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Moving the Living and the Dead

The Power of Bronze Drums in Contemporary Ethnic China

The bronze drum in Asia has long been regarded as a form of antiquity and a cultural relic of the bronze age, representative of cultural groups found in China, Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar's border region. Through a close examination of bronze drum culture among the Baiku Yao ethnic minority of northwest Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, in southern China, this article reveals the constitutive role drums play in contemporary social and religious life. This article draws on eight years of ethnographic data and builds on a material culture studies analytical framework to describe the sacralized life of the bronze drum. Through a ritualized anthropomorphic metamorphosis, the bronze drum is said to become a constituted member of the Baiku Yao community and hold sacred power to bridge the human and spirit worlds during funeral ceremonies. This article analyzes the symbolic dimensions of the bronze drum as a cultural practice and as a medium through which Baiku Yao ritual order, social organization and arrangements, and interactions with the spirit world can be understood. It reveals that bronze drums today possess agency in their power to move people, living and dead.

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The sound of the drums beckoned us. I jumped on the back of Lu Jimin's motorcycle, and the two of us sped up the mountain. We diverged from the paved road that connected Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region to Guizhou province and traversed a steep, rock-covered single track. As soon as we came upon a crowd of motorbikes covering the narrow path, we stopped. Situated in an unused rice paddy that looked over the surrounding terraces was a group of men gathering around a large wooden square 10-foot-high arch. Suspended from the top beam were half-meter-wide bronze drums. A middle-aged man sauntered up to a large pig-skin-covered wooden drum facing the line of bronze drums, picked up thick wood mallets resting on its tympanum, and slammed them down with great force. On every beat he squatted a little to lean into the drum for more force. As his rhythm continued, men approached each of the hanging bronze drums and began to join the lead drummer. Their deep, resonating rhythm began to echo across the neighboring karst mountaintops. It was mid-spring, funeral season for the Baiku Yao, a small sub-branch of the Yao living in southwest China.

One man stood beside the bronze drum hitting its round flat face, while the other man moved a large wooden bucket in and out of its curved bell from behind. The front drummer held a thin bamboo stick in his right hand and tapped the top side of the bronze drum bell to produce a tinny sound on the upbeats. In his left hand, he held a mallet made of tree root to hit softly into the center of the drum's face on the downbeats. Every time he hit the face, the other drummer pushed his wooden bucket into the large bell and just as quickly pulled the bucket out, cupping the sounded blast from the mallet, and sending the soft warm tone outward. The row of buckets flew in and out of the drum bells in perfect unison. Each pair of men performed this movement with bodies fixed in position and heads facing the ground in a solemn stance.

The lead drummer slammed his thick wooden mallets down for a final blow and began to pound more rapidly, a crescendo, ending the first of eleven stanzas. The mood immediately changed. The bronze drummers stood up and excitedly waved their mallets and buckets into the air, yelling. Long-barrel musket rifles were fired and enveloped the rice paddy with white smoke. Each drummer was handed a bowl of locally produced moonshine and consumed it in one draught. I was told it was to keep each player grounded in the human world. Within minutes, the lead drummer grabbed his sticks again and began the next stanza.

Night had fallen quickly, and the final blast of drums rang out. A young man ran across the rice paddy waving strips of white paper attached to a long bamboo rod to signal the end of the first day of the funeral ceremony. Only the drummers and a few dozen men from the village remained. Each pair of men unstrung their drums from the wood frame and walked over to a large flat basket on the ground to receive meat kebabs and glutinous rice balls as a token of gratitude from the family of the deceased. As the crowd dissipated, the village party secretary standing close by turned to me and asked, "Will you be joining us tomorrow? We will be sacrificing the water buffalo before sending up [*shang shan* or "bury"] the elder."

I didn't come to the Baiku Yao village of Huaili, deep in northwest Guangxi, with the intention of researching bronze drums. Rather, my focus was on the recently established village ecomuseum (2004), an initiative led by Chinese scholars and the regional government to, on the one hand, help protect and manage heritage and, on the other hand, promote cultural and ethnic tourism. What began as an investigation on museum development approaches in rural China and the impact of village museumification (Nitzky 2012a, 2012b, 2014) became also an ethnography on bronze drums among the Yao of southwest China.

In the later part of the twentieth century, the social sciences began to take a more critical look at the relationship between people and things. We saw with Arjun Appadurai's seminal edited volume *The Social Life of Things* (1986) and a proliferation of literature from the likes of Daniel Miller (1987), Marilyn Strathern (1988), Nicholas Thomas (1991), Janet Hoskins (1998), and others that the human-object relationship deserves a broader social analysis articulating how people and objects are "tied up with each other." Consequently, what Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall (1999, 170) and others in contemporary material culture studies propose is a new theoretical perspective that looks at objects as constitutive of meaning. In other words, objects do not simply have meaning, they make it. Furthermore, using a biographical approach we can "understand the way objects become invested with meaning through social interactions they are caught up in" and how these meanings change over the "life of the object," recognizing that objects can and should be seen in terms of an unfolding process of becoming (see Thomas 1991). For this article, I draw on this scholarship to illustrate one phase of the life of the bronze drum.

Bronze drums in Asia are regarded as a form of antiquity, representative of long-past societies of the Chinese–Southeast Asian border region, and symbols of national identity. The bronze drum, deemed recently by the Chinese government as a cultural relic, a significant part of national cultural patrimony, and in its earliest iterations a proclaimed national treasure, has a social life that has undergone significant change in meaning, value, and use over the past two thousand years in Asia. Drawing on the archaeological and ethnographic record, many texts have focused on the material form, function, and movement of ancient bronze drums, often creating taxonomies in the process. However, little attention has been paid to understanding the contemporary bronze drum practices and meanings. This article examines the bronze drum not as a cultural artifact or relic but as a meaningful, vital object that is a durable constitutive component of daily life in ethnic southwest China.

For the Baiku Yao, a sub-branch of the Yao in northwest Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR), bronze drums accumulate biographies by entering the Baiku Yao community as part of a household, undergoing a sacralizing naming ritual, and participating in communicative and mediatory acts in funeral ceremonies. Building on ethnographic empirical data collected in the northern reaches of GZAR from 2008 to 2016, living with the Baiku Yao of Nandan county, and employing a material culture studies analytical framework combined with anthropological and ethnomusicological approaches, I examine here the constitutive aspects of bronze drums in social and religious life. I aim to show how bronze drums are "invested with meaning through the social interactions they are caught up in" (Thomas 1991) and entangled in an active and potent socio-religious system among the Baiku Yao (Dawe 2001). In my investigation of the contemporary relationships between the Baiku Yao and bronze drums, I aim to illustrate the signifying practices of possessing, knowing, and sounding bronze drums and to move beyond examining objects as passive or muted to reveal that bronze drums occupy engendered and status-defining positions and possess agency in the eyes of the Baiku Yao in their power to move people, living and dead.

Bronze drums in China

Archaeologists have unearthed bronze drums throughout northern Vietnam and Myanmar and even as far south as the Malay peninsula and the archipelago of Indonesia (Calò 2009). However, nowhere possesses as many bronze drums as southern China. Of the 2,400 bronze drums worldwide, the majority are found in China. Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, and Guangxi are considered the main locations for production and the movement of bronze drums in China over the last two thousand years.[1] While the bronze drum is argued to have originated in Yunnan province, today the most are found in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, namely in its northwest reaches of Hechi Red River Basin (*Hechi Hongshui Heliu*). Composed of seven counties—Donglan, Nandan, Tian'e, Fengshan, Bama, Dahui, and Du'an—and a total of 109 townships, Hechi has over 1,400 bronze drums (Wu et al., 2009). Unique to Hechi is the continued use of bronze drums by different ethnic minority groups, such as the Zhuang, Miao, and Yao. The Baiku ("white trouser" in Chinese) Yao, known locally as the *Donuo*, is a sub-branch of the Yao umbrella ethnic nationality (*minzu*) (see Litzinger 2000; Gladney 1994). With a population of approximately fifty thousand, the Baiku Yao live across three border townships of Lihu and Baxu in Guangxi and Yaoshan in Guizhou Province. Lihu township has the largest collection of bronze drums for any township in the region (Wu et al., 2009).[2] The Baiku Yao are the main reason the Hechi Red River Basin was named in 2015 an official bronze drum cultural ecological protection zone.

While no written texts date the introduction of the bronze drum to the Baiku Yao people, historical and archaeological records show that the bronze drum collection and casting developed early in Guangxi.[3] Chinese texts note that bronze drums in China date back to the Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE) (Jiang 1982, 1999).[4] In my conversations with two notable scholars of bronze drums in China, Nong

Xuelian and Jiang Tingyu, they stressed that early bronze drums were the right of regional leaders and proof of elite wealth and prestige (personal communication, August 2016). Charles Higham (1996, 2002) and Ian Glover (2010), scholars of bronze culture in Southeast Asia, similarly concur that bronze drums and other bronze objects were markers of high status. Higham (1996, 2002) asserts that ownership of bronze drums was considered the highest symbol of the aristocracy (see also Andaya 2016). In addition to the possession of bronze drums by southwest China's elite, deputy director Lu Wendong of the Museum of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region informed me that elite would flaunt their status by virtue of the width, height, and intricacy of their creation (personal communication, August 2016).

Mr. Nong Xuejian of Guangxi Museum of Anthropology provides an analogy to demonstrate the bronze drum's importance in southern China, stating that historically the bronze drum was like the *ding* (tripod bronze vessel found in northern China) of the south (personal communication, August 2016). Like the *ding*, bronze drums have mobility, moving across the region of southern China and northern Vietnam in accordance with established relationships between lords and elites. As Glover (2010, 19) notes with respect to their wide circulation and connection with diplomacy, bronze drums were prestige goods. In fact, the Chinese historical account of Ma Yuan, a military general of the Eastern Han dynasty who suppressed and conquered much of southern China and northern Vietnam, illustrates the significance of "drum diplomacy." Bronze drums were so important that General Ma Yuan is said to have seized bronze drums across the region and melted them down to be recast as bronze horses in an attempt to remove the power of ruling elites during his southern military raids (Cooler 1995, 8; Han 1998).

From the earliest and most simplistic Wangjiaba-type bronze drum to the later and more intricate types of Shizhaishan, Lingshan, and Majiang,[5] bronze drums in China have transformed in size, decorated motifs, and patterns over time. Geometric motifs and patterns depicted on bronze drums tell us about the strong symbolism drums had (and maintain) in representing a connection between natural and supernatural worlds (Calò 2014). Motifs such as peacocks, feathered dancers, flying birds, canoes, clouds, and thunder adorn the face and sides of bronze drums, depending on the type, period, and region. Along with these patterns, the star/sun-like relief centrally located on the face of bronze drums communicates a connection to and worship of celestial bodies, nature, and the supernatural world (Imamura 2010; Han 1998, 2004; Calò 2014, 2009). Ambra Calò and others note that these features point to the unique spiritual qualities drums were thought to possess among different cultural groups found in China as well as in Southeast Asia. For example, Nong Xuejian explained to me that the three-dimensional frogs placed on the face of many bronze drums are connected to the Yue people of southern China. As farmers, the Yue people were dependent on rain for their crops. The croaking of frogs and the clapping of thunder were thought to precede the coming of rain, and three-dimensional frogs adorned the tympanum of many bronze drums as a venerated symbol of the fertility of the land. People believed that if the drums were struck, rainstorms would ensue (see Bernet Kempers 1988, 21, 67–68, 177–78; Calò 2009, 121). Some research also states that drums were considered to possess great spiritual power as protectors against

disaster and evil and brought fortune and wealth (Wu et al., 2009). "Among the Yueh chieftains of Yunnan," as Richard Cooler (1995, 9) discusses, drums "were used to summon the gods, obtain blessings, and to heal the sick." As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, for the Baiku Yao of Guangxi, the bronze drum also possesses a spiritual power to summon and communicate with the supernatural world.

Historically, bronze drums served different purposes among various groups of the China–Southeast Asia border region and beyond. Importantly, bronze drums are not mere antiquities found in museum collections. They continue to hold cultural significance among several ethnic groups today. The Zhuang of northwest Guangxi, for example, continue to venerate the frog during the annual MaGuai Festival by sounding their bronze drums for a good harvest. This article focuses on how for one ethnic minority group in southern China the bronze drum remains an essential element in their socioreligious life. For the Baiku Yao, the bronze drum, or *nou* in Baiku Yao language, is a sacred device understood in the community as a bridge or medium to communicate with the ancestral and spirit world that has consequences in the social realm.

The sacredness of drums

Beyond secular musical performance, drums throughout the world are seen to take on important and distinct symbolic meaning among different cultural groups. Social scientists and historians have well documented drums used for religious and ritual ceremonies. For shamanic and animistic ritual practices, for example, drums play a significant role among Native American groups like the Lakota and Iñupiat, the Sámi of Northern Europe, and the Manchu, Evenki, Oroqen, and Yi of East Asia. According to Michael Witzel (2011) and Mariko Namba Walter and Eva Jane Neumann Fridman (2004), a key device of Siberian shamanism, along with shamanic practices from East Asia to the Americas, is a circular frame drum. Its beat is said to induce visionary ecstasy, trance, "vision quests," and divination (see also Pentikäinen 2010 on the Sámi). Beyond the transformation sound drums produce, many groups claim the drum as a living being or force that contributes to power and mediumship of the shaman. In Åke Hultkrantz's (1991, 16) extensive work comparing shaman drums, the Siberian drum is noted for its embodiment of a spirit, namely the guardian's spirit. It is granted life when a spirit possesses the structural membrane of the drum. Christopher Rybak and Amanda Decker-Fitts (2009), drawing on the work of Joseph Epes Brown (1953), claim that among many Native American groups the round form of the drum "represents the entire world, and the rhythmic beat represents the heartbeat of the world." The "talking drums" found in Nigeria are said to have a direct connection to deities. Olusegun Oladosu (2016) stresses that the drum both reveals the pulse and inner feelings of the Yoruba people of Benin and Western Nigeria, and the rhythm enhances the ecstatic state of the practitioner. Oladosu also shows the ritual salience of Yoruba drums in how they "facilitate the acts of spiritual expression in ritual passages by awaken[ing] and invok[ing] the spirits of deities [namely Ogun, the god of iron] in festivals and thus motivat[ing] connection between them and the participants" (2016, 57). Through their power to transform the state of practitioners,

to summon spirits, and to embody life itself, drums can hold significant power, potent symbolism, and revered sacredness.

To quote the late social anthropologist Stanley Tambiah (1979, 1985, 1996): "Anything toward which an 'unquestioned' and 'traditionalizing' attitude is adopted can be viewed as sacred" (1985, 130). In my discussions with Baiku Yao elders and bronze drum players, a similar collective unquestionability was expressed about the power drums embody and their ability to communicate directly with the ancestral world. The exploration of the sacred and constitution of sacred objects has long been a focus of attention in the social sciences. Much earlier than Tambiah, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1964) examined the sacredness found in *mana*, describing the sacred as "that which gives value to things and to people, magical value, religious value, social value." Apart from Hubert and Mauss's analysis of the sacredness of things and beings, eminent sociologist Emile Durkheim, in his seminal text, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1954), probed further the relationship between the sacred and the social. While noting that sacred objects may vary from one society to the next, Durkheim found uniformity across societies in that "the sacred character of a thing is not implicit in the intrinsic properties of the thing; it is something added." Durkheim's constructivist approach showed that nothing, therefore, is excluded *a priori* from the realm of the sacred; anything can be given representative meaning. Thus, while sacredness may be unquestionable by a group, sacredness is also proscribed by that very group. Furthermore, Hubert and Mauss supported that the sacred is representative of and constitutes the values of a given community and its members. Be it holy water, the Nile River, sutras, or bronze drums, a community is seen engaging in certain acts in accordance with the ascribed values and meanings to maintain the sacredness of a thing or being.

According to Durkheim (1954, 380), "an object is sacred, because it inspires, in one way or another, a collective sentiment of respect," which endows "its representation in the conscious mind with such strength that it automatically prompts or inhibits" certain acts (Derlon and Mauzé n.d., 5). Tambiah (2013) states that sacred things are "recognized as permanent embodiments of virtue and power." To understand the sacredness of a drum is not only to detail its characteristics and distinction from the profane but also to probe how it exemplifies and manifests morals, values, and social obligations of the group that defines it and holds it in high esteem. In this article, I illustrate how the bronze drum performs the essential role in the eyes of the Baiku Yao of announcing the death of a community member to the human and spirit world. Its revered sound is collectively understood as having the power to open the path to the ancestral land for the deceased spirit to reach. The event described at the beginning of the article reveals how communicative interaction is an essential part of funeral ceremonies among the Baiku Yao. This includes music and drumming as a mode of enacting ancestral respect and mediation between the natural and supernatural worlds. The process of enactment requires particular drums, the wooden drum and bronze drum, to be played in unison by village laymen during funeral ceremonies. The bronze drum also demands respect because of the sacralization process it undergoes after entering the community, whereby it experiences an anthropogenic metamorphosis through ritual. Rather than maintaining a stance on the dichotomous

relationship between sacred and profane, with their associated unbridled distinction, I aim here to show how the inscription of sacredness of the bronze drum has serious consequences in the social realm for the Baiku Yao, so much so that cultural and symbolic capital as well as kin relations are constituted through the drum's ownership and use. For this article, I highlight the social and cosmological relationships in which bronze drums are entangled in rural China. In following Alfred Gell, I attempt to unravel not only what the bronze drum represents and embodies but what bronze drums *do* affectively by holding a "practical mediatory role" (1998, 6) in the Baiku Yao world.

Bronze drum folklore

Several miles up the steep and winding road from the township of Lihu, Li Fangcai's adobe and brick home sits centrally located in Huaili village.[6] He is known throughout the Baiku Yao community and beyond as a master drummer and has been recognized by the Guangxi regional government as an intangible heritage "inheritor." Li Fangcai sat on a low wood stool across from me in his home. We were separated by dinner cooking in a steel wok over a wood fire pit that his wife had prepared. In the corner of Li Fangcai's house stood an enormous wooden skin drum like I had seen before leading the line of bronze drums. He saw me take notice. Leaning toward me over the simmering wok, Li said, "You know, we play drums for deceased elders!" He slowly pulled back out of the smoke and took a few puffs off his stubby cigarette. His pause was intentional after this definitive statement. The silence that persisted connoted a certainty, a claim of the power of the drum.

Conversations and interviews with villagers and my attendance at funeral ceremonies summer after summer over eight years provided little in the way of a deeper description on the power of the drum beyond what I heard repeated in household after household, "we play drums for deceased elders." Although the Baiku Yao are steeped in a complicated ritual system of venerating ancestors and animate and inanimate spirits, I observed that they do not engage in discussions in the symbolism of ritual life with each other, let alone with a visiting anthropologist. Only those recipients of a shamanic ritual may be informed of the name of a harmful spirit, the reason for pain or strife, and what needs to be done to appease it through ritual sacrifice. Such knowledge is not considered taboo or secretive. Rather, the fact that it remains elusive and tacit is an illustration of the Baiku Yao people's unquestionable acceptance of ritual belief and practiced ritual postulates (see Rappaport 1999). The questions I posed about the role of the bronze drum were considered odd. It was obvious to them that "we play for deceased elders." Indeed, the unyielding certainty of the bronze drum's power strengthens the dimensions of its symbolic attachments.

Durkheim and others tell us that cultural objects are "the fruits of collective production, fundamentally social in their genesis." In the case of the Baiku Yao bronze drum, collective production can be seen as the act of cultural transmission, through voicing and passing on oral traditions, learning through social practice, and the unspoken certainty of spiritual power. Around the night fire the collective production process would take place. Baiku Yao elders would lament that the days

when children would sit around the fire hearth at night and listen to tales from their elders had disappeared. The introduction of the television and more recently the smartphone had certainly accelerated if not induced such change. As we experienced the warm glow, elders kindly entertained my probes for any knowledge surrounding the bronze drum in the spatial and temporal context. My inquiries, unbeknown to me at the time, lent themselves to the receipt of community knowledge by present youth. In the households I visited to discuss the bronze drum, young children listened on as I did for the first time, receiving the benefits of cultural production. One instance, the tale of Lasai Decha, serves as an example of many such evenings when I learned the meaning of bronze drums through folklore.

> A long time ago . . . a young boy named Lasai Decha was taking out his cow to the fields to graze when he saw a mother cow undergoing significant pain while giving birth to her calf. Later that day, Lasai Decha returned from his duties and informed his mother of what he witnessed that day. She then patiently explained to him the birthing process and stated, "not only do cows suffer, but I too underwent significant pain and suffering for several days to give birth to you." Much later, upon his mother's death, the filial Lasai Decha decided not to permit his mother's body to be consumed by his fellow villagers, according to customary form of cannibalism after someone's death. Instead, the son secretly hid his mother's body in a coffin underground in his home to prevent her body from being seen. When villagers came to ask of his mother's whereabouts, the boy lied, saying she was off in the fields. Lasai Decha went to consult his maternal uncle (*jiujiu*) on how to honor his deceased mother. His uncle explained that he must offer meat to his fellow villagers even if it was not his mother. His uncle told him that he would need a water buffalo to sacrifice. In addition, he would need a bronze drum and cow-skin drum to play for his mother. His uncle mentioned a man who had such drums that Lasai Decha should see. Lasai Decha collected a large water buffalo of his own and invited his uncle to slaughter the animal in public. Then he divided the meat to present to each household. Although the villagers were initially angry that Lasai Decha had violated the social laws of society, they welcomed the sacrifice of the buffalo as an alternative.

Every elder I spoke with told me this story, recalling it from their memory of sitting around the evening fire when they were younger. Why did elders relay this tale when asked about the use of the drum for the deceased? The tale of *Lasai Decha* exemplifies acts of honoring the dead and the role kin must play in this process. The elision of cannibalism was never explained to me by elders, and I received little to no response to my probe. However, the bronze drum in this story could be used as an explanation for abandoning the grisly practice of eating the dead, as a more honorable way to pay reverence to deceased elders. The transmission of the narrative of *Lasai Decha* is the oral expression of this sentiment, and the bronze drum and the water buffalo act as the physical embodiment of it. For the Baiku Yao I spoke with, the bronze drum triggers strong moral and social obligations.

The collective knowledge of this narrative across Baiku Yao society constitutes a fundamental part of the discourse on ritual practice that legitimizes both the logic of death and the custom of funerals. While little is mentioned directly in the narrative on the use of the drum, other folktales were referenced by villagers I spoke with. Most

notable is that of the Monkey Drummer, which points to the association between the bronze drum and death:

> A long time ago, a *dounou* ["Baiku Yao people" in Baiku Yao language] male elder went into the forest to harvest some soybeans. While in the forest, he got tired from working and decided to take a nap. After a while, a group of monkeys were coming down the mountain and saw the man lying in a pile of soybean husks not moving. Thinking he was dead, the monkey and accompanying fox decided to play the bronze drum for the man to commemorate his death. The elder was wakened by the sound of the drums, and, lying still, he watched mesmerized at the animals playing. He witnessed the monkey beating the drum jumping around it and making strange movements. He became so surprised that he stood up and startled the animals, making them run off into the forest. The man took the two drums—wooden pig-skin drum and bronze drum—back to his village. Later, during the funeral of a village elder, the man decided to play the wooden pig-skin drum with the accompanying bronze drum. While playing, the man began to mimic the movements he remembered from the monkey on the mountain. The man told his story to the villagers and thus began the legend of *QinZeGeLa*, monkey stick jump.

Through this folktale, we witness the relationship Baiku Yao people have with nature. In this case fauna, the monkey and fox, are displaying anthropomorphic characteristics in their ability to make effective and symbolic use of human material culture, providing them with curiosity and cleverness, as well as consciousness in terms of reason. Here, the monkey and fox are using the drums as communicative devices associated with (assumed) death. It is unclear in the tale if the animals are attempting to "wake" the dead, or if they are attempting to communicate with the deceased ancestors, similar to what the drums are used for by the Baiku Yao people. However, the tale shows a direct correlation between drums and death. The legend of *QinZeGeLa* and the tale of Lasai Decha are orally transmitted stories that act as collective productions of kinship and moral and social obligation well known by all Baiku Yao. These are postulates based on rules of social conduct associated with a collective sentiment of filial piety. Because the *QinZeGeLa* often follows the tale of Lasai Decha in conversations with Baiku Yao elders, it shows that actions taken to honor the dead are tied to the bronze drum, representing the connection between the living and the dead. For the Baiku Yao, the bronze drum signifies the ritualization of death.[7]

The value of sound

The bronze drums Baiku Yao possess and use for funeral ceremonies are of the Majiang style (Heger IV type, Song to Qing dynasty, 960–1912 CE). These are adorned with concentric circles leading to a central sun/star relief on the tympanum, with four ear handles attached to the drum waist. Majiang bronze drums are smaller in shape than other types found throughout China and Vietnam, and are approximately 50 cm in diameter, standing at approximately 30 cm in height. My inquiries on the adornment and motifs on their bronze drums received little interest by my Baiku Yao informants. Lu Chaojin, Lihu township mayor, former vice director of the Lihu Baiku Yao ecomuseum, and Baiku Yao resident of Huaili village, told me "value is not found

in bronze drum visual aesthetics, such as physical form and the carved patterns, [but] rather it is found in the drum's sound" (personal communication, June 2016). Much earlier associations between bronze drum size and motif intricacy and elite status are irrelevant to the Baiku Yao's emic value system based on sound. The desire for a superior sound was also made clear to me in my visits to the local Lihu township market days, held on dates of 3, 6, and 9 in the month. Li Shiqi is a drum refurbisher and seller in Lihu and distributes bronze drums across northern Guangxi and southern Guizhou. Every market day he comes to the main square in Lihu to display and play his drums to entice potential buyers. On each occasion I observed a crowd of Baiku Yao men surrounding the sounded drums. They were not examining the visual aesthetics of each drum, but rather listening intently and discussing the quality of their sound. In conversations with Li Shiqi, he emphasized that sound was the key to a drum's value (personal communication, August 2018).

Sitting on the stoop of Lu Jimin's family home, he told me the story of the recent acquisition of his household bronze drum. About a year ago, while on his walk down the mountain to Lihu market town, Lu Jimin's father was told by another villager about a nearby bronze drum for sale. Intrigued by the praise of the drum, Lu's father went to see it. Immediately after hearing the drum, he called his son. "My father," Lu Jimin recalled, "made no mention of its beauty or size. Rather, he went on and on about this drum with a rich, warm, and soft sound" (personal communication, August 2017). Lu explained to his father that he had no money to acquire such a drum at that time. His meager farming income and wife's salary from migrant labor were barely enough to sustain a family of four. But his father was insistent, doting on the drum's sound. Using his own money saved from years of hard labor, his father returned home later that night with the bronze drum over his shoulder.

Across the seventy households in Huaili and twenty households in the larger Lihu township I interviewed, Baiku Yao villagers all expressed a strong desire to have a bronze drum of their own. According to the Nandan Cultural Relics Management Office, since the late 1990s, Baiku Yao villages have seen a rise in bronze drum ownership. The proliferation correlates with the rise in land tenure and the call for migrant labor in large urban centers, like Shenzhen and Guangzhou. New, available income and the increase in remittance has contributed to the building of new concrete homes in Lihu villages; the purchase of automotive vehicles, televisions, and smartphones increased meat consumption; and a rise in bronze drum acquisition. Interestingly, this has also come at the same time as contemporary bronze drum manufacturing in Hechi.[8]

Since the early 2000s, bronze drums have begun to be manufactured in two specific locations in Guangxi, in Huanjiang county and Dongsan county. I was fortunate to visit the largest bronze drum factory in Guangxi founded by the Wei brothers in Huanjiang, closest to Nandan county and Lihu township. The Wei brothers and their crew produce a whole line of bronze drums, from miniature souvenirs and hand-size instruments played like a gamelan to the world's largest bronze drum, listed in the Guinness Book of World Records at over 6.5 meters (20 feet) in diameter (Xinhua 2018). In my conversations with the owners, they explained that the most bronze drums were sold to the Baiku Yao, followed by the Zhuang, Miao, and Shui ethnic

groups of Guangxi and Guizhou province. Acknowledging the importance of sound for their biggest clientele, the Wei brothers told me that they decided to invite Baiku Yao elders known to have what many in the community call "a good ear for drums" to the factory to assist in the manufacturing process (personal communication, August 2018). Formerly, bronze drums were acquired through inheritance, trade, and private monetary exchange with outsiders, typically with the Zhuang, recalled for me by Lu Laoyao, the eldest Baiku Yao shaman in Guangxi who recently passed away at eighty-one years old (personal communication, April 2013). Bronze drums now come to Lihu township via Baiku Yao entrepreneurs trying to capitalize on local cultural needs. The Wei brothers' construction of Guangxi's first bronze drum plant established an available line of bronze drums for the Baiku Yao.

Bronze drums hold a temporal market value as a commodity for the Baiku Yao people. However, the drum quickly moves from the "commodity phase" of consumption into what Igor Kopytoff (1986) calls a state of singularization, changing as it enters a new regime of value (Appadurai 1986). For the Baiku Yao, singularization of the bronze drum is established when it joins them as part of the community and as a declared sacred object of funeral ceremonies. This transformational process begins when the newly acquired bronze drum is brought to the village. Male clansmen and villagers come from across the village to witness the arrival of the new bronze drum and hear it sounded for the first time. In discussing the welcoming event of a new drum, villager and local drum expert Lu Jishen explained to me that all bronze drums are prized for their funeral ritual purpose, but certain drums are regarded more highly: "A well-made drum is one that has a good shape, symmetry in form, and compatible thickness for its size, and the right material composition.[9] But it all comes down to its sound" (personal communication, August 2013).

The scrutiny devoted to the sound of a bronze drum during this initial public welcoming event sometimes leads to decisions to alter it. This, combined with the rise of an economy of newly manufactured drums, has contributed to sound alteration becoming an important trade among the Baiku Yao. Augmentation of a drum's sound involves a process called "rubbing," whereby the underside of drum's metal tympanum is thinned and buffed, currently using an electric sander. Thinning the material of the drum face can enhance sound quality by making a softer and cleaner sound.[10] The standard for good sound, according to bronze drum seller Li Shiqi, is older inherited drums. He explained that purchased newly manufactured drums are often brought to him to rub and to match the sound of older bronze drums. In recent conversations with Baiku Yao villagers, with the proliferation of drum production and sale, a nostalgic value on older bronze drums has become even more prominent in the community, for they are regarded as possessing the best sound quality.[11]

Bronze drum acquisition and possession is situated into a particular value system for the Baiku Yao people. Jean Baudrillard emphasizes that objects must be understood in terms of their sign value beyond their utilitarian value. He points to the fact that objects "serve as symbolic markers of class, status, and prestige" (cited in Woodward 2007, 75). This can be understood through the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986) and his notion of the cultural field and forms of capital. As a "site of cultural practice," Bourdieu describes a cultural field that involves multiple cultural "agents"

and the behaviors they perform determined by the economies of various forms of capital. In applying this to the consumption of bronze drums and the discourse of sound and status that surround them for the Baiku Yao, I have observed behaviors associated with wealth and the limits thereof, as well as knowledge of "tasteful" or valued sound quality. For instance, considering the high price for bronze drums, the purchase of a drum by an individual household or extended family demonstrates a significant investment. As of 2018, bronze drums purchased in a local market can cost between 7,000 to 10,000 RMB, or $1,100 to $1,570 US dollars, approximately half a year of income for a Baiku Yao villager farmer. More than economic capital, collective recognition of possessing a good-sounding bronze drum immediately affords social admiration. Among the Baiku Yao, the knowledge and ability to have an ear for drum sound is a form of cultural capital. I observed this in Huaili when a Baiku Yao elder I was speaking with was invited to hear a newly acquired bronze drum to consult on questions regarding sound and sound augmentation. I learned that only a handful of elders in the community were consulted on sound aesthetics, including Lu Jimin's father. Lu expressed to me, "You know, guys have different preferences; some like the drum to sound this way, some like it that way, but when it is a warm, soft sounding drum, everyone agrees on its worthiness." Lu Jimin's words were clear—there was a collective recognition of bronze drum sound quality. In fact, after his acquisition of the new bronze drum, I heard continuous praise given to Lu Jimin's father throughout the Baiku Yao community, revealing the elevated status he was accorded for his knowledge of good sound and with his stamp of approval, the acknowledged higher value of the new drum. For the Baiku Yao, the ability to identify preferred taste in drum sound or a household's financial capacity to purchase an object of great monetary value affords symbolic capital, social prestige, and certain reputation and status augmentation as a result.

The value system of bronze drums among the Baiku Yao, of which wealth and knowledge are integral parts in consumption and esteem, is based on their claimed sign value of sacredness. The necessity of these performative symbolic devices for the Baiku Yao prompts their acquisition as well as the development of skills related to distinguishing good "soft" sound from inferior tones. With the drum's power of sound deemed essential to the funeral ritual and passage of a deceased villager to the sacred realm of the ancestral land, it becomes clear why sound is both desired and commands respect and admiration.

The anthropomorphic metamorphosis of drums

According to the Baiku Yao people, the power of sound is not only tied to the natural world. The Baiku Yao understand "sound" as deeply connected to and an expression of emotive spirits (Xu 2010, 53), be it from a human, animal, spirit, or celestial body. According to Baiku Yao elders I spoke with, sounds that move the Baiku Yao have organic and spiritual functionality in communication. In discussions on the power of sound, elders referred to a traditional folktale on their origin of the sun. In the oral legend of *Gu Vo Va Glei and the Nine Suns*, after the strong and heroic Gu Vo Va Glei slayed the eight suns with his bow and arrows, the world turned to complete

darkness. It was only from the deep and resolute sound of the bear that the last celestial sun could be summoned to grace the world with its light.[12] Here it is shown that for the Baiku Yao a connection can exist between the natural and supernatural world, and sound can act as a medium of communication between these worlds.

For the animistic Baiku Yao, all things can have a spirit, including the mountains and rivers, the sun and moon, wind and rain, animals, humans, the home, and also the bronze drum (see Yu 1987). The Baiku Yao understand the spirit world as not ethereal but as a realm possessing volition and as an active force in the universe. In speaking about the spirit world, or supernatural, Roger Ivar Lohmann (2003) claims that it is a "universal human experience that is elaborated differently in different traditions" and is often defined in academic circles through the "unique spiritual reality of a given culture." Many etic assumptions exist for the "supernatural," such as Joseph Bosco's (2003) articulation as a "realm of spirits beyond the observable world that seems to transcend natural law."[13] Bosco (2003) and Lohmann (2003) both warn of "the dangers of conflating various etic and emic *definitions* of the supernatural" (emphasis in Lohmann 2003). According to Lohmann (ibid., 176), what is most important is to move beyond definitions to understand how different people model this phenomenon through both etic and emic perspectives. Present in this discussion, as suggested in the preceding paragraphs, is the argued separation between the spirit and human worlds.

For the Baiku Yao people, however, they interpret the "law" of the universe as deeply implicated in the relationships between humans and spirits. One can easily influence the other, and harmony between both worlds can suddenly be disrupted. With the belief in the power of emotive spirits to cause unpredictable, sometimes treacherous, occurrences—including life, sickness, death, rain, flooding, and drought—impacting an individual, family, village, and the environment, Baiku Yao people practice social obligation in how they honor and appease certain spirits and ancestors. This complicated ritual and belief system, I observed, leaves the Baiku Yao with an unceasing sense of powerlessness that plays a prominent role in their social life.[14]

The Baiku Yao, like other cultures found throughout the world,[15] engage in countless ritual acts in the attempt to understand and communicate with emotive spirits. Ritual practitioners are called upon to give blessings and appease spirits by performing various rituals. In many cases ritual practitioners attempt to reduce the imminence of calamity and resolve pain and misfortune enhanced by villagers' "eruptive anxieties" (Norenzayan and Hansen 2006, 174; see also Durkheim 1954). Only a small group of these "spirit men and women,"[16] referred to as *weiyua* and *nomhao* in Baiku Yao language, are seen to possess the ability to conduct these rituals.[17] Their role in bringing balance to the natural and spirit worlds further makes salient the blurred distinction of these realms for the Baiku Yao. Rituals conducted by *weiyua* and *nomhao* range from hearing and summoning spirits to reciting incantations, conducting divination, journeying into the spirit world, leading funerals, and bestowing a name to a bronze drum and sanctifying it as a sacred living object.[18] Only through a specific initiation ritual, conducted by a *nomhao* with divination abilities, does the bronze drum enter a state of singularization in the Baiku Yao community,

when its spirit is recognized and is imputed with symbolic agency and the power to animate communicative practices between both natural and spirit worlds.

A few days after Lu Jimin's father acquired his new bronze drum, he made arrangements with the family and clan and invited a *nomhao* on an auspicious day to perform the naming ritual. Lu Jimin's explanation corroborated other accounts I collected on the ritual procedures involving the *nomhao*'s communication with the spirit of the drum and the guardian spirit of the household.[19] The bronze drum lay on the floor, centrally located in the middle of the home. The *nomhao* sat near the bronze drum on a short wooden chair, accompanied by his assistant. While cups of wine were filled and placed in a large flat bamboo basket on the ground, the *nomhao* began to cut a short stack of white tissue paper into a rectangular arch shape. Taking the tissue paper and a piece of charcoal from the cooking hearth near him, the *nomhao* drew an image of a figure riding a horse, creating a totem of the household protective spirit, *Gong Gu Xi*. After the tissue paper was stuck on a central pillar of the house, the assistant helped to slit the throat of a live chicken, draining some of its blood into one of the empty white cups. The wine, incense, and the sacrificial chicken were offerings to the household spirit. As they were "given," the *nomhao* chanted in a monotone voice, occasionally tossing uncooked rice over the incense. That same morning, the *nomhao* and his assistant conducted a series of similar offering practices outside near a small pool of water. There they sacrificed a live duck and also offered wine to honor the water dragon spirit, which is said to have a connection to the bronze drum. Both the household and dragon spirits are appeased in order to request acceptance of the new bronze drum spirit.

Back inside the home, the chicken and duck were being prepared for the later meal. Several bowls were placed on the tympanum face of the bronze drum, each filled with wine, raw pork, raw chicken and duck meat, and water. Holding in his hand two pieces of split bamboo sticks, approximately 5–8 cm in length, the *nomhao* began to chant and focused intensely on the drum. After several minutes of chanting, the *nomhao* "presented" a name to the bronze drum through his words.[20] Immediately, the *nomhao* dropped the bamboo sticks, as his divination device, into one bowl of water sitting on the drum. When the bamboo sticks crossed,[21] which may take several tries and different naming attempts, the *nomhao* declared the spirits' consent. Turning to the members of the household, the *nomhao* announced the drum's name. The household hosts and invited guests rejoiced and commenced a large feast to celebrate the welcoming of the bronze drum into their community.

The process of anthropomorphism—"imaginatively attributing and thence perceiving humanlike characteristics in nonhuman things" (Lohmann 2007, 5; see also Guthrie 1993)—is fundamental to the inscription of the bronze drum as a participating sacred object. The attributes of a drum's name, gender, and "living" community member are bestowed and recognized through this ritual, creating a sense of personhood for the bronze drum. Indeed, the naming ritual is the projection of the internal culture on the external world (Lohmann 2007, 5). The Baiku Yao engender bronze drums with sacred meaning as they are brought into the ritual logic of animistic practices and human interactions with the spirit world. According to Janet Hoskins (1993, 119), rendering cultural objects, like the bronze drum, with

specific anthropomorphic characteristics further legitimizes the constructed belief and social system and relates to the achievement of certain goals. The culmination of this sacralization process for the bronze drum is claimed by the Baiku Yao to allow the drum to participate in the funeral ceremony as an active member of the community that has agency in its power to communicate with the spirit world and open the gate to the ancestral land for the deceased.

Ceremonial bronze drums

Consanguineal and affinal kin and the entire clan of the deceased are immediately notified when an auspicious day is chosen for a funeral.[22] The son or brother of the deceased acts quickly to find and acquire one or more water buffaloes (depending on available family finances) for funeral sacrifice.[23] The maternal uncle of the deceased is contacted, because he plays an important role in orchestrating the funeral ceremony arrangements. Men notified of the funeral come from across the region bringing their bronze drums to the home of the deceased or nearby kin. Drums are stored there for the duration of the funeral. Family and friends begin to prepare gifts for the deceased and the decedent's family. Intricate and elaborate ceremonial clothing, hand-made by Baiku Yao women, is taken out of the locked wood chests to place in the deceased's coffin at the time of burial. Other sacrificial animals are acquired, and consultations are made with family about necessary funeral resources, such as wine and glutinous rice.

On the first day of the funeral ceremony, called "opening the path" or *bojie* in Baiku Yao language, drums take center stage. Anywhere from a few to over two dozen bronze drums are hung on a large wooden arch frame, as detailed at the beginning of this article. Only bronze drums that have undergone the naming rite of passage may be played at a funeral. Before they are sounded, a *nomhao* leads a "welcoming" ritual, called *ji gu*, for the bronze drums (figure 1). The *nomhao* proceeds to move down the line of drums, chanting to each one, asking the drum spirit to participate in the funeral. The *nomhao* lightly dips a pair of chopsticks into a bowl of water and taps them onto the center of each bronze drum and begins to chant:

> Divine "jade mother,"
> Auspicious jade mother.
> Today, the elder (name) has passed away,
> We ask of you to come and join us in grievance.
> We use fresh water and good wine to wash your face.
> Everyone can see our sorrowful heart.
> For the elder that has passed away we come together to hold this memorial service.
> Using your formidable power to drive away demons and ghosts,
> To escort the elder to go to the otherworld.
> Today many bronze drums have come,
> Maternal grand-uncle, paternal grand-uncle, and elders [are here].
> *(If is it not the deceased household's bronze drum, these two sentences change into*

"You are representing [relative's name]."*)*
Numerous ancient treasures are requested amiably
Simultaneously giving off your jade-mother formidable power.
Open your jade-mother throat,
Give off your jade-mother sound.
Let your jade-mother sound reach the temple of heaven,
Let your jade-mother sound reach the otherworld.
Now you jade mother will open the path for the elder,
Now you jade mother will protect the spirit of the elder.
Here, a support frame is for you jade mother
Together we will pass.[24]

After each bronze drum is welcomed, Baiku Yao men approach the drums and split into pairs. With the bronze drum hanging only ten centimeters off the ground, each drumming pair takes their positions next to or behind the bronze drum with a mallet or wood-slat bucket in hand and commences playing. Bronze drums follow the drumming rhythm of the central wooden skin-covered drum and begin the "formal" drumming period of *bojie*.[25]

Drumming has a determined set of bars with repeating measures of rhythmic melody (see figure 2). The number of measures in each cadence is determined by the lead *zou* drummer in accordance with the gender of the deceased, typically ten measures long. Once each cadence is reached in unison, all drummers lift their arms and drumming devices into the air, yell, and stop to take a drink of wine. This is extremely important, for the consumption of wine symbolizes that the drummer's spirit stays grounded and does not leave with the deceased to the spirit world. The

Figure 1. Bronze drum, Huaili village, Lihu township, Nandan county, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Photograph courtesy of Huaili Ecomuseum

rhythmic drumming continues until the determined number of bars for the deceased are completed.

Funerals in Baiku Yao society are considered a time of great loss and a period to lament the death of a loved one. Clansmen, relatives, and friends gather to grieve and cry for the loss of the deceased. This emotional period takes place in different locations and times throughout the three-day ceremony. Particular instances of crying as an expression of grief include sitting next to the coffin, circling the sacrificial buffalo, and leading and carrying the deceased up the mountain for burial. Drummers' behavior exemplifies this sentiment with their serious, solemn, and devout look of concentration facing the earth during the drumming process. Yet, when each drumming cadence is reached, the mood suddenly shifts. Drummers' joyous outbursts are not considered disrespectful at all.[26] As one villager exclaimed to me as drums echoed behind him, "When elders die, it is a time of happiness. They reach the ancestral land, which is a land of paradise. Death is a relief from the hardship of real life." Death symbolizes a moment of rejoicing, whereby the deceased can join with his or her ancestors. The sound of the bronze drum holds the key to this union, said to open the path to the ancestral land, announcing the journey of the dead.

This article has shown that many Baiku Yao associate the power of the bronze drum with its ability to communicate with the spirit world. Drumming also plays a central role in commanding movement of the living. What may seem to be the use of word of mouth to publicly spread the announcement of death is, in fact, the sounding of the drum. It is a kind of "call to prayer," a pronounced call to honor the dead for the entire Baiku Yao community. Villagers I spoke with lamented that when they hear the distinct rhythmic sound of the bronze drums, they know someone has died. The sound of drums is the indicator and consequently promotes social coordination and cooperation in movement for the group. The sound beckons villagers to come together to commemorate the passage of the deceased to the ancestral land.

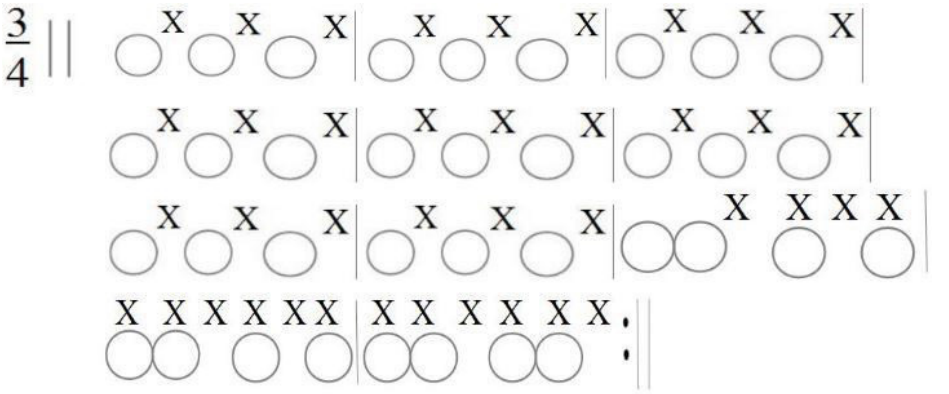

Figure 2. Huaili bronze drum style. "O" represents hitting the center of the drum with a mallet, "X" represents hitting the side of the drum with a bamboo stick. The rhythmic melody can be lengthened or shortened between the first and eighth bar according to the *zou* player. Diagram created by William David Nitzky.

Much scholarship on shamanic and animistic practices found worldwide notes how ritual practitioners typically handle or perform ritual devices, including drums. In the notable historian of religion Mircea Eliade's (1964) work on the diversity of shamanic practices, he suggests that mediumship does not belong exclusively to the shaman; laymen themselves are capable of such a phenomenon. Baiku Yao ritual leaders who preside over the funeral, chanting over the sacrifice of the water buffalo and even "journeying" from dusk to dawn into the spirit world escorting the deceased soul to the ancestral land, discussed in the following paragraphs, do not engage in the drumming practice. They never handle bronze drums during a funeral. Drumming is a practice only beholden to Baiku Yao laymen. Those who bring their drums into the funeral space to honor the dead, and those who are welcomed to play due to their relation with the owner, engage in this participatory act. Importantly, unlike the *nomhao*, these male villagers are not performing as mediums. Rather, they act as mechanisms to activate the affective power of the drums. In my conversations with several drummers after funeral services, not one villager claimed their individual role in opening the path to the ancestral land through drumming. It was said to me that the bronze drum spirit was sending its sound and acted as mediator.

Bronze drums command respect and are distinguished from the profane entertainments of daily life because of what they symbolize, the high esteem in which they are held, how and when they are sounded, and how they are kept. Yet, my observations suggest that the bronze drum's association with the sacred realm because of its collectively understood power as a primary mediator and communicator between the living and the dead is an unambiguously social phenomenon. Rather than this blurred boundary making sacredness of the drum questionable or diminished for the Baiku Yao, entanglement in the social has produced the reverse effect. The bronze drum is not seen merely as a distant object holding symbolic value for funerals. Instead, villagers directly participate in disseminating its power through a somatic experience, which contributes to increased respect and social responsibility for the drum by village laymen.

As household treasures, storage of bronze drums is conducted with the highest degree of care by the Baiku Yao. They must only be moved when needed. To secure their safety, the whereabouts of the stored bronze drums is a private household matter. Secrecy persists, and villagers often do not discuss where they keep their drums. In my evaluation of households with bronze drums, they claimed they were stored in the "safest place" in the home, referred to me as either under the bed of the head of the household covered by a blanket, under a stairwell, or even in an indoor dug out hole located in the floor. Although villagers know which households hold drums, prior to the 1980s reform era, the secrecy of drum location was strictly enforced across the village. During the Mao era, bronze drums were kept in far off mountain caves with their location known by only a few men, because of their seizure under the ill-fated movement to increase steel production for the nation during the Great Leap Forward (see Lynch 2008). Huaili villagers also stated that during the Cultural Revolution, "The use of bronze drums was strongly prohibited, and was also deemed 'superstitious' (*mixin*). We couldn't play the drum or sacrifice buffaloes, so we did not have funerals at that time." During this time the number of bronze drums

significantly declined in Hechi region; in Hechi's Donglan county alone, the number fell from five hundred in 1961 to forty in 2009 (Wu et al., 2009).

The evening after the bronze drums are first sounded for the funeral is an important time for community cohesion and cultural transmission. Only during this time, between *bojie* and the burial, can bronze drums be played "freely." Freedom to play bronze drums at this time is open to males of any age and does not require asking permission from the drum to play. Outside of the funeral drumming, this is one of the only times youth can learn the practice of drumming. A home of one of the relatives of the deceased is chosen and used as a gathering space for villagers to come intermittently to mourn and sit together to reminisce about the loss of a friend or relative. In the corner of the home one or two bronze drums hang from a ceiling beam. Male villagers take turns playing the bronze drum, creating a deafening sound inside. Youth, typically over the age of twelve, can request to play the bronze drum at this time. Youth are encouraged to play by an elder and first handed a mallet and bamboo stick to practice beating the drum. The *doulou*, or wooden bucket, is not given to youth until they are big enough to handle the heavier and more laborious object. Male villagers I interviewed at one of these night gatherings claimed that they actually do not "teach" youth how to play. One elder stated, "It is up to the youth himself if he wants to play." As youth take up drumming, an elder will often stand nearby to watch on for guidance. Only after a youth finishes will an elder offer any advice on improving playing technique. All of my drummer interviewees surveyed, from ages eighteen to seventy-five, learned to play the bronze drum in this way.[27] Only after a youth is familiar with the form and technique of drumming are they welcomed to play during the funeral ceremony. The transmission of bronze drum playing for the Baiku Yao is not a forced practice or understood as a formal means of inheritance between teacher and student. Rather, it is a cultural practice transmitted through personal interest and communal obligation.

On the second day of the funeral, villagers gather to participate and witness the sacrifice of the water buffalo.[28] Members of the family of the deceased circle the buffalo in turn, crying to it and giving thanks to its sacrifice, all while the *nomhao* chants and throws handfuls of uncooked rice at the animal. After the buffalo receives three blows to the neck by a long sword blade, villagers tie its legs tightly with rope, carefully dogging the buffalo's long sharp horns. Soon after the animal is brought to the ground, men gather around and slaughter it.

The night of the second day brings the spiritual journey to the ancestral land. The highest-level ritual practitioner in the community is called upon to come to the home of the deceased. Late in the evening, surrounded by family, kin, and close friends of the deceased, he sits in front of the coffin. For the next six to eight hours, until sunrise, the *nomhao* chants, in an ancient Baiku Yao vernacular unintelligible to most villagers, and journeys into the spirit world, guiding the soul of the deceased to the ancestral land, called *hijie nuodu* in Baiku Yao language. In Huaili only two practitioners have the ability to perform such a ritual, Gu Zong Zou (forty years old), and Lu Laoyao (eighty-one years old), both of whom have themselves passed to the ancestral land as of 2019.

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to spend several days with Gu Zong Zou in 2015 to discuss the "journey" he conducts. Unlike many *nomhao* and *weiyua* I spoke with, Gu Zong Zuo was open to talk about his ritual practices, explaining clearly to me that the night journey "shows us where we came from and how we got here. It includes the origins of rice and clothing, the bronze drum and skin-covered wooden drum, the land we once lived on, and the migration of our people." When asked if he traveled alone on this journey with the deceased, he said that the spirit of two village elders seated next to him holding sticks during the ritual accompany him. They help defend against any challenges faced along the way. "It is the most dangerous for me and the spirit of the deceased," he said, "as we are confronted with many obstacles and demons. Reaching the ancestral land is an extremely arduous act." While Gu Zong Zou explained to me some of the key points of their journey, I slowly composed a list of place names and a map sketch. Watching me draw, he grinned and asked for my pen and paper. Over the course of our conversation he roughly illustrated the journey himself (see figure 3). Over the course of their travels, he guides these spirits from Huaili to the village of Badi, through the land of monkeys, over the perilous volcano, the mountain so high one can touch the stars, and across the seven pools to a large river, to name just a few sites.[29] When they reach "the river," Gu Zong Zou calls to the ancestors. Only when they are welcomed may Gu Zong Zou and the spirit of the deceased cross. Afterward, all spirits of the living that accompanied them on the journey rush with Gu Zong Zou along the same route back to Huaili and to the natural world of the living.[30]

The next morning, villagers gather on the third day of the funeral to participate in the burial of the deceased. Men carry the coffin, covered with a hand-made embroidered and indigo-dyed cloth, up to the mountain side where a grave has been dug. After the burial, villagers gather outside near the deceased person's home and sit together on the ground in two long thirty-to-forty-person rows facing each other. In the center of the parallel rows of mourners, meat from the sacrificial buffalo and glutinous rice is placed on large green plant leaves, and, using bamboo chopsticks cut for the funeral, villager attendants begin the meal.[31] Women eat first, and then men come down from the grave site and switch places with them. At this time, owners of the bronze drums go to where they have been stored for the duration of the funeral. Similar to the welcoming of the drums prior to the funeral ceremony, a *nomhao* conducts a final ritual to thank the drums, give them nourishment with bowls of meat, water, and wine placed on their face, and send them back to a peaceful existence in their respective households.[32]

Social arrangements and the bronze drum

The position the bronze drum occupies as a social agent in Baiku Yao culture affects the relationships people form with it and the social arrangements between villagers (Hoskins 2006; Gell 1998, 7). Taboos, ritual order, and practices, encoded in postulates of the sacred (Lambek 2013, 5; Rappaport 1999), produce a kind of performative truth and certainty for the Baiku Yao people. Furthermore, they establish clear kin, community, and gender relations. Playing the bronze drum and skin-covered

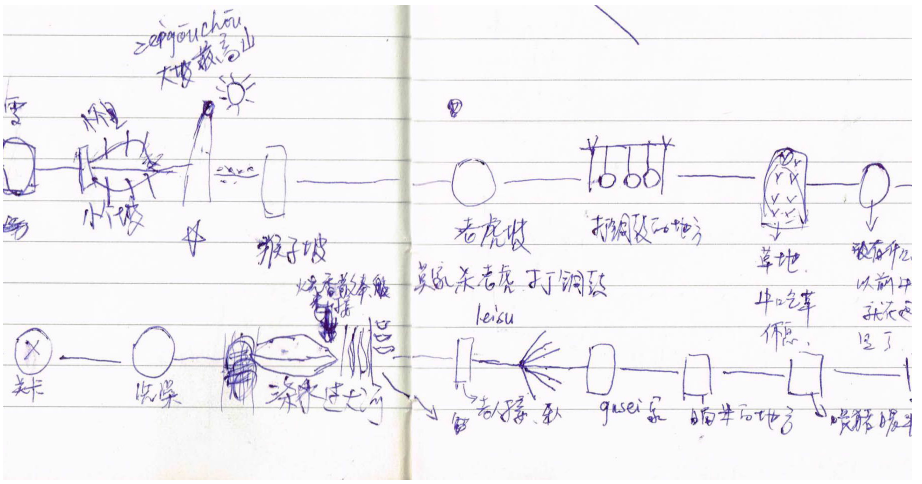

Figure 3. Partial depiction of the "journey" to the Baiku Yao ancestral land. Translation by Lu Chaoming. Illustration by Gu Zong Zou of Huaili village and William David Nitzky, 2015.

wooden drum is strictly conducted by men. Women, however, are excluded from this performative act and from handling a named drum. In her discussion on gender and musical instruments, Veronica Doubleday (2008) argues that, "when any class of people wishes to maintain control over a particular musical instrument, an exclusive instrument-human relationship is developed, forbidding outsiders access." Women are placed in a negative instrument-human relationship with the bronze drum, where gender taboos aim to exclude them from interactions with the drum's sacredness (Doubleday 2008, 5; see also Herdt 1982).

Every member of the family, extended family, and clan of the deceased participates in the funeral ritual through practices of gift giving, mourning, sounding bronze drums, cooking and food preparation, and buffalo sacrifice. These different roles within the funeral exemplify clan obligation and cohesion. Chinese scholars who have studied Baiku Yao culture call family clan organizations *youguo*, literally meaning "oil pot" in Chinese, and pronounced *wei yao* in Baiku Yao language. The creation of this etic term draws on the fact that blood relatives of the deceased, from nuclear family members to cousins, share a custom of not consuming "fat oil" (all forms of meat) during the funeral and mourning period. This is seen in the fact that blood relatives of the deceased do not take part in the seated-row food consumption after the burial like other funeral attendees. In the main Huaili village, for example, there are four *youguo* clans.[33] The association of the *youguo* is also significant through other social activities among the Baiku Yao, such as marriage; when a member of a *youguo* has been declared by a *nomhao* or *weiyua* as threatened by a harmful spirit, a "day of rest" may be prescribed for the entire clan.

Sanctions on bronze drum usage also impact the clan and kin relationships. Most villagers I spoke with about the ability to request a bronze drum by others expressed that sharing was clearly clan endogamous. If a bronze drum is purchased by multiple households, such as when several brothers pool their money to acquire a drum, a common act in Huaili, the bronze drum is considered part of that particular family.

Typically the eldest brother or the brother who contributed the most money for acquisition houses the bronze drum, unless their home is deemed unsuitable for the protection of the drum. While members of the multiple households may use the drum, it is not customarily borrowed. On the rare occasion it is, the drum must not be given to anyone outside of the families' clan and requires mutual consent given by the families' brothers.

Clan cohesion is also strengthened through drum ownership. As mentioned, possession of a bronze drum elevates the status of an individual. This also translates and extends to the entire clan of that individual. If an individual's bronze drum is deemed of high value due to its revered sound, this reputation, too, extends to the individual's clan. In late-night conversations with Baiku Yao elders about well-regarded bronze drums, I often heard them refer to an individual villager by name for his particular drum or mention of his clan.

Quantity as well as quality brings prestige. A clan's possession of multiple bronze drums symbolizes the power of the clan in the Baiku Yao community.[34] This was also evident in villagers' discussions of past funerals with me. They judged a funeral by the number of buffaloes sacrificed and bronze drums sounded. The more drums played at a family member or clansmen's funeral demonstrates the esteem and honor for that individual and his or her family. At the same time the Baiku Yao are experiencing a growth in bronze drum ownership, it is important to not lose sight of the fact that the bronze drum is a form of inheritance, and its value is transmittable. Bronze drums are customarily passed down from generation to generation. When a son and his family inherits a drum, it continues to afford pride to the household and for the entire clan.

Conclusion: Social life of bronze drums

This article has shown that the bronze drum is no mere inanimate object but differs only in form from other sacred objects well known to anthropology, such as the revered necklaces and bracelets of the Kula in the Trobriands (Malinowski 1922; Weiner 1992), the sperm whale tooth (*tabua*) in Fiji (Arno 2005; Sahlins 1983), string bags in New Guinea (MacKenzie 1991), and barkcloth ponchos (*tiputa*) in Polynesia (Thomas 1999). In short, the bronze drum has a vibrant social life in contemporary China. A two-thousand-year-old form of material culture, once the treasure of regional lords and a tool of ancient cultural diplomacy, the bronze drum remains an integral part of Baiku Yao culture. I have shown the multiple facets of signifying practices associated with bronze drums, involving folklore, funeral ceremonies, social arrangements, and the links between the living and spirit worlds that structure pragmatic aspects of social and ritual life for the Baiku Yao (Woodward 2007, 14, 28). As shown in this article, Baiku Yao folklore transmits the association between the bronze drum and honoring the dead into the collective consciousness of villagers through the spoken word. The naming ritual incites an anthropogenic metamorphosis of the bronze drum for the Baiku Yao and initiates the drum's sacredness, defining it as a spirit in the community, a protector of the household, and participating agent in funeral ceremonies. The drum's sound is said to have the power to summon the living and also open the path for the dead to venture to the

idyllic ancestral land. Its sacredness also is seen to have consequences in the social realm. The bronze drum sound is not only a necessity for spiritual mediation but also an aesthetic that becomes a mark of cultural capital throughout the Baiku Yao community. Furthermore, reputation and social arrangements of kin and community inclusion and exclusion are articulated through bronze drum possession and use. According to Appadurai (1986, 5), by engaging with objects' dynamic movement and exploring their connection to the human experience, "we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things" and grasp the meanings that are "inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories." Indeed, through the social interactions within which they are embedded, bronze drums stimulate a collective emotional response because of their ability to animate memories, enjoin filial piety and kin obligations, and make connections with the spirit world. When bronze drums are integrated in broader social, cultural, economic, and political contexts as a result of recent government-led initiatives to constitute bronze drums as protected "cultural heritage" and used as resources to achieve certain economic goals through tourism, the Baiku Yao people are forced to reckon with the meanings, values, and significance of their prized drums. I explore a new "heritagization" phase in the social life of bronze drums in forthcoming work.

Through extensive ethnographic data collected while living with the Baiku Yao in northern Guangxi, this article has detailed the local knowledge that surrounds and frames the bronze drum. Furthermore, I have exposed the agency of bronze drums in contemporary ethnic China. Alfred Gell speaks of the capacity of things to be "social agents." He writes that agency of a thing is "seen as initiating causal sequences of a particular type, that is, events caused by acts of mind or will or intention, rather than the mere concatenation of physical events" (1998, 16). Putting people and objects, particularly art, on equal footing, Gell presents the capability of things to evoke change, acting as protagonists in the movement and actions of people. They do this, Gell argues, when they are enmeshed in social relationships (ibid., 17). This agentive role of things becomes even more pronounced when inanimate objects are conceived of as being alive (Winter 2007). The symbolic action of mediation, communication, and protection by bronze drums among the Baiku Yao builds and shapes people's perceptions and meanings of ritual, the link between the natural and spirit worlds, and kin-based arrangements and obligations. Meanings for the sacred drum and their imputed agency emerge in these social interactions.

I argue, following Margaret Kartomi (1990), that we must address objects and material culture through an emic perspective and articulate the local classifications and signifying practices that are culturally emergent, expressed in writing, voice, and through behavioral expressions by the cultural groups that value and engage with the transmission and practice of such cultural heritage. This relativistic and ethnographic approach to material culture aids in highlighting the culture-emerging schemes that reflect the norms and rules, belief and value systems, social uses and performance practices, and social arrangements that shape and are constituted by forms of material culture like the bronze drum. Material culture requires human interactions for relevant "things" to acquire and animate agency. It is clear that Baiku Yao people understand this well, which is why they go to great lengths to

modify and improve inferior-sounding mass-produced drums flooding the market to reach a high-level sound deemed best for funerals, and why they inscribe drums with anthropomorphic attributes through naming rituals to make them kin for communication with ancestors. Yet people, too, require such materiality to define their own social relations and agency, demonstrating a dialectic between people and things (Feldman 2010, 150). In this article, I have shown how bronze drums are not inanimate objects, fixed in time, as often seen in museums across China and the world. In the social context of the Baiku Yao, bronze drums are significant forms of living material culture—with names, stories, spiritual embodiment, and agentive power—that are essential for navigating the boundaries between sacred and social realms and the social arrangements of clan and community collectivities in the Baiku Yao's contemporary social life.

When we hold an heirloom in our hands or something that was bestowed to us by a parent or grandparent, why—if at all—does this object resonate with us? Is it a memento or gift? Does it have "stopping-power" and the ability to make us reflect on our past and our place in the present? What exactly does it embody? Does it signify wealth or prestige? Is it connected to a memory? Does it possess the identity or spirit of our kin as an inalienable attribute, described by Annette Weiner (1992); do we hold our ancestors in our hands? How does it speak to us, and what does it say? Does it reveal its past, its life? Does it have power over us or others? The relationship between the bronze drum and the Baiku Yao people of southern China reveals how material culture is entangled in our own multiple webs of cultural significance (Hoskins 2006, 81). Bronze drums should be understood as more than a transmitted form of tangible heritage. They can have a social life and the power to challenge our senses and our comprehension, and to order our social worlds.

Notes

1. Calò (2014) explores the diversity of routes drum traveled throughout China, Southeast Asia and the Malay Peninsula, and Indonesia.

2. According to Nandan Culture Bureau (*Wentiju*) the county has 405 bronze drums distributed across Lihu (215), Baxu (91), and so on (see Wu et al., 2009, 27).

3. Imamura (2010) notes from records by Chen and Huang (1993) that bronze drums dating to the Warring States Period, fourth to second century BCE, were found in Guangxi.

4. In addition to possessing different functions, bronze drums have evolved over time with a range of shapes, decorations, and material composition. They generally have a common shape, cylindrical and hollow, with a large bellowing bell and flat face. However, diameter and height, carved motifs, and relief decorations differ across types associated with region and time throughout southern China and Southeast Asia. Bronze drums stand anywhere from one-third of a meter to a half meter tall, with a face approximately half a meter in diameter. These measurements are an average of the three types of bronze drums—LengShuiChong, Zunyi, Majiang—found in southern China. Vietnamese and Burmese bronze drums are found to be similar in shape and height, yet some do reach almost a meter tall. These bronze drums date

from three periods: the end of the Song dynasty and beginning of the Yuan dynasty, the Yuan and Ming dynasty, and the Qing dynasty, with the majority seen as Majiang type (Wu et al., 2009).

5. In 1902 Franz Heger identified and classified four different types of bronze drums throughout Southeast Asian and southern China, by region and chronology, known as Heger types I–IV. There have been subsequent variations in this classification system offered by Chinese, Vietnamese, and Western scholars (Bernet Kempers 1988).

6. As the largest village in Lihu township, Huaili consists of nine natural villages (*ziran tun*), considered hamlets of a village political structure, with a population of 99 percent Baiku Yao.

7. Baiku Yao believe that after death the deceased's spirit is not extinguished. The spirit exists in the universe, and the relationship with the living persists even after death. For the deceased to have a peaceful existence in the afterlife, the spirit of the departed must reach the ancestral land and remain there for eternity.

8. The manufacturing of bronze drums in GZAR is evidence to support the durability of bronze drums usage among ethnic groups across the region as well as bronze drums representing status symbols for individuals and clans for the Baiku Yao. It also indicates how the Han majority have embraced the bronze drum as a moniker of wealth and good fortune, especially seen in southern China.

9. The direct correlation between a drum's sound and the raw material (including certain elements, such as silver and gold) composition is illustrated in the fact that for Baiku Yao villagers, older drums that possess these qualities are ascribed higher value than newer drums, which are claimed to be much thicker and have much lower amounts of gold and silver (*jinyin*) and less bronze.

10. Thinning also adds to drum fragility. Thus, much care is placed on beating and transporting the bronze drum.

11. According to bronze drum sound connoisseur Lu Zhisen, such practices were not required before, because bronze drums were previously made of better materials. He explained to me that within the past ten years, the sound quality of drums has diminished, attributed, according to him, to the rise in "mass production" and use of alternative materials to create metal alloy. Interestingly, this is around the same time the bronze drum became publicly recognized as an important "cultural heritage" of Guangxi.

12. Today it is said that upon hearing the sound of the rooster the sun awakes and rises in the morning. The oral legend of *Gu Vo Va Glei and the Nine Suns* was told to me by Baiku Yao storytellers and Huaili primary school teacher He, who had conducted his own research on local folktales (personal communications, May–August 2016).

13. There has been a long and continuous debate in anthropological circles on the emic and etic sides of the term "supernatural," such that many find problematic the utility of etic distinction between "natural" and "supernatural" (see Lohmann 2003).

14. Chinese research on the Baiku Yao acknowledges this fact but often does not delve into analysis on this topic. This is partly due to the fact that ethnic minority engagements with the spirit world have long been regarded as "superstitions" (*mixin*), and their study has only recently become more accepted in Chinese academia. Although research on Baiku Yao culture and religious activities does exist from the early 1980s (see Yu 1987), it has been, for the most part,

preliminary. Since the establishment of the Huaili ecomuseum in 2004 and designation of Yao embroidered dress and *QingZeGeLa* as intangible cultural heritage elements, Baiku Yao culture has received much more academic and government attention, seen through a significant rise in academic publications in Chinese (see also Nitzky 2014). However, rich ethnographies are still lacking, especially on the ritual system of the Baiku Yao.

15. See for example the Miao and Yi in southwest China and Native American Cheyenne and Ilahita Arapesh of Papua New Guinea, to name a few (Mueggler 2001; Lowie 1924; Tuzin 1982).

16. I prefer to use the emic term instead of the etic concept "shaman." A shaman is commonly referred to as someone who "uses soul journeys in dreams and trance to counteract supernatural causes of illness" (Lohmann 2003). In Baiku Yao society, *weiyua* and *nomhao* work to counteract supernatural causes, but they do not call on other spirits to embody them as a form of spirit possession. They use incantations to "communicate" with spirits in the supernatural world for multiple reasons. Although it may seem through observations that these practitioners slip sometimes in a "trance," my conversations with *weiyua* and *nomhao* reveal that they are in fact always mentally "present" and are seen as constantly aware of events taking place in the human world during their rituals. Like shamans found in other parts of the world as described by Eliade, *weiyua* and *nomhao* obtain their ability to conduct such rituals from a dream-like experience. *Weiyua*, in particular, are said to be able to engage in a "journey" to find and bring back a threatened or missing soul. I use the term "spirit men and women" here to connote a "conjurer and seer of spirits."

17. Of the six male ritual practitioners in Lihu township I interviewed, all received the ability to practice rituals and communicate with spirits at middle age, some starting as late as sixty-five years old. *Weiyua*, however, are summoned much earlier in age, most around the age of twenty-six. The "summoning" period often takes place through a series of vivid dreams or visions of the future in which the individual encounters a specific spirit that calls on them. This transition period of embracing the spirit often involves bouts of extreme physical discomfort with escalations of personal sickness, including rashes, bleeding, earache, and even malabsorption and malnourishment. Regarded as the most powerful *weiyua* in Lihu township, Gu Zong Zou explained to me that, "suddenly, at the moment of total incapacitation, when I was only skin and bones, my body began to change, and my health improved. It was when I had accepted the *jidou* [child-like spirits] and way of the *weiyua*" (personal communication, August 2013). Typically, *weiyua* are women and *nomhao* are men, although exceptions do apply, such as in the case of the male ritual leader Gu Zong Zou, who is identified by local Baiku Yao as a *weiyua*. In the Baiku Yao community there are often more *nomhao* than *weiyua*.

18. Rituals I observed often involve a two-step process: (1) the *weiyua* locates and calls back/retrieves the soul of the living and; (2) a spirit man or woman (either *weiyua* or *nomhao*) gives ritual offerings to thank the associated spirit god that had "endangered" or "taken" the human soul. This second ritual is often conducted days or weeks later and only held if the soul of the living returns to their respective body, for example the person for which the ritual is performed gets better. For both *nomhao* and *weiyua*, they often call upon their respective household protective spirit (*gong gu xi* in Baiku Yao language; Ch. *jiashen*) to assist in ritual practices.

19. Description of the naming ritual is drawn from my research in Lihu and cross-checked with data gathered by ecomuseum staff at Huaili ecomuseum, along with some information from Liang (2005, 114–15) and Wu et al. (2009, 217).

20. Female drums are referred to as *mei* in Baiku Yao language, translated as "mother." Male drums are referred to as *bo*, or father. Given names for drums include an auspicious name followed by the *mei* or *bo* term, such as "gold mother" and "jade mother." Bronze drums also have a specific gender determined by their appearance—the molded "sun/star" motif on the tympanum face of the drum—and sound. For the Baiku Yao, female drums are prized over male drums, reflected in the high number of "female" drums found throughout the Baiku Yao–populated townships of Lihu, Baxu, and Yaoshan. Female drums (*geme nou*) are said to possess a deeper and more resonating sound than male drums' (*gebeng nou*) higher, sharper sound. A male drum is recognized by having a long flat sun image with its rays protruding from the center of the drum. Female drums have short, curved relief sun rays. The shape of the sun rays and added metal used to form the curved relief of the "female" drum is understood by some local experts as a factor in altering the sound of the drum. See Lohmann (2007) for a similar analysis of gendered feminine drums of the Asaburo.

21. Crossed sticks forming an X is considered auspicious, parallel sticks are not. For other rituals, the ritual practitioner may use a split piece of jointed segment of a bamboo stem (or culm), with both halves of the bamboo dropped on the ground for divination. An auspicious sign with this tool is when one half is facing up and the other is facing down.

22. From May until October, funerals are not held in Baiku Yao society. From early summer to mid-fall, villagers are busy with the yearly harvest and time is limited for planning and preparing large events like funerals. In addition, because water buffaloes are an indispensable part of the cultivation process, sacrifice of buffaloes for the funeral ceremony during this time would be disruptive to modes of production and to the constructed sociocultural system. Thus, applying this functionalist and cultural materialism approach, funerals are held only after the harvest and before the start of working on the next year's crop. In cases when a member of the community dies from May to October, their funerals are put on hold. The body of the deceased is placed in a prearranged black wood coffin and placed in a dug hole in the ground of the deceased's family home. This temporary grave is used until the allocated time for funerals or when the family is prepared to host a suitable formal funeral service.

23. To hold a formal funeral, a buffalo must be sacrificed. If the family is financially incapable, experienced by many prior to the 1980s reform period, the deceased's body will be buried in a grave on the mountainside and later a formal funeral with sacrificial buffalo will be hosted. Even after several years a previously deceased relative may be honored. Water buffaloes can be family owned, purchased from relatives or other clansmen, or, as commonly done today, acquired from a breeding farm. On average, water buffaloes can be very costly for a Baiku Yao household. At the time of data collection on water buffalo purchases (2013), one cost between 5,000 and 10,000 RMB (approximately $800–$1,600 US dollars).

24. This ritual chant was performed in "ancient" Baiku Yao language, and the words are incomprehensible to the average villager. With the help of a local shaman and transcription by Lu Chaojin, the chant was first converted into vernacular Baiku Yao language and then translated into Chinese for the author to document in 2012. The bronze drum "jade mother"

is used here as an example. It is the name of a newly acquired drum of Lu Chaojin, of which the author witnessed the naming ritual and use during a funeral. The deceased elder's name is left out of the transcription out of respect for the deceased and their family. The transcribed text was also cross checked with research conducted by Liang (2005, 115, in Wu et al., 2009).

25. Baiku Yao bronze drums are played using three distinct rhythms. Rhythms are played according to where the funeral is held or where the deceased is from. Rhythms include Huaili, Yaoli, and Jihou. In Baxu county and Yaoshan they play the Huaili rhythm.

26. Laughing, smiling, and joking is also seen from a small group of three or four male villagers standing behind the lead drummer playing the skin-covered wooden drum. As the drumming takes place, these men hold a set number of sticks—an even number (8, 10, or 12) if the deceased is female and an odd number (7, 9, or 11) if male—and they joyously wave the sticks in the air, said to aid in guiding the deceased into the otherworld, with the sticks used as forms of defense against any treacherous encounters along the way.

27. Some male villagers also received practice earlier in age, learning the rhythm of drumming by playing the bamboo drum (*zhu tonggu*), a short bamboo tube with carved holes that is banged on the ground and tapped with a bamboo stick to mimic the sound of the bronze drum.

28. The duration between the *bojie* ritual and sacrifice of the water buffalo can be a few days. However, the second day for sacrifice and third day for burial are always consecutive. I have recorded on several occasions the entire funeral ceremony of the Baiku Yao, from start to finish. Yet, a complete description of the many acts and rituals of this events falls outside the scope of this article. See scholars Yu (1987), Liang (2005), Liu (2006), and Xu (2010), who have written a description of many parts of the funeral ceremony in Chinese.

29. I only present some highlights on the route to the ancestral land. According to Gu Zong Zou and Lu Chaojin there are over two hundred sites traveled along this route.

30. By conducting a detailed analysis correlating the multiple steps and locations that compose the Baiku Yao people's route to the ancestral land in relation with the history and geography of the land inhabited by past generations of Baiku Yao (and assumed to be crossed on their migration to their present location of northern Guangxi and southern Guizhou province, such as Hunan, Jiangsu, and Shanxi provinces), one may begin to create a theory on the migratory route taken by the Baiku Yao and an accurate ethnohistory. Along these lines of investigation, in 2016, I assisted former ecomuseum vice-director Lu Chaojin, the Huaili ecomuseum, and members of the recently established Baiku Yao Culture and Development Association on a new project to compose a written account of Baiku Yao culture by Baiku Yao authors. Ritual practitioners, including Gu Zong Zou, and Baiku Yao storytellers were brought together from across the region to record their accounts, chants, and discussions. The publication of the first volume of this work is forthcoming in Chinese.

31. Each attendee, who has gifted wine, rice, corn, or money to the family of the deceased, also gives about half a kilogram of wrapped cooked glutinous rice, the prized stable of the Baiku Yao.

32. Three bowls of rice, glutinous rice, and wine are placed on each bronze drum, and the ritual practitioner chants: "Divine [bronze drum's name], auspicious [bronze drum's name], today the elder has already been sent up the mountain, he/she is already settled at the ancestral land. The far clear black moon [bronze drum's spiritual name] is a supernatural entity. He gave you a thick and broad handle, he gave you a red face. Now, we have not eaten meat, now we give

you meat. We have not drunk, now we give you drink. Together we use fresh water and wine, to wash the sorrow of the face. You came with [relative's name], you came on the back of [relative's name]. This bowl of wine is to let him face your face. This bowl of meat is set aside for him to have energy to return home. Thunder has hit you motionless, wind has blown you to not shake. Protect your master's richness. Protect your master's fortune."

33. In the Huaili ecomuseum villages, Manjiang natural village has six clans, HuaQiao natural village has four clans, and HuaTu natural village has five clans.

34. Every clan in the entire village of Huaili has at least one bronze drum. Bronze drums can also bind an entire village. For example, in Manjiang, one of the natural villages of Huaili, five drums—*meimu*, *meilo*, *meispei*, *meitho*, *meizei*—are communal "village drums," passed down from a common ancestor of the whole Lu clan of Manjiang. These drums are protected by the village leader of Manjiang and are allowed communal borrowing within the village for funeral ceremonies.

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