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Cultural Endangerment and Education: Educational Analysis of Changes in Cultural Transmission of the Dongba Dance Tradition of the Naxi People in Lijiang, Yunnan, China

Abstract Many traditional ethnic cultural items are being endangered in China. Using the Dongba dance culture of the Naxi people as a case study, this paper seeks to analyze and interpret the endangerment of culture from an educational perspective, based on an analysis of the interaction between the cultural transmission mechanism of Dongba dance and the formal schooling of the Naxi people in Lijiang, China. By describing and comparing the traditional and current forms of Dongba dance transmission, the paper shows how the institution of formal education competes with older modes of cultural transmission, resulting in the endangerment of Dongba dance as a living cultural relic. So, in order to truly realize and improve the function of education in transmitting cultural heritage and to guarantee educational equity, we should prioritize sophisticated ethnic minority cultural items in the assessment and selection phases of education, grant them institutional cultural capital, and put greater effort into developing an appropriate school-based curriculum so that ethnic minority culture may be transmitted and inherited via formal schooling.

Keywords cultural endangerment, Dongba dance, cultural transmission

Introduction

The relationship between cultural transmission and education is a hot issue in ethnic minority education research in China. Recently, many ethnic cultural items have found themselves endangered and in crisis mode. Since economic, political and cultural protection measures have failed to resolve the problem, and cultural transmission is intrinsically related to education, it is necessary to analyze and interpret cultural endangerment from the perspective of education.

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Using fieldwork and a review of literature through the theoretical perspective of cultural capital, this paper discusses the cause of cultural endangerment based on research of the interaction between the change of cultural transmission mechanisms of Dongba dance and the Naxi people's formal schooling. To gather data, the author conducted fieldwork in Lijiang from July to August 2008. During this period, interviews were conducted with 12 Dongbaes and Dongba apprentices, nine related Naxi scholars, six local government officials from the Education Bureau, Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau, People's Congress, television station, County Annals Office and government sponsored journal of Lijiang, organizers of four non-governmental cultural heritage organizations, three people in charge of Dongba cultural enterprises, one primary school principal, three primary school teachers, one owner of a folk music bar, two visitors and five parents. Participant observation was conducted in a class of Dongba culture in a primary school and in a sacrifice ritual; and questionnaires were given out to 10 male and 10 female students, of whom 12 were Naxi and eight non-Naxi. The author also visited Sanba Naxi Autonomous Township of Shangri-la county and visited one old Dongba.

The Dongba faith is the Naxi people's indigenous religion, and forms the core and origin of their indigenous culture. Serving multiple functions, Dongbaes are the organizers and hosts of religious rituals; they are also the creators, successors and disseminators of Dongba culture (Li, 1993). Dongbaes work as laborers, and do not function as full-time Dongbae. As with other ordinary farmers, they marry, have children, support families and work. However, they are also wizards, hosting sacrificial rituals in order to divine, ward off calamities and cast out evil spirits. Also, ritual practice requires Dongbaes to be artists and craftsmen. A qualified Dongba can have multiple functions as paper-maker, illustrator, artist of carvings and weaving, singer and dancer. What is important is that Dongbaes are teachers. In traditional Naxi folk society, Dongbaes were the only group who could read, write, and keep and master the ancient scriptures of their ethnic group. In farming and mountainous areas without a systematic school system, those who were interested in their own ethnic culture could learn only from Dongbaes.

Dongba culture refers to the cultural system and tradition developed from the Naxi indigenous religion, the Dongba faith. This includes the writing system, ceremonies, arts, knowledge, and various material cultures. Constituting the core of Naxi culture and reflecting the main aspects of Naxi history and society, Dongba culture is the basis of Naxi identity. Dongba dance is a complex indigenous dance seen in religious rituals, and is categorized in the same way as shamanist sacrificial dance. Dongba dance culture is an organic component of Dongba culture.

Although the term "endangered culture" does not yet have any definite or universally accepted definition, it is almost a generally acknowledged fact that

quite a few ethnic traditional cultures are endangered; a Chinese government survey and related research confirms this situation in China. The difficulty of defining endangered culture comes from the trouble to quantify intangible cultures and the multitude of cultural items of various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, in the process of protection and study of intangible cultural heritage it is increasingly reported by experts and bearers of traditional culture that there is a tendency toward some cultures' endangerment. Although endangerment cannot be judged precisely by quantitative measures, there are standards by which one can judge when a state of culture is on the way to becoming extinct.

The author proposes, at a minimum, that the following indices should be adopted to judge whether a cultural item is endangered: (1) the number of transmitters and inheritors, and their age structure are apparently declining; (2) the social structure facilitating transmitters to identify with and choose the culture changes or disappears; and (3) cultural transmission tends to be inauthentic or undynamic. On this basis, the definition of endangered culture proposed by the author is: When considered with the social facts and the changing tendency of culture, although a cultural item or cultural system is still in existence in daily life, its speed of transmission is slower than that of its loss or mutation. In that case, it is predictable that it is at the critical point of dying. At that a point, the cultural item can be classed as endangered.

The culture industry in Lijiang has made rapid progress and the practice of culture there gives a sense of prosperity. Despite this, there are grounds for interpreting Dongba dance as an endangered culture. If measured according to the above indices, given the number and the changing trend of real Dongbaes and Dongba dances that are passed down, this is clearly the case. Experts of Naxi culture, transmitters of Dongba cultural heritage, and local residents all share this view.

In this paper, the transmission of Dongba dance is separated into two periods: traditional and modern. By 1949, being based on a self-sufficient natural economy, the Naxi social structure was stable. Dongba cultural transmission had not yet been impacted by a commodity economy or subjected to direct outside human intervention. At that time, Dongba culture had a stable and mature mode of transmission. However, after 1949, Naxi society changed considerably. This was due to multiple factors, among which was the ultra-left ideology of the 1950s to 1970s, the popularity of compulsory education, a change in means of livelihood, and developments in science and technology. All these contributed to the rapid change and decline of Dongba culture after the 1980s, when the transmission method of Dongba cultural heritage transitioned from family to informal education. The endangerment of culture can be explained to some degree through a comparison between the traditional transmission mode and the

current state of transmission.

This paper describes and analyzes the cultural transmission of Dongba dance in three parts: the transmission motive, transmitters and inheritors, and the transmission method. The paper will first describe the historical importance of Dongba dance and how the knowledge of Dongba dance was traditionally passed on, by whom and to whom. It will then discuss the various ways in which Dongba culture, including dance, is transmitted today. Finally, the paper will show how the institution of formal education begun to compete with traditional modes of cultural transmission, resulting in the endangerment of Dongba dance as a living cultural relic.

Historically, as a part of Dongba sacrificial ritual, Dongba dance could only be witnessed at ritual sites. However, because Dongba dance is not independent of other cultural aspects of Dongba religion, the cultural transmission of Dongba dance is indivisible from that of Dongba culture as a whole.

Changes in Cultural Transmission of Dongba Dance

The Traditional Mechanism: Interpersonal Exchange

Before 1949, most Naxi areas had become feudal societies. Naxi people had frequent contact with Han, Tibetan and Bai people living in neighboring areas and had absorbed a lot of outsider culture. The ruling classes there—regional officials appointed by the court and chieftains of the Mu family in the Qing Dynasty, intellectuals, and gentry in the Republic of China period—thought of Dongba culture as “wizardry” and tried to transform their social tradition. Dongba activities were not profitable, and Dongbaes did not make money from religious practice. However, at that same time, religions categorized as shamanism had degenerated so greatly that they existed fragmentally, retaining only the functions of divination and treatment of illness. Despite this, without political support or profit, the Dongba faith could still be passed down stably among the Naxi lower and middle class, due to strong religious belief, the need to maintain community, the demand for education, psychological need, and material compensation.

The Naxi have an animistic faith. The worship of ancestors, ghosts and gods were the main components of their traditional Dongba faith. Reverence and long-term religious careers made Dongbaes believe that dancing was a most effective medium between god and people (Yang, He, & He, 1983). In Naxi daily life, villagers had Dongbaes hold rituals or practice divination to pray for guidance from the Dongba's power. Dongba dance was an important part of the Dongba sacrificial ritual. As a means of expression surpassing language, dance

was the best means to communicate with ghosts, gods and ancestors, to gain power and create atmosphere. Later, it gradually became a folk custom and was infused into all aspects of Naxi life.

Culture has an implication for national and social community (Wang, 2000). Dongba culture fully manifested Naxi people's thinking and will, maintained "the lasting and real common life" of people living in the community, and strengthened their interpersonal interaction. During the traditional period, Naxi people offered sacrifices in Dongba rituals at major life events such as marriage, funerals, birth and puberty. They offered sacrifice to heaven, ancestors, and god of nature Shu at certain seasonal occasions. When having setbacks, they held rituals to offer sacrifice, too; every ritual formed a node of daily life and created meaning. A ritual is not only a way to strengthen the connection and release stress but also a way to celebrate important events. At the same time, it can also weaken the possibility for society to disintegrate into crisis (Haviland, 2006).

The social significance of religious folk dance lies in unifying social cohesion, and makes religious adherents driven by the same motive and emotion behave according to the same purpose (Han, 2008). Dongba dance was usually danced by multiple blood relations and integrated with sacred moral values. The mysterious atmosphere at the scene, complex procedures, and participation by multiple persons could unite the group, promote group consensus, form ethnic identity, maintain social order, and form collective memory. Different from other competing social arenas like school, in Naxi clans and communities, Dongba dance was non-utilitarian. Dongbaes' self-actualization was interdependent with community structure and clan identity.

Before Han culture and the imperial exam system entered Naxi areas, education of Dongba culture was the Naxi's principal purposive educational activity, satisfying their curiosity and fulfilling their basic need for exploring and understanding life and the world. Dongba cultural transmission had the characteristics of general religious education. Dongbaes were owners, recorders, interpreters and disseminators of culture as well as natural teachers. From Dongba teachers and through Dongba cultural practice, ordinary villagers could learn their own ethnic culture and knowledge, and then get common historical and emotional memory shared by all the ethnic group members as long as they were interested. The transmission of Dongba dance was thus both education of religious knowledge and education of religious sentiment.

To some degree, every religious ritual is for curing people's internal spirit. Through Dongba dance, the direct purpose in worship is to please gods, strangle hold evil spirits, ward off calamities, and eliminate filthy things; however, its ultimate aim was to give people happiness and comfort. Pleasing god was pleasing man. Dongba dance was relaxing and amusing. It rid ritual participants' fatigue and worries and made them feel one with god. Dongba faith fostered

ethics and treated Naxi people's mental health with traditional concepts. People got the peak of their experience with hearty dance movements, and then got the feeling of safety that they were blessed by god. So after the Dongba ritual, the ritual host family and participants all felt relaxed and delighted, as the mental burden was released. Dongba dance mentally released the Dongba who hosted the ritual as well. It satisfied Dongbaes' needs for belonging, esteem and self-actualization, mentally and socially (see He, 2003).

Income was not the main motive to sustain Dongba cultural transmission. Dongbaes' main income was day-to-day farming and livestock-raising. The reward of hosting rituals and instructing apprentices was not generous, and was usually physical, for example, liquor or a leg of chicken, lamb or pig, etc. Sometimes, the reward could not balance out the loss of working time. "Not making money by Dongba activities"¹ had been a tradition and also a principle of self-discipline for practitioners.

In traditional Naxi society, Dongbaes were almost the only transmitting group of Dongba dance. Dongbaes' social status and financial conditions were no different from other people. In secular society, despite prestige, Dongbaes had no special status or political privilege. Because Dongba culture had never been advocated or valued by the government and Dongbaes lived sparsely, the precise number of Dongbaes in Lijiang before 1949 had never been recorded. Approximately, there were at least two Dongba families in every village, of which at least two Dongbaes could host sacrifice rituals. The number of apprentices was also not certain. Conservatively estimated, the number of Dongba accounted for approximately 1% of the Naxi population, or around 1,000 people (Feng, 2005).

The modes of Dongba dance transmission can be divided into two types: kindred and non-kindred transmission. Dongba teachers and their apprentices had a deep affection for each other, and their relationship was that of master and apprentice or father and son; all Dongbaes were men. The title of Dongba was passed on within clans between male family members, from father to son, from grandfather to grandson, from uncle to nephew, and so on, patriarchically. The succession of Dongbae did not follow a strict hereditary system, but blood links guaranteed the stability and comprehensiveness of cultural transmission. Besides intra-family succession, Dongbae apprentices usually chose Dongbae who were on good terms with their own clan or community to be their masters. Sometimes, an apprentice would live with his master and work for him for years, learning Dongba skills in his spare time. Thus, master and student formed affection akin to a blood relationship, in which trust, respect and love between teacher and student went far beyond that of modern school education. They had an emotional

¹ Many Dongbaes repeated this when interviewed.

investment in the culture they were transmitting and inheriting. All the Dongbaes interviewed expressed homage to their master and said they had been learned discipline by their master's instruction.

Non-kindred transmission includes formally acknowledging somebody as a master, consulting between Dongbaes and self-taught learning. A common misconception is that Dongba skills, like other treasures of heritage, are forbidden from being taught to others. In reality, the transmission of Dongba skills had never been exclusive or monopolized. Because most Dongbaes are "good at certain skills," Dongbaes and Dongba apprentices' communication and mutual study are an important complement to kindred transmission. Furthermore,

It has always been the case that Dongba cannot host rituals for their own family, so to some degree, it is not the most important for a Dongba whether his son inherits the skills. He usually teaches others without reservation and completely (...) If Dongbaes are invited to host ritual, they must go. (Initial interview with Dongba Y's, aged 32, responsible for Dongba cultural transmission in Yushuizhai Tourism Company, August 5, 2008)

Indeed, Dongbaes would teach apprentices with different surnames more attentively. Such rules guaranteed an open and stable mechanism for Dongba cultural transmission.

In the past, there was neither official assessment for Dongbae nor qualification criteria marking the end of an apprenticeship. Actually Dongba ritual sites were "examination rooms" for Dongbae apprentices to be "assessed and authenticated." A feature of Dongba dance transmission was that it was learned and imitated during practice, therefore every ritual site was a young Dongbae's classroom and examination room. Except for the leading Dongba, young Dongbaes were not strictly judged on dancing ability. Dongba rituals were open for learners of Dongba dance. Generally in Dongba dance, it was senior Dongbaes who decided the order that they would participate in the ritual, or Dongbaes consciously stood in line, with good dancers at the front, and learners following and imitating. The public and Dongba teachers' acknowledgement had the function of a diploma or qualification certificate. Well-performing Dongba learners would be recognized as Dongba over time.

In brief, this mode of transmission happened through an "acquaintance circle" as well as face-to-face. It was a part of life, not organized, systemized or strictly standardized, and the dance was taught by personal example and verbal instruction. Therefore it can be referred to as "interpersonal transmission." This kind of transmission was realized within the family, community, work, and ordinary life.

Disseminators and the audience knew each other well and had frequent contact. Transmission was almost entirely through face-to-face communication, with the

transmitters and inheritors controlling the flow, volume, definition and accuracy of information at the same site. Such non-formal interpersonal dissemination not only made the teacher and learner interact culturally but also served as a lubricant between the ethnic group and families for the establishment, maintenance and development of their relationship. In fact, ethnic cultural accumulation is usually profound in such face-to-face interpersonal dissemination (Yang, 2005). This mechanism guaranteed that the professional cultural transmitters and inheritors, i.e., Dongba and their apprentices, would form a stable and close transmission network.

The Current Transmission Situation: Disaggregation of Interpersonal Transmission and Search for Multi-Transmitting-Channels

After 1949, Dongba cultural transmission stopped being spontaneous, and became influenced by human intervention. From the early 1950s to the end of the 1970s there was a stagnant period for Dongba cultural transmission. Dongba activities, especially cultural ones like dance closely connected with religious rituals, were forbidden. This period extended for 30 years, until the period from the early 1980s to the early 1990s when the environment was loosened, some cultural traditions were resumed, and the study of Dongba culture was strengthened. Since the 1990s, an industrializing era of Dongba cultural transmission has dawned. With the rapid development of tourism and a culture industry, many pieces of cultural heritage, especially in the arts, have been commercialized. Dongba culture has taken on the appearance of a “craze.” At the same time, activities of Dongba cultural transmission and education have begun to emerge prominently in different fields and different groups. However it is generally believed that these activities have failed to radically slow the decline of core elements of Dongba such as Dongba dance.

Meanwhile, the transmission of Dongba dance culture has entered a period of change, characterized by diversity, instability and superficiality. The motive for transmitting cultural heritage changed from value driven to exploitation driven by instrumental rationality, i.e., the purpose changed from being about devout religious belief, maintenance of community and meeting educational needs, into being about the pursuit of money and cultural consciousness. The field of transmission changed from traditional communities in mountainous villages to special transmitting places, organizations and some experimental schools in urban areas. There are no special transmitters or inheritors any more. Transmitters have transformed from the original old Dongbaes and senior Dongbaes to scholars, governments, commercial organizations, and the Dongbaes of today. Inheritors are no longer Dongbaes apprentices but rather Dongbae students from various backgrounds. The transmitting and inheriting channels and

modes have diversified but have not yet reached a constant state. Cultural transmission is no longer about interpersonal transmission, life education, life-long learning and learning in practice, but rather it is a collective form of cultural transmission through classroom teaching or short-term training.

The commercial prospects for Dongba culture are a significant opportunity. Dongba cultural resources are presently a major engine of the cultural and tourist industry in Lijiang. Since Dongba dance can be presented in performance, its transmission is accelerated with the development of the culture industry. On the other hand, to gain their own foothold in competition in the market economy and improve life, individuals voluntarily participate in cultural transmission activities. For example, most Dongbaes leave the countryside, stop farming and grazing, and come to Lijiang's ancient city, Kunming, or even Beijing to work in the tourism industry. The job enables them to increase Dongba knowledge and skills, including Dongba dance.

A precondition of profit maximization is the minimization of cost. For cultural capital, it should be to trade maximum output with minimum time and energy input. Thus, very few students study Dongba culture for a long time. Although more young people learn Dongba skills now, most of them do so for employment. There is hardly any one of them who really wants to be a Dongbae successor (Zhao, 2002). They usually stop studying Dongba culture to make a living in tourism, after learning a little Dongba writing or drawing. It is relatively more difficult to learn Dongba dance, for it is practical, abstract and experiential, and Dongbaes able to teach it are in short supply. For this reason, very few students study Dongba dance intensively.

Cultural consciousness is another main motive for Dongba dance transmission. Over the past 100 years, the Naxi people have realized that Dongba culture is an "encyclopedia of Naxi ancient society" (Chen, 1999) within which the dance and music constituted a special knowledge system conveying rich information. When interviewed and introducing the reason why they learned Dongba culture, pupils and scholars, and indeed almost all transmitters and inheritors at all levels, first mentioned "Dongba culture is our own culture. It's meaningful to transmit and inherit it," "Dongba culture is valuable. It should not be lost by us," and so on. Though some employees in the Dongba cultural industry acknowledged frankly that they do it for economic development and to make a living, people emphasize the significance of cultural transmission. People do have deep affection for and identification with their own history and culture.

Since 2000, the Yunnan provincial government together with the Lijiang municipal government unveiled regulations including "Conservation Regulation on Ethnic and Folk Traditional Culture in Yunnan Province," "Conservation Regulation on Dongba Culture in Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County Yunnan Province" and "Conservation Regulation on Naxi Dongba Culture in Yunnan

Province,” to encourage and support academies, museums, non-governmental organizations and individuals to run Naxi Dongba cultural schools and cultivate successors of Naxi Dongba culture. Though financial investment and detailed regulations on how to rescue, protect and transmit Dongba culture have not been given, with symbolic meaning and advocacy, these regulations eliminated the misgivings of the masses.

Now, the multiple functions of education of Dongba dance contribute to its transmission. Dongba dancing as well as Dongba characters, drawing, and singing constitute a part of art education in basic education in Lijiang, taught in the “local knowledge class,” the “second classroom” (a class fostering students’ interest or training practical skills) and interest groups in a few schools. However, dancing comprises only a very small proportion of the school curriculum, compared with Dongba pictographic characters, Naxi language, and drawing. Dongba dance is taught informally, through non-governmental cultural heritage organizations or cultural transmission points in the countryside. All the learners are adults. According to their different study purposes, there are occupational training sessions and traditional cultural education. Though Dongba dance culture still serves an educational role, compared with that in the traditional period, its educational function has been greatly weakened and has a very limited range. To some degree, the ultimate aim of Dongba cultural education is no longer self-development or improvement, but rather the learning of an available skill or craft.

Dongba traditional beliefs are also no longer the means and rules that sustain the community. National or local laws, regulations and commercial rules have taken the place of Dongba cultural rules. The constraining power of village regulations and folk conventions based on religion in Naxi areas has thus been greatly weakened. Now Dongba culture only fulfills the function of maintaining and rallying the ethnic community as the basis of the Naxi people’s identity.

Dongbaes are living carriers of the tradition of Dongba dance. Currently, identification of Dongbaes as transmitters and inheritors has become differentiated, and the boundary of Dongba population is indistinct. Dongba learners who once studied Dongba knowledge, Dongba presenters, and those who work in the tourist industry in Dongba costume are all generalized as “Dongba.” However, some local Dongba culture experts referred to such Dongbaes as “cheaters,” stating that they had gone beyond the boundary of “cultural authenticity.” A course of study for a contemporary learner of Dongba culture is short, and there is a high dropout rate. In people’s view, Dongbaes who can truly master the culture are rare. Those proficient in dancing and able to independently teach in the master-apprentice manner are even fewer. These are only found in some distant areas outside Lijiang, such as Sanba township in Shangri-la county and Eya township in Muli county, Sichuan province.

By the end of 2008, the author had compiled statistics on the Dongba, aided by local scholars in Lijiang. At first sight, the results were more optimistic than estimated. Taking someone who believes in and takes part in the rituals of Dongba culture as apprentice or whole member, as a Dongbae, there are nearly 300 in the whole Naxi region. Among these, 182 are from Lijiang, with the remaining number from Shangrila and Muli.

However, these Dongbaes have very different knowledge levels and degrees of participation of cultural transmission activities. Through my fieldwork and discussion with many descendants from long lines of Dongbae, Dongba culture scholars and Dongba cultural industry workers, the conclusion can be drawn that there are two kinds of Dongbaes who master authentic and well-founded Dongba knowledge: (1) those who had acquired learning and practice before 1957 when Dongba activities were forbidden, namely those aged 65 or above; and (2) grandsons in a Dongba family who acquired Dongba knowledge from their grandfathers since the 1980s, namely those around the age of 30. Due to the prohibition against Dongba culture from the early 1950s to the end of the 1970s, most middle-aged Dongbaes in fact have a low level of Dongba skills and knowledge.

There remain few truly learned and talented Dongbaes. People who engage in Dongba theory and practice have a contact circle, and given its small scale, are familiar with each other. Reputation has always been an important criterion for Dongba authentication, so the two standards of “real” Dongba are objective and reliable. The author’s fieldwork confirmed this.

According to the above judgments, the amount of those who meet the standard of a traditional “real” Dongba is 50 at most, and most of them live in backwaters outside of Lijiang, like Shangri-la and Muli. Dongbaes of 80 and above do not teach or participate in cultural transmission activities any more. Most young Dongbaes are doing temporary jobs in the Lijiang urban area. In addition, from time immemorial, “authentic” Dongbaes have their own division of duties and skills, as not everyone is able to dance or is good at dancing.

Furthermore, Dongba dance has regional characteristics, with different styles in different areas. With the decrease in the number of Dongbaes, Dongba dances have decreased and regional characteristics of the dances have also decreased. Now, at most, over 30 kinds of Dongba dance are handed down, although Dongbaes said that the total number of Dongba dances was no less than 200. The number of good Dongba dancers who know both the “hows” and “whys” of Dongba dance is no more than 20.

The sharp fall of the number of Dongbaes and Dongba dances in Lijiang reflects the fact that in the Naxi people’s main location, Lijiang, Dongba dance culture has declined. Dongba dance is the difficult part of Dongba skills and its performances are limited, so those who can dance are far less than those who can

write Dongba pictographic characters, read Dongba classics or draw Dongba illustrations. "Dancing is different (from other Dongba cultural elements). Dances look similar and there is a relatively systematic dance notation. But the dance moves are not necessarily the same. So it must be personally taught and demonstrated" (initial interview with a local scholar in Lijiang Dongba Culture Institute of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, August 9, 2008). Thus, compared with other Dongba cultural elements, the future of Dongba dance is less bright.

The fact that Dongba dance is endangered is generally agreed upon among Dongbaes, scholars, experts, officials, education workers and ordinary Naxi people interviewed in author's fieldwork. When asking about the preservation of dances and rituals, the most common responses were "there is none left," "few [dances] left," "it's difficult [to transmit dancing]," "in Lijiang city, it [Dongba dance] is used for serving and cheating tourists," and so on. "Just when Naxi Dongba culture starts to gain a high reputation, both domestically and abroad, it is challenged by an unprecedented extinction crisis" (He, 2002). "Like other ethnic minorities, Naxi society is facing an era of breaking up various traditions" (Li, 2005). "Due to historic reasons and modern impact, many Naxi areas have become blind spots for Dongba culture. The eco-environment of Dongba culture is increasingly endangered, Dongba culture in its original state is facing a crisis of extinction." Dongba culture "is born congenitally deficient, without care and postnatal support, and risks being lost" (Guo, 2002), "is wholly endangered" and "will become extinct in 50 years" (Bai, 2001). The above judgments have become generally acknowledged, fueled by an awareness of the urgency of the situation.

Nowadays, Dongba dance teachers comprise of Dongbaes, scholars, governmental organizations and local elites and scholars.

Due to the disaggregation of the traditional mechanism of cultural transmission, the Dongba are no longer the main force to pass on Dongba culture, only participating in cultural transmission activities as employed teachers or students; scholars, local elites, some governmental cultural organizations and tourist companies that have become advocates and organizers of Dongba cultural transmission. Scholars and Dongbaes are introducers of knowledge; Dongbaes turn from masters to teachers in charge of teaching practical, indigenous knowledge and skills. In contrast, what scholars teach is more theoretical. Their classes or lectures include cultural policies and history, values, writing system and classical works of Dongba culture. Veteran Dongbaes have become scarce resources. They often have several roles, being teachers or consultants in school, cultural heritage organizations or tourist firms. However, the most influential cultural transmitters today are scholars, most of whom are from the Yunnan Academy of Social Science and its affiliated Lijiang Dongba Culture Academy.

They often teach part-time in cultural heritage organizations.

Governmental cultural organizations, such as the Lijiang Special Subject Leading Group on Cultural Legacy Protection and Development, approved by Lijiang municipal government, or the Dongba Culture Museum and Dongba Culture Academy are another representative Dongba cultural heritage group. They conduct practical training, but seldom teach dancing. Dongba learners participate in the training part-time.

In Lijiang, multiple commercial tourist organizations provide services or performances of Dongba culture for a fee. But, limited by scale, ability and concept, few commercial organizations keep the original form of Dongba culture and conduct Dongba dance transmission activities spontaneously.

Grassroots non-governmental cultural transmission such as that occurring at the town or village level are usually initiated and run by local elites and scholars. To date about 10 such transmission points have been established where senior Dongbaes or Dongba apprentices serve as teachers in evening classes or irregular classes offered during slack seasons. These points carry on cultural heritage activities primarily through Naxi language learning and Dongba pictographic character popularization, tourist performances, building Dongba eco-cultural township or villages and academic research. However, the author's fieldwork shows that, for multiple reasons, including the lack of funds and teachers, irregularity of student resources, class hours and sites, most of these transmission points are not self-sustaining. Because the cultural item of dancing is more difficult to master, organizations teaching Dongba dance number no more than two or three, and the kinds of dance taught there are few. Strictly speaking, current traditional interpersonal transmitting groups or networks have already disappeared in Lijiang, only scattering in remote areas outside Lijiang, like Baidi village in Shangri-la county or Muli county in Sichuan province.

Since 2000, multiple primary schools in Lijiang successively initiated Dongba cultural education. Usually, a grade or a class is selected in which Naxi students take a bigger proportion and the lessons are given in the "second classroom" (practical training or interest developing class) once or twice a week. The curriculum components are mainly Naxi language, Dongba pictographic characters, Dongba drawing and Dongba culture popularization. Only one or two schools teach Dongba dance, employing teachers to create and rearrange a couple of theatricalized Dongba dances from some basic Dongba dance moves as the school's repertoire. In brief, in basic education, Dongba dance learners are limited to few classes in one or two schools, and the dances have been recreated and rearranged, and are different from real Dongba dance that takes place in Dongba rituals. In secondary education, Dongba culture classes are at a standstill.

Several scholars systematically learn Dongba rituals and dances, and some reach the level of formal Dongba. However, in this case it is mainly theoretical

study and the few scholars learn primarily for the organization of cultural transmission. They have contributed a lot to the implementation of Dongba cultural heritage, but their roles are very different from that of traditional Dongbaes. Therefore, their participation in Dongba activity cannot be counted as life practice.

Current Dongba cultural transmission can thus be divided into three parts: traditional interpersonal transmission, informal education transmission and school-based transmission. Family tradition and the mode of interpersonal transmission in the community have nearly disaggregated, mainly relying on a combination of informal and formal education. The new method of transmission is complicated, dispersed and unsystematic.

Changes of social structure make the space for traditional modes of transmission increasingly narrow. The reality shows that the traditional spontaneous master-apprentice transmission is no longer the main form of Dongba cultural transmission. Such transmission modes have been seriously endangered for the following reasons. First, both transmitters and inheritors are being drained away. Except for those who are old and frail or too busy to get away from home, most Dongbaes who know some Dongba knowledge and are publically acknowledged for it take temporary jobs in Lijiang, tourist sites, performance sites or Dongba culture research institutes. Though they accept apprentices, they can spend little time in their hometowns in the countryside, so they can only instruct apprentices in person temporarily when they host rituals or return home. Formal schooling also competes with traditional Dongba cultural transmission for student resources. School-aged children at the age of six and above have to go to school and do homework after school. People are no longer raised to be Dongbae. The apprentices learning from masters are mainly adults who failed to enter a higher-level school.

Second, the transmission carrier—Dongba rituals—has decreased, and Dongba dance's transmission fields have been greatly downsized. Dongba dance is a practical cultural activity, demanding time, space, manpower and materials. With the types, scale and frequency of Dongba ritual decreasing, at present, most of the spontaneously conducted rituals associated with Dongba dance are funeral rituals.

In the past decade, many local elites and scholars have practiced the idea of rescuing endangered Dongba culture. Informal education has become the main form of Dongba cultural transmission. Informal education employs a teaching method somewhere between traditional interpersonal transmission and modern formal education. It uses formal education's class teaching system, class teaching methods and even advanced teaching means, but its organization is loose and without a well-compiled teaching program or assessment mechanism. Usually, it also does not have a fixed set of teaching materials, educational system or number of credit hours. Though cultural heritage organizations disseminate

widely, the content transmitted is identical. Most of them are superficial and aimed at Dongba culture illiteracy elimination, and they seldom involve higher-level, abstract and ritual-carrying cultural elements such as Dongba dance. Its length of education is usually short; if longer, learners usually study only in their spare time. The cultural transmission mode of informal education is still at a tentative stage. The transmitters and inheritors, sites, means and effects are uneven and complicated. Transmission activities in informal education can be divided into non-governmental spontaneous cultural heritage activities, governmental sponsored transmission activities and commercial firms' transmission activities.

Local people of the Lijiang region started non-governmental cultural heritage activities organically, depending on their localities and influencing neighboring villages and towns. Related sections and cultural organizations of the local authorities may grant irregular and indeterminate support.

In 1998, the Lijiang county government listed six townships with a "residual Dongba cultural eco-environment and Dongba faith atmosphere." These six, Dadong, Baoshan, Fengke, Ludian, Tacheng, and Taian were named "Eco-Townships of Dongba Culture." The naming of the six townships as such was mainly for "political encouragement" (initial interview with a local scholar in Lijiang Dongba Culture Institute of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, August 9, 2008). However, the government did not grant accompanying investment of manpower or materials. Until the present, there have been over 10 Dongba cultural transmission points in Lijiang, with over 400 young people participating, mostly in the above mentioned townships. Through research, the author learned that the idea of the Eco-Townships of Dongba Culture was to rescue and recover traditional ethnic culture as well as to build cultural tourism resorts. Nevertheless, even in these townships where the cultural eco-environment is comparatively better, Dongba rituals stopped many years ago. Cultural heritage activities aimed at preserving the dying and lost elements are promoted, but they are facing various challenges such as lack of funds, sites, teachers, time and stable student resources. Thus, except for two or three transmission places, regular class hours, stable student groups, and deep and systematic teaching cannot be assured, and therefore they lack a substantial effect. Most transmission places exist in name only and it is not rare that, at some transmitting places, founders, people in charge and Dongba teachers dispute different interests, sometimes even to an unpleasant outcome. The low success rate reflects the difficulty and challenge of the non-governmentalization of cultural transmission, but also that non-governmental cultural transmission is not impossible either.

Government-sponsored Dongba cultural transmission includes the Dongba Culture School at the Lijiang Dongba Culture Museum, Cultural Transmission

Class of Dongba Culture at the Dongba Culture Institute, and an Intensive Training Class of Protection and Transmission of Dongba Culture. Relatively speaking, such cultural heritage activities are usually outside the traditional community and involve collective teaching, better teachers, students with diverse backgrounds and shorter study hours. The teaching there is more theoretical and better funded than those sponsored by non-governmental organizations, not aiming at training professional Dongba but instead at cultural dissemination. Though governmentally sponsored cultural transmission involves Dongba dance, it provides few chances to practice, so learners cannot master it in the short term but can only visually learn about the dance.

In recent years, after the appeal of scholars, some classes in primary school opened Naxi language and traditional culture and art classes. However, only one school taught Dongba dance and the others usually taught Naxi folk music and dance. The Dongba dance that students learned had been rearranged and modified, to remove religious and narrative content. Hence, what students learned, in fact, was folk dance with Dongba characteristics in Dongba costume.

Entering Dongba culture into the formal school curriculum would be an effective and influential means of cultural transmission, it would guarantee student resources, regular class hours, and good teaching discipline. However, there are also limitations. Currently, school based teaching is mainly aimed at the popularization of Naxi language, Dongba characters and culture. It is not living transmission centering on Dongba rituals. It is therefore currently not enough to transmit practical and connotatively ample Dongba dance solely through formal schooling.

The traditional interpersonal mechanism of transmitting Dongba culture is indigenous and genuine. Originally, Dongba dance was transmitted for religious application, which is living transmission and the root of Dongba dance. However, as time passed, living Dongba cultural elements closely connected with community life have sharply decreased, and Dongba cultural transmission has almost disappeared from Naxi people's daily life. Replaced by tourists and research groups, Naxi ethnic community members are not Dongba's only serviced objects. Cultural transmission is not spontaneous but rather, it tends to be rational, that is, it is the combination of value rationality of cultural self-consciousness and instrumental rationality for profit; the cultural transmission has broken away from the countryside community where the transmitters are mainly kindred community and of the same geographic area, and has entered other social fields, including urban centers and the countryside, where cultural transmitters are community members with similar interests. Today cultural transmitters input shorter study times and consequently, they learn less. Living learned senior Dongbaes are few and aged, not able to demonstrate in person highly difficult dances. The traditional master-apprentice interpersonal

transmitting mechanism has been endangered. On a positive note, as the main growth engine of Dongba culture, the mode of social transmission is utilitarian, aiming at cultural popularity and occupational training. However, because Dongba dance learning is time-consuming, practical, and applied on only a few occasions, this mode of social transmission hardly helps Dongba dance. As a kind of “local knowledge” education, the contents of formal schooling’s cultural transmission are popularization, language and characters, mostly aimed at preventing the loss of Naxi language and traditional culture. Currently, this approach is still being explored and is incapable of transmitting real Dongba dance.

A History of Formal Education in Lijiang

Before modern education entered Lijiang, Taoism, Buddhism, various folk beliefs and Confucian concepts all coexisted. This is reflected in Naxi culture and the traditional education system.

Naxi Chinese education dates back to the Yuan Dynasty. After the appointment of regional officials by the Court in Qing Dynasty since the first year of Emperor Yongzheng’s reign, in 1723, the ruling class began education in Chinese and opened several government academies and free schools. The non-governmental forms of school, ancient private schools played the role of disseminating Confucian culture. People were resistant to education in Chinese to some degree, but Han culture was imposed nonetheless. Han education was significant for the culture, education, economy and social development in Lijiang. Historically limited, officials representing official culture thought of all of the ethnic customs and local knowledge as barbarian customs, blindly ignoring traditional Naxi culture. Formal education represented by government-run free schools in the traditional age was one of the main means by the central authorities to implement “governance and civilization” in ethnic minority areas and exert influence and control. Given special symbolic meaning, education in Chinese was a status symbol.

By the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905, to keep up with the trend of abolition of the imperial examination system and establishing modern schools in Lijiang Naxi areas, the Naxi modern education system was started. By the 1930s, Lijiang became the starting point of democratic thought and the cradle of democratic revolution in Yunnan, and cultivated ethnic talents and leaders. Furthermore, during the War of Resistance against Japan, many prestigious universities moved southward and merged into the Southwest Associated University in Yunnan province. Industry, commerce, and trade were relatively developed and local intellectuals emphasized education. All of the above facts contributed to the development of modern cultural education and a new atmosphere. From urban to

rural areas, a formal education system—including lower primary school, higher primary school, secondary school, high school and normal college—was established. By the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, there were 39 completed primary schools, 247 junior primary schools, 13,860 pupils and 440 teachers (see Cultural and Historical Data of Lijiang County Political Consultative Committee; Annal Compilation Committee of Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County, 2001; Gu, 1997, p. 1125).

At the end of the 1990s, Lijiang realized the goal of the “making nine year compulsory education universal and eliminating illiteracy among young and middle-aged people,” which was the central government plan to popularize compulsory education in west China. In Yunnan province, the economic level is relatively developed economically, the education level is relatively high, and Han culture has been popularized in Lijiang. Many local residents and students now feel unfamiliar with authentic Dongba culture. The language of instruction in Lijiang is Mandarin Chinese and bilingual education is no longer offered.

Interaction between Dongba Dance Cultural Transmission and Education

Historically, there were two ways for the education realm to connect with non-education contexts. On the one hand, the education realm and face-to-face community life intertwined together completely and thus education was a basic means for local social reproduction and cultural transmission among a community. On the other hand, during colonization and the construction of the nation-state, the education realm became totally separated from community life and instead connected with a larger social realm. This pushed a “delocalization” trend of society. This transformation began first in the West. Its course can be summarized as transformation from “face-to-face community socialization” to “universal knowledge dissemination beyond face-to-face socialization” (Wang, 1999).

The Dongba dance transmission mechanism belongs to the former, and apparently modern education belongs to the latter.

Traditional Period: Independent from Each Other and Developing Respectively

Since Chieftains Mu² advocated Han cultural education and some intellectuals took part in imperial examinations, Dongba culture gradually retreated from

² Feudal estate-holders and political rulers of Lijiang were surnamed Mu in Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties for 470 years.

urban and flat areas to mountainous and rural areas; though this occurred at a low speed. Han culture at that time was seldom introduced into areas where Dongba culture was popular. Formal education and indigenous education of Dongba culture were able to develop simultaneously, both demonstrating an ascending trend from the late Qing Dynasty to 1949. The scale of education of Dongba culture and Dongba faith both reached the most significant end right before 1949. At that time, between the late 1930s and early 1940s when modern school education was growing vigorously, traditional Dongba culture was also taking a prosperous look. Only few Dongbaes knew about modern culture; the others only knew about their own ethnic culture (Feng, 2007).

In fact, along with the push of official education represented by Han culture education, Dongba culture was not intensely suppressed. On the contrary, due to the increase in the economic level, rituals were held more frequently. The formal education system, representing central government, and the indigenous education system as Dongba cultural education, performed their own functions respectively, having no notable conflicts. Because Dongba cultural education satisfied grass-root Naxi people's needs for belief, community maintenance and education, it was positive to the stabilization and development of Naxi society. For that reason neither inland mainstream culture represented by those officials appointed by the central court nor elite class who had identity to the mainstream culture represented by Chieftain Mu forbade Dongba culture, though they considered it backward and labeled it as "native wizardry" and "barbarian customs."

It is generally acknowledged that, when two cultural systems fuse and collide, strong culture or so-called advanced culture will certainly assimilate weak culture or so-called backward culture (Zou, 2001). "The impact of foreign culture" has become a most popular explanation of cultural endangerment and extinction. However, it is necessary to contemplate the phenomenon that formal school conveying Han culture and interpersonal transmission of Dongba culture developed simultaneously before 1949.

Education through private schools or official schools and, later, modern formal education, disseminated mainstream ideology and universal knowledge through school realms. Education spaces such as old private or public schools, and modern compulsory education have symbolic power, without a direct connection to the real life of Naxi society. Formal education is one of the main means by which central governments realize direct control of ethnic minority places and convey official ideology. Initially accepted by local elites, the formal education system is definitely purposive and actually has the nature of political organization. Central governments realize the potential for control of viewpoint of the Naxi upper class through education. Identified by mainstream culture, the Naxi upper class retains legitimate label of "elite." Central governments and Naxi upper class interact, and Naxi upper class controls and administrates middle

and lower class. As a dynamic cultural course, Dongba cultural transmission keeps rural communities stable and developing. Hence, an ordered cultural administrative system forms.

Formal education conveying official knowledge is the field for mainstream cultural reproduction, ruled by cultural capital logic of mainstream society. Temperament, interest and skills under Han cultural criteria—fluent Chinese, decent style of conversation, manner, musical-instrument-playing, chess, calligraphy, painting and poetry, etc.—form practitioners' concrete cultural capital; "scholarly honor of official rank" and diploma obtained in formal examinations mean the possessing of legitimate institutionalized cultural capital; all the schooling apparatus and cultural products that can show status are objective cultural capital. The cultural capital is valid nationwide, with which one can get higher reputation and social status in the official system. Thus the cultural capital is easy to convert into social capital and economic capital.

Including that of Dongba dance, completely built into Naxi traditional community life, the transmission of Dongba culture is practical, interpersonal and of daily life, and reproduces Dongba culture in traditional Naxi social fields. Though the traditional transmitting mechanism looks unorganized, in fact as noted it has a closely-knit network of education through acquaintance. Even if some apprentices and their masters were not blood-related, their mutual affection was similar to blood-relations. This closely-knit network framed basic structure of Naxi rural society, giving typical and rich social capital to Dongba cultural transmitters. Dongba temperament, living philosophy and knowledge constituted concrete cultural capital; empowering ritual and public acknowledgement of Dongba power constitute institutional cultural capital; various religious instruments and classic works used in Dongba ritual are naturally objective cultural capital. With institutional cultural capital, a Dongba is qualified to host rituals and teach apprentices, and then have income. Hence, cultural capital converts into economic capital. Tangible interpersonal networks and intangible capital networks constitute double guarantees of Dongba cultural transmission together. At this time, Dongba dance had a great variety, rich implication and stable transmission.

In all, before 1949, formal education and Dongba cultural transmission had their own symbolic meanings and value. They had some intersection and conflicts but the conflicts were not serious because their cultural capitals formed and converted respectively in relatively independent fields divided as urban and rural, upper stratum and middle-lower stratum. External culture, mainly official knowledge, was reproduced through formal education fields. Though it influenced Dongba culture, it impacted Dongba culture little in rural communities, where the sphere of influence was Dongba culture.

Education of various types at different levels gives individuals special

“identification culture,” that is, certain social expectation, self-identity, self-expectation and knowledge structure (Gu, 1997). In this stage, the Naxi’s characteristic of co-existence of diverse cultures was notable. Han culture, neighboring ethnic cultures and indigenous Dongba culture got along harmoniously. It took on a diverse look of culture in Naxi areas.

Formal education in the traditional period stepped over community life and directly connected with a larger social space: the state. The course of the formal knowledge education system expanding is the direction for the course of change for Naxi socialization. Formal education is the most effective channel of national cultural reproduction. Popularization of formal schooling is the course of the central government strengthening the connection with and controlling all the levels. Formal education is oriented to the outside of community, making people yearn toward and identify with the external world outside of community. People attend formal education to get away from countryside and develop upward. In contrast, Dongba cultural transmission is oriented to the inside of community. It helps maintain community and cultivate people conforming to traditional ethics.

In this long period, though not presenting a threat to Dongba cultural transmission directly, formal education took an increasing proportion of cultural production and reproduction in Naxi social realms, a higher position and a bigger applied range. However, the formal education system did not bring transmission space to traditional culture and local knowledge. Relatively speaking, the course of formal education expanding is the course of Dongba cultural influence shrinking, namely the course of its cultural capital being depreciated.

Modern Period: Popularization of Formal Education and Endangerment of Dongba Culture Transmission

Schools are official organizations conveying knowledge and transmitting culture and dominating cultural reproduction. The interaction between modern school education and Dongba cultural transmission is school education growing popularized and monopolized while Dongba cultural transmission declines and becomes endangered. School education and Dongba cultural transmission have no intersection in transmitting contents and compete for transmitters and time against each other. When formal education conflicts with local knowledge, obviously the education with the authority of institutional cultural capital is in a stronger position; this leads to a crisis in the transmission of Dongba dance.

In the nearly 30 years before China’s recent reform period, the cultural power space of local knowledge resources represented by Dongba culture in Lijiang had almost all been lost. Due to the change of cultural values, the cultural capital value of Dongba culture had nearly returned to zero. However, even though Dongba culture was rectified in the early 1980s and both its economic and

academic value has been recognized, it is still hard for the mechanism of Dongba cultural transmission to survive. The nature of Dongba activities after 1980 is non-governmental training or local knowledge education, far from systematic and without a stable cultural transmission as a mechanism. It cannot create an authentic traditional Dongba who can transmit the Dongba cultural knowledge. The traditional interpersonal transmission mechanism is the internal logic and rule system dominating Dongba cultural survival and development, but it is fading out of social life and endangered. The modern transmission mechanism has not yet been formed, and the currently existing piecemeal transmission activities cannot be counted as the resumption of tradition.

The modernization movement after 1949 has accelerated social mobility and education is the most important capital contributing to upward social flow. In the past, education in each ethnic minority area reflected the local ethnic group's needs and played an important role of carrying on, passing down and developing ethnic culture. Now, education in ethnic minority areas reflects the need of modernization, so it is inevitable that ethnic minority education is integrated into the modernization process. The manifestations of educational modernization are the rapidly-built modern education system in ethnic minority regions. Formal education represents a "modern" social system and ideology, scientific knowledge and cognition. In terms of culture, formal education plays the role of integrating diverse culture. It makes individuals "modernists" living with modern consciousness, modern knowledge and skills, and modern life style (Qian, 2004).

Therefore, the national standard of cultural capital is widely-used in the whole Naxi world. Official knowledge and mainstream culture is the generally-acknowledged "orthodox culture" in school, and its cultural reproduction is therefore dominant. National schooling and indigenous Dongba cultural transmission thus have *de facto* cultural conflicts, such as the competition for time, sites and transmitters between official knowledge and local knowledge. Because most Naxi children accept Han culture early and have no cultural or language barrier in school, such conflicts are not the main cause to poor academic achievement but are the main cause to the disaggregation and endangerment of the Dongba cultural transmitting mechanism. Before local culture and local knowledge is included into an educational assessment system, it is hard to reach the ideal state where formal schooling and local cultural transmission promote and supplement each other.

The author's fieldwork fully confirms the above judgment. Nearly all the education practitioners interviewed at all levels sorted curriculum importance in this order: computer and English language are the most important, then formal courses such as Chinese and math; local knowledge is considered as the least important. It is generally believed that a primary school offering computer skills and English indicates that the school has a high teaching quality and advanced

conditions; parents sending children to learn piano, ballet and English indicates that the parents are capable, because computer, piano and ballet are from the West, representing “advanced” societies. As for local knowledge like Dongba dance, because the interviewees knew the identity of the researcher and it is considered “politically correct” to put importance on ethnic traditional culture, they almost always stated “local knowledge is important.” However, as the author’s interviews progressed, nearly all the interviewees said frankly that formal education should follow the curriculum of the textbooks. Some comments from interviews included: “after all, China still implements exam-oriented education” (initial interview with non-Naxi parent of a secondary school girl, August 20, 2008), “students should learn Dongba culture when they are free and under no pressure of study” (initial interview with Naxi parent of a secondary school boy, August 20, 2008), “nevertheless, it would be regretful not to know my own ethnic culture.”³ Three parents said that if their children are admitted by college (indicated a promising future), “then it is not worth it to regret not knowing Dongba culture.” Pupils have strong plasticity. Because Dongba culture class is easy, without exams, and teachers have instructed children in class that “it is significant to transmit Dongba culture,” they all told the researcher that they liked to study Dongba culture. Secondary school students with some Dongba knowledge mostly said that it was necessary to learn Dongba culture, but a small percentage of them said only by good academic mark could they leave countryside and realize their own ideals. As one put it, “if we were underachieving, there is still time for us to learn Dongba knowledge.” Urban secondary school students have different ideas about Dongba culture. Some students are non-committal to Dongba culture, for they have more “modern” hobbies like sports, pop music and internet games, or for they have sensed the importance of study (official knowledge). Another set of students think Dongba culture class should be opened in secondary school, out of interest or due to the publicity of cultural protection.

In all, resistance against Dongba cultural transmission in school education is mainly from leaders, teachers and some parents. The higher students’ grades are and the higher parents’ education levels are, the bigger the resistance is. Even scholars advocating Dongba cultural transmission choose to guarantee their own children’s academic record before traditional cultural education. The reason is that the higher grade a teacher teaches, the bigger the pressure from performance assessment criteria of academic mark and rate of student entering higher school he or she is bearing; the higher education degree parents have, the higher expectation they attach to their children on promoting social competition with education capital.

³ All the Naxi parents said so.

From time immemorial, formal education in China has been elite-oriented. “Making use of what one has learned”⁴ excludes physical labor and application in rural daily life. The curriculum design and assessment standard of modern education perpetuates this. Modern education as an “external factor” has existed in the Naxi social realm for fewer than 100 years and its popularization for 20 years. The system and contents of formal education are from the West. Its cultural reproduction does not include indigenous culture and local knowledge. For practical interests, to obtain institutional cultural capital taking certification and diploma as main form, the educated must accept the assessment standard of examination and choose official knowledge and mainstream culture. Therefore, even if traditional ethnic culture closely interrelates to students’ daily life and kindred history is integrated into school education as school-based curriculum or local knowledge, if it takes no weight in the system of entrance examination, it still cannot bring institutional cultural capital. It thus still can not escape from being marginalized. In recent years, the obstruction in secondary schools and above of the attempt of “Dongba culture into class” has proved the above judgment. The word “college entrance exam baton” was mentioned many times in the interviews of administrative leaders of education and teachers. It vividly reflects “symbolic violence” and the institutional singleness of selection and assessment.

Conclusion

In sum, the root of endangerment of a spiritual culture item is that, in a particular social realm the cultural capital of the cultural item is devalued, forcing transmitters and inheritors to choose mainstream culture favorable to their survival and development and social competition. The absence of institutional cultural capital directly determines the devaluation of a cultural element, because institutional cultural capital taking certification and diploma as the main form is authoritative, scarce and universal, easy to convert into economic and social capital.

To truly realize the cultural transmission function of education, realize cultural transmission’s improvement of school education, and guarantee educational equity, it is suggested that excellent ethnic traditional culture should be properly weighed in the assessing and selecting phase of ethnic minority education system and given institutionalized cultural capital; at the same time, school-based curriculum development should be promoted and given greater transmission space.

⁴ A Chinese idiom “学以致用(xue yi zhi yong).”

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