

Three Stages of Naxi Wedding in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township: Mutual Assistance Practice, Intergenerational Education and Cultural Expression

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of modernization, exploring the connotation and function of ethnic wedding rituals is crucial for understanding the symbiotic relationship between rural mutual assistance traditions and ethnic cultural inheritance. Taking the three-stage wedding rituals (Xiao Xiangbang, Da Xiangbang, and the official wedding day) of the Ruka branch of the Naxi ethnic group in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township as the research object, this study adopts participatory observation, in-depth interviews and literature analysis methods. The research finds that the three-stage wedding rituals have distinct functional divisions: Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang are practical carriers of rural mutual assistance, forming a gradient participation model from kinship to extended kinship and reflecting the logic of the “differential mode of association”; the official wedding day is a concentrated presentation of Sanba Naxi traditional culture, embodying ethnic connotations through elements such as pine gates, traditional costumes and scripture recitation. These rituals also assume the function of intergenerational education, transmitting ethical norms and cultural concepts through oral tradition and ritual practice. The study reveals the dual social functions of the rituals in maintaining rural mutual assistance networks and inheriting Naxi ethnic culture, providing a typical case for exploring the connection between rural mutual assistance and ethnic cultural inheritance in border areas.

Keywords: Naxi wedding rituals; rural mutual assistance; intergenerational education; cultural inheritance; Wushuwan Village

1. Introduction

As important carriers of ethnic culture and rural social relations, wedding rituals embody the operational logic of rural mutual assistance and the unique connotations of ethnic traditions. They also assume the function of intergenerational education, inheriting ethical norms through ritual practices. Wushuwan Village, located in Baidi Village, Sanba Naxi Township, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is a typical settlement of the Ruka branch of the Naxi ethnic group, adjacent to the Tibetan cultural circle. Its relatively isolated geographical environment has largely preserved traditional Naxi wedding customs and maintained the mutual assistance model prevalent in rural China. It should be clarified that “Xiangbang” refers to mutual assistance, specifically reciprocal support between relatives and villagers: when one family holds a wedding, relatives and villagers assist in preparations; in return, they will offer help when other families host weddings. The exchange of gift money also follows this reciprocal logic of mutual giving. The “three stages” discussed in this paper are specifically: Xiao Xiangbang (Mutual Help among Close Kin), Da Xiangbang (Extended Mutual Help among Relatives, Villagers and Friends), and the official wedding day. These stages exhibit clear functional divisions: Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang serve as core links of rural mutual assistance, reflecting the universal logic of mutual aid in rural China; the official wedding day constitutes a concentrated presentation of traditional Sanba Naxi rituals, demonstrating unique ethnic characteristics through elements such as ethnic costumes, pine gates, and scripture recitation, while completing the transmission of intergenerational education. Against the backdrop of modernization, exploring the functional divisions and connotations of these three stages is of great significance for understanding the symbiotic relationship between rural mutual assistance traditions, the inheritance of intergenerational

education, and ethnic cultural inheritance. Based on participatory observation and fieldwork, this paper systematically presents the practical details of the three-stage rituals, focuses on analyzing the mutual assistance logic embodied in Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang, thoroughly interprets the traditional connotations of Sanba Naxi weddings reflected by elements such as costumes, pine gates, and scripture recitation, and pays special attention to the intergenerational educational function and inheritance of ritual norms embedded in the rituals, so as to explore the internal connections between rural mutual assistance, intergenerational education, and ethnic cultural inheritance.

2. Research Area and Methods

2.1 Research Area Overview

Sanba Naxi Township derives its name from three uneven basins: Dongba, Baidi, and Haba. Located in the eastern part of Shangri-La City, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, it is the only Naxi township in the city. Covering a total area of 979.73 square kilometers, the township is part of the buffer zone of the “Three Parallel Rivers” World Natural Heritage. The terrain slopes from northwest to southeast, with the Baishui River and Jina River—tributaries of the Jinsha River—flowing through the entire region, providing abundant water resources. It is particularly renowned for the Baishuitai travertine terraces, known as the “Fairy’s Left Farmland”, as well as Haba Snow Mountain, a natural botanical and zoological garden hailed as the “Mother of the World’s Gardens”. Other attractions include ancient human relics such as the Zhari Rock Paintings, and natural landscapes like the Black Sea and Jiuzihai. The area boasts significant biodiversity, with a vegetation coverage rate exceeding 75%, including cold temperate coniferous forests and alpine meadows. It is home to rare species such as Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys and snow pheasants, and is rich in medicinal materials like *cordyceps sinensis* and *fritillaria*.

As the easternmost villager group of Baidi Village in Sanba Township, Wushuwan Village is a settlement of the Ruka branch of the Naxi ethnic group and is known as the most beautiful village in Shangri-La. The Akabala Dance, also called “Yalili”, originated here. The dance incorporates elements of god worship, reverence and praise of nature, as well as expressions of people’s yearning for a better life and their wishes. Adjacent to residential areas of the Han, Tibetan, and Yi ethnic groups, the village witnesses frequent exchanges among multiple ethnic groups in production and daily life, forming a unique pattern of multi-ethnic coexistence. The local economy is dominated by traditional agricultural production, with rice, broad beans, wheat, and corn as the main crops. The relatively isolated geographical environment and traditional production methods have not only largely preserved the original features of traditional Naxi wedding rituals but also maintained the traditional rural mutual assistance model. The mutual assistance behaviors in Xiao Xiangbang (Mutual Help among Close Kin) and Da Xiangbang (Extended Mutual Help among Relatives, Villagers and Friends) are typical of rural China, and the wedding rituals feature distinct Sanba Naxi characteristics, making Wushuwan Village an ideal research case for exploring the connection between rural mutual assistance and ethnic wedding traditions in border areas.

2.2 Research Methods

This study mainly adopts participatory observation and in-depth interviews, supplemented by literature analysis. The researcher conducted participatory observation on local wedding rituals, recording in real time the details of the ritual process, participants’ behaviors, and the symbolic meanings of related customs. During fieldwork, in-depth interviews were conducted with local villagers, including elders familiar with traditional wedding rituals, newlyweds who have experienced modern weddings, and village cadres concerned about cultural inheritance. The interview content covers the origin of wedding customs, the evolutionary course of rituals,

understanding of mutual assistance behaviors, and attitudes toward cultural inheritance. Meanwhile, the researcher sorted out and analyzed relevant academic works, journal papers, and local chronicles, providing theoretical support and references for interpreting the research results.

3. The Field Presentation of the Three-Stage Wedding Rituals in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township

Traditional weddings in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township, follow a clear chronological sequence, forming a complete three-stage process with distinct functional divisions: Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang serve as core links of rural mutual assistance, completing wedding preparations through mutual support based on rural interpersonal networks; the official wedding day constitutes a concentrated presentation of traditional Sanba Naxi rituals, demonstrating the unique ethnic culture and ritual norms of the Naxi people through exclusive elements such as traditional costumes, pine gate construction, and scripture recitation for blessings. This three-stage process with clear division of labor not only ensures the smooth holding of the wedding but also achieves the dual functions of maintaining rural mutual assistance networks and inheriting Naxi ethnic culture.

3.1 The First Stage: Core Preparation by the Kinship Circle

Xiao Xiangbang (Mutual Help among Close Kin) marks the initial stage of wedding preparations. The core participants are the immediate and close relatives of both the bride and groom, and the primary task is to complete the basic preparation work for the wedding, laying a material foundation for subsequent rituals. The scope of mutual assistance at this stage is concentrated within the “kinship circle”, reflecting the interpersonal logic of the “differential mode of association” in traditional rural society (Fei, 2008). On the day of Xiao Xiangbang, a core task of male relatives such as the groom’s uncles and brothers is to borrow tables, chairs, and benches from the village activity room. These items are communal property of the village, specially provided for villagers to hold weddings and other collective activities, and can be borrowed on demand and returned after use. This form of public resource sharing fully reflects the mutual assistance tradition formed by rural society to address the shortage of individual family resources under limited agricultural production conditions, and is a universal form of mutual assistance in rural China (Yan, 1996). Such mutual assistance also extends to the exchange of gift money: when the couple holds the wedding, close relatives will present gift money, locally known as “Guali” (gift hanging), to express their blessings. In the future, when these relatives hold weddings or other important events, the couple’s family will reciprocate with gift money, forming the “flow of gifts” and “reciprocal mutual assistance” among relatives and friends (Yan, 1996).

In addition to borrowing tables and chairs, male relatives are also responsible for slaughtering pigs, primarily to provide meat raw materials for the wedding. Dishes made from pork are indispensable at Naxi weddings in Wushuwan Village, a custom passed down through generations. After slaughtering the pig, male relatives sit in the yard to cut the pork, while female relatives are responsible for cleaning it. Female relatives also take charge of preparing meals, cleaning other ingredients, tidying the yard, and receiving relatives and friends from both sides. Meanwhile, elderly women in the village will take rice from the newlyweds’ home to steam at their own homes. Once cooked, young villagers will collect the steamed rice from each household using electric tricycles and transport it back to the newlyweds’ home uniformly. This is a long-standing tradition in the village, ensuring the supply of staple food during the wedding through centralized mutual assistance in rice steaming. The division of labor during the Xiao Xiangbang stage is relatively flexible: relatives take on tasks based on their respective skills, and some villagers are fixed in certain roles without explicit assignment, reflecting the long-established tacit understanding of mutual assistance.

On the day of Xiao Xiangbang, the families of the bride and groom will each hold a short

“preparatory meeting”, where family elders clarify the division of labor for the Da Xiangbang stage. This includes designating responsible persons for specific tasks such as slaughtering cattle and chickens, cooking, serving dishes, pine gate construction, and dance organization, to ensure the orderly progress of subsequent links. Villagers generally regard Xiao Xiangbang (Mutual Help among Close Kin) as the “basic link” of wedding preparations, believing that the early involvement of relatives can lay the foundation for large-scale mutual assistance in subsequent stages.

3.2 The Second Stage: Extensive Mutual Assistance in the Extended Kinship Circle

Da Xiangbang (Extended Mutual Help among Relatives, Villagers and Friends) is the core stage of wedding preparations. Participants expand from the kinship circle to include relatives, friends, and village neighbors, with the core task of completing all wedding preparation work. The scope of mutual assistance at this stage extends to the “extended kinship circle”, which is a concentrated manifestation of the rural mutual assistance network in Wushuwan Village and a common form of interpersonal interaction in rural Chinese society (Jiang, 2004). The extensive participation of villagers not only improves the efficiency of wedding preparations but also strengthens the emotional bond between individuals and the village community, aligning with the operational logic of rural society. In addition, the collective singing and dancing in the evening of Da Xiangbang serve as a relaxation activity after the intensive preparation work, laying a festive atmosphere for the subsequent traditional Naxi wedding.

3.2.1 Daytime Preparation: Gender-Based Division of Labor with Clear Responsibilities

On the morning of Da Xiangbang, the male group of the groom’s family—including the groom’s friends and male villagers—conduct intensive labor. Their core tasks include slaughtering cattle and chickens, and initial processing of ingredients. Meanwhile, they neatly arrange the tables, chairs, and benches borrowed from the activity room during the Xiao Xiangbang stage in the yard to prepare for the wedding banquet. The female group forms a “kitchen cooperation circle”, consisting of female relatives and friends, with core tasks of preparing food for the wedding and decorating the bride’s room. The decoration of the bride’s room takes “festivity and auspiciousness” as the core theme, with red “double happiness” stickers, wedding photos pasted on the walls, and twin posters placed at the head of the bed, creating a warm and solemn atmosphere that emphasizes the importance of reproduction.

Notably, the elderly women who took rice from the newlyweds’ home during the Xiao Xiangbang stage will successively return the steamed rice on the morning of Da Xiangbang. Each elderly woman places the steamed rice in a clean bamboo basket and carries it to the groom’s home. The collectively steamed rice is stored in a large wooden bucket specially used for grain storage, serving as the staple food for meals during the Da Xiangbang stage and the wedding banquet. The female group during the Da Xiangbang stage forms a close-knit “kitchen cooperation circle”, consisting of female relatives and friends such as the bride’s aunts, sisters, and the groom’s female cousins. Their core tasks are to prepare semi-finished food products for the wedding and decorate the bride’s room. The decoration of the bride’s room takes “joy and blessing” as the core theme, with every detail carefully arranged by female relatives. They paste red paper-cuts featuring patterns such as double happiness, mandarin ducks, and peonies on the walls and windows of the bride’s room—all of which carry auspicious meanings: double happiness represents the couple’s happiness, mandarin ducks symbolize marital harmony, and peonies stand for prosperity. They also place quilts embroidered with traditional Naxi patterns (such as landscapes, flowers, and birds) at the head of the bed. These quilts are hand-embroidered by the bride’s mother and grandmother, taking several months to complete. The exquisite embroidery and bright colors convey the elders’ deep love and blessings for the bride, creating a warm and solemn atmosphere in the entire bride’s room (He & Li, 2018).

Meanwhile, male relatives begin preparing materials for the pine gate by collecting fresh pine branches. Villagers believe that pine branches, which remain green year-round, symbolize

“enduring marriage and successive generations”. Many Naxi rituals utilize pine-related materials such as pine branches and pine torches. At noon, villagers start constructing the pine gate, which is erected at a prominent location outside the groom’s house. The pine gate consists of two thick pine branches as columns, with the top woven into a crossbeam using pine branches to form a “gate” shape, presenting a natural aesthetic. The construction process is guided by experienced elders in the village: males are responsible for building the framework, while females clean up the scattered pine branches on the ground afterward, reflecting the cooperative logic of gender division of labor.

3.2.2 Nighttime Activity: Festive Preening for the Traditional Wedding

The evening of Da Xiangbang (Extended Mutual Help among Relatives, Villagers and Friends) serves as a festive prelude after the daytime preparation work. Villagers hold collective singing and dancing activities in the groom’s yard, which not only provides relaxation after the intensive mutual assistance preparations but also gathers popularity, laying a warm and festive atmosphere for the traditional Naxi wedding the next day. The singing and dancing activities follow a fixed sequence, forming a hierarchical performance structure. Folk artists in the village play the Hulusi as accompaniment, and villagers spontaneously form a circle to dance to the rhythm, mainly performing the traditional Naxi group dance (Datie). The melodious and lively melody of the Hulusi is the core accompaniment instrument for traditional Naxi singing and dancing. Villagers believe that the sound of the Hulusi signifies auspiciousness, which can pray for blessings for the newlyweds and lay a cultural foundation for the subsequent traditional wedding rituals.

Subsequently, the Akabala Dance is performed. As a traditional dance of the Ruka branch of the Naxi ethnic group in Wushuwan Village, it is characterized by powerful movements and distinct singing rhythms. Young and middle-aged villagers, together with the elderly, form two teams to perform antiphonal singing and dancing, with profound and lengthy lyrics and magnificent momentum. Afterwards, group dance performances are held. First, the “Grandmother Team” takes the stage, wearing traditional Sanba Naxi costumes (white pleated skirts, black long-sleeved tops, sheepskin capes on the back, and colored tassel belts around the waist), performing traditional Naxi dances with steady and slow movements, reflecting respect for the elderly. Then the “Mother Team” takes the stage, also wearing traditional Naxi costumes, with dance movements that are both gentle and dynamic. Finally, a free group dance session begins, where all participants voluntarily form a circle. The participation of multi-ethnic neighbors in the dancing reflects friendly interactions between ethnic groups in rural society, adding a multi-ethnic festive atmosphere to the upcoming wedding (Yang, 2023).

3.3 The Third Stage: The Official Wedding Day, Concentrated Presentation of Sanba Naxi Traditional Rituals

The official wedding day is the core stage of the three-stage process and a concentrated presentation of traditional Sanba Naxi rituals. All rituals revolve around “the newlyweds’ identity transformation within the ethnic group” and “the inheritance of traditional Naxi culture”. The core venue is the groom’s yard, where key traditional Naxi elements such as pine gates, elders’ scripture recitation, and ethnic traditional costumes are concentrated. Throughout the wedding, the bride and groom only wear traditional Sanba Naxi costumes, a typical symbol of the uniqueness of traditional Naxi weddings. This stage not only signifies the official formation of the couple’s family but also achieves the public confirmation of their identity within the Naxi ethnic group and the inheritance of traditional culture.

3.3.1 Early Morning Preparation: Symbol Decoration and Clothing Preparation

In the early morning of the day, villagers first complete the final decoration of the pine gate—placing a rectangular wooden board in front of the pine gate, on which red couplets are pasted. The content of the couplets focuses on “a harmonious union lasting a hundred years” and “eternal concentricity”, which not only strengthens the festive atmosphere of the wedding but also endows

the ritual with a strong Han cultural element. At the same time, the males of the groom's family begin to place tables and chairs neatly in the yard according to the expected number of guests, and the females enter the kitchen to complete the final preparation of the food.

The bride's makeup and costume preparation are carried out simultaneously. Unlike the common practice of wearing wedding dresses or Xiuhe dresses in Chinese weddings, the newlyweds only wear traditional Sanba Naxi costumes throughout the wedding. The bride's core accessory is a sheepskin shawl—a symbolic costume of Naxi women, representing “diligence and perseverance”. The groom wears a traditional Sanba Naxi white top with a black belt adorned with colored tassels around his waist, symbolizing “steadiness and reliability” as well as “festivity and auspiciousness”. The newlyweds' costumes are all hand-made, prepared several months in advance by the mothers or female relatives of the bride and groom. Each costume carries the blessings and expectations of the elders, embodies the connotations of traditional Naxi culture, and serves as an important carrier for the intergenerational transmission of emotions and cultural inheritance of the Naxi ethnic group (Sala, 2012).

3.3.2 Core Rituals: Bed-Making Blessing and Elders' Scripture Recitation

While the bride is getting her makeup done at her home, the elders of the groom's family perform the “bed-making ritual” in the groom's new house. As one of the important traditional rituals of Naxi weddings, it is believed to have a decisive impact on the newlyweds' future marital life. The bed-making is led by female elders, with other female relatives observing and assisting. The ritual follows a strict and orderly process: first, the female elder spreads a red mattress on the bed, symbolizing “prosperity and happiness”. She then spreads red quilts embroidered with auspicious patterns on the mattress and arranges them neatly. Afterwards, she places “dates, peanuts, longans, and lotus seeds” on the quilt in a specific order. The combination of these four items implies “early birth of a noble son” through Chinese homophones, symbolizing the sincere expectation for the newlyweds to reproduce and continue the family lineage. This practice is similar to Han rituals and aligns with the Naxi people's “family-oriented” ethical values. During the bed-making process, the elders carefully arrange the quilts and recite Naxi auspicious phrases aloud. These phrases, spoken in the local Naxi dialect, are simple yet full of warmth and sincerity. For example: “The quilt is spread flat, and life will be smooth; dates and longans are placed evenly, and the family will thrive; the couple will be harmonious, and happiness will be endless; raise children with kindness, educate them with etiquette, and pass down the family tradition from generation to generation”. These auspicious phrases not only express the elders' blessings for the newlyweds but also transmit Naxi family ethics, life expectations, and educational norms to the newlyweds through oral tradition—especially the responsibilities of educating children and inheriting family virtues, enabling the younger generation to understand their obligations in family continuity and intergenerational education (Li, 1995).

After the bed-making ritual, the elderly grandparents in the village gather in the living room to preside over the “scripture recitation and blessing” ritual, a typical manifestation of Naxi religious beliefs. The elders sit in a circle, praying for the newlyweds through singing and recitation. The core theme is to pray to heaven and earth for the newlyweds' peace and smoothness in marital life, marital harmony, and family prosperity. In addition, the scriptures also possess an educational function: through the elders' repeated recitation, the younger generation is subtly influenced, and the Naxi virtues of diligence, kindness, and mutual assistance are passed down through oral tradition. The scripture recitation, low and melodious, lasts the entire morning, creating a solemn and sacred atmosphere that reflects the Naxi people's reverence for ancestors, heaven, and earth. It also completes the transmission of intergenerational ethics, traditional culture, and educational concepts. Through scripture recitation, the traditional religious beliefs, values, ethical norms, and educational requirements of the Naxi people are passed on to the younger generation, ensuring the continuity of ethnic culture and the inheritance of educational norms. This ritual is an important part of Naxi religious beliefs and cultural inheritance, playing a

crucial role in maintaining the stability of Naxi family and ethnic social order.

3.3.3 Wedding Feast and Closing Rituals

The core activity of the official wedding day is the wedding banquet, which is held in a “rotating banquet” mode. The specific number of rounds is determined by the number of guests, usually 3 to 5 rounds. Each round strictly follows the fixed sequence of “refreshments – firecrackers – main meal – newlyweds’ gratitude”, reflecting the standardization of traditional etiquette. Before each round, female relatives first serve refreshments to each table of guests, mainly including buckwheat cakes, er si tang (rice noodle candy), and tea, to tide the guests over. After the guests finish the refreshments, firecrackers are set off—the sound not only announces the official start of the wedding banquet to the village but also symbolizes “warding off evil spirits and avoiding disasters”.

After the firecrackers are set off, the main meal officially begins. Waiters serve the dishes to the tables in an orderly manner. The main meal mainly features local specialty ingredients such as pork, beef, chicken, shrimp, chickpea jelly, lichen, and wild fungi—all fresh ingredients prepared during the Da Xiangbang stage. The dishes are rich and diverse. In the middle of the main meal, the bride and groom take the stage in their traditional Sanba Naxi costumes to drink “concentric wine” together, after which they toast and express gratitude to all guests. During the meal, the newlyweds walk around each table, communicating cordially with the guests. “Concentric wine” is a custom in many ethnic weddings, symbolizing that the newlyweds will share joys and sorrow and be of one mind after marriage.

In the evening, after all wedding banquet links and collective entertainment activities are completed, the groom’s family sets off fireworks. The gorgeous fireworks blooming in the village night sky not only announce the successful conclusion of the traditional Naxi wedding to the entire village but also convey warm blessings to the newlyweds. The festive atmosphere is felt throughout the village. After the fireworks display, the groom’s family organizes personnel to return the tables, chairs, benches, pots, bowls, ladles, and other items borrowed for the wedding to the village activity room. This proper maintenance of village public resources lays the foundation for other villagers to use these resources in the future, representing a continuation of the mutual assistance tradition from the preparation stage. Meanwhile, the newlyweds’ family sorts out the gift money received during the Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang stages, carefully recording the givers and the amounts. This ensures appropriate reciprocation when the givers hold weddings or other important events in the future, maintaining this reciprocal mutual assistance relationship.

4. Dual Connotations: Rural Mutual Assistance Logic in Xiao Xiangbang & Da Xiangbang and Naxi Traditional Culture on the Official Wedding Day

The three-stage wedding process in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township, embodies dual connotations: Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang serve as practical carriers of rural mutual assistance, reflecting the universal operational logic of rural Chinese society; the official wedding day is a concentrated carrier of traditional Sanba Naxi culture, embedding the Naxi people’s values, cultural psychology, and religious beliefs. The clear division of labor between the two ensures the smooth holding of the wedding and achieves the dual inheritance of rural mutual assistance traditions and Naxi ethnic culture. The mutual assistance behaviors in Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang include not only labor support but also gift money exchanges, fully reflecting the reciprocity of rural mutual assistance.

On the one hand, the mutual assistance logic of Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang: the mutual assistance behaviors in these two stages form a gradient participation model from “kinship to extended kinship”, a typical form of rural mutual assistance in China. Ranging from the close support of core relatives to the extensive participation of extended relatives and neighbors, this model reflects the interpersonal network logic of the “differential mode of association” in rural

society (Fei, 2008). This form of mutual assistance, combining labor support and gift money exchanges, is a common practice formed by rural society to address the limitations of individual family capabilities. It not only improves the efficiency of wedding preparations but also strengthens the emotional bonds between village members and consolidates the cohesion of the village community.

On the other hand, the traditional cultural connotations of Naxi weddings: the wedding stage presents a variety of exclusive traditional elements of Sanba Naxi, which together constitute the core carrier of Naxi cultural identity. First, the pine gate: pine branches remain green year-round. In the Naxi worldview, pine trees symbolize “vitality”. The construction of the pine gate not only reflects the Naxi people’s reverence for nature but also implies that the newlyweds’ marriage will be as enduring and resilient as pine trees. Meanwhile, as the “ritual boundary” of Naxi weddings, the pine gate distinguishes between “ritual space” and “daily life space”, guiding participants to enter a “ritual state” and enhancing the solemnity of traditional rituals (Turner, 1969).

Second, “dates, peanuts, longans, and lotus seeds” and elders’ scripture recitation: the combination of these four items conveys the expectation of “early birth of a noble son” through homophones, reflecting the Naxi people’s “family-oriented” ethical values. Behind this expectation lies an emphasis on intergenerational inheritance and family education—raising and educating children is regarded as a core family responsibility. The recitation of auspicious phrases by elders during the bed-making ritual and the scripture recitation ritual transmits these ethical values, traditional religious beliefs, and educational norms to the newlyweds through oral tradition, completing the intergenerational inheritance of Naxi culture and the transmission of educational concepts. Third, traditional Sanba Naxi costumes: unlike the common practice of wearing wedding dresses or Xiuhe dresses in Chinese weddings, the bride and groom only wear traditional Sanba Naxi costumes throughout the wedding. The bride’s sheepskin shawl and the groom’s white top are not only symbolic costumes of the Naxi people but also carry the cultural connotations of the Naxi people’s reverence for labor and nature, serving as important visual symbols of traditional Naxi weddings. For the younger generation, the inheritance of traditional costumes also constitutes a form of implicit education, enabling them to understand their own ethnic culture and the values of diligence and reverence for nature from an early age. Fourth, collective singing and dancing: the traditional Naxi group dance (Datie) and Hulusi accompaniment in the wedding are important components of traditional Naxi culture. They not only enhance the festive atmosphere but also realize the display and inheritance of traditional Naxi art. In the process of collective participation, young people learn ethnic songs and dances, while perceiving a sense of group identity and the requirements of interpersonal harmony, thus undertaking the function of educational socialization.

5. Dual Social Functions: Maintaining Rural Mutual Assistance Networks and Inheriting Naxi Ethnic Culture

The three-stage wedding process in Wushuwan Village, Sanba Township, with its clear division of labor, possesses dual social functions: Xiao Xiangbang (Mutual Help among Close Kin) and Da Xiangbang (Extended Mutual Help among Relatives and Villagers) mainly serve to maintain rural mutual assistance networks and integrate rural social relations; the official wedding day primarily undertakes the function of inheriting Naxi ethnic culture and maintaining ethnic social order. These two functions complement each other, jointly promoting the stable operation and development of village society. The mutual assistance logic of Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang is highly consistent with the theories of “differential mode of association” and “human relationship society” (Fei, 2008; Yan, 2006; Shen, 2007).

First, maintaining rural mutual assistance networks and consolidating village cohesion (the function of Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang). The mutual assistance behaviors in these two stages form a gradient participation model from “kinship to extended kinship and neighbors”, a

typical form of rural mutual assistance in China. Ranging from the close support of core relatives to the extensive participation of extended relatives and neighbors, every participant integrates into the preparation process through labor input and forms a reciprocal mutual assistance relationship through gift money exchanges, establishing a mutual assistance consensus of “all for one, one for all”. This form of mutual assistance is a common practice formed by rural society to address the limitations of individual family capabilities. It not only ensures the smooth progress of wedding preparations but also strengthens the emotional bonds between village members and consolidates village cohesion. In the relatively isolated mountain village environment, this mutual assistance network serves as an important guarantee for villagers’ survival and development.

Second, integrating social relations and building family alliances. A wedding not only represents the union of the newlyweds as individuals but also confirms the alliance between the two families. The participation of relatives in the Xiao Xiangbang and Da Xiangbang stages, the leadership of elders in the bed-making and scripture recitation rituals, and family interactions during the wedding banquet all continuously strengthen the connection between the two families (He & Li, 2018). Meanwhile, the exchange of guests and gift money during the wedding banquet also expands the village’s social network, forming cross-family and cross-ethnic social ties. This social integration helps resolve conflicts and disputes within the village, maintaining the stability of village social order.

Third, transmitting rural ethical norms and ritual paradigms, and maintaining social order. Every link of the wedding ritual contains two levels of ethical connotations: on the one hand, ethnic Naxi ethical norms such as respect for the elderly, filial piety, family continuity, and children’s education, which are mainly transmitted through ethnic rituals such as scripture recitation; on the other hand, rural ethical norms such as “mutual assistance” and “gratitude and reciprocity”, which are mainly embodied through mutual assistance behaviors. As an important carrier of intergenerational education, the wedding ritual enables the younger generation to not only understand the ethical requirements of rural society but also clarify the family’s educational responsibilities—how to educate children in accordance with ethnic traditions and rural norms, and how to pass down the virtues of diligence, kindness, and mutual assistance—through the words and deeds of elders. These rural ethical norms and educational paradigms are common to rural Chinese society, not unique to the Naxi ethnic group. They are transmitted to every participant, especially the younger generation, through ritual practice, clarifying the individual’s responsibilities and obligations within the family, rural society, and intergenerational education, and maintaining village social order. Compared with written rules, the oral transmission of ethical norms and educational concepts in rituals is more vivid and easier for villagers to accept and inherit.

Fourth, completing identity transformation and ensuring rural social reproduction. Through core wedding rituals such as bed-making, scripture recitation, and the wedding banquet, the newlyweds officially transform from “single individuals” to “married couples”, and their social identity is collectively recognized by all village members. This identity transformation is not only an important milestone in the individual life course but also a core link in rural social reproduction—ensuring the sustainable development of village society through marriage and family lineage continuation. The mutual assistance behaviors in the wedding provide material and emotional support for this identity transformation and social reproduction, a common guarantee mechanism in rural China. For the Naxi people, who are mainly engaged in traditional agriculture, the continuation of family lineage is closely linked to the inheritance of land and production materials, reflecting the integration of ethnic production and living characteristics with the logic of rural social reproduction.

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