



Exclusion or Inclusion: The Minority Culture Protection

Inheritance and Development in the Festival Economy

A Case Study of “San Yue Jie” Festival of Bai Nationality, Dali

Lijian Zhang

College of Ethnology and Sociology, South-Central University for Nationalities, Wuhan 430074, China

Tel: 86-27-6348 0609 E-mail: zljyn@yahoo.com.cn

Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Hubei Province, the History, Actuality and Development of Bai Nationality, Hefeng, Hubei Province. QSZ07004.

The Minsitry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, ethnic identity under the background of diaspra: a case study of Bai nationality, Sangzhi, Hunan province, 07JC850004.

Abstract

The thesis based on the case study of “San Yue Jie” Festival of Bai Nationality, revealed the history, developing process and current situation of “San Yue Jie” Festival. Considered that the festival acted as an important role in the manority culture, the festival economy was a key to develop the manority culture. Futher more, the thesis disclosed the positive influences, formation and features of festival economy. Discussed that how to transform the traditional festival into an festival economy sucessfully. The festival economy would be provide an model to protect, inheritance and develop the traditional manority culture.

Keywords: Festival economy, Bai nationality, Feature, Traditional manority culture protection

Bai Nationality is a minority mainly living in southwest China. This nationality has long history and unique features with “San Yue Jie” as its most important traditional festival, which is also the largest scaled fair in China. This fair, held below the Diancang Hill of Dali City, begins on March 15 of lunar year and lasts 5 to 7 days. The study on “San Yue Jie” is an important key to discovering the culture of Bai Nationality, and helpful for exploring the past of Bai, present situation of the festival and promoting the development of this festival, helpful for exploring the join of tradition and modern.

1. History of “San Yue Jie”

1.1 Legend of “San Yue Jie”

Since “San Yue Jie” has been the most important traditional festival of Bai, the origin of this festival has been controversial for a long time. The earliest document on “San Yue Jie” showed up in Ming Dynasty and was widely spread in Qing Dynasty.

The widely spread story is as follows. Dali, also called Yeyuze, was swamp long ago. At end of Sui Dynasty and beginning of Tang, devil Luosha occupied Dali, taking out human eyes and eating flesh, and the civilians suffered from him a lot. During the ruling of Emperor Yonghui (AC 650-655), Kwan-yin came to Zhonghe Hill of Dali and seized Luosha. The people there gathered there on March 15 every year to sacrifice Kwan-yin in order to express appreciation. Later people did business there and it slowly became present “San Yue Jie” (Note 1). This story reflects that the origin is closely related to religion and the fighting between Kwan-yin and Luosha reflects the conflict between Buddhism and local religion.

Actually, the civilians prefer another legend. Once upon a time, a young fisherman near Er Sea married Third Princess of Dragon King. On March 15, the moon was round and bright. The Princess looked at the moon, and remembered the Yue Jie held by Chang E. Therefore, she and her husband went to Yue Jie by riding a dragon. She liked all the goods on the moon, but she couldn’t buy them. The couple made up their mind to hold a Yue Jie of their own at the foot of Diancang Hill, so that the civilians could buy anything they liked. Subsequently, they planted a tree on the slope of Zhonghe Hill and the fair was held on every March 15. This is the origin of today’s “San Yue Jie”. This story is more humane and consequently is widely accepted by Bai people.

Till now, “San Yue Jie” has become a kind of economic event from a religious activity. It also sees the process of

unification of various nationalities and has been turned into a carrier for Bai's traditional culture and economic development.

1.2 Developing process of "San Yue Jie"

First Stage: at the early stage, "San Yue Jie" was a typical religious sacrifice to memorize Kwan-yin, and it was Buddhist temple fair at first.

Second Stage: in the middle of the developmental process, namely in Ming and Qing Dynasty, economic factor has been added to temple fair and it has become local exchange fair. The fair covers Yunan, Sichuan, Jiangxi, Guangdong, Zhejiang, Hunan, Guangxi, Shanxi, Guizhou, Tibet, Burma, etc. The civilians trade horses, drugs, tea, cotton, wood, magnet, copper, tin and so on.

Third Stage: at the latest stage, namely after Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture made "San Yue Jie" national festival, it has become the legal festival for Bai people and important material exchange center of southwest China.

From the above, we know that Kwan-yin's coming to Dali was just a legend, and it was an important center of Road of Silk of southwest China. The need of social and economic development and local advantage are the main reason why "San Yue Jie" keeps prosperous for more than one thousand years.

2. The Current Situation of "San Yue Jie"

In 1991, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture made "San Yue Jie" national festival. This festival was approved by the government because it can protect traditional culture and festival and promote regional development. At the latest stage, cultural exchange facilitates economic development. Based on Bai's unique culture, ancient "San Yue Jie" rejuvenates and speed economic growth, strengthens national unification, increases trade and enhances foreign relations.

With development of the commercious economy, the scale of "San Yue Jie" is more and more big. In 1995, some people from more than 20 provinces, cities, the autonomous region, and some foreign friends from several dozens national attended this grand meeting. The present population surpasses 1 million people, and the total of the trade nearly 10 million. In 1997, both guests from the whole nation of more than 20 provinces, cities and autonomous regions, and the entire province of 16 places, states, cities, and friends and the compatriots from Hong Kong and Macao from more than 30 countries presence in the world, and plus various races populace from each place of the whole state came in and attended the meeting. During the whole festival, the amount of the population reached more than 1 million people. The so large-scale grand meeting that national minority interflowing of commodities, happens rarely in Yunnan and even the whole nation.

Not only the scale becomes more and more big, but also the festival content of "San Yue Jie" is also more richly colorful. Besides the economics and trade of bazaar, there have traditional literary arts activities (E.g. singing Dabenqu, hitting Bawangbian, etc.) And national sports performance or the competition (E.g. horse racing, matching dragon boat, archery, and track and fielded.) According to the announcement which "San Yue Jie" national festival working committee promulgates in 2007, "San Yue Jie" will on the basis of keeping the previous trait of activities hold the grand scale horse racing congress, the traditional Chinese medicine selling, the Dali special famous flowers that camellia is important buying and selling, local special and excellent commodities buying and selling, the economics and trade discussion, the economical technical cooperation, the traveling recommendation and the colorful populace national culture activity. It will form a large-scale festival which integrates native product, the economics and trade discussion, the technical cooperation, the cultural activity.

In the new developing process, "San Yue Jie" added the new content increasingly, and attracted the interest of the domestic and foreign guests, among it the quite value raising is organizing the science and technology displaying and communicating meeting in 1984. The science and technology displaying and communicating meeting limited much to publicize the science and technology knowledge, and the technical consultation. After the integration the science and technology displaying and communicating meeting with "San Yue Jie" closely since 1991 together, it not only has enriched the active content of "San Yue Jie", but also makes the science and technology displaying and communicating meeting be able to obtain a better development platform. In 1999, the science and technology displaying and communicating meeting holding in the same period of "San Yue Jie", it altogether has 9 cities and counties in the state, and 42 units and the individuals from 6 provinces, cities in the whole nation participating in the trade and displaying 20 kinds of new product, 100 items of new technical, and the deal amount amounting to 2.07 million Yuan. Thus, it realized the double wins of the aspects of nationality, festival, culture, science and technology, economy and so on.

In the "San Yue Jie" festival, the most noticeable naturally is the active prosperity of economics and trade market and the remarkable result of attracting business and leading expenses. From 1990 to 1998, in statistical figure of the "San Yue Jie" commodities and trade bargaining' total amount, we can see the prosperous present situation. (See Table 1)

The economical cooperation working also leapt the new stair. In 1991 when the first session of national festival, the amount of the commodity cooperating in and out is 56.39 million Yuan, but in 1997 the total amount of economical

cooperation reaches 390 million Yuan.

3. The Modern Inspiration of “San Yue Jie”

3.1 *The Positive Influences of “San Yue Jie”*

Till now, we can say that “San Yue Jie” has a huge change on the forms and contents. This influence represents not only the festival itself, but also some aspects relating to festival. There are three influences in the following:

Firstly, traditional festival form is reserved. The “San Yue Jie” can be saved till today. Its direct influence is that “San Yue Jie” taking as Bai Nationality traditional festival have been handed down and inherited.

Secondly, many traditional cultures can be spread out and carried on, which are existed relying on festival. It can be described as the indirect influence of causing by “San Yue Jie”. Compared modern “San Yue Jie” with its primary formation, it has been changed greatly. Moreover, there is much information adding in it continuously. Those are the important reasons of “San Yue Jie” which can continue in developing and keeping vital force and energy. There are many contents relating closely to “San Yue Jie” together, such as, civilian athletic sports (horse-racing, swing, etc.); national clothes and custom; original text (folklore, story, etc.). Especially, taking as the national consciousness and national cohesion of thought level can mark and intensify (show and enhance) in annual “San Yue Jie”. The influence of “San Yue Jie” also extends increasingly. Not only Dali Bai nationality, but also Kunming, Yuxi(Yunnan), Beijing (capital city), Sangzhi (Hunan), Bijie (Guizhou), and so on, all together enjoy the biggest national festival of Bai nationality in the meantime. In addition, not only Baizu people enjoy the national festival, but the compatriot of Yizu, Miaozu, Huiyu, Zangzu, Lisuzu in Dali Baizu Autonomous Prefecture, also actively take part in the festival. So, “San Yue Jie” has already become a grand festival activity that the people of all ethnic groups to solidify greatly.

Finally, the good benefits of economy forms a benign cycle. “San Yue Jie” experienced an upheaval, but the unchangeable core among them is that the national religion feelings and the commercial activity of goods exchange. Especially, the economical coloring in the festival is particularly more and more strong, becoming the key which promotes the festival progress and decides the rise and fall or success and failure of the festival.

3.2 *The Formation of Festival Economy*

In the progress of the national economical development, we can see that, some places emphasize one-sided the economical development, neglect and even deny the protecting and handing down of the national culture, and think that the traditional is feudalistic and the ancient is falling behind; by contrast, others only emphasize the tradition, not the development, and think that traditional culture can not be changed a little and the more original, the better, limiting the development of the minorities. These standpoints that are two kinds of entirely different represent an extremity. And it reflects the mutual confuse which is how carry on the double wins of tradition and modern and how develop national economy on the premise of keeping national culture. Obviously, we never only pursuit short-term economical interests, neglecting the unrebirthing of national history and culture, nor persistently emphasize protecting traditional culture, consecrating the traditional culture, or represent as the primary development of anthropology, which hope the native nation the more flourishing, the better, and the investigated object the more backward and original, the better. Here, the successful developmental model of “San Yue Jie”, that is, the developmental model of festival economy provides a better answer for tackling this problem.

3.3 *The Feature of Festival Economy*

The following discussed are the characteristics of “San Yue Jie”, that is, the success of “San Yue Jie”, and also, some successful inspiration which festival economy facing with the confusion of titration and modern gives us.

“San Yue Jie” developed from the original religious activities to business market, and finally obtains official approval and has had the legal strict significant. This developing progress represents as follows:

3.3.1 The national characteristic of festival economy. Namely the mass foundation and the degree of welcoming by the populace.

In practice of the national development, the people gradually recognized that the self-closed nation does not have the developmental future. Under the objective condition, the self-seal also cannot be realized, because any a nation, a country or an area all are unable to close the gate to do the construction, and have closely to do with the surrounding person, the matter, the thing. Therefore, the idea of “the more national, the more global.” manifests the bigger existing space of the nation. As to festival economy, because of the festival having the thick national color, it receives this nation’ high attention, then widely accepts for other nationalities, and becomes the activity which gets many people’ participation. So, one of national characteristic’ implications is, the mass character, namely has the mass quantity of people to participate in the festival, either the appreciation or the performance, either buying or selling, which receives the general populace’s welcome; the other national characteristic implication is, any kinds of holiday, it relates to any a specific nation in the aspects of the history, the culture, spreading out and so on. Moreover, this nationality often is mainly inhabitation, protection, carrying forward, the dissemination and the impetus of this kind of holiday. Although the festival is during the development and also can accept together by other nationalities or the regions, but its main

impetus possibly is only some specific nationality. This demonstrates just like in development of “San Yue Jie”, which history, culture, and even the national festival of the official determination. This developing process connects closely with Bai nationality together. While the urgent national characteristic, the mass foundation of festival and its thick national culture charm can vanish, the holiday economy can be overshadowed.

3.3.2 The recreation of festival economy

Taking as any kind of festival, recreation is its basic general character. Especially, in the ancient Chinese times, when the entertainment is extremely deficient in countryside, the entertainment status of the festival cannot be substituted. This is the important reason why many national festivals is prosperous. Until now, although there appeared more entertainment facility and the medium, the festival having the simple and honorable entertainment function still received people's favor.

3.3.3 The plasticity of festival economy

In the transition from the pure holiday to the festival economy, the holiday also must be transformed and have strong compatibility. One kind of festival, if is eternal, will lack the containing and absorption of foreign culture, will be unable to adapt the new changing situation, and will finally becomes the ossified historical memory. On the other hand, one kind of festival if is extremely indefinite, will lose the true colors and the direction in long-term changes and will finally become another kind of festival content which be changed beyond recognition. Therefore, rising to the festival economy, the holiday also must have the relatively stable kernel, and simultaneously have the very great self-adjustment and the ability of adapting different culture and different time demanding.

3.3.4 The synthesis of the festival economy

As one kind of festival economy, it also must have the comprehensive characteristic. If the festival only limits such a culture content (E.g. diet, clothing, custom, horse racing, swing and so on ,as the sole cultural element), or such a domain (politics, economy, culture, religion ,etc.), to a great extent it will affect the festival' spreading scope and the degree which will accept. But “San Yue Jie” precisely synthesizes the horse racing congress, the traditional Chinese medicine displaying and selling, the flowers and plants displaying and selling, the place famous specialty superior commodity sells, the economics and trade discussion, the economical technical cooperation, the tour recommendation and the colorful populace national culture activity, and has glowed the vitality in the new time.

Each above discussed points are the key of deciding whether the festival could transform to the festival economy, also are the focus of holiday taking as dealing with the confusion of tradition and modern, even are the modern enlightenment which manifests in “San Yue Jie” that the special Bai nationality festival economy, and finally has realized successfully the double wins of the tradition and the modern and achieves satisfactory results of the "art to blossom, economy to bear fruit". This indicates that the traditional fair trade function of national festival once to meet with the modernization commodity economy, can insert the biplane wing of culture and economy, and surpass the pure economical trade. This model of festival economy relating closely to traditional national culture has very strongly pointed, and can be loved by the national populace, creating and developing independently, which its applied prospect is extremely broad.

References

- Dali Bai nationality autonomous prefecture Culture Bureau arranging. (1998). *The Cause and Reason of the Bai Nationality Country*. Chengdu: Bashu Booking.
- Li, Lincan. (1967). *The Synthetic Study of Nanzhao Dali Country New Material*. Taipei: Ethnology Research Institute in The Centre Academic.
- Huang, Ze. (1995). *Southwest National Festival Culture*. Kunming: Yunnan Education Press.
- Duan, Jihua & Tie, Jun. (2000). Initial Research Changes of the Yunnan Dali Bai“San Yue Jie”. *Beijing Second Foreign language Institute Journal*. (3).
- Song, Kejie & Shi, Zhenming. (2000). Dali “San Yue Jie”, Now More Fiery. *Contemporary Economy*. (7).
- Shi, Yilong. (2006). On the Terms of “Culture, Civilization, Tradition and Modern”. *Journal of South-Central University for Nationalities*. (3).

Notes

Note 1. This story came from “The History of Bai Country”. Chengdou: Bashu Press, 1998. It also could be seen in the book of Li Lin Can, “*The Synthetic Study of Nanzhao Dali Country New Material*”.Taipei: Ethnology Research Institute in The Centre Academic, 1967.

Note 2. The following data requotes from Duan Jihua, Tiejun, “*Initial Research Changes of the Yunnan Dali Bai ‘San Yue Jie’*”. “Beijing Second Foreign language Institute Journal”, 2000 (3).

Table 1. The Previous Years “San Yue Jie” Business Trade Bargaining Datasheet (Note 2)

Time(Year)	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Total Amount of Business Trade Bargaining (ten thousand Yuan)	35127	40251	69291	77241	73702	80640	77569	82600	72247