Superscription without Encompassment: Predicaments of Turning *Gwer Sa La* into Intangible World Heritage
State vs. Religion in Modern China

- **Secularism**
  - State/religion separation imposed by the state
  - Self-strengthening project
    - Campaign against religion (Duara 1995)
  - Communist Atheism

- **State-religion**
  - Civil religion: Confucianism over “religions” (Granet 1975)
  - State/society: Axial Age vs. non-/pre- Axial Age: (Duara 2001; Palmer 2007)
My Proposal

- **Problems**
  - Religion/politics/economy are not GIVEN categories
  - Power is not the ONLY player in China-west interaction

- **Method**
  - Two-Directional
    - Top-down: macro- and narrative (discourse), state
    - Bottom-up: micro- and praxis (vernacular), society
  - Comparative (Dumont 1967; Peter Van der Veer 2009)
Dali

- Kingdoms:
  - Nanzhao and Dali (652-1254)
- Sinicisation:
  - Chinese Conquest (1381-)
- Ethnicisation:
  - Ethnic classification since 1956 (Liang, 2010)
- The Dali City:
  - Township: 4, rural/urban
  - Population: 486,800
  - Ethnicity: 7, Bai/Han/Hui, etc.
What’s Gwer Sa La

- “visiting three places”
  - (绕三灵, raosanling)
  - Three places
    - Dali City God Temple: 22\textsuperscript{nd} of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Month
    - “Capital of Gods”: 23\textsuperscript{rd}
    - Riverside Town: 24\textsuperscript{th}

- Participants
  - All Bai-speaking people
  - “Old Women Associations”
  - 20-25 thousand (estimate in 2010)
Gwer/Chaol

- **Gwer**: to Stroll
  - visiting, sight-seeing, having fun
  - Opera shows
  - Fair
  - Sing and Dance

- **Chaol**: to face (the gods)
  - Incense and candle
  - Firecrackers
  - Offerings
  - Communion
  - Donate
  - Petition
**Anx (to find)**

- **Anx Jiart ni**: to find lovers
  - *Bir sai bai vux*: discrete relation
  - *Kuanx biart huirx*: dog-bark meeting
  - *Fenlu huirx*: romantic meeting
- **Non-/extra-marital relations**
  - Song duet
  - Commitment
  - *fvl jiart*: friends
  - Pregnancy
- **Flirt (2001)**
  
  "How could you eat things so black?"
  "The black is delicious"
  "How could you eat them raw?"
  "Cooked is no good, in Gwer Sa La we eat raw things."
Discourses

Populist

- “a pageant” (Yang Qiog, 1910, Duan Wei 1912)
- “festival of the rural Min Chia” (C. P. Fitzgerald 1941)
- “peasants won’t abandon their tradition of thousands of years” (Zhao Guansan 1947)
- “Survival of the Bai’s ancient memory” (Yang Zhengye 1994)
Discourses

Native

- “We do good deeds, but about men and women together, I never heard of.”—Informant Y, 2001
- “People of other Villages go, we don’t.”—informant D, 2001
- “We go, but we return before dark.”—informant Z, 2005
- “talking about lovers is not necessarily taking lovers.” (Zhao Yuzhong, 2007: 11)

Modernist

- “corrupt, decadent, superstitious, forbidden and abandoned, and the images were destroyed” (1916 Dali Gazetteer).
- Banned in 1930s (but failed)
- Banned by “brigade” (1960-80s)
- “bold villagers were arrested and accused of ‘committing improper man-woman relations’”
Applying for Intangible Cultural Heritage

- 2003, Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture government applies for national ICH;
- 2006, success, one of the 518 projects;
- 2009, nominated for candidacy of UNESCO “representative list” of ICH (failed);
- 2010, Prefectural Bureau of Cultural Heritage created
Intangible Cultural Heritage

- **UNESCO**

- **China**
  - *Advice on ICH* (State Council, 2005)
  - Ministry of Culture
  - *Law on Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2011)

- **Local Government (Yunnan and Dali)**
  - ICH as the major government campaign
  - Economic incentive
    - “Build the province with culture”
    - Tourist industry/Fiscal deficit/GDP-ism

- **Academic**
  - Folklorists/historians/anthropologists
The “Dali Bai Gwer Sa La” (Dali Baizu Rao Sanling, 白族绕三灵) is a traditional folk cultural activity, created through the Bai’s long agricultural practice and rice-paddy custom. It was intended to amuse gods and man, performed through songs, dances and sacrificial activities, hosting a spectrum of cultural activities including history, religion, folklore, art, and commerce…Its original meaning is probably to visit three “public houses”. The “three spirits” (sanling) refer to three symbols of gods, a religion particular to the Bai.

—-application brochure by the government of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture
- Historic: evolutionism
  - “Three public houses”
  - Tradition/Modern dichotomy
    - “On the verge of extinction”
    - “modern agriculture” /“media” /“social mobility”
    - “dominant culture” (强势文化, qiangshi wenhua” “significantly changes the Bai’s life style,”

- Ethnic: evolutionism
  - Uniquely Bai, “a folk carnival, solely possessed by the Bai.” (白族独有的)
  - “cultural transmitter” (代表性传承人) of Gwer Sa La
  - “almost every kinds of performing art popular in Bai folk cultures are found in Gwer Sa La”.
  - Gwer Sa La “remembers the formation and the history of the Bai culture.”
“Openly dating” “开放相会”

- “‘openly dating’ is allowed, or even encouraged, among man and women, old and young. They can take advantage of these days to meet their lovers they made before marriage.”
- “Gwer Sa La ...retains some elements of primitive sexual promiscuity.”
- “This form of moral ... allusively carries the Bai’s correction over the Confucian dogma of feudal society.”
- “Gwer Sa La is to conceive a baby“—a Bai folklorist
- “carnival for married Bai men and women”—China Central Television
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-gov’t</th>
<th>Gov’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant</td>
<td>spotted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficacious (prosperity)</td>
<td>Inefficacious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>donation</td>
<td>financed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spontaneous</td>
<td>organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodied knowledge</td>
<td>Imposed symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mutual disinterest and mutual non-participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Capital of Gods

- Queen
- Love-People
- Emperor
- Brothers
- Benzvult of Xiaoyi
- Niangniang
- Six animals
- Tankin
- Six animals
- God of Wealth
Benzvlت (本主)

- **My/our master (vuceng)**
  - Village patron god
- **Prosperity**
  - God of wealth
  - Goddess of fertility & god of infant mortality (*niangniang* & *ergege*)
  - Gods of Six Animals
  - Prince Śākyamuni
- **Captial of Gods & Benzvlts**
  - Prosperity
  - Hierarchy
  - Alterity
Benzvlt and household

- **Pai** (拜, venerate)
  - Women of the household
    - Incense and candle
    - Firecrackers
    - Offerings
    - Communion

- **Xup** (修, cultivate)
  - Old women of the household
  - “old women association” (Gu yaoni huirx)

- Benzvlt & Household
  - Prosperity
  - Hierarchy
  - Alterity
“Old Women Association” in Gwer Sa La

- Like other participants
- Procession
- Chanting sutras together
“Old Women Association”

BEFORE Gwer Sa La

- “receiving the princess”
  - 9\textsuperscript{th}-17\textsuperscript{th} of 2nd Mon.
  - Cloth/rain
- “Sending-off the Horse Groom”
  - 3\textsuperscript{rd} of 3\textsuperscript{rd} Month:
  - Singing season
- “Sending-off the horse-groom and the princess”
  - 23\textsuperscript{rd} of 4\textsuperscript{th} Month
  - Gwer Sa La
Legend of alliance

- “Princess Jingu”
  - daughter of Love-People Emperor
  - Elopement with the Horse Groom
  - The visit (17th of 2nd)
  - Horse Groom’s left (3rd of 3rd)
  - The end of visit (23rd of 4th)
  - Love-People Emperor’s abdication

- Historical fact
  - 7th century
  - Nanzhao annexation
Alterity as Encompassment
- (Dumont 1966)

Stranger-king
- Ugly/barbaric/elopement/re remote; Alliance with stranger

Sahlins 2008: 197
- “the elementary forms of kinship, politics and religion are all one’, which is the acquisition and assimilation of ‘the potency of alterity.”
# The Encompassing alterity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household</th>
<th>Benzvlt</th>
<th>Capital of gods</th>
<th>Weishan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>Village</td>
<td>Dali</td>
<td>Non-Dali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plain</td>
<td>Plain</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
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<tr>
<td>My family</td>
<td>My master</td>
<td>King of 500 Gods</td>
<td>Stranger-king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Coin</td>
<td>Shoe</td>
<td>Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosperity</td>
<td>Prosperity of the alterity</td>
<td>Prosperity of the alterity</td>
<td>Prosperity of the alterity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dali

Village (land)
- Friends
- household
- Benzvlt & OWA

Gwer Sa La (non-land)
- Riverside Town (“sea”)
- Capital of Gods (Mt.)
- Horse Groom Temple (Mt.)
- Dali City God Temple (city)

Weishan (non-Dali)
Contextualising ICH: religious revival

- State regulation
  - Suppress/eradicate/weaken/contain
- Rapid growth and revival
- Thriving of Protestants
  - 10 times in 30 years
Overcrowded
From Maoist cult to Nationalism?
Is Chinese Nationalism Religious?

- History in China
  - “Homo Historiens” (Huang, 2007)
  - Historical righteousness (Liu Yizheng, 1910)
  - Immutable of the same cosmological order (Levenson 1983, Feuchtwang, 2001; Duara, 2010)

- Bruce Lincoln (2006)
  - Marxists’ “extreme confidence on historical dialects” (p. 115)
  - Nationalism becomes religious when it “grounds its view in immutable ancestral traditions of transcendental authority more than human in nature” (p. 6).

- Peter Van Der Veer
  - Spirituality is “at the same time seen as universal and as tied to conceptions of national identity.” (2009b: 1097)
  - “the relation between religion and secularism in India and China is a key to understanding both similarities and differences in the development of their perspective nationalisms” (2009a: 93).

- Mandate of Heaven/(pre-1911)
  - Renunciation (Liang 2008, 2010)

- Post-1911:
  - “Mandate of People”?
  - Transcendence

- Post-1949:
  - Building of the Spiritual Civilisation
  - Marxist Utopia
  - Revival of the Great Chinese civilisation
  - Confucianist Nationalism

- Nationalism:
  - A new version of state-religion?
“ICH-ing” popular and ethnic religions
Religion as Culture

- **“Religion”**
  - Five religions
  - Hierarchy of nationalised associations
  - Bureau of religious affairs

- **“Cults”**
  - Militant movements (Falungong) / “Unregistered” Churches
  - New religions (Bahai’i, Humanistic Buddhism, Sathya Sai Baba)
  - “Superstitions”

- **“Culture”**
  - etatisation and Commodification
  - Ethnicity crosscutting religions
  - Bureau of Culture/ Bureau of Cultural Heritage
Religion

Religions in China

State

Nationalised religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Catholicism, Islam)

Political Consultative Conference

Bureau of Religious Affairs

Bureau of Public Security & National Security

Bureau of Culture

Heterodox cults (subversive religions) & Unregistered church

Non-subversive Popular Religions
ICH: Superscribing “illegitimate” religions

- Superscription
  - Duara (1988, 2010)
  - Imperial state superscribed a series of values vested in popular religions

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<th>Contemporary Chinese State</th>
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<td>Maoist Communism-nationalism</td>
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<td>Political/economic/religious</td>
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<td>Imperial sacrifice</td>
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<td>Confucianism over other “teachings”</td>
<td>Nationalism over religions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local gov’t: petition to enfeoffment</td>
<td>Local gov’t: apply for ICH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gwer Sa La of the practitioner</td>
<td>Gwer Sa La of the government</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Prosperity (human, wealth, animal, crops)</em></td>
<td><em>Tourism, “cultural sovereignty”, ICH</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Context dependent</td>
<td>Context independent</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Alienation, inclusivity, gender</em></td>
<td><em>Identity, exclusivity, possession</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Encompassment of alterity</em></td>
<td><em>Superscription of the subject</em></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Conclusion: Superscription without Encompassment

- The Gwer Sa La participants renews the communal/household prosperity.
- It is a series of encompassesment of alterity sanctioned by a stranger-king legend.
- State authorisation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is an attempt to “superscribe” the “illegitimate” religious practices,
- but the ideas behind the superscription follows a set of colonised concepts that never encompasses the values vested in Gwer Sa La
- ICH is thus a “superscription without encompassment”
Thank You!