

# Wizard, Politics and Civilization

## Research on the Bimo's Historical Role of Yi Peoples\*

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**Abstract**—The paper combed the production, development, evolution and actuality of Bimo in the Yi Peoples' concrete social. The traditional role of Bimo can still serve the government and folk. Bimo have been selected as the inheritance of "intangible cultural heritage". They are the living carrier, the inheritance and transmission of traditional culture. Bimo mediate civil disputes, resolve contradictions, and maintain harmony using folk law. That is generally recognized by people. Bimo master the knowledge system and value concept. They are born in internal Yi society, believed by vast majority of Yi peoples. Bimo have both mediciner and wizard identity. When people facing the disaster, disease and pain, Bimo bring psychological comfort, give spiritual power to them. The paper concludes that we should understand Bimo and traditional culture objectively, use its positive side innovatively, and discard its negative side.

**Keywords:** *Bimo identity, change, contemporary significance, Yi peoples*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The existing research shows the scholars agree that the Bimo of the Yi Peoples originated in the primitive clan society, flourished in the Tang and Song Dynasties, and declined from the Yuan and Ming Dynasties to the early Qing Dynasty. There are slight differences among different Yi regions because of their different economic bases and social development processes, but the overall historical trend is the same. Previous studies have touched on the history of Bimo, but they are relatively brief, especially about the development of Bimo in the primitive clan society and its identity transformation and historical orientation from the beginning of the National Revolutionary War to the early stage of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in 1978. The author agrees with the views of the predecessors and tries to make up for the shortcomings in the work of the predecessors. The purpose is to sort out the

origin, development and current situation of the Bimo of the Yi Peoples in a more complete way, as the basis for further research.

Fraser J.G deeply analyzed the historical role of wizards. He pointed out that "in the primitive era, the wizards were freed from the state of physical labor as the main means of livelihood, and were allowed and encouraged by society to explore the mysteries of nature. In order to be competent for the duties of wizards, they must try their best to make themselves know more than others, and to know as much as possible all the knowledge needed to help people struggle with nature and all the knowledge that can alleviate people's sufferings and prolong their lives. This promotes the development of knowledge and culture. Fraser J.G's assertion is insightful and consistent with historical reality. If we look at the historical process of the development of knowledge and culture of all nationalities in the world, in their primitive times and early social stages, wizards possessed the most knowledgeable "cultural people" in the society at that time. The intellectuals in the early society of the Chinese nation are the so-called "Medicine, Taoist priest, Augur and Historian" in the historical books. In fact, they were all "wizards" at that time or developed from wizards. As a kind of culture, the emergence of "Medicine, Taoist priest, Augur and Historian" was also the result of the gradual development of witchcraft in the primitive era." [1] Bimo in Yi society is a high-ranking wizard. They created ancient Yiwen, wrote classics and books of Yiwen, and were ambassadors for spreading and inheriting traditional culture; they worshipped ancestors and worshipped gods, presided over various sacred rituals, and were messengers for communicating between people and gods; they exorcised evil and avoided evil, and were calming pills for appeasing panic and agitation; they were dignified and impartial, mediators of disputes and judges of right and wrong.

Fraser J.G pointed out that the wizard system is not only an opportunity for the development of cultural knowledge, but also the key to the formation of the sacred monarchy. Because wizards enjoyed a pivotal social status in early society and were respected by people and society, it made it possible for them to seize the highest political power and even become the leaders of tribes and kings of the state: "In

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summary, we seem to have reason to draw the view that in many parts of the world, the king is the succession of ancient wizards or witch doctor. Once a special wizard class has been separated from society and entrusted with the task of policing the country, these people will gain increasing wealth and power until their leaders stand out and become sacred kings.” [2] Looking back on the development history of Yi society, we can find that the change of Bimo's political status was accompanied by the social civilization at that time, and its priest role remained unchanged and became more and more prominent.

## II. THE GOVERNOR IN THE PERIOD OF UNITING RELIGION AND POLITICS

From the beginning of the primitive matriarchal clan society to the end of the Song Dynasty, Bimo served as tribal chiefs and leaders, as well as religious priests. In the late Song Dynasty, there appeared a "prince" who separated power from Bimo. Bimo's dominion began to be weakened.

When clans are born, they are matrilineal, not paternal. Maternal clan system is a common historical stage in the development of human society. “The Communist family economy implies women's domination within the family, just as that can't confirm the biological father and recognize a biological mother only means a high degree of respect for women.” [3] In Yi society, the eldest women of the whole clan are chiefs in the matriarchal clan stage. Leading all members to engage in various activities, some large-scale and arduous work requiring all-out efforts will be accomplished jointly by all the large families of the whole clan. Because people feel that women have a mysterious and perceptible power in the future. Every war is mediated by women. Before liberation, when the rivalry armoured between the branches of the Yi Peoples, once an old woman appeared, the two sides agreed to an armistice, which was some manifestation of the unfailing authority of maternity after the patriarchal system replaced the materiarchal system.

The age of Zhi Ge A Long is a transitional period from matrilineal clan to paternal clan. With the development of production and people's understanding of the harmfulness of intermarriage in life practice, people's marital form has changed from intermarriage in close relatives to extramarriage in “Pu Lu Li Ya”. Correspondingly, people have gradually changed from an unfixed “Original Group” to a more fixed clan. The transformation of clan society from matrilineal clan to patriarchal clan is also reflected in the legends of the Yi people. The story that Shi Er E Te searched for his father is widespread among the Yi people in Liangshan. It is said that Shi Er E Te decided to look for his father. He did not find him anywhere in the world. The last “fairy” told him, “Marry a wife and have a son then see a father.” So he married the “fairy” and held ancestral rituals to ascertain his father's and son's lineage. [4] These legends reflect that Yi ancestors, like other ethnic group, had experienced a long matrilineal and patriarchal clan society in history. In matrilineal society, women hold more power in society, and lineage is calculated by matrilineal. Later, with the continuous development of productive forces, men

occupied the main position in agriculture, animal husbandry, handicraft industry and commercial production activities, so that matriarchal clan society began to transform into patriarchal clan society, and marriage also changed from sub-clan marriage of matriarchal clan to pairing marriage

During the Qin and Han Dynasties, Qin opened up Wu Chi Dao, Han set up prefectures and counties. Especially in the period the control of the Shu Han regime over the Yi area, the Yi culture in the Yi area of Southwest China centralized with the power to the Da Xing and Yi Shuai. The Bimo culture began to differentiate into several regional cultures and serve the political power. Bimo is a clan tribal leader, military leader and religious leader in the primitive clan society. There is a Yi People's proverb that: “Listen to the debate between the old man and pay homage to the ancestors can let you know their reason. He emperor must learn to offer sacrifices.” Therefore, during the Three Kingdoms (220-265) and Western Jin and Eastern Jin dynasties, Bimo was in a period of rapid development.

In the Tang Dynasty(618 A.D.- 907 A.D.),some Yi tribes were still in the transition stage from parental slavery to slavery, and some had entered slavery, but the grass-roots units were still based on the family village communities linked by blood. The form of social organization is that every 100 or 200 families constitute a small tribe, among which there are large tribes, and tribal chiefs are called “Guizhu”. Small tribes have small Guizhu, big tribes have big Guizhu, and big tribes have pushed a chief as their alliance leader, known as “Du Da Guizhu”. Du Da Guizhu was the supreme ruler of the Yi people at that time. They are priests and ruler, and they are still a unity of integrating politics and religion. It can be seen that the Guizhu has a hierarchies, and the big Guizhu is in charge of the small Guizhu. This is a political system which combines religious priests (the chief priests), military chiefs and tribal chiefs. It is a political organization which combines “Zi”, “Mo” and “Bi” It is prevalent in the history of the Yi people, such as the state of the state of Luoshi, the state of Luodian, the state of Yelang and the state of Ailao.

During the development of slavery economy and feudal economy, the political organization of the Yi peoples in the hinterland of Liangshan and its surrounding areas also changed accordingly. The rulers of the Song Dynasty continued the policy of Tang Dynasty .That is appeasement and solicitation. At this time, the rulers of the Yi peoples in Liangshan area appeared a large number of “princes”. It can be seen from this the political leaders and religious priests in Liangshan Yi region have gradually separated. In the historical legends of the Yi peoples in Liangshan, “Bi” (i.e. religious priests, the predecessor of the “Bimo” wizard), “Zuo” (monarch) and “Mo” (minister) are separated. This can be verified by the records of Chinese literature and history. It shows that the political organizations of Liangshan and its surrounding Yi areas have further developed in the Song Dynasty.

### III. AUXILIARY MINISTERS IN THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

During the Yuan Dynasty, Sai Dian Chi set up Xing Zhong Shu Sheng in Yunnan Province, and implemented the “Tu-guan” system. He appointed local barbarian leaders and Guizhu of all levels as local officials, trusted them and entrusted them with reuse so as to make them official officials with legal power. From the Yuan Dynasty to the early Qing Dynasty, Bimo went down from the ruling position to the assistant position, bowed out from the leader and become the minister. So a kind of priest named “Xi Po” split up from slave owners and feudal lord groups and served for the chief. The “Xi Po” was in the position of assisting the government. At this time, the priest not only had his specific title — “Xi Po”, but also had a clear range of functions. He was not only the chief’s adviser, but also the witch who cured diseases and disasters. Obviously, he was no longer the ruler of the regime when politics and religion were united.

It is worth mentioning that the King of Nan Zhao evolved from the primitive clan leader and wizard “Xi Po”. In the Yuan Dynasty, the clan leader of the Yi peoples in Liangshan was named “Xi Po” by the same name as the wizard. Since then, “Xi Po” was designated as the clan leader and slave owner, while the wizard was called “Bimo”. The exclusivity of appellation shows that in the development of Yi society after Yuan Dynasty, witches have evolved from clan tribal chiefs in primitive society and become assistant politicians. This is the direct origin relationship of “the king must learn to offer sacrifices” as mentioned in the Yi literature. [5]

### IV. RELIGIOUS CLERGY AFTER BUREAUCRATIZATION OF NATIVE OFFICERS

The Ming Dynasty developed the “Tu-guan” system of the Yuan Dynasty and developed into a more complete “Tu-si” system. In the mid-Ming Dynasty, the system of “bureaucratization of native officers” was implemented. The “Tu-si” system of minority nationalities was abolished, and the system of “Guizhu” system was disintegrated, thus forming a social and political system of five levels of “Zi, Mo, Bi, Ge and Zhuo”. Bimo’s function has gradually changed from a “Guizhu” with political and religious power to the sacrifice, the historian, the divination and chief’s adviser. He is the chief’s staff and assistant, and his position is still above the “Ge” (craftsman) and “Zhuo” (civilian).

During the Yong Zheng period of the Qing Dynasty, in order to remove obstacles, develop the frontier and meet the needs of large-scale population, Er Tai vigorously pursued the policy of “bureaucratization of native officers” in the southwestern frontier areas. Most of the Yi chiefs and local officials were expelled, and then Bimo flowed into the common people. Some of them developed into Bimo specializing in religious affairs, while others took compiling Yi classics to disseminate national culture as their duty. At this time, the Yi lettering is still widely used in the Yi society, from official documents and seals to sales contracts. In order to adapt to this situation, the Prefecture of Linan established

Yi schools to train Yi talents at the later of Qing Dynasty. In the Imperial Examination of “Rural Personnel”, there are Chinese and Yi examinations, those who pass the Chinese examinations are “Rural Personnel” and pass the Yi examinations are “Bimo”; they are the upper-level literati. At the beginning of its establishment, many Bimo brass bells were cast. All the winners awarded Bimo bells and sealed it as Bimo, which made Bimo to be an intellectual of high status. Under this cultural background, many schools of Yi literature have been set up in various areas of the Yi peoples, and a large number of Yi intellectuals who have mastered the Yi language and know the Yi peoples’ history and culture have been trained. For those who pass the Bimo test, the government authorizes the maintenance of local order. Pu Zheng-xing was a native of Mi Le Municipality Yunnan Province. He went to school at the “Yi wen Si Shu”. In the late Qing Dynasty, he rushed to take an exam in the Guang Xi Prefecture (now Lu Xi) and was awarded the title of “Qian zong”. When he was 30 years old, he founded “Yi wen Si Shu”. The students came from Mile County, Huaning County, Jiashui County and other places. [6]

After the period of “bureaucratization of native officers”, Bimo was assumed by the ruled class. According to the investigation of Mr. Yao-hua Him in Liangshan Yi area, Originally, Bimo was held by the slave owners and nobles in the Hei Yi. Later, they thought that Bimo was driven by people’s call. This affected the nobility of the slave owners class and transferred to the ruled Bai Yi. In the early 1950s, the Hei Yi Bimo of Liangshan had become scarce. In the late 1940s, the Lu Jia Tu Si used Hei Yi and Bai Yi Bimo in the Wei Ning County Guizhou Province. The Hei Yi Bimo take charge of the starting point of legal affairs, and then Bai Yi Bimo completed the whole legal affairs. This is a manifestation of the transition from Hei Yi Bimo to Bai Yi Bimo.

### V. CONCLUSION

In primitive clan society, Bimo was a clan leader and tribal chieftain. In the Tang and Song Dynasties, Bimo was Guizhu. From clan society to Song Dynasty, Bimo was not only a political leader, but also a spiritual leader. In the Yuan Dynasty, the Guizhu were brought into the management system of the central dynasty. From then on, Bimo’s status began to change from being in power to assisting government. The Ming Dynasty inherited the “Tu-guan” system and developed the “Tu-si” system. Since the mid-Ming Dynasty, especially in the early Qing Dynasty, Bimo has no political support and has flowed into the common people. On the initiative of protecting and inheriting “the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, the Bimo has been awarded the honorable title of “inheritor of intangible cultural heritage” and assumes the national mission of inheriting and promoting the essence of national culture. In Liangshan Yi District, some Bimo are bridges between the government and the people. On the one hand, they act as traditional mediators of disputes. On the other hand, they participate in the construction of democracy and legal system at the grass-roots level. They combine traditional customary law with

modern national law organically. They have made efforts to resolve folk contradictions and build a civilized rural style.

In summary, as a wizard in a broad sense, Bimo of the Yi peoples has played an important historical role in the specific historical period of the Yi society. Along with the changes of social forms and the development of social civilization, its political identity has gradually weakened, while its cultural role has been strengthened, and it has become the inheritor of the intangible cultural heritage of the Yi peoples. On the one hand, the change of the historical role of Bimo supports Fraser J.G's view that the spiral interaction between wizards and politics, wizards and civilization is on the rise. On the other hand, it shows that wizards are endowed with more cultural functions with the perfection of political system and the prosperity of civilization. This applies not only to the Bimo of the Yi peoples, but also to the Wizards of many peoples. Bimo, as the inheritor and disseminator of traditional knowledge of the Yi peoples, is the symbol of the peoples and the source of the Yi culture. As a clergyman praying for the people, he can alleviate psychological anxiety, give comfort, and face disaster, disease and pain with calm and positive attitude. He is also a folk psychological consultant. As the executor of the folk customary law and mediator of disputes, Bimo is a positive force to maintain the harmony between the neighbors and the countryside. Therefore, expanding and promoting Bimo's positive energy, creatively utilizing Bimo as a traditional talent, and making it play an active role in the construction of social culture and civilization, may be the purpose of protecting "Intangible cultural heritage". At the same time, this is the positive force of social governance.

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