's "nonoppositional agency," I argue that, while living under and sometimes reproducing the Neo-Confucian patriarchal system, Bai women's collective "body-voice habitus" has created a sustainable sounding environment that enables communication with divinities and a female-only space in which they build connections with each other, refines their virtues, and empower them to carry on their family and religious obligations. Finally, I turn to antiphonal singing, an improvised singing activity not exclusive to the *Guex Sal Lad* but one that is often invoked in government and scholarly accounts as a typical manifestation of the intimate atmosphere of the *Guex Sal Lad*. In this section, I explore the politics of pleasure in the Bai people's social life and the multiple senses of "public intimacy" (Guilbault 2010) enacted in these community-based musical events and their generative power to turn the *Guex Sal Lad* into an intimate space.

Chapter 4 turns from rural Bai people's festive experiences to the sub-soundscape of the state-led and locally implemented ICH projects surrounding the Guerx Sal Lad. This chapter mainly focuses on how local governments and public institutions at the prefectural, municipal, and county levels have followed the state's ideology and endeavored to develop the Guerx Sal Lad into an ICH. These practices have given new life to the Guerx Sal Lad as a performing platform. To lay the contextual foundation, this chapter begins with a general introduction to the primary policies and regulations that have operated at the national, provincial, and prefectural levels since the late 1990s. The chapter then shifts to a discussion about how local public institutions have acted on the heritagization of the Guerx Sal Lad in four different ways: (1) rewriting the festival in the two attempts to apply for the national ICH list in 2006 and the UNESCO ICH list in 2009 and some effects on the rewriting process; (2) the top-down transmission system; (3) public performances organized by local governments; and (4) transmission programs inserted into school education. I intend to show the complexity of the process through which the Guerx Sal Lad, a religious festival, is reshaped into a form of non-religious cultural capital representing the Bai identity. I offer a balanced review of the efficacy of ICH projects in transmitting practices within the festival and in influencing rural Bai communities' experiences. I argue that the heritagization process of the Guerx Sal Lad has framed religious components as folklore and put emphasis on the music and dance involved in the festival. As a result, the religious dimensions and religious sounds of the festival have been suppressed and even eliminated. However, these same processes have protected people's religious practices and have given the Guerx Sal Lad a new life as a performance platform that motivates people's participation in alternative ways.

Chapter 5 centers on three specific sub-groups of the third realm: basic-level cadres, representative transmitters recognized by the government, and local Bai scholars. These three

groups are positioned between different levels of government and rural Bai people. Their practices are all influenced by state ideologies and nationalism. Meanwhile, they mediate the contestation between the people and state power as well. Basic-level cadres often do the actual work of implementing policies from higher-level administrations and integrating rural practices into the state's various projects. In the discussion on basic-level cadres, I first provide a brief introduction to the PRC's ethnic minority policies and basic methods of minority cadre training and recruiting. I then discuss the flexibility of basic-level cadres in playing with the ambiguity of policies regarding the government-led ICH projects and maintaining space for rural community's religious practices. Representative transmitters are well-known local artists who are selected to transmit their expertise, represent the achievements of ICH projects, and set models for other rural community members. Since the way representative transmitters get involved with local governments' cultural systems is totally different from that of basic-level cadres, I start this section with a description of the designation system for representative transmitters. Next, I present two examples of how representative transmitters' practices have become the voice of government ideology. At the end of this section, I analyze various transformations that transmitters and their traditions have gone through since the recognition of the Guerx Sal Lad as an ICH item. Local scholars, the third focus of this chapter, are important consultants for local governments, creators of the Guerx Sal Lad's official accounts, and decisive forces of local knowledge production. Through reading into their positionality and discourses surrounding the Guerx Sal Lad, particularly writings published during the 1980s and 1990s, I highlight the central role played by local intellectuals, especially Bai scholars, in empowering their voices as ethnic minority scholars and integrating the Bai into the project of building a multi-ethnic nation.

This dissertation concludes with a discussion readdressing the soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad as an example of dialogic heteroglossia. I bring different sub-soundscapes and ideologies of their associated social groups together to examine the frictions and gaps between different ideologies on regulating and identifying the Guerx Sal Lad and religious practices of the Bai people in general. I draw out the interconnected soundscapes of the Guerx Sal Lad and analyze the intersectional influences between different sub-soundscapes and social actors. Finally, I illustrate how the overlapping and negotiating of different soundscapes contribute to the larger, inclusive soundscape of the festival.

## 2.0 Encountering the Bai and the Guerx Sal Lad

In this chapter, I provide important information and a detailed overview of the Guerx Sal Lad as a whole. First, I present a survey of the Bai people's religious beliefs, especially the religious elements encompassed in the Guerx Sal Lad. As a necessary explanation and supplement, this section is followed by a brief history of the formation of Bai identity and the relationship between people's religious beliefs and Dali's geo-political changes from an independent kingdom to the southwestern frontier of modern China. I attempt to illustrate the long-term interactions between various cultures and religions and contestations between different political forces on the land of Dali. These exchanges have greatly shaped the syncretism of religions and cultures in today's Guerx Sal Lad and everyday religious practices of the Bai. They were also the foundation of different legends that have been told about the festival and the history of the Bai. Moreover, as I will show in the following chapters, the definition of the Guerx Sal Lad is often tied to the representation and understanding of the Bai as a group; therefore, although this research focuses mainly on the contemporary Guerx Sal Lad, it is important to address that, throughout history, the identity of the Bai was never fixed but constantly subject to reinterpretations and reconfigurations, as was the meaning of Guerx Sal Lad. The last section of this chapter is an overview of the history, related legends, and primary activities of the Guerx Sal Lad in its larger, inclusive soundscape. Due to the scarcity of available historical records and scholarly discussion about the festival, my presentation of the last section is based on various existing fragmented accounts by scholars and writers combined with my fieldwork observations and interviews conducted in Dali city.

Unfortunately, a great number of historical records and scholarly research concerned with the history of Dali and the Bai were written from a power holder or Han perspective (Yang Bin

2008, 3). On the one hand, these sources can only represent the dominant narrative of the history of the Bai and the Dali region within the framework of a united multi-ethnic nation. The lack of emphasis on ordinary people's experiences and practices is a frustrating limitation of this field of research which illustrates the fundamental asymmetry of power in ethnic-history writing. However, on the other hand, these previous writings and studies still provide significant insights into the genesis of the diverse activities in the Guerx Sal Lad and Bai people's religious beliefs. They are also helpful in elucidating the process from which a group of people from different cultures and regions were gradually bound up with a unified ethnic identity—Bai.

## 2.1 Deity Worship of the Bai

Deity worship, especially the local benzhu worship,<sup>20</sup> plays an essential part in the Bai people's ordinary life.<sup>21</sup> In the current Dali, there are many temples and shrines for people to worship deities and spirits and to consult with spirit mediums.<sup>22</sup> People worship ancient heroes, such as Duan Chicheng 段赤城, a poor young man who killed a giant serpent and sacrificed himself for the safety of the people; they worship the gods from Daoism, such as the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang dadi 玉皇大帝) and the Earth Mother (Dimu 地母); and they worship Buddhas from

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<sup>20</sup> Another appellation the Bai people used to call their benzhu is *laoguni*, which literally means “the great-grandfather” (Zhao Yuzhong 2016, 480–81). In this research, I follow the translation of Chinese scholar Zhao Yuzhong (2016) to interpret benzhu as “the tutelary deity,” because benzhu is both the ancestor and the guardian spirit of a village.

<sup>21</sup> Although scholars believe that all Bai people take on the benzhu belief, it does not mean that it only belongs to the Bai. According to Li Donghong and Zhao Yuanliang (2021, 167), villages in the Dali region inhabited by the Han have their benzhu temples as well.

<sup>22</sup> A lot of these temples were restored through donations from the local administration office, villagers, and religious organizations like Lotus Pond Societies and Dongjing Societies.

Buddhism in their everyday lives, religious festivals, and temples. People's religiosity and worship practice are based on a "practical dependence" (Chau 2006, 62) on the deities and operate in a "gift-relation" (Liang Yongjia 2014, 427) between them. People pray to deities for the prosperity (*fawang* 发旺) of the family and for help when they are in distress. These desires are achieved through a series of "giving, receiving and returning" (428). Worshipers offer "gifts" to deities, such as making offerings and donating to local temples, transmit their requests through praying and burning paper petitions, and return deities' blessing and protection by making more offerings and reciprocating with gods on important lifecycle events.

Benzhu worship constitutes a core component of the Bai people's religious practice, showing a syncretism of traditions in esoteric Buddhist practice, Confucianism, Daoism, Shamanism, ancestor worship, and animism (Zhou Kaimo 2005). "Benzhu" literally means "one's own master." It refers to the tutelary deity of every village who is perceived by people as "not only the first ancestor but also the guardian spirit of a community" (Zhao Yuzhong 2016, 481). Other than the name related to their identity, each benzhu has a divine title which is similar to the imperial titles of emperors and empresses in Chinese ancient courts. For example, the divine title of the Loving People Emperor is the "Great Holy Grounding Emperor Coming From the Far West to Safeguard the Preaching of the Buddhist Doctrines" (Dasheng xilai hufa lingzhen wufang jianguo huangdi 大圣西来护法灵镇五方建国皇帝). During my fieldwork, I was bewildered by the huge pantheon of benzhu ranging from ancestors, world creators, deified local historical figures, and local royals, to deities of Buddhism, with particular legends, characters, and social relations with other benzhu. All the deities people worship during the Guerx Sal Lad, from the Loving People Emperor (Aimin huangdi 爱民皇帝) to the Numinous Emperor of Er River (Erhe lingdi 洱河灵帝), belong to a village's benzhu.

Benzhu are the highest deity within their territory, because all aspects of their people's lives, from life and death to their land and livestock, are under benzhu's guardianship. People go to benzhu temples on significant days in the life cycles of family members, during major festivals, or when they have specific requests or questions for benzhu. When someone passes away, other family members need to go to the benzhu temple and ask benzhu to erase that person's name from the living world. On benzhu's birthdays, worshipers bring out the statues of benzhu in ritual procession to inspect the boundaries and ensure that their people are protected from demonic incursions into their territory. Benzhu are seen as omnipotent because they are "always there ready to ensure fertility and prosperity, as well as provide protection against any unpredictable misfortune, be it individual or communal" (ibid.). The memorialization of their accomplishments and kind deeds to their people is carried on by folk legends, temple couplets, tablets, and people's religious practices.

Different from Buddhism and Daoism in which Buddhas and gods are permanent once they are consecrated, in benzhu worship, a village can have different benzhu throughout time based on different folktales and their relationship with the local social-cultural context. Furthermore, one can find the same benzhu being presented in various identities and appearances in different villages. For example, Duan Chicheng is presented as a hero who killed the giant serpent in Hehua village (Hehua cun 荷花村), yet he is also the Numinous Emperor of Er River in Heyicheng village (He Yongfu 1997, 61). Every village has a benzhu temple where the benzhu of that village and other general deities, such as the God Mahākāla (Dahei tianshen 大黑天神), the God of Wealth (Caishen



财神), and the Goddess of Fertility (Zisun niangniang 子孙娘娘), are enshrined.<sup>2324</sup> It is common to find statues of benzhu placed together with Daoist and Buddhist divinities inside one temple; there can be more than ten of them. In most temples, deities are represented by statues, often a small one in front of the major ones (Figure 2). Sometimes, two to three contiguous villages might share one benzhu temple.



**Figure 2** The hall of Jingu at the Great Temple of the West (Xibian Dasi 西边大寺), Weishan. A smaller statue of Jingu is placed in front of the major one. Photograph by author, March 22, 2021.

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<sup>23</sup> In Schmitt's research on Dali's benzhu cult, his systematic survey indicates 106 benzhu temples identified in 156 villages on the Dali plain (Schmitt 2007, 187).

<sup>24</sup> Benzhu temples in the Dali region have a similar system of accompanying deities. In addition to the benzhu, other common deities enshrined include the God Mahākāla, the God of Wealth, and the Goddess of Fertility, the God of Medicine (Dou'er gege 痘二哥哥), Son of the New King (Xinwang taizi 新王太子), and Gods of Domestic Animals (Liuchu dawang 六畜大王) (Yang Zhengye 1994, 34–37).

It is also important to make sure the temple environment is well maintained because the space of the temple does not just exist in its physical form, but also an invisible space as the deities' domicile. To keep the temple clean and organized is not just for the sake of worshippers but also for the deities to have a better living environment. A beautiful and well-maintained abode and the number of worshippers it attracts reflect the efficacy and reputation of the deity, as well as the strength and capability of the community. Other than daily cleaning, red paper couplets (*duilian* 对联) pasted in the temple need to be updated on important dates, such as the Guex Sal Lad, benzhu's birthday, the Chinese New Year, and the mid-Autumn festival. On these important dates, benzhu temples are always jam-packed with worshippers paying respect to deities and seeking knowledge of the future through looking at the incense (*qiao xianghuo* 瞧香火). Worshippers bring new clothes for deities and dress their statues, just like being a guest in other people's homes (Figure 3). As Liang Yongjia (2014, 429) noted, "Through temple activities, people create 'indebtedness' with gods or the supernatural, or in reference to them, that guarantees continuous reciprocity of moral actions."



**Figure 3** The Lotus Pond Society from Wenge village (Wenge cun 文阁村) wearing new cloth for guomu on her birthday at the Shendu temple, Qingdong village. Photograph by author, October 16, 2020.

## **2.2 History of Dali and the Formation of the Bai Identity**

The origin of the Bai has long been a site for extensive debates among local intellectuals. Some suggested ancestors of the Bai include the aboriginal (Du Kun 1960; Zhang Xu 1990), Bo (You Zhong 1985; Wang Shuwu 1957), and the Diqiang 氏羌 peoples from northwest China (Xu Jiarui 1962), but the most recent and commonly agreed theory is that the Bai are a mixed group of diverse origins (Fang Guoyu 1957; Lin Chaomin 1990; Ma Yao 2000; Li Donghong 2004; Lin

Chaomin and Li Jing 2019).<sup>25</sup> Since the prehistoric era, the Ailao 哀牢 people lived on the west side of the Lancang River (Lancang jiang 澜沧江), the Bo 僂 people from the Min River (Min jiang 岷江) basin, and the Han migrated to Er Lake region during different time periods, lived together with the aboriginal groups, and mutually influenced one another. In imperial China, non-Han groups in the southwest were referred to as *manyi* 蛮夷, the barbarians. Chinese states adopted a series of projects and measures, such as through education and administration systems, to transform and “civilize” non-Han populations. Around the tenth year of the Zhenyuan era (794), as the Nanzhao kingdom realigned itself toward loyalty to the Tang court, a unitary group began to take shape (Lin Chaomin and Li Jing 2019).

### **2.2.1 The Nanzhao Kingdom (652–902) in the Tang Dynasty (618–907)**

The Nanzhao kingdom was the first unified kingdom around Yunnan which consolidated the central role of the Er Lake region as the political, economic, and cultural center of Yunnan, as well as a major commerce center of the trade route from Southeast Asia to Assam in India. The kingdom was founded by the chieftain of the Mengshe chiefdom (Mengshe *zhao* 蒙舍诏, also called Nan *zhao*, meaning *zhao* in the south), Piluoge 皮逻阁 (?–751).<sup>26</sup> In the early Tang dynasty, there were six major chiefdoms in the Dali area, and the Mengshe chiefdom (modern Weishan) ruled by Xinuluo 细奴逻 (617–674) in the south was the strongest.<sup>27</sup> During the seventh century,

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<sup>25</sup> Another theory proposed by Western scholars suggests that the ancestors of the Bai people were Thai, which has been convincingly refuted in the 1960s (see Liang Yongjia 2018, 79–89).

<sup>26</sup> Although the founder and successive kings of the Nanzhao were the Yi, officials in the ruling class were mostly the Bai (You Zhong 1982).

<sup>27</sup> Beside the six chiefdoms, there were other small local tribes, clans, and polities as well (Yang Bin 2008, 72).

the power of Tubo 吐蕃 (proto-Tibet) kept increasing and expanding to the Er Lake region. Several tribes made alliances with Tubo, which greatly weakened the domination of the Tang in the Yunnan region. To constrain the power of Tubo, the Tang court entered Yunnan and forged an alliance with the Mengshe ruler (*Manshu*, 14–18). In 737, the Mengshe chiefdom led by Piluoge incorporated the other five kingdoms with the support of the Tang court, and united the Er Lake region. A year later, Piluoge established the Nanzhao kingdom in the Er Lake region and was granted the title “King of Yunnan” (*Yunnan wang* 云南王) by the Tang court (Fang Guoyu 1957). Since then, Nanzhao became the first united polity in the Er Lake region.

With its rapidly increasing power, the Nanzhao kingdom once ruled the area of today’s Yunnan Province along with parts of today’s Sichuan, Guizhou in China and Vietnam, Laos, and Burma in Southeast Asia. Nanzhao’s rapid expansion and changing political interests of Nanzhao, Tubo, and Tang China led to intense conflicts and shifting alliances between these three kingdoms, until Nanzhao made peace with the Tang court in 794 and helped the Tang court defeat Tubo. Yet, this reconciliation was also the beginning of another stage of expansion of Nanzhao and the later collapse of Nanzhao-Tang relationship (Yang Bin 2008, 78–79). In the first half of the 800s, Nanzhao became the most powerful kingdom in mainland Southeast Asia. Shilong 世隆 (844–877), the new ruler of then Nanzhao, discontinued the tributary relationship with the Tang court and changed the kingdom’s name to the Kingdom of Etiquette (Dali guo 大礼国)(*ibid.*).<sup>28</sup> In the following century, Nanzhao and Tang pursued a series of military campaigns and negotiations,

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<sup>28</sup> The name of the Kingdom of Etiquette in Chinese has the same pronunciation with the later Dali kingdom but with different characters.

until 902, when a Tang official, Zheng Maisi 郑买嗣, maimed the infant king of Nanzhao, leading to the fall of Nanzhao.<sup>29</sup>

During almost three hundred years of the regime, Nanzhao rulers adopted the administrative system from Tang China and strongly encouraged the study of Chinese culture. The Tang court established schools in non-Han areas where kings of the Nanzhao sent students to obtain a Han education, especially the teachings of Confucianism. The Nanzhao kingdom adopted the Confucian ritual system, built sacrificial altars, and established the first Confucius temple in the Er Lake region. Nanzhao elites absorbed different elements from the Han, such as the kinship system, political structure, Sinitic script, and agricultural techniques. However, this incorporation was not a one-way process, as the Nanzhao and the later Dali kingdoms continued to expand their power and territories within the Yunnan area, newcomers and people from other groups were often assimilated into the Bai as well (Lin Chaomin 2019; McCarthy 2009, 16).

Buddhism had been introduced to the Dali region around the end of the seventh century through Tianzhu 天竺 (proto-India), Tubo, Southeast Asia, and the central plains (*zhongyuan* 中原) (Zhang Haichao 2011; Yang Xuezheng 1992, 84). The most prevalent esoteric form of Buddhism in Nanzhao was Tantric Buddhism, often known in Dali as the *azhali* 阿吒力 religion transmitted from Tianzhu. Soon after its dissemination, *azhali* became the dominant religion and state ideology in the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms and helped to consolidate the governing of the kingdom. The term *azhali* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit term *ācārya*,<sup>30</sup> meaning “spiritual teachers”. This term was originally a respectful title for *azhali* masters, but, in Nanzhao, it was

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed history of the interactions between Nanzhao, Tang, Tubo, and other neighboring powers during the Tang Dynasty, see Yang Bin 2008, 66–91 and Backus 1981.

<sup>30</sup> Other common Chinese transliterations for *ācārya* include *asheli* 阿闍梨, *achili* 阿叱力, and *azuoli* 阿佐梨 (Zhang Zehong and Liao Ling 2018, 41).

used to indicate azhali monks in general. Azhali adopts the bodhisattva of mercy (Guanyin 观音) and the God Mahākāla (Dahei tianshen 大黑天神) as the guardian spirits (Zhang Zehong and Liao Ling 2018, 41).

In Nanzhao, azhali masters were often given socially high status and treatment so that religion could serve the political cause. They practiced this esoteric Buddhism while holding important political positions and conducting national rituals. This position was often hereditary. Many royalties and social elites converted to Buddhism, owning both political and religious power (Lian Ruizhi 2007, 6–8). During the period of Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms, rulers in Dali and their regimes created a system that contained and integrated both indigenous and Buddhist deities. To solidify their ruling and effectively avoid conflicts among chiefdoms, rulers often incorporated themselves and regional deities (later benzhu) into a series of Buddhist guardian deities, conferred Buddhist guardian deities as regional deities, or deified themselves, war heroes, or chieftains as regional deities. Moreover, rulers often linked their kinship to these deities to legitimize their status and privileges (Lian Ruizhi 2009). This explains why, in today's Dali, benzhu's identity ranges from deities to various historical figures. This kind of Buddhist kingship was also presented in its emphasis on sorcery and ritual which integrated Buddhism from central China, India, Tibet, and Southeast Asia (ibid., 6). These sorcery practices are often cited by local scholars as one of the original sources of certain elements in the Guex Sal Lad, such as the singing and dancing of *hualiu* elders (*hualiu laoren* 花柳老人), whose performance combines religious practice, speech and songs, and expressive body movements.

Following the fall of the Tang, the Mengshe chiefdom that ruled the Nanzhao kingdom was replaced by several short-lived regimes until general Duan Siping 段思平 (894–944) took power in the Dali region and founded the Dali kingdom (937–1253) during the Five Dynasties and Ten

Kingdoms (907–960). During the Song dynasty, to avoid the kind of conflict between the Nanzhao and the Tang happening again, the Song emperor declared a non-engagement policy toward the southwest. However, apart from the political and military interactions, other sorts of exchange, such as trade and tributaries, were still maintained between the Dali kingdom and the Song (Liu Yongsheng 2006; Lei Xinlai and Ge Quan 2017). As a result, compared to the Nanzhao period, there were much fewer sources and records on the history of the Dali and later Dali kingdoms. But as the Dali kingdom existed as a Buddhist kingdom for close to another three centuries, except for a short interruption known as the Dazhong kingdom (Dazhong guo 大中国)(1094–1096), a number of Buddhist texts and arts remained and provided important insights for later scholars.

### **2.2.2 The Dali Kingdom in the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368)**

In 1253, the latter Dali kingdom was conquered by the army led by Kublai Khan 忽必烈 (or Hubilie) (1215–1294). Since then, the Er Lake region began to be incorporated into the Mongolian Yuan Empire (1279–1368). The imperial court imposed its administration structure, taxation, and economic and cultural system to Yunnan. Meanwhile, native peoples influenced immigrants from other groups in various ways, leading to a process of indigenization as well. Based on the administrative structure of the Mongol empire, Yunnan was reorganized as a province. The Mongol rulers established the native chieftain (*tusi* 土司) system, appointing hereditary native chieftains to administer different areas and defend the frontiers.<sup>31</sup> While paying tributes and taxes to the Mongol court, native chieftains had the power to rule based on local customs (Gong Yin

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<sup>31</sup> The native chieftain system was not applied just to the Yunnan area, but also to other regions in southern areas, including Sichuan and Huguang provinces (modern Hunan and Hubei provinces) (Zhang Xiaosong 2005).



1992, 22–52; Luo Qun 2013). Although Dali lost its political superiority, it was still an important regional cultural and economic center. It also stood in a significant strategic position for the expansion of Mongol territory. When the first official governor of Yunnan Sayyid 'Ajall Shams al-Din 赛典赤 (or Sai Dianchi) (1211–1279), a Muslim from Central Asia, was sent by Kublai Khan, he brought Islam to Yunnan and deployed a land settlement program that simulated a large number of migrations of Mongol, Chinese, and Muslim civilians and soldiers (Armijo-Hussein 1997; Zhou Yanxian 1991).

During the Yuan dynasty, the position and influence of azhali were weakened. The Yuan court attempted to spread Confucian learning throughout its territory and utilize Chinese Zen Buddhism as another central principle of people's edification (*jiaohua* 教化) in Yunnan. But, at the same time, they adopted a tolerant policy toward different religions (Zhang Guangbao and Song Xueli 2014, 202–33). As a result, the previously dominant religion of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms was supplanted by Confucianism prevalent in imperial China.<sup>32</sup> Confucianism became an important principle to rule and civilize native “barbarians.” Under the governorship of Sayyid 'Ajall Shams al-Din, officials built Confucian schools and temples, conduct Confucian rituals and music (*liyue* 礼乐), and spread Confucian teachings (ibid., 301–04; Zhou Yanxian 1991). Since the Yuan dynasty, “Bai” or “Bai people” (*Bai ren* 白人) as a united group identity started to be widely used in local documents to describe the descendants of the Bai king or the aristocracy of the Dali kingdom, which marked the recognition and acknowledgment from the central China (Lin Chaomin 1982).

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<sup>32</sup>The practice of Confucianism in the Dali region could be traced back to the Three Kingdoms period (220–265), but did not become an influential religion until the Yuan dynasty (Zhang Zehong 2006).

### 2.2.3 The Late Imperial Era (1382–1911)

In 1368, the short-lived Yuan dynasty was overthrown by the Ming court (1368–1644). The founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), also known as Ming Taizu 明太祖, utilized the central military-garrison (*weisuo* 卫所) system which established troop stations across the empire to guard subdivided administrative areas. Under the military-garrison system, the migration of Han officials, soldiers, traders, and civilians from the south of Yangtze River continued and accelerated through a forced migration policy. They opened up uncultivated land, brought their farm implements and farming techniques, and married local women, which not only facilitated the development of local agriculture and economy but also further complicated the boundary between local and non-local identities. By the middle of the sixteenth century, Han residents in the southwest had reached approximately thirty percent of the local population (Lee 1982, 285–86). To support the military and feed the locals, the Mu clan created military garrisons and farms for military, civilian, and business use (*tuntian* 屯田) throughout the area.<sup>33</sup> Until the late Ming, the number of military farms in Yunnan had reached over four hundred (Lin Chaomin 2005, 110; Zhou Yanxian 1989; Zhang Guangbao and Song Xueli 2014, 262).

The Ming actively promoted Chinese culture in order to transform indigenous populations into Chinese. Confucianism and Daoism became important instruments of the state edification system, while azhali was heavily oppressed. In the early Ming, to maximize his power and imperial authority, Zhu Yuanzhang began to initiate a comprehensive system of state sacrifices and music for his empire. Based on Confucian and classical ideology, this system stipulated every aspect of

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<sup>33</sup> This system was established in the Han dynasty and reached its peak in the Ming dynasty (Zhou Yanxian 1989).

state rituals, including the subject of sacrifice, venues, dates, and specific procedures and paraphernalia. Zhu Yuanzhang also redefined and standardized the title and legitimacy of different religious gods. Only deities who had done well for the people could be included in the state sacrifices. But, of course, the criteria of “done well” was based on rulers’ political ideologies (Zhang Guangbao and Song Xueli 2014, 265–70; Lam 1998).

As the state sacrifice system permeated the border region, the Ming actively promoted temples to Daoist rituals and gods, such as the City God (Chenghuang 城隍) and the Literary God (Wenchang 文昌), which eventually became integrated with local popular religious practices, especially benzhu beliefs. For example, many Daoist gods were incorporated into the pantheon of benzhu, various Daoist rituals and texts were combined into practices of benzhu beliefs as well. The system of state sacrifices also provided local elites with a model for conferring benzhu with honoring titles based on their contributions and credits, such as the divine title of the Loving People Emperor mentioned earlier (Chao 1999, 515; von Glahn 2004, 200–02). However, folk beliefs were regarded by administrative officials as improper cults (*yinsi* 淫祀). Therefore, although administrators did not subdue these religious practices, they were not included in the state ritual system and local gazetteers (Zhang Haichao 2008, 11; von Glahn 2004, 200–02).

For the edification of ethnic minorities, especially for native royal elites and their descendants, disseminating Confucian teachings became a primary responsibility for local officials. In more than sixty Confucian schools across the region,<sup>34</sup> Confucian teachings were incorporated into the mandatory education system in the Dali region. Just as in the Yuan dynasty, Qing emperors imposed highly centralized edification programs on the southwestern frontier. The Qing initiated

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<sup>34</sup> There were only nine Confucian schools in the Yuan dynasty (Zhang Guangbao and Song Xueli 2014, 318).

public education programs in remote border regions and found more public schools than the Yuan, which greatly increased the success of non-Han residents in imperial civil service examinations. A lot of Bai elites and members of the former aristocracy had already “adjusted themselves to Chinese administration” (Lian Ruizhi 2013, 86) by having the greatest number of students among different ethnic groups, mastering Han culture, and writing directly in Sinitic script. Local elites started to take part in the imperial civil service examinations to become government officials (You Zhong 1983, 58–59; Wang Ruiping 2004). To further stabilize Ming’s control of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious population, Zhu Yuanzhang ordered to ban and burn all documents and records of the history and culture of Yunnan before the Yuan dynasty, which caused a severe gap in the written genealogy of Dali’s centuries of history.

During the late Ming dynasty, the Ming rulers expanded their direct control over Yunnan to a greater extent by abolishing the hereditary posts of native chieftains and forcefully replacing them with only Chinese circular officials (*gaitu guiliu* 改土归流), which ended centuries of indigenous ruling in Dali and further accelerated the acculturation of ethnic minorities into the Han traditions. The enforcement of this policy was limited in its scope in the Ming dynasty and reached its peak during the mid-Qing dynasty (1644–1912). However, the native chiefdom system continued in the southwest and left an important influence on regional administration until the end of the Qing dynasty (Luo Qun 2013; Herman 1997). The Qing court acknowledged more than one thousand native chiefdoms in the southwest region and assigned several hundred more of them (Gong Yin 1992, 115). At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Qing officials developed different programs such as tax remission and grants of land to encourage migration from populated areas to the southwest. Immigrants were also intrigued by the burgeoning mining industry in Yunnan. By 1850, the Han had become the major population in southwest China (Lin Chaomin

2005, 112; Lee 1982, 293–99), whereas Dali became the only region where the Bai people were still the main inhabitants.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Qing court was in the face of political turmoil from both internal revolts and foreign invasions. The increasing exploitation and oppression resulted in frequent and bloody uprisings in the Dali region (Yunnan Bianxiezu 1988, 141–44). The most famous and influential one was the Muslim Panthay Rebellion led by Du Wenxiu 杜文秀 (1823–1872). From 1856 to 1872, Dali was the capital of the Kingdom of Pacifying the South (Pingnan guo 平南国), an independent Muslim state in Yunnan province. This movement witnessed the outbreak of widespread violence and ruining of a number of mosques and temples. After the signing of a series of unfavorable treaties with colonial powers, China was forced to open its gates to foreign interests (Atwill 1997; Lipman 2004, 43). Western colonists, missionaries, and scholars started to arrive in Dali by the end of the century. In 1881, the interdenominational missionary alliance China Inland Mission established its first station in Dali.<sup>35</sup> French Catholic missionaries of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris also opened a mission in Dali city. However, they only achieved limited success in converting people in Dali to Christianity (Fitzgerald [1941] 2005, 210–220).

The Qing basically continued the household registration system that originated in the Ming dynasty. During the Ming dynasty, residents of Yunnan were divided into three categories: military households (*junjia* 军家), civilian households (*minjia* 民家), and indigenous households (*tujia* 土家). The first category indicated households of immigrant soldiers who remained in the Dali region. In terms of civilian households, most of them were original residents under the administration of

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<sup>35</sup> The China Inland Mission entered China in 1876 and grew from fifty-two missionaries at the beginning to an all-China total of 1,063 in 1915 (Latourette 1929, 389, 584).

circular officials. The last one was used for households ruled by imperially assigned native chieftains (Fang Guoyu 1957, 14; You Zhong 1983, 56). At first, the term *minjia* was regarded as descendants of the barbarians. By the Qing dynasty, as military households were brought to an end, it gradually became a neutral term used by Han and in official documents to refer to the indigenous population who speak the Bai language, while they called themselves *sua ber ni*, meaning people who speak Bai (Fitzgerald [1941] 2005, 11–13).<sup>36</sup> It carried no connotation of ethnic identification, as indigenous Bai-speaking populations had long co-lived and integrated with large numbers of Han immigrants. The term “minjia” was used until Minjia people became officially identified as Bai in the 1950s.

#### **2.2.4 The Republican Era (1911–1949)**

In 1911, the Nationalist Party led by Sun Yat-Sen 孙中山 (or Sun Zhongshan) overthrew the Qing and established the Republic of China. During the Republican era, people of the Dali region were deeply involved in the resistance against the oppressed control of regional warlords, the nationalism of the Republican regime, and later the turmoil of international and civil war between the Nationalists and Communists, until the Communists came to power. In early twentieth-century China, Sun Yat-Sen and his Nationalist government were caught up in building a modern state which promised scientific control and material progress. On the one hand, folk beliefs were regarded as an obstacle to the development of social progress. On the other hand, the social power of numerous religious associations in villages and their believers were seen as a

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<sup>36</sup> In different records of the Qing, “*bai ren*”, “*bo ren*”, and “*minjia*” were used alternatively as the term for the descendants of the Nanzhao and Dali kingdoms (Fang Guoyu 1957).

potential source of revenue. Therefore, the early Republican government implemented a series of religious policies. It recognized Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity as “religions,”<sup>37</sup> while folk belief and related ritual activities, such as temple festivals, spirit mediums, and ancestor worship, were heavily suppressed and labeled as superstition (*mixin* 迷信) for the sake of modernization. From 1927 to 1930, images and statues of deities got destroyed in Dali. Village temples were repurposed into modern-style public schools and offices for government use (Yunnan Bianxiezu 1988, 71; Duara 1991).

Sun Yat-Sun was eager to restore the control of the Han over the territories of the former Qing and to build a united nation that could fight against the Manchu and other foreign threats. However, the pro-Han nationalism of the Nationalist Party excluded other non-Han populations and endangered their control over a large portion of the former imperial territory, especially the country’s borderland. Therefore, a rather more inclusive ideology was carried out. The Nationalist government acknowledged the nation as a multiethnic state and reconceptualized it as a “Republic of Five Peoples” (*wuzu gonghe* 五族共和), including the Han as the majority, Manchu, Mongolians, Tibetans, and Hui (Muslims). Although this conception did not address differences among different minority groups, other non-Han populations, such as peoples centered in the southwest, were still excluded. The Nationalists believed that other minorities, who had “a comparatively low level of civilization” (Deal 1976, 32), would be assimilated into the Han eventually and would become civilized through education and assimilation into Han culture (Gladney 1994, 99). After the ascendancy of Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (or Jiang Jieshi) (1887–1975), the Nationalist party

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<sup>37</sup> The concept of “religion” was introduced into China through Japan in the late nineteenth century.

dropped the concept of Five Peoples and, again, addressed the indivisibility of one homogenous Chinese nation.

During the Republic era, a lot of inhabitants in Dali, particularly in Xizhou, the wealthiest and most developed township in Dali, began to claim that their ancestors were from the south of the Yangtze River (*jiangnan* 江南), where most Ming immigrants came from. Moreover, Xizhou residents mostly self-identified as Han but not Minjia and, except for language, there was almost no difference between them and the Han regarding their customs, lineage culture, and traditions of ancestor worship. The claim of Jiangnan origin and identical social practices between the Minjia and the Han were observed by anthropologist Francis L.K. Hsu during his one-year research in Xizhou, which he called the West Town, in the mid-1940s during China's war with Japan. Since he published these findings in his significant monograph *Under the Ancestors' Shadow* ([1948] 1967), a heated debate has started to rage among both Chinese and foreign scholars concerning the demarcation between the Minjia and the Han in the Republic era.<sup>38</sup>

Many scholars have provided their answers with supported evidence or analyses of Francis' observations on this issue (Wu 1990; Liang Yongjia 2010, 2018, 54–65; Duan Weiju 2004; Notar 1999, 2008b; Fitzgerald [1941] 2005; Leach 1949). One of the most insightful arguments I found is from Chinese anthropologist Liang Yongjia. He suggests several important phenomena to support the self-identification of the Minjia people as Han. According to him, compared to the Minjia outside the Xizhou area, Xizhou residents were highly acculturated to Han traditions and language; ancestor worship had always been important to inhabitants in the Dali region and

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<sup>38</sup> During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, some Euro-American and Japanese scholars also debated on whether the people of Dali were the Shan people who established the Nanzhao and fled to Southeast Asia after the conquest of Yuan. However, this chain of thoughts was completely rejected by later studies of both foreign and Chinese scholars (see Liang Yongjia 2018, 82–89).



reached its climax during the Republic era; and they were materially and technologically more advanced. Therefore, Minjia people in Xizhou “embraced the mental attitude of proactively defining themselves as relatively cultured Han” (Liang Yongjia 2010, 89). More importantly, Liang points out that it is problematic to use the concept of “ethnic group” (*minzu* 民族) to understand Minjia people’s self-identification during the Republic era. It was not until the 1950s that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) adopted this concept in its ethnic identification project and implemented it in different regions to foreground the notion of ethnic awareness and the construction of a multi-ethnic nation (*ibid.*, 90).

### **2.2.5 The People’s Republic of China (1949–current)**

In its early years, the CCP promoted the idea of “national self-determination” (*minzu zijue* 民族自决) to raise support from people who were discontent with or oppressed by the centralized control of Chiang Kai-shek’s nationality policy (Mullaney 2011, 24–27).<sup>39</sup> The policy of “national self-determination” supported not just ethnic equality, but also the right for non-Han peoples to be independent with the ideal of a federal, multi-ethnic nation. Later, during the late 1930s, the CCP adjusted the policy of “national self-determination” to “national regional autonomy” (*minzu quyu zizhi* 民族区域自治). In the People’s Political Consultative Conference of September 1949, the principle of “regional autonomy for ethnic minorities” was laid out as the basic policy for solving ethnic minority issues. This policy prescribes that, under the unified leadership of the state, the people of ethnic minorities living in autonomous regions would elect their self-governing organs

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<sup>39</sup> The term “minzu” was introduced into China in the late nineteenth century. It was adopted from Japanese *minzuko* (Harrell 2001, 29).

to manage their internal affairs (Ma Rong 2019, 94–95). In 1956, the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture was created, along with several other autonomous areas.

In 1950, the central government sent a Central Visiting Delegation (Zhongyang daibiao tuan 中央代表团) to Yunnan. The team spent around one year, propagandizing the CCP's ethnic policies, inquiring into local ethnic groups' living situations and demands, and gathering information on local social and economic conditions. To implement the ethnic policy and national regional autonomy, the Ethnic Classification Project (*minzu shibie* 民族识别) was put into practice in the 1950s. The principle proposed by scholars who led the project was “ethnonym by owners” (*mingcong zhuren* 名从主人), which means the right of decision-making should be in the hands of the people (Fei Xiaotong 1980, 61; Lin Yaohua 1984, 3). However, a number of challenges emerged during the process of applying this principle to the identification work in different ethnic minority regions with complex ethnic composition and relations. In Yunnan Province, for example, the 1953 provincial census received more than 260 claimed ethnic groups (Lin Yaohua 1984, 1).<sup>40</sup> In the same year, the Yunnan Ethnic Classification Research Team (Yunnan minzu shibie yanjiu Zu 云南民族识别研究组) was formed. The members of this research team comprised anthropologists, linguists, and sociologists whose work was to conduct research on ethnic minorities' language, history, social status, and economic situation. After the investigation, the number of ethnic groups in Yunnan was reduced to sixty, and finally further downsized to twenty-five (Ma Yao 1994, 276). In 1954, the Minjia people were officially recognized as part of China's

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<sup>40</sup> On the national level, there were more than 400 ethnic groups asked to be recognized as ethnic minorities (Fei Xiaotong 1981, 2).

official 38 distinct ethnic groups under the ethnonym “Bai.” In 1979, the number of ethnic minority groups was expanded to fifty-five.<sup>41</sup>

Since the ethnic identification, the idea of the Bai has been revived and the Bai people have begun to develop their own ethnic markers, such as costumes, music, and festivals. There were complicated and multiple reasons for the prefectural party committee to choose “Bai” as the new standard ethnonym. To reach an agreement on the new ethnonym, in 1956, an ethnic symposium was held by the United Front Work Department of the Party Committee of Dali (Dali diqu tongzhanbu 大理地区统战部). The committee comprised Dali prefectural authorities and local elite representatives chosen by the local Party committee (Liang Yongjia 2018, 69).

In their discussion, the committee debated over three choices: “Minjia,” “Bai,” and “Bo.” The final decision to use “Bai” as the new ethnonym was a move that combined different ethnonyms into “one population that should become singular, identifiable, tangible, commensurable, and mobilizable” (ibid., 77). Some reasons for the committee to choose “Bai” included that the character of Bai has a positive symbolic meaning as white, which connotes pure, innocent, and bright; that it has historical connections with the White kingdom (Baizi guo 白子国), a chiefdom built before the Nanzhao; and that it is easy for the majority of people, especially rural people who were mostly illiterate, to learn and understand (ibid., 65–76). According to Liang Yongjia, this decision was “the local elites’ conscious complicity with the state project” which sought to create “a common fate” shared by people and the state so that ethnic groups can begin to pursue a better life and equal social-political right in a communist future (ibid.).

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<sup>41</sup> For studies focusing on the CCP’s Ethnic Classification Project, see Mullaney 2004, 2011; Tapp 2002; Wu 1990; Yang Bin 2009; Liang Yongjia 2012; and Pan Jiao 2010.

In the newly founded People's Republic, under a constitutional principle of “a unified country of diverse nationalities” (*tongyi de duominzu guojia* 统一的多民族国家), the awareness of the multiple ethnic minority groups as integral parts of the nation was widely circulated. In autonomous regions, the constitutional principle guaranteed ethnic minority groups to protect their rights, build institutions of nationalities, develop their dialects and languages, and preserve or reform their traditions, customs, and religious beliefs. However, during around thirty years of social upheavals, different political campaigns, such as the Land Reform (*Tudi gaige* 土地改革) (1950–1953), the Anti-Rightist Campaign (*Fanyou yundong* 反右运动) (1957), and the Great Leap Forward (*Dayuejin* 大跃进) (1958–1960), mobilized all the focus and attention to social transformation. Deliberate attempts to suppress minority religions, distinctiveness, and customs were widespread (Gladney 1991, 91–92).

Just like in the Republican era, the PRC government continued to recognize Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Protestant Christianity as official religions. In Dali, while these official religions enjoyed legitimacy as “religion” and faced less trouble, other “non-religions” were deprived of resources and subjected to feudal superstition (Liang Yongjia 2018, 33–52). Such radical attacks reached their peaks during the Cultural Revolution (*Wenhua dageming* 文化大革命) (1966–1976). Religions of all sorts were heavily suppressed. Countless temples, monuments, and deity statues were destroyed. Entertainment and festivals were eradicated. Religious leaders and masters were paraded through the street, imprisoned, or even executed. It was not until the implementation of the Reform and Opening (*Gaige Kaifang* 改革开放) policy (1978) that ethnic minority groups started to receive an unprecedented degree of religious tolerance and ethnic autonomy (Wickeri and Tam 2011, 51). Since the 1980s, China has sparked a widespread cultural and religious revival. This cultural and religious revival created the opportunity for the Bai people

to reconnect to the past and construct a sense of ethnic cohesion. Different cultural and religious elements that have long been among people's practices began to be singled out as a symbol of Bai-ness and as a tradition with a long history. Furthermore, popular and other folk practices of the Bai people have been revitalized and commodified by the local government for generating revenue and developing the cultural and tourism industry (McCarthy 2009, 60; Liang Yongjia 2018, 94–99).

## **2.3 An Overview of the Guerx Sal Lad**

### **2.3.1 Origins and Legends of the Guerx Sal Lad**

The Guerx Sal Lad is a cultural-social space displaying the Bai people's understanding of folk beliefs, gender, sexuality, and ethnic identity. It also embodies continuous assimilations between the Bai and various cultures, as well as the changing status of the ethnic identity and its relationship with the state. Local scholars and officials often present this festival as one of the most important festivals of the Bai. However, different movements of cultural cleansing throughout history left us with limited resources to retrieve the exact origin of the Guerx Sal Lad or a comprehensive account of what this festival was like in the past. "Guerx Sal Lad" is the name of the festival in the Bai language, which means "visiting three places."<sup>42</sup> In different research and documents in the Han language, it has been translated into several names in Mandarin, including

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<sup>42</sup> Some scholars speculate that the original meaning of "Guerx Sal Lad" is "visiting three public houses (*gongfang* 公房)," a private space where young people hang out and have dates (Yang Zhengye 2000; Zhang Xilu 1986).

“Raosanling” (strolling through three spiritual places), “Raoshanlin” 绕山林 (strolling in mountains and forests), and “Raosanglin” 绕桑林 (strolling in the mulberry forest), among which “Raosanling” is the most commonly used one and became the official name of the festival.<sup>43</sup> These names indicate local intellectuals’ different understandings of this festival’s nature and origins. Some suggested origins of the festival include:

- 1) Based on the legend, the son of White King (Bai wang 白王), the king of the White kingdom, ran away from home, therefore, people looked for him everywhere in the Dali region. When people finally found him, “Raoshanlin” became a carnival to celebrate (Yang Ruihua 1993, 75);<sup>44</sup>
- 2) Dali used to be a land of the ocean occupied by Raksha demons (*luocha* 罗刹) who ate human flesh and eyes. Guanyin subdued the demon, and the sea receded to the east, giving way to a stretch of the plain. When Guanyin returned, she ordered her guardian, the King of Five Hundred Gods (Wubai shenwang 五百神王), the tutelary god of Qingdong village, to stay and honored him as the Founding King (Jianguo huangdi 建国皇帝). He was a benevolent emperor. After his death, people mourned and worshipped him every year, which gradually formed the festival (Zhang Xilu 2007, 188–92);

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<sup>43</sup> In C. P. Fitzgerald’s research on the Minjia people ([1941] 2005), he mentions that the Minjia people rejected the name “Raoshanlin,” because the festival has no relation with mountains or forests (136).

<sup>44</sup> During my fieldwork, an informant also told me that the reason why the Guex Sal Lad is also an amorous meeting is because the son of the White King was a young man who was very into romance and a free lifestyle, therefore, the festival was held by the king to attract his son to come back home.

- 3) A ritual of people worshiping at the Capital of Gods, the Capital of Celestial Beings, and the Capital of Buddhas on behalf of their tutelary gods and praying for a good coming year (Yang Ruihua 1993, 75; Li Zhengqing 1985, 83);
- 4) A time to worship Duan Siping, the king of the Dali Kingdom, his father Duan Baolong 段保隆, and their ancestor Duan Zongbang 段宗榜 (Yang Ruihua 1993, 75);
- 5) Dali used to be a land of the ocean where people lived in the mountains and depended on hunting and herding for their livelihood. To thank the Mountain Gods (Shanshen 山神), people celebrated and offered sacrifices to pray for protection and good harvests (Zhang Xilu 2007, 188–92);
- 6) There was a ravine in the Diancang Mountains called Mulberry Forest Ravine (Sanglingu 桑林谷). Because the shape of the ravine resembled a woman's vulva, people organized the Guerx Sal Lad to pray for offspring (Li Zhengqing 1985, 83–84).

These interpretations appear in the literature of folk stories collected by local intellectuals and officials. Several of them were also told in various forms by people I met during my fieldwork. They reflect the Guerx Sal Lad's correlation with the Bai people's history, religious beliefs, legends, farming culture, and memories of climate change. Among numerous conversations with local Bai people, I had never received a single, unitary version of what the Guerx Sal Lad is. Some say the Guerx Sal Lad is a time for worship. Others say it is an important festival for rain-begging (*qiyu* 祈雨) or an amorous meeting (*fengliu hui* 风流会). However, most people mentioned the close association of this festival with a legend encircling the story of Jingu and her husband, the hunter Xinuluo. This story ties different activities and events closely related to the festival together, showing the way the Bai people represent their own history and culture through bodily practices.

Of course, details, even plots of the story can vary greatly depending on who is telling it. A version I was told repeatedly in my conversations with rural participants of the festival is as follows:<sup>45</sup>

Jingu was the daughter of Zhang Lejinriu 张乐进求, the king of the White kingdom. The king had three daughters.<sup>46</sup> Two of the princesses were married to Xizhou, while Jingu only cared about singing Bai tunes and having fun every day. One day, the whole family went to another town to worship their ancestors. At night, Jingu ran outside to sing and dance with people. When the king found out the next morning, he got very angry with Jingu and locked her in her room with guards standing outside, but she still tried to escape. After a big fight, the king threw Jingu out of the house. Jingu was enraged by his irritable father, so she just ran away from home.

After Jingu left, she didn't know where to go, so she just kept walking toward the south. She first stopped at a small hill called Da Tumu (大土墓) and waited there for a long time, but still, no one came to look for her. After a few hours, she decided to keep walking along Er Lake. She passed the Heyi River (Heyi jiang 河矣江), the Xiangyang River (Xiangyang he 向阳河), and Dali,<sup>47</sup> until the sun went down. When she arrived at Qiwu village (Qiwu cun 七五村) in Xiaguan 下关 in the south of Dali, she got really tired and hungry, so she fell asleep against a large banyan tree. In the middle of her sleep, a giant snake climbed down the tree and tried to bite her. At this exact moment, a young man shot the snake with his arrow. The huge sound woke Jingu up. When she saw this young man, she was shocked by his pockmarked face and rugged appearance. The young man said to her, "Don't be afraid. I am a hunter living at Weishan."<sup>48</sup> My name is Xinuluo.

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<sup>45</sup> I recorded the following account of the legend (January 2021) from a member of the Shendu temple administration committee, Li Zhanjia 李占甲, who unfortunately passed away in early 2022.

<sup>46</sup> That is why the Bai people also call Jingu as "the third princess."

<sup>47</sup> Local people often refer to the area of Dali Old Town as Dali. It is about fifty kilometers south of Xizhou.

<sup>48</sup> The Weishan Yi and Hui Autonomous County is an autonomous county that is about eighty-nine kilometers south from Xizhou. The Bai and Yi people both belong to the Yi branch of Tibeto-Burman speaking groups (but the



Where are you from? Why are you sleeping here alone?” Jingu was thankful for him saving her life, so she told him the reason why she was there alone. After listening to what she had been through, Xinuluo sympathized deeply with her and aroused much admiration for her bravery. He told her, “It is not safe here. There are a lot of jackals and tigers in the woods. If you want, you can go back with me, or I can send you back to your home.” Jingu thought that going back with him was too inappropriate. She refused his invitation. But Xinuluo couldn’t just leave herself here alone, so he gave her his own bread, found some branches to set up a fire pond so she would feel warm enough, and roasted his prey to let her eat. When the night fell, she told her to have some rest and he would keep her safe. The next day, he asked her again, “If you want to go home, I can send you off the mountain. If you are willing to go home with me, I only have my mother at home, and she will treat you like one of her own.” Jingu didn’t want to go home, but if she stayed, it would be too dangerous. She thought that he seemed kind enough, so she decided to follow him back to Weishan.

After they walked for a while, Jingu stopped and told Xinuluo, “If you want me to go back with you, I need to ask the deity.” They found a sacred tree that was a thousand years old. Jingu kneeled in front of the tree and asked the deity what she should do and where she should go. As soon as she finished praying, a white-haired old man appeared and told her, “This young man in front of you is a kind-hearted person. If you don’t want to go back, just follow him. He will become a king in the future.” Jingu kowtowed to him several times, then left with Xinuluo. During Jingu’s time in Weishan, she was treated really well by Xinuluo, his mother, and people in their village. After some days, they got married and live together very happily. After a few months, they had a

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Bai language has gradually diverged from the Yi branch). Historically, these two groups had close relationships in their politics, economy, and cultural customs.

baby boy.

When the king finally received the news, he was furious about being the last person to know that his daughter was married to a nobody. At that time, he was looking for someone to be his successor. One night, the Numinous Emperor of Er River appeared in his dream and told him that Jingu was married to a very good fuma (the emperor's son-in-law) who would have a much better fortune than him and that he should bring her back. On the second night, the City God came to his dream and told him the same thing. He was shocked that different deities came to tell him the same thing about this young man in his dream. Maybe it's true. Therefore, the king announced to his people that he had forgiven Jingu and asked them to bring her back. People were thrilled to know about this good news. On the tenth day of the second lunar month, they set off with troops and horses. The sedan chair was ready. Wind and percussion instruments were played along the way. The crowd was full of singing, dancing, and laughter.

Xinuluo's mother was worried that Jingu might regret this marriage, so she told Xinuluo to accompany her. But because of his "un-presentable" look, he decided to stay at the Baohe temple (Baohe si 保和寺) at Wanqiao 湾桥, not far from Xizhou, and wait for Jingu there. When she came back, they would go back to Weishan together. But Jingu had not seen her family for a very long time, so she stayed longer. Therefore, on the third day of the third lunar month, people sent fuma back to Weishan first so he could wait for Jingu at home.<sup>49</sup> Jingu stayed in Xizhou until the transplanting season, then people sent her to the City God temple near the Ancient Town of Dali to say goodbye to her uncle who lived there and stay for the night. Early the next morning, people came from near and far only to see her off when fuma sent people to bring her home. Then they

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<sup>49</sup> Another version of why fuma went back to Weishan first is that something emergent happened back to his tribe in Weishan so fuma had to go back (Zhang Yunxia 2017, 13).

went to Shendu temple where Jingu's mother is enshrined to see and comfort her for her daughter's leaving. From then on, every year, people would come together, send Jingu back to Weishan with vibrant celebrations, and worship in temples for good fortune.

Just like other folktales, this legend has many variants. Among different storytellers, people are often confused about some characters. For example, several people told me that the Loving People Emperor, the benzhu placed in the Shendu temple, is the father of Jingu, which is why people will go to Qingdong every year. Another version of the identity of fuma is that he was a general from a Yang family in Weishan. He met Jingu at the Baohe temple when he was herding sheep (Zhang Ju 2019, 48–50). However, no matter how different these details are, the main story and locations involved in it remain the same: Jingu ran away from home and got married in Weishan to Xinuluo. The route and schedule of rural Bai people's activities during the Guerx Sal Lad coincide with the timeline and places described in the legend as well.

This legend put the Guerx Sal Lad into a coherent storyline and a chain of interconnected ceremonies that are core to the Bai people's, especially women's, religious life. It provides the logic of the pilgrimage itinerary and manifests the mobile presence of bodies involved in festive activities. Every year, people go to Weishan on the tenth day of the second lunar month to bring Jingu and fuma back to Xizhou, to the Baohe temple at Wanqiao to send fuma back home on the third day of the third lunar month, and send Jingu back to Weishan at the time of the Guerx Sal Lad. In this case, an important part of the Guerx Sal Lad becomes a pilgrimage of worship (*chaobai* 朝拜) in Jingu and fuma's honor. Among people who participate in all these events, women from Lotus Pond Societies are the majority. On the twenty-second day of the fourth lunar month, they are the main group who send Jingu to the temple of the City God near the south gate of the Dali Old Town. The arrangement of this is also reflected in the "Scripture of Sending Off Jingu" (Song

Jingu jing 送金姑经) which is chanted by Lotus Pond Societies during the Guerx Sal Lad (Figure 4). On the second day, everybody goes to the Shendu temple at Qingdong to worship the Loving People Emperor. And, on the last day, people go to the Er River Temple (Erhe ci 洱河祠) to worship the Numinous Emperor of Er River.<sup>50</sup>

Self-cultivate on the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month, send Jingu back home.	四月修行二十三， 送姑您回去。
Send Jingu to the south gate.	把您送到南正门。
Send Jingu to outside the gate.	把姑送到城门外。
Jingu, don't be sad, fuma carries three poles, he comes with a wooden boat for your well-being.	阿姑别再心疼了， 姑爹抬来三根杆， 抬来木船救安康。
Jingu, please sit inside, It (the wooden boat) can block the stormy waves.	阿姑坐进里面去， 海浪来了可挡住。
Jingu, please sit inside.	阿姑坐进里面去。
Fuma, don't squeeze.	姑爹你就不要挤。
Jingu, listen to what your big brother tells you, believe what fuma tells you.	大哥说话姑要听， 姑爹说话姑要信。
Jingu is very capable.	阿姑您的本事大。
Dali will thrive.	大理大发旺。

**Figure 4 The “Scripture of Sending Off Jingu” from the Lotus Pond Society of Sha village (Sha cun 沙村).**

**Translated into Mandarin by Yang Zhe and into English by author.**

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<sup>50</sup>The itinerary slightly varies between different villages based on their relevance to Jingu.

Furthermore, this legend offers a glimpse of the close ties between the personified deities and the Bai people, as well as the active presence of sound in the Bai people's rituals and celebrations. This legend has been vigorously told among people at different social levels, from scholars' work to local county annals, but the most vivid testimonies to the aforementioned natures embedded in the legend are displayed in and woven into various sounding practices in the Guerx Sal Lad and the fabric of rural Bai people's daily rituals and experiences.

### **2.3.2 Mapping the Guerx Sal Lad**

#### *Destinations and Itineraries*

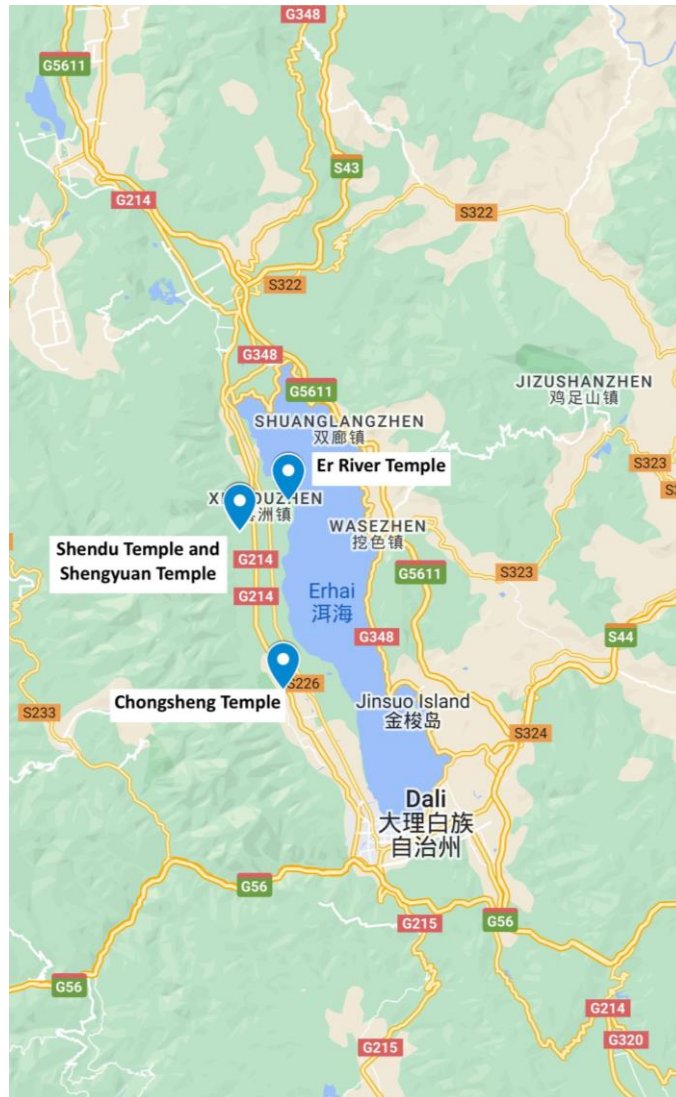
In general, the Guerx Sal Lad occurs annually from the twenty-second day to the twenty-fifth day of the fourth lunar month.<sup>51</sup> It is the busiest time of the agricultural cycle. The wheat is ready to be harvested, and new rice seedlings are waiting to be germinated. Participants of the Guerx Sal Lad comprise rural villagers, government officials, scholars, local media, and national and international tourists. Rural villagers who attend the festival are from all areas of the Dali basin, but people who live on the west side of Er Lake, especially villagers from Xizhou, Wanqiao, and Yinqiao townships (Yinqiao zhen 银桥镇), are the main partakers.<sup>52</sup> For the majority of rural participants, the Guerx Sal Lad starts on the twenty-third day. For three days of time, people are obliged to worship in several temples in villages along the Er Lake and the Diancang Mountains.

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<sup>51</sup> Some scholars consider the Guerx Sal Lad as a three-day festival from the twenty-third day to the twenty-fifth day of the fourth lunar month (Cheng Xu 1989; Yang Ruihua 1993; Yang Zhengye 2000) or from the twenty-fourth day to the twenty-sixth day of the fourth lunar month (Schmitt 2007), however, based on my fieldwork, people from different villages and social groups might have different activities, some of which begin on the twenty-second day.

<sup>52</sup> Similar to the observation of Fitzgerald in the 1940s ([1941] 2005, 136), today's Guerx Sal Lad is actively joined by rural villagers rather than residents in more urbanized and business-oriented areas like the Dali Old Town.

This unchangeable route is centered around three “Capitals”—the Shendu temple at Qingdong being the Capital of Gods, the Shengyuan temple (Shengyuan si 圣源寺) right beside the Shendu temple (or the Chongsheng temple [Chongcheng si 崇圣寺] close to the Dali Old Town) being the Capital of Buddhists (*fodu* 佛都), and the Er River Temple at Heyicheng village being the Capital of Celestial Beings (*xiandu* 仙都) (Map 3). Along the way, they might also visit some other temples based on their preferences.



**Map 3 Locations of the Shendu temple, the Shengyuan Temple, the Chongsheng Temple, and the Er River Temple. Map adapted from Google Maps.**

*The Capital of Gods—Shendu temple*

The Shendu temple is located at Qingdong, a village on the foothills of the Wutai Peak (Wutai feng 五台峰) of the Diancang Mountains (Figure 5). It is regarded by people in Dali as the most efficacious and powerful benzhu temple in the Dali basin. The name of the benzhu that resides in this temple is Duan Zongbang (Figure 6), who was a major general of the Nanzhao

kingdom and the ancestor of Duan Siping, the founder of the Dali kingdom. Historical record *Bogu Tongji* 夔古通记 (General History of the Bai) has it that, in the time of the Dali kingdom, Duan Zongbang helped the Kingdom of Mian (today's Myanmar) put an end to the invasion by the Kingdom of Lions (today's Sri Lanka) (You Zhong 1989). In the Bai people's benzhu belief, Duan Zongbang is the highest-ranking benzhu and known as the Loving People Emperor, who is considered the "central benzhu" and "King of Five Hundred Gods." Not only is he venerated in several different villages with different aliases, but an array of other benzhu are connected to him as relatives or courtiers, comprising a complex network of social relations. Local scholars identify that the founding of the Shendu temple can be traced back to the time of the Dali kingdom. The temple was originally built to honor the Mountain God. After Duan Siping found the Dali kingdom, the Duan family transferred the Mountain God to another temple, enshrined their ancestor Duan Zongbang as the benzhu of Shendu, and designated him as the central benzhu (Gan Yunwan 2017, 410–42).





**Figure 5** The exterior of the Shendu temple. Photograph by author, October 13, 2020.



**Figure 6** The statue of the Loving People Emperor at the Shendu temple, Qingdong. Photograph by author, October 13, 2020.

Meanwhile, some scholars argue that this benzhu is actually Zhang Lejinqu, the king of the White kingdom and the father of Jingu. People worship him as the benzhu for his benevolent rule (Yang Yuxin 2000, 176–78). Moreover, “Shendu” in the Bai language is *caop het* 朝里, which means “within the royal court” (*chaoli*). As both Zhang Lejinqu and his queen are enshrined in Shendu temple, it is unsurprising that this temple is called “the royal court.” The legend about the accomplishments of Zhang Lejinqu, his relation with Jingu, and his abdication also formed one of the main origins of the Guerx Sal Lad.<sup>53</sup> However, for most of the rural participants, whether

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<sup>53</sup> For a detailed discussion on various identities of the benzhu placed in the Shendu temple, see Lian Ruizhi 2009, 42–46, 49–53.



the benzhu is Duan Zongbang or Zhang Lejinqu does not seem like a decisive issue to them. During my fieldwork, most people just called him by his title, the Loving People Emperor, and emphasized his highest authority among all benzhu. Some even told me that Duan Zongbang is Jingu's father. Therefore, to them, the importance of the Shendu temple is more on the benzhu's religious authority and powerful efficacy, which has kept its never declining worshippers. Throughout history, different parts of the temple went through many times of repairs and rebuilding. The current temple complex was rebuilt during the Qing dynasty and renovated in 1978. In 2013, the Shendu temple was listed as one of the prefectural preserved cultural relics (*wenwu baohu danwei* 文物保护单位) (Figure 7).



**Figure 7** The stone tablet erected by the prefectural government to commemorate the Shendu temple being a prefectural preserved cultural relic. Photograph by author, October 13, 2020.

*The Capital of Buddhists—Shengyuan Temple or Chongsheng Temple*

The exact location of the Capital of Buddhists has long been a point of dissenting perspectives. The disagreements are over two Buddhist temples, the Shengyuan temple right next to the Shendu temple and the Chongsheng temple close to the Dali Old Town. These two temples are both historically significant and have gone through innumerable destructions from political turbulence and natural disasters, as well as reconstructions under different ruling powers. The Shengyuan temple is the oldest Buddhist temple in the Dali region (Figure 8). It is believed to have been the site where Guanyin first appeared in the Dali basin. According to historical legend, the temple was built during the late Sui dynasty (581–618). It was originally dedicated to Guanyin, but was transferred several times by different regimes into a temple for esoteric Buddhism, and finally became the current Chan Buddhist temple (Wang Mengqi and Lv Yuejun 2015, 44). During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the Shengyuan temple and many precious statues and carvings kept in it were heavily destroyed, including the manuscript of *Baiguo Yinyou* 白国因由 (Origins of the Bai Kingdom), an important source that extensively depicts the ancient history of Dali and many religious myths surrounding the spread of Buddhism in the Dali region (ibid.). The current Shengyuan temple was rebuilt in 1947. The compound has lost its splendor. When there is no special event or festival, the temple just sits there quietly. The halls and courtyards inside the compound were left to decay with basically no one to take care of them.



**Figure 8** The exterior of the Shengyuan Temple. Photograph by author, October 13, 2020.

On the other side, the Chongsheng Temple (popularly known at present as the Three Pagoda Temple [Santa si 三塔寺]), looks much more magnificent (Figure 9). The Chongsheng Temple is situated several kilometers to the northwest of the Dali Old Town's north gate, around 20 kilometers south of Qingdong. The temple compound is well known for its three pagodas, which are currently the tallest (nearly 70 meters high) and oldest masonry in Yunnan province. The construction of the temple was initiated in the ninth century. The central pagoda called the Qianxun Pagoda (Qianxun ta 千寻塔) was built first and later the other two. The Chongsheng Temple was a profound source of Buddhist artifacts and the transmission of various forms of Buddhism in the Dali region during the Tang and Song dynasties. A large number of cultural relics still remained (Fang Guoyu 1978, 51). In 1956, three pagodas were listed as a nationally preserved cultural relic.



Since 1978, when China started its reform era, the temple compound was restored and has been promoted as a national and international tourist site. In July 2011, the Chongsheng Temple was certified as a 5A-level “National Tourist Resort,” the highest rank authorized by the State Bureau of Tourism.



**Figure 9 The three pagodas. Photograph by author, August 7, 2018.**

On whether the Capital of Buddhists is the Shengyuan Temple or the Chongsheng Temple, I have seen and heard both answers in scholars’ research and during my fieldwork. In academic studies, the concept of the Capital of Buddhists is mostly mentioned in scholars’ discussions on the Guerx Sal Lad, but they rarely bring up the reasons why either temple is defined as the Capital of Buddhists. An elder of the managing committee of the Shendu temple told me that the

Shengyuan temple was the old Capital of Buddhists, but later the title was passed to the Chongsheng temple.<sup>54</sup> In another interview, an official of the Prefectural ICH Center confirmed this answer.<sup>55</sup> If both the Shengyuan temple and the Chongsheng temple are the capitals of Buddhists, which one is the one people go to during the Guerx Sal Lad? Because of the tight connection between the three capitals and the Guerx Sal Lad, it might make more sense to center on accounts from practitioners. Quite consistently, most participants of the festival I have spoken with consider the Shengyuan temple as the Capital of Buddhists. They either do not go to the Chongsheng temple at all or do not regard it as a necessary or significant location for the pilgrimage. Moreover, a legend of the Shengyuan temple is closely associated with Xinuluo, the ruler of Mengshe zhao. According to the legend, Guanyin went to Weishan to find Xinuluo and pointed out that he would become the future king and establish the kingdom of Nanzhao, therefore, Xinuluo built the Shengyuan temple to express gratitude for Guanyin's divine grace.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Capital of Celestial Beings—Er River Temple*

The Er River Temple is located at the center of Heyicheng, a large fishing village in Xizhou township sitting beside Er Lake, around seven kilometers west of Qingdong. This benzhu temple is shared by three adjacent villages.<sup>57</sup> The benzhu of the Er River Temple is Duan Chicheng, whose alias is the Numinous Emperor of Er River (Figure 10). According to legend, during the Nanzhao kingdom, there was a giant serpent who lived in Er Lake and blocked the narrows, causing severe floods which swamped the whole town. The king offered a substantial reward for killing the

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<sup>54</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Yuelin, March 17, 2022.

<sup>55</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Xiangjun, November 4, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Personal communication with Li Zhanjia, January 28, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> According to Zhao Yuzhong (2016), these three villages were originally grouped into a *li* 里, the smallest unit of the administrative demarcation by the Ming court.

serpent. Duan Chicheng, a brave young man from a poor village, was armed with knives and an iron cuirass and went to challenge the serpent. In the end, he risked his life by letting the serpent swallow him whole and finally stopped the flood. To memorize him, the king built a temple named the Spiritual Temple (Ling ta 灵塔) and put the serpent bone inside to stabilize it (Fang Guoyu 2001, 142).



**Figure 10** The statue of Duan Chicheng at the Er River Temple. Photograph by author, November 7, 2020.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the complicated geographical structure of the Dali region and seasonal monsoon rains have made the Dali basin vulnerable to floods and mudslides. Therefore, numerous legends are dedicated to different water gods, and Duan Chicheng is regarded as the God of Er Lake (*erhai zhi shen* 洱海之神). Throughout the Dali region, he is the benzhu with the



most temples where people worship him as the Numinous Emperor of Er River, the Dragon King (Longwang 龙王), and benzhu who can bring rains and protect people from drought and waterlogging (Yang Yuexiong and Yang De'ai 2020, 66–68). In the Er River Temple, Duan Chicheng is situated on a dragon throne at the center of the main hall and surrounded by his courtiers, including the Snail God (Luoshen 螺神) and Goldfish God (Jinyushen 金鱼神) who are also water gods. Other halls are the domiciles of the Goddess of Fertility, the God of Medicine, the God of Wealth, and the Nine Dragons Holy Mother (Jiulong shengmu 九龙[隆]圣母).

The current appearance of the Er River Temple is a good example of the local government's involvement in the Guerx Sal Lad (Figure 11), which I will discuss in Chapter 4. The temple faces east. On a horizontal plaque hanging above the gate, large Chinese characters of the name of the temple “Er River Temple” and “the Capital of Celestial Beings Heyicheng” are inscribed.<sup>58</sup> Right below these titles, a few rows of smaller characters describe the main deities enshrined in the temple and claim that this historical temple is a necessary stop for the pilgrimage that happens during the Guerx Sal Lad. On the right side of the gate, the Prefectural ICH Center erected a stone tablet in 2016. Characters engraved on it, again, assert the important position of the Er River Temple:

National Intangible Cultural Heritage	国家级非物质文化遗产
The Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai	白族绕三灵
...	...
The Protection Site of the Activity Route	活动线路保护点
...	...
Xiandu · Erhe Ci.	仙都 · 洱河祠

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<sup>58</sup> The title of “the Capital of Celestial Beings” was designated by the Prefectural ICH Center in 2016.



**Figure 11 The current appearance of the Er River Temple. Photograph by author, November 7, 2020.**

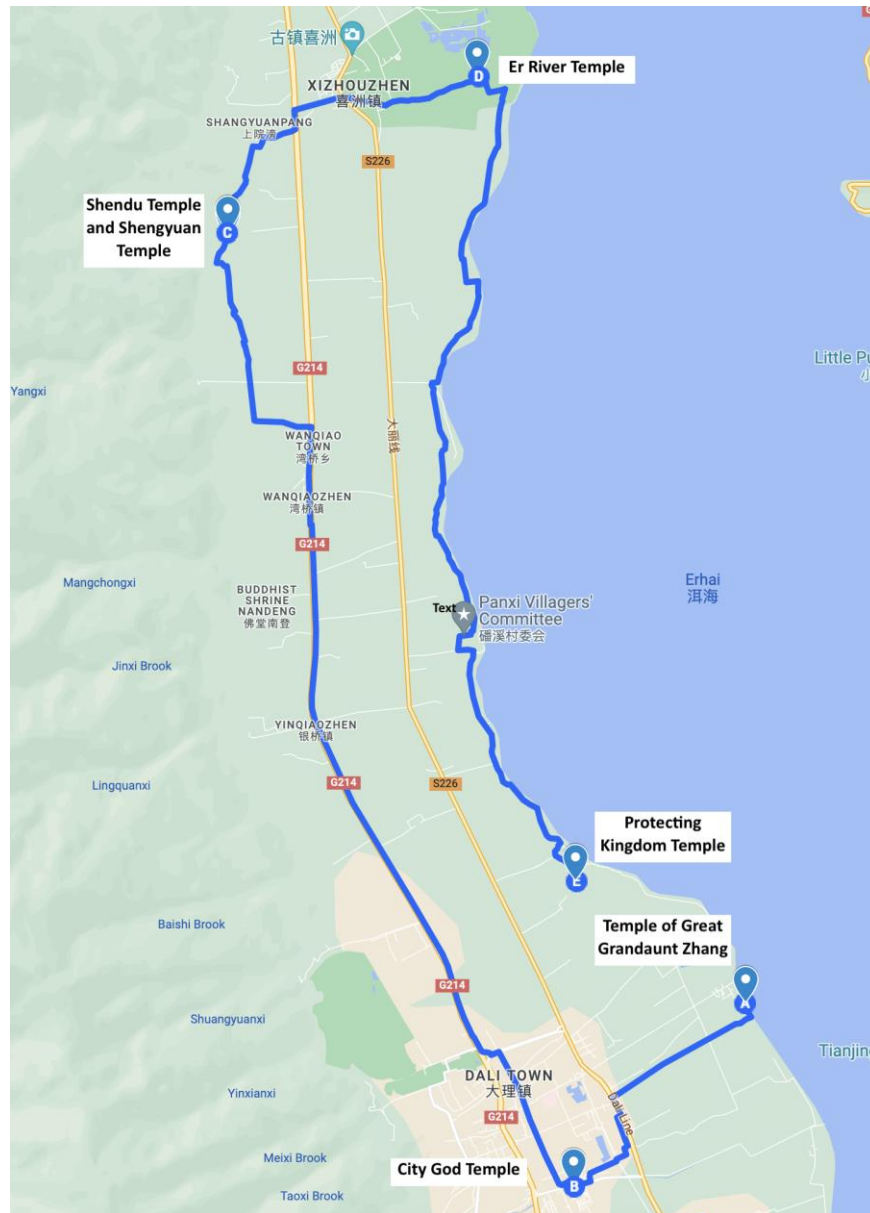
On the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month, people begin their pilgrimage from the City God Temple right outside the south gate of the Dali Old Town, pass by the Chongsheng temple, and finally arrive at the Shengyuan temple and the Shendu temple to worship the Loving People Emperor and other deities. After a night of rest, people continue their journey on the twenty-fourth day to the Er River Temple at Heyicheng Village to worship the Numinous Emperor of Er River. The whole itinerary draws a circle in the Dali basin. On the twenty-fifth day, people from villages around Xizhou disperse and go back home, while people who live close to the town of Dali keep on going until they arrive at the final destination, the Protecting Kingdom Temple (Huguo ci 护国祠) in Majiuyi village (Majiuyi cun 马久邑村) alongside Er Lake, where Zhang Yulin 张玉林, alias the Protector of the Nation, Defender of the Peace Emperor (Huguo bao'an

jingdi 护国保安景帝) is the village benzhu.<sup>59</sup> But, of course, this general summary cannot represent the experience of all people in the Dali region. Their specific itineraries and activities vary based on several factors, including their social roles, the location or historical past of their villages, and the identities of their benzhu. For example, for members of Lotus Pond Societies and some pious villagers, their activities and the timing of these activities are relatively fixed and closely follow the legend of Jingu which I will present later in this chapter. They go to the Temple of Great Grandaunt Zhang (Zhanggutaipo miao 张姑太婆庙) one day earlier. Some villagers told me that the Great Grandaunt Zhang is the older sister of Jingu, therefore when Jingu comes back from Weishan, she will stop at her sister's place for a few days.<sup>60</sup> Later the same day, they go to the City God Temple where the City God (the uncle of Jingu) resides, and spend the night there. In the early morning of the twenty-third day, different Lotus Pond Societies all assemble to wait for fuma to take Jingu back to Weishan, then the pilgrimage mentioned above happens (Map 4).

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<sup>59</sup> Zhang Yulin is the fuma of Duan Zongbang, therefore, on the last day of the Guerx Sal Lad, Zhang Yulin and his wife always give a reception for people who come back from the north.

<sup>60</sup> However, when I visited the Temple of Great Grandaunt Zhang during my fieldwork, several old ladies who manage the temple told me that it was not okay to claim something they did not know. This answer puts the statement of the Great Grandaunt Zhang as Jingu's older sister in doubt.



**Map 4 The complete itinerary of the Guerx Sal Lad pilgrimage. Mapadapted from Google Maps.**

### *Primary Activities*

The main components of the Guerx Sal Lad are deity worship and merrymaking. People grouped by villages or families carry incense, spirit money, and other food offerings in bamboo baskets on their backs, going from temple to temple along the pilgrimage route. A lot of families also bring their live sacrifices of roosters. They bow, kowtow, and make offerings to different



deities, expressing gratitude to them and praying for a good year for the whole family. In the Shendu temple where a shared open cooking space is present, worshippers cook their food offerings and meals there, but the space is often too small to contain a large number of worshippers, some of them also set up their cooking wares in the open field outside the temple (Figure 12).



**Figure 12 People cooking in the open field outside the Shengyuan temple. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

Inside and outside the temples, members of Lotus Pond Societies come from different villages and occupy every possible space. They set a temporary altar with incense and offerings such as fried rice chips (Bai language: *gallal* 干兰), fruits, rice, wine, and tea spread on it. Most of them sit, stand, or kneel in a rectangular shape, chanting along with the rhythmic

accompaniment provided by several percussion instruments, including drum, brass cymbal, wooden fish (*muyu* 木鱼), and a small bowl-shaped brass bell suspended on a stick (*yinqing* 引磬) (Figure 13). In some temples with additional spaces, such as the Protecting Kingdom Temple at Majiuyi, another village-based organization, the Dongjing Society (Dongjing hui 洞经会), participates in the soundscape by playing *dongjing* music, a collection of Han-derived ritual and literati music pieces that are closely related to Daoism and Confucianism and were spread, inherited, and localized in a lot of areas of southwest China (Figure 14). The Dongjing Society is a grassroots organization dedicated to the worship of the Literary God and the Martial God. In contrast to Lotus Pond Societies, members of Dongjing Societies are mainly composed of elderly men in the village. Members of Dongjing Societies are considered the moral models of the village because only educated male elites or members could join the association.<sup>61</sup> Although not a major stakeholder of the Guerx Sal Lad, Dongjing Societies frequently perform at annual festivals of their major gods and other rites or folk activities such as funerals and memorials for community members (Rees 2000).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In recent years, female members have been gradually allowed to join the association as well.

<sup>62</sup> For a comprehensive study of these groups in Dali, see Teng Zhen 2012; for Dongjing associations among the Naxi in Lijiang, see Rees 2000.



**Figure 13 A Lotus Pond Society chanting outside the Shendu temple. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**





**Figure 14 The Dongjing Society of Majiuyi village performing at the Protecting Kingdom Temple.**

**Photograph by author, June 7, 2018.**

In 2006, the Guerx Sal Lad was announced as one of 518 items in “the First List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage.”<sup>63</sup> Since then, local government institutions, particularly ICH-related units on the prefecture and county levels, have begun to make a strong presence at the festival. From 2017 to 2019, a Guerx Sal Lad themed showcase was presented on a temporary outdoor stage right outside the Shengyuan temple every year on the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month (Figure 15). The show was supported by the Prefectural ICH Center and organized by the Dali Municipal ICH Protection and Management Office (Dali feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu

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<sup>63</sup> In the first national ICH list, twenty-nine items are related to ethnic minority festivals, including the Guerx Sal Lad.



guanli suo 大理非物质文化遗产保护管理所, hereafter the Municipal ICH Office) and village committees. It was aimed at encouraging the recovery of activities involved in the Guerx Sal Lad and attracting more people's attention to this festival. I was at the showcase in 2018, where performing troupes formed by rural villagers representing villages around the Dali region performed one by one. The content of their performance simulated the pilgrimage group.<sup>64</sup> While one group performed on the stage, other groups just hung around the area, singing and dancing for spectators, journalists, and tourists who couldn't stop using their cellphones and cameras to take photos and videos (Figure 16). At the open market space outside the temples and along the long road to the temple, people wander across vendors' stands selling local snacks, crafts, clothing, instruments, DVDs, and services of petition writing and fortune telling (Figure 17). Security guards and police arranged by local governments patrol around, controlling the transportation and preventing any action or movement that may pose a threat to social safety and order.

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<sup>64</sup> According to Zhang Yunxia (2017, 52), in 2012, the Dali Prefectural Society of the Bai Ethnic Group and the Xizhou County government held a concert, inviting folk artists from different counties to perform in the same space.



**Figure 15 The government-organized showcase in 2018. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**



**Figure 16 Photographers and journalists taking photos of cultural bearers' performances. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**





**Figure 17** The open market along the long road to the Shendu temple. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.

Along with the pilgrimage, each village forms its own processional troupe, which I will explore further in Chapter 3. The size of the pilgrimage group is highly flexible, changing from a few people to dozens.<sup>65</sup> The larger group can be very elaborate. The group is normally led by members of Lotus Pond Societies or the hualiu elders, whose performance combines religious practice, speech and songs, and expressive body movements. A procession ensemble follows, playing brass instruments, bamboo flutes, and simple percussion instruments to accompany the procession. At last, village members sing Bai folk tunes and perform folk dance genres such as tyrant's whip (*bawang bian* 霸王鞭), double flying swallows (*shuang feiyan* 双飞燕), or money

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<sup>65</sup> I have also seen people undertake the pilgrimage alone, but they are in the minority.

drum (*jinqian gu* 金钱鼓). People sing, dance, and play music along their pilgrimage journey, lifting their spirits and providing amusement for the deities they pass by.

In recent years, the development of technology and means of transportation has impacted people's pilgrimage in a big way. In the past, when walking on foot was the main means of commuting, it would take much longer for people to move from one location to another. People walked all the way on foot to experience a long and arduous journey. Therefore, they often chose to stay at one location at least for one night and leave the next morning. This "inconvenience" created a space and environment for people to communicate and provide amusement and entertainment for each other. They would hang out, play instruments, sing, and carouse till dawn. However, since more and more means of transportation are available nowadays, people often leave right after they complete their activities. Li Xuesheng 李学圣 from Heyicheng village once described the scene to me,

In the past, people from all villages in Dali would come here. It was too crowded with ordinary people (*laobaixing* 老百姓), so people often stayed for the night, laid on the ground, put on a straw mat, and slept till the next day. Now people's living conditions get better and transportation becomes convenient, so they are worried about traffic congestion. In the old days, this was never a concern. People just stayed here for the night, singing folk songs and love songs and doing antiphonal singing, until the next day come.<sup>66</sup>

With the development of modern transportation, this journey and its existing time are much shortened. Instead of making music and dancing along the whole way, people only start to perform when they get close to temples. But even the traveling method has changed, and no matter what

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<sup>66</sup> Personal communication with Li Xuesheng, June 7, 2018.

size is these volunteered groups, one can sense the same degree of visceral enthusiasm and piety from people's performative examples of sound and movement.

In addition to an important occasion to venerate deities and pray for families, the Guerx Sal Lad is also described by local people as an amorous meeting. Many people told me anecdotes about others looking for a lover or reuniting with old lovers during the festival, sometimes it even involves extramarital relationships. One musical activity that is often connected to the romantic atmosphere of the Guerx Sal Lad is antiphonal singing, a very common activity for the Bai people's entertainment in different festivals, temple fairs, and daily life. During the Guerx Sal Lad, people gather around after a whole day's trip. Two persons, mostly a man and a woman, sing in dialogue using Bai folk tunes with improvised lyrics in the Bai language. The content of the lyrics can be about anything, but it often contains flirtatious and even sexually explicit content. Spectators shove to get a better view of the performance, occasionally bursting into laughter when they hear something funny or exciting. When the night falls, lovers are scattered in different places and continue their dates (Shen Haimei 2009, 66). Although there is no record in the historical literature on this amorous aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad,<sup>67</sup> the meeting between lovers remains a discreetly active part of the festival until today.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Liang Yongjia (2018, 128) speculates that the possible reasons why there is no historical record on the sexual aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad include that it is too inappropriate to show people outside Bai society and that local scholars who are influenced by Confucianism denounce this aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad which is against Confucian code.

<sup>68</sup> During my field trip to the festival in 2018, I was assured by several local people that one would still see people dating their lovers in the mountains when the night came.

### 2.3.3 A Brief History of the Guerx Sal Lad

It is commonly accepted that the Guerx Sal Lad was developed during the Nanzhao period (Pan Jingjing 1992), but the earliest written record that can give some details of the festival was *Dianzhong Suoji·Raoshanlin* 滇中琐记·绕山林 (Sundry Notes on Central Yunnan) ([1910] 2001) written by local intellectual Yang Qiong in the late Qing (1644–1911). In this text, the Guerx Sal Lad was called in Han Chinese “Raoshanlin,” meaning rolling in the mountain forest.

The Raoshanlin festival in Dali is held yearly from the twenty-first to the thirtieth day of spring. Men and women gather around. There are thousands to millions of people grouped into ten to a hundred. Each group is led by a shaman (*wuxi* 巫覡). The men wear paper flowers in their hair and straw sandals on their feet. Silk fabrics are tied at their waist and on their willow. The shirttails are open. One trouser leg is rolled up. The elderly women wear Daoist costumes, hang Buddha beads on their necks, put bamboo hats on their heads, carry sachets, and hold walking sticks in their hands. Their decoration is different from the men’s, but if there is a red paper flower, they wear it as well. The men hold silk fabric and fans, dancing, singing, or waving tyrant’s whips. Tyrant’s whip is a twenty to thirty inches bamboo stick drilled with several holes on each side and attached with some copper coins on it. People hold the middle of the stick, tap each side, and swing the stick to touch their arms, heels, necks, and bottom. They lean back and forward, twist and turn, touching their joints on every beat. It is a really unique skill.

The festival is normally held in April. The first day is at the City God Temple of the county. On the second day, people pass by the Three Pagoda Temple and arrive at

Shengyuan temple. The third day is at Heyicheng village. The fourth day ends at Majiuyi village. This is why the festival is called Raoshanlin.

People eat and sleep in temples or courtyards. Each group has its own stove. When the food is cooked, people offer it to the gods. The shaman is seen as auspicious. Everybody kneels down devoutly. After the offering, people eat the food, sleep, and crisscross on the floor of the temple, until there is no more room.

It is said that the festival originated in the Nanzhao kingdom. It has continued for thousands of years, probably because of the words of shamans. They pray for male offspring and exorcize diseases. It is also because Dali is known as a Buddhist country, and only superstition could interpret their teachings. It is also because Dali is known as a Buddhist country. Words of deities and Buddhas, especially the superstitious part, cannot be eradicated. (Yang Qiong [1910] 2001, 302)

Although Yang's description does not mention clearly the religious elements of the Guex Sal Lad, it reveals a general picture of the time, pilgrimage route, and content of this festival a century ago, in which people's activities and clothing were not far from what happens today, except for a few differences. For example, nowadays, the shaman who leads the group has lost the shamanic function and is replaced by the hualiu elders. In addition, instead of men dancing the tyrant's whip, in today's Guex Sal Lad, this dance is performed by both men and women, mostly women. There were a few other Qing poems that confirmed the description of Yang and provided some complementary details of the festival in the Qing dynasty. *Raosanling Zhuchi Ci Sanshou* 绕三灵竹枝词三首 (Three Bamboo Branch Poems of Raosanling) written by a provincial degree



holder (*juren* 举人) Duan Wei 段位 mentions the activity of singing Bai tunes by young women.<sup>69</sup> In Li Xieyi's 李燮羲 (1875–1926) poem *Zhuzhici·Raosanling* 竹枝词·绕三灵, he describes men “wear cocked blue hats and embroidery shoes...The whole street laughs at them” (Zhao Lixian cited in 2003, 52), which highly resonates with the dress of hualiu elders today.

From the Republican period to China's reform era in the 1980s, the Guerx Sal Lad was criticized by the local government as “decadent” and was once banned because of its “feudal superstitious” elements. Many people were arrested under the charges of “promiscuous relationship between men and women” (Liang Yongjia 2018, 128–29). An elder in the village once told me that, when the policy was not supportive, government officials would confiscate all the instruments whenever they saw anyone playing them. People were not allowed to sing tunes either. However, the prohibition did not stop people from carrying on their practice in a secret and downsized manner. Whenever the officials came, they would immediately hide.

In C. P. Fitzgerald's research on the Minjia people ([1941] 2005), his description of the Guerx Sal Lad, which he designated as “Gwer Sa La,” offers important information on the festival of the Republic period. To his understanding, the Guerx Sal Lad was a carnival attended mainly by the rural Minjia peasants living in the Dali basin, not the urban Chinese. According to Fitzgerald's observation, the Guerx Sal Lad was a one-day festival on the twenty-fifth day of the fourth lunar month. Some people, mostly young men, would start traveling a day before. They walked along the east side of the Diancang Mountains towards the north and worshiped in shrines of local deities and Mountain Gods along the road (no visit to Buddhist temple) until they arrived in Xizhou. On the day of the festival, people began to travel southward along the Er Lake. Groups

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<sup>69</sup> Zhuzhici is a style of poetry devoted to local topics.

of young male dancers and several male musicians performed dances and lewd remarks to people who gathered at the entrances of villages they passed by. The final ceremony was held in Majiuyi village, where people brought out the tablet of their village benzhu and celebrated (138–40). Fitzgerald especially depicts the performance and cross-dressing elements of male dancers accompanied by elder musicians: “It is a question whether these dancers are not, or once were, meant to dressed as women...Some of the dancers, however, do wear straw sandals with colored thread and red woolen pompoms on the toes, which resemble the sandals worn by girls on market days. All the dancers wear spectacles or dark glasses, and carry fly whisks or cleft willow wands in their hands” (138).

Later, during the investigation of the Bai people in the Ethnic Classification Project, Miu Luanhe 缪鸾和 from Yunnan University provides another general description of the Guerx Sal Lad, which illustrates the appearance of the hualiu elders and their performance as well.

There is a grand festival in Dali called Raosanling. People in the county go to Xizhou one after another and worship deities. There can be tens of thousands of worshippers, departing from the Diancang Mountains and coming back along Er Lake. The festival lasts three to four days. People sing and dance, competing with their glamorous skills. There are seventy-one villages. They all make offerings to their own benzhu. Each village forms a group led by two men holding a six to seven feet tall willow branch. They walk forward at a slow pace. One of them leads the singing and the other one gags. They have their own repertoires, such as “Shi’er shu” 十二属 (Twelve Zodiac Animals) and “Tan wugeng” 叹五更 (The Five Watches at Night in Sorrow). When they arrive in Xizhou, they put the branch in front of the deities. (Xu Jiarui cited in 1978, 272)

Miu Luanhe's depiction of the Guerx Sal Lad was written in as late as the 1950s. What is intriguing is that the observations of Fitzgerald and Miu were made around ten years apart, yet some evident differences are revealed when comparing them. While the routes of people's pilgrimages in these two descriptions are similar, in Miu's description, the length of the festival was three to four days long instead of what Fitzgerald mentions as one day. Moreover, the pilgrimage groups presented by Fitzgerald were composed of only male dancers and musicians, but Miu clearly points out that the group was led by two men performing with a willow branch. Although the explanation of why these differences or changes existed is missing from the literature, these two detailed descriptions both closely resemble people's practices in today's Guerx Sal Lad which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter.<sup>70</sup>

The status of the Guerx Sal Lad drastically changed since the 1980s, when a high tide of folk culture and religious revival took place and China's tourism industry started to rise in the 1990s. The Guerx Sal Lad went back to the public sphere and soon took on a cultural representation of the Bai ethnicity shaped by government interventions and a market-driven economy. In 2005, the Bureau of Culture of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture (Dali baizu zizhi zhou wenhua guanliju 大理白族自治州文化管理局, the current Bureau of Culture and Tourism of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture) listed the Guerx Sal Lad in the "First List of Ethnic Folk Traditional Culture Protection of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture" (Dali baizu zizhi zhou diyipi minzu minjian chuantong wenhua boahu minglu 大理白族自治州第一批民族民间传统文化保护名录). In the following year, it was listed in "the First List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage." This

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<sup>70</sup> More recently, Beth E. Notar (1999), Jeffrey Howard Schmitt (2007), and Liang Yongjia (2018) offered their accounts of the Guerx Sal Lad as well, but their observations are relatively up-to-date and not in stark contrast with mine, they are, therefore, not included in this part of the discussion.

recognition symbolizes a process in which the Guerx Sal Lad and people's religious practice have been gradually transforming into a representation of the Bai identity and a cultural commodity of the state's ICH movement and tourism industry. The local government promoted the festival as an ancient ethnic carnival exclusive to the Bai people that amuses both deities and humans. It was seen as a "living fossil" of the history and ethnic culture of Bai, representing the harmonious relationship between ethnicities, religions, as well as deities and humans. Even the theme of the amorous meeting, which was once treated as a taboo issue, becomes a manifestation of the Bai people's "deepest respect and caring for humanity" (Dali ICH Protection Center 2016).

In 2009 and 2016, two attempts were made by the prefectural government to submit an application of the Guerx Sal Lad for UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, but both ended in failure. Although the Guerx Sal Lad failed to join the stage of world heritage, the continuation and transmission of this festival still received much attention from local and national governments. In 2013, the Prefectural ICH Center was established with economic support from the Ministry of Finance. Since then, a series of works and actions have been put out on different levels to support and encourage the revival and continuation of the Guerx Sal Lad, such as clarifying and promoting the pilgrimage route, training new cultural bearer teams, renovating temples, and facilitating the teaching of related content of the festival in school education.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The Dali region has long been a crossroads between different religious, cultural, and material influences that have traveled these roads. The Bai are an official ethnic minority group

that was identified in 1956 through the official ethnic classification scheme, but the origin of the Bai is often traced back to a remote past. From an independent political and cultural center of Yunnan and even beyond to a peripheral region in a vast empire, the ever-evolving process of the Bai's identity formation is closely related to the alteration of kingship and authority structure. Moreover, the continuous assimilation and acculturation among different groups on this land have also deeply influenced who are the Bai and the complexity of people's cultural and religious practices today. As a cultural-social space, the Guerx Sal Lad embodies these interactions between the Bai people and outside cultures, as well as the changing status of the ethnic identity and its relationship with the state. As I have shown in the brief history of the Guerx Sal Lad, over the past century, new practices contained within a few days of the festival did not totally replace the old practices. As new practices were adopted, they overlaid earlier ones.

It is not easy to get a precise and complete picture of all the happenings during the Guerx Sal Lad since the presentation of which can be influenced by so many factors, such as the time and space of observation, the identity of the observer, and the function of the presentation. My description of the Guerx Sal Lad is a result of my observation of the festival in 2018 and 2021, as well as many interviews and conversations with people who have participated in the festival for years. I have no intention of suggesting that my depiction of different practices reflects a Guerx Sal Lad shared by all Bai people of the Dali region, but my description does represent the knowledge and direct experiences I learned from people I encountered during my time in Dali. Therefore, even if my narrative might be different from other scholars' experiences on some details, it presents the Guerx Sal Lad, its polyphonic soundscapes, and the relation of various social actors with it in a current time and space. In the following chapters, I will examine how these sounding

events enact and are mediated by negotiations between key social actors with differing ideologies in the shaping of the Guerx Sal Lad.

### 3.0 The Guerx Sal Lad of the Rural Bai Community

In this chapter, by examining an array of sounding and bodily practices that rural Bai people consider crucial to the Guerx Sal Lad, I present this festival as a cultural-social space that manifests the Bai people's conception of religious belief, gender, and social intimacy. The chapter shows three different dimensions of the festival: as a religious space for people to communicate with the personified deities; as a gendered space for Bai women to practice their religious agency; and as an intimate space for rural villagers to conduct their sociality. These three spaces are often interpenetrated and not mutually exclusive. Practices that I will discuss occur in the same festive soundscape and sometimes belong to more than one space. I approach these practices not solely through their auditory senses but place them in a relational and conjunctural arena replete with music, sound, bodies, sights, smells, and embodied minds. They all serve as evidence of a whole way of everyday life shared by the Bai people and an alternative understanding of the Guerx Sal Lad outside the official narratives presented by local governments.

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I present a detailed account of people's major worship practices in the Shendu temple, the role of dilder (a double-reed shawm), and pilgrimage performance during the festival to explore sound, body, and objects as primal mediums between rural Bai people and the deities. In the second section, I explore the body-voice (Meintjes 2019, 64) of Lotus Pond Societies in their religious sound making and bodily practices to argue that Guerx Sal Lad is a gendered religious space in which women deploy their religiosity, what Mayfair Yang (2021) describes as their "nonoppositional agency" (243), to build connections with each other and to connect with deities for the benefit of families, the land, and the Bai people as a whole. Finally, I explore the multiple senses of "public intimacy" (Guilbault 2010) communicated

in Bai society by looking at the activities of antiphonal singing in the Guerx Sal Lad.

### 3.1 The Guerx Sal Lad as a Religious Space

In one of my interviews, Zhao Caiting 赵彩庭, a seventy-three years old man who has been participating in the Guerx Sal Lad for most of his life and currently a prefectural-level representative transmitter of the Guerx Sal Lad, explained to me why people worship in the Shendu temple every year, “They (the deities) have done so many good things for us, so we sing to them, pay homage to them, and thank them. We worship them and cry for them. People are so thankful. It would be great if they didn’t die.”<sup>71</sup> Even just in this short response, it is apparent that sonic experiences and emotional attachment to deities are rooted in the Bai people’s worship practices. When people describe the atmosphere of the Guerx Sal Lad, a term they commonly use is *renao* 热闹. This term literally means “hot and noisy,” which refers to the bustling and exciting quality of a place or an occasion, as well as the feeling of joy and vitality (Weller 1994, 113–28; Chau 2006, 149–50; Blake 2011, 184).<sup>72</sup> *Renao* is an important indicator of the success of the Bai people’s temple festivals. Like other festivals in China, the Guerx Sal Lad presents a high-spirited amalgamation of various sensory stimulations rooted in rural Bai people’s everyday religious practice. As I will show in this section, they provide an invisible vehicle to enact, construct, and affirm the communication between people and their deities (Chau 2006, 165).

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<sup>71</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, December 18, 2020.

<sup>72</sup> The colloquial *renao* is equivalent to other terms in Chinese, such as *honghuo* (Chau 2008) and *naore* (Ueng 2003, 61–66). Many non-Chinese societies also have concepts similar to *renao*, such as the Malay and Indonesian concept of *ramai* (Rasmussen 2010, 44–45; Weintraub 2004, 40) and *hlermu* among sherpas (Ortner 1978, 81).



### 3.1.1 Sound, Sight, and Body in Worship

When I started my fieldwork, it was still some time away from the Guerx Sal Lad. Due to the pandemic, all large gatherings and festivals were canceled by the local government. I had a chance to observe the Guerx Sal Lad back in 2018 when everything was still “normal.” I remember I was so impressed by the renao atmosphere and soundscape of this festival (see my description of the soundscape of the 2018 Guerx Sal Lad in Chapter 1). There were so many people, performing, worshipping, singing, and wandering around the temporary markets. Sometimes it was even hard to move beyond the crowd. But, unfortunately, in 2018, I did not have enough time to observe and document everything. When I arrived in Dali two years later, I was really worried that no one would be there or that no activity would happen when it was time for the festival. When the day had come, I was relieved. Even though I didn’t see a Guerx Sal Lad with the same scale as in 2018, and the itinerary of people’s pilgrimage and rituals like sending off Jingu got simplified as well,<sup>73</sup> I would say that I had the opportunity to witness a smaller-sized “people’s” version of the festival (Figure 18). There was no official-organized performing competition, much less singing and dancing, and fewer people, but the proposed ban from local governments didn’t really stop what rural communities have been practicing every year at this time. During the Guerx Sal Lad, people still worshipped in different temples and made their pilgrimage, which proves how important deity worship is to this festival and people’s religious lives. It stays constant as time goes by.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> According to my communication with people, a lot of them skipped locations such as the Temple of Great Grandaunt Zhang and Majiuyi. For a full description of the ritual of sending off Jingu, see Zhang Yunxia 2017, 51.

<sup>74</sup> This finding is different from Fitzgerald’s and Schmitt’s observation that the Guerx Sal Lad is “holiday making rather than religious observance” (Fitzgerald [1941] 2005, 130).



**Figure 18 The Guerx Sal Lad in 2018 (left) and 2021(right). Photograph by author, June 6, 2018, and June 2, 2021.**

The worship practices involved in the Guerx Sal Lad can be summed up in the following categories: prayers and offerings, chanting by Lotus Pond Societies, and pilgrimage. Yet people don't have to follow any strict rules or plans. Their activities are complex and engrossing experiences, rich in affective experiences, especially various sounds. In this section, I look closely at music and sound in three bodily practices during the Guerx Sal Lad—the worshipping of deities at the Shendu temple (permanent worship space), the playing of the reed shawm dilder, and the pilgrimage (temporary worship space)—to show that music, sound, and people's sounding bodies take on the role of a channel between different worlds, transmitting messages and connecting human and deities' spirits.

### *The Shendu temple*

For worshippers, deities watch and listen to the human world, respond to people's requests, and supervise human behavior. Elder people often describe deities as someone who “comes down from above (*tianshang xialaide* 天上下来的).” For most of the benzhu, there is no strict hierarchy exists. They are connected as friends, relatives, or lovers, except for the Loving People Emperor

at the Shendu temple who is considered the central benzhu and the King of Five Hundred Gods. This status represents the degree of his divine efficacy (*lingyan* 灵验) and the authority of the Shendu temple.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the Shendu temple is often the most popular worship space during the Guerx Sal Lad.<sup>76</sup> The Shendu temple compound is facing east (Map 5 and Map 6).<sup>77</sup> Two Horse Gods (Mashen 马神) stand on either side of the gate, guarding the benzhu and his domicile. Inside the compound, one first sees a subsidiary courtyard where the hall of the God of Wealth is housed in the middle. On the right corner of the courtyard, there is a cooking space (*tianchu* 天厨) with around ten ranges for people to deal with their food offerings and to cook their meals. An entrance hall connects the subsidiary courtyard to the main courtyard. On two sides of the entrance hall, the Cow God (Niushen 牛神) and the Pig God (Zhushen 猪神) are situated on each side.<sup>78</sup> In the main courtyard, the main hall is located in the middle, with a north-wing room and a south-wing room on each side. The south-wing room is dedicated to the Goddess of Fertility.

The main hall includes three open rooms. In the middle one, one finds the imposing statue of the Loving People Emperor (Figure 19) seated in the front center position. He is dressed in a yellow dragon robe (*longpao* 龙袍) with an additional layer of colorful cloak and wears a lotus crown (*lianhua guan* 莲花冠). Compared to other benzhu's statues whose color is normally the same as human skin, the Loving People Emperor is gilded. He sits on his dragon throne, raising

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<sup>75</sup> Adam Yuet Chau (2006, 2) defines divine efficacy as “a particular deity’s miraculous response to the worshiper’s request for divine assistant.”

<sup>76</sup> For a comprehensive study of the benzhu belief, see Jin Dongzhao 2003.

<sup>77</sup> The temple was originally facing the south and changed to its current direction after the rebuilding during the Ming dynasty. The choosing of direction is according to Chinese geomantic principles of *fengshui* to achieve an auspicious meaning and positive influence (Personal communication with Li Zhanjia, January 28, 2021).

<sup>78</sup> In the past, except for the Cow God, the Pig God, and the Horse God, there were the Goat God, the Rooster God, and the Dog God as well, but they were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Chen Jiyang 2007, 48).

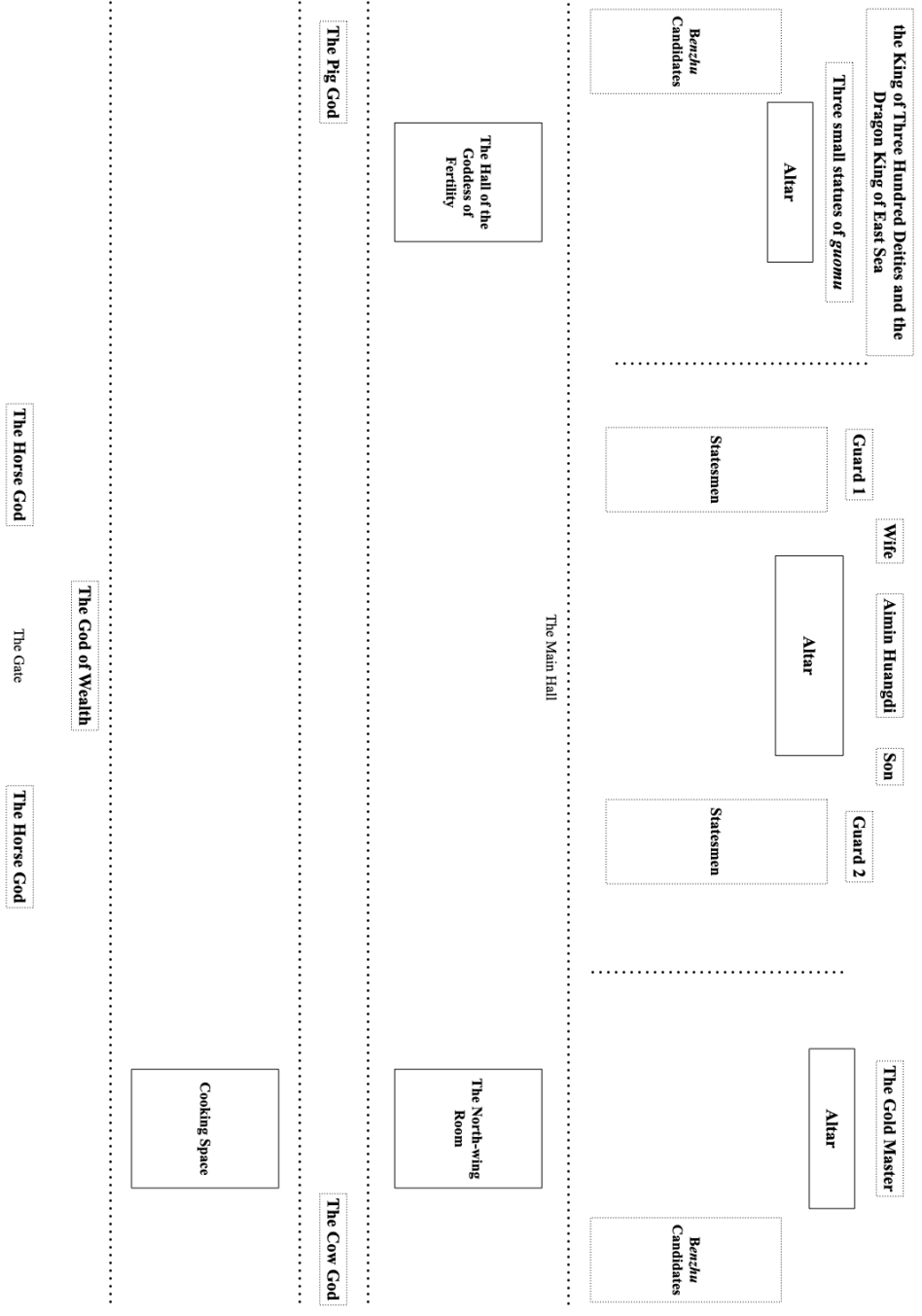
his right hand with index and middle fingers pointing up and facing worshippers, while his left hand is in his lap. His wife and son (*taizi* 太子) sit on each side of him. Two guards protect them on each of the outer sides. Six statesmen of the Loving People Emperor's court, three on each side, stand on a lower level in front of the Loving People Emperor and face each other, holding a petition board or a book and a brush in their hands, representing the hierarchy of a court. Looking up, one sees two dragons, one yellow and the other blue, curled around the top of the wall. In front of the Loving People Emperor's statues sits an altar, a rectangular table stacked with offerings such as fried rice chips, fruits, rice, wine, tea, candles, and petitions (*biaowen* 表文). In the other two open rooms, there are statues of the King of Three Hundred Deities (Sanbai shenwang 三百神王), the Dragon King of East Sea (Donghai longwang 东海龙王), the Gold Master (Jinye 金爷) who is in charge of the national finance, ten benzhu candidates, and three small statues of guomu, the wife of Zhang Lejinqu. <sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> People also call the wife of Zhang Lejinqu as guomu, meaning Mother of the Country. According to Chen Jiyang (2007), the original statue of guomu was hidden by people during the Cultural Revolution. After the turbulent period, people created another new status, but it was criticized for not being identical to the old one, therefore, a second new statue was created. That is why there are three statues of guomu in the Shendu temple.



Map 5 A photo map of the Shendu temple compound. Made by author.



Map 6 Plan of the Shendu temple. Made by author.





**Figure 19** The statue of the Loving People Emperor at the Shendu temple, Qingdong. Photograph by author, October 13, 2020.

### *Worship*

The twenty-third day is the day when most people go to the Shendu temple. On that day in 2021, the weather was nice but a little bit chilly. I arrived at the Shendu temple around 8:30 in the morning. Quite contrary to my expectation, even though it was during the pandemic, the compound was already full of people. They held basins or saucers with food offerings, wandering across different gods and deities (Figure 20). Most people who came were organized in groups as families, villages, or different Lotus Pond Societies. Each person brought various offerings to pay respect to gods and deities, including meat (raw or cooked), fruits, vegetables, rice, colorful fried rice chips, tea, wine, incense, spirit money, and petitions, among others (Figure 21). They went to

different temple halls in turn and made offerings to each deity, but the Loving People Emperor was the deity who received the most offerings.



**Figure 20** Outside the Shendu temple on the twenty-third day. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.





**Figure 21** General offerings for the deities. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.

There were various forms of worship. When people worshipped a deity, they first held their offerings up high and bowed a few times to let the deity see them. Then they left some offerings on the altar, usually including some tea, wine, small bowls of rice, and fried rice chips. People often made two forms of food offerings—meat offerings and vegetarian offerings—based on the identities of specific deities. When people performed meat offerings, it normally consisted of two rounds. The first round was called raw offering (*shengji* 生祭) and the second round was cooked offering (*shuji* 熟祭) (Figure 22). While meat offerings were mostly for benzhu and other deities from local folk beliefs, vegetarian offerings were for deities from Buddhism and Daoism. For example, as the Loving People Emperor eats meat, people offered him meat and wine. But Jingu is a vegetarian, therefore, people offered her vegetables and tea.



**Figure 22** The cooked offerings. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.

After the offering, people kowtowed to the deity. The ways people kowtow also reflect their degrees of devotion. People made bows and kowtowed from just a few times to more than ten times. When they were doing that, they spoke out their requests to the deity (Figure 23). It is important to voice out the requests so the deity can hear them. People believe that deities do exist and will be present. An elder woman once told me, “When we go to the temple, they will see us. They know that we are here to pay respect to them. We bring pigs and sheep, burn incense, and kowtow, so they will protect us.” People also offered red silk ribbons to the deities (*guhong* 挂



红),<sup>80</sup> praising their contribution and kindness to people. In most of the important festivals and temple fairs, people's worship is often accompanied by the playing of the dilder, a double-reed shawm. The loud and penetrating sound of the dilder is an important symbol of auspiciousness. It also represents the presence of the deities. I will discuss this instrument further in the next section.



**Figure 23 People worshipping the Loving People Emperor. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

In a lot of cases, women from several families go to the temple and worship together. One of them is often a senior member of the Lotus Pond Society in their village or an elder female who

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<sup>80</sup> In Chinese culture, the color red often symbolizes good luck and royalty (see Wang Min 2001, 187–90 for a discussion on the cultural meaning of the color red in China's wedding ceremony).

is considered with high virtue and prestige in their village (*degao wangzhong* 德高望重). She is responsible for praying and presenting offerings to the gods in the name of the families. On the twenty-third day of 2021, seven families from the same village went to the Shendu temple together. Each family brought a rooster.<sup>81</sup> They held the roosters and lined them up in a row, bowing and kowtowing to the Loving People Emperor (Figure 25). After kowtowing, they put the roosters on the floor and held them still, while the elder woman was praying for them. In this kind of prayer, each phrase is normally recited in the AB form. Part A describes the food offering that the elder woman picks up and her action dealing with it; part B is often auspicious words that rhyme with the ending word of A. The praying constitutes not only the recitation part but also a series of accompanying bodily actions, handling various food offerings and showing them to deities. Therefore, the action of praying in Bai religious life is a mixture of sound, sight, bodily movement, and embodied mind for the deities. Example 1 is an audio-video example presenting an elder female praying for a Su family. Figure 24 is a transcription of her recitation and accompanying body movements during the prayer, in which the descriptions of body movements are italicized (Example 1).

一把银，二把银，三把遍地洒金银。

A handful of silver, two handfuls of silver, and three handfuls of gold and silver everywhere.

打开喜财门，摆着鱼和肉，让他遍地洒金银。

Open the joyous gate of wealth, there's fish and meat, let him (the head of the family) splash gold and silver everywhere.

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<sup>81</sup> A live rooster is the most common meat offering in Bai people's worship practice because it is considered the representative of the *yang* 阳 as opposed to *yin* 阴, therefore it symbolizes the auspicious spirit and the power to exorcise evil spirits. When offering the rooster to deities, people often throw a handful of rice in front of the rooster. If the rooster eats the rice spontaneously, it means good luck for the prayer (Wang Si 2015, 67–68).

打开凤凰鸡，让他代代出来做大官。

Open the phoenix chicken and let generations of his family become great official-holders.

（一刀）分两半，让他遍地洒金银。

Cutting it in half, let him splash gold and silver everywhere.

*Cut the cooked chicken from the middle*

打开鸡蛋（圆又圆），代代全部做状元。

Open the round chicken egg, and let generations become top scholars.

*Patted the cooked chicken egg with the back of a kitchen knife, then cut it open*

打开鸭蛋，鸭嘴鸭舌，金银抓朝里，病痛抓朝外。

Open the duck egg, duck beak, and duck tongue, catch gold and silver towards the inside, and catch illness and pain towards the outside.

*Patted the cooked duck egg with the back of a kitchen knife, then cut it open*

打开这块鸭蛋，（全家人）安安心心，万事大吉。

Open this duck egg, the whole family will feel at ease, everything will be lucky.

打开肥肉瘦骨，让他们起房盖屋。

Open the fat meat and the thin bone, let them build houses.

*Cut the raw meat*

一分两半，一人一份。

Cut it in half, half for you and half for me.

吃鱼头，让苏德江家金子银子做枕头。

Eat the fish head, and let the family of Su Dejiang use gold and silver to make pillows.

*Slightly turned the cooked fish head*

吃鱼尾巴，四代同堂，五代增光。

Eat the fishtail, let four generations live together, and let five generations be glorious.

*Slightly turned the cooked fishtail*

这两条鱼心合心，做人轿来抬。

These two fishes with heart linked to heart, making the sedan chair to carry.

*Quickly held the bowl of fish up high.*

这两条鱼背靠背，出门赚大钱。

These two fishes are back to back, (let the family) make big money when they are out.

豆腐贡品，明明白白，讨个明白。

The tofu offering, as clear as noon, (they) ask for clarification.

*Picked up the tofu then put it back.*

这两条鱼，一分两（截），四方有财，八方进宝。

Cut these two fishes in half, gaining wealth from four directions, gaining treasure from eight directions.

撤席撤席，大吉大利。

Remove the offering table (repeat twice), good fortune, and every success.

撤堂撤堂，富贵荣华。

Exit the hall (repeat twice), (endowing them) a high position and great wealth.

**Figure 24 A transcription of an elder female praying for a Su family, December 5, 2021. Words italicized indicate body movements. Translated into Mandarin by Yang Zhe and into English by author.**



**Figure 25 Seven families worshipping the Loving People Emperor with roosters. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

After worshipping the deity, people put some cash into the merit box (*gongdexiang* 功德)

箱) as a sign of gratitude for the deities' blessings, then bent their fingers and knocked on the box three times to notify the benzhu. One of my interlocutors told me that "to knock on the merit box is to 'bother' (*darao* 打扰) the deity. Make big profits with little capital. We gather merits. A person notifies the deity that he/she is learning these merits. He/she offers a hundred bucks to ask the deity to bless him/her so he/she can get more. If he/she gets more money, he/she will come back and thank the deity, burning incense for the deity and making more donations, so that the deity will get more incense burning."<sup>82</sup> After people made donations to the temple, people in charge of the temple business tied a piece of red silk ribbon on the donators' arms, symbolizing blessings from the deity (Figure 26).

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<sup>82</sup> Personal communication with Li Jishou 李继寿, January 11, 2021.





**Figure 26 People getting red ribbons from the temple administrator. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

Worshippers also purchased petitions written by rural literati who offered this service at their stall outside the temple. Villagers told the petition writer the names of their family members and what aspects they wanted to make requests from the deities, such as fortune, safety, and fertility. Next, the petition writer wrote them all down on a piece of yellow paper and put the paper in a paper-made rectangular box with family names and purposes written on it (Figure 27). When people requested blessings from the deities, they held the rectangular box in front of them and quietly prayed to the gods, silently meditated on their prayer, or lit it up in front of the incense burner (Figure 28). The stronger the fire is, the more explosion sounds there are, and the more effective people's worship would be. When the petition was almost burned out, people threw it in the incense burners. Some people also just left the complete petition around the deities' statues.





**Figure 27** People asking rural literati to write petitions for them outside the Shendu temple. Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.



**Figure 28 A woman burning her petition in front of the incense burner outside the Shendu temple.**

**Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

After people completed worship and offerings, the time was close to noon. People started to cook lunch at the shared open cooking space.<sup>83</sup> People either cooked the raw offerings they brought or just ate the food they prepared before the trip. Village elders told me that the deities need to eat first, which means that all the food was blessed, then they cooked it, chopped the food into smaller pieces, and shared it, meaning that they received the blessings from the deities. Women were responsible for cooking, including ingredient preparation, cooking, and cleaning afterward, while men were in charge of chopping the wood and making the fire.

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<sup>83</sup> In 2018, when there was no pandemic yet, there were too many people within the temple compound, so some just set their cooking ware in the open space outside the temple and cooked there.

When I was at the center of the temple yard, I heard waves of sound—chanting, the beating of wooden fish, gongs, and drums, the cooking wares, and the crowd—intersecting with one another. I smelled food people were cooking and the smoke from burning incense, spirit money, and petitions. I saw people busy worshipping their deities through their voices, their eye contact with deities, and their repeated bodily practice. They looked satisfied because they had received blessings for themselves and their families. In Chau's (2006, 2) research on the revival of folk belief in reform-era China, he addresses the significance of people's actions, as people's "doings" in their religious practices: "It is people and their actions that enable the establishment of human-deity relations and interactions." In a worship space like the Shendu temple, Bai people "do" their religious belief through praying, presenting offerings, and repeatedly showing respect to the deities through their bodily gestures and movements (kowtowing, bowing, kneeling, etc.).

While people's bodily practices enable the connection between humans and the divine, I will add that the coming together of all kinds of sounds and their producers act as a vital part of creating this relationship as well. As mentioned earlier, people believe that deities are present. The deities are able to hear and see people's doings. Therefore, worshippers' voices and bodies become a key portal through which people can forward their messages to the deities and show their level of devotion. That is why they articulate their wishes clearly while gazing at the deities, and explain the process to the deities while they are handling the food offerings. Moreover, the sound of the burning petitions represents the deities' blessings and auspiciousness. The sound of people's offerings and donations shows their gratitude. The sound of people cooking, chatting, and greeting one another demonstrates the vitality of people's religious practice and its close connection with people's everyday lives. All these sensory stimulations work together and transform the temple into a sacralized space, where the deities and humans shared the festival experiences and

communicate with one another.

### 3.1.2 The Sound of the Dilder

In the Guerx Sal Lad, sounded instruments, such as the dilder, bamboo flutes, *sanxian* 三弦 (a three-stringed lute), gongs, cymbals, and drums, are always present in most of the events. They accompany people's worship, pilgrimage, life rituals, performance, and other spontaneous entertainment activities. Among all these instruments, the dilder is particularly loud and even feels noisy to some people. The dilder is a double-reed wind instrument that is crucial for the Bai people's common rituals (Figure 29). One can see this instrument and hear the penetrating sound of it in the Bai people's lifecycle events such as weddings, people's birthday celebrations, and funerals, as well as in any large and small-scale festival and religious activity.<sup>84</sup> It also appears in all scholarly and general written descriptions of these events. yet the important social and religious dimension of the dilder has long been understudied.<sup>85</sup> Compared to the large number of studies on suona used in other geographical areas in China,<sup>86</sup> there is only a small amount of existing research focusing on the dilder of the Dali region, which mainly looks into its musical morphology, repertoire, and artistic use (Yang Guanghui 1988; Huang Jinhuan 1999; Zhou Kun 2012; Ma

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<sup>84</sup>This situation was different during the Cultural Revolution, according to an informant, most folk music was forbidden. The local government would confiscate instruments, including the dilder, whenever they saw one.

<sup>85</sup>For a few studies include discussion on the dilder's social function, transmission, and ritual use, see Zhang Li 2020 and Zhao Quansheng 2009.

<sup>86</sup>Research on suona in other geographical areas in China largely focuses on its musical aspects (Shi Yibing 2022; Zhou Qingqing 2020; Sui Jingshan 2004), performing techniques (Zhang Ning 1998; Yang Huiqing 2021), history (Liu Yong 2000; Zhou Qingbao 1984), the tradition of suona band (Zhao Yanhui and Zhao Shiwei 2019; Zhao Yanhui 2005, 2021) and its ceremonial use in weddings and funerals (Liu Yong 1999; Zhao Yanhui and Zhao Shiwei 2009; Xiao Wenpu 2017). One exception is Stephen Jones' research (1995, 1999, 2007) on suona bands in Shanxi, Northwest China, in which he illustrates the performance of suona bands in various rituals and ceremonial occasions, but the main subject of his research is still the musicians.

Jianqiang 2008). Inspired by Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 1996, 2005), Eliot Bates (2012) advocates a research paradigm that explores the agency of musical instruments and the heterogeneous networks around them. As he argues, “any material object, within any assemblage, has the same capacity for action” (373). The ANT developed by Latour is useful to understand the dilder as an indispensable actor in the social interaction within the Bai society, I will show that the dilder is inextricably linked to and constitutes the “human-object-divine relations” (371) within the Bai people’s religious life. In different rituals and rites of passage, the dilder acts as an actant that “modif[ies] a state of affairs by making a difference” (Latour 2005, 71). It participates in the heterogenous communication between humans and non-humans as much as its co-actants, worshippers, and deities. The dilder also plays the role of an important channel connecting different participants, creating an invisible space beyond the human world for the presence of the deities, transporting messages between them, and helping to express the power relations between worshippers and worshipped (72–76).





**Figure 29 A dilder. Photograph by author, November 21, 2021.**

The dilder is a double-reed shawm originally from Persia and Arabia and introduced to Central China in the Jin and Yuan dynasties (1115–1368), then spread out to other areas.<sup>87</sup> Today, it is played over a wide geographical area and by various ethnic groups. The Bai dilder has seven

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<sup>87</sup> There is no single understanding of the origin of the dilder used by the Bai people. Four main hypotheses include: (1) it was the legacy of the Jin and Yuan dynasties; (2) it was introduced from Southeast Asia or South Asia; (3) it was a variant of indigenous instruments; and (4) it was a result of the combination of various cultures (see Liu Yong 2000 and Zhang Li 2020).

front finger holes, which is different from the eight-hole version used in most other regions in China. Measuring around 20cm, the conical body of dilder is usually made of softwood such as Azelea wood, boxwood, and pearwood, with a detachable copper bell. From the mouthpiece, the body flares outwards from 1cm at the top to 10cm at the bell bottom (Yang Guanghui 1988, 57). Using the technique of circular breathing and fingering, players produce a highly ornamented melodic line and a stream of powerful and continuous sound.

The dilder is primarily played by males. It is usually used in solo or in an ensemble consisting of a dilder, a small double-frame drum, a gong, and a pair of cymbals. Sometimes a sanxian or a flute is included as well. The playing skills of the dilder are mainly passed on through demonstration and imitation between master and apprentice and within families. But before apprentices start to learn the dilder, they need to know how to play other percussion instruments in the ensemble and follow their masters to different events so they can get familiar with different repertoires (Zhang Li 2020, 25). Today, the playing of the dilder also appears on the stage of art music troupes, touristic performances, television, and other media. In the folk setting, musicians who play the dilder are well respected in Bai society. When they are invited to perform at a lifecycle event, the host will keep a separate table for them to perform and have meals. Some of the musicians are also ritual specialists and spirit mediums, such as Duan Deyuan 段德元 (1963–) from Qingdong village.

Duan Deyuan is a locally well-known dilder player, a county-level representative transmitter, a temple caretaker, and a ritual specialist who helps people with fortune-telling (Figure 30). He started to learn how to play the dilder, sanxian, and *erhu* 二胡 (Chinese two-stringed fiddle) with a master in 1988 and later played with his two uncles-in-law. Three years later, he met another master who taught him how to conduct different rituals and fortune-telling. He was

introduced to this master by a head member of the Lotus Pond Society in his village because, according to him, the Buddha (*foye* 佛爷) told them that there was a disciple (Duan) who is decent and smart and knows how to help people do things well.<sup>88</sup> As a result, he started to help out in the Shendu temple in 1991, assisting his master with rituals and fortune-telling. As a dilder player and spirit medium, Duan has a very busy schedule. In one of my interviews with him, he showed me a thick stack of invitations he received to play at people's events or to help people with fortune-telling. Even during the off-season, he had to work every day. Sometimes he even needed to go to more than one event on the same day. He told me that he enjoys his busy life because, as a pious worshipper, all these activities and his services in rituals and in temples allow him to do good and accumulate merit (*jide xingshan* 积德行善).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Personal communication with Duan Deyuan, November 21, 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.





**Figure 30 Duan Deyuan playing his dilder at home. Photograph by author, November 21, 2021.**

Duan also identifies himself as the senior disciple/assistant of the Loving People Emperor.<sup>90</sup> During the Guerx Sal Lad and other temple festivals at the Shendu temple, he was always there working as the spirit medium between the Loving People Emperor and worshippers, giving blessings to people who come to worship and transmitting their messages to the deities. During my fieldwork, he was at every religious activity and venue related to the Guerx Sal Lad, from picking up Jingu to sending off Jingu. He either went there alone to play the dilder as a blessing or led a group of people from his village to join the event as a representative of the village and the Loving People Emperor. On the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month in 2021, when I entered the main hall of the Shendu temple, he was standing on the higher platform in front of

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<sup>90</sup>Duan told me that he took on this role from a fortune teller. There were only a few people in his village who were disciples of the Loving People Emperor, but others all passed away. Personal communication, November 21, 2021.

the Loving People Emperor's statue and hanging red ribbons offered by worshippers on the benzhu's neck. Only he stood up there. A little bit later, he came down, stood behind the altar, and started to play the "Tune of Inviting Deities" (Qingshen diao 请神调) on the dilder, because it has the power to invoke different deities to come down, receive offerings, and enjoy their entertainment (Figure 31). At this moment, the dilder worked as a medium between the human world and the deities' world. The sonorous sound of the dilder reverberated through the whole temple space as if it can reach beyond the clouds and penetrate the pantheon of deities, asking them to witness the piety of their worshippers.<sup>91</sup> On a special day like this, Duan always plays this tune several times, especially when a big group of people comes to worship the Loving People Emperor. People often told me that the sound of the dilder is considered to carry auspicious meaning. It is the same as the way Stephen Jones (2007, 58) describes the sound of suona music in Chinese ceremonies: "Like firecrackers, the mere sound of a shawm band is enough to alert people to a ceremonial, and to satisfy their demand for convention."

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<sup>91</sup> In Yang Xifan's research (2012) on wind and percussion ensemble (*chuidayue* 吹打乐) of the Bai people, he mentions the function of the dilder to pay respect to and entertain the deities. In Xiao Wenpu's (2017) research on suona of the Yao people, the author addresses the important role of the suona as the representative of the Flute God (Dishen 笛神).



**Figure 31 Duan Deyuan playing the “Tune of Inviting Deities” in front of the Loving People Emperor.**

**Photograph by author, June 2, 2021.**

The role of the dilder as a two-directional medium between humans and the deities can be witnessed in different rituals related to the Guerx Sal Lad. In the third lunar month of 2021, I was in Weishan to observe the events of picking up Jingu, and I happened upon a special rite. Two members of the Lotus Pond Society from Fengming village (Fengming cun 凤鸣村) were claiming their role as tea servants of the deities at the hall where Jingu was enshrined. They needed to ask permission from Jingu to allow them to take this responsibility.<sup>92</sup> Duan Deyuan was there as well. When two members paid tribute to Jingu, Duan Deyuan played the “Tune of Inviting Deities”

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<sup>92</sup>In every Lotus Pond Society, there are a few people in charge of tea or wine service for the deities. Some of these people are not ordained through selection, but through fortune-telling caused by personal or family matters. For example, one of the two members told me that she broke her leg a few years ago. After that incident, she always felt distracted and uncomfortable, so she went to a spirit medium and wanted to find out the reason behind it. That’s when she was told that she needed to serve tea for the Loving People Emperor.

again, until they finished (Figure 32). The synchronicity of the worship and the playing of dilder, once again, demonstrates the significance of this instrument and its sound in opening a sacred world and space for communication between humans and deities. The sound of dilder marks the duration of a ritual. It creates a different temporality and invisible space of the ritual in which the co-presence of the deities invited by it and worshippers occurs and a connection between them is established and affirmed. Duan remarked,

Bai customs cannot be without the dilder. For weddings, we play joyous tunes (*xiaodiao* 小调) and for the funeral ceremony (literally called “white event,” *baishi* 白事) we play funeral tunes (*baidiao* 白调). The dilder will make the event very renao. For the communication between deities and humans, people will invite deities to come and fix people’s illnesses and other matters, therefore the dilder is for inviting them. It also represents human prestige. Deities can hear, such as the Eight Immortals (Baxian 八仙),<sup>93</sup> one of them plays the dilder as well.... Whenever the dilder sounds, ten thousand taels of gold will come (*suona yixiang, huangjin wanliang* 唢呐一响, 黄金万两). Whatever you do, you play the dilder, and deities will come.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Duan made a mistake here. Baxian, or Eight Immortals, are a group of legendary deities. Each of them has their own special object from which they draw their magical powers. Among them, the only music-related deity is Han Xiangzi 韩湘子, who plays the flute. However, Duan’s claim still shows the close relationship between instruments and deities.

<sup>94</sup> Personal communication with Duan Deyuan, June 2, 2021.





**Figure 32 Lotus Pond Society members of Fengming village kowtowing to Jingu while Duan Deyuan playing the “Tune of Inviting Deities.” Photograph by author, March 23, 2021.**

Scholars have examined the transmission of the deities’ power through different material forms, such as incense (Arthur 2018; Santangelo 2019) and spirit money (Blake 2011; Scott 2007). In Wei-pin Lin’s (2015) studies on god statues and spiritual mediums in Chinese folk belief, she emphasizes the coordination and mutual complement between objects and spirit medium in materializing the magic power of the deities. According to her, “Deity statues, by their very nature permanent and durable, contain divine power within them; spirit mediums draw out this power and express it to the world through their miraculous performances” (11). Although the dilder is different from the deity statues in which the spirit of the deity dwells, three kinds of effects are distinguished for this object and the sound it makes. For worshippers, the sound of dilder is meant to represent a sense of auspiciousness. When aimed toward the deities, it is to please, entertain, and invite them. In terms of the relationship between worshippers and the deities, it works as a

medium across the boundaries of two worlds. Without the sound of the dilder, the deities will not be present, therefore the ritual and its space would not exist. But, at the same time, the power of the dilder will not be achieved without the player as a messenger of the deities. The dilder player and the sound of the dilder also mark and enact the order of celestial authority and humans' position within that order. During the playing of the dilder, the player always stands in between the deity and worshippers as their mediator and messenger. The hierarchal relationship between worshippers and worshipped is also addressed by the utterance of the dilder.

### 3.1.3 Sounds of the Pilgrimage

In the Guerx Sal Lad, sounds do not just stay in a certain geographical location, they are in motion as well. During the few days of the Guerx Sal Lad, people make pilgrimages to several different locations to worship and entertain related deities and benzhu. The procession is often led by members of Lotus Pond Societies or hualiu elders. Hualiu elders' performance is a combination of religious practice, speech and songs, and expressive body movements. They can perform in various festivals and blessing ceremonies of their choice. However, hualiu elders and their performances are necessary to the pilgrimage group in the Guerx Sal Lad.

In a pilgrimage group, hualiu elders normally walk in the front part of the group. Hualiu in Mandarin or *huof hhex* in Bai language means lovers or couples. Hualiu elders are always played by two persons of any sex (but if same sex, one will play the role of the other sex).<sup>95</sup> There are differences in hualiu elders' garments and implements between different villages, but several

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<sup>95</sup> Based on Miu Luanhe's description, in the past, hualiu elders were usually performed by two men (Fang Gouyu 2001).

essential elements are shared by most people. Two hualiu elders both dress in bright costumes and wear sunglasses. The person who plays the role of a man wears an octagonal hat decorated with colorful pompons and ribbons. Sometimes the male character carries a yak tail in one hand. The female character sticks a small piece of round-shape paper with a flower pattern onto her temple. It is a symbol of the time of a temple festival. When they walk, they hold a willow branch with a gourd, a mirror, and colorful silk ribbons attached. The willow branch is called the commune tree (*sheshu* 社树),<sup>96</sup> or the tree of making money (*yaoqian shu* 摇钱树). These two images both have important meanings: one represents the identity of a village or a clan, the other one denotes wishes for good fortune. The gourd is used to summon fortune and luck.<sup>97</sup> It is also taken as an instrument to subdue the evil spirit. This function is similar to the mirror, which is often called the demon-revealing mirror (*zhaoyao jing* 照妖镜), as well as the yak tail which is used to ward off demons (Figure 33). With all these components of ritualistic meanings, the willow branch becomes a ritualistic instrument, representing the religious aspect of hualiu elders' performance. Zhao Caiting told me that their outfits only got more elaborate and expensive after the 2000s. When the Guerx Sal Lad just revived in the early 1980s, they were still wearing coarse cloths made of blue and black fabric and straw hats. They also wore straw rain capes, because one of the functions of the performance of hualiu elders is to pray for rain. When the dragon king sees people wearing the straw rain cape, he knows that they need the rain for transplanting seedlings.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> The willow branch is an essential element of hualiu elders' props, because hualiu elder is also called the elder couple holding trees (*zhishu laoren* 执树老人).

<sup>97</sup> An interlocutor told me that people used to put alcohol in the gourd as well so they can drink it when they got tired.

<sup>98</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, April 17, 2021.



**Figure 33 Cross-dressed hualiu elders in the Guerx Sal Lad. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**

The performance of hualiu elders includes simultaneous improvised singing and expressive body movements. When the performance begins, two elders first move a big step forward, then stop and crouch into a wide lunge position with one leg up and one back. This is when they begin to sing in an improvised manner. When they sing, they swing the yak tail behind them. Their upper



bodies lean forward toward each other and their heads swing from side to side like they are whispering to the other person, although their volume stays the same. After they finish singing, they move forward and repeat the process several times with different lyrics.

The repertoire of hualiu elders' singing is also called the hualiu tune (*hualiu qu* 花柳曲). It combines elements of speech and song. The singing is call and response, combining Bai and Han languages. One person is the main narrator, while the other person is mainly in charge of making a short response. Normally, the respondent replies at the end of each phrase of the narrator's call. Either the male or the female character can be the main narrator. While the call initiated by the main narrator is melodic, the response by the respondent is speech-like. The lyrics of the call part are mostly improvised to fill in a relatively fixed pentatonic melody. Filler words and connecting words with no actual meanings are often added to make the sentences smooth. The lyrics often center on depictions of various scenes at the Guerx Sal Lad. Based on different locations and activities, hualiu elders will sing different content.<sup>99</sup> The lyrics sung by hualiu elders are a significant site where the history and people's experiences of the Guerx Sal Lad can be heard. Zhao Caiting and his wife Zhao Shuzhen 赵淑珍 are famous hualiu elders in the Dali area (Figure 35). They are one of the few couples who can still perform a more traditional version of the hualiu tune. There are four basic sections of their hualiu tunes. They perform each one at different locations: the market outside the Shendu temple, in front of the Shendu temple, on the dam where people have their entertainment activities, and at Heyicheng village (see Appendix B for a full transcription of the lyrics of these four sections). Figure 34 is a transcription of the first two phrases

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<sup>99</sup>In C.P. Fitzgerald's (Fitzgerald [1940] 2005, 124) description, he speculates that the lyrics of hualiu tunes in the 1940s were mainly related to "unbearable" content because they often made men laugh hard and women flush with shame.

of Zhao Caiting and Zhao Shuzhen's rendition of hualiu tune when they are at the Shendu temple (Example 2). In this transcription, the top staff presents the first phrase and the bottom two staves constitute the second phrase. After each phrase delivered by Zhao Caiting, Zhao Shuzhen responds with a short spoken phrase. Three lines of text in different font sizes differentiate three different languages. Italics designates the romanization of the Bai language. The bottom two lines of text are Chinese and English translations of the Bai lyrics.

(zaod) gerl ni bei pia wut berf sed wad miaol, bei zid nial ga xiouf jie pia.  
 今天到了五百神王庙到了我们把香敬上  
 Today we came to the Temple of the King of Five Hundred Gods, after we arrive, we offer him incense.

*Response: jie de at gerd laoz.*  
 已经敬了很多了  
 You have offered a lot (of incense) already.

(erd) gal - lal nivx - sei daf zi ded  
 干 - 兰 乳 - 扇 抬 朝 前  
 Put gallal and nivxsei (cow's milk cheese 乳扇) at the front,

(na - na) naot ga xiouf geit pia  
 把 香 烧 起 来  
 (and) burn the incense.

*Response: geit zil hua hua se laoz.*  
 香已经烧得很火了  
 The incense is burning strong enough.

Figure 34 The first two phrases of Zhao Caiting and Zhao Shuzhen's hualiu tune. In this transcription, words in parentheses indicate filler or connecting words without actual meanings. ˊ and ˋ indicates upward or downward glide with unfixed pitches. ✨ indicates wide vibrato.



**Figure 35 Zhao Caiting and Zhao Shuzhen. Photo provided by Zhao Caiting.**

The leaders in the pilgrimage group are often followed by a small ensemble playing the dilder, bamboo flute, and simple percussion instruments including a drum and cymbals to accompany the procession. Here, these instruments play an important role. Because of their loud volume, these instruments are often considered a device to clear away different “noises,” that is bad fortune, impure spirits, or evil spirits. Besides their volume, the extent of efficacy of the sounded instruments is also associated with the material they’re made of, as well as the quality of their sound. For example, the gong is made of brass, which symbolizes the color yellow and the element of gold. In Chinese culture, yellow is associated with prestige, wealth, and good luck. Therefore, the material brass gives this instrument a positive meaning. The better the quality of the brass is, the more efficacious the instrument will be. If the reverb is long enough, more bad

things will be blocked outside.<sup>100</sup>

Following the band, village members sing Bai folk tunes and perform a dance called “tyrant’s whip,” which is named after the only and most important prop of this dance. Tyrant’s whip is a 20 to 30 inches bamboo stick drilled with several holes on each side and attached with some copper coins on it. When people dance, they swing the bamboo stick to touch different joints on the body, making crisp sounds (Figure 36). All these acts are good to “solicit a prosperous harvest ‘in the field, in the human multiplicity, and everything’” (Liang Yongjia 2018, 124). There are clear distinctions between the role of members in a pilgrimage group based on their gender and age. The ensemble is often formed by male members of the village at different ages, dance is often provided by women in their middle age and younger age.



**Figure 36 Performance of tyrant’s whip during the Guerx Sal Lad. Photograph by author, June 7, 2018.**

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<sup>100</sup> Personal communication with Li Xing 李兴, December 27, 2020.

The description I just offered depicts the most complete form of a pilgrimage group in the Guerx Sal Lad. Nowadays, it is not that easy to see such a full group of people with all the elements mentioned above in a pilgrimage group, unless people are required to organize a team to perform in government-organized events or for important visitors such as journalists and scholars (Example 3). Otherwise, forms and performances during the pilgrimage are selected and performed rather spontaneously. Zhao Caiting recalled that, in the past, there were a lot more people in the pilgrimage group. People from the same village went on the trip together, playing the dilder and bamboo flute and dancing together.<sup>101</sup> Nowadays, the formation of pilgrimage groups from different villages is not fixed.

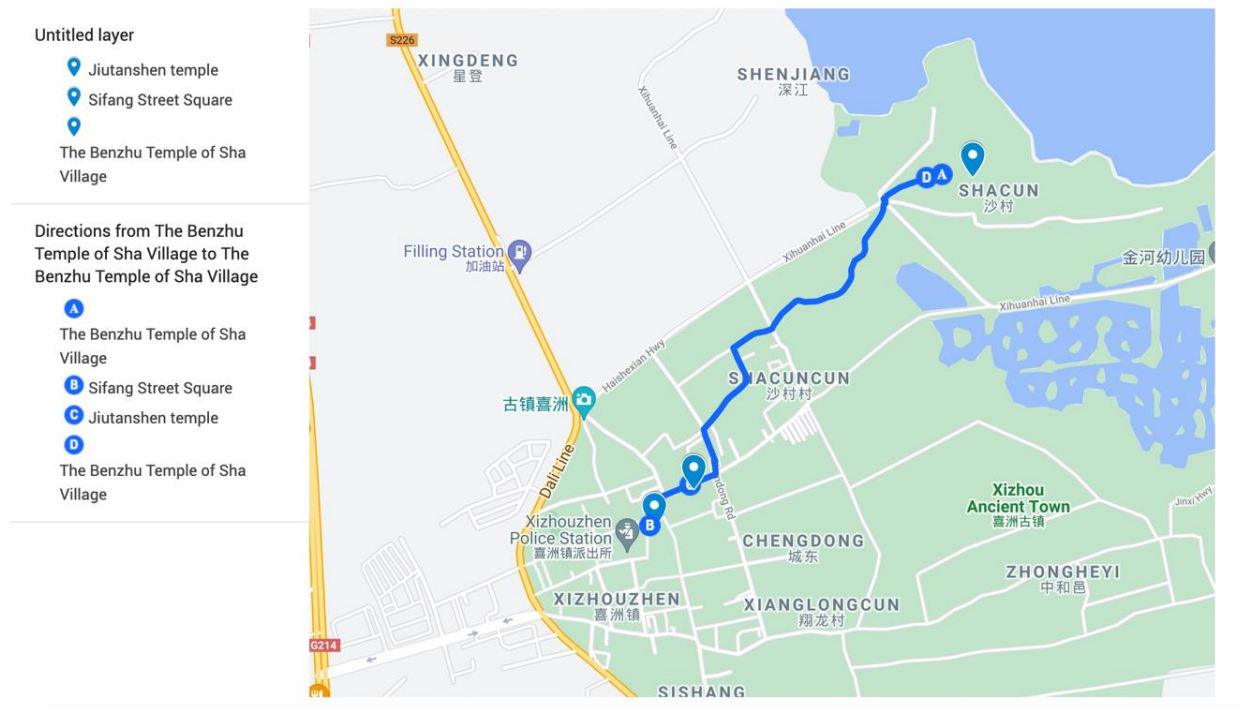
On the last day of the Guerx Sal Lad in 2021, I had a chance to follow the pilgrimage group of Sha village. They set off from their village, crossed the main roads of the Xizhou Old Town (Xizhou guzhen 喜洲古镇), stopped by at the main square of the old town and the Nine Altars Temple (Jiutanshen miao 九坛神庙), and finally arrived at the benzhu temple in their village (Map 7). Instead of having a full composition of the pilgrimage group, this group took the symbolic form of a dragon dance team (*wulongdui* 舞龙队). A woman holding a dragon ball attached to a bamboo stick was leading the group. Behind her, approximately ten women were waving red ribbons, symbolizing the dragon body, or colorful fabric fans in their hands. Their foot slightly lifted when they pace, making it a little bit dance-like. Two hualiu elders and a small ensemble consisting of the dilder (again, played by Duan Deyuan), a drummer, and a percussionist playing cymbals walked along with these women (Figure 37). During the whole time, Duan Deyuan repeatedly played a combination of the “Tune of Welcoming/Seeing Out Guests” (Jie/songkediao 接/送客

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<sup>101</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, December 18, 2020.



调) and the “Tune of Dragon Moving Up to the Heaven” (Longshangtian 龙上天). When they got close to their benzhu temple, a thundering blast of firecrackers signaled their arrival. the temple administrator was waiting for them to greet them and led them into the temple.



**Map 7 The route of the pilgrimage group from Sha village. Adapted from Google Maps.**



**Figure 37 The pilgrimage group from Sha village in front of their benzhu temple. Photograph by author, June 3, 2021.**

There were two courtyards in this temple. The main hall where the benzhu was enshrined was located in the yard inside. There was a flight of steps leading upwards to the main hall. The pilgrimage group danced and played music all the way to the inner courtyard and walked up the steps where the administrator joined the drum beating on the drum beside the hall door. There was an altar right outside the hall, facing the direction of the benzhu's field of vision. Before entering the main hall, everyone made a bow toward the altar. The group then paced around the hall, showing to the gods that they had arrived, around the altar, and finally went down the steps to the courtyard. During this process, most women kept their dance-like walking steps and waving red ribbons along with the rhythm of the dilder. One elder woman, at the back part of the group, did a dance step that was different from everyone else. There was no choreographed form of her dance steps. Instead, her steps were improvised, moving among the four cardinal directions. Once in a

while, she would twirl. Her body was constantly in a steady motion. In her hands, the red ribbon was held up high toward the benzhu, as if it was an offering. When she was dancing, she sometimes looked at the benzhu, making eye contact with him. When she danced back to the courtyard, she bowed to the benzhu once again.

When all people were in the courtyard, the group started the dragon dance. At the same time, the hualiu elders were singing beside the dancing group, not as an accompaniment, just a simultaneous action. Following the guide of the women holding the dragon ball, other members performed several movements of the dragon dance, such as “dragon looking up” (*longtaitou* 龙抬头), “dragon moving up to the heaven,” “two dragons playing balls” (*erlong xizhu* 二龙戏珠), and “dragon shaking tail” (*longbaiwei* 龙摆尾). As the dragon dance was getting to the end, players increased the tempo of the music as well, providing a rhythm for the climax of people’s worship (Example 4).

This moving performance put on for the benzhu, what Tweed (2006, 122) has termed “terrestrial crossings,” including various sounds and choreographed body movements. It did not just happen at a fixed location but took place along the whole way of people’s geographical journeys. Whether a simplified group like the Sha village group or a complete group as mentioned earlier, all performances and sounds happened simultaneously. These sonorous and auspicious sounds that were transported by people’s moving bodies sacralized the spaces they have gone through, demonstrating and reinforcing the power of the deities. More importantly, with no clear spatial markers, the routes these sounds took and the spaces they sounded in and spread to demarcated the geographical scope of people’s social life and production, which was also the very sacralized territory of their benzhu. But, meanwhile, sounds also connected the benzhu’s territory with its surrounding area as members of the Sha village visited different temples and deities along



their pilgrimage route, constituting and reaffirming benzhu's relationship-network (Zotter 2020, 123; David 2012). They traverse from a distance, signaling the deities and other people along the way to know the coming of this specific group. As Booth (2008, 65) suggests in his research on the wedding processions (*baraat*) of north India: "Processions are by definition movements through space; musicians as physical beings and producers of sound play a crucial role in mapping out physical space in social or cultural ways and in the construction of specifically processional space." Other than being the marker of the space, the volume, intensity, and physical vibration of the sound can help to construct an alternative space and reality for the processional ritual, so that worshippers' thoughts could reach the divine easier (67–80).

### **3.2 The Guerx Sal Lad as a Gendered Space**

Before I attended the Guerx Sal Lad for the first time, what I expected was a roughly equal number of men and women participating in this grand occasion that happens only once a year. However, when I was there, I was astounded that women actually comprised the majority of participants in the festival. They no doubt outnumbered males. They were in every temple praying for their families. They were on the way to different temples. They were chanting inside and outside those temples. They were chatting and laughing while wandering around the bustling market outside the temples. They were singing and dancing in all the performances and other musical activities. In different religious events I went to, they carried their offerings, incense, food, and other staples of worship in their bamboo baskets that look much bigger and heavier than their physical sizes, traveled by small vans in groups, and worshipped various deities around the Dali region (Figure 38). Sometimes, they made pilgrimage trips together several hundred miles away

to celebrate the significant day of a deity. Of course, in the past, they did all these by walking on foot.



**Figure 38** An elder Bai woman carrying her worship staples. Photo provided by Zhao Qian 赵茜.

Most of the women I have seen in different religious activities, especially in the Guerx Sal

Lad, are members of Lotus Pond Societies. Lotus Pond Society is a village-based religious association comprised of middle-aged and elderly women who are devotees of different deities. This society and its practices evolved from the esoteric practice of the Buddhist tradition of *azhali*. In the Dali area, every village has at least one Lotus Pond Society. Some villages with a bigger population have more than one and they are shared by several communes (*she* 社). Each Lotus Pond Society is made up of approximately thirty to a hundred middle-aged women. This society and its religious practices have a strong presence in the Guerx Sal Lad. I observed them most frequently during my fieldwork. Whenever I went to a temple festival, I always saw members of Lotus Pond Societies, preparing their offerings, chanting, cooking, and praying to the gods.<sup>102</sup> They made pilgrimage trips together as well to worship deities that are efficacious.

Women in Lotus Pond Societies play a central role in not just Bai people's religious life, but Bai society in general. Their religious practices are crucial to the prosperity of each village and their own families. Women often join the group after the age of fifty because that is normally when they already have grandchildren and there are much fewer family affairs they need to worry about. Therefore, they can have more time and energy to dedicate to the deities and to find peace of mind. This is an important state of mind for members of Lotus Pond Societies, because a fundamental responsibility for Bai women after they join the society is to cultivate merit and to pray for blessings and protection for their families through deity worship. Gaining inner peace is helpful when they are chanting or expressing gratitude to deities. Most members of Lotus Pond Societies are all mothers who take doing good for families and self-cultivation as intentions.

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<sup>102</sup> For each village's own temple fair, such as a *benzhu*'s birthday, only the Lotus Pond Society of that village will be present. When a larger-scale religious festival occurs, Lotus Pond Societies from different villages will all attend.

In the Bai society, women are the main actors of the Guerx Sal Lad, people's religious practices, and the prosperity, health, and fertility of their families. Yet, compared to a large number of resources on the festival and its activities—government documents, news reports, and advertisements, they were almost silenced in the official narratives except for some general mentions. This situation poses questions about women's agency and experiences within the festive space and soundscape. What kind of strength do they carry in their body and embodied voices to hold their religious belief and empower their social effect? What kind of space do they create for each other within the gendered social norms of particular eras in Bai history? How do they bond with each other through sound and bodily practices?

In this section, I focus on the practices of Lotus Pond Societies. Although there have been studies on women's daily practices in Bai society (Su Xing 2020; He Zhikui and Tang Dongmei 2010; He Zhikui 2009), the practice of Lotus Pond Societies (He Zhikui 2008; Zhang Yunxia 2013, 2017), and the gender aspect in Bai people's village deity worship (Jin Shaoping 2008; Bryson 2013), the amount of scholarship is not impressive. The strong presence of melodic and rhythmic sounds in women's religious practices has almost never been discussed.<sup>103</sup> More importantly, the collective voices and bodily habitus of these female members embody women's agency within the religious context (Weiss 2019, 5). By presenting Bai women's bodily and sounded practices, especially the worship and chanting experiences of Lotus Pond Societies, I aim to show that the religious life and "body-voice" (Meintjes 2019, 64) of Bai women do not just fulfill their responsibility to pray for protection and prosperity for families. Moreover, living within the conditioned patriarchal social system, although Bai women do not intentionally attempt to subvert

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<sup>103</sup> There is only one article by Zhou Kaimo (2005) that analyzes the female gender role, women's musical activities, and their symbolic meaning within the benzhu ritual.

or resist gender complementarity and sometimes even help to reproduce an asymmetric gender relationship, their dedication to deities and repeated religious practices have produced unintended effects that empower them to take on important social responsibilities and enable them to create a female space for them to communicate and support each other. This way of nonoppositionally negotiating gendered social norms has been termed by Mayfair Yang (2020, 243) as women's "nonoppositional agency." I will revisit this concept and discuss its relations with Bai women's body-voice in detail later.

### **3.2.1 The Structure and General Practice of Lotus Pond Societies**

The structure of Lotus Pond Societies reveals a hierarchy among members, which is also reflected in their religious practices. Within a Lotus Pond Society, there are six functional units, including (1) a head scripture mother (*jingmu* 经母) who is usually the leader of the whole association; (2) a core committee composed of several scripture mothers whose duty is to assist the head scripture mother and deal with the daily routine. Among all members of the society, scripture mothers know better about all the scriptures, dates of temple festivals, and specific procedures of different rituals; (3) the treasury unit which is in charge of financial records and purchasing goods; (4) the heaven's cook unit whose responsibility is to prepare offerings; (5) the cooking unit for taking care of members' food, and (6) the storage unit which ensures and burns incense and spirit money in rituals (Zhang Yunxia 2013, 50–57). The rest of the association are general members. During the chanting, scripture mothers are the ones initiating and leading different scriptures. They are also teachers of newer members. They teach them scriptures, legends of deities, and the etiquette of worshipping different deities. This hierarchy is also expressed through their instrument playing. Among different percussion instruments, only scripture mothers

can play drums, cymbals, and wooden fish, while the rest of the members play bells.

The routine gathering time of Lotus Pond Societies is the first and fifteenth day according to the Chinese calendar, that is when members of each Lotus Pond Society assemble in their own benzhu temple, performing scripture chanting and praising their deities. There are myriad temple festivals when Lotus Pond Societies go to various benzhu temples or other locations to honor different deities of that area. In everyday life, members of Lotus Pond Societies are often invited by other community members to chant for blessings, such as people's weddings, baby's first month birthday, and new building inaugurations. They are also invited by families to go to temples with them, praying to deities for specific purposes, such as for fertility and family prosperity. The scriptures of Lotus Pond Societies' chanting encompass content from Buddhism, Daoism, to historical stories and legends of the Bai people. For different occasions and deities, members choose different scriptures. For example, there are scriptures specifically for inviting visitors (the deities); when they pray to the Guanyin or get invited to a joyful occasion, they chant the "Scripture of Guanyin" (Guanyin jing 观音经);<sup>104</sup> if there were people passed away, Lotus Pond Societies would chant the "Scripture of Protection" (Baowei zhenjing 保卫真经) to recount all big moments in a human's whole life.

In the past, most women were illiterate, therefore the learning of scriptures heavily depends on listening and chanting repetitively. But since more women have attained education now, some literate or semiliterate members have transcribed the lyrics of scriptures into a hand-written booklet so other members can copy it and learn different scriptures faster and easier (Figure 39). It is also more convenient for them to practice their scriptural chanting in their spare time. At their common

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<sup>104</sup> The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in China.

gathering, new members often sit at the back, holding the transcription and chanting following senior members. Scriptures chanted by Lotus Pond Societies are a mixture of different religious traditions using Han language, Bai language, or a combination of the two. Buddhist scriptures may be chanted in Daoist temples, although usually not the reverse. There are shared scriptures by Lotus Pond Societies from different villages. Popular scriptures related to the Guerx Sal Lad include the “Scripture of Picking up Jingu” (Jiejingu jing 接金姑经), the “Scripture of Sending off Jingu,” and the “Tune of Worshipping the Mountain” (Chaoshan diao 朝山调), among others. Yet, according to members of the Lotus Pond Society from Jiangdu village (Jiangdu cun 江渡村), while the basic melodies of different scriptures kept the same as in the past, because of the mix using of the Han and Bai languages in the chanting and differences between regional accents, the chanting of these scriptures by different Lotus Pond Societies might sound rather different from one another.



Figure 39 A hand-written booklet of the “Scripture of the Prince” (Taizi jing 太子经) and the “Scripture of the Underworld” (Diyu jing 地獄经). Photograph by author, September 29, 2021.

3.2.2 Chanting and Ritual of Lotus Pond Societies

Chanting is an important way for ordinary people, in this case, female worshippers, to approach the gods, please them, and ask them to respond to human requests. As Mayfair Yang (2020, 54) points out, for Chinese religion, the main approach to sacred texts is not “to discursively analyze or interpret them,” like Protestants, but “to chant, absorb, and embody them through ritualized repetition.” As a music practitioner, when I heard the chanting of Lotus Pond Societies for the first time, what immediately caught my attention were its highly melodic tunes, the evenly paced unison of members, and the tinkling sound of several percussion instruments. This was



musical to my Western-trained and unreligious ears. During the early stage of my fieldwork, I always asked questions according to these “musical features,” such as “do you have a score?” “How do you learn to sing this?” “How do you memorize the melody?” But no one ever understood my questions, not once, until I realized that, this is not the “right” way to think about the chanting of Lotus Pond Societies, not in their understanding. To them, chanting is a sounded expressive practice to recite (*nian* 念), to worship (*baijing* 拜经), and to express their gratitude to deities.

There are several rather fixed melodies shared by more than dozens of scriptures. The core of a scripture normally consists of a set of stanzas of five to seven-character lines. For example, Figure 40 shows two sentences of the “Scripture of Sending Off Jingu” recited by the Lotus Pond Society of Fengming village. Each sentence consists of seven Chinese characters. Stanzas with different texts are set to one short melody in repetition and chanted in a combination of Bai and Han languages. At the beginning and the end of most of the scriptures, there is often a pair of matching phrases (*jingtou* 经头) associated with Guanyin starting and closing the chanting. According to Bai scholar Zhang Cuixia (2015, 158), this specific reciting form is originated from the ritual performance of precious scrolls (*baojuan* 宝卷), a genre of prosimetric ballad that was popular throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>105</sup> The melody members chant is a repetition of the same melodic section (Figure 41) (Example 5). Several percussion instruments provide rhythmic accompaniment to the chanting, including drum, brass cymbal, wooden fish, and bell. Members of a Lotus Pond Society always chant in one key unison at a moderate tempo from approximately 60 bpm to 90 bpm. Their voices sound steady and peaceful. This quality of their

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<sup>105</sup> While some precious scrolls consist of pious Buddhist tales without a clear sectarian coloring, other precious scrolls focus on the teachings of the new religions that emerged over the course of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

voice is nothing performative like how Nicholas Harkness (2014) describes the voice of Christian vocal music in Seoul which aims for an ideally clean and stable quality similar to European classical voice that represents a sense of privilege. Instead, the voice of Lotus Pond Societies members suggests a long-practiced routine and self-cultivated peace in their minds after they completed their major family fairs. Moreover, their voicing of scriptures is not a one-directional act, instead, a senior member from the Sha village told me that their chanting is there to be heard by the deities.

三月修行三月三，	Cultivate on the third of March,
驸马陪姑闲一月。	fuma stayed (in Dali) with Jingu for a month.

**Figure 40** Two sentences of the “Scripture of Sending Off Jingu” recited by the Lotus Pond Society of Fengming Village. Translated by author.



**Figure 41** The main melody section of the “Scripture of Sending Off Jingu” recited by the Lotus Pond Society of Fengming Village.

There are two basic forms of posturing for chanting. When members chant inside the

temple, they often break the group into half and sit face-to-face with senior members sitting at the front. When they chant in a space outside, most typically, members sit, stand, or kneel in a rectangular shape. Some Lotus Pond Societies form a semicircle. During the chanting, as a symbol of authority, the head scripture mother plays a drum and a gong to rhythmically lead the chanting, while other members play wooden fishes with steady beats. They often set a temporary small altar, with offering spread on it, and a makeshift incense burner in the middle. In some cases, they just use a piece of large paper, put it on the floor, and put all their offerings together as the altar. While most of the members are chanting, a few others are in charge of counting spirit money and taking care of the burning incense. One of scripture mothers holds papers offering to gods up high during the chanting (Figure 42). Burning incense has the function of cleaning the surrounding environment and invoking the deities named in the scriptures (Schmitt 2007, 154). For scriptures dedicated to a specific deity, when they cross certain deities' names or related details, members who are in charge of tea or wine service will offer tea towards the altar, and other members will lean forward, symbolizing their respect to the deity, as a scripture mother told me, "Deities are passing by in the sky" (*shenxian tianshangguo* 神仙天上过). After every section, some spirit money will be burned.



**Figure 42 The Lotus Pond Society of Qingdong village at the Shendu temple. Photograph by author, December 22, 2020.**

The whole set of scripture chanting can last for several hours. During the chanting of scripture, as I mentioned earlier, members keep their movements and postures consistent, no matter standing, sitting, kneeling, or making body movements such as leaning forward and bowing. When hundreds of voices from different Lotus Pond Societies overlap and resonate with one another at temple festivals, a powerful and sustained female-sounding space is created by their collective voices, enabling the connection between humans and the divine and empowering them to carry on their family and religious obligations and refining virtues.

Before and after the chanting, members enter the temple to worship again and make food offerings. Scripture chanting is one of the most basic and common practices of their religious life.

During the Guerx Sal Lad, Lotus Pond Societies from different villages occupy different open spaces to chant and voice out their piety to deities. The closer they are to different deity halls, the more convenient it is for them to conduct their offerings and other rituals. They worship and chant in the temple of the City God, the Shendu temple, the Er River Temple, and benzhu temples in their villages. As “a sonic phenomenon that is taken up in all sorts of human communicative action” (Harkness 2015, 321), these women’s collective voices create a sustained sounding environment that gives rise to the communication with divinities and gods, on the one hand, and an empowered female space in which they carry on their family and religious obligations and refining virtues.

Another important site for Lotus Pond Societies members to have shared experiences is various rituals and rites during temple festivals. Their shared embodied memory and repeatedly performed ritual performance construct a female space in which Bai women develop intimate affective connections with each other and practice their religious agency. During the Guerx Sal Lad, other than chanting and worshipping, one important task for Lotus Pond Societies is to send Jingu back to fuma who is waiting for her at Weishan. Every year, Lotus Pond Societies from different villages go to Weishan on the tenth day of the second lunar month to pick Jingu up and send her back during the Guerx Sal Lad. The whole ritual process of sending Jingu back begins on the night of the twenty-second day.

On the night of the twenty-second day in 2021, members of the Lotus Pond Society from Wanqiao went to the City God temple and stayed in the temple for the night. Around 5 am on the morning of the twenty-third day, they started to chant the “Scripture of Sending Off Jingu” and other common scriptures. Around 6 am, they held a portrait of Jingu and offered incense, tea, wine, and fried rice chips to her, meaning that they sent Jingu back to Weishan. Until next year when they need to pick her up at Weishan again, they would take out the portrait to be enshrined,

symbolizing Jingu is back home. In 2021, the ritual was simplified due to the government's restrictions during the pandemic. According to Zhang Yunxia (2016, 49–50), this ritual normally includes a host praying and burning petitions for all people's good fortune and a great next year. People also burn their offerings, spirit money, food, and clothes for Jingu. Zhang's description is similar to what I observed at Weishan when people pick Jingu up. Picking Jingu up involves a seven days trip to Weishan, a mountainous county about eighty-nine kilometers south from Dali, and several stops along the way.

In 2021, I joined the trip of the Lotus Pond Society from Fengming village. Before going to Weishan, I was worried that not many people would be there because of the pandemic. When I called a member I know, she told me that, if the guards don't allow them to go into the mountain, they will go there a few days earlier so they can still be there. They never miss this yearly trip. Along the way to Weishan, every once in a while, members opened the car window and poured a little bit of tea outside to thank deities for traveling with them for a long way. When we arrived at the temple they accommodate, members set up a small altar and told me that this altar was dedicated to all the deities they invited here along the way. Every morning, they renewed the tea and wine on that small altar and burned incense for these deities (Figure 43).



**Figure 43** A simple altar set by the Lotus Pond Society members from Fengming village. Photograph by author, March 23, 2021.

This kind of repeated religious movement is also present in their detailed ritual procedures when they worship and make offerings to deities. For example, when making bows to deities' statues, compared to general worshippers, Lotus Pond Societies members, especially people who have special roles such as tea or wine servant, do it with more complex gestures and body movements. When they pay tribute, the procedures are like below (Example 6):

1. Fold their hands, hold them up in front of their bodies, and bow once;
2. Then, the little finger of their right hand is intertwined with the thumb of their left hand (right hand up, left hand down). They bow three times to the middle, one time to the right, one time to the left, then come back to the middle and bow again. When they bow, they



bend their knees with a slight bounce.

3. After that, they kneel and kowtow nine times;
4. Repeat the second step;
5. At last, they fold their hands and bow to the middle, the right, the left, and the middle again.

This is not a long process. It only lasts less than one minute, but it gets repeated again and again whenever they worship a deity or go to a religious activity. They do this year after year, generation by generation. In her ethnography of Zulu women's ululation in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Louise Meintjes (2019) conceives women's danced ululation as "body-voice," an embodied practice that builds, marks, and acts in relationships between women and between women and men. In the male-dominated performance of *ngoma* (a competitive form of music and dance), women ululate with their danced bodies to respond in various ways to the performing men. In this way, women cocreate the process of *ngoma*. Women also connect with each other through ululation as they fill in each other's phrase gaps and ululate polyphonically. Reworking the global North-centered research orientation which often blindly assumes "ubiquity, newness, efficiency, and abundance of technology...irrespective of place" (64), Meintjes argues for women's ululation as a sound producing technology and technique that voices out "unique affective biographies and political histories" (65). It carries women's struggle within the harsh patriarchal structure as well as the violent histories of colonialism and apartheid.

The chanting and bodily religious practices of Lotus Pond Societies present an important form of women's body-voice and vocalization outside the global North. As I have shown, Lotus Pond Societies' chanting is always accompanied by members' still body postures or various body movements, as much as their vocal expressions—chanting, singing, inaudible praying, chatting, or laughing—in their myriad worship practices and journeys. As a sound producing technology, Bai



women's chanting requires basic vocal and rhythmic skills, good memory, endurance for long standing, walking, or posturing, and the ability to recite in unison. Moreover, they repeat their worship practices and pilgrimage journeys in various temple festivals and religious events year after year. Within every single religious occasion, they also chant scriptures and worship different deities time and again. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (2021, 227) uses Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to address the importance of pious women's regular engagement in ritual activities and performance that forms their bodily discipline and enables them to embody the divine.<sup>106</sup> I would add that techniques of women's vocality and sounding and the repetition of their religious practices as a means of techniques are equally crucial in strengthening their habitus. Lotus Pond Societies' "body-voice habitus" is reinforced through their frequently reiterated religious actions and their engagement with regular sounding and bodily routines, enabling Bai women to embody a space for themselves.

Similar to Meintjes' analysis of ngoma in South Africa, within the context of rural Dali, Bai women's body-voice projects and asserts their relational presence with each other and with men. But, instead of voicing directly to the performing men in the same space as a respective and supportive act, Bai women's body-voice unintentionally creates and acts in a female-only space against the conditioned patriarchal social system that exists in Bai society. The issue of gender asymmetry within Bai society has been explored by several local scholars. They argue that Bai culture places high value on the virtue of maternity. Some evidence includes the existence of many female benzhu associated with fertility and health, such as Nice Heaven Holy Mother who

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<sup>106</sup> Bourdieu (1977, 72) defined "habitus" as a "system of durable transposable dispositions." Habitus comprises a set of socially and culturally instilled inclinations, bodily practices, and habits. It is produced and preconditioned by objective social structures and the process of socialization. In turn, habitus generates social practices and finally reacts to and reproduces the social structure.

Provides Defense for Families (Jiutian weifang shengmu 九天卫房圣母) and Goddess of Fertility (Jin Shaoping 2008, 78). Further, there are many folk stories centering around female characters, and the custom of uxorilocal marriage is maintained in many Bai families (He Zhikui 2009, 86–87). Scholars claim symmetrical power relations between Bai women and men because women are the main factor of benzhu worship. Except for conducting worship and rituals, they are often the organizers of various benzhu-related activities (Jin Shaoping 2008, 78–79). However, the ubiquity and significance of women’s participation in different religious practices do not mean that they have absolutely equal status as men in either a religious setting or Bai society in general. Although women comprise the majority of worshippers and temple volunteers in most rituals and ceremonies, men still play an authoritative role as leaders or ritual experts (ibid., 80; Huang, Valussi, and Palmer 2011, 113). In Bai families, even though filial gratitude to parents, especially to mothers, is central, the Neo-Confucian patriarchal system resulting from long-term acculturation with the Han has defined women narrowly as child-bearers and homemakers. Women have to discipline themselves based on patriarchal house rules (He Zhikui 2009, 86-87). Besides bearing the weight of taking care of families and maintaining home life, industriousness is also a central criterion for evaluating a woman’s virtue. When men seek work in urban areas, Bai women need to work in the fields and undertake work in construction sites as well.

From these discussions, we see a paradoxical and complex gendered power structure. The correspondence between the high status of the maternal role in traditional Bai culture and filial obligation in the Neo-Confucian patriarchal family system has resulted in a conditional social prestige for Bai women. They situate higher in the gender hierarchy only when they become a mother (see also He Zhikui 2011). The patrilineal kinship norms are likely to ensure women’s reproduction in order to maintain correct lineage inheritance (Yang 2021, 225). In other social

circumstances, women's experiences are still constrained by patriarchal bias over women's sexuality and chastity. Other than the examples mentioned by scholars above, during menstruation, women must avoid going to temples or attending any rituals, because blood is considered impure and karmic (Schmitt 2007, 149; Bryson 2015, 633; Zhao Caiting, pers.comm., 2020). That is partially why women often join a Lotus Pond Society after they have gone through menopause (Bryson 2015, 633). Women are bound up with their domestic life. Since the feminization of agriculture after the economic reform, they take care of their families while sharing the workload with men.

Lived under conditioned patriarchies, Bai women's chanting and religious routines enact a female-only space in which they bond with each other and reaffirm their collectively recognized piety and domestic value. Similar to ululations of Zulu women, Bai women's religious body-voice is not "resistant as much as it is a claim to ongoing participation" (Meintjes 2019, 70). Instead of resisting or reacting directly to the gendered politics within Bai society, I argue that Bai women's body-voice carries what Mayfair Mei-hui Yang has termed as women's "nonoppositional agency" to assert their presence and their power as a vital part of Bai people's religious expressions and common well-being.

In her examination of rural Wenzhou women's religious agency, Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (2021) incorporates perspectives from feminist scholars on female agency in non-Western contexts (Mahmood 2005; Avishai 2008, Burke 2012) to criticize the privileging of resistance or acts of defiance as the center of Western feminist discussions around ways to exercise female agency and remind us about female agency's contingency and specificity. As she suggests, "changes in social structure do not rely solely on the agency of resistance, confrontation, or explicit disobedience; they may also be engineered *from within* a structure of power, through loyal adherence to its ideals

and rules” (255; italics in original). According to Yang, while Wenzhou women “continue to cultivate traditional virtues of modesty, deferral to men, and religious piety” (227) which unconsciously reproduce or reinforce the traditional patriarchal structures, their religious bodily habitus might simultaneously cause unintended consequences that “also modify and recalibrate them” (230). For example, their spiritual attachment to deities enables them to actively take leadership in religious organizations and activities such as fundraising for temple restoration. They also form “sisterhoods” so as to better serve the divine and support each other both emotionally and materially (232–53).

In rural Dali, women have not been exposed to explicit feminist discourse before. Similar to Wenzhou pious women, Bai women’s body-voice, their worship practices and self-cultivation, and their nonoppositional agency are activated by their commitment and dedication to the prosperity and health of their families. Together, they offer good service to the deities, take pilgrimage trips, and fulfill their obligations, sharing a women’s world within a patriarchal social system while marking their relationships with each other, the deities, and their families. Even though their womanhood and obligations may stay within or even reproduce the logic of patriarchal structures, their devotion and religiosity enable them to undertake important social responsibilities and to nonoppositionally negotiate with the structure of gendered social norms. In their chanting and worship, they address deities directly on behalf of their families. At these moments, women are much more than a cocreator of people’s religious activities, but the most important and often the only agent through whom the whole family’s prosperity and well-being can be secured. Men, instead of the superior power to women, become family members who can only reach the divine through women’s religious body-voice. When I was with women from Fengming village at Weishan, sometimes, I just sat with them, helping them to make red ribbons

or flowers while chatting about life, food, and legends of deities. At these moments, I strongly felt that I was in a space that belongs only to women. These ribbons and flowers were for the deities. They went around more than dozens of temples, just to offer these ribbons to deities so they could bring their blessings home to their families. Their body-voice and their religious practices develop their own understanding and implementation of womanhood, female virtue, and religious life. By voicing out and deploying their religious agency, they create a space where they could pursue more freely the sense of bonding, collectiveness, and empowerment.

### **3.3 The Guerx Sal Lad as an Intimate Space**

The Guerx Sal Lad is not just about the communication between humans and deities, it is also about interactions between community members. In addition to a complex space of worshipping and entertaining the deities, people often relate the Guerx Sal Lad to a sense of intimacy. I have heard from different people that the Guerx Sal Lad is at the same time an amorous meeting, where men and women, especially old lovers, can have a chance to meet up and get romantically involved with each other. This dimension of the Guerx Sal Lad has been highly subdued by the official narrative of local government institutions and caused heated debate in local intellectuals' research.<sup>107</sup> When I attempted to consult local scholars or officials about this aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad, they either claimed that this phenomenon is exaggerated by news media and touristic promotion or denied the existence of it and strongly criticized scholarly works that noted

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<sup>107</sup> However, the local ICH application team adopted the amorous element of the Guerx Sal Lad in the application text to the national ICH list as a way to validate the Bai's "correction over the Confucian dogma of feudal society" (quoted from the English translation by Liang Yongjia 2013).

this kind of interaction between men and women. When I first heard about this aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad, I was suspicious about its distinctiveness as well and assumed this phenomenon might be relatively common for any large-scale festival. But during my fieldwork, people specially mentioned this part of the festival. According to Zhao Caiting,

The Guerx Sal Lad makes people shy. In the old-time, young men and women would go there and date. Some also date by doing antiphonal singing. It's a meeting of romance, an amorous meeting. People all sing there. Once they feel good, they just go in the field, forest, or ravine to fool around. Back then, medial technology was not developed enough. Some people (women) don't have any kids even after several years of marriage, they would just go to the Guerx Sal Lad and find a man to sleep with. It still happens. Some people would bring a blanket so they can sleep better. Even old people will participate in it.... There is a saying, musicians gamble and sing tunes, just for walking the amorous road.<sup>108</sup>

Li Xuesheng from Heyicheng village once described the scene to me as well:

In the old days, the main content of the Guerx Sal Lad is to be involved in love and romance (*tanqing shuoai* 谈情说爱). People who love to sing tunes would go to antiphonal singing.... In the past, people become emotionally involved through antiphonal singing.... April has the best weather in Dali, and young and married people both join. Around twenty-some years ago, men and women would mess around just at Qingdong, but they often got caught and put into jail. This kind of thing still happens today, you just won't see it. I sing, and you answer. If we have a good atmosphere, I will still want to sing with you next year. Even if we live on the opposite side, we will sing together on this day.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, December 18, 2020.

<sup>109</sup> Personal communication with Li Xuesheng, June 7, 2018.

To address this aspect of the Guerx Sal Lad, I do not attempt to verify the existence of amorous relationships between people during the festival (Zhao Yuzhong 2008) or to analyze the possible rational and historical references behind this phenomenon (Shen Haimei 2009). What interests me, however, is to explore the forms of intimacy created through people's engagement and the meanings of these intimacies that speak about the politics of pleasure in Bai people's social life and their understanding of the Guerx Sal Lad. In both Zhao Caiting and Li Xuesheng's words, a musical activity was mentioned repeatedly, that is, antiphonal singing. Antiphonal singing happens as two singers—normally one male and the other female—sing together in a question-and-answer format.<sup>110</sup> According to Zhao Caiting and Li Xuesheng, antiphonal singing in “the old days” was the most common and, at the same time, a crucial way to engender, exchange, and sustain intimacy and romantic feelings between two persons in a private setting. In current times, while the sense of intimate communication remains, this activity has transformed beyond a performative act between two persons. It has become a public performance.<sup>111</sup> In this section, by looking into the current practices of antiphonal singing during the Guerx Sal Lad, I examine the juxtaposition of multiple “public intimacies” (Guilbault 2010) in Bai people's social and musical experiences, as well as its generative power to form the Guerx Sal Lad into an intimate space of people's sociality.

My use of “public intimacy” and my analysis of musical interactions in Bai people's antiphonal singing is inspired by Jocelyne Guilbault's (2010) insightful study of the transformative capacities of live soca performances. In her research, Guilbault argues for pleasure as a productive force that is able to articulate cultural politics other than the norms including “the grid of resistance”

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<sup>110</sup> I have occasionally seen two women engaging in this type of singing as well.

<sup>111</sup> According to my interlocutors, antiphonal singing between two persons in a private setting still exists, but it is rare.

or “the outcomes of capitalist reproduction” (17). Instead, she focuses on the transformative capability of live soca performance to generate multiple forms of public intimacies on different levels between artists and among audience members. As she demonstrates, public intimacies and their generating process are performative. They are able to “reiterate identities and produce discursive effects that articulate cultural understandings of things such as race, class, gender, and sexuality” (ibid.). In live soca performance, public intimacies produce pleasure, create new connections and community belonging (sensual, emotional, and physical), distribute shared knowledge and aesthetics, and redraw the boundary between the private and the public. But they nonetheless perform social exclusion in terms of gender, sexuality, and class.

In current Bai society, antiphonal singing is a very common activity for people’s entertainment in different festivals, temple fairs, and daily life. Similar to soca performance, antiphonal singing is always relational and performative. The current practices of antiphonal singing in the Dali region involve a great deal of intimate interactions and communications between singers, between singers and the audience, and among the audience. The pleasing atmosphere and the delicate sense of intimacy brought out by singers’ singing are described/considered key qualities for a successful performance. Therefore, the concept of public intimacies provides a very useful lens to understand the way that music-making is embedded in a wide range of experiences produced in antiphonal singing. It is also helpful in demonstrating the performativity of antiphonal singing, which produces and helps to maintain various forms of public intimacy and reiterate people’s understanding of them.

Guilbault defines intimacy in live soca performances as “the variety of contacts among people that soca makes possible and...the spatial proximity it helps create” (17). By “spatial proximity,” Guilbault points to the ability of soca live performance to assemble “bodies that have



rarely ever performed together in the same space” (19). Among the Bai, antiphonal singing also gathers people and generates a variety of interactions and interrelationships among participants. However, instead of social strangers who do not usually appear on the same stage, Bai singers and audiences are more often community members who have a shared language, cultural experiences, and sense of sociality. Therefore, the concept of “intimacy” in my discussion is closer to what Santos and Donzelli (2007, 31) define in their research on the social life of rural China, which is “a form of relatedness entailing material or virtual proximity, implying the sharing of spaces, things, or experiences and resulting in bonding between individuals.” Moreover, in contrast to Guilbault’s analysis of intimacy created in the moment of performance, I show how the co-presence of multiple public intimacies also leads to the conflict between different senses of intimacy embedded in the past form of antiphonal singing as private communication and its current form as public entertainment. The negotiation of different intimacies not only disrupts the division of the private and public spheres, it also marks people’s understanding of morality and sexual propriety, especially for women.

One of my first encounters with antiphonal singing in Dali was a day before the temple fair of the City God Temple on May 28, 2021, when I got a call from one of my interlocutors, Hong Xiaomei 洪小妹. She is a woman in her sixties who is well known by a lot of people for her excellent skills in antiphonal singing. Even before I talked to her, I had already seen her a few times before on antiphonal singing occasions and local singing contests (Figure 44). On the phone, she asked me to go to the City God temple the next day where they were going to do antiphonal singing at an open park nearby. On the day of the temple fair, I arrived there around 2 pm. When I got close to the park, different musics and singing voices blasted from loudspeakers reached my ears first. I saw a big crowd of people, mostly above the age of forty. Most of them split into groups

and scattered in different parts of the park. Others were crisscrossing between one group and another. There were a few groups playing ensemble music with erhu, sanxian, and flute. Some were dancing along with the piercing music from loudspeakers. Most of the groups were doing antiphonal singing. Every pair of singers was equipped with a loudspeaker with a mini microphone attached to it. Onlookers were either standing or sitting on a small chair brought by themselves. They attentively looked at the singers with a smile on their faces, sometimes used their cellphones to take videos, and sometimes burst out laughing when they heard something interesting and funny (Example 7).



**Figure 44 Hong Xiaomei at an antiphonal singing event. Photograph by author, June 7, 2018.**

During the Guerx Sal Lad, antiphonal singing may happen anytime, anywhere, as long as people feel the urge. Lyrics of antiphonal singing are mostly sung in Bai or a local variation of Southwestern Mandarin (*hanhua* 汉语). Based on the basic melody, singers play with words and phrases, adding or deleting a few notes in every phrase to fit their improvised lyrics. In the Dali region, there are various regional melodic styles, such as the Bai tune, the Eryuan 洱源 tune, and the Han tune. For each style, there is a basic melody that singers use. In the Xizhou area, people often use the Bai tune (Figure 45). In the past, as Zhao Caiting and Liu Xuesheng have described, antiphonal singing in the Guerx Sal Lad used to be a special way for individuals to create romantic connections and build up intimacy in a private and mostly secret environment when intimacy and romance were forbidden in public. The sense of intimacy and romantic love in the act of antiphonal singing in the past was closely connected to the sphere of privacy (*yinsi* 隐私) shared between two persons against other people’s sight, hearing, and moral judgment. Although there is no equivalent term in Bai language for privacy, the same awareness of privacy definitely existed when my interlocutors used words like “secretly” (*toutoudi* 偷偷地) or “quietly” (*qiaoqiaodi* 悄悄地) to describe the antiphonal singing in the past.<sup>112</sup>



Figure 45 The basic melody of the Bai tune.

<sup>112</sup> According to Yan Yunxiang (2003, 9), notions of romance and free choice in spouse selection emerged in the 1950s and became increasingly prevalent in the domestic sphere since the 1980s.

Since the 1990s when minority music started to become a cultural resource for the construction of ethnic identity and tourism development, antiphonal singing has gradually turned into a form of semi-performative display, organized or spontaneous, that can happen anytime anywhere. Spontaneous group event of antiphonal singing as I described at the beginning of this section is very common, singers often participate in singing competitions organized by local government institutions as well. Whenever there is a festival or temple fair, people will know that there must be antiphonal singing. One can just go there and join freely. For antiphonal singing, one can sing with a stranger, or with an acquaintance. The process of two persons doing antiphonal singing, their repeating call-and-response, and interactions with each other, is also a test and incubator of close partnership. If two singers sing well together, they often call on each other to go and sing together as partners. In Dali, the renao atmosphere of the Guerx Sal Lad makes it a perfect occasion for doing antiphonal singing. Every year, members of this music community reunite at the same time and at the same place for doing antiphonal singing without having to know each other.

Even though the format of antiphonal singing has been through great changes, the sense of intimacy in a private setting can still be read in the content of people's singing conversations. Especially when the interaction happens with the opposite sex, the lyrics are often around the romantic relationship between men and women. Some even include content associated with extramarital affairs. Figure 46 shows an example that I heard during my fieldwork.

女：  
吃饭吃饭那就走，  
我叫朋友一起去，  
吃饭吃完咱回去，  
各回各的家，  
阿咿哟。

Woman:  
If you want to eat then let's go,  
I will ask my friends to come,  
After eating let's go back,  
Back to each's home,  
A-yi-yo.

<p>男： 只要和我去吃饭， 把你丈夫约来也不怕， 我把媳妇也约来， 吃完各回各的家， 阿哟哟。</p>	<p>Man: As long as you go eating with me, You can ask your husband as well, I will ask my wife, After eating we go back to each's home, A-yi-yo.</p>
<p>女： 你的情意太好了，阿哟哟， 这种情意没见过， 男人我见太多了， 像你这样的还没见过， 阿哟哟。</p> <p>...</p>	<p>Woman: You're so fine, a-yi-yo, I have never seen this kind of affection before, I have seen so many men before, Never seen anyone like you, A-yi-yo.</p>
<p>女： 这回我哥你听着， 这次后还有下次， 下次我又再找你， 阿哟哟。</p>	<p>Woman: Listen to me this time, older brother (<i>ge</i> 哥),<sup>113</sup> After this time, there'll be the next time, I will look for you again, A-yi-yo.</p>
<p>男： 阿妹既然这么说， 这句唱完不唱了，阿哟哟， 先把肚子填饱了， 饱吃饱再各回家， 阿哟哟。</p>	<p>Man: As younger sister (<i>amei</i> 阿妹) This phrase won't be completed, a-yi-yo, Let's feed ourselves first, Then we can go back to our own homes, A-yi-yo.</p>

**Figure 46 A transcription of the romantic content of an antiphonal singing, May 26, 2021. Translated into Mandarin by Yang Zhe and into English by author.**

The passage above implies an open but respectful attitude towards people's relationships. One can discern the teasing and playful tone between the man and the woman, but, at the same

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<sup>113</sup> “*Ge*,” “*age*” (阿哥), or “*gege*”(哥哥) all mean older brother. They are common terms often used in love songs to indicate the male lover, and “*amei*,” “*mei*,” or “*meimei*” indicate the female lover.

time, these two people value each other's marriage life. However, when the sense of intimacy that normally belongs to the private sector is transposed to the public sphere, an individual sense of privacy becomes consequently nested with the idea of publicness that is open and accessible to all (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992; Warner 2002), as well as people's different understandings of the boundaries of propriety. As a result, confusion and frustration happen when a singer's personal boundaries are in conflict with others. At another singing event, Hong Xiaomei told me,

Sometimes people get rude when they sing. It's not good for children to hear. The other day, he (her singing partner) sang "I treat you like my wife, holding you and sleeping together at night." It really freaked me out. It's not polite. My husband was there, so I stopped singing with him. If I sing with you, I should tell you that your wife is good and kind, but not messy. Antiphonal singing needs a sense of propriety. Not to mention that I'm older than him. He should respect me.

I was there when the singing happened. Figure 47 shows part of the lyrics.

女：  
道阿哥，  
我丈夫那人好不住，  
我丈夫那人很仁义，  
天天疼着我，  
阿哟哟嚯呵。  
混午混晚领我去，  
赚的钱都交给我，  
肉的肉啊鱼的鱼，  
三顿吃不完。

Woman:  
Let me tell you *age*,  
My husband is good,  
He is a man with righteousness,  
He spoiled me every day,  
A-yi-yo-ai-yi-yo.  
He takes me to have meals,  
He gives me every penny he earned,  
Meat and fish,  
It won't be finished in three meals.

男：  
道阿妹，  
你丈夫这人要不成，  
他用鱼刺来骗猫，  
真真的。  
那天他被打以后，

Man:  
Let me tell you, *amei*,  
Your husband is hopeless,  
He uses fish bones to fool the cat,  
Seriously.  
On that day when he got beaten,

身子被打成茄子炖洋芋，  
阿哟哟嚯呵。

His body was beaten into eggplant and  
potato stew,  
A-yi-yo-ai-yi-yo.

女：  
他的坏话你莫说，  
你要说他的坏话，  
唱也不唱了，  
阿哟哟嚯呵。  
我们只是在会场上唱，  
道阿哥，  
唱歌只是为开心，  
你老是说他不是，  
唱也唱不成了，  
阿哟哟嚯呵。

Woman:  
Don't say bad things about him,  
If you do that,  
I won't sing anymore,  
A-yi-yo-ai-yi-yo.  
We are only singing at this venue,  
Let me tell you *age*,  
To sing is to have fun,  
If you keep saying bad things about him,  
We can't sing together anymore,

男：  
道阿妹，  
我劝阿妹你莫气，  
唱曲只是开玩笑，  
阿妹不能太当真，  
真真的，  
唱曲你哥我逗你，  
  
亲来亲去是你们亲，  
  
外来外去我是外人，  
阿哟哟嚯呵。

Man:  
Let me tell you, *amei*,  
I'd advise you don't get angry,  
Singing tunes is just for fun,  
*Amei*, don't take it seriously,  
Seriously,  
Your brother I sing tunes just to amuse  
you,  
No matter how close, you two are the  
closest,  
I am just an outsider,  
A-yi-yo-ai-yi-yo.

女：  
喜欢你也只是喜欢你老婆，  
  
道阿哥，  
我也喜欢我丈夫，  
你喜欢你老婆，  
我喜欢我丈夫各不相干。

Women:  
If you like anyone, you only like your  
wife,  
Listen to me, *age*,  
I like my husband,  
You like your wife,  
It's different.

**Figure 47 A transcription of the offensive content of an antiphonal singing, July 7, 2021. Translated into  
Mandarin by Yang Zhe and into English by author.**

As most the current practices of antiphonal singing become a performative act of pleasure

in public, a new sense of public intimacy is created through singers' music-making and the affective contagion they bring to the co-present audience. As public entertainment, the purpose of antiphonal singing is not just emotional connection anymore, instead, the pleasure of the audience becomes the main responsibility of singers. What people care about the most in current antiphonal singing is the lyric content the two singers bring to the table. It is also the most fun part. It does not matter who starts the singing or what type of lyric content the first person initiates, the most important thing for the singers is to catch what the last person just sang and continue the conversation using the same melody. Many singers told me that a crucial standard for measuring a good singer is whether that singer is able to come up with a good answer immediately, what people called "belly talent" (*ducai* 肚才), indicating the number of good answers one can keep. Singer's singing skill is relatively not that important. Another way to explain this criterion for a good singer is in the description of antiphonal singing Hong Xiaomei told me, "If your partner sings to the sky, you need to follow to the sky. If your partner sings into the sea, you need to sing into the sea as well." In another short conversation with Hong Xiaomei, we discussed what can be regarded as good antiphonal singing. The conversation went as follows:

Me: how do you decide if someone is good with antiphonal singing or not?

Hong: It depends on the partner. Whatever you sing, I need to answer you.

Me: Does the pitch need to be perfect?

Hong: It's not about the tune. You need to be like you're arguing. You need to win. Like love songs, the more you sing the deeper it gets. There is nothing to be shy about. You just sing it out and let people laugh hard. People who watch and listen to your singing. You make them laugh.

Apparently, she did not really understand my question about the pitch, a common feature



of vocal techniques of professional music. A good round of antiphonal singing depends on the collaboration and competition of two persons. It depends on whether the two singers can make people laugh and feel lightened. When singers go singing, they often bring portable amplification systems with them so they can attract more people. Sometimes, singers turn their bodies slightly to the audience, observing people's reactions. Instead of facing each other, a lot of them stand side by side as they are performing. They laugh when their partner is singing something interesting. They cover their face with their hands when their partner's lyrics make them feel shy. Their emotions transfer to the audience through their embodied performance and interactions with others, making people get close to each other and create pleasure.

As I have shown, the interactive and lively performance of current antiphonal singing presents a co-existence of multiple forms of public intimacy formed by different social relations across different times and spaces. As public entertainment, the performance is constituted through improvisations that draw from singers' relationships with people. The performing process creates partnerships between singers and emotional connections between participants. Through the metaphorical lyrics and tunes, Bai people involved in the performance—singers and the audience—keep sharing and readdressing their understanding of sociality through their embodied practices. They share the experiences of intimacy and pleasure, a sounded space, and an extraordinary moment compared to their day-to-day life. In the past, the format of antiphonal singing was controlled by the sense of intimacy between two persons in a private setting. As this music-making activity gradually transformed into a form of public performance, its changing function, location, and ways of interaction developed a new sense of public intimacy and connections among singers and audiences while the private sense of intimacy was still contained in singers' improvised lyrics and interactions. The negotiation between two different intimacies

has brought pleasure and excitement to the audience, but also sometimes challenged their consideration of ethical boundaries.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presents different sounding and bodily practices that are integral to the sub-soundscape of rural Bai practitioners' Guerx Sal Lad as an intersection of worship space, gendered space, and intimate space. As most of the data were collected during the pandemic, the simplified Guerx Sal Lad presents spontaneous, "undisciplined," and genuine sound events that are rooted in Bai people's daily lives, oral culture, and beliefs that are much downplayed or even twisted in both academic and official narratives. As a worship space, the Bai people "do" their religion through myriads of bodily sounds of both humans and non-humans. These sounds, moving and static, sacralize the space where people occupied and pass by, as well as create, reinforce, and sustain the relationship between humans and the deities. As a gendered space, women, especially mature women, are the main carriers of Bai people's religiosity and collective well-being. Their body-voice habitus helps them develop their own understanding and implementation of womanhood, female virtue, and religious life. Within a patriarchal society, their voices and bodily practices enable them to create a female-only space where they could pursue more freely the sense of bonding, collectiveness, and empowerment. As an intimate space, collective and community-based music activities like antiphonal singing enact a performative time and space across the boundaries of domestic and public. People's singing and interactions in these events invoke and create different senses of "public intimacy," which enacts a web of delicate and intersubjective social relations. Musical interactions between singers and between singers and the audience create

community belonging and experiences of pleasure, but at the same time raise conflicts between participants' varying understandings of morality. By the capacity of music, sound, and body to evoke sensual, emotional, and affective bonding and unities, the sub-soundscape of rural community's Guerx Sal Lad forms a significant site of people's connection with the divine, with each other, with their history, and with Bai people as "we."

#### 4.0 The Guerx Sal Lad as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

In 2006, the Guerx Sal Lad was listed as an ICH item in the first batch of “The National List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of China” (Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan minglu 国家级非物质文化遗产名录). Three years later, in 2009, the prefectural Bureau of Culture and the Prefectural ICH Center expanded their ambition and applied for the UNESCO World Heritage List. Although the application ended in failure, it demonstrates the significance of the Guerx Sal Lad to local governments as an important form of social, cultural, and economic capital. This chapter shifts the focus from rural villagers’ experiences to local government institutions’ engagement with the Guerx Sal Lad as an ICH item. By local government institutions, I refer to governments and ICH-related public institutions at the prefectural, municipal, and county level. I examine the state-led, top-down transmission system of the Guerx Sal Lad and the reactions and responses of rural community members. Moreover, I explore local government institutions’ interventionist actions toward a soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad that is pro-national, non-religious, and ethnically distinct.

In this chapter, I first lay out the major official policies and initiatives associated with ICH enacted at the national, provincial, and local levels. Then, I illustrate primary measures taken by the local level governments from four different aspects—the applications for the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List and the UNESCO World Heritage List, the establishment of the transmission system, the public performances organized by local institutions, and the incorporation of ICH items in school education—to show the implementation of different policies and what really happens on the ground. Moreover, I explore the process by which the ICH projects around

the Guerx Sal Lad have given the festival a new life as a performance platform that motivates people's participation in the festival and raises their ethnic pride in an alternative way.

## 4.1 China's Engagement with ICH Preservation

### 4.1.1 Actions on the National Level

China joined the preservation schemes and discourses of ICH preservation relatively late, but as soon as the state government began to implement a series of policies and plans, the project of ICH safeguarding in China quickly entered a period of expansion.<sup>114</sup> In three rounds of the Proclamations of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, 2003, and 2005, with the traditional opera genre *kunqu* (2001), the seven-string zither *qin* (2003), the Uyghur *muqam* suites (2005), and the Mongolian long song *urtiin duu* (2005), China was one of only four countries that successfully attained recognition in all (Rees 2012, 26).<sup>115</sup> The recognition of these “masterpieces” also demonstrates the capability of traditional arts as a crucial representation of the country and ethnicity with honor on the world stage.

In 2005, the General Office of the State Council (Guowuyuan bangongting 国务院办公厅) promulgated the “Opinions on Reinforcing the Work of ICH Preservation in China” (Guanyu jiaqiang woguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu gongzuo de yijian 关于加强我国非物质文化遗产

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<sup>114</sup> Actually, as early as 2003, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Finance, and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission collectively commenced the “Chinese Ethnic Folk Culture Protection Program” (Zhongguo minzu minjian wenhua baohu gongcheng 中国民族民间文化保护工程) as a response to the initiation of the UNESCO, which can be seen as the predecessor of the state's later actions, see An Deming 2017.

<sup>115</sup> The other three countries are Japan, South Korea, and India.

产保护工作的意见) with the “Temporary Means for Nominating and Evaluating National-level Representative ICH Items” (Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiaozuo shenbao pingding zanxing banfa 国家级非物质文化遗产代表作申报评定暂行办法) as an attachment. These regulations served as a guideline for the preservation work at different administrative levels (Guowuyuan Bangongting 2005). The Opinions defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as “the witness of China’s historical development...the crystallization of the wisdom and civilization of the Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu* 中华民族), the bond of national feelings, and the foundation of maintaining national unity” (ibid.). Such reinterpretation shaped the concept of ICH and its related project strategies according to the state’s own ideas and needs, defining an ICH project with “Chinese characteristics” (*zhongguo tese* 中国特色) (Chang 2017, 114).

Based on the Opinions, China established a system of four administrative-level ICH inventories: national, provincial, prefectural, and county-wide (Guowuyuan Bangongting 2005), embedding the concept of ICH into the national consciousness. Each level is in charge of selecting and publishing lists of ICH under their jurisdiction. Moreover, a general survey of ICH items in different regions was conducted on a national scale (ibid.). To provide a working model for the survey, the Chinese National Academy of Arts (*Zhongguo yishu yanjiu yuan* 中国艺术研究院) and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center of China (*Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu zhongxin* 中国非物质文化遗产保护中心) established in 2006 compiled (2005) and published (2007) the *Handbook for Surveying China’s ICH* 中国非物质文化遗产普查手册 (*Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan pucha shouce*).<sup>116</sup> This handbook clarifies the significance,

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<sup>116</sup> The establishment of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center of China symbolizes the official beginning of the ICH work becoming part of the national scheme.

rationale, and principles of China's preservation work and specifies the methods of conducting the survey for each category on the national ICH list (Zhongguo Yishu Yanjiu Yuan 2007). According to the handbook, the implementation of China's ICH project contains a three-stage plan: from 2004 to 2008, the state would initiate pilot programs, conduct surveys, and rescue cultural elements on the verge of extinction; from 2009 to 2013, the primary task would be comprehensive and focused on protecting ICH items; from 2015 to 2020, the state would improve and consolidate the preservation system (ibid., 5).

In 2006, China was elected to the UNESCO General Assembly as the sixth member country of the 18-member Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of ICH (Liu Kuili 2020, 32). In the same year, China announced the first "National Intangible Cultural Heritage List," including 518 items categorized into ten different genres (Guowuyuan 2006). To recognize and preserve some ICH items practiced simultaneously in various regions and communities, the State Council announced the second list in 2008 and revised the names of five categories,<sup>117</sup> which finalized the category list of China's Representative ICH list that continued to be used (Guowuyuan 2008). After the National People's Congress (NPC) enacted the Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage of the People's Republic of China (Zhonghua renmin gongheguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan fa 中华人民共和国非物质文化遗产法) in 2011, the state government changed the name of the fourth list in 2014 from "National Intangible Cultural Heritage List" to "National Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Item List" (Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiaoxing xiangmu minglu 国家级非物质文化遗产代表性项目名录). From 2008, 2011, 2014, to 2021, the state

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<sup>117</sup> In the second list, "acrobatics and sports" were changed to "sports, entertainment, and acrobatics" (*tiyu, youyi yu zaji* 体育、游艺与杂技); "folk dance" was changed to "traditional dance" (*chuantong wudao* 传统舞蹈); "folk music" was changed to "traditional music" (*chuantong yinyue* 传统音乐); and "folk visual arts" was changed to "traditional visual arts" (*chuantong meishu* 传统美术).

released four other lists, increasing the number of items from 518 to 1,557. Following the growing number of items, the state government established a designation system of representative transmitters and their transmission in 2007 to recognize culture bearers with outstanding skills and reputations and to enhance the transmission of China's folk traditions. At present, there are in total five lists of national-level representative transmitters, appointing a grand total of 3,063 people under the 1,557 items.<sup>118</sup>

From 2006 to 2023, the orientation of the state government towards ICH preservation has gone through a series of changes from demanding authenticity to pursuing integrated safeguarding (*zhengtixing baohu* 整体性保护) (Ma Zhiyao, Liu Zhiying and Liu Yaoyao 2019). Since the early 2000s, China's ICH safeguarding work was swept up by the "original ecology" (*yuanshengtai* 原生态) movement that stemmed from the concern about the endangered ecological degradation throughout the country (Rees 2016), as well as the shifts of the state concern "from an emphasis on development and modernization to the protection and preservation of nature" (Gorfinkel 2012, 107). In turn, cultural ecology became a central issue of scholars' concern as well (Liu Xiaochun 2008, 154). The original ecology movement addresses the so-called authenticity, and original, unmodernized context, style, and setting of folk culture. This concept was largely used for the preservation of ethnic minority cultures, especially music and dance, in the state's ICH programs, in which local governments, media, and scholars attempted to extract people's traditions and living culture from their day-to-day context and made them heritage so they can become the representation of the local image (*ibid.*). As a result, original ecology performances and music competitions were held on national television programs every year which brought folk singers and

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<sup>118</sup> The original number of national representative transmitters was 3068, but five of them were disqualified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2021.



musicians out of their villages and went on the national stage, original ecology singing style became part of the conservatory curriculum, and numerous cultural products were created in the name of original ecology.<sup>119</sup> Different initiatives and programs made original ecology a household term, until people realized the paradox between the concept and all the staged performances it had brought out and the impossibility of the existence of “unpolluted” culture without any influence from the outside world and the process of modernization (An Deming 2017, 23; Zhang Yunping 2006).

ICH is no remnant or living fossils, but living traditions and cultures carried on and used by people in a process of constantly creating, modifying, and adapting. The rise of this awareness has led to the adjustment of methods on museumization to emphasize integrated safeguarding and put ICH into practice (Ma Zhiyao, Liu Zhiying and Liu Yaoyao 2019, 40).<sup>120</sup> Liu Kuili (2004, 1), the deputy chief member of the National Expert Committee for Safeguarding ICH (Guojia feiwuzhi wenhuayichan baohugongzuo zhuanjiaweiyuanhui 国家非物质文化遗产保护工作专家委员会), suggested the principles of integrated safeguarding: “(We need to) safeguard both the cultural phenomenon itself and its living roots...pay attention to culture’s formation and development in both its ‘past tense’ and ‘present tense’...while taking culture’s values and its background and context seriously, integrate and coordinate the relationship and interests of different stakeholders...and respect the value and cultural identity of cultural sharers.” This mode of integrated safeguarding was applied in another important ICH project, that is, the establishment of several national eco-cultural protection zones (*wenhua shengtai baohu qu* 文化生态保护区) by

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<sup>119</sup> For discussion on the original ecology music and dance, see Qiao Jianzhong 2006, 2011; Yang Minkang 2006, 2011; Rees 2016; Tang 2021.

<sup>120</sup> However, it does not mean that the thought of pursuing and aiming to present cultural authenticity has completely ceased in institutional discourse and local governments’ practices. Rather, the legacy of the original ecology movement has remained and continued to be considered by some as a criterion of “good” folk art forms.

the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. As of June 2020, twenty-four national eco-cultural protection zones, including Dali, have been announced. “Eco-cultural protection zones” refer to “particular regions confirmed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism which, while taking the preservation of intangible cultural heritage as its core, conduct integrated protection of cultural forms with a long and rich history, a fine sustainable environment, significant values, and distinct characteristics” (Wenhua he Lvyoubu 2018). The purpose of this project is to protect intangible cultural heritage as well as the ecological and human environment which gives them life, stimulating efforts towards ICH’s sustainability.

#### **4.1.2 Actions on the Provincial Level**

The state government’s initiatives and policies on ICH preservation have resulted in far-reaching resonance within the whole country. Following the national model, the preservation and research of intangible cultural heritage in different regions have become a central concern for government institutions at all levels. Yunnan was the first province to act on issuing regulations on preserving intangible cultural heritage. In 2000, Yunnan province issued its first “Regulations for the Protection of Ethnic Folk Traditional Culture of Yunnan Province” (Yunnansheng minzu minjian chuantong wenhua baohu tiaoli 云南省民族民间传统文化保护条例), which specifies the range of subjects that are under the protection of the regulations, the obligations of all local governments from the county level up, the standards of identifying representative items and transmitters, and other guidelines of protection work.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> In 2013, the provincial government replaced this proclamation with the “Regulations for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Yunnan Province” (Yunnansheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu tiaoli 云南省非物质文化遗产保护条例).

In 2003, Yunnan provincial government launched the “Ethnic Folk Culture Protection Project of Yunnan Province” (Yunnansheng minzu minjian wenhua baohu gongcheng 云南省民族民间文化保护工程), which led to a two-and-a-half-year process of conducting surveys on ethnic folk cultural resources throughout the province. The result of this project covered more than 10,000 villages and 60,000 people, which greatly increased local governments’ knowledge of the diversity of ethnic cultures in Yunnan. Building on resources collected from the project, 129 county governments approved and listed 8,589 county-level ICH items in 2005 (Pu Lichun 2010, 46). A year later, Yunnan provincial government also published its first list of provincial representative items, and released the trial version of the “Administration Measures on Representative Transmitters of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Yunnan Province” (Yunnansheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan xiangmu daibiaoxing chuanchengren rending yu guanli banfa 云南省非物质文化遗产项目传承人认定与管理办法) in 2010.

To carry out the preservation process at different administrative levels and to consolidate the implementation of national and provincial governments’ regulations, Yunnan provincial government established ICH protection centers and units in several prefectures and cities. Through organized training and academic symposiums, these centers gradually formed their own work teams and a group of supporting experts (ibid., 47). In 2006 and 2007, the Ministry of Finance granted 4.15 million RMB to Yunnan province as a special fund for the preservation of provincial ICH (Chen Xiang 2008). Until 2020, records and information of all national and provincial representative transmitters have been digitally archived.

In recent years, the Yunnan government launched another project that is closely associated with ICH conducted in Yunnan—the preservation of ethnic minority groups’ languages and ancient books. As a number of ancient books and scriptures of ethnic minority groups have been

lost and a lot of their keepers and interpreters, who were often ritual specialists, have passed away, it is urgent for local governments to collect, recover, translate, and archive these precious documents. So far, the Yunnan Provincial Office of Ancient Books of Ethnic Minority (Yunnansheng shaoshu minzu guji bangongshi 云南省少数民族古籍办公室) has edited and published 100 volumes of the *Anthology of Ancient Books and Precious Editions of Ethnic Minority in Yunnan* 云南少数民族古籍珍本集成 (Yunnan shaoshu minzu guji zhenben jicheng). This huge series includes approximately eight hundred precious editions of ancient books collected from twenty-five ethnic minority groups dwelling in Yunnan province, containing information about politics social history, religious beliefs, philosophy, arts and literature, language, medicine, and technology, among others. Some other important publications include the *Comprehensive List and Summary of Yunnan Ethnic Minority Oral Intangible Cultural Heritage* 云南民族口传非物质文化遗产总目提要 (Yunnan minzu kouchuan feiwuzhi wenhua yichan zongmu tiyao) (6 volumes), which includes introductions of 4,600 ICH items in Yunnan province, and *The Collected Works of Yunnan Ethnic Minority Classical Epics* 云南少数民族古典史诗全集 (Yunnan shaoshu minzu gudian shishi quanji) (3 volumes), both published in 2009 (Pu Lichun and Shenjing 2012, 65).

#### **4.1.3 Actions on the Prefectural Level**

The Dali Prefecture is the prefecture with the most national-level ICH items in Yunnan province. The prefecture government released its first list of both representative items and transmitters earlier in September 2005, even earlier than the announcement of the provincial list. Until the end of 2020, the Dali Prefecture listed 800 protected items, comprising sixteen national

items and fifty-nine provincial items (Dalizhou Feiyi Zhongxin 2021, 2). The prefectural government also formulated protection and administrative measures for both intangible cultural heritage and representative transmitters. In 2021, the prefectural People’s Congress approved the “Regulations for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Dali Bai Nationality Autonomous Prefecture” (Dali baizu zizhizhou feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu tiaoli 大理白族自治州非物质文化遗产保护条例), the first prefectural law in the field of culture in Dali. Since Dali was listed as a national eco-cultural protection zone in 2011, the prefectural government has received more than six million RMB from the state and provincial governments for developing ICH safeguarding projects. The prefectural and municipal governments opened several museums to introduce and showcase local ICH items and their cultures. Until 2020, these museums have held more than fifty exhibitions and activities on ICH in the Dali Prefecture (Yang Yanling 2020). Together with the development of the tourism industry, ICH, especially traditional craft artifacts, became a significant asset for Dali’s already flourishing culture and ethnic tourism. Many internet-famous check-in spots (*wanghong daka dian* 网红打卡点) were set up where tourists can experience the making of traditional craft artifacts while taking beautiful photos and sharing them with the world through social media.

To enable efforts on work associated with ICH, the Dali Municipal ICH Protection and Management Office (Dali feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu guanli suo 大理非物质文化遗产保护管理所, hereafter the Municipal ICH Office), a non-profit public service unit (*shiye danwei* 事业单位) affiliated to the Dali Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism (Dalishi wenhua lvyou guanli ju 大理市文化旅游管理局), was established in 2010. The primary responsibility of the Municipal ICH Office is to manage and conduct surveys on ICH resources of the eleven counties and one ethnic township under its jurisdiction. The Dali Prefectural ICH Protection Center was

established in 2014 under economic support from the Ministry of Finance, with members selected from related institutions such as the Dali Prefectural Museum (Dali baizu zizhizhou bowuguan 大理白族自治州博物馆) and the Dali Culture and Art Research Institute (Dalizhou wenhua yishu yanjiusuo 大理州文化艺术研究所). Once the Prefectural ICH Center was formed, it was designated as the responsible unit for the preservation of the Guerx Sal Lad. Although there is no superior-subordinate relationship between the Prefectural ICH Center and the Municipal ICH Office, they often need to work together on ICH-related programs.

#### **4.2 What is the Guerx Sal Lad? Two Attempts to the National and UNESCO ICH Lists**

In the first “National Intangible Cultural Heritage List” announced in 2006, the Guerx Sal Lad, which appeared in its Mandarin name Raosanling, was on the list under the category “folk customs” (*minsu* 民俗) with sixty-nine other items. As the first national-level representative item in Dali, the Guerx Sal Lad soon became the center of Dali’s ICH projects. According to my interviews with Zhao Xiangjun 赵向军, the director of the Prefectural ICH Center and one of the main local officials who participated in the application work, there were several reasons why the Guerx Sal Lad was chosen among all local ICH items. First, the “Temporary Means for Nominating and Evaluating National-level Representative ICH Items” states that ICH can be divided into two general categories—traditional cultural expressive forms (*chuantongde wenhua biao xian xing shi* 传统的文化表现形式) and cultural space (*wenhua kongjian* 文化空间). For the national list, the application team interpreted the Guerx Sal Lad as belonging to the second category. Article 3 of the Temporary Means defines cultural space as “a site regularly holding

traditional cultural events or highlighting traditional cultural expressive forms” (Guowuyuan Bangongting 2005). According to Zhao Xiangjun, unlike other festivals, such as the Torch Festival (*huoba jie* 火把节),<sup>122</sup> that are shared by different ethnic groups in Dali, the Guerx Sal Lad belongs exclusively to the Bai. And it does not happen every day or everywhere, but only once at a certain time of the year in the Dali basin; the infrequency of performances is one important factor in the designation of ICH. Moreover, this festival encompasses most of the elements of Bai culture that are considered important by the local government and its expert team—folk customs, religion, music, and dance—and can present a sense of continuation of the historical culture of the Bai, therefore it can be defined as an epitome of the diverse Bai culture.<sup>123</sup> There was another practical reason to choose the Guerx Sal Lad. A lot of elements included in the festivals, such as the tyrant’s whip, *dabenqu* 大本曲 (a narrative singing tradition of the Bai), and bai tunes, were already on the provincial or municipal ICH list, which made the Guerx Sal Lad an even stronger candidate for the national list.

The position of the Guerx Sal Lad as uniquely Bai and its inclusiveness of different cultural elements have made it become an ideal choice for local governments to represent Bai culture and ethnic identity. The distinctive culture in Dali has long been an essential key to local economic development. Therefore, the inscription of the Guerx Sal Lad on the national ICH list is crucial for local governments to generate more competitive cultural capital. During the application process, the narrative on what is the Guerx Sal Lad became a significant space for local governments to

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<sup>122</sup> The Torch Festival is one of the major holidays shared by several different ethnic minority groups in southwest China, such as the Yi, Bai, Naxi, Jinuo, and Lahu. During the festival, torches are lit to drive out malevolent spirits and bless people with good fortune.

<sup>123</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Xiangjun, November 4, 2020.

construct and present what they consider as the identity of Bai, or, rather, what kind of Bai identity they think that the national and international evaluation teams wish to see.

In 2009, the prefectural government and ICH-related units attempted to join the competition in a much bigger arena, which is UNESCO World Heritage List in 2011. The success of registering on the world list and receiving international recognition means new opportunities for economic benefits and a great deal of national and ethnic pride (Oakes 2006; You Ziyang 2015). Scholars from both Yunnan and Beijing were invited as consultants for preparing and evaluating candidacy files, but the application was rejected. In 2016, after the establishment of the Prefectural ICH Center, a second attempt at the World Heritage List was initiated, but it ended in failure again. From 2006 to 2016, the underlying image of the Guerx Sal Lad constructed by related local government institutions in three attempts changed from a “primitive fertility cult” (Liang Yongjia 2013, 59) to a cultural space for people to worship their benzhu through diverse cultural expressions.

#### **4.2.1 The Rewriting of the Guerx Sal Lad**

##### *The First Attempt*

In 2006, the prefectural Bureau of Culture managed and oversaw the compilation of the application to the national ICH list. Liang Yongjia (2013) argues that the application in 2006 presented a codified imagery of the festival created by the prefectural and provincial governments to its imagined viewers—the inspectors from the Ministry of Culture and domestic and international tourists. According to Liang, this codified imagery of the Guerx Sal Lad “significantly deviated from the meanings that the un-empowered participants are accorded, and also contradicted the previous official attitude” (58). In earlier decades, as I mentioned in Chapter



2, the Guerx Sal Lad was treated by governments and local intellectuals as “feudal superstition.” Many people were in jail on the charges of “promiscuous relationship between men and women” (Liang Yongjia 2018, 128–29). In the application, however, the “promiscuous relationship between men and women” became acceptable. Regarding religious elements, even though certain religious content, such as the benzhu worship, was raised in the text, the religious nature of the Guerx Sal Lad was still considered sensitive as “feudal superstitions” and downplayed in the application materials.

As the first national-level ICH item in Dali, the legitimization of the religiosity of the festival by the state, Liang Yongjia (2013) argues, was conducted through what Prasenjit Duara (1988, 778) conceptualizes as “superscription of symbols.” Duara uses this formulation to illustrate the imperial Chinese state’s relationship with popular cults during the period of late imperial China. Using the myths of Guandi 关帝, the Chinese god of war, loyalty, and wealth, Duara shows how variegated social groups superscribed their beliefs and visions of Guandi in their cultural practices, and according to their own changing needs. When the imperial state attempted to establish its own image of Guandi as the dominant one over others, it never completely erased or silenced other versions of Guandi. Instead, the state granted its own title to Guandi, promoted the worship of Guandi, and even patronaged other versions of Guandi, making him “the patron of patrons” (783). In turn, other worship groups, including merchants, rural elites, and peasants, considered official recognition of Guandi helpful in enhancing his divine powers. As a result, different versions of Guandi negotiated and drew on each other’s symbolic power in the interpretive arena of the myth to accommodate their aspirations, enhancing the efficacy of the deities altogether.

Applying Duara’s concept of “superscription,” Liang Yongjia (2013, 74) considers the heritagization of the Guerx Sal Lad a new way through which the state governments can “co-opt

religions of non-subversive nature.” By redefining the religiosity of the Guerx Sal Lad and benzhu worship as “culture” instead of “religion,” the state governments superscribed an imagined meaning to the festival so it could be legitimized and regulated, even though there was a huge gap between the state-superscribed version and Bai people’s actual practices. On the one hand, the state has changed its governmentality toward religion to a relatively moderate one. On the other hand, folk beliefs regained immense popularity since their revival in rural China. However, folk beliefs still carried the burden of illegality and illegitimacy (Chau 2005; Chen Zhiqin 2015; Wang Liyang 2016, 184). For example, in a national meeting on supervision over the protection of ICH held in 2009, the Minister of Culture, Cai Wu (2009), emphasized that it is important to properly handle the relationship between folklore and superstition and to remove all the backward elements in intangible cultural heritage, such as superstitious content.

The means of legitimizing folk belief through concealing its religiosity is also signified in the categorization of the official ICH items. As Svensson and Maags (2018, 20) argue, ICH listing is “a selective process that leads to hierarchies and exclusion. It can furthermore be used as a tool of governance to control and manage tradition, cultural practices, and religion, and to steer people’s memories, sense of place, and identities in certain ways.” Among the ten categories of China’s ICH preservation list, none of them is dedicated to religion. There are only a small portion of items are related to folk beliefs, but they all fall into different cultural categories, such as traditional music (*chuantong yinyue* 传统音乐) and folk customs. In the current context of the ICH project in China, folk beliefs encompassing various elements of folk culture and people’s folkways have also become a significant local legacy with enormous political, cultural, and economic value. Therefore, by re-termining all religious events as “cultural activities,” the religious content encompassed in the festival is legitimized. The Guerx Sal Lad and benzhu worship now

can “safely” become the representation of the distinctiveness of Bai culture and enable recognition by the ICH committees.

Under the cover of “cultural activities,” the image of the Guerx Sal Lad was introduced as a “primitive fertility cult” that is exclusively Bai and endangered by gradual extinction (Liang 2013, 59). For becoming part of the national ICH inventory, it is important for the application materials from different regions and communities to identify their cultural symbols as ICH while showing that their ICH can contribute to the collective heritage of the Chinese nation. The Guerx Sal Lad’s oldness and essentialized Bai-ness in the application text was consonant with the growing pride in the country’s long history and rich traditions, as well as the need of the original ecology movement in which ICH was aimed to present the distinctiveness and irreplaceable nature of local traditions (Liu Xiaochun 2008, 154). Emphasizing the ancientness of the festival also implied the underlying evolutionist thinking of the application team. By emplacing the Guerx Sal Lad at the other end of modernity, the application text interpreted the festival as a historical object frozen in time and in turn hinted at its fragility and difficulty to stay the same under various external social-cultural changes (Liang Yongjia 2013, 65).

Such self-othering is not uncommon in the representation of ethnic minority groups in China. It demonstrates what Steven Harrel (1995, 4) calls the state’s “civilizing project,” in which the Han represents the center with a superior degree of economic and political power and a higher stage of civilization, while peripheral peoples, here the ethnic minority groups, are promised to raise their civilization “to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level.” As a symbol of the success of the project, ethnic minority groups accept the premise that they are less cultured while absorbing elements from the center into their own culture to improve. The civilizing project is also a process of generating ethnogenesis, through which an individual group develops the

consciousness that they are ethnically distinctive compared to other groups. Ethnic minority groups and their behaviors are portrayed as backward, ancient, promiscuous, and exotic, which further enslave them with inferior status. In the context of China's ICH project, Juheon Lee (2020, 11) points out that, among thirty-eight items on UNESCO's 2014 list, items of the Han culture are designated to represent Chinese civilization, while cultural elements of ethnic minority groups mostly belong to folklore: "Han elements are techniques or knowledge related to architecture, calculation, calligraphy, craftsmanship, and opera music; elements of ethnic minority group cultures are mostly folk songs, folk dances, folk festivals, and storytelling."

### *The Second Attempt*

The application attempt in 2009 for the UNESCO ICH list was charged by the Dali Culture and Art Research Institute and supervised by the prefectural Bureau of Culture until the Prefectural ICH Center was established in 2014. The application text presented a version of the *Guex Sal Lad* that was less mystified and closer to reality. The reasons behind this shift were multilayered. First, the presentation of what is *Guex Sal Lad* in the application texts was heavily influenced by the social and political vision of the state at that time. Since regional tourism started to promote ICH items as tourist attractions, the rapid development of cultural and folklore tourism caused a large amount of spurious "fakelore" (Dorson 1976) for appealing to local and international tourists. To put an end to these fabricated projects, the state government began to advocate the authenticity of folk culture (Wenhua bu 2011).

Second, the image of ICH is often conditioned by the negotiation among local, national, and international stakeholders. The definition of an ICH item and the selection of what can be recognized as a "legacy" need to fulfill the requirement of UNESCO to show "how inscription will

promote respect for cultural diversity and human creativity, and will promote mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals” (Criterion R.2).

Moreover, as ICH has become a significant medium for local governments to attain national economic support and to increase their social visibility, elements that are helpful in achieving this goal are often added, or even created, to compose the narrative of the legacy (Zhao Yuzhong 2013, 96–97). Therefore, the aim of the application team this time became to present the festival as a religious festival encompassing diverse cultural elements that only belong to the Bai people. However, the narrative in the application materials still followed the logic of characterizing the Bai people as a peripheral ethnic group with ancient customs and an open attitude toward the relationship between men and women.

In the defining sentences at the beginning of the application text, instead of “a traditional folk cultural activity” stated in 2006, the revised definition depicted the Guerx Sal Lad as “an annual grand festival and cultural ritual that every individual of the Bai ethnic group in Dali of Yunnan Province participates in for agricultural cultivation and makes sacrifices to the village patron gods” (Dali Zhou Wenhua Guanliju 2009). The revised definition not only put the religiosity of the festival up front but also gave it a clear attribute—festival—to clarify the festival’s intended categorization. However, as anthropologist Zhao Yuzhong (2013) points out in his research on the transmission and preservation of the Guerx Sal Lad, since the 1950s, the time of transplanting rice seedlings has been moved up by at least two seasons because of climate change, better irrigation conditions, and improvements on rice varieties; thus “agricultural cultivation” and rain praying have stopped being the drives of the Guerx Sal Lad for a long time (95). The intention of including this element was actually self-explained in the application texts, which was to prove that the festival “has maintained the ancient customs of worship and sacrifice

in the outskirts of villages and communities” (Dali Zhou Wenhua Guanliju 2009). This narrative created the same connotation as the application in 2006 which pictured the festival as a primitive and peripheral folk cultural activity. In the same vein, the text in 2009 traces the history of the Guerx Sal Lad back to 1,000 years ago, to “the primitive times,” emphasizing a sense of ancientness to Bai culture.

Other than the ancientness of the Guerx Sal Lad, the festival was delineated as a time “when ‘old flames’ take this occasion to date, which is part of the Bai ethnic custom” (ibid.). Through emphasizing this “ethnic” custom, the image created by the application team eroticized the Bai people’s activities as “being at a lower level of culture where they have not yet learned the proper civilized morals of sexual repression and/or hypocrisy” (Zhao Yuzhong 2013, 10) and implies that this kind of licentious behaviors is “ethnic,” and found only in the life of ethnic minorities. The application text, again, foregrounded the status of the Bai people as a peripheral minority different from the Han majority by highlighting their repackaged characteristics.

Moreover, copying from what the State Council wrote in the “Opinions on Reinforcing the Work of ICH Preservation in China” (2005), the 2009 application text used the same description of the Guerx Sal Lad, romanticized it as (again) “the witness of China’s historical development...the crystallization of the wisdom and civilization of the Chinese nation, the bond of national feelings, and the foundation of maintaining national unity.” By adopting the exact texts in a state document, while celebrating the glorious past of the Bai and its cultural inclusiveness, this text co-opted the Bai into part of the long history of Chinese civilization and the unity of this multiethnic nation (Lee 2020; Silverman and Blumenfield 2013, 4). As Susan McCarthy (2009, 112) puts it, “in doing so they position themselves within a Chinese present and a Chinese future, one that celebrates a traditional culture and identity in part because elements of that tradition are

progressive and advanced.” Meanwhile, the festival was described as an open platform for “equal communication and a harmonious coexistence between man and nature, man and gods and humans themselves” (Dali Zhou Wenhua Guanliju 2009), which suggested the Bai people as a central actor in contributing to China’s cultural success and linking Chinese civilization to spirits that can benefit the whole world.

Although the domain of the Convention that the application team applied in 2009 was “Social practices, rituals and festive events” (Article 2.2),<sup>124</sup> in my interviews with Zhao Xiangjun, he emphasized that the application team wanted to continue to present the Guerx Sal Lad as a “cultural space.” This orientation minimized the sensitive nature of the Guerx Sal Lad as a “religious” festival and was well fitted into the domain of cultural spaces termed by the Convention at the same time. Different from the national explanation of what is cultural space, according to the Convention:

The instruments, objects, artifacts, and spaces associated with cultural expressions and practices are all included in the Convention’s definition of intangible cultural heritage. In the performing arts, this includes musical instruments, masks, costumes, other body decorations used in dance, and the scenery and props of theatre. Performing arts are often performed in specific places; when these spaces are closely linked to the performance, they are considered cultural spaces by the Convention.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The corresponding domain in the national ICH regulation is “folklore activities, etiquette and festivals,” which does not show anything component related to religiously charged “ritual.” See the “Temporary Means for Nominating and Evaluating National-level Representative ICH Items” (Guowuyuan Bangongting 2005).

<sup>125</sup> “Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance, theater),” UNESCO, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/performing-arts-00054>.

The strong preference for performing arts is reflected in the large portion of music and dance genres in China's national ICH list. So far, there are 170 elements inscribed on the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Representative Item List under the category of music, and more than ninety of them are folk song traditions. In the primary passage of the application text depicting people's activities during the Guerx Sal Lad, the diversity of music and dance occupies a large portion:

The festival Raosanling culminates in carnival processions from the 23rd to the 25th days of the fourth lunar month. During these three days, thousands of Bai people living in and around the Erhai lake basin wear hats decorated with flowers, representing good harvests, decorate sun-like patterns on their foreheads, and hold gourds indicating intense fertility, all walk to the three "sacred centers." Some of them hold branches of willow trees for rain prayers, some beat octagonal-shaped drums and wave fly whisks or bamboo wands ornamented with copper coins which symbolize the 24 solar terms of the four seasons. They sing the local Bai "Daben ballads," an artistic oral tradition, to express the joy and happiness in their lives, and they play "Dongjing Ancient Music," which shows their sincere worship of their patron gods and Daoist gods. In each village, at every temple, and in the woods and along the river banks, groups of men and women converge to sing folk love songs and dance a classic dance, "Foot in foot and back against back" which looks similar to the ancient pictographic character for copulation. In the three days and nights, they walk around and stay at temples and nearby woods and river banks. (Dali Zhou Wenhua Guanliju 2009, translation in original)

In this passage, it is obvious that the Guerx Sal Lad was reimagined as a celebratory occasion in which people "express the joy and happiness in their lives" through singing, playing



music, and dancing. However, compared to reality, this description presented an artificial mosaic of different activities in the festival and several music and dance genres of the Bai people. As I illustrated in Chapter 3, in the performance of the hualiu elders, they wear decorated hats and hold willow branches and guards that symbolize a good harvest and fertility. Here, elements that are apparently associated with them were combined with the dance of tyrant's whip, the main feature property of which was "bamboo wands ornamented with copper coins" (ibid.).<sup>126</sup> At the end of the passage, an important characteristic of the dance of tyrant's whip appeared again, which was the movement of "foot in foot and back against back," only this time the dance was presented as entertainment between men and women. Moreover, although people do perform dabenqu and Dongjing Ancient Music during the Guerx Sal Lad as a means to express their appreciation for deities or as a recreational medium, according to my fieldwork, they are not a "must-have" item in the festival.

The Guerx Sal Lal is a time and space for the Bai people to express gratitude to deities who protect local communities, to make wishes for families' prosperity and health, and to reinforce their sociality through different sounding events—worship, pilgrimage, singing, music playing, and dance. But, in the application text, its religious aspects were significantly downplayed. What was left was an assembled body of customs, music, dance, and special costumes of the Bai alongside an exhibition of their joyful and harmonious lives. This romanticized and exoticized image of ethnic minority groups' "natural ability" in singing and dancing (*nengge shanwu* 能歌善舞) has been a longstanding cliché in the representation of ethnic minority groups that pre-exists the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and a ubiquitous statement of ethnic minority groups in the

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<sup>126</sup> Although some people have both the skill of hualiu elders' performance and the dance of tyrant' whip, these two practices are never performed by the same person at the same time.

1980s and 1990s (Wong 2012, 36; Rees 2000, 176). Music scholars have explored the stereotyping of ethnic minority groups in the Chinese government's authoritative discourse and Mandarin popular music (Rees 2000, 23–27; Wong 2009, 247–49), the deployment of stereotypes in ethnic minority's own narrative (Wong 2013, 111), as well as the works of versatile minority musicians and singers that complicate and challenge the orthodox minority representations (Wong 2012; D'Evelyn 2013; Harris 2002). The application text of the Guerx Sal Lad provides another example of how the “singing and dancing” stereotype of ethnic minority groups has been internalized and transformed into a showcase for the Bai people's cultural diversity and a representation of the Bai people's ethnic pride, which in turn serves as evidence for legitimating claims of national and group belonging.

However, this outcome of imagining what UNESCO (outsiders) wanted to see exactly demonstrates the logic of self-stereotyping. It oversimplified the meaning of the festival and the communicational complexity between humans and deities. Performing arts is of course one of the primary ways for the Bai to express their emotions and connect with each other and the spiritual world, but the choice to single them out overlooked the crucial role of people's religious experiences and expressions built on their sounding and mobile bodies as I analyzed in Chapter 3. Moreover, as I will demonstrate later on, the reiteration of the exotic singing-and-dancing stereotype also, to a certain degree, shaped the formation of the transmission system of the Guerx Sal Lad and had an effect on the public display of local governments' preservation work.

#### 4.2.2 Some Effects of Rewriting

##### *The Elimination of Religious Sounds*

As I mentioned above, in current China, folk beliefs are almost always troubled by the problem of “legitimacy.” Concerning the Guerx Sal Lad, as a compromise, or an alternative way of legitimation, local government institutions filtered the festival and categorized the central element of the festival—people’s expressions of their folk beliefs—into traditional folk customs. As a rather comforting result, the religious side of the festival can keep its own way in people’s practices, but quietly. However, since officially recognized cultural bearers are selected following the content of recognized ICH items, content associated with the Bai people’s religious beliefs is mostly excluded from the ICH system, including its recognition and various transmission programs.

As I illustrated in Chapter 3, people’s religious worship, especially the activities of Lotus Pond Societies, plays a central role in the Guerx Sal Lad, which is also why the festival is considered a religious event. However, there is no any Lotus Pond Societies related content appearing on the list of protective items. On the list of representative transmitters, there is not a single member from Lotus Pond Societies included, unless she is recognized as a singer or dancer at the same time. Therefore, the heritagization of the Guerx Sal Lad represents what is described by Japanese folklorist Tatsuhiko Sakurai (2010, 123) as a process “in which, when something with regional social values is elevated to a higher level, only the ‘extracted essence’ is taken as the ‘resource’ with general values, whereas those ‘non-resource’ elements left out are eliminated. However, folk belief in people’s daily practice is not residue without the ‘essence’. To local people, the entirety of folk belief is what exists as their ‘resource’.”

When I attempted to find out from local officials why Lotus Pond Societies were eliminated from the list, I encountered the following responses: 1) The government mainly helps and supports

practices that are in danger of extinction, but Lotus Pond Societies are not endangered; 2) the practice of Lotus Pond Societies is mainly organized within villages, so the government won't intervene too much; 3) there are a lot of complex policies for the regulation of religion, so they just let Lotus Pond Societies organize themselves, as long as there is no harm to individuals and the society. It is certainly problematic that the rewriting of the Guerx Sal Lad only recognizes parts of people's common practices in the festival, which resulted in a fragmented valuation of folk beliefs. During the process of heritagization of the Guerx Sal Lad, when this religious festival gets in the way of being a "proper" ICH item by containing some politically sensitive components, such as Lotus Pond Societies, religious sounds—their practice, their dedications, their self-cultivation, even their existence—must be eliminated from the records. More importantly, these eliminated elements are the purview of middle-aged and elderly women, a marginalized group that heavily lacks social resources and networks. What gets to stay are those characteristics that foster ethnic pride and have positive energy (*zheng nengliang* 正能量), but do not hold back progress.

### *Repackaging the Guerx Sal Lad*

While local governments put great effort into the safeguarding work of the Guerx Sal Lad, the repackaging of the festival in the application process also, to a certain extent, changed the forms and contents of the festival in real practice. In the implementation of the state government's ICH movement, it is often regional government institutions that issue administrative regulations and exert specific measures to organize and define the safeguarding of ICH items. Since the establishment of the Prefectural ICH Center in 2014, the Guerx Sal Lad has been one of the items under its guardianship. Consequently, practices, spaces, and events of the Guerx Sal Lad included in the application texts, as well as practitioners of the festival, all became the objects of the

Prefectural ICH Center's adjustment to "standardize" (*guifan* 规范) and "recover" (*huifu* 恢复) various aspects of the festival.

After two years of surveys looking for problems with the current status of the Guerx Sal Lad, starting in 2016, the Prefectural ICH Center imposed a series of interventionist approaches. Intangible cultural heritage, by UNESCO's definition, is living culture, "transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity" (UNESCO 2003, 2). However, the measures deployed by the Prefectural ICH Center went in another direction, striving to keep different practices in the festival in a fixed, obligatory sequence. First, as people's destinations along the route of their pilgrimage are not very consistent, name plaques were erected at the Chongsheng Temple, the Shendu temple, the Er River Temple, and the Protecting Kingdom Temple to "reclarify" the core destinations of the route.<sup>127</sup> Representative transmitters and transmission groups are now required to conduct their pilgrimage trips following this route. Another measure the Prefectural ICH Center took was opening an exhibition room at Heyicheng village so people can have the opportunity to know more about the Guerx Sal Lad's history. When explaining the rationales behind these measures, the director of the Prefectural ICH Center noted, "during the process of transmission, it is worrisome that some traditions are arbitrarily changed or going in a wrong direction, that's why they need guidance."<sup>128</sup> The director also told me that, in the past, Heyicheng village could not be found on the digital map, but as people were able to find a few places close to Heyicheng village, they frequently mistook the location of the Er River Temple.

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<sup>127</sup> There was no plaque erected at the City God Temple, because the original location of the temple is now within a military zone.

<sup>128</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Xiangjun, November 4, 2020.

These actions are not without problems. Although the “reclarification” of the route of pilgrimage has increased the crowd at these locales and, to a certain degree, revalorized the activities there, it has kept the Guerx Sal Lad “frozen in time and space like a museum display” (Hesselink 2004, 407) without consideration of sustainability. Moreover, the reclarification process has also potentially erased the distinct meaning behind people’s choices of the route, as well as endangered the variety of people’s participation in the festival which is tied to their social-cultural relationships with specific places. The standardization of people’s culture and social space can potentially reshape the average Bai people’s understanding and perceptions of their traditions and customs. As a result, they will be impacted by various media about “what is the appropriate way to be an ethnic minority, and then act accordingly” (Zhao Yuzhong 2016, 487). Regarding the exhibition room at Heyicheng village, it is located in a small valley which can only be found through a small sign on the wall of the valley next to it (Figure 48). Moreover, it was almost always closed whenever I attempted to visit there during my fieldwork. A village cadre told me that, there is not enough funding to hire someone to guard and manage the room on a daily basis.



**Figure 48** The exhibition room of the Guerx Sal Lad at Heyicheng village. Photograph by author, June 7, 2018.

It is too simple, however, to draw the conclusion that the application of the Guerx Sal Lad to the national and world ICH lists and the image of the festival that the application team created have only harmful influences on the actual practices of the festival and the people who carry the tradition. Having it listed on the ICH lists at various levels (so far, the national and provincial) not only alternatively consolidates the legitimacy of the Guerx Sal Lad as a crucial annual event of the Bai people so it can be free from external interference, but the inscription also helps to secure extra funding and a local, provincial, national, and even international reputation for the festival. Because of the ICH project, religions that might otherwise be considered superstitious become legitimized under the umbrella term of “folk customs” or “culture” (Liang Yongjia 2013; Zhou Xing 2013;

Gao Bingzhong 2007). Scholars have noted that people's folk and traditional culture and customs will probably be safe as long as a natural environment for these practices still exists and they are outside the radar of the government's attention and away from the front stage of the tourism industry (Davis 2006, 45; Ingram 2012a, 66). I would argue that the lack of attention to the real subjects of the festival in official texts, or even the invention of certain traditions, might actually prevent these practices from entering the supervised discourse and create the space for the continuation of practices that might otherwise be considered superstitious and eventually eliminated from the festival scene.

Meanwhile, through the rewriting process, the Guerx Sal Lad takes on a second life that coexists with its identity as a religious festival. As I will demonstrate in the next section, the system transformed the Guerx Sal Lad into a platform for the Bai people to exhibit their community and personal pride through music performances and an avenue for them to raise awareness of their cultural retention and transmission.

### **4.3 The Transmission System of the Guerx Sal Lad**

As a religious festival encompassing elements of local deity worship, music, dance, and many other sounding events, it is difficult to define what should be transmitted in the Guerx Sal Lad and how to transmit them through the ICH transmission system. Currently, the transmission of the Guerx Sal Lad represented in the Prefectural ICH Center's ICH transmission project mainly focuses on two aspects: passing on the skills of several music and dance genres that people perform at the Guerx Sal Lad the most and are enlisted as ICH items, including tyrant's whip, the dance with octagonal tambourine (*bajiao gu* 八角鼓), and *dabenqu*; and "recovering" the pilgrimage



groups. Representative transmitters (including but not limited to transmitters of the Guerx Sal Lad) and various transmission units designated by local government institutions are the implementers of the Prefectural ICH Center's transmission plans. In 2022, there are fifteen representative transmitters, including one national-level transmitter, two provincial-level transmitters, four prefectural-level transmitters, and eight county(municipal)-level transmitters listed under the item of Guerx Sal Lad. Among these representative transmitters, just less than half are deeply involved in the religious activities of the Guerx Sal Lad, either as ritual specialists or hualiu elders. A few of them are capable of taking on the roles of both hualiu elders and performers. The rest are mainly performers in the music and dance genres. No matter what area they are specialized in, they all frequently participate in the Guerx Sal Lad one way or another.

#### 4.3.1 Transmission of the Guerx Sal Lad

Another major step that the Prefectural ICH Center took was to form transmission groups and stations in different villages. Until now, the Prefectural ICH Center has set up and financially supported two transmission institutes (*chuanxi suo* 传习所), eight transmission sites (*chuanxi dian* 传习点), and seventeen transmission groups (*chuanxi duiwu* 传习队伍) in the Dali city.<sup>129</sup> Transmission institutes are at the highest level among these three categories, which receive financial support from the project of the Dali Cultural Ecological Protection Experimental Zone (Dali wenhua shengtai baohu shiyan qu 大理文化生态保护实验区). The two transmission

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<sup>129</sup> In 2021, the Prefectural ICH Center published a volume entitled *Raosanling*, which introduces the current safeguarding work of the Guerx Sal Lad. This volume mentions the construction of transmission groups twice but with inconsistent numbers, thus, the information here is based on my interview with the director of the Prefectural ICH Center in 2021.

institutes are under the guidance of Zhao Piding 赵丕鼎, the first and only national-level representative transmitter of the Guerx Sal Lad (Figure 49),<sup>130</sup> and Yang Meihua 杨美华, a prefectural-level transmitter. Transmission sites are formed around representative transmitters as well. At these transmission sites, transmitters offer classes, take apprentices on their specialized skills, and organize rehearsals and training on the content included in the Guerx Sal Lad. During the festival time, they need to hold or participate in performances, competitions for transmission groups, or other music activities to showcase their training results and the achievements of local governments' ICH projects.

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<sup>130</sup> Zhao Piding has four daughters and one son. Except for the oldest daughter, his four other children are all representative transmitters.



**Figure 49 The “Flowers on Flowers” (Huashanghua 花上花) transmission institute led by Zhao Piding.**

**Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**

The seventeen transmission groups are located in different villages and named after their village names. Each group has around thirty members. But as same with transmission institutes and sites, these groups are mostly led by representative transmitters of the village. Other than participating in and organizing performances, they have another primary task, which, according to Zhao Xiangjun, is to “recover” the traditional pilgrimage groups. The traditional format of pilgrimage groups that different transmission groups need to “recover” to is the “full-size” form as I described in Chapter 3, including hualiu elders, members of Lotus Pond Societies, a small ensemble, Bai tune singers, and dancers. The director emphasized that a “traditional” pilgrimage group is characteristically with no modern component, such as popular music, nor any content that

was not part of the Guerx Sal Lad in the past, such as flower lantern (*huadeng* 花灯), a genre of folk song, dance, and theatrical entertainment common to southern China. In the context of the current Guerx Sal Lad in which people are grouped with the household as the basic unit or formed into smaller and more flexible groups, the prefectural ICH Center attempts to bring the past into the present, as well as the future. Setting these groups in different villages and naming them after their villages also reflects the effort of the Center to turn the pilgrimage groups back to the time when they were organized under the unit of communes or villages.

However, there is no clear evidence or literature that can show that the Guerx Sal Lad in the past was exactly like what the prefectural ICH Center imagined that every village or commune would organize a full-size pilgrimage group, at least most of them would. More importantly, instead of having spontaneous groups formed during the festival time, the “recovering” process has created a new form of pilgrimage group that is organized and standardized. These seventeen newly formed groups and the more than five hundred members involved are much different from the pilgrimage group I described in Chapter 3. In most cases, unlike those spontaneous groups conducting pilgrimages to pay tribute to and entertain deities, the main obligation of these new groups is to perform on the stage wearing elaborate ethnic costumes to an audience who are present at the Guerx Sal Lad, or perform while they are moving between locations to people around them.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, transmission groups can be separated into different sub-groups. Some components, such as members of Lotus Pond Societies and hualiu elders, are often not part of their daily rehearsals and performances. They are only added to the groups when a pilgrimage group is needed. Another major difference is that these groups are all established around and under the

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<sup>131</sup> Although some members conduct pilgrimages as well, they normally don't do it in such a large organized group.

leadership of representative transmitters. This format not only decides that their common practice will be consistent with the transmitters' specialized areas, but sometimes the performance of a group will become centered around the transmitter.

#### **4.3.2 The Guerx Sal Lad as a Performance Platform**

In 2016, the Prefectural ICH Center decided to organize annual public performances during the Guerx Sal Lad to demonstrate the result of different transmission groups' training. Therefore, from 2016 to 2018, the Prefectural ICH Center built a stage in the spacious courtyard in front of the Shengyuan Temple every year on the twenty-third day. On this stage, seventeen transmission groups and other self-organized performing groups from different villages brought out their refined and elaborate performances. The performance was organized by the Prefectural ICH Center with support from the Municipal ICH Office, the Xizhou township government, and village committees which these seventeen groups are under the jurisdiction. However, the staged performance showed big differences from the practices of people in the village context. I describe the differences in the following section.

On the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar calendar in 2018, it was still early morning, but the open space in front of Shengyuan temple was already packed with crowds. In the space closer to the stage, there was a large group of people, ranging from elder men and women to little kids. While men mostly wore simple and elegant white shirts and deep blue vests with beautiful white patterns on them, women were dressed in much more embellished Bai costumes in different colors and styles and wore beautiful make-up. Some of them were holding instruments, tyrant's whips, or feather fans. There were several couples of hualiu elders as well, attracting spectators' attention



with their bright and anomalous garments and expressive performances. These people were all performers from different villages' performing groups waiting to go on the stage and bring out their best performances. The formation of every group was based on the elements of a pilgrimage group, mostly including one hualiu couple, a few Lotus Pond Society members, several Bai tunes singers, a small band, and a group of female dancers dressed in unified costumes. Each group was led by a group leader holding a sign or a banner with the name of their village on it (Figure 50).



**Figure 50** Transmission groups waiting to perform on the stage. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.

The performance started around 10 am when two hosts (one male and one female) wearing Bai costumes walked on the stage, imitating the movements of hualiu elders and announcing the arrival of the Guerx Sal Lad. The male host was Zhao Fukun 赵福坤, Zhao Piding's son, and the

female host was staff from the prefectural ICH protection center (Figure 51). To cater to an audience speaking different languages, Zhao was responsible for speaking the Bai language, while the female host spoke in Mandarin. They first extended welcomes to everyone who came to the festival and introduced several government units that organized today's performance. Then, through the microphones, they passionately recited a short poetic verse describing the renao atmosphere of the Guerx Sal Lad and indicating the official start of different villages' performances.



**Figure 51 Two hosts of the performance. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**

The first group that went on the stage was the transmission group of Xiazuoyi village (Xiazuoyi cun 下作邑村) led by Zhao Piding. His group was also the largest and most elaborate of all. Before other members got on the stage, Zhao Piding's five daughters and their students from Zuoyi Complete Primary School (Zuoyi Wanxiao 作邑完小) presented a delicately choreographed

dance of tyrant's whip accompanied by the booming music played from the amplifier. After that, Zhao Piding, who was already in his late seventies, slowly walked onto the stage with the help of two young people. Other members of his group followed him. They set up a square wooden table at the back center of the stage as the altar, which was full of various offerings for deities. Four Lotus Pond Society members stood by the altar, two on each side. Several men holding modified *shengdou* 笙斗, a long stick with signs saying "Great Harvest of the Five Grains" (*wugu fengdeng* 五谷丰登) and small colorful flags inserted on it, lined up at the back, while other members circled around the stage. When everything was settled, Zhao Piding recited a short poem to the audience, wishing Dali and the people there a good coming year. While he was conveying his greetings, two middle-aged men representing the village made tributes and kowtowed towards the altar (Figure 52). After this ritualistic section, all members gathered together and began their performance, circling around the stage, dancing, singing, and playing music to officially open today's performances.





**Figure 52** The performance of Zhao Piding’s transmission group at the Guerx Sal Lad. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.

After the group of Zhao Piding finished their performance, sixteen other performing groups from different villages went on stage and performed one by one. Taking the format and basic elements of the pilgrimage group I mentioned in Chapter 3 as the foundation, each performing group more or less added some other components to their performances. For instance, several performers from the performing group of Yinqiao township, wearing bright costumes mimicking a clamshell, a woman riding a donkey, a fisherman, and a bride sitting in a sedan chair, danced a simple pattern of three steps forward, and one step backward, which were all typical elements of *yangge* 秧歌, a collective folk art form combining dance, drama, and song that is popular throughout rural China. Therefore, the performance was rather different from what the officials of

the Prefectural ICH Center told me that it should be an occasion to showcase the achievements of different transmission groups in recovering the pilgrimage groups as they were in the past.

Throughout the performance, more than half of the seventeen groups turned the “pilgrimage on the stage” into pure performance. The performing group of Wanqiao township was led by a provincial representative transmitter of dabenu. Instead of performing in a pilgrimage format, this group transformed the whole performance into a song and dance show (Example 8). Before everyone else went on stage, the representative transmitter performed a short excerpt of dabenu to the accompaniment of a simply choreographed dance by four young females dressed in Bai costumes. Meanwhile, other members of the group, roughly ten women wearing kerchiefs and daily clothes and seven members of Lotus Pond Society, slowly walked onto the stage and lined three sides of the stage. When the representative transmitter finished his performance, he went off the stage. The four young females stayed there, dancing, while stepping back to the side of the stage.

Next, seven members of Lotus Pond Society walked to the center of the stage and started to “perform” scripture chanting. They were not sitting or standing facing each other like they normally do. Instead, seven members were standing facing the audience. One of the members was holding a microphone and chanting the scripture, while the other six members were just playing their wooden fishes and chanting at a low volume. During their chanting, other female performers left on the stage shook their tyrant’s whips and swung their bodies from side to side along with the rhythm of chanting as a background.

After a few minutes, as their performance was still going, a loud musical intro played by a midi synthesizer produced dilder, together with a simple, slow-paced percussive accompaniment, blustered out from the amplifier. The music was the tune of “Dragon Moving Up to the Heaven,”

which is often used as the accompaniment to the dance of tyrant's whip in different villages. Along with the intro, two female performers, one pretending to play a dilder and another pretending to play a sanxian, walked to the front stage with warm smiles on their faces, interacting with audiences through eye contact and slightly swaying their bodies along with the music. All females around the stage held their tyrant's whips up and started to shake them to make clicking sounds. A bit later, the representative transmitter turned himself into a hualiu elder and went back to the center of the stage again with his partner, followed by a female singer holding a microphone as well. The hualiu elders started to perform their typical movements, leaning back and forward. However, instead of the improvised call and response, they were singing a Bai tune, and the representative transmitter was the only one who had a microphone, while the other hualiu elder was just cooperating with him and acting out the movements. Besides them, the female singer was singing a famous Bai folk song. Her high-pitched and nasal voice stood out among all the sounds happening on the stage. At that moment, what can be seen from the audience's angle is a performance centered around the hualiu elders and the singer, while dancers were dancing around them. As for members of the Lotus Pond Society, they were behind and blocked by the main roles (Figure 53). Their voices and sounds of the chanting instruments, among the singer and the representative transmitter's singing, the loud music accompaniment, and the shaking sound of more than twenty tyrant's whips, were completely silenced until the accompanied music came to an end.



**Figure 53** The performance of the transmission group of Wanqiao. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.

It is obvious that the staged performances of pilgrimage groups were greatly different from the village tradition (Table 1). Under the guidelines of the local governments, even though the format and elements of the pilgrimage are preserved, the components that express people's experiences and feelings, as well as document the history of the Guerx Sal Lad, such as the content of hualiu tunes and the scriptures of Lotus Pond Societies' chanting, are overlooked or even left out because of the intention of the performance which is to present something that the audience can grasp immediately. The diversity of the elements included in the performance and the visual effect they bring out become the main concern of different groups.

**Table 1 A comparison of some most significant differences between pilgrimage within the village context and in the staged performance format.<sup>132</sup>**

	<b>Village Tradition</b>	<b>Staged Performance</b>
<b>Components</b>	Flexible	Hualiu elders, members of Lotus Pond Societies, a small ensemble, folk tune singers, and dancers
<b>Social Context</b>	Pilgrimage as a meaningful interaction between humans and deities, the land, and other villages	To showcase the diversity of the traditional Bai culture
<b>Hierarchy</b>	The group is often led by members of Lotus Pond Societies or the hualiu elders	The group is under the leadership of a representative transmitter, who is also the center of the performance
<b>Leaders</b>	Bring gratitude and celebratory atmosphere to deities, signal the arrival of the group, and clean out the malicious spirits	Organize and direct the performance
<b>Audience</b>	Deities and casual passerby	People in the audience, tourists, and casual passerby
<b>Space</b>	The Dali basin	The constructed stage
<b>Clothing</b>	Flexible. Daily wear or ethnic costume	Ethnic costume
<b>Technical Equipment</b>	None	Microphone and portable amplifier

For groups led by representative transmitters, which they mostly were, the transmitter became the head of the group, instead of the hualiu elders or the dilder player like in the village format, which reflects the functional differences between the leaders of pilgrimage groups in the village traditions and on the stage. The former's obligation is to bring gratitude and a celebratory atmosphere to the deities, signal the arrival of the group, and clean out the malicious spirits, while the latter becomes the organizer and director of a staged performance. The intervention of modern

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<sup>132</sup> The format of this table is inspired by Ingram 2012b.



sound technology has facilitated the clarification of this new hierarchy in the way that the leader of the performance and the center of different elements are now decided by who has the authority to hold the microphone in a group. Like the performance of the transmission group from Yinqiao township, when transmitters were also the directors of their own village's performance, they became the stars of the stage as one of the few people or often the only person who can have the microphone. Their voices became the absolute majority. When I was observing the performance, I was lucky to get a place right next to the stage, and it was even hard for me to hear anything other than microphoned sounds.

Moreover, the performance of the pilgrimage was far removed from its original environment. It was confined to the space of the stage, which greatly eliminated the mobility of this event. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, people's pilgrimage and their sounded and bodily activities at several salient locations are a powerful means to maintain people's connection with the deities, other communities, and the land they live in so that the history of and the experiences associated with these places and deities of these territories can still be accessed and sensed from one generation to the next. On the stage of government-organized performance, however, the role of pilgrimage becomes a validation of local governments' achievements in ICH safeguarding. Even if it can still be seen as a means of entertainment for the deities and communities, it is way different from the village tradition which requires celebratory and sincere bodily labor to visit one after another village to pay tributes to deities and people who dwell within.

The staged display created a new form of performance specific to the context of ICH. The new form is similar to the original ecology performance in that cultural bearers present staged village-style traditions to the audience. Different from the original ecology performance, however, rather than authenticity, the ICH performance strives to present the "livingness" of traditional

culture and its capacity to be recreated. The performances of the seventeen transmission groups varied from one another but not too much, which could even make the audience feel a bit repetitive. The large number of participating groups, their similar yet different performances, and the passion received from the audience, however, well proved that traditions are actively practiced in different villages and are still embraced by people.

In 2019, the Prefectural ICH Center believed that the goal of presenting the excellent results of the transmission group project had been achieved and it was time to give the festival back to the people (*huanjieyumin* 还节于民) so they can organize and celebrate the festival by themselves.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, they removed the stage and gave the space back to the spontaneous performances of the people. But after a myriad of government-organized performances and competitions and several years of rehearsing and performing through transmission programs, many activities at the Guerx Sal Lad, from the pilgrimage to antiphonal singing, have already transformed into public performances. Local governments and ICH-related units have constructed a different soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad which added ICH into its multiple identities. Although the new lives of these practices are much different from their traditional forms, they are not threatening the village traditions in the Guerx Sal Lad, but co-exist with, and sometimes fuse into them. More and more village dance groups are formed by villagers, mostly by women. They often perform their dances at the Guerx Sal Lad when there is a big crowd to celebrate the important moments. They dance side by side or fuse with the performance of representative transmitters, which helps to blur the boundaries between the government-recognized folk elites and folk artists. Under the influence of the ICH program, village singers are encouraged to take part in antiphonal singing competitions

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<sup>133</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Xiangjun, November 4, 2020.

organized by local governments. Moreover, the locations and scopes of these performances are greatly increased. Some groups not only perform locally but get invited quite often to perform on the provincial and even national stage. These increasing musical activities draw a new and more diverse crowd to the Guerx Sal Lad, inserting a new dimension into the festival's changing history.

### **4.3.3 The Guerx Sal Lad for the Next Generation**

Other than taking action on activities of the Guerx Sal Lad, the Prefectural ICH Center also instituted transmission programs in local school education. Transmitters in different counties provide several classes per week based on their specialized skills. Every school has its own specific plan and requirements for students. For example, Zuoyi Complete Primary School demands students to know how to sing at least two Bai folk songs and to perform at least one excerpt of any Bai dance genre.<sup>134</sup> Until now, the classes held in schools are mainly on sanxian, bai tunes, and the dance of tyrant's whip. Students are asked to learn these folk art forms in the manner of traditional ways, acquiring songs and dances by imitating their teachers. The outcome of these programs is often performed at school and other official events. In addition, the dances, performed on the school's basketball court, are gradually transformed into exercises during class breaks. In all the classes and rehearsals that I have been to, both teachers and students seemed enthusiastic and worked hard on these new activities (Figure 54).

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<sup>134</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Dongmei, May 12, 2021.





**Figure 54** Students of Zuoyi Complete Primary School performing the dance of tyrant’s whip and octagonal tambourine. Photograph by author, October 27, 2020.

Zhao Dongmei 赵冬梅 (Figure 55) is a prefectural-level transmitter of dabenqu and a well-known singer of Bai tunes in the Dali region, she is also the oldest daughter of Zhao Piding. Starting from the spring term of 2020, she has been invited to teach Bai tunes and dabenqu at Dongmen Complete Primary School (Dongmen Wanxiao 东门完小) twice a week for the first and second-grade students. Dongmen Complete Primary School is a local primary school that has put a lot of effort into cultivating students’ knowledge and appreciation of the traditional culture of the Bai. On campus, different folk legends and stories of the Bai history, eminent historical figures, as well as introductions to benzhu culture, Guerx Sal Lad, and folk culture are pasted on walls. The school also invites transmitters or scholars to perform and teach students every semester.



**Figure 55 Zhao Dongmei, a prefectural-level transmitter of dabenqu. Photo provided by Zhao Dongmei.**

For the learning of Bai music, students have classes on Bai tunes every Monday and dabenqu on every Friday. During the fall term of 2020, I often visited her in her classes. Students seemed very happy whenever they saw teacher Zhao, maybe because her presence always meant that they can temporarily put away their school work and enjoy some music (Figure 56). One of the tunes they learned that semester was called the “Sparrow Tune” (Maque diao 麻雀调), which is a small tune in dabenqu that is very popular among the Bai people. The lyrics of the “Sparrow Tune” are written in a combination with the Bai and Han languages, vividly depicting the lovely scene of a sparrow flying and playing around the field and in the trees. There are a lot of filler words (*chenci* 衬词) and mimetic words (*nishengci* 拟声词) sung in the Bai dialect, which makes

the tune more dynamic and funnier, but also more complicated than the basic three, five, and seven characters structure of dabengu as every phrase has different characters (Figure 57).



**Figure 56 Zhao Dongmei teaching students of Dongmen Complete Primary School to sing the “Sparrow Tune.” Photograph by author, October 27, 2020.**



$\text{♩} = 90$

Chinese lyrics: 一个麻雀(么)一张(那哈)嘴(依呦),  
English translation: One sparrow has one mouth,

一个头来(吱)两只眼, 两只翅膀(吱), 两条腿, 两条腿,  
one head, two eyes, two wings, two legs,

(嗯哪)还有一条(那哈)尾(依呦).  
and a tail.

麻雀飞在(么)鼓楼(那哈)上(依呦),  
The sparrow flies up to the drum tower.

一个妹妹来舂米, 三碗谷子(么)舂完了, 舂完了,  
A girl comes to pound the rice. She finishes pounding three bowls of millet,

(嗯哪)舂出半碗(那哈)米(依呦).  
and gets a half bowl of rice.

麻雀飞在(么)碓窝(那哈)里(依呦),  
The sparrow flies in the reef nest.

$\text{♩} = 60$        $\text{♩} = 90$

头一翘来(吱)尾一甩, 脚一扒, 眼一眨, 嘴一张一张一张,  
The head tilts, the tail swings, the legs gripple, the eyes wink, and the mouth opens and closes,

句哩啍啍吱啍句哩, 这个吨那个吨句句句句,  
(Mimetic words imitating the movement of the sparrow)

(吐噜噜噜), 又吨克一(那哈)嘴(依呦).  
(Mimetic words imitating the movement of the sparrow) pecking the rice again.

(哎依呦么哎嗨呦, 哎依呦么哎嗨呦).

Figure 57 A transcription of the “Sparrow Tune” based on Zhao Dongmei’s performance in class. Words in brackets refer to filler words with no actual meanings. Cross note heads denote the vocal delivered close to spoken tones, what Chinese musicologist Qian Rong (2017) termed “yueshuo” 乐说 (musical speaking). Cross noteheads indicate approximate pitch only.

When Zhao Dongmei taught them, she sang the phrases one by one. After each phrase, students sang after her. They repeated this process again and again until students were able to sing the whole song by themselves. They often broke into laughter, either by someone's mistakes or the humorous lyrics. Through learning this playful song, students inadvertently experienced the aesthetics and intricate relationship between music and language in dabenu and received knowledge on the ecological relationship between people's agricultural life, landscape, and music. They also embodied the emotional connection with traditions, letting the music become part of their Bai identity. The classroom became a valuable space for transmission. Even if the singing of students might not even be on the pitch, they had a taste of and raised their interest in different music traditions.

To invoke the younger generation's enthusiasm for Bai traditional culture, in addition to regular courses, the Prefectural ICH Center planned to incorporate related knowledge on ICH items of the Bai into the Dali Prefecture's school examination system. For example, students who show excellent skills in certain traditions or ICH items can obtain extra points in their high school entrance examination. New majors associated with ICH were suggested to be added to the curriculum of higher education and technical and vocational education (the Prefectural ICH Center 2021, 65–66). Outside the schools, transmitters also take students to their homes or studios now. Instead of working with students one on one, some transmitters often conduct group classes with several students learning together at the same time. Most transmitters have never gone through any training in professional art troupes or educational institutions. They acquired their skills through an apprenticeship with older folk artists, therefore it is natural for these transmitters to have different teaching styles and techniques. During my fieldwork, I took lessons on sanxian with two

different teachers. Not only their fingering, techniques of finger use, and pedagogy are different, but they also both insisted that their method is the “right” one.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the government-led and locally implemented projects of safeguarding the Guerx Sal Lad as an ICH item. As we have seen, this project does not comprise a simple top-down mechanism but is fueled by different and even competing understandings and representations of what is the Guerx Sal Lad, ICH, and safeguarding. I showed the complicated relationship and interactions between different levels of actors in the process of heritage making, the effect of transmission programs, as well as rural participants’ reception of all the new changes brought by local governments’ initiatives.

As my illustration of rural Bai people’s practices in the Guerx Sal Lad in Chapter 3 demonstrated, the meanings and value of the Guerx Sal Lad for the rural Bai people are built on their collectively shared memories and ongoing practices within the community. Even if most activities described in the 2006 and 2009 application text do happen during the festival, the constructed image of the Guerx Sal Lad as a cultural space to present the distinctiveness and diversity of Bai culture is far from what rural Bai people understand and practice on the ground. This constructed image has been incorporated into different sounding practices in the soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad and transmission programs launched by the local ICH-related units. While leaving space for religious practices to continue by themselves through the legitimization of religious components as folk customs, music, and dance traditions have become the focus of the

transmission of the Guerx Sal Lad, which has resulted in the staging of different cultural traditions, new arrangements of traditional art forms.

These achievements have indirectly increased the popularity of the Guerx Sal Lad as this festival turned into a cultural capital representing the Bai identity. They have also successfully encouraged a lot more rural community members to participate in the transmission and performing of various music traditions. Yet the process of the Guerx Sal Lad's heritagization has presented other challenges for cultural maintenance. As different ICH transmission programs have been set up in school education, the next generation of the Bai people acquires the opportunity to learn and cultivate their interests in folk music and dance which they can enjoy and stay within their daily life as how people practiced them in the old days. However, these ICH genres only occur in the Guerx Sal Lad as people's entertainment and performances, which means that the religious significance of the festival is still not part of the school curriculum. Such neglect further demonstrates the fundamental and crucial role of people's religious routines, especially those enacted by and for families. Whenever I visited different temple festivals or Lotus Pond Societies assemblies, I often saw little kids playing outside the temples, waiting for the adults in their families who were conducting their worship or chanting inside. These kids inadvertently observe and experience all the sounding and bodily practices in the Guerx Sal Lad, which eventually become part of their bodily memories and living lives that carry on from generation to generation.

## 5.0 The Guerx Sal Lad of the “Third Realm”—Basic-level Cadres, Representative Transmitters, and Local Scholars

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I explored the sounding practices of rural communities and major ICH projects organized by local governments associated with the Guerx Sal Lad. In this chapter, I focus on one group comprising three sub-groups that are positioned between the state ideology and rural practices: basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local scholars. As I discussed in Chapter 1, these three sub-groups belong to what Philip Huang (1993) termed “the third realm” in current China’s social-political environment. Regarding the practices and discourses associated with the Guerx Sal Lad, basic-level cadres are selected to represent and implement the state government’s agenda and policies. Representative transmitters and local scholars often act as part of the apparatus of local governments to popularize and embody the state ideology on ethnic minorities in their practices and shape the public’s understanding of and relation to the Guerx Sal Lad. However, as most of them are Bai themselves who grew up with Bai culture, customs, and food, they occupy a pivotal space between the state and Bai communities and mediate the tension or contestation between them in their work. In this chapter, I explore different ways these three sub-groups get involved in the government system and how they embody, acknowledge, and work with their identities positioned in the third realm.

In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the work of basic-level cadres. I start this section by outlining state policies and attitudes toward ethnic minority groups since 1949 and the methods of recruiting and cultivating minority cadres in this social-political context. I then investigate the positionality of basic-level cadres and their flexibility in implementing the state’s policies and conducting ICH-related projects. Representative transmitters are mostly folk (*minjian*



民间) artists who are selected from rural villagers to set an example for other folk artists and to act as a medium between local governments and rural communities. By looking into their multi-layered identity and changes in their practices related to the Guerx Sal Lad, I aim to demonstrate the sometimes blurred and sometimes reinforced boundaries between representative transmitters and rural communities. I illustrate the designation system of representative transmitters set up by local governments to show another way, other than cadre recruitment, that ethnic minority members get involved with the government system. Then, I look at examples of representative transmitters being the voice of the government ideology and the various transformations they have been through since the listing of Guerx Sal Lad as a national ICH item, especially the interrelationship between their practices under the newly added identity and their ties with the rural experiences.

Local scholars have played a crucial role in writing the history of the Guerx Sal Lad and in explaining and interpreting different aspects of it—its legends, practices, elements, and controversies—with their scholarship. Since the establishment of the PRC, a lot of local scholars have worked closely with local governments on conducting investigations on local culture (Lin Yaohua 1984), consolidating the Bai identity (Liang Yongjia 2012), and, in recent ICH projects, writing the official account of Guerx Sal Lad. In the last section of this chapter, I examine the central role played by local scholars and their scholarship, especially from the 1980s to 1990s, in constructing the traditions, cultural values, and official history of the Guerx Sal Lad, as well as their ideas about ethnicity and nation in their writings. My discussion will mainly focus on minority scholars who are highly influential in both academic and non-academic fields of the Dali region.

## 5.1 Basic-level Cadres

### 5.1.1 Minority Policies and Cadre Recruitment

Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, confronting a country with many different ethnocultural communities involved in different social and economic circumstances, the priorities for the state government's work were to solidify national unity, mediate relationships between the Han and ethnic minorities, and improve interethnic cohesion (Leibold 2013; He Linkai 2010). To initiate ethnic work (*minzu gongzuo* 民族工作), the state government set up the Central Ethnic Affairs Commission (Zhongyang minzu shiwu weiyuanhui 中央民族事务委员会) in 1949 to deal with issues related to ethnic relationships. In the same year, the state government also proclaimed its interim Constitution called the "Common Programme" (Gongtong gangling 共同纲领) which included a section on ethnic policies. The ethnic policies in the Common Programme prescribed the equal status of ethnic groups and the autonomous rights for ethnic minorities to manage their internal affairs. Moreover, they advocated for a certain number of minority representatives in the local governments of multi-ethnic regions or ethnic autonomous regions (Ma Rong 2019, 94). However, the premise of these policies was that China is a unitary state and all policies needed to be implemented under the unified leadership of the CCP. Another important project regarding ethnic issues was to determine the number of ethnic groups in China so that policies could be implemented smoothly and evenly. Since the early 1950s, as I illustrated in Chapter 2, the CCP organized a massive project of ethnic identification, which built the foundation of the official ethnic composition in China today. During the turbulent social changes of the 1960s, particularly

the Cultural Revolution, the freedom and autonomy of ethnic minorities were largely reduced and even prosecuted, until the reform era in the late 1970s (Mackerras 2003).

Since the reform era in the 1980s, the state government began to focus attention on improving ethnic minorities' economic and industrial development to solidify ethnic integration (Leibold 2013; He Linkai 2010, 116). In the Dali Prefecture, the state and prefectural government built new infrastructure works such as highways, airports, and hydroelectric dams. Tourism, alongside tobacco cultivation, construction and building materials, biological resources, and mining industry, brought the Dali Prefecture and its diverse ethnic minority cultures to the world stage (Dali baizu zizhizhou weiyuanhui and Dali baizu zizhizhou renmin zhengfu 2006). To cater to the rapidly growing consumerism of minority culture, prefecture authorities have consciously promoted and commodified the folk customs and beliefs of the Bai people and the spectacular scenery of Dali as the major asset in developing the Dali Prefecture as one of China's key tourist destinations (McCarthy 2004, 37).

The Constitution reissued in 1982 readdressed the importance of autonomy for ethnic minorities, which laid the foundation for the later issuing of the Law of Regional Autonomy (Minzu quyū zìzhì fǎ 民族区域自治法) in 1984. The Law of Regional Autonomy emphasizes the importance of building a unified country of diverse nationalities and insists that every ethnic autonomous region is an inseparable part of the country. It states that ethnic minority groups have the freedom to use and develop their own languages and to maintain or reform their ethnic customs. It also re-foregrounds ethnic equality and the rights of ethnic minority regions to have self-governing organs and self-administration. Once the Law of Regional Autonomy was promulgated, it soon became the core principle of China's ethnic work (Ma Rong 2019, 96–97; Leibold 2013; Guowuyuan Xinwen Bangongshi 2009).

However, the implementation of ethnic policies varies from one region to another. While the state government's policies and attitudes toward ethnic politics in China today seem more relaxed and tolerant in some ethnic regions, they can be rigid and even brutal in others. The way that the CCP government views and governs ethnocultural diversity in the country is described by Thomas Heberer (2001, 215) as a "Confucian path to assimilation." He states that "the traditional Confucian way of assimilation was never aimed at elimination of non-Chinese people, but rather demanded their submission to the center (formerly, the emperor), as well as their incorporation into the general structure of the Chinese empire: the goal remained their 'cultivation' by means of Confucian values, that is, cultural, nonviolent Sinification." Under this view, ethnic minorities are expected to be loyal to and content with the state, and any aspect of ethnic distinctiveness that might question official narratives of a unified nation should be completely toned down. The region of Dali presents a contrasting example to sensitive regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang. As I illustrated in Chapter 2, the Bai have a long history of engaging with the Han politically, economically, and culturally. As an ethnic group that has never threatened the integration and the authority of the state, the Bai has enjoyed a relatively higher level of religious freedom and cultural autonomy.

To make the goal of national integration into reality and to implant the consciousness of this ideology into every administrative level, cultivating minority professionals and cadres became a key method in the CCP's efforts to realize the nationalization of the country. The initiatives of recruiting minority cadres had already started earlier than the establishment of the PRC. During the Anti-Japanese war, the CCP organized special cadre training classes for ethnic minority groups and later, in 1941, built the Nationalities Institute (Minzu xueyuan 民族学院) in Yan'an (Sun Yi 2009, 80). But a national policy regarding the training of minority cadres was not promulgated

until the 1950s when the state established another ten nationalities institutes around the country where minority cadres and scholars could continue their education (Guowuyuan Xinwen Bangongshi 2009).<sup>135</sup> In these educational programs, minority cadres and elites were trained according to a shared sense of national belonging and Chineseness. They took lessons on the long-term integration history between the Han and non-Han people, as well as ethnic policies and systems of ethnic autonomy (Leibold and Chen 2014, 1–8). Excellent students and cadres selected by local governments were sent to particular party schools (*dangxiao* 党校) or ethnic cadre schools (*minzu ganbu xuexiao* 民族干部学校) established in every autonomous region and prefecture to continue their study. Most of the graduates from these academies became minority cadres working in middle and lower-level positions. Moreover, in the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, ethnic minorities have to be represented in a ratio according to their population. These specialized minority schools and institutions were part of a series of preferential treatment policies the state government set out to facilitate educational opportunities for minority students and cadres. These policies also include special budgets, ethnic quotas in advancement to higher education and governments, and specially designed classes in schools, among others (Leibold 2013; Sautman 2010; Mackerras 2003).

Over the past seventy years, the training programs of minority cadres and different ethnic education programs conducted by the state and local level governments have cultivated a number of educated, patriotic, and bicultural minority elites who are in charge of various administration works on various levels, especially in cultural affairs and local scholarship (Harrell and Li 2003, 364). On the one hand, ethnic policies increased the participation of ethnic cadres and experts in

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<sup>135</sup> In the following years, some of these institutes were developed into ethnic universities.

national politics and ethnic issues. On the other hand, the existence of minority cadres at every administration level greatly facilitated the implementation of state regulations and the promotion of state ideologies.

### **5.1.2 The Flexibility of Basic-level Cadres**

In Dali, until 2004, the proportion of minority cadres and professionals reached 49.5 percent compared to Han cadres. For ethnic groups with less population, the prefectural government recruited a certain number of middle school graduates from these groups and funded their studies for higher education in the prefecture (Dali baizu zizhizhou weiyuanhui and Dali baizu zizhizhou renmin zhengfu 2006). Among the cultural cadres that I interviewed during my fieldwork, unlike the Han officials described in Harrell's research who hold severe prejudice against minority people and refuse to adapt to their life (Harrell 1995, 25), a lot of cadres who work in local government institutions of Dali are either Bai or born and raised in Dali. Some of them hold a degree in ethnology or history and have researched or paid a lot of attention to the Bai for a long time before they took their government jobs. Therefore, they have a fair amount of knowledge and experience in the culture they administrate. Moreover, under the Regulations for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Yunnan Province (2020), prefectural and county government institutions on cultural administration are responsible for setting and operating plans related to ICH preservation; conducting surveys and archiving documents and materials of ICH items; organizing nomination, evaluation, and recommendation of representative items and

transmitters; managing ICH special fundings; and organizing activities to promote ICH projects.<sup>136</sup> From setting and operating plans related to ICH preservation to helping representative transmitters to draft and revise their application form, they are responsible all the hands-on work related to representative transmitters and their practices.

Being a government-recognized minority cadre or elite carries different connotations. Compared to cadres of provincial and higher levels of administration, local cadres, as someone who imposes and implement different policies and regulations on behalf of the state, possess the great power to decide and influence local affairs (Harrell 1995, 34). They represent governments to regulate and inspect local affairs and to make sure that “unhealthy” customs and actions against the state’s ideology do not create any trouble (Harrell and Li 2003, 225–26). Meanwhile, they also represent the voice of ordinary minority communities. However, the kind of voice that they can make is constrained. Only the ones in favor of the state’s projects and policies toward ethnic minorities are encouraged and allowable to be conveyed to the higher level. As a result, some cadres choose to self-silence and comply with the state’s ideology unconditionally. Several representative transmitters I know are also deputies of the Dali Prefectural People’s Congress. One of them once told me when I asked her what they usually do at the annual Prefectural People’s Congress meetings, “(We) just sit there, listen to the leaders’ speeches and make some votes.”<sup>137</sup> When she was saying these words, her tone and attitude were relaxed and indifferent, as if the voting part is just a process they need to go through without any hesitation. What her tone also showed was that the only vote she would/can give was inclined to the government.

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<sup>136</sup> “The Regulations for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Yunnan Province,” Yunnan sheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu zhongxin wangzhan 云南省非物质文化遗产保护中心网站 (the Website of Yunnan Provincial ICH Protection Center), accessed June 28, 2022, <http://www.ynich.cn/view-11312-965.html>.

<sup>137</sup> In Chinese: “jiushi zuo zai nali, ting ting lingdao jianghua, tou toupiao.”

Nonetheless, while the government-led projects are implemented throughout different administrative levels and establish a state apparatus participated by basic-level cadres and local ethnic minority community members, there are also some of them who understand the potential negotiation they can initiate between the local presence of the state ideology and minority culture. As Koen Wellens (2009, 445) accurately describes, these cadres “are part of both the party-state apparatus and minority society and as such they both ‘translate’ central policies into local implementation while at the same time claiming space within the administrative system for certain aspects of local minority culture.”

In terms of various ICH projects related to the Guerx Sal Lad, I would argue that, even if the basic-level cadres helped present a constructed imagery of the Guerx Sal Lad to their “imagined” superiors, it does not mean that they were not aware of what happens on the ground. Instead, they were able to and did compose their narrative and actions selectively and tactically to increase the chance of success for the festival to become an ICH item, and, at the same time, maintained a space for rural and sensitive activities to continue, especially if they are themselves minorities. On the one hand, they, as cultural cadres, presented the image of the Guerx Sal Lad according to the state ideal of “a unified state of multi-ethnicities” and reacted quickly according to the changes in state policies. On the other hand, they chose the Guerx Sal Lad out of a sense of ethnic pride and actively participated in the ICH project to improve the life and economic situation of their own ethnic group and to generate different possibilities for the Guerx Sal Lad’s continuation.

In my several interviews with officials of both the Prefectural ICH Center and the Municipal ICH Office, they were not only familiar with what kind of practices were happening on the ground but also acknowledged that the core of the festival is actually its religious content. But, at the same time, they mentioned the necessity to follow closely and to respond flexibly to the



changes in state policies, which vary according to the changes in the state's strategic goals (see also Chau 2006, 14–15). For example, the application brochure in 2006 describes the Guerx Sal Lad as “a folk carnival entertaining gods and man, solely possessed (*duyou* 独有) by the Bai.” About this image constructed in the past, Yang Jianhua, the director of the Municipal ICH Office commented, “the descriptive model of ‘carnival’ had been considered by the state as an extremely negative example, which is extremely problematic. Carnivals belong to foreign countries. We shouldn’t transplant the concept here to replace the reality of China. The ICH project in China is not mature enough yet. The opinions of experts will change as well...The text of ICH is not the same as tourism promotion. It will be archived, so it should not contain too many adjectives. The state really dislikes it. We should just present what really happens. We don’t even use the term ‘original ecology’ anymore.”<sup>138</sup>

According to cadres in the Municipal ICH Office, there are a lot of flexibilities in the application process for ICH items as well. For example, a lot of items are ambiguous concerning their appropriate categorization. Quite often, one folk art form, such as dragon dance and ethnic minority costumes, can be understood and interpreted into different categories. Dragon dance can be taken as either folklore, folk dance, or sports. For different categories, the application reports, video documents, and other materials of the same art form will have very different outcomes. Local cadres, who are actually implementing and operating the usual business and routine work related to ICH items, have the power to mediate between the state's ICH regulations and people's cultural practices. By reinterpreting these practices and letting them become suitable for the state's ambiguous categorization, many cultural traditions can have the chance to directly benefit from

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<sup>138</sup> Personal communication with the director of the Municipal ICH Office, April 8, 2021.

the ICH project, such as funding, reputation, and social elevation. In a way, the flexibility in the state's regulations and basic-level cadres' negotiation with it opens more possibilities for the legitimation of different traditions, some of which might otherwise be regarded as sensitive or superstitious. However, through the same process, these traditions have to be redefined and might continue in a contrastingly different manner ever since, while their way of being and practices in the past gradually become silent.

## 5.2 Representative Transmitters

Similar to basic-level cadres, all representative transmitters of the Guerx Sal Lad or of ICH genres involved in the festival are drawn from the society. Despite their identity as government-recognized transmitters and as part of the government apparatus, they are identified with rural interests as well and continued to participate in rural practices. The majority of these transmitters were from a rural background, either born in a family of practitioners or guided by other masters as apprentices. Before getting designated as representative transmitters, they worked as subsistence farmers, fishermen, or ritual experts.

In Zhao Caiting's family, at least three generations of family members—he, his father, and his grandfather—were farmers. They plant rice and corn in spring, broad beans during autumn, and do fishing all year round. When Zhao was still a little kid, he started to go to the Guerx Sal Lad with his grandfather and father. As his grandfather and father were both hualiu elders, he inherited their practices after years of observation and imitation.<sup>139</sup> Now his grandson also joined

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<sup>139</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, December 18, 2020.

him and began to perform in the Ethnic Village (Minzu cun 民族村), an ethnic minority theme park in Kunming. Another city-level transmitter of the Guerx Sal Lad, Li Jishou, practices as a hualiu elder and a dancer. Li Jishou is now in her forties. She learned these skills all from her mother who studied with another folk artist in another village close by. After she learned the dance, she then taught other friends and gradually formed a dance group until now. When she was working in the village production brigade (*shengchan dui* 生产队),<sup>140</sup> she met her now husband and began to dance together as hualiu elders since then.

The stories of Zhao Caiting and Li Jishou are very common among representative transmitters in the Dali region. Most of the transmitters I encountered during my fieldwork told me that they grew up attending the Guerx Sal Lad. When they were still kids, they followed elders in their family to the festival, and when they became adults, they got involved in the festival in various ways. Some performed publicly as a member of village performing groups, some joined the antiphonal singing, some participated in religious activities, such as pilgrimage with other people in the village, and some were involved in several different activities at the same time. Their multiple identities drive them to worship deities during the Guerx Sal Lad for good harvests and family prosperity and enable them to entertain deities with their performances.

However, ever since becoming representative transmitters, another identity is added to them. They do not participate in the Guerx Sal Lad as just rural community members anymore, but simultaneously representatives of governments' cultural projects whose obligation is to showcase their expertise recognized by the ICH projects. This change of status also brings a series of transformations to their practices and life. It is important to note that, other than government

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<sup>140</sup> Production brigade was an important social and administrative unit in the People's Commune system in PRC from 1958 to 1984 which were mainly in charge of the basic accounting and farm production.

interventions, some transformations are carried out by individual agencies and motivations as well. Confronting the changing social status, audiences, and the cultural-social contexts of their practices, folk artists turned transmitters need to “make sense of the musical past and set the course for the future...(and) negotiate and decide on the way of handling the available musical resources” (Lau 1996, 116–18).

### **5.2.1 The Designation System of Representative Transmitter**

Compared with the recruitment approach of minority cadres, the designation system of representative transmitters presents another way that the state mobilizes ethnic minority members. Following the issue of the Temporary Means for Confirming and Administering Representative Transmitters of National-level ICH Items by the provincial government in 2008, the prefectural government released its own trial version of the regulation in 2010 and established a top-down (national, provincial, and prefectural) designation system, through which rural cultural bearers and their traditions preserved by the ICH project become part of the government apparatus. In this system, the state's policies on ICH preservation are studied and implemented at all levels from national to county level. On the contrary, the nomination of an item or transmitter within the ICH inventory is required to begin from the bottom upward, which means that most representative transmitters come from a rural background.

The nomination process often happens every three years and involves the coordination of different departments. The whole process begins with the submission of a candidate file at the county level. The files are required to show that the applicant has strong skills and abundant performing or teaching experience. If the files are not qualified, officials working at the Municipal

ICH Office often need to conduct research to seek out the problems and help different villages and cultural stations to revise their files. Additional documents might include photographs and audiovisual materials. After a series of investigations on the identity, skill level, and moral character of the applicant, the application will be passed to the superior-level government. At each level, a jury composed of authorities from the responsible unit of nomination and experts scrutinizes both the files and the reports. If the transmitter passes the review of the jury and becomes an official transmitter, the Dali City Bureau of Culture and Tourism will announce the result. After the announcement, there is still a twenty-day period to wait for feedback or objections to the decision. When the name of the transmitter is printed in the “red-head documents” (*hongtou wenjian* 红头文件), the official documents with red letterheads flow from the higher to the lower levels of the Party and government organization, it means that it is finally official.<sup>141</sup>

Through a long process of selection, examination, and finally, declaration, the social position of representative transmitters who come from communities at the bottom of society often moves to a higher level in the top-down hierarchy, which not only symbolizes an official recognition of their values from the top but also provides them a better platform to showcase their capability and to share their excellent skills (Rees 2012, 53; Ingram 2012a, 68). Meanwhile, as the whole process of becoming a representative transmitter follows the criteria defined by the state government and is supervised by government institutions, this social elevation also transforms transmitters into part of the system apparatus and creates another layer within the hierarchy.

The regulation of representative transmitters is based on the jurisdictional management principle. At the beginning of a year, representative transmitters of different levels need to sign an

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<sup>141</sup> Personal communication with the party branch secretary (*dangzhibu shuji* 党支部书记) of the Municipal ICH Office, April 8, 2021.

agreement with their responsible unit, listing out their planned activities, such as performances and workshops, for the year.<sup>142</sup> According to the agreement, prefectural-level transmitters are required to recruit at least three to five apprentices, their time used for transmission cannot be less than twenty-four hours per month; provincial-level transmitters are required to recruit at least five to eight apprentices, and the transmission time cannot be less than forty-eight hours per month; national-level transmitters are required to recruit at least eight to twelve apprentices, the transmission time cannot be less than seventy-two hours per month (Dalizhou feiyi zhongxin 2021, 73).

Official transmitters accrue annual funding support from the ICH project to support their transmission. National transmitters can obtain 20,000 to 30,000 RMB per year,<sup>143</sup> while the city-level transmitters can only get 1,000 RMB.<sup>144</sup> These funds are regulated to be specifically used for ICH-related content, such as purchasing appliances for classes, inviting instructors, and registration fees for competitions. However, several transmitters told me that, instead of giving directly to transmitters, these funds will be distributed to their affiliated government institutions first, such as the village committee. Some village committees might hold part of the funding for other uses. As a result, there is no guarantee that transmitters can receive the full amount of money, which is already not a big number, but they still need to fulfill their planned transmission activities as they stated in their agreement with the ICH centers.

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<sup>142</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Dongmei, a prefectural-level transmitter of dabengu, May 12, 2021.

<sup>143</sup> Helen Rees (2012, 32) mentions that, during the 2010s, national-level representative transmitters could get 8,000 RMB a year.

<sup>144</sup> Personal interview with Yang Yanchun 杨艳春, the director of the Dali Municipal Cultural Center (Dalishi Wenhuguan 大理市文化馆), January 15, 2021.

Other than self-organized activities, official transmitters are required to participate in government-related events whenever they are needed.<sup>145</sup> When the year ends, transmitters need to submit a hand-written report on the work they completed throughout the whole year. Moreover, transmitters are encouraged to take written or video records of materials that can prove their achievements, such as different performances they had, prizes they won from competitions, and information on people who interviewed them, so they can have enough materials to show their qualifications. These works require a certain level of literacy from the transmitters, which excludes people who have limited experience in school education and the skills to handle modern technology, particularly older people. However, these people are actually often those who embody the traditions for the longest time. For example, when I visited Duan Deyuan's home for the first time, he handed me a notebook and asked me to write down my basic information in it, such as my affiliation and contact information, because cadres who work in local cultural units suggested to him that it is helpful to keep a record of who visited or interviewed him if he wants to apply to become a representative transmitter in the future. For Zhao Caiting, even if he is already a prefectural-level transmitter, he still needs to keep documenting his achievements and performances for his annual report or application for higher recognition in the future.<sup>146</sup> However, Zhao Caiting is already seventy-three. He and his wife rarely go out and socialize, therefore it is difficult for them to get useful information.<sup>147</sup> They did not know that it is good for them to keep records of visitors until I brought it up and helped them set up the format in a notebook. Moreover,

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<sup>145</sup> A prefectural-level transmitter once told me that the compensations for these events are really low and even none. Sometimes it will be hard for their living especially if they have their own small business.

<sup>146</sup> The way Zhao Caiting became a representative transmitter was through the search by cadres of the Municipal ICH Office through word of mouth, thus he did not need written records or other materials to prove his skills.

<sup>147</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Caiting, January 14, 2021.

Zhao Caiting is illiterate and suffers from poor hearing. It is almost impossible for him to collect written records without help from his children who are working in other cities.

In 2015, the Ministry of Culture (now the Ministry of Culture and Tourism) initiated the “Research and Training Project of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage Transmitters” (Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuancheng renqun yanxiu peixun jihua 中国非物质文化遗产传承人群研修培训计划). It was a move to expand the function and influence of colleges and universities in safeguarding ICH and cultivating transmitters. Since then, representative transmitters have been required to take training courses on professional knowledge and related skills, as well as communicate with other transmitters and scholars. The major goal of this long-term project was to “help transmitters consolidate their foundation, widen their horizons, improve their cultural literacy, strengthen their cultural confidence, and elevate their technical expertise.”<sup>148</sup> In Yunnan province, Dali University is the only collaborated unit that is not in the provincial capital, Kunming.

In 2020, I visited a class hosted by the School of Art at Dali University. The class was one of a ten-day training program on the making of traditional instruments of the Bai. The day I visited was their last class and the closing ceremony. In these classes, around ten representative transmitters of musical ICH items from various counties were recruited to study the format, playing, and making of several instruments popular in the Dali region, including the dilder, sanxian, and octagonal tambourine, under the instruction of Li Yiqing 李义清, a prefectural-level transmitter works in the School of Art (Figure 58). Every transmitter tried to make an instrument by themselves as their graduating project and used them in their performance at the closing ceremony.

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<sup>148</sup> “Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuanchengren yanxiu peixun jihua” 中国非物质文化遗产传承人研修培训计划 (Research and Training Project of Chinese ICH Transmitters), Zhongguo Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Wang 中国非物质文化遗产网 (Website of Chinese ICH), accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.ihchina.cn/train.html>.



At the end of the program, they were all given a certificate to prove their participation in these courses. Meanwhile, transmitters are also invited to universities to offer training programs to the students on ICH-related skills, such as folk music and dance.



**Figure 58 Li Yiqing's class on instrument making attended by local transmitters. Photograph by author, December 8, 2020.**

In addition, ICH-related units, such as the Prefectural ICH Center, the Municipal ICH Office, and cultural centers at different administration levels, often hold non-scheduled training courses for transmitters, among different class content ranging from the history of Dali to practical skills such as the self-promoting method of using Tik Tok, courses on playing skills are the most

frequent ones. For example, in 2020, the Dali Municipal Cultural Center (Dalishi wenhuaguan 大理市文化馆) organized ten training courses and activities for representative transmitters, including courses on music and dance genres, rehearsing new repertoire for regional competitions, and organizing public performances.<sup>149</sup> Scholars from other universities and colleges also came to learn from transmitters and then went back to compile new textbooks based on the folk style.<sup>150</sup>

### 5.2.2 Representative Transmitters as the Voice of the Government

#### *The National-level Transmitter and the Dominant Position of Dabenqu*

In 2008, Zhao Piding (Figure 59), a very well-known folk artist of dabenqu, was endorsed by the Ministry of Culture as the only national representative transmitter of the Guerx Sal Lad. Dabenqu, the specialized area of Zhao Piding, is a narrative singing tradition of the Bai people. Although it is one of the most popular folk music traditions in the Dali region, it is definitely not a primary component of the Guerx Sal Lad. That is why the position of Zhao Piding as the first and only national “master” was a big controversy among other representative transmitters.<sup>151</sup> Moreover, instead of representative transmitters of the Guerx Sal Lad, the leaders of most transmission groups assigned by local governments are transmitters of dabenqu. It is not only because of the popularity of this music genre but also because of the ability of dabenqu as a powerful device for promoting propaganda about government policies and prescriptions.

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<sup>149</sup> Personal communication with Yang Yanchun, January 15, 2021.

<sup>150</sup> Sometimes, however, transmitters have to face exploitations from scholars and government institutions. According to Li Jishou, a university professor and her team from another province once came and asked to learn her dance for the compilation of new textbooks. Even though she spent several days teaching them, she did not hear anything from them again after they left. She had no information on whether the textbook had been published or whether she was credited in the textbook. There was no compensation either.

<sup>151</sup> During my fieldwork, several representative transmitters revealed their reluctance of accepting Zhao Piding as the national-level transmitter. Even cadres who work at related cultural departments had doubts on this result.



Figure 59 Zhao Piding, the national-level transmitter of the Guerx Sal Lad. Photo provided by Zhao Fukun.

The three Chinese characters compose *dabenqu* separately means “big,” “songbook,” and “melody,” therefore “*dabenqu*” literally means “melody from the big songbook.”<sup>152</sup> The origin of *dabenqu* is still in dispute, but a lot of scholars suggest that *dabenqu* already existed during the Ming dynasty (Dong Xiutuan 2004, 89). *Dabenqu*’s music includes three singing styles (*qiang* 腔), nine melodic variations (*ban* 板), and eighteen small tunes (*diao* 调), which are used and selected based on different story content and the specific character the singer is playing. The melody structure of this opera-narrative form consists of stanzas of four lines, three-sevens, one-five, that is with seven, seven, seven, and five syllables. Apart from the melodic element, there is also speech,

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<sup>152</sup> Personal communication with Zhao Piding, April 6, 2016.

which can be in dialogue. The traditional lyrical content of dabenqu includes three main subsets: folkloric stories and legends from both Han and Bai cultures; songs convey religious cultivation and moral teachings from Buddhism, Daoism, and benzhu belief; and depictions of people's daily life (Yang Liangcai 1985; Zhao Lu 1992). Each story can last for hours. The versatile music repertoire and diverse subjects of storytelling made dabenqu an extremely popular entertainment for the Bai people in the Dali region before the Cultural Revolution. This operatic genre was traditionally performed only by male artists, but since the 1950s, a cadre of female artists started to perform and gradually broke the longstanding dominance of male artists in dabenqu performances (McCarthy 2009, 114–15). In various festivals, rites of passage, and family celebrations, dabenqu artists were often invited to perform in villages. Sometimes their performance lasted for days (Dong Xiutuan 2006, 103) (Figure 60).



**Figure 60** Zhao Piding performing at Xiabedeng village (Xiabedeng cun 小北登村) in 2017. Photo provided

by Zhao Fukun.

Since the late 1980s, although dabenqu has been through a few years of revival, the rise of new media, technology, and entertainment pushed traditional art forms to a marginal status. To cater to a new audience, many new dabenqu pieces composed by younger artists and representative transmitters have been drastically reduced in duration. The content of this new repertoire is related to recent social phenomena, such as the pandemic situation in Dali and increasing oil prices. In the traditional form, the singer looks at a songbook while performing and uses basic props to facilitate the performance, such as the clapper, fan, woodblock, and stick. In current performances, for convenience, they simply refer to a piece of paper with lyrics on it. At the Guerx Sal Lad, the format of dabenqu that occurs is more often a shortened piece or excerpts from the complete repertoire as a tribute to the festival or performance for people's entertainment.

Dabenqu is sung in a combination of Bai language and Mandarin, thus it is easy for various audience groups to understand and access. Accordingly, it becomes an important resource for local government institutions to showcase their achievements in developing ethnic minority cultures and fulfill policy-related tasks. This is not a new phenomenon, but a continuation of Maoist China when mass art forms were utilized for mass education and political propaganda. As ethnomusicologist Yang Mu (1994, 303) explains, "Politics often plays a significant role in China's contemporary musical life." Since the 1940s, various forms of cultural expressions such as folk songs, instrumental music, dances, and regional operatic traditions were ideologically reformed and made to serve the revolutionary cause of Socialist China. Cultural workers were also sent by the CCP to learn from local artists so they can create more repertoire that connected and educated the masses (Tang Kai 2021, 8; Harris 2018, 45; Rees 2000, 20–21; Baranovitch 2001, 22–23; Kwan 2008, 82–86). Vocal genres were strongly preferred because of their capability of delivering extramusical messages. In the 1950s and 1960s, a lot of the newly composed dabenqu



delineated the class struggle, resistance, and difficult life of the laboring people (*laodong renmin* 劳动人民) (Yang Liangcai 1985, 84), which served to unite different groups—the Party, cultural workers, and ethnic minority groups—and to consolidate the building of national identity through praising the great achievements of socialism and party leadership (McCarthy 2009, 114–16).

The setting of dabenqu performance is relatively simple, which only needs one singer and one player of sanxian. Therefore, dabenqu artists are often invited to perform at festivals, temple fairs, weddings, and funerals. In addition, musicians of dabenqu sometimes entertain their friends or families during rest periods in the fields or elsewhere. In the meantime, the function of dabenqu as a cultural expression representing the ideology and vision of the government continues. In current Dali, dabenqu artists are often arranged by local governments and village committees to perform for rural villagers in villages in order to publicize regulations on public hygiene and agricultural techniques. For instance, Zhao Fukun, the son of Zhao Piding and a prefectural representative transmitter of dabenqu, is one of the transmitters who frequently attend activities and performances organized by local governments and compose new pieces following current affairs (Figure 61). During the COVID-19 pandemic in China, his dabenqu piece “United to Fight Against the Pandemic” (*Zhongzhi chengcheng kang yiqing* 众志成城抗疫情) was commissioned and promoted by the Dali Municipal Office of External Propaganda (Dali shiwei xuanchuan bu 大理市委宣传部) as a theme song for the Dali region (Dali Xuanchuan 2020). As the performing of dabenqu requires a certain level of literacy, singers like Zhao Fukun who have the ability to compose lyrics themselves, which highly increased their involvement in government-organized activities. Transmitters who can compose policy-related lyrics are particularly welcomed and thought of highly by local officials. It is also easier for them to get more public exposures and

resources that other transmitters won't have.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that dabenu performers ended up becoming major participants and even leaders of the Guerx Sal Lad's transmission, especially since the religiosity of the Guerx Sal Lad and its core practitioners have always been on the edge of legitimacy before it obtained its identity as an ICH.

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<sup>153</sup> Similar situations are also noted by scholars researching on ICH within the broader Chinese context (Ingram 2012b).



**Figure 61 Zhao Piding and Zhao Fukun performing at the Addressing Meeting of Xi Jinping’s Important Speech of “July First”(the Founding Day of the CCP) in Haidong township (Haidong zhen 海东镇). In the photo, Zhao Piding is reading a news report on Xi’s speech. Photo provided by Zhao Fukun.**

*Perform as Obligation*

Instead of religious and entertainment purposes, the most important obligation for representative transmitters at the Guerx Sal Lad is to present their performances. In my interviews with transmitters, when describing their participation in the festival, many of them used the



expression “to perform” (*qu biao* 去表演), while most people just commonly use “to go to” (*qu* 去) the festival. Since becoming designated representative transmitters, practices of transmitters at the Guerx Sal Lad have transformed from an immersive experience of various affective, spiritual, and sensory interactions between humans, the gods, and the environment, to a work with a clear goal of not disappointing their titles and the trust from governments. It does not mean, however, that experiences of all representative transmitters are identical from one to another.

For some transmitters, especially those who are positioned at a lower social level and women, their experiences are a mixture of both. Because of their deep-rooted connections with their communities, families, and beliefs, having a new identity does not necessarily mean that their previous activities in the festival as rural community members draw to a close completely. Instead, they still continued their religious activities while fulfilling their duty as representative transmitters. He Songkang 何松康 is a prefectural-level transmitter of the dance of tyrant’s whip and the leader of the sixth group (*zu* 组) of Qingdong village (Figure 62).<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, she is a daughter, a mother of a daughter, and a grandmother. She learned to dance the tyrant’s whip with her grandfather, who was also the head of the Shendu temple administration committee. Growing up, He Songkang always followed her grandfather to different temple festivals, including the Guerx Sal Lad, to watch him dance. As time passed, she became familiar with the variety of religious rituals and worship procedures. Helping out with village temple affairs turned into part of her life as well. Under the influence of her mother who was the head of the Lotus Pond Society in her village, He Songkang became a younger member of it and participated in Lotus Pond Society’s religious routines whenever she was available. In her daily life, she takes care of the household,

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<sup>154</sup> Zu is an administrative unit subdividing village.

while completing trivial work as a village leader, such as collecting utility fees and organizing farm work in the village. As her life is deeply rooted in local religious beliefs and intra-community bonds, He Songkang's practice at the Guerx Sal Lad has not changed much since her designation. Other than organizing members of her transmission site to perform the tyrant's whip, she still goes to temples, praying for prosperity for the family and helping with related activities of the village, such as cooking food offerings and collecting merit donations (*gongdeqian* 功德钱).<sup>155</sup>



Figure 62 He Songkang in her transmission studio in Qingdong village. Photograph by author, April 13, 2021.

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<sup>155</sup> Personal communication with He Songkang, April 13, 2021.

Meanwhile, there are also representative transmitters that gradually turned away from their participation in the Guerx Sal Lad. Higher levels of designation indicate richer resources for the transmitters, but, at the same time, the schedule of these representative transmitters in a higher designation is frequently occupied by government-organized events, journalist interviews, and other activities related to the promotion of ICH projects. These changes and interruptions have increasingly kept them away from joining other activities in the festival like what they used to do, especially with various religious activities. An ironic fact is that more than one of these higher-level transmitters expressed to me that they had rarely gone to the Guerx Sal Lad until they became representative transmitters unless they needed to perform. But no matter what, these representative transmitters all do their best to fulfill their obligations as government-recognized models for the transmission and promotion of Bai cultures. Their higher status of designation also carries a greater sense of responsibility, which often resulted in more elaborate presentations of their skills. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes to illustrate a busy day and the embellished presentation of Zhao Piding's family on the twenty-third day of the fourth lunar month of 2018.

It was 8 in the early morning. I arrived at Xiazuoyi village. Even though households in Dali villages don't have any house numbers, it was not difficult at all to locate Zhao Piding's home, also where he and his family rehearse and offer dabenqu training classes. Everyone I asked knew where they live and, when I got close to his place, a clear sign of the "Dali Municipal ICH Transmission Base" (Dalishi feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuancheng jidi 大理市非物质文化遗产传承基地) was hung on the wall pointing the direction (Figure 63). When I arrived at Zhao Piding's home, members of his transmission group were already gathered and started to prepare for their performance later at the Shendu temple, adult women were helping girls check their costumes and tyrant's whips, two middle-aged men

were dressing up as the hualiu couple, and band members and shengdou bearers were making small chats.



**Figure 63** The sign hanging at the lane entrance of Zhao Piding’s home. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.

At 8:30 am sharp, the group began to proceed to the Shendu temple 2.9 kilometers away. Except for Zhao Piding who rode an electric bike because of his age and health issues, and several heavy shengdou and their bearers who traveled by tractors, the other members all walked on their feet. They first walked singly or in groups until they arrived at the road outside their village, where they stopped temporarily and reformed into an organized pilgrimage group under the lead of Zhao Piding. The band began to play music, and dancers started to wave their tyrant’s whips while walking. Zhao Piding had the most imposing

group compared to others. In addition to the basic elements of a pilgrimage group—Lotus Pond Society members, hualiu couples, a band, Bai tune singers, and dancers—at the front of the group, several strong young and middle-aged men were holding large and heavy shengdou, as well as flags stated with the names of “Huashanghua Dabenqu Transmission Institute,” “Guex Sal Lad Transmission Institute of Zuoyi Village,” and “Guex Sal Lad Intangible Cultural Heritage,” showing the status and identity of Zhao Piding as the only national representative transmitter of the Guex Sal Lad. Along their way to the Shendu temple, they sometimes stopped and reformed the group to keep it in order, especially when they made it to the long road towards the Shendu temple where the crowd was large (Figure 64).

...Right after the whole morning’s performance, I followed Zhao Piding and his group back to his home, where journalists from China National Radio (Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai 中央人民广播电台) were waiting for them. They had an interview with Zhao Piding and his daughter Zhao Dongmei about the Guex Sal Lad, dabenqu, and other Bai folk music. This kind of activity is not new to them. Then female members of the transmission group and their students at Zuoyi Complete Primary School performed their newly rehearsed performance of tyrant’s whip for the guests, which finally put an end to their whole day’s work.





**Figure 64 Zhao Piding and his procession group. Photograph by author, June 6, 2018.**

Compared with He Songkang, Zhao Caiting, and Li Jishou who regularly attended the Guerx Sal Lad before and after they became representative transmitters, Zhao Piding and his family have cut their ties with practices other than performing, because, as I documented in my fieldnotes, they were too busy with local government-assigned activities. Bearing the titles of national representative transmitter and “transmitter family,” they are frequently invited to perform at different temple festivals, but they go to these festivals just to perform, and religious activities are not part of their agenda. In the following few years, I learned that, since the government-organized performance was canceled, the Zhao family has not participated in the Guerx Sal Lad anymore. However, in 2022, I saw on my social media that the whole family showed up at the Shendu temple to worship Duan Zongbang. Since I could not make it to the festival due to the

temporal COVID lockdown in Beijing, I asked about the reason behind their participation, turned out that the Zhao family went to the temple because there was a TV station hoping to document some activities of the Guerx Sal Lad.

### **5.2.3 Changes Brought by the Designation**

#### *Social Elevation and Responsibility*

The recognition and attention that ICH items and related projects have received from the state and local governments have elevated the social status of representative transmitters which in turn has bestowed upon them a sense of responsibility and self-respect. Other than regular teaching and offering transmission courses, transmitters are expected to have their own creative work and compositions. Some transmitters I interviewed expressed that, since their appointment, they have started to pay more attention to the documentation and study of Bai history and culture, and they want their works to be part of that history as well. As a result, more and more newly created music and dance pieces about the Guerx Sal Lad have been presented on public stages and social media platforms. Recently, building on the melodic structure of the “Big Scripture Tune” (Dajing Diao 大经调), one of the eighteen small tunes of dabenu, Zhao Fukun filled it with new lyrics, describing the celebratory atmosphere of the Guerx Sal Lad and offering blessings to people.

Several transmitters told me that the title of representative transmitter also symbolizes a certificate and validation for them to perform publicly and to take on more students. In Zhao Caiting’s understanding, “in the past, we were not qualified to take apprentices because the state

(*guojia* 国家) did not trust us.<sup>156</sup> Young people were not willing to study with us because they felt shy. We never had chances to perform publicly either because our social status was rather low and we only wore poor clothes.” By comparing the past, especially during the Cultural Revolution when practices of the Guex Sal Lad and folk music were considered decadent and politically undesirable (Chapter 2), Zhao Caiting expressed the life changes that the setting of representative transmitters had brought him. Folk artists like hualiu couples and dilder players who were once at the bottom of the social hierarchy have been raised to a higher social level through the ICH project. The social elevation has earned them respect and reputation, made them proud of what they do, and lifted their practices out of the pool of what people used to consider cultural dross. Ever since the Guex Sal La became a national ICH item, Zhao Caiting and his wife are often invited to perform in Kunming and on a lot of other stages during festivals to give people blessings. The younger generation began to take an interest in this traditional practice as well. Currently, Zhao Caiting has four apprentices. Every month, he goes to the county government to teach them hualiu tunes and the dance steps of the hualiu elders. In recent years, his apprentices started to perform at the Guex Sal Lad and other festivals as well.

The recognition from ICH projects has brought cultural bearers a lot more exposure and opportunities to perform on bigger stages. But, at the same time, these representative transmitters were selected as the model for other transmitters and folk musicians. Once they own the title, they become public figures as well, therefore, their performances, actions, and even words and deeds, all become something they need to be careful about and self-censor. For instance, as I illustrated

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<sup>156</sup> The Chinese word *guojia* can be translated as the state, government, nation-state, or general meaning of a country, in which *guo* takes on the meaning of the word, while *jia* means home or family. In Chinese people’s everyday parlance, *guojia* is often equivalent to the government, that is, the CCP, and contains the connotation of patriotic love for the country and the CCP (see Guo Yingjie 2004, 30–31).



in Chapter 3, the antiphonal singing during the Guerx Sal Lad can be about anything, even flirtatious and sexual content. But, on the ICH or official stages such as singing competitions, the lyrics of people's singing need to be confined to content with what governments consider healthy (*jiankang* 健康) and positive (*xiangshang* 向上) messages. A representative transmitter once told me, "We do antiphonal singing as well. Usually, people sing more explicit (*lugu* 露骨) things, like 'I sleep with you, you sleep with me, and how do we sleep,' but it is impossible to sing this kind of stuff in competitions. We need to sing love songs without any explicit elements. We also need to sing some content about the CCP's policies."<sup>157</sup> As someone who often performs on government-organized stages and creates works commissioned by local governments, it is important to keep politically sensitive. A *dabenqu* transmitter told me that he was asked recently to compose a new piece on expressing gratitude to the communist party. Although after several times of revisions, his new work was still criticized by local leaders because, as the generation grew up in socialist China, he put too much emphasis on the achievements of Mao Zedong but not on the current president Xi Jinping.

### *The Decrease of Traditions*

While raising the social status of transmitters and the traditions they bear, the dominance of the government-led designation system as a certificate or proof of their profession has led to the gradual decrease of traditional methods of cultural transmission and made joining the ICH club the last straw that can help folk artists survive from being eliminated in the process of

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<sup>157</sup> During my fieldwork, I attempted to look for examples that could illustrate how texts of antiphonal singing have been changed in public competitions. Unfortunately, local governments or related cultural institutions did not organize any antiphonal singing competitions or performances because of the pandemic.

modernization. Local governments and related departments are enthusiastic about “upgrading” folk arts and traditions into “art forms” and “canon.” In the field of music and dance, traditional techniques and teaching methods started to be given away to the framework of Western art music and the conservatory training system. The traditional way of tuning a sanxian, for example, used to depend highly on the tones of the Bai language. Musicians tuned the three strings of sanxian based on the relevant pitches of the Bai phrase “*gerd goux pierl*,” meaning two slices of meat.<sup>158</sup> Now, this method is rarely used. What replaced it are the syllables *la-re-la* corresponding to the movable do in the Western solfège system.<sup>159</sup> For younger students, some transmitters adopt Chinese cipher notation (*jianpu* 简谱) in their teaching so the students can learn the melody faster, especially for teaching instruments.<sup>160</sup> While these methods can be useful for bridging the gap between traditional teaching methods and the conservatory training system, in a negative sense, the intervention of a different system of music conceptualization often, in reality, interrupts the viable transmission mode that has been operating for a very long time.

One afternoon, I went to a rehearsal of a municipal-level transmitter’s performing group in her village, as they were preparing a new choreography of the dance of tyrant’s whip for the evaluation by the Municipal ICH Office the next day. To improve their performance, they also invited a provincial-level dabenqu transmitter to play sanxian for them as the accompaniment and to give them some opinions. As a traditional dance genre with many different suites of movements, the number of movements included in different suites of the dance of tyrant’s whip can have up to

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<sup>158</sup> Personal communication with Zhang Liangshan 张亮山, composer of the Dali Bai Opera Troupe (Dali baijutuan 大理白剧团), August 23, 2022.

<sup>159</sup> I assume this influence comes from some transmitter’s training programs in local art schools and conservatories in which they will learn some basic concepts and knowledge of Western music theory. Western music and its theory are still considered, in a lot of music-related fields in China, a more advanced and ideal method for composers and music education.

<sup>160</sup> The cipher notation is similar to the movable do system.

dozens. Performers of tyrant's whip traditionally dance out the suite from the first movement to the last in order all at once, one beat for each movement. This is also reflected in its traditional teaching method. The teacher teaches the student from one movement to another, without much attention to the beat and rhythmic pattern. Therefore, the musical accompaniment often needs to be set at a moderate tempo to fit the movement speed of the dancing.<sup>161</sup> Since the provincial-level transmitter was invited here to give suggestions, I asked him some explanatory questions about the cooperation between the dance and sanxian playing. However, the way he illustrated the choreography and music was more like a music director working in an art troupe. He emphasized the importance of counting beats and the differences between playing different scales. He also addressed that the performance needs to have nice artistic articulations and enough attention given to breathing in the music, which apparently failed to comply with the traditional aesthetic of tyrant's whip and the understanding of the supporting role of the accompanied music. Through various ICH projects and increasing interactions between transmitters, universities, and other arts institutions, a disseminated set of vernacular language and discourses influenced by the principles and aesthetic standards of Western art music started to make an impact on the long existed frameworks of aesthetic values and forms of transmission of folk and traditional art expressions.

### *The Increase of Competition*

At least since early socialist China, music competitions and performances have been one of the most commonly used methods by the CCP to increase musical production and “incorporate new talents into the official production mechanism and the official sphere” (Baranovitch 2003, 213; see also Wong 1984, 129–30). It is also highly valued in the PRC to gain accreditation from higher

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<sup>161</sup> Personal communication with He Songkang, April 13, 2021.

political or cultural centers (Rees 2000, 161). In the context of ICH projects, these government-sponsored music activities also play the important role of encouraging musical creativity and presenting the achievements of the ICH transmission programs. As traditional art forms, especially those that are recognized as ICH items, are embedded into a large number of public performances and competitions, traditions become materials for the “official production mechanism” as well. The reputation, honor, and prizes brought by winning the competitions become what stimulates people’s participation and involvement in transmitting and promoting traditional art forms. They also become, to a certain extent, decisive in determining which traditions are worth carrying on and which transmitters, according to the criteria of the competitions, are better than others.

In turn, this competitive dynamic has had a big impact on transmitters’ day-to-day practices and social interactions. Whenever I interviewed transmitters, they would always, at some point, bring to my attention their experiences of performing on national or even international stages, the certificates they received from local governments, or the awards they won in regional and national competitions, as if they were the most reliable and authoritative proof of their skills and expertise (Figure 65).



**Figure 65 Zhao Caiting showing me his certificates and awards. Photograph by author, April 17, 2021.**

Under this influence, some self-organized competitions started to be held by local businesses and institutions as well. On the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth of September 2021, the “Huishui Cup” (*Huishui bei* 绘水杯) Music and Dance Competition was held at the Huishui Grange (*Huishui tianzhuang* 绘水田庄) in Dali city. This competition was hosted by the Grange in collaboration with the transmission institute of Shangguan township (*Shangguan zhen* 上关镇) and organized by a few transmitters who work at the Grange as performers. Compared to government-held competitions, this competition was financially sponsored by several local businesses. There was no restriction on what kind of music or dance genre the contestants presented on the stage, so the audience saw a series of performances, from traditional Bai music

to Western choral music (Figure 66). Judges included three representative transmitters, a leader from the transmission station in Jiangwei township (Jiangwei zhen 江尾镇), and two leaders from the sponsored businesses. Glass trophies were made for the winners. Each judge also received a certificate as proof of participation. Although the scale and authority level of this kind of competition are far from the government-sponsored ones, it does effectively boost the confidence of contestants and work as an important achievement of the transmitter-organizers that can be written in their annual report. By imitating the actions and experiences of the groups with a higher social status, they were able to embody an imagined experience of success and prestige.



**Figure 66** A quartet's performance accompanied by a small Chinese music ensemble. Photo provided by He Songkang.

The recognition from ICH projects and competitions among transmitters have also created conflicts and a feeling of jealousy among representative transmitters of different levels and between them and folk musicians who do not own or have failed to acquire this identity. To the government, the newly emerged competitive dynamic is a way to encourage competition among folk artists so the transmission of traditions will be facilitated. But to others, representative transmitters represent a sense of success and pride, as well as a different group with a better economic situation and social status, even if most often a higher income only exists in people's imaginations. I have heard from different transmitters how some village offices have skimmed on the funding that was supposed to support their transmission classes.

Moreover, the income from being a representative transmitter is barely enough for them to make a living. A lot of transmitters have their own small businesses or other day jobs as their main source of income, but the higher the level they are, the more events and performances they are assigned by local governments and cultural centers. Performing in these events is considered their obligation, so they often do not get paid. As a result, even their basic living conditions could be in danger. However, the higher social status of these transmitters is already enough to invoke the feeling of envy and bitterness among other less "successful" peers. During my fieldwork, it is not uncommon to hear acerbic criticism from transmitters and folk artists towards others, especially people who are positioned at a higher level of status. It also becomes usual when someone self-claims that he or she is the best in their specialized areas.

#### **5.2.4 Representative Transmitters vs. "Professional" Performers**

As I mentioned above, the recognition from ICH projects and local governments has elevated folk artists' social status, given them more exposure, and enabled them to turn their skills

and crafts into a source of income to support their living conditions. However, even if representative transmitters are highly praised and encouraged by local governments, they are often considered less skilled and qualified than “professional” performers from local art troupes. To governments and government-affiliated artists, they are still part of the rural subaltern communities.

The privileged status of art troupe performers in China was clearly indicated in Mao Zedong’s influential speeches given at the 1942 Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art which aimed to mobilize art and literary workers (*wenyi gongzuozhe* 文艺工作者), who were the main audience of these talks, and to define the relationship between art and literature works and revolutionary work in general so that art and literature can better serve the revolutionary cause. In his introductory speech, Mao emphasized the importance for art workers to identify with and get to understand workers, peasants, and soldiers who represent the broad popular masses. Meanwhile, art workers were also who should “educate them patiently... (and) helping them” when the masses’ shortcomings exist since they are “illiterate, ignorant, and uncultured as a result of prolonged feudal and bourgeois rule” (McDougall 1980, 59, 71).<sup>162</sup> This prejudiced attitude also extended to the realm of professional arts and folk arts. In Mao’s concluding remarks, he addressed that the “budding” art and literature (wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folk tales, and so on) from worker-peasant-soldier backgrounds needed to be developed into an advanced level or come under the guidance of the higher level of art and literature and serve the needs of the masses (66–72; see also Rees 2012, 25).

The hierarchical relationship between professional and folk artists and arts embedded in Mao’s dictum in 1942 has heavily influenced the state’s directions for art and music making, as

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<sup>162</sup> McDougall’s translation is based on the 1943 Chinese publication of Mao’s talks in May 1942.



well as the public conceptions and perceptions of folk arts and their bearers ever since. Based on the forms of propaganda troupes (*xuanchuan dui* 宣传队) in the 1930s which performed revolutionary texts and well-known folk tunes to reach the masses, new performing troupes were formed in various forms and under various names, such as cultural work troupe (*wengong tuan* 文工团), song and dance troupe (*gewu tuan* 歌舞团), or narrative singing troupe (*quyi tuan* 曲艺团) (Jones 1995, 48–49). Different performing troupes began to enjoy prestige because of their political and artistic significance as voices of the state’s political ideology. In contemporary China, government-sponsored art troupes often work as important representatives of governments’ social-political ideologies, delivering authoritative voices through music and dance. They are also a symbol of local cultural identity and a window through which this local cultural distinctiveness can be presented to national and international audiences (Tsai 2016, 44; Gibbs 2017), therefore still playing the role of instructor and model of local folk arts.

The Dali Bai Opera Troupe is a professional art troupe that was formed by the Dali prefectural government in 1962 under the notice of the Propaganda Department of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee (Yunnan shengwei xuanchuan bu 云南省委宣传部).<sup>163</sup> Bai opera (*Bai ju* 白剧) is a later created opera genre along with the establishment of the Dali Bai Opera Troupe, which incorporates elements from *dabenqu*, *chuichui qiang* 吹吹腔, a Han-influenced operatic genre taking the *dilder* as a crucial instrument prevalent in the Bai and Yi ethnic groups of the Dali region, and other Bai folk music genres (Qin Si 2018, 191–92).<sup>164</sup> Apart from Bai

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<sup>163</sup> In 2014, the troupe was merged into the Dali Prefectural Ethnic Song and Dance Theater (Dalizhou Minzu Gewutuan 大理州民族歌舞团).

<sup>164</sup> In its early stage, a Bai opera would only apply one singing style from either *dabenqu* or *chuichui qiang* based upon the content or emotion needs, but later artists in local Bai opera troupes gradually combined the two (Qin Si 2018, 192).

mythology, historical stories, and transplanted repertoire from other operatic genres, a large portion of the Bai opera repertoire center around the revolutionary past and heroic stories under socialist and post-socialist China. For example, on June 10, 2021, the Dali Bai Opera Troupe put on a newly produced opera *Sentiment of the Bai People* (Baizi Qinghuai 白子情怀). The plot of this opera portrays the life story of Shi Jie 施介, a Bai communist and revolutionary martyr who fought for and died at a young age for China's revolution in the 1930s, and his deep love for his wife Du Xiaonian 杜小年 during the turbulent time.

The early team of performers and musicians of the Dali Bai Opera Troupe was composed of recruited members from folk artists. The Troupe paid them regular salaries and organized professional training and rehearsals. Since then, the designation of folk artists was replaced by professional performers (*zhuanye yanyuan* 专业演员), implying their different social status as specialized, skillful, and government-supported performers (Lau 1996, 119). Although current performers working in the troupe mostly graduated from local art schools or colleges, there are still a lot of senior musicians, composers, or lyricists from rural backgrounds who learned most of their skills from folk artists.<sup>165</sup> However, their government-affiliated identity and their label as professionals have given them not just superior social status over representative transmitters but also public credibility and trust from local governments and cultural institutions believing that they have the full ability to help with the advancement of traditional music. A leader of the Dali Municipal Culture Center once told me that, in one of the training courses they organized, when folk musicians of *sanxian*, including representative transmitters, played their music, the staff of the Cultural Office found out that these musicians did not know how to play with the “right”

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<sup>165</sup> Personal communication with Zhang Liangshan, August 23, 2022. See also Ye Xintao 2001, 27.

fingerings, so they invited a professional performer from the Dali Bai Opera Troup to teach them the standardized fingering, even though I learned later that the main instrument that professional performer plays is the dilder, he just also knows how to play sanxian. As the leader told me, “The performance requires unity.”

### **5.3 Discourses of Local Scholars and the Official Account of the Guerx Sal Lad**

In China’s context, especially in ethnic minority regions, intellectuals and scholars, especially local scholars, often have a great influence on local knowledge production as well as the official account of folk traditions because of their prestige and close contact with government institutions and local elites. In Dali, local scholars’ involvement with the Guerx Sal Lad is multilayered. They trace the history of the Guerx Sal Lad and expand people’s understanding of the rich and capacious happenings in the festival, elevating the festival as a valuable ethnic tradition. They participate in and have a say in almost every government project related to traditional and folk culture. As I illustrate in Chapter 4, in the application of the Guerx Sal Lad to the ICH list, local scholars composed an important part of the expert committee and got involved in the selection, supervision, and narrative making. They intervene in the decision-making process as a third party, helping local governments conduct research and interact with local governments about transmitters’ updates and local knowledge, which, to a certain extent, shapes the transformation and direction of the safeguarding work of the festival. At every year’s Guerx Sal Lad, it is also common to see scholars, including myself, conducting fieldwork at different sites for their own research, coursework, or government-related projects. Meanwhile, because they have the means and ability to write, local scholars are also the authoritative voice who can define what

Guerx Sal Lad is in official history and discourse through their publications, academic seminars, and/or public talks. Their narratives often become the “textbook” for government officials and transmitters on how to tell and retell the history and nature of the Guerx Sal Lad.

I use the term local scholars to indicate both official and non-official, Bai and non-Bai scholars who are based in Dali and conduct research mainly on the Bai. They include scholars who are affiliated with local universities and research institutions, social elites who work or retired from local government institutions, as well as amateur scholars who are active in the local intellectual scene. In Dali, some senior minority scholars are highly respected, even more than professors in universities.<sup>166</sup> They work outside universities and research institutions. A lot of them were trained through the cadre education system as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and work or used to work “within the system” (*tizhi nei* 体制内), that is, in government-related institutions, such as the local cultural bureau or cultural centers, therefore their research and publications are often aligned with state concerns. They might not have any academic training in specialized fields, but are familiar with and deeply interested in different cultural elements and have spent a large amount of time studying, doing research, and publishing on them in various local journals. They are well known and acknowledged by society and other institutional scholars for their work and dedication. Therefore, these scholars often have more say than academically trained scholars on defining and other discourses about the Guerx Sal Lad.

In ethnic minority regions, whether working in universities or research institutions or not, a scholar’s ethnic identity and knowledge of Bai history and culture can become important criteria to value the scholar’s authority and reliability. In 1990, the Society of Baiology (*baizu xue* 白族

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<sup>166</sup> Most of these ethnic minority scholars are men, which reflects the power dynamic of gender within the Bai society, in which men are the gatekeepers of discourse, while women are the practitioners.

学) was founded by Bai scholars in different regions of China and a journal of the Society called *Baiology Studies* (Baizuxue Yanjiu 白族学研究) was launched at the same time. The membership of the Society consists of both official and non-official Bai scholars. They are dedicated to research on the ethnic history, economic development, education, language, religion, and folk arts of the Bai and have published extensively on these subjects (Shi Zhongli 2001). The establishment of the Society can be read as a clear example of the significance of ethnic identity in shaping the narratives and knowledge production of an ethnic group. To a great extent, being a Bai is often the crucial feature that bonds scholars from different backgrounds, but it can also become a point of reference for inclusion and exclusion.

In my contact with local scholars, I came to realize that the concept of ethnicity and the responsibility of being an ethnic scholar meant so much to them. I have more than once, both implicitly and explicitly, heard local scholars address the importance of the responsibility of Bai scholars whenever they found out that I am a Bai as well. One time, after I sent a text to a respectful local scholar and expressed my gratitude for his generous help, he replied to me, “If you need anything, don’t hesitate. It is great that you work hard on your fieldwork with your love for your hometown and your ethnic group. You set a good example for other young scholars. We will all try our best to help you.” Even though I have never talked about the reason why I chose the Guerx Sal Lad as the topic of my dissertation research, to them, me choosing to come back to Dali and conduct research on Bai culture is more likely out of my love and loyalty to my hometown and the culture of “my” people, rather than an academic choice. And this choice, to them, is equal to my identification. My identification with the Bai is way more important compared to my lack of life experiences and cultural immersion in the Bai culture. This attitude of local scholars towards Dali and the Bai is a great example of their determination and seriousness in presenting the greatness

of the Bai traditions and protecting the integrity of the ethnic identity of the Bai, even if in some cases the protection might become a way of cleansing any element they consider negative to the image of the Bai and a barrier between local and nonlocal scholarship.

In this section, drawing upon a critical review of local scholarship on the Guerx Sal Lad from the 1980s to 1990s, particularly essays published in a collective volume, *The Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai in Dali* (2005), I discuss how local scholars construct the Guerx Sal Lad as a distinct tradition of the Bai and their influence on shaping the official and folk accounts of the festival. I understand the meaning of “tradition” in the sense that Sue Tuohy (2018, 120) conceptualizes in her excellent research on the collector-editors of *Anthology of Hua'er Folksongs* (1988). Sue interprets traditions as “imagined,” in the way that tradition “is not an ordered set of materials with an independent existence stretching through time. Instead, individuals construct a tradition in particular contexts; they select and interpret resources as representatives of that tradition, resources that fit their imagination of the basis of that tradition and its value in relation to the present, while appealing to the past.” Scholarly discussions of different time periods about the Guerx Sal Lad are closely connected to the historical and social context associated with ethnic research agendas of different time periods. In the process of constructing an imagined Guerx Sal Lad, studies and writings of different groups of scholars also reflect their membership in multiple social communities (Wright 2021, 459; Litzinger 2000, 17).

### **5.3.1 *The Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai in Dali* (2005)**

In 2005, a collective volume, *The Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai in Dali*, was published by the Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House (Yunnan minzu chubanshe 云南民族出版社). This volume is an outcome of the prefectural government’s application project for the National

Intangible Cultural Heritage List, as well as so far, the first and only collective volume focusing on the Guerx Sal Lad. This volume is a government-sponsored and scholar-participated project, which is reflected in the composition of the compilation team. The compilation team of this volume is constituted of officials from local governments and cultural departments and scholars and experts from local research institutions, representing the close collaboration of local governments and intellectuals in Dali. The two editors of this volume are Yang Yanjun 杨宴君, then deputy governor of the Dali Prefecture, and Yang Zhengye 杨政业, then director of the Dali Prefectural Bureau of Culture (currently the Dali Prefectural Bureau of Culture and Tourism).

The volume is divided into five sections. In addition to the “Foreword” written by Zhao Lixiong 赵立雄, then governor of Dali Prefecture, there are four sections containing twenty-six essays. The first section (five essays) particularly focuses on the ICH work related to the Guerx Sal Lad, including reports from the application team and related research articles. The second section, which is also a larger part of the volume, has twenty-two scholarly research articles or newspaper reports focusing on various facets of the festival, among which seven are dedicated particularly to the origin or history of the Guerx Sal Lad, six are around the definition and general observation of the Guerx Sal Lad, three analyze related literature and poems, three discuss the musical elements in the festival, and a few others on other cultural elements involved. The last section includes a report on the work of the ICH project on the festival since 2002 and a glossary of some major references. The written time of these essays expands from the 1980s to the early 2000s. Except for the twenty-eight pages report put together by experts from the application team, other essays are rather short, ranging from two to seven pages.

In the “Foreword,” Zhao Lixiong (1–2) describes the Guerx Sal Lad as “the origin and transmission site of the representative works created by talented creators of Bai ethnic folk arts,

the historical witness and relic of primitive fertility cults of ancient China, and a folk carnival for the entertainment of gods and humans owned particularly by the Bai. It condenses the essence of great traditional Bai art, carries antiquated historical information and primitive memories of the Bai and other ethnic groups, and highlights the creativity of the Bai people. It is a distinct ethnic folk cultural space.” While this narrative was part of the ICH project, it also presents the direction and results of scholarly research from the 1980s to the early 2000s. A large portion of local scholarly research during this time period concentrated on locating the origin of the Guerx Sal Lad (Li Zhengqing 1985; Yang Ruihua 1993; Zhang Mingzeng 1993; Han Fang 1981), constructing a successive and uninterrupted history for it (Li Zhengqing 1986), and interpreting its deep connections with ancient traditions of the Bai (Yang Zhengye 1993, 2000). Among twenty-two long short essays, in addition to five of them without a clear time of writing or publishing, thirteen out of seventeen were written or published during the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>167</sup> which assembled most of the scholarly and non-scholarly writings published during this period that were considered representative of what local governments and scholars deem important.

### **5.3.2 Scholarly Writings on the Guerx Sal Lad (1980s to 2000s)**

Through citing and drawing from sources of the past and present to construct the representation according to present needs, local scholars produce narratives and materials to be passed on and used by those after them (Touhy 2018, 120). The Guerx Sal Lad has long been a highly valued yet less researched event compared to other Bai cultural aspects. Although it is one

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<sup>167</sup> Among the other four essays, there are two of them were written in 1957, and the other two were written in 2003.



of the most celebrated festivals of the Bai people and is listed as a national ICH item representing the cultural image of the Bai as a whole, it has received far less attention from academics compared to other aspects of the Bai traditions, such as the benzhu belief. The earliest scholarly research focused specifically on the Guerx Sal Lad did not emerge until the 1980s.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, scholarly literature written by Western or Western-trained scholars that offers detailed descriptions of the festival before this time period, such as *The Tower of Five Glories—A Study of the Min Chia of Dali* (1941) by C.P. Fitzgerald and *Under the Ancestors' Shadow: Chinese Culture and Personality* (1948) by Francis Hsu, has not been translated into Chinese until the early 2000s, therefore, local scholars' writings in the 1980s signified the beginning of serious academic discourses on the Guerx Sal Lad done by minority intellectuals from within Bai culture. From then to the present, the angle of vision, methods, and resources of scholars' research have gone through several phases. Nonetheless, the small number of writings from the 1980s to the late 1990s are still considered significant in opening up the space for later scholarly research on the Guerx Sal Lad. They also became the foundation of the official account of the festival today, such as the application text for the national list.

After decades of political turbulence, it was not until the mid-1980s that ethnic cultures and religions that had been previously labeled as capitalist bourgeois were revived. The research on traditions became an encouraged and urgent task for scholars because of the need for nation-building and a re-understanding of traditional cultures that were treated as “feudal superstition.” This is particularly true for ethnic minority regions. The amount of research published on the Guerx

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<sup>168</sup> There were also local scholars' writings on the Guerx Sal Lad in the 1940s–60s, such as in Xu Jiarui's *The Cultural History of Ancient Dali* (Dali Gudai Wenhushigao) (1949) and in Mao Xing's introduction to the *Collected Bai Folktales* (Baizu Minjian Gushi Chuanshuo Ji) (1959), but they are mostly descriptions on activities in the festival, rather than scholarly discussion. For discussion on this literature, see Bryson 2017a.

Sal Lad in the 1980s was limited. Most of them were written by local minority intellectuals who work outside the academia, such as in government institutions. As someone who was recruited as government cadres and received higher education compared to other peers, minority intellectuals carried with them the responsibility of writing the social history and culture of the Bai, constructing a distinctive ethnic identity, and guarding ethnic dignity. As a result, early studies on the Guerx Sal Lad primarily focus on answering historical questions and clarifying the definition and nature of the festival so as to rehabilitate its reputation. The discussions were mainly concerned with the questions on what is the Guerx Sal Lad and what is the origin of the Guerx Sal Lad. Similar to what Schein argues for historiography on the ethnonym of Miao (2000, 37), through different methods, these studies connect various activities and elements in the festival to the history and practices of the ancestors of the Bai while integrating them into the general history of the Huaxia 华夏 (or the Han) culture, which not only contributes to the image of the Bai as an ethnic group with a long and unbroken history but also reinforces the identity of the Bai as an inseparable part of the multi-ethnic nation.

One of the detailed examinations of the Guerx Sal Lad during this time period appears in two articles written by a local scholar named Li Zhengqing, who worked both in education and in local government institutions. Li Zhengqing (1933–) was born and raised in Xizhou township. He graduated in Chinese from Yunnan Normal University (Yunnan Shifan Daxue 云南师范大学). Before the 1980s, Li spent several decades working as a teacher in local schools. In 1983, he left his teaching position and started to work as a government official in Zhaotong, a prefecture-level city located in northeast Yunnan (Li Zhengqing 1998). Although from the Hui ethnic group, Li speaks fluent Bai and has been long working on the research of Bai culture, especially the Bai language. Besides his daytime work, Li published extensively on the history of Bai culture and

language. For example, his *Investigation on the History of Xizhou Culture* (Dali Xizhou Wenhua Shikao) (1998) includes long and short essays focusing on different elements of the culture and history of Xizhou township and the Bai, ranging from history, geography, economy, ethnicity, kinship, religion, folklore, poetry, education, and biographies.

In 1985 and 1986, Li Zhengqing published two articles on the Guerx Sal Lad as a short series. The first is titled “The Origin and Nature of the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai” (1985) and the second article is titled “The Development and Transformations of the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai” (1986). As the titles indicate, these two articles aim to sort out the history of the Guerx Sal Lad and “summarize its original manner” (Li Zhengqing 1985, 80). Building on Yang Qiong and Miu Luanhe’s description of the Guerx Sal Lad in the late Qing dynasty and the 1940s (see Chapter 2), Li Zhengqing further supplements the knowledge about the festival by adding and correcting the information on its time, name, and organization. More importantly, Li Zhengqing conducts his main analysis by examining the semantic symbolism of the Bai language. According to the editor’s note, Li’s research breaks the norms of former scholarship which only took Han Chinese as the foundation of analysis (1985, 80).

By taking the method of looking at the abundance of homophones in the Bai language and citing similar phenomena in other Bai regions as evidence, Li associates the origin of the Guerx Sal Lad with vulva and reproduction worship. Based on his conversations with elders in villages participating in the Guerx Sal Lad, the original location of the festival was at a ravine in the Diancang Mountains and later moved to the Dali basin. Because the shape of the ravine resembles very much a woman’s vulva, the earliest Guerx Sal Lad was closely related to reproduction worship (83–84; see also Chapter 2). Moreover, the Bai terms of several objects used in the festival, such as the mulberry tree and willow tree, and the bamboo used to make tyrant’s whip, all have

homophones associated with actions or meanings related to fertility, sexual behavior, or offspring, which further prove the relationship between the Guerx Sal Lad and the theme of fertility worship. This argument that the Guerx Sal Lad originated from the worship of fertility is supported by the article of Zhang Mingzeng, a well-known Bai non-official scholar. Further, he defines the origin of the festival as “an occasion of conducting unconstrained intimacy (*yehe* 野合) in a time when people only recognized mothers but not fathers” (1993, 122).

Several scholars trace the history of the Guerx Sal Lad back to agrarian society and shamanic practices of ancient times (Yang Ruihua 1993; Yang Zhengye 1993, 1998). In Yang Ruihua’s article “Investigation on the Origin of the Guerx Sal Lad” (1993), he suggests three possible aspects for locating the origin of the festival. First, the Guerx Sal Lad is a result of the transformation of the Bai ancestors from hunting and nomadic people to agricultural people. Yang cites *Bogu Tongji Qianshu* 夔古通记浅述 and *Dianzaiji* 滇载记 (Records of Yunnan) from the Ming dynasty, and *Huayang Guozhi* 华阳国志 (Chronicles of Huayang) from the Jin dynasty (266–420),<sup>169</sup> proving that the Bai ancestors in the Dali region developed the mulberry silk production in an early time. He argues that, since the Bai people had long had the custom of singing while working in farms and dancing while having work breaks, these activities gradually turned into part of the Guerx Sal Lad. Second, the Guerx Sal Lad is the legacy of the shamanic practices of the Bai ancestors. According to Yang Ruihua, the Guerx Sal Lad originated from the worship of the mulberry god and expanded over time to other deities. During the long transformation time, authorities from different religions and time periods shaped the festival in ways catering to their own political agendas. Similarly, Yang Zhengye’s article published in 2000, “Cultural Illustration

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<sup>169</sup> *Huayang Guozhi*, written by historian Chan Qu, is one of the earliest local gazetteers of China, depicting the local history, geography, and individuals of the current regions of southwest China.

of the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai,” links the time of occurrence of the Guerx Sal Lad to the Bai people’s yearly agricultural activities and addresses the importance of the tradition of benzhu belief kept as a main component of the festival.<sup>170</sup> Different from Li Zhengqing, in Yang Zhengye’s argument, the willow tree, which stands for the unit of a village, also represents the benzhu and the territory of that village, symbolizing the participation of both humans and deities who are able to control the weather, protect people, and bless them with good harvests and offspring. Therefore, the willow tree actually presents people’s worship of the rain, sun, land, and other agricultural aspects (83–84).

In local minority scholars' research from the 1980s to the late 1990s, scholars were eager to trace the history of the Guerx Sal Lad back to an ancient time, at least the time of the Nanzhao Kingdom. In their writings, the Guerx Sal Lad was depicted as a tradition that was formed because of the Bai ancestors’ earnest will for basic life needs and their tight connection with deities and their environments. And this tradition, even after more than a thousand years, still keeps remnants of the ancestors’ practices and beliefs. The image of the Guerx Sal Lad as a centuries-old festival that survived historical vicissitudes and a number of interruptions can be seen as a projection of local minority scholars’ particular vision of the Bai as a long-lived ethnic group with its own splendid and complex cultural traditions. As Yang Zhengye states in his article when he talks about the connection between the Guerx Sal Lad and Bai culture in general: “If we look deeper into the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai, we will discover that it is an assemblage of multiple cultures. It contains many components from primitive culture as well as elements from later modern society; it includes strong local cultural features, as well as many signs of the infiltration of Han culture. But, no matter

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<sup>170</sup> This article was developed from another article that Yang Zhengye published in 1998, see Yang Zhengye 1998.

how, the Guerx Sal Lad is an ethnic festival that is truly owned by the Bai people themselves. The Guerx Sal Lad is the culture that can represent the ethnic personality and spirit of the Bai people” (ibid.).

Historically, compared to other ethnic minority regions, social elites, circulating officials, and travelers produced a large body of writings on Dali the place and its culture and customs. This pool of literature has become a precious resource that has been heavily cited by scholars who conduct research on the Guerx Sal Lad. As mentioned above, local minority scholars, by citing early literature that describes local customs and cultures, attempt to add great historical depth to the Guerx Sal Lad and construct its image as the representation of the strong and never-stopped bond between the Bai people and their ancestors. In other places in these writings, scholars also cite early sources of the dominant Han culture, which indicates the great influence of the Han traditions upon the Bai and implies the inseparability of the Bai from the great nation’s history as the shared traditions and cultural elements present. For instance, in Yang Ruihua’s (1993) article, he cites classical works of Imperial China, such as *Li Ji* 礼记 (Confucian Book of Rites) and *Lvshi Chunqiu* 吕氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Lv Buwei),<sup>171</sup> to show the similar logic between the Bai ancestors’ practice of silkworm god worship and the existence of the silkworm festival in the Han region, which he argues as a reflection of the Bai ancestors’ “admiration for Chinese manner” (*mu huafeng* 慕华风) (70).

In Yang Zhengye’s updated version of the 1998 article published in 2000, he considers the use of the commune tree by hualiu elders a result of the spread and assimilation of the Han culture, particularly the tradition of commune, which can be traced back to at least the Chunqiu period

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<sup>171</sup> *Lvshi chunqiu*, a collection of different schools of thought by the end of Zhanguo Period (481–403 BCE).

(770–476 BCE). According to him, in ancient China, people from the Central Plain had the tradition of taking trees, such as pine trees, locust trees, or mulberry trees, as symbols representing different clans and territories and holding them during assemblies.<sup>172</sup> As the willow branch held by hualiu elders and the village as the organizational unit are some of the distinct features of the Guerx Sal Lad, Yang Zhengye argues that the ancient cultural phenomenon that used to exist but is now gone has been kept in the practice of the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai people in Dali, which can be seen as “the living fossil kept for the richness of contemporary anthropological and historical research, as well as a significant contribution of the Bai people to safeguard the historical and cultural heritage of our mother country” (62).

But, in addition to ancient literature, scholars’ research published during this period rarely cited other sources, neither scholarship from their contemporaries nor their field research.<sup>173</sup> The absence of citations is likely caused by the lack of enough publications and studies on the Guerx Sal Lad and discussions of academic ethics at that time. But, more importantly, it reflects the self-righteousness and pride of ethnic minority scholars in their work and life experiences as someone who is immersed in Bai culture. In one of my interviews with a famous local Bai scholar, I attempted to cautiously ask about the references and foundation of his argument on the Guerx Sal Lad, he told me, “Why do I need references? My academic research mainly follows the fields of ethnology and history with a great deal of fieldwork. I don’t do references... When I published my book on benzhu belief almost thirty years ago, we didn’t have any mentor to guide us, but now it’s been acknowledged and agreed upon by both academia and the Bai people. Some scholars of

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<sup>172</sup> Although Yang Zhengye does not cite any source to prove this historical phenomenon, in Li Zhengqing’s article, he suggests similar outcomes by citing from *Zhouli* 周礼 (the Rites of Zhou) completed in the Zhanguo Period (475–221BCE) and *Lunyu* 论语 (the Analects of Confucius) from the Chunqiu period.

<sup>173</sup> In some worse cases, I found the exact same phrases, even short paragraphs, in articles written by different scholars.

academic style (*xueyuan pai* 学院派) love to use all kinds of references, but most people just copy one another without any fieldwork.”

This short statement reflects the paradoxical attitude that non-official scholars hold toward official scholars. On the one hand, they respect the research tradition formed and carried by predecessors of the time before them, they also look up to experts and scholars from higher administrative level cities, which is reflected in the invited involvement of scholars from Beijing in different discussions and decisions on local ICH applications. On the other hand, they are critical of certain academic methods of conducting research, such as having “too many” references. As a result, many non-official scholars only cite historical documents or do not use references in their publications for the most time. They state that they have done a great deal of fieldwork but do not mention or use this concept anywhere in their writings.<sup>174</sup> Compared to researchers who begin as cultural outsiders who are not familiar with the Bai, Bai scholars who grew up and have been living the Bai culture can use their life experiences as research. However, no one can claim familiarity with all elements of a culture. There are several factors that might have influenced their view on not applying the concept of fieldwork in their scholarship. In the 1980s and 1990s, students from minority regions had much fewer opportunities to obtain academic training. Moreover, I assume that, for minority scholars, fieldwork belongs more to outsiders or amateurs who are not familiar with Bai culture. According to my contact with local intellectuals, once any outside scholars express a claim or argument that can potentially hurt or have a bad impact on the dignity and social morality of Bai culture and history, local intellectuals often turn to the role of the gatekeeper to condemn any voice that they deem as slander of the Bai as a group. In one of my conversations

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<sup>174</sup> According to my observations, these phenomena occurred much less among the later generations of local scholars, as most of them had formal academic training.



with a local Bai scholar, she seriously criticized a non-Bai scholar's research on the Guerx Sal Lad, in which that scholar noted the occurrence of extramarital affairs during the festival. In the Bai scholar's comments, the non-Bai scholar's depiction disrespectfully portrays the Bai as an ethnic group that does not care about family morality and Confucius cultivation, which has caused a lot of negative voices among local scholars.<sup>175</sup>

Along with their love for Bai culture and their great contribution to the growth of understanding and discourses around the festival, in earlier local scholars' writings, the lack of citations and references often, unfortunately, results in the question of accountability of the author's empirical grounding. The way of writing in these early publications often makes the arguments and accounts seem like confirmed facts. Authors utilize phrases like "the Guerx Sal Lad is..." and "the time of the Guerx Sal Lad should be..." without mentioning the rationale or resources behind these statements. Moreover, the self-righteous discussion on the festival also resulted in vagueness and ambiguity on many details of the festival. For example, in Li Zhengqing's "The Origin and Nature of the Guerx Sal Lad of the Bai" (1985, 82), he states that "'*bang*' (group 帮) is a synthesized performing unit. The performance of every *bang* is generally called the 'mulberry forest dance' (*sanglin wu* 桑林舞), which combines speaking, singing, dancing, and music. The mulberry forest dance is the biggest feature of the performance during walking movements." In the description of the components of the mulberry forest dance, Li Zhengqing mentions the instrument accompaniments of the dilder and flute, the hualiu elders, tyrant's whip, and the singing of Bai tunes. It is clear that what he indicates is the performance of the pilgrimage group. It is true that, according to Li Zhengqing and several other local scholars,

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<sup>175</sup> Liang Yongjia (2007, 17) also describes his experiences with local scholars on the same issue.

the meaning of the Guerx Sal Lad in the Bai language is “strolling in the mulberry forest” (ibid., 81–82). During my fieldwork, however, I have never heard anyone mention the term “mulberry forest dance” in any context. In Yang Zhengye’s 1998 article, he mentions the mulberry forest dance as well, but, in his description, it is women who dance the tyrant’s whip, and no attention is given to musical instruments and the singing of Bai tunes (85). In both Li and Yang’s articles, there is no explanation of either the reason why the performance is called that name or the resources that he got informed from,<sup>176</sup> which, unfortunately, leaves this name uncertain with a question mark.

Minority scholars’ studies from the 1980s to the late 1990s focused on clarifying the nature and history of the Guerx Sal Lad. Moreover, they treated the Guerx Sal Lad as a synthesized and homogenous aggregation, from which what readers can get are the partial, fragmentary, and ideologically positioned nature and practices of the festival. The most important goal was to highlight the cultural value of the Guerx Sal Lad to the Bai identity as well as the greatness of the multiethnic nation, even though the missing content—people’s current practices in the festival and their significant meanings to people’s day-to-day knowledge production—were totally left out without consideration.

Because of their credibility and reputation among local elites, local scholars’ narratives on the definition, legends, and history of the Guerx Sal Lad during this time period became important references for later scholars’ research, as well as the model of transmitters and local elites when they introduced the festival to others. However, instead of drawing upon early sources to understand the current meaning of the festival, local scholars concentrated on selecting current

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<sup>176</sup> In Yang Zhengye’s article, he states that his explanation of the mulberry forest dance is based on “consulting literature and field research,” but without giving further information on what literature he took as reference.

practices to prove the oldness of the festival, leaving the lively practices of people in a historical and cultural vacuum. As a consequence, the inconsistency of local scholars' descriptions of many details of the Guerx Sal Lad also occurs in the narratives of local elites and transmitters. In every interview, one question I would always ask was what is the Guerx Sal Lad? And there were so many times that some transmitters and elder elites in villages were clearly using the language and account from local scholars' studies. But, meanwhile, when scholars conduct fieldwork, the words and retellings of these elder members of the rural community often, in turn, become the "authentic" story and oral history coming from the people. As a result, the boundary between scholarly discussion and folk tales and traditions becomes even more blurred.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the practices and discourses of actors positioned between the government and the rural community—basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and scholars. While having very different social statuses and practices related to the Guerx Sal Lad, they all act as important mediators between the local governments' propaganda and people's everyday practices. For basic-level cadres, the long-term and step-by-step recruitment and education planned and operated by the state have implanted the ideas of patriotism and ethnic integration deeply into basic-level cadres' minds and work. They operate ICH projects according to the state-led policies and designation system; they conduct surveys and recommend different traditions to showcase the diversity of ethnic minority cultures within the united multi-ethnic nation; and they make sure that there will be no politically sensitive or dangerous elements in the content of ICH projects. But their familiarity with the bureaucratic system and experiences in

government work also enable them to play with the ambiguities of governments' ICH policies and help more traditions get seen, acknowledged, and legitimized.

For representative transmitters, the designation from local governments has greatly influenced the meaning and purpose of their participation in the Guerx Sal Lad, as well as the ways they carry and transmit their traditions. Their identity as representative transmitters means that their practices, speech, and manners need to represent a positive image of the government. Their expertise needs to serve as the voice of government propaganda, which often ends up with a gradual detachment from their involvement as rural members. The higher level they are positioned in the designation system, the further they might become away from all the sounded events representing people's voices. Becoming part of the system has brought them reputations and exposure on bigger stages, which requires them to set higher standards for themselves, but it has also complicated the dynamics and social relations between transmitters, turning their practices into a site of competition for higher recognition from local governments and higher ranking in the social ladders so they can stop being considered part of the rural.

On the other side, local scholars' narratives and their imagined construction of traditions have, to a great extent, shaped not just the official accounts of the Guerx Sal Lad, but, more importantly, the folk narratives which in turn become the rich source of future scholars' inquiry. The basis of local scholars' narrative has a lot to do with the responsibility they self-carry as the spokesman of the Bai as a group and as active participants in the discourse of nation-building. The choice they made on the naming and definition of the Guerx Sal Lad says a lot about not just their stance towards the Guerx Sal Lad, but towards the traditions of the Bai and the notion of Baines in general. In local scholars' construction, participants of the festival are presented as a unified group with the same intention, level of knowledge, and practices, representing the best and greatest

merits of the Bai people as a whole. The image of the Guerx Sal Lad represents the distinct traditions and brilliant history of the Bai as an important member contributing to the diversity and depth of Chinese culture. In various government-organized events and training courses, in government reports, textbooks, and promotions to outside tourists, the narratives constructed by local scholars are disseminated among transmitters, officials, scholars, the next generation, and the larger world outside Dali, becoming both the official story of the Guerx Sal Lad and the Bai people and the future folk accounts passed on through generations.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have presented the sub-soundscapes—experienced and imagined—of three groups of social actors—the rural community, governments (both state and local), and key mediators in between (basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local minority scholars)—that are crucial to the shaping, defining, and maintaining of the Guerx Sal Lad. The sub-soundscape of rural Bai villagers is filled with sounds and sounding events, both religious and non-religious, that connect humans and deities, create communications between community members, and represent families and villages' prosperity and well-being. Through the ICH project, local governments have imagined and created a sub-soundscape for the Guerx Sal Lad that caters to the state ideology of a united multi-ethnic nation. In this sub-soundscape, local governments have toned down the religious sounds of the Guerx Sal Lad and turned it into a cultural space displaying the music and dance traditions of the Bai. Basic-level cadres, representative transmitters, and local minority scholars, who mediate between the government and rural Bai villagers, embody another sub-soundscape that interlocks with others. While voicing and representing government propaganda and the idea of ethnic integration, their practices and discourses regarding the Guerx Sal Lad have also taken the people as a significant departure point for considering the practical space and benefits for people's traditions and religious experiences, as well as the ethnic pride of the Bai as an aggregate.

The formation of these sub-soundscapes varies according to their accented ideologies, that is, the meanings that three groups have given to and taken from the festival. Yet, at the same time, these sub-soundscapes, sound-making processes, and understandings of the festival, acting as a dialogic heteroglossia, are always mutually dependent and in negotiation with others. They are

interdependent and conditioned by each other's existence. There is not one sub-soundscape that is able to wipe out others completely. In the dialogic relationship of these sub-soundscapes, the state and its ideology have long occupied the dominant position which makes it hard for other groups to subvert the power relationship. However, while the state ideology and state-led projects as the centripetal forces attempt to unify different sounds and voices from other sub-soundscapes and make unsatisfying sounds disappear, they always find themselves disrupted and even outmaneuvered by these sounds. In the dialogic soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad, sounds and musics are important sites where different social actors negotiate the definition and practices of the Guerx Sal Lad. They are rooted in people's participation, especially their religious experiences.

The sub-soundscape of the rural Bai practice provides the basic foundation for governments and intellectuals' redefining of the Guerx Sal Lad. On the one hand, for the state, the celebratory atmosphere and diverse music and dance forms presented in the Guerx Sal Lad constitute a vital part of an inventory of cultural sources representing the unity of the Chinese nation and the diversity of ethnic minority cultures in China. For provincial and local authorities, on the other hand, making the Guerx Sal Lad a national-level ICH means not only a source of ethnic pride but also an important opportunity to conduct local economic development and raise the national and international reputation of the Bai and Dali region. To secure all the possible social and economic support and investment, it is crucial for local institutions to regulate the Guerx Sal Lad according to the state's cultural policies and political agenda.

In governmental representations of the Guerx Sal Lad, local government institutions have selected, filtered, and redefined the sounds—sounds, voices, meanings, and experiences—of rural Bai communities. The “Bai people” described in official texts indicate more of an abstract notion of collectivity and group identity that is used to invoke feelings of unity, collective pride, and

cultural diversity. Official promotion and ICH application texts depict the Guerx Sal Lad as a collective action of the Bai people, a joyful and diligent group that showcases their ancient traditions, distinct ethnic customs, and colorful musics and dances. This representation ignores the complex constitution of the people and generalizes their abundant and elaborate festival experiences into a monolithic meaning.<sup>177</sup> It turns the multiplicity of the Bai people's voices into a combined and homogeneous one at the service of ethnic pride and identity under the ideology of building a united multi-ethnic nation.

Local governments have filtered various sounds of the Guerx Sal Lad in their safeguarding and regulation of the festival. In the design and implementation of preservation programs related to the Guerx Sal Lad, local governments have ignored and excluded the religious sounds and activities of the rural communities. For example, the crucial practices of Lotus Pond Societies are not listed in the government-supported ICH item list, even though they are the core of people's participation in the festival. Rather, local governments have selected, promoted, and placed music and dance, genres that are less ideologically harmful by nature yet can become strong tools for governments' propaganda campaigns, into different transmission plans and school educations. Yet, it is important to note that, in the social-political context of China, the same process of heritagization is a mechanism through which religious traditions can be validated and the sensitive elements in them can be modified. As Liang Yongjia (2017, 74) argues, the act of the state government that turned the Guerx Sal Lad into an ICH is a new measure to subsume or legitimize non-subversive religious activities, and this is why these religious components "can be protected by law without being recognized as religions."

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<sup>177</sup> The urban population, for example, is not a major participant in the Guerx Sal Lad.



With different purposes but in a similar way, local minority intellectuals' discussion only dedicates limited attention to musics and sounds in the Guerx Sal Lad, even though these elements are exactly what are embedded in people's everyday practice. Local scholarship considers the Guerx Sal Lad significant evidence of the Bai as a valuable member of the multi-ethnic nation and an ethnic group with brilliant histories and cultures that contrast with the biased image of minorities as "backward" and "barbaric." Because of the constant collaborations with governments' official projects as important consultants, local minority scholars' narratives are often in line with the state ideology. Meanwhile, as both an ethnic minority and a public intellectual who is often affiliated with local government work, they bear the responsibility to elevate the social status of their ethnic groups and to explain their histories and cultures. Developing discourses around the Guerx Sal Lad is also a process whereby minority intellectuals can establish their voice and authority separate from the majority Han scholars.

Within these dialogic relationships, governmental actions and intellectuals' writings often have transformative effects on rural communities' practices. The government has established a government apparatus composed of local cadres, scholars, and rural community members through state-led and locally implemented ICH projects. Many Bai rural villagers have joined the apparatus and become representative transmitters. Through music-dance-making, teaching, and performances, representative transmitters pass on their expertise to other rural community members and the next generation, promote the state's agenda, and consolidate the idea of unity in the diversity of the multi-ethnic nation. Transmitters, local intellectuals, and teachers in schools have adopted and retold local scholars' accounts and interpretations of the Guerx Sal Lad's history, legends, and practices to students, journalists, and outside scholars who visit them. As a result, representative transmitters, their knowledge production, and their retelling of scholarly defined

Guex Sal Lad have inextricably linked to the intertwined power relations, ideological campaigns, and minority politics in contemporary China. Regarding rural members' practices, local government institutions have carried out the transmission project and established different transmission groups, which has resulted in increasing performances, organized and spontaneous, of traditional music, dance, and local operas at the festival as well as higher interest in Bai traditions from the younger generation. During this process, rural Bai members, rather than passively receiving and taking in these practices, have incorporated these performances and music traditions into their recreational activities both at the festival and in their everyday lives, renewing their ties with the Guex Sal Lad and their ways of creating a sense of community.

Some dialogues and voices might seem not straightforward or efficient on the surface. Did the local government's ICH projects safeguard the Guex Sal Lad? Whose Guex Sal Lad are they trying to protect? What about the rural members who are the main participants and bearers of the festival? Do they have agency in this at all? Did the process of heritagization impact Bai women's religious practices? In her examination of intangible cultural heritage in China, Helen Rees poses the question: "How large a role [do] national and local authorities actually have to play in helping maintain traditional arts?" In this case, helping maintain the Guex Sal Lad? Does the ICH movement reproduce local cultures at the expense of local people? Many scholars contend that, in China's ICH project, the most important participants and cultural bearers, that is the community members, have little say in the decision-making process and are "anonymous and homogeneous, lumped together as 'the mass,' subject to observation and representation" (Liang Yongjia 2017, 63; Chang 2017, 2; Byrne 2011, 147–49; Wang Liyang 2016, 186). While I fully agree with their argument, it is also important to note that, for most rural Bai people, ICH is still a foreign term that is remote from their knowledge and day-to-day life, not to mention any awareness of the whole

ICH movement happening in China and its relationship with the UNESCO. Moreover, the major approaches taken by local institutions to preserve the Guerx Sal Lad have encouraged more platforms for ethnic performing arts in the festival and constructed an official narrative of the festival that is, to a large degree, different from the rural community's practices. At this writing, these programs have not had any major impact on rural Bai people's religious practices or understanding of the Guerx Sal Lad. As long as people's religious experiences are not forcefully banned or oppressed by the centripetal forces, they will always keep on living.

For rural villagers, the Guerx Sal Lad is an important time and space for participants to reaffirm their relationship with the deities through their sounding and bodily ways of worship, pilgrimage, and celebration. It is one of many occasions for them, especially women, to fulfill their obligations as family members by voicing their prayers for the well-being and prosperity of the family. Meanwhile, the Guerx Sal Lad is a site where rural villagers apply and reflect on their received understanding of the perpetual cultural, social, and political changes surrounding them. The Guerx Sal Lad has become a performance platform for them, especially cultural bearers, to showcase their musical expertise and to perform their sociality, which in turn creates a communal sense of intimacy.

Through my fieldwork, I found out that a large number of rural villagers just keep on with their practices without caring about or even being aware of any regulations of local governments or the discourses formulated by intellectuals. They continue to practice what they have been doing irrespective of whether the state or local authorities take notice of them or not (Kuah and Liu 2017, 3). The whole discourse around ICH and the operation of different programs all stops at the level of representative transmitters. I argue that this state of holding oneself aloof from the outside world can be read as an expression of the rural community's agency against interferences from other

political and social powers. Their sounding and bodily practices offer the best proof. In Chapter 3, I have shown the ubiquitous presence and occurrence of rural communities' sounds, bodily movements, and sensual experiences at the Guerx Sal Lad. Sounds made by rural participants can be intersectionally soft-loud, static-moving, personal-communal, or secular-divine. These sounding moments create a powerful and permeating soundscape that expresses the situated agency of the rural communities to hold on to their traditions, their religious beliefs, and their power in everyday life. They are also significant in keeping the Guerx Sal Lad vibrant and indispensable to the Bai peoples' cultural, social, and religious life.

In this dissertation, I demonstrate that the soundscape of the Guerx Sal Lad is mediated and formed by the dialogic relationship among the sub-soundscapes of multiple key stakeholders. In this dialogic heteroglossia, social actors collaborate, negotiate, and come to terms with each other, shaping the Guerx Sal Lad and the Bai as they are now. Yet, this dialogic relationship under no circumstances stays in a static status quo. It is, on the contrary, an open-ended and compositional process constantly subject to new changes and dialogues. Every time I go back to the field, new engagements and episodes always meet me at some unexpected corners. In my recent follow-up fieldwork, I have seen older members in Lotus Pond Societies transferring their pilgrimage obligations to younger members and sending them off to Weishan with wishes; I have seen small kids running around in temples, helping out with rituals and playing whatever instrument they can with the elders; I have also heard complaints from female representative transmitters about their anger against the result of the election on higher level representative transmitters which only includes male transmitters with fewer efforts and lower skills.

Since the establishment of the PRC, the Guerx Sal Lad, its religiosity, ethnic belonging, and many and various practices, have always been at the intersection of voices uttered, amplified,

and circulated by different actors involved in framing the Bai culture and forming the ethnic identity of Bai. The continuations and new shifts I encountered during my fieldwork and multiple versions of the festival across time and groups of actors—as a primitive fertility cult, a feudal superstition, a carnival of the Bai, a representation of the Bai culture and Bai ethnicity, and an occasion for people to communicate with the deities and other community members—have reflected and signified the participation and contestation of these different voices. As the contestation continues, the Guerx Sal Lad will take on new meanings and forms that superscribe, negotiate with, or even replace existing ones. During this process, what is crucial yet often overlooked is that when some groups speak louder than others, disempowered and underrepresented groups will be excluded and pushed to the margins because of their incompatibility and incompetence with the dominant ideologies. More often than not, these groups constitute significant and indispensable partakers in the festival and ensure its sustainability. However, even if the voices of these groups are minimized or ignored in the dominant accounts of the festival, they will still persist and continue as a vital part of people’s everyday lives and soundscapes.

## Appendix A Glossary of Chinese Terms and Names

This glossary is divided into twelve sections: core terms associated with the Guerx Sal Lad; deities' names; personal names; scriptural titles; Bai History and ethnic politics; genres, titles, and terms of sound, music, and dance; institutions; place names; historical literature; policies, laws, and regulations; administrative divisions; and other terms. The alphabetization is arranged according to the alphabetic order of the Hanyu Pinyin system. For Bai terms, their Hanyu Pinyin romanization and translations in Chinese characters are both given. The names of authors and literature that appear in the Bibliography are not repeated here.

### Core Terms Associated with the Guerx Sal Lad

<i>fengliu hui</i>	风流会	Raosanling	绕三灵
<i>fodu</i>	佛都	Raoshanlin	绕山林
<i>hualiu laoren (zhishu laoren)</i>	花柳老人(执树老人)	Shendu/shendu	神都
Raosanglin	绕桑林	<i>xiandu</i>	仙都

### Deities' Names

Aimin huangdi	爱民皇帝	Jinye	金爷
Baxian	八仙	Jinyushen	金鱼神
Caishen	财神	Jiulong shengmu	九龙[隆]圣母
Chenghuang	城隍	Jiutian weifang shengmu	九天卫房圣母
Dahei tianshen	大黑天神	Liuchu Dawang	六畜大王
Dasheng xilai hufa lingzhen wufang jianguo huangdi	大圣西来护法灵镇五方建国皇帝	Longwang	龙王
Dimu	地母	<i>luocha</i>	罗刹

Dishen	笛神	Luoshen	螺神
Donghai longwang	东海龙王	Mashen	马神
Dou'er gege	痘二哥哥	Niushen	牛神
Duan Chicheng	段赤城	Sanbai shenwang	三百神王
Erhe Lingdi	洱河灵帝	Shanshen	山神
<i>fuma</i>	驸马	Wenchang	文昌
Guandi	关帝	Wubai shenwang	五百神王
Guanyin	观音	<i>taizi</i>	太子
<i>guomu</i>	国母	Xinwang taizi	新王太子
Han Xiangzi	韩湘子	Yuhuang dadi	玉皇大帝
Huguo bao'an jingdi	护国保安景帝	Zhushen	猪神
Jianguo huangdi	建国皇帝	Zisun niangniang	子孙娘娘
Jingu	金姑		

#### Personal Names (Folk Artists, Cadres, Scholars, and Historical Figures in Dali)

Bai wang	白王	Shi Jie	施介
Du Xiaonian	杜小年	Shilong	世隆
Duan Wei	段位	Sun Zhongshan	孙中山
Du Wenxiu	杜文秀	Xinuluo	细奴逻
Duan Baolong	段保隆	Yang Yanchun	杨艳春
Duan Deyuan	段德元	Yang Yanjun	杨宴君
Duan Siping	段思平	Yang Zhengye	杨政业
Duan Zongbang	段宗榜	Zhang Liangshan	张亮山
He Songkang	何松康	Zhang Yulin	张玉林
Hong Xiaomei	洪小妹	Zhang Lejin	张乐进求
Hubilie	忽必烈	Zhao Caiting	赵彩庭
Jiang Jieshi	蒋介石	Zhao Dongmei	赵冬梅
Li Jishou	李继寿	Zhao Fukun	赵福坤
Li Xieyi	李燮羲	Zhao Lixiong	赵立雄
Li Xing	李兴	Zhao Piding	赵丕鼎
Li Xuesheng	李学圣	Zhao Qian	赵茜
Li Zhanjia	李占甲	Zhao Shuzhen	赵淑珍
Ming Taizu	明太祖	Zhao Xiangjun	赵向军
Miu Luanhe	缪鸾和	Zheng Maisi	郑买嗣
Sai Dianchi	赛典赤	Zhu Yuanzhang	朱元璋

Piluoge 皮逻阁

### Scriptural Titles

Baowei zhenjing 保卫真经  
Chaoshan diao 朝山调  
Diyu jing 地獄经  
Guanyin jing 观音经

Jiejingu jing 接金姑经  
Song Jingu Jing 送金姑经  
Taizi jing 太子经

### Bai History and Ethnic Politics

Ailao 哀牢  
Bai ren 白人  
Baizi guo 白子国  
Bo 僂  
Dali guo 大礼国  
Dayuejin 大跃进  
Dazhong guo 大中国

Diqiang 氏羌  
Fanyou yundong 反右运动  
Gaige kaifeng 改革开放  
gaitu guiliu 改土归流  
jiaohua 教化  
junjia 军家  
liyue 礼乐  
manyi 蛮夷

Mengshe zhao 蒙舍诏  
minjia 民家  
mingcong zhuren 名从主人

minzu quyuzizhi 民族区域自治  
minzu shibie 民族识别  
minzu zijue 民族自决  
Nanzhao 南诏  
Pingnan guo 平南国  
Tianzhu 天竺  
tongyi de duominzu guojia 统一的多民族国家  
Tubo 吐蕃  
Tudi gaige 土地改革  
tujia 土家  
tuntian 屯田  
tusi 土司  
weisuo 卫所  
Wenhua dageming 文化大革命  
Yunnan minzu shibie yanjiu zu 云南民族识别研究组  
Yunnan wang 云南王  
zhongyang daibiao 中央代表团  
tuan  
zhongyuan 中原



## Genres, Titles, and Terms of Sound, Music, and Dance

<i>bajiao gu</i>	八角鼓	<i>jinqian gu</i>	金钱鼓
<i>baidiao</i>	白调	<i>longbaiwei</i>	龙摆尾
<i>Bai ju</i>	白剧	Longshangtian	龙上天
Baizi Qinghuai	白子情怀	<i>longtaitou</i>	龙抬头
<i>ban</i>	板	Maque diao	麻雀调
<i>baojuan</i>	宝卷	<i>muyu</i>	木鱼
<i>bawang bian</i>	霸王鞭	<i>nishengci</i>	拟声词
<i>chenci</i>	衬词	<i>qiang</i>	腔
<i>chuantong yinyue</i>	传统音乐	Qingshen diao	请神调
<i>chuantong wudao</i>	传统舞蹈	<i>sanxian</i>	三弦
<i>chuichui qiang</i>	吹吹腔	<i>sanglin wu</i>	桑林舞
<i>chuidayue</i>	吹打乐	Shi'er shu	十二属
<i>dabenqu</i>	大本曲	<i>shuang feiyan</i>	双飞燕
Dajing Diao	大经调	<i>suona</i> <i>yixiang,</i>	唢呐一响，黄金万
		<i>huangjin wanliang</i>	两
<i>sheng</i>	声	Tan wugeng	叹五更
<i>dilder/suot</i>	唢呐	<i>diao</i>	调
<i>luof/suona</i>			
<i>erhu</i>	二胡	<i>wulongdui</i>	舞龙队
<i>erlong xizhu</i>	二龙戏珠	<i>xiaodiao</i>	小调
<i>huadeng</i>	花灯	<i>yangge</i>	秧歌
<i>hualiu qu</i>	花柳曲	<i>yin</i>	音
<i>jianpu</i>	简谱	<i>yinqing</i>	引磬
Jie/songkediao	接/送客调	<i>yishi yinsheng</i>	仪式音声
<i>jingtou</i>	经头	Zhongzhi chengcheng	众志成城抗疫情
		<i>kang yiqing</i>	

## Institutions

<i>chuanxi dian</i>	传习点	<i>gewu tuan</i>	歌舞团
<i>chuanxi duiwu</i>	传习队伍	Guojia feiwuzhi	国家非物质文化遗产
		wenhuayichan	遗产保护工作专
		baohugongzuo	家委员会
		zhuanjiaweiyuanhui	

<i>chuanxi suo</i>	传习所	Guowuyuan bangongting	国务院办公厅
Dali baijutuan	大理白剧团	Minzu cun	民族村
Dali baizu wenhua yanjiu yuan	大理白族文化研究院	<i>minzu ganbu xuexiao</i>	民族干部学校
Dali baizu zizhizhou bowuguan	大理白族自治州博物 馆	Minzu xueyuan	民族学院
Dali baizu zizhi zhou wenhua guanliju	大理白族自治州文化 管理局	<i>quyi tuan</i>	曲艺团
Dali diqu tongzhanbu	大理地区统战部	<i>wengong tuan</i>	文工团
Dali feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu guanli suo	大理非物质文化遗产 保护管理所	<i>xuanchuan dui</i>	宣传队
Dalishi feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuancheng jidi	大理市非物质文化遗 产传承基地	Yunnan minzu chubanshe	云南民族出版社
Dalishi wenhua lvyou guanli ju	大理市文化旅游管理 局	Yunnansheng shaoshu minzu guji bangongshi	云南省少数民族 古籍办公室
Dalishi Wenhua guan	大理市文化馆	Yunnan shengwei xuanchuan bu	云南省委宣传部
Dali shiwei xuanchuan bu	大理市委宣传部	Yunnan Shifan Daxue	云南师范大学
Dali wenhua shengtai baohu shiyuan qu	大理文化生态保护实 验区	Zhongguo kexueyuan	中国科学院
Dalizhou feiyi zhongxin	大理州非遗中心	Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu zhongxin	中国非物质文化 遗产保护中心
Dalizhou Minzu Gewutuan	大理州民族歌舞团	Zhongguo yishu yanjiu yuan	中国艺术研究院
Dalizhou wenhua yishu yanjiusuo	大理州文化艺术研究 所	Zhongyang minzu shiwu weiyuanhui	中央民族事务委 员会
<i>dangxiao</i>	党校	Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai	中央人民广播电 台
Dongmen Wanxiao	东门完小	Zuoyi Wanxiao	作邑完小

## Place Names

Baohe si	保和寺	Min jiang	岷江
Chongcheng si	崇圣寺	Qianxun ta	千寻塔
Da Tumu	大土墓	Qingdong	庆洞
Dali Gucheng	大理古城	Qiwu cun	七五村
Diancangshan	点苍山	Sanglin gu	桑林谷
Erhai	洱海	Santa	三塔
Erhe ci	洱河祠	Santa si	三塔寺
Eryuan	洱源	Sha cun	沙村
Fengming cun	凤鸣村	Shangguan zhen	上关镇
Haidong zhen	海东镇	Shengyuan si	圣源寺
Hehua cun	荷花村	Wanqiao	湾桥
Heyi jiang	河矣江	Weishan	巍山
Heyicheng	河矣城	Wenge cun	文阁村
Huguo ci	护国祠	Wutai feng	五台峰
Huishui tianzhuang	绘水田庄	Xiaguan	下关
<i>jiangnan</i>	江南	Xiangyang he	向阳河
Jizushan	鸡足山	Xibian Dasi	西边大寺
Jiangdu cun	江渡村	Xizhou zhen	喜洲镇
Jiangwei zhen	江尾镇	Xizhou guzhen	喜洲古镇
Jiutanshen miao	九坛神庙	Xiazuoyi cun	下作邑村
Lancang jiang	澜沧江	Xiaobeideng cun	小北登村
Ling ta	灵塔	Yinqiao zhen	银桥镇
Majiuqi cun	马久邑村	Zhanggutaipo miao	张姑太婆庙

## Folk Belief

<i>achili</i>	阿叱力	Lianchi hui	莲池会
<i>asheli</i>	阿阁梨	<i>lingyan</i>	灵验
<i>azhali</i>	阿吒力	<i>mixin</i>	迷信
<i>azuoli</i>	阿佐梨	<i>nian</i>	念
<i>baijing</i>	拜经	<i>qiao xianghuo</i>	瞧香火
<i>baishi</i>	白事	<i>qiyu</i>	祈雨
<i>benzhu</i>	本主	<i>shengji</i>	生祭

<i>biaowen</i>	表文	<i>shenxian</i>	神仙天上过
		<i>tianshangguo</i>	
<i>darao</i>	打扰	<i>shuji</i>	熟祭
Dongjing hui	洞经会	<i>tianchu</i>	天厨
<i>foye</i>	佛爷	<i>tianshang xialaide</i>	天上下来的
<i>erhai zhi shen</i>	洱海之神	<i>wuxi</i>	巫覡
<i>gongdeqian</i>	功德钱	<i>xinyang</i>	信仰
<i>gongdexiang</i>	功德箱	<i>yinsi</i>	淫祀
<i>guahong</i>	挂红	<i>zongjiao</i>	宗教
<i>jingmu</i>	经母		

### Historical Literature

<i>Baiguo Yinyou</i>	白国因由	<i>Lvshi Chunqiu</i>	吕氏春秋
<i>Bogu Tongji</i>	樊古通记	<i>Raosanling Zhuchi</i>	绕三灵竹枝词三首
		<i>Ci Sanshou</i>	
<i>Bogu Tongji</i>	樊古通记浅述	<i>Yunnan minzu</i>	云南民族口传非
<i>Qianshu</i>		<i>kouchuan feiwuzhi</i>	物质文化遗产总
		<i>wenhua yichan</i>	目提要
		<i>zongmu tiyao</i>	
<i>Dianzaiji</i>	滇载记	<i>Yunnan shaoshu</i>	云南少数民族古
		<i>minzu guji zhenben</i>	籍珍本集成
		<i>jicheng</i>	
<i>Dianzhong</i>	滇中琐记·绕山林	<i>Yunnan shaoshu</i>	云南少数民族古
<i>Suoji-Raoshanlin</i>		<i>minzu gudian shishi</i>	典史诗全集
		<i>quanji</i>	
<i>Huayang Guozhi</i>	华阳国志	<i>Zhouli</i>	周礼
<i>Li Ji</i>	礼记	<i>Zhuchi-Raosanling</i>	竹枝词·绕三灵
<i>Lunyu</i>	论语		

### Policies, Laws, and Regulations

<i>daibiaoxing</i>	代表性传承人	<i>wenhua shengtai</i>	文化生态保护
<i>chuanchengren</i>		<i>baohu qu</i>	区
Dali baizu zizhi zhou	大理白族自治州第一批	<i>wuzu gonghe</i>	五族共和
<i>diyipi minzu minjian</i>	民族民间传统文化保护		
	名录		

chuantong wenhua boahu minglu				
Dali baizu zizhizhou feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu tiaoli	大理白族自治州非物质 文化遗产保护条例	Yunnansheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu tiaoli	云南省非物质 文化遗产保护 条例	
minzu gongzuo	民族工作	Yunnansheng feiwuzhi wenhua yichan xiangmu daibiaoxing chuanchengren rending yu guanli banfa	云南省非物质 文化遗产项目 传承人认定与 管理办法	
Minzu quyue zizhi fa	民族区域自治法	Yunnansheng minzu minjian wenhua baohu gongcheng	云南省民族民 间文化保护工 程	
Gongtong gangling	共同纲领	Yunnansheng minzu minjian chuantong wenhua baohu tiaoli	云南省民族民 间传统文化保 护条例	
Guanyu jiaqiang woguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu gongzuo de yijian	关于加强我国非物质文 化遗产保护工作的意见	zhengtixing baohu	整体性保护	
Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiaozuo shenbao pingding zanxing banfa	国家级非物质文化遗产 代表作申报评定暂行办 法	Zhonghua renmin gongheguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan fa	中华人民共和 国非物质文化 遗产法	
Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan daibiaoxing xiangmu minglu	国家级非物质文化遗产 代表性项目名录	Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan chuancheng renqun yanxiu peixun jihua	中国非物质文 化遗产传承人 群研修培训计 划	
Guojiaji feiwuzhi wenhua yichan minglu	国家级非物质文化遗产 名录	Zhongguo minzu minjian wenhua baohu gongcheng	中国民族民间 文化保护工程	

## Administrative Divisions

<i>jiedao banshichu</i>	街道办事处	<i>she</i>	社
<i>minzu xiang</i>	民族乡	<i>zhen</i>	镇

## Other Terms

<i>amei</i>	阿妹	<i>minsu</i>	民俗
<i>baizu xue</i>	白族学	<i>minzu</i>	民族
Baizuxue Yanjiu	白族学研究	<i>mu huafeng</i>	慕华风
<i>bang</i>	帮	<i>nengge shanwu</i>	能歌善舞
<i>caop het/chaoli</i>	朝里	<i>qiaoqiaodi</i>	悄悄地
<i>chaobai</i>	朝拜	<i>qu</i>	去
<i>chuantongde wenhua</i>	传统的文化表现形式	<i>qu biaoan</i>	去表演
<i>biaoxian xingshi</i>			
<i>dhuantong meishu</i>	传统美术	<i>renao</i>	热闹
<i>dangzhibu shuji</i>	党支部书记	<i>sheshu</i>	社树
<i>degao wangzhong</i>	德高望重	<i>shenfen zheng</i>	身份证
<i>douyin</i>	抖音	<i>shengchan dui</i>	生产队
<i>ducai</i>	肚才	<i>shengdou</i>	笙斗
<i>duilian</i>	对联	<i>shiye danwei</i>	事业单位
<i>duyou</i>	独有	<i>tanqing shuoai</i>	谈情说爱
<i>fawang</i>	发旺	<i>tiyu, youyi yu zaji</i>	体育、游艺与 杂技
		<i>tizhi nei</i>	体制内
<i>gallal</i>	干兰	<i>toutoudi</i>	偷偷地
<i>ge</i>	哥	<i>wanghong daka dian</i>	网红打卡点
<i>gongfang</i>	公房	<i>weixin</i>	微信
<i>guifan</i>	规范	<i>wenhua kongjian</i>	文化空间
<i>guojia</i>	国家	<i>wenwu baohu danwei</i>	文物保护单位
<i>hanhua</i>	汉话	<i>wenyi gongzuoze</i>	文艺工作者
<i>hongtou wenjian</i>	红头文件	<i>wu yixi weigui</i>	物以稀为贵
<i>Huashanghua</i>	花上花	<i>wugu fengdeng</i>	五谷丰登
Huaxia	华夏	<i>xiangshang</i>	向上
<i>huanjieyumin</i>	还节于民	<i>xueyuan pai</i>	学院派
<i>hui fu</i>	恢复	<i>yang</i>	阳
<i>Huishui bei</i>	绘水杯		

<i>huoba jie</i>	火把节	<i>yaoqian shu</i>	摇钱树
<i>jide xingshan</i>	积德行善	<i>yehe</i>	野合
<i>jiguan</i>	籍贯	<i>yin</i>	阴
<i>jiankang</i>	健康	<i>yinsi</i>	隐私
<i>ju ren</i>	举人	<i>yuanshengtai</i>	原生态
<i>lao baiwen</i>	老白文	<i>zhaoyao jing</i>	照妖镜
<i>laobaixing</i>	老百姓	<i>zheng nengliang</i>	正能量
<i>laodong renmin</i>	劳动人民	<i>zhonghua minzu</i>	中华民族
<i>li</i>	里	<i>Zhongguo feiwuzhi</i>	中国非物质文
		<i>wenhua yichan pucha</i>	化遗产普查手
		<i>shouce</i>	册
<i>lianhua guan</i>	莲花冠	<i>zhongguo tese</i>	中国特色
<i>longpao</i>	龙袍	<i>zhuanye yanyuan</i>	专业演员
<i>lugu</i>	露骨	<i>zu</i>	组
<i>minjian</i>	民间		

## Appendix B Lyrics of Four Hualiu Tunes Performed by Zhao Caiting and Zhao Shuzhen

Below is a translation of four sections of the hualiu tunes performed by Zhao Caiting and Zhao Shuzhen. Each section presents what they encountered and experienced at a particular place during the Guerx Sal Lad. The four places include (in order) the market outside the Shendu temple, the Shendu temple, the dam where people have their entertainment activities, and Heyicheng village.

Since the sentences of hualiu tunes are often incomplete as a subject or conjunction is sometimes absent, I attempt to follow the same structure in my English translation, unless the meaning of a sentence becomes unclear, then the necessary elements will be added in parenthesis.

### Section 1: at the market outside the Shendu temple (Example 9)

#### Mandarin Translation

男：上关到下关一百二十二公里。

女：应该不用吧！

男：上关往下是周城街，下关往上是喜洲街。

女：走错了吧！

#### English Translation (“M” indicates Man; “W” indicates Woman)

M: One-hundred and twenty-two kilometers from Shangguan to Xiaguan.

W: I don't think it's that far!

M: Below Shangguan is the street of Zhoucheng, above Xiaguan is the street of Xizhou.<sup>178</sup>

W: I'm afraid that's the wrong way!

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<sup>178</sup> In Dali, people often use “up/above” or “down/below” to indicate north and south; for instance, Xizhou is above/north of the Dali Old Town.



男：喜洲街好漂亮，喜洲街好热闹，南边卖鱼，北边卖米。	M: The street in Xizhou is so beautiful, so renao. (Sellers) sell fish in the south and rice in the north.
女：买一箩筐米！	W: Buy a basket of rice!
男：石头牌坊下卖肉，木头牌坊下卖雪。	M: Meat is sold under the stone arch, snow is sold under the wooden arch.
女：秤吃几袋雪？	W: How many bags of snow can the scale hold?
男：兄弟姐妹来吃雪，吃雪的钱我来付。	M: Brothers and sisters, come eat the snow, I will pay for it.
女：难道你不付还要让我付吗？	W: Are you trying to get away with it so I will pay?
男：女孩子们唱唱跳跳，把鞋子也跳破洞。	M: Girls sing and dance until there are holes in their shoes.
女：小心被踩到！	W: Be careful, don't get stepped on!
男：一跳跳到大理城，衣衫裤子买一套。	M: Dance to Dali Town, buy a set of clothes.
女：买好几套！	W: Buy several!
男：白衬衣一买件，红褂子穿在上。	M: Buy a white shirt, wear a red coat on it.
女：可别穿错了！	W: Don't wear the wrong cloth!
男：白衬衣买一件，绣花鞋买一只。	M: Buy a white shirt, buy a pair of embroidered shoes.
女：要买好几双！	W: Buy several!
男：三缕色箍买一串，四两银镯买一只。	M: Buy a three-colored headband, buy a four <i>liang</i> silver bracelet. <sup>179</sup>
女：要买就买好几只！	W: If you want to buy, just buy several of them!
男：麦草帽子买一顶，兔子帽带上面。	M: Buy a wheat straw hat, then wear a rabbit hat on it.

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<sup>179</sup> *Liang* is a traditional unit of weight. One kilogram equals twenty *liang*.

女：可别带错了！  
 男：手上握着把扇子，绣花手帕甩朝后。  
 女：要甩朝前！  
 男：脸蛋化成粉红色，打扮成绕三灵的样子。  
 女：还没到绕三灵呢！  
 男：一逛逛到庆洞村，来看热闹的人很多。  
 女：人山人海！  
 男：老奶奶们过来看，老爷爷们踮着脚看。  
 女：注意安全！  
 男：一群吊儿郎当的光棍把我拖上又拖下。  
 女：把我裤子也脱掉！  
 男：把我拖到馆子里，请我吃生皮。  
 女：多切点生皮给我们吃！  
 男：哄他我用嘴来说，让他白欢喜一场。  
 女：你这是在骗人呐！  
 男：他若问起我住处，我是弹三弦他嫂。  
 女：是吹笛子他哥！

W: Don't wear the wrong one!  
 M: Hold a fan, swing the embroidered handkerchief toward the back.  
 W: (You) should swing toward the front!  
 M: Put makeup on the face so it turns red, dress up as the look of the Guerx Sal Lad.  
 W: Haven't arrived the Guerx Sal Lad yet!  
 M: Stroll to Qingdong village, so many people come to see the renao scene.  
 W: So crowded!  
 M: Old grandmas come to see, old grandpas stand on tiptoes to see.  
 W: Be careful!  
 M: A group of hooligans drag me here and there.  
 W: (They) take off my pants as well!  
 M: They drag me to the restaurant, treat me with *shengpi* (raw meat).<sup>180</sup>  
 W: Cut more shengpi for us!  
 M: Use my talking to amuse him, let him feel cheerful for nothing.  
 W: You're lying to him!  
 M: If he asks me where do I live, I will say I am the sister-in-law of that *sanxian* player.  
 W: (It should be) the brother of the flute player!

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<sup>180</sup> *Shengpi* is a food common to the Bai. It often includes raw pork and half grilled pig skin.

## Section 2: in front of the Shendu temple (Example 10)

### Mandarin Translation

男：今天到了五百神王庙，到了之后我们把香敬上。

女：已经敬了很多了！

男：干拉、乳扇抬朝前，把香烧起来。

女：香已经烧得很火了！

男：猪头敬在前，再敬一些鸡鹅鸭。

女：已经摆的满满的了！

男：兄妹二人跪下磕头，敬神王。

女：对了！

男：我们希望神王保佑我们，保佑鸡猪牛马大发大旺。

女：谢金口！

男：保佑我们庄稼有个好收成。

女：谢金口！

男：一亩地可以收两三千，还能有剩粮剩米。

女：吃不完拿到街上卖！

### English Translation (“M” indicates Man; “W” indicates Woman)

M: Today we came to the Temple of the King of Five Hundred Gods, after we arrive, we offer him incense.

W: You have offered a lot already!

M: Put gallal and *niuxsei* at the front, burn the incense.

W: The incense is burning strong enough!

M: Offer the pig head first, then some chicken, duck, and goose.

W: The table is full!

M: Brother and sister get down on their knees and worship the King.

W: Right!

M: We wish the King will bless us, bless chicken, pig, cow, and horse with prosperity.

W: Thank your golden mouth!

M: Bless us with good harvest.

W: Thank your golden mouth!

M: Every *mu* of the land can receive two or three thousand (*jin*), there is still rice left.<sup>181</sup>

W: If not able to eat them all then sell them on the street!

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<sup>181</sup> *Mu* is a Chinese unit for the measurement of land. One *mu* is approximately one-sixth of an acre. *Jin* is a unit of weight. One *jin* equals half kilogram.

男：保佑天下人民生活好，保佑天下人民平平安安。  
 女：谢金口！  
 男：保佑我俩活到一百岁，要过一百年。  
 女：一百岁也可以的！  
 男：绕三灵从老一辈就已经流传下来，大家都来唱唱跳跳。  
 女：好好地唱起来！  
 男：一年一次的绕三灵十分热闹。  
 女：实在很热闹啊！  
 男：我独自去看一看，抬起头来细细看。  
 女：我来看看！  
 男：白子白女唱白调，实在很好听。  
 女：真好听啊！  
 男：绕三灵从老一辈就流传下来，一逛就得逛三年。  
 女：没错！  
 男：如果三年里你只逛了两年，那你会因为不守承诺而肚子疼。  
 女：那会非常痛！  
 男：没有孩子的人去绕三灵，风流会上求娃娃。

M: Bless all people to have a good life, bless all people with safety.  
 W: Thank your golden mouth!  
 M: Bless us to live to one-hundred years old, to pass one-hundred years.  
 W: One-hundred years old is fine!  
 M: The Guerx Sal Lad is inherited from the older generation, everybody comes to sing and dance.  
 W: (Let's) enjoy the singing!  
 M: The Guerx Sal Lad which happens once every year is very renao.  
 W: It's really renao!  
 M: Let me go there and see it alone, hold my head up and see it closely.  
 W: Let me see!  
 M: Bai men and women sing Bai tunes, sound so nice.  
 W: (They) sound really nice!  
 M: The Guerx Sal Lad is inherited from the older generation, once (you) start to stroll (you) need to continue for three years.  
 W: That's right!  
 M: If you only stroll for two out of three years, you will have bellyache because you don't keep your promise.  
 W: (You will) have a lot of pain!  
 M: People with no kid go to the Guerx Sal Lad, to beg for a kid in the fengliu hui.

女：求一个大胖小子！	W: To get a big fat boy!
男：你若求到了，就会生个大胖儿子。	M: If you begged, you will have a big fat son.
女：谢金口！	W: Thank your golden mouth!
男：绕三灵上谈情又说爱，在老一辈那里就已经许下了承诺。	M: Courting during the Guerx Sal Lad, the older generation has made their promises.
女：有这样的承诺！	W: (They) did promise!
男：自由婚姻，自己做主，与父母无关。	M: Free marriage, make your own decision, it has nothing to do with parents.
女：都是自己做主啦！	W: (People) all make their own decisions!

### Section 3: on the dam (Example 11)

#### Mandarin Translation

男：三月到了三月三，四月到了绕三灵。

女：对啦！我们来绕三灵啦！

男：我曾带媳妇去过绕三灵，可还没有带妹子去过。

女：我们同阿哥一起去！

男：明天你若和阿哥一起去，我带你去绕三灵。

女：好呀！

男：买个梳子梳头发，买你一对帽子。

女：多买几对！

#### English Translation (“M” indicates Man; “W” indicates Woman)

M: It's the time of March the third in March, the Guerx Sal Lad in April.

W: That's right! We come to the Guerx Sal Lad!

M: I brought my wife to the Guerx Sal Lad before, never other girls.

W: We go with age together!

M: If you go with age(me) tomorrow, I will take you to the Guerx Sal Lad.

W: Sounds good!

M: Buy a comb to comb your hair, buy you a pair of hats.

W: Buy more!

男：买着帽子去拜老爷。	M: After buying hat (we) go to worship <i>laoye</i> (old master). <sup>182</sup>
女：真炫耀呀！	W: Very showy!
男：走到南边拜老爷，走到北边买酸角吃。	M: Go to the south to worship <i>laoye</i> , to the north to buy tamarind.
女：多买一些！	W: Buy more!
男：妹子你若喜欢吃酸，可以多买吃几个。	M: Girl, if you like to eat sour food, (we) can buy more.
女：真好！	W: That's very nice!
男：看到北边有一个池塘。	M: I see a pond in the north.
女：别怕，不会飞走！	W: Don't worry, it won't fly away!
男：池塘旁边有燕子一对，我们要打它，它却飞走了。	M: There is a pair of swallows beside the pond. I want to hit it, but it flew away.
女：飞来飞去的！	W: Fly around!
男：一直在那左飞飞右飞飞。	M: Fly to the left and to the right.
女：注意着一点！	W: Be careful!
男：这对燕子分开了，还做什么夫妻。	M: If this pair of swallows separate, they cannot be husband and wife anymore.
女：夫妻分开了！	W: The couple split up!
男：跳来跳去，猫嘴里衔这一只老鼠。	M: Jump here and there, the cat holds a rat in the mouth.
男：一位母亲看了心疼，躲到楼上哭。	M: A mother feels distressed, hides upstairs and cries.
女：她的鞋子坏了！	W: Her shoes are worn out.
男：哭什么呢？她既没裤子也没鞋子。	M: Why crying? She does not have pants or shoes.
女：多给她买上几套！	W: Buy her more cloths!

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<sup>182</sup> Here, *laoye* indicates to the King of Five Hundred Gods.

男：裤子也烂鞋子也破。

M: Pants and shoes are worn out.

女：给她买上几双鞋！

W: Buy her more shoes!

男：十月怀胎，九月生，父母生我那时，把我们当黄金。

M: Be pregnant in October, give birth in September, when I was born, my parent treated me like gold.

女：热热乎乎包裹起！

W: Wrap you up warmly!

男：把小脸蛋洗干净，穿上暖和的衣服。

M: Clean the little face, wear warm cloths.

女：好好的捂起来！

W: Cover you up nicely!

男：害怕捂出热痱子，心窝吓得蹦蹦跳。

M: (They were) afraid that I would get heat rash, their hearts were pounding.

女：你小心被吓坏！

W: Be careful, don't to be frightened!

男：小孩生下来几年。

M: The baby was born for a few years already.

女：现在出生的孩子，日子很幸福！

W: Life for kids born in these days are good!

男：出生在民国时期的孩子，长大去当兵。

M: Kids born in the Republic period went to be soldiers when they grew up.

女：我们也是兄弟姐妹很多！

W: We did have a lot of brothers and sisters!

男：他说两个孩子中抽一人，三个儿子抽两丁。

M: One would be drawn out of two sons, two would be drawn out of three.

女：多抽几个！

W: Draw more!

男：因为我们也是家里兄妹多，名字也挂上。

M: We had many brothers and sisters as well, therefore put our names on as well.

女：确定吗？

W: Are you sure?

男：那时我们去大理，没有遇到验兵官。

M: When we went to Dali, we didn't encounter the army inspector.

女：遇不到是假的！

W: I don't believe that you didn't encounter them!

男：一天我们来回走，晌午去到湾桥吃。

M: We stroll around, go to Wanqiao at noon to eat.

女：会被饿坏吧！

W: (We) will get very hungry!

男：切一盘生皮，烧酒倒两三斤。

M: Cut a plate of shengpi, pour two to three jin of liquor.

女：小心醉倒了！

W: Don't get drunk!

男：我们朋友兄妹那么多，就你一人看着我们吃。

M: We have many friends, brothers, and sisters here, only you are watching us eat.

女：一人吃一点！

W: Everybody eat some!

男：我是叫花子受了气，越想越伤心。

M: I am like a beggar being a doormat, the more I think the sadder I am.

女：不要太伤心！

W: Don't be too sad!

#### Section 4: at Heyicheng village (Example 12)

##### Mandarin Translation

男：左脚一步一步走，右脚一步一步跟。

**English Translation** (“M” indicates Man; “W” indicates Woman)

M: The left foot walks one step by another, the right foot follows.

女：慢慢走！

W: Don't rush!

男：不知不觉走到了河矣城，河矣城的人很有情义。

M: (I) just realize we arrived Heyicheng, people here are very affectionate.

女：多么有诚意！

W: They are so sincere!

男：抬出来的那杯茶如此的香，上面撒芝麻。

M: The tea they brought smells so nice, topped with sesame.

女：香气冲鼻！

M: Smells really good!

男：抬起头来细细看。

M: Hold my head up and see.

女：多看看！

W: See more!

男：二十四日河矣城逛下来，实在热闹啊！

M: Strolling in Heyicheng on the twenty-fourth, it is so renao.

女：实在热闹啊！

W: It's really renao!



男：兄妹二人唱调唱到庙里面，有很多的经母老太在那边。	M: Brother and sister sing tunes until arriving at the temple, there are a lot of jingmus inside.
女：真是太热闹了！	W: It's so renao!
男：手里握着一只木鱼，把经念起来。	M: Hold a wooden fish, recite the scripture.
女：一人比一人念的好啊！	M: (They) recite so well!
男：男子修行修一人，女子修行修一屋。	M: Men self-cultivate themselves, women cultivate the whole group.
女：谢金口！	W: Thank your golden mouth!
男：老人老太修行修成佛，以后上天堂。	M: Old men and women self-cultivate toward Buddhahood, they will go to heaven.
女：全部接上天堂！	W: Send them all to heaven!
男：让我自己来看一看，抬起头来细细看。	M: Let me see, hold my head up and see closely.
女：多看看！	W: See more!
男：北边舞着一条龙，南边舞来一对狮子。	M: (People are) performing dragon dance in the north and lion dance in the south.
女：一人比一人舞得好！	W: They dance so well!
男：舞龙舞狮多好看，实在好热闹！	M: It's so nice to see dragon dance and lion dance, so renao!
女：把鞋子也挤掉！	W: It's too crowded, shoes got lost!
男：兄妹唱调唱到大殿里，跪下磕个头。	M: Brother and sister sing tunes until arriving at the main hall, get down our knees and kowtow.
女：可以多磕几个头！	W: (We) can kowtow for a few more times!
男：今天来到了五百神王庙，来磕个头。	M: Today we came to the Temple of the King of Five Hundred Gods to kowtow.
女：多磕个头！	W: Kowtow for a few more times!

男：本主您要保佑我们，保佑大家身体健康。	M: Benzhu please protect us, bless us with good health.
女：谢金口！	W: Thank your golden mouth!
男：保佑天下人民生活过得好，家家都过上好日子。	M: Bless all people to live a good life, every family lives a good life.
女：实在好过啊！	W: Life is really good!
男：今天我们要唱几句，今天我们来唱上几调。	M: We will sing some tunes today.
女：多唱几句吧！	W: Sing more!
男：现在到了回家的时间了，我们要回家了。	M: It's time to go home, we will go home now.
女：时间还早，再多唱几句！	W: It's still early, just sing more!
男：姊妹你来听我说。	M: Sister, listen to me.
女：我听你说。	W: I'm listening.
男：绕三灵也结束了，咱们各回各家。	M: The Guerx Sal Lad is over, let's say goodbye and go home.
女：是呀！	W: Right!
男：你回喜洲去，我回龙尾关。	M: You go back to Xizhou, I go back to Longweiguan.
女：明年我要到哪里找你？	W: Where do I find you next year?
男：明年绕三灵我们还是约在这个老地方相遇。	M: We will meet up at the same place next year in the Guerx Sal Lad.
女：好的！	W: Okay!

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