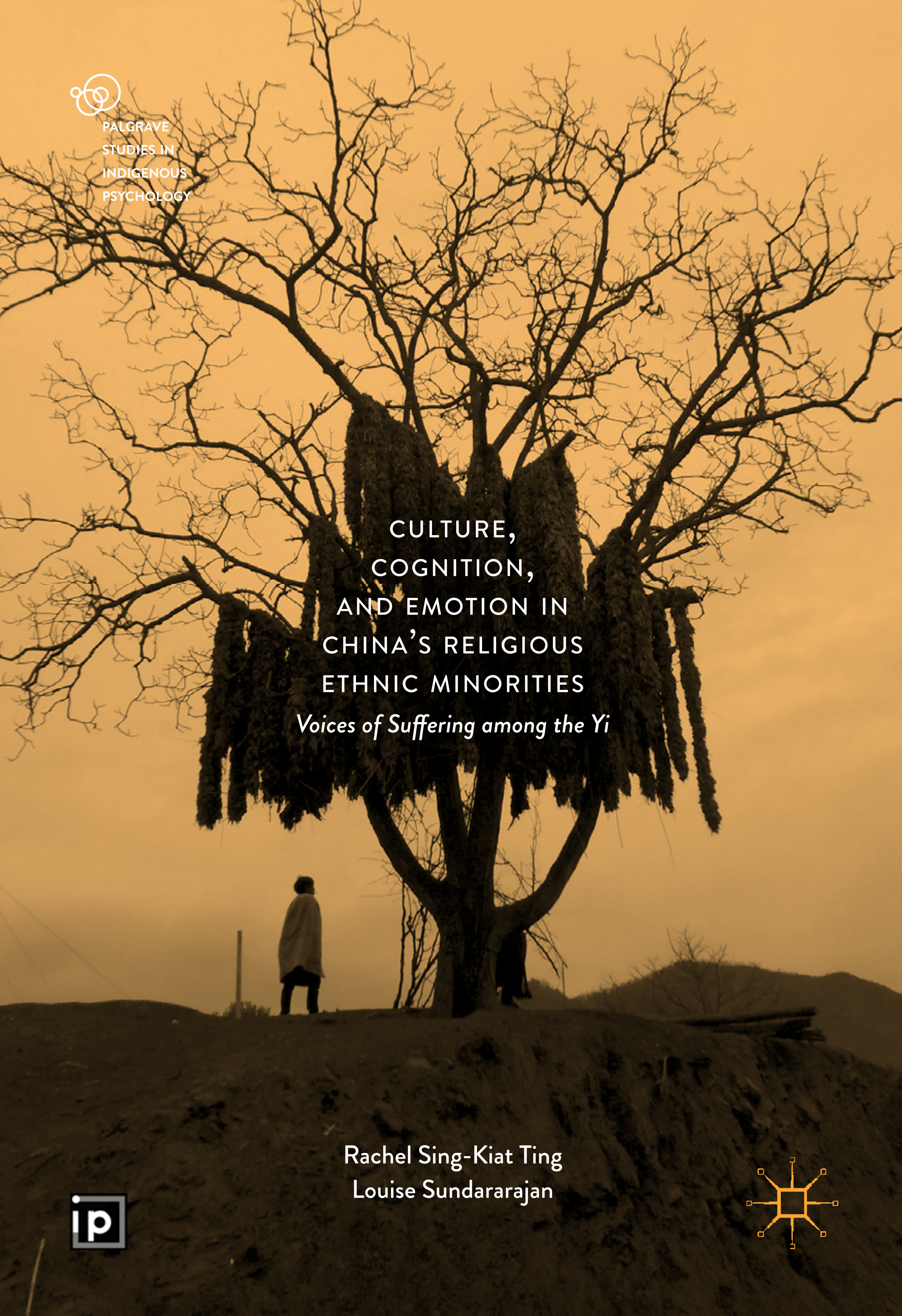


PALGRAVE
STUDIES IN
INDIGENOUS
PSYCHOLOGY

CULTURE, COGNITION, AND EMOTION IN CHINA'S RELIGIOUS ETHNIC MINORITIES

Voices of Suffering among the Yi

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting
Louise Sundararajan

Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology

Series Editors
Louise Sundararajan
Independent Researcher
Rochester, New York, USA

Kuang-Hui Yeh
Institute of Ethnology
Academia Sinica
Taipei, Taiwan

Alvin Dueck
School of Psychology
Fuller Theological Seminary
Pasadena, California, USA

Thomas Teo
Department of Psychology
York University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Jeffrey Paul Ansloos
Faculty of Human and Social Development
University of Victoria
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology aims to introduce psychologists and social scientists to the indigenous psychology movement and to major theoretical and practical issues discussed in this tradition. It publishes books that make significant contributions to psychology in the era of globalization by asking important questions about the discipline, profession, and practice of psychology. The series critically appraises cultural assumptions and theoretical frameworks; sheds light on the dialectics of the universal and the particular in human subjectivity; goes beyond Western psychology in researching the ontological, epistemological, ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions of the mental life; addresses issues of structural oppression in the globalizing era; and explores possibilities for a more equitable global psychology. Given the interdisciplinary nature of indigenous psychology, this book series welcomes contributions from all disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities. In particular, it welcomes scholarship that embodies a critical thinking that is informed by the local knowledge, and inspired by the spiritual strivings of a culture.

More information about this series at
http://www.springer.com/series/15445

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting • Louise Sundararajan

Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities

Voices of Suffering among the Yi

palgrave
macmillan

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting
School of Sociology
China University of Political Science
and Law
Beijing, China

Louise Sundararajan
Rochester, New York, USA

Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology
ISBN 978-3-319-66058-5 ISBN 978-3-319-66059-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017953760

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2018
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: © Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To those participants who passed away during our study, as well as the kind folks we met in the homeland of the Yi

FOREWORD

Rachel SK Ting and Louise Sundararajan have produced a truly remarkable book. It is a significant contribution to indigenous psychology and this alone makes it worthwhile. However, even more, it is a marvelous exemplar of a mixed-methods approach, cooperatively executed by a multidisciplinary team of research assistants who reflect upon their experience. The research assistants come from sociology, psychology, social work, and religious studies at various levels of expertise, all skillfully guided by Rachel and Louise, both to do significant research and to reflect upon what they do in the name of research.

This important contribution to indigenous psychology is informed within a theoretical framework of the mutual interaction of emotion and cognition that co-evolve with the ecological niche of culture. However, rather than simply espouse theory, this study proceeds from the ground up, with research teams heavily sharing in the lives of their participants. Not seeking to impose Western psychological assumptions and methods upon one of the 56 indigenous ethnic groups in China, this research team (all Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China) choose to study two Yi communities, located in the remote mountains of China, one near the town of Meigu, the other near Luquan. While the Yi ethnic people only make up about 0.65% of China's massive population, they are one of the ethnic minorities officially recognized by the present government and number in excess of eight million persons. Of all the ethnic minorities (constituting less than 9% of the overall population), the Yi make up one of the larger groups.

The authors do a fine job of placing the Yi within an historical and geographical context, illustrating why they are an important indigenous group to study. While the Yi's history is clouded by a disputed past, they are likely an amalgamation of six tribes, united by a commitment to the Bimo religion as the Hans were initially united by Confucianism. This is what makes the Yi an indigenous group worthy of serious study. From a Western ethnocentric perspective, the Bimo religion itself is simply dismissed as a "superstition," which, in terms of respecting indigenous traditions, is unwarranted. As the authors rightly note, despite its great distance from Western views of religion, the Bimo religion sustains the Yi culture with Bimo (priests) who transmit its practices via rituals, sustained by a sacred text that only a few can read. While not monotheistic, the authors rightly note (and the research team came to respect) that the Bimo religion is complete in and of itself, fulfilling all the markers of any religion: beliefs, scripture, clergy, and rituals. Throughout the text we are presented with wonderful, in-depth narratives, as the Yi priests and believers tell of their participation in rituals requiring animal sacrifice, and of their healers, who communicate with the spiritual realm in a tradition far removed from the monotheistic religions common in the West and studied in the psychology of religion.

The focus of this research is how the experience of suffering is narrated in two different Yi communities. The identities of the communities are protected by only indicating their general location in the remote mountains of Sichuan and Yunnan, China. One, near the town of Meigu, is more geographically isolated and continues as an exclusively strong-ties Yi-Bimo culture. The other is a weak-ties culture near Luquan. While mostly Yi, it has a history of Christian influence, largely due to successful efforts by British Methodists to convert the Yi. Especially notable is Samuel Pollard, who created the Miao script. The success of Pollard and other Christian missionaries in Yunnan is indicated by the fact that there are 386 registered churches in the Luquan area, with 80% of the Yi population identifying as Christians. Thus, both Yi communities are defined by religion, one indigenous to China (Bimo) and one not (Christian).

While there are many subtleties worth additional attention, including the distinction between "Black" and "White" Yi, identity politics is not the focus of this book. Thus, the major value of this mixed-method study is its focus upon the differences between the exclusively Yi-Bimo tradition of the Meigu community as compared to the largely Yi-Christian community of the Luquan. Rather than getting tangled in the exposition of mere theory, the book documents the differences in suffering narratives of the two communities, informed by, and illustrative of, the theory of ecological rationality.

I do not want to keep the reader from entering into the unfolding of what will likely prove to be an engrossing and, for many, even a personally transforming read. We will see that this was the case for the researcher team. Part of the immense value of this book is that it is a study of real persons in their natural settings by real researchers who do not hide behind methods or techniques imposed from without.

Many have challenged Western positivistic, natural science psychology as itself a dangerous myth and one that distorts rather than illuminates indigenous cultures. However, efforts to sustain a human science in the face of devastating criticisms of positivistic science have not been successful in the West. This is one of the reasons this book is so important. As I will discuss below, and have stated above, it is an exemplary model of mixed methods that illustrates not simply how to do human science with indigenous groups, but how to do it humanely. Humanely means no deception, no manipulation, and that the research's claims are tested by the one criterion essential to a human science that is humane: a negotiated acceptance of descriptions by both researcher and participants, indicating a shared understanding of experience.

A simple summary of some of the major findings is useful here, but is no substitute for a thoughtful and reflexive reading of the narratives in the text. As one might expect, both Yi communities experienced adversity likely enhanced by poverty, which moderates all forms of suffering. However, how the suffering was narrated varied noticeably between the two Yi communities, as ecological rationality suggests should be the case. The Yi-Bimo community tended to talk about emotionally rousing events without naming their emotions. Instead they expressed their emotions through implicit codes. This is contrasted with the Yi-Christian community, who used a more extensive lexicon largely available to them from their Christian culture. This claim is supported by the Christian community making more extensive use of Internal Attributions and a personally reflexive Life Review, while the Yi-Bimo community had ready access to and made use of the more supernatural explanations readily available in Yi-Bimo culture. Many of the suffering narratives focused on HIV and AIDS, more common in the Yi-Bimo than Yi-Christian communities, for reasons explained in the text.

While much more can be said about the empirical findings of this study, the book must be read to glean the real significance of the rich data provided by the research team. The study began in 2014 with two research teams each visiting and establishing rapport with their respective communities. Initial interviews were conducted, as well as focused interviews with religious leaders. This constituted phase one. Phase two was the following year (2014–2015), when follow-up interviews were conducted, each lasting 30 to 60 minutes, with the original participants, or replacements when necessary. Continued contact with the participants was by follow-up phone interviews, constituting phase three of the study. True subject mortality limited follow-up interviews as seven of the original participants died during the study. Data of the semi-structured interviews, coding, and thematic analyses was collected from 47 Yi: 24 Yi-Bimo from Meigu and 23 Yi-Christian from the Luquan area.

Detailed exposition of difficulties and the methods used in collecting data, and on reliably coding narratives, are provided in the book and provide a virtual manual on how to do significant human science. When appropriate, statistical differences between groups on coded measures are provided, but the real merit of this work is in the rich descriptions the narratives provide. Having said this, I recommend you begin reading and looking at the correlated photographs, which will introduce you to the participants whose lives you will begin to understand through the narrations of their sufferings in the face of adversity, some shared by both communities, others unique.

I would be remiss if I did not expound upon what I see as the truly exceptional contribution of this work, not simply to our understanding of the indigenous psychology of the Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian traditions, but to how significant human, and truly humane, science ought to be done. In Chap. 6 the authors present a reflexive analysis of how they and their research assistants were themselves personally affected by participating in this study. They categorize changes in three domains, each linked to the three phases of the research. The domains address cognition, emotion, and relations. Since, as noted above, the study involved intense, personal relations with the participants and did not involve deception or manipulation, true "objectivity" was neither desired nor feigned. The narratives' authenticity was the issue and the goal was mutually shared understanding. Interviews were recorded, extensive photographs were taken, and validity checks were made, while at all times protecting the communities and the individual subject's anonymity. For instance, some photographs have faces obscured, others not. The choice was the participants'. At the end of the study each participant was given a cellphone with a video clip of the interview, with a note of appreciation from the researchers. The research teams treated their participants as human beings with meaningful lives, and sufferings that could at least be understood with empathy and clarity, even if they could not be ameliorated.

As you read this book, it is likely that, just like the researchers, the transitions in each domain will be noted in yourself. At first, you will likely be cognitively curious, intrigued by a different worldview, especially that of the Bimo. Then you will come to appreciate the difficulty of coding such rich narratives. Finally, your thoughts are likely to shift to issues of social justice and ultimate concerns. As some researchers noted, for these geographically isolated people, with minimal public transportation, who are alone and getting older, part of what is needed is simply companionship.

Second, as a reader, you are likely to at least vicariously share the researchers' anxiety and other emotions as they doubt their ability to complete the study, to live in an isolated location, under difficult conditions, and, in some cases, with persons suffering from HIV and AIDS. As you read these detailed descriptions, the narratives will almost certainly have you reflecting, as did many researchers, that suffering is integral to life, and a feeling of calm and peace may envelop you. Finally, like the researchers, you may experience a sense of gratitude for being part of the study of other lives, and a sympathetic witness to their stories.

Relationally, you might reflect upon the participants' thoughts. Why did they agree to be part of this study? Why cooperate at all? Maybe the participants thought the researchers were part of a government project? A church mission? Charity workers? Some of the researchers became sad and emotional when participants died. Others were aware of age differences, and called participants "Grandma" or "Grandpa," showing the researcher's respect for familial relationships. Long after completion of the study, some researchers stayed in touch with those who had become their friends.

There is so much in this book to recommend. It deserves a wide audience among all those interested in a human and humane science that can help us understand indigenous groups. Yet understanding is not necessarily an end in and of itself.

The book concludes with a discussion of the formidable challenges facing all those who feel called to intervene to improve the lives of others, whether as professionals or not. One example should suffice. How do you approach the problem of HIV and AIDS infection, and balance out government concerns with population control, in a land where, for complex cultural and personal reasons, a male child is more desirable? How does one address the willingness to risk infecting one's partner with HIV when the goal is to conceive another child in the hope that it will be male? This book is full of questions made possible by a deep reflexive understanding of narratives that no reader will be able to simply ignore. To raise such questions is itself a call to action without imposing a solution from without.

Chattanooga, Tennessee Ralph W. Hood Jr

PREFACE

In the globalizing era, Western psychology has been internationalized, diversified, indigenized, and translated into different cultural contexts, including China. The industry and discipline of psychology is mushrooming in many of China's modern cities. However, many psychologists are just "copying and pasting" Western psychology to understand Chinese people. Even though many efforts were invested in promoting indigenous psychology for Chinese populations, these scholars are still treating the Chinese as "one" homogenous group, dismissing the myriad ethnic and religious diversity within. Furthermore, as China is growing stronger in terms of its economy and international trading, its society is also facing tremendous challenges in keeping interracial harmony and international peace.

This monograph seeks to present a different side of China—a China secluded in the deep mountains, far removed from all the clamors of the modern cities, and yet just as ravaged by modernity, if not more ruthlessly so, as any other disenfranchised population around the world. Through a systematic and rigorous study by a multidisciplinary team, this book tells the "hidden" and "insider" stories of suffering among the Yi groups. In the mainstream Han ethnic group, many are not aware that there is such a distinctive minority group among them, and a social class still living in poverty and illness. As indigenous psychologists, we believe that it is a moral imperative to raise consciousness about this forgotten group, to let their stories be known and their voices heard.

According to the public record, there are 56 ethnic groups in China (including the Han ethnic group, which makes up 91% of the population), among which the Yi is the seventh largest, residing mainly in the most isolated and deprived regions. The Yi are being marginalized in Chinese society with labels such as “AIDS/HIV,” “drug addicts,” “violent,” “lazy,” and so on. They have been practicing a spiritual tradition passed down through the Bimo priesthood. The Bimo serve as indigenous healers for the Yi people, and they normally orchestrate blessings rituals at community funerals and weddings. Yet, this kind of spiritual practice was deemed “superstitious” and “illegal” during the Cultural Revolution in China (1960s–1980s). It was suppressed and the Bimo family clans dispersed. Their suffering stories were untold, and cultural trauma left its mark in terms of their current poverty, illness, and illiteracy. The same thing happened to other Yi groups who were converted to Christianity by missionaries during the 1920s. Since all foreign missionaries were expelled after the Communist Party took over China in 1949, local Christians were persecuted and dispersed. The lifting of the ban on religious practices only happened in the 1980s. As both a religious and ethnic minority, Yi people have shown their resilience over the past 60 years.

This monograph is an investigation of two Yi communities from Sichuan and Yunnan, who practice two radically different religions—Bimo and Christianity. By analyzing their narratives of suffering, we found that, in times of adversity, these two religious groups expressed their emotions, cognition, and behavior differently. We argue that religion as a cultural system co-evolves with the ecological niche and cognitive styles, which have a pervasive impact on the emotional expression and help-seeking behaviors of the local community. Based on both qualitative and quantitative analyses, this monograph presents the experiences of the Yi communities in the hope that their voices, heard through harrowing narratives of suffering, may inspire in the reader hope and an appreciation of their resilience, as well as a deepened sensitivity to the plight of the Yi as “economic misfits” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 28) as China races to become a superpower in the global economy.

We want to acknowledge the funding of our research project by Travis Research Initiatives (California, USA). We are grateful for the contribution of our research assistants, the participation of our interviewees, and the local informants who assisted in translation and guidance. Last but not least, we thank the final external reviewer for the constructive criticisms that made this book better. We were granted per-

mission to use all the photographs in this book by our participants and research team members. To show some of the richness of the ethnographic data, we posted more pictures and video links online (created by the research team). Readers are free to view them should they feel interested. May this book inspire you to become our co-traveler through the depth and richness of human suffering.

Sibu, Malaysia
Rochester, NY, USA
July 3, 2017

Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting
Louise Sundararajan

Reference

Bourdieu, P. (2000). Making the economic habitus: Algerian workers revisited. *Ethnography, 1*(1), 17–41.

CONTENTS

1 First Things First: Research Orientation and Background Information on Two Yi Communities in Southwest China 1

Scope of Our Study: An Unusual Blend of Approaches 1

Theoretical Framework 2

Aim of Our Study: What Is This Study About? 4

The Historical Background of Yi and the Native Bimo Tradition 6

The Introduction of Christianity in Southwestern China 7

Research Sites in Yunnan and Sichuan 8

Culture and Cognition: Theoretical Predictions 25

Research Methodology 28

Structure of This Book 35

References 37

2 Narratives of Suffering 41

Self-Reflection of the First Author: A Pilgrimage to Indigenous Psychology 41

Narratives of Suffering from Yi-Bimo 46

Thematic Analysis: Yi-Bimo Group 53

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians 63

Thematic Analysis: Yi-Christian Group 69

Group Comparison of Frequency of Categories of Suffering Events 78

References 81

3 Suffering and Worldviews 83
Narratives of Suffering of the Yi-Bimo 83
Why Does Worldview Matter 89
Bimo Worldview on Suffering and Healing 90
A Focus Group Study with Bimo Priests 92
Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Interviews with the Yi-Bimo 95
Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians 102
Christian Worldview of Suffering and Healing 109
Focus Group Study with Yi-Christian Leaders 110
Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Interviews with the Yi-Christians 112
Comparison Between Religious Groups on Causal Attributions of Suffering 119
References 123

4 Help-Seeking in Suffering 125
Reflection of the First Author: On the Experience of Marginalization 125
Religious Coping Versus Help-Seeking Behavior 127
Religious Communities in the Yi Ethnic Group 130
Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Bimo 131
A Focus Group Study with Bimo Priests 139
Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Yi-Bimo Interviews 140
Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians 148
A Focus Group Study with Yi-Christian Leaders 157
Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Yi-Christian Interviews 158
Comparison Between Religious Groups in Help-Seeking Behavior 165
References 169

5 Emotions of Suffering 171
What Are Emotions and How to Study Them? 171
Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Bimo 173
Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians 178
Culture, Cognition and Emotion 187
A Sign System of Emotion 188
A Psycho-linguistic Study of Suffering Narratives 190
Mentalization and Alexithymia: A Western Diagnosis 196

Culture, Emotion, and Health: A Semiotic Analysis 197
Religion as Buffer to Suffering 199
References 200

6 Toward a Reflexive Indigenous Psychology 203
Narratives of Suffering from Both Sites 206
Researchers' Changes in Cognition, Emotion, and Relationship 214
Suffering Narratives of Yi-Christians 224
Suffering Narratives of Yi-Bimo 228
Ecological Rationality In Vivo: How Field Study Shaped the Differences Between Two Teams of RAs 233
Reflecting on Indigenous Psychology (IP) Research 238
References 243

7 Challenges and Future Directions 245
Challenge #1: Problems of AIDS and Drug Addiction in the Liangshan Area: Side-Effects of a Broken Sign That Perpetuate Through Generations in Vicious Cycles 247
Challenge #2: Barrier in Help-Seeking: Urgent Need for a Culture-Sensitive HIV Prevention Program 255
Challenge #3: Disappearance of the Villages in China: The Voyage of Yi Migrant Workers 262
Challenge #4: Toward a Paradigm Shift: Implications for Indigenous Psychology and Western Psychology 268
Concluding Remarks 269
References 274

Appendix: Interview Guidelines 277
Phase I-Focus Group (3–5 Religious Leaders) 277
Phase II-Individual Semi-structured Interview Protocol 278

Index 281

List of Figures

Diagram 1.1 A schematic representation of all the contributing factors to suffering experiences 3
Fig. 1.1 Our pilot study team. Our local translator lent us sheepskin cloaks as it was below 10 °C outdoors 10
Fig. 1.2 On our way to visit the village, the van had to drive through a creek which is at knee-high water level during October 11
Fig. 1.3 The center of Bimo culture, but it was no longer in use at the time of our visit 12
Fig. 1.4 One of the Bimo priests showed us his hand-copied scripture scrolls, which were made from a specific kind of paper and written in ancient Yi script 14
Fig. 1.5 A Bimo priest performing a blessing and cleansing ritual at the household of some newly-weds 15
Fig. 1.6 Sacrificial ritual happening alongside the cooking process 16
Fig. 1.7 Only the male descendants of the *jia zhi* were permitted to carry the flags in the *Nimucuobi* rituals. Female family members were mainly there as observers 17
Fig. 1.8 Beer bottles are normally seen outside Yi households 19
Fig. 1.9 There were many posters of Jesus and writing from the scriptures pasted on the walls of Yi-Christian households 22
Fig. 1.10 The female seniors helped clean the church building before and after the services in the village 22
Fig. 1.11 During the service, Holy Communion was conducted by the lay pastor 23

Fig. 1.12 The congregation praying together with some kneeling down on the floor 24
Fig. 1.13 The front cover of the Bible—Black Yi, New Testament 25
Fig. 1.14 The Yi hymnal, wrapped in the cover of Mao's Red book as a disguise 26
Fig. 1.15 The tombstone of Gladstone Poreous was inscribed with his Chinese name—Zhang Er Chang 27
Fig. 1.16 This building was built as the first seminary in Southwest China, but was shut down after 1949 28
Diagram 1.2 Mapping cultures along the axes of cognition 29
Diagram 1.3 A schematic representation of the research process 32
Fig. 2.1 EM, in the middle, and her children 48
Fig. 2.2 SZ's father, QQ, squatting at the front door when we first met him 49
Fig. 2.3 SZ, the girl in the middle, and her extended family—uncle and grandmother 51
Fig. 2.4 LQ and her sons in their doorway 53
Fig. 2.5 YG on the left, sitting with her sister in earlier years, while she was still healthy 62
Fig. 2.6 Grandpa SC in his front yard in 2015 65
Fig. 2.7 The RA taking a picture in front of the house with Grandma W and her family 69
Fig. 2.8 The first author at Grandma Tang's bedside 74
Fig. 2.9 The first author interviewing Sister Wang in her front yard 76
Fig. 3.1 SX, with her daughter on the right (faces were masked as requsted by the participants) 87
Fig. 3.2 Listening to ET's story in front of his house 88
Fig. 3.3 Focus group with Bimo priests 93
Fig. 3.4 The RA meeting JG in front of the bus station 104
Fig. 3.5 The RA listening to BR in his room 107
Diagram 3.1 Causal attributions of two Yi religions, as indexed by the Why Scale 122
Fig. 4.1 YX smiling at us during our second visit in summertime 134
Fig. 4.2 HZ on his construction site 138
Fig. 4.3 The RA and Mrs. H, on the right, during the interview 150
Fig. 4.4 Grandma Y and her grandchildren in their rental room 156
Diagram 4.1 Help-seeking methods of two Yi religious communities, as indexed by the HELP Scale 168
Fig. 5.1 QT and his son near the fire pit 174
Fig. 5.2 Listening to MHWJ telling his life story 177
Fig. 5.3 Grandma CZ sharing walnuts picked from her own house with us 179

Fig. 5.4 The RA listening to Grandma CZ singing hymns in her living room 181
Fig. 5.5 Our first visit to Grandma BL, in front of her house 184
Fig. 6.1 The RA showing the video clip to DE and his mother 208
Fig. 6.2 The RA taking information from QZ in front of his house 211
Fig. 6.3 QZ, standing on the right, met up with the RA at a Chengdu restaurant 214
Fig. 6.4 Grandma GL listening to the video clip on our last visit 227
Fig. 6.5 AS seeing us off in front of his house 230
Fig. 6.6 The research team standing next to the SH dam, which was built during the 1960s by our participants from Luquan 242
Fig. 7.1 GR was holding a cigarette during the conversation 249
Fig. 7.2 GR's son being held by his grandparents 253
Fig. 7.3 M and his family standing at the front door and smiling 257
Fig. 7.4 The cover page of the currently available version of the HIV awareness and prevention brochure 261
Fig. 7.5 GG and her mother, KM, squatting down on the roadside, talking to the RA 263

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 A schematic comparison between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians in terms of ecological rationality, defined as cognition co-evolved with the ecological niche 3
Table 1.2 General background information of the participants 30
Table 2.1 Themes of suffering events among Yi-Bimo interviewees ($n = 24$) 54
Table 2.2 Themes of the suffering events among Yi-Christian interviewees ($n = 23$) 70
Table 2.3 Comparisons of suffering events reported across two groups 79
Table 3.1 Themes regarding the causal attribution of suffering among Yi-Bimo ($n = 24$) 96
Table 3.2 Themes regarding the causal attribution of suffering among Yi-Christians ($n = 23$) 113
Table 3.3 Differences between causal attributions of suffering between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo 121
Table 4.1 Themes from the help-seeking behaviors of Yi-Bimo participants ($n = 24$) 141
Table 4.2 Themes from the help-seeking behaviors of Yi-Christian participants ($n = 23$) 159
Table 4.3 Differences in help-seeking behaviors between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo 167
Table 5.1 Differences in emotional expression between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo 193
Table 5.2 Summary of the cognitive differences in suffering narratives between two Yi religious communities 194

Table 5.3 Correlation matrix of items that showed significant group differences 195
Table 7.1 An expanded schematic comparison between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians in terms of ecological rationality, defined as cognition co-evolved with the ecological niche 246

CHAPTER 1

First Things First: Research Orientation and Background Information on Two Yi Communities in Southwest China

As the first chapter of the first psychological investigation of the two religious communities of the Yi, secluded deep in the mountains of Southwest China, this propaedeutic has the important task of orienting the reader. We begin with an introduction to the purpose and scope of this psychological investigation, and the theoretical framework of our study. Next, we give an overview of the historical background of the Yi, their native Bimo tradition, and the spread of Christianity in Southwest China near the end of the nineteenth century. Then we take the reader on a tour to the two research sites—Meigu and Luquan. Lastly, we outline our research protocol of the mixed method approach, which consists of both qualitative and quantitative measures.

Scope of Our Study: An Unusual Blend of Approaches

This study is a multilayered endeavor, which consists of the warp of theoretical prediction on the one hand, and the weft of phenomenological analysis on the other. These two approaches differ in their levels of analysis. The theoretical approach is abstract and removed from the phenomenal world, whereas the phenomenological approach is deeply immersed in fieldwork, capitalizing on an empathic understanding of

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_1

the participants in the study. This difference in levels of abstraction may be understood in terms of two types of observations—the bird's eye view and the worm's eye view. Corresponding to the theoretical approach, the bird's-eye perspective gains an overview of things, but does not dwell on details. Corresponding to the phenomenological approach, the worm's eye view capitalizes on experiential learning, counting each tree on its way to knowledge. These two approaches rarely collaborate in the field; and it is this unusual and synergistic combination of the two that sets this study apart from run-of-the-mill psychological studies.

Theoretical Framework

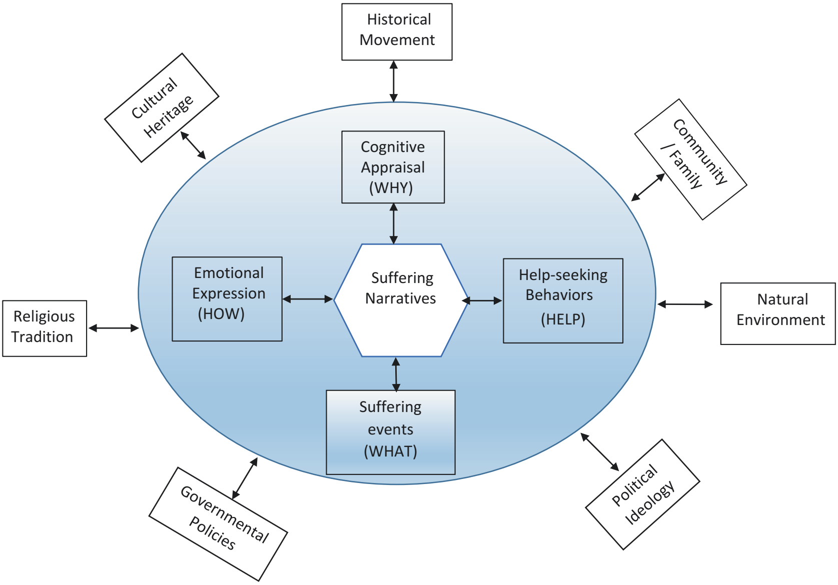
The theoretical framework that guides this study is ecological rationality (Todd et al. 2012), which posits that cognitive styles shape different types of adaptation in response to varying environmental demands, as well as being shaped by them. This theory is extended by Sundararajan (2015) to explain the difference in cognitive styles across cultures, using strong versus weak ties as ecological niches to replace collectivistic versus individualistic societies/cultures. We here adopt and adapt it further to explain the difference in suffering experiences between two religious communities among the Yi in Southwest China. More specifically, the theory predicts that the differences between the two Yi communities fall along the divide between cognitive styles privileged by strong ties versus weak ties, respectively (see Table 1.1).

The various cognitive components of suffering, as shown in Table 1.1, will be further examined in Chaps. 3–5 according to the scales we constructed (What, Why, How, Help). In addition, there are other contributing factors to suffering that we will not analyze. It suffices here to adumbrate them all with a chart (see Diagram 1.1).

As Diagram 1.1 indicates, our investigation pays selective attention to certain variables, and not others. Note that all the demographic variables (on the outer ring of the diagram), such as governmental policies, historical factors, and so on, are not the focus of our investigation. What we focus on instead are the cognitive styles behind certain behaviors—help-seeking, emotional expression, and causal attributions—associated with suffering. This point can be elaborated by levels of analysis. The variables that show up on our radar screen, as indicated by the shaded circle on Diagram 1.1, are accessible at two levels of

Table 1.1 A schematic comparison between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians in terms of ecological rationality, defined as cognition co-evolved with the ecological niche

Ecological niche	*Strong ties*	*Weak ties*
Cognitive styles		
Representation of emotion	Implicit Somatic expressions	Explicit Verbal, linguistic, conceptual
Information processing	Perceptual (concrete)	Conceptual (abstract)
Categorizations	Experience-bound In-group versus out-group; natural versus Supernatural Causes	Higher level of abstraction Church as all-inclusive group: God having sovereignty over all things, natural and supernatural
Cognitive orientation	Physical space (external)	Mental space (internal)
Cause of suffering	External Attribution (cause is external to the self)	Internal Attribution (sin)
Responses to suffering	Concrete action (hire a religious specialist to do ritual)	Mental action (prayer, etc.)
Cognitive effort	Low cognitive effort	High cognitive effort


Historical Movement
Cultural Heritage
Community / Family
Cognitive Appraisal (WHY)
Emotional Expression (HOW)
Suffering Narratives
Help-seeking Behaviors (HELP)
Religious Tradition
Natural Environment
Suffering events (WHAT)
Governmental Policies
Political Ideology

Note. Variables inside the shaded circle are the focus of this study.

Diagram 1.1 A schematic representation of all the contributing factors to suffering experiences analysis—at the abstract, experience-distant level, cognitive styles are conceptualized and predicted by the bird's-eye approach; at the concrete, experience-near level, data on help-seeking, emotional expression, and causal attributions are collected through sympathetic listening to the suffering narratives of the research participants. What falls outside the scope of our investigation is the mid-range level of analysis that focuses on the societal, historical, political, religious, and environmental factors (shown on the outer ring of the diagram) found in anthropology literature.

Aim of Our Study: What Is This Study About?

Due to this difference in levels of analysis, our investigation of the two religious groups of Yi neither asks nor answers the same questions that concern anthropologists. Rather, it asks a different set of questions. Guided by the theory of ecological rationality, we propose that religion as a cultural system co-evolves with the ecological niche and cognitive styles, which have a pervasive impact on the emotional expression and help-seeking behaviors of the local community. Let us spell out more fully what we do and do not include in our research agenda:

1. This study is not about religion per se, because religion is dissolved into the higher-level analysis of culture. By the same token, this study is not about the religious experience of the individual—we focus only on religious behaviors, such as rituals and prayers, that give us information on cognitive styles and emotional expression.
2. Although we study suffering, we do not focus on coping as it is narrowly defined in the literature (Harrison 2001), because coping is dissolved in the larger context of cognition and emotion, in other words as normal functioning.
3. Corresponding to two types of explanations, remote and proximate, there are two types of ecology—one is evolutionarily ancient; the other pertains to more recent history. The latter is the focus of proximate explanations of suffering—such as the historical, political, economic, and social factors that can make life difficult. By contrast, our focus is on the "ecological niche" that co-evolved with the cognitive styles of a culture in the evolutionary past.

Cast in the context of evolution and stated in simplest terms, ecological rationality posits that the cognitive skills of an organism evolved to serve the purpose of its ecological niche as well as shaping it. For example, in the ecological niche of the beaver, it is advantageous to build dams, such that beavers have evolved such skills. In our framework of cultural analysis, we posit two evolutionarily ancient ecological niches—strong ties and weak ties (Granovetter 1973)—each privileging the development of certain cognitive styles and not others, see Table 1.1.

For illustration, consider the two different cognitive orientations—internal versus external. Cognitive orientation refers to attentional focus—external focus on the physical space versus internal focus on the mental space. Our prediction, as shown in Table 1.1 and to be explained further in Chap. 5, is that mental, internal focus is privileged by weak-ties societies, in which one frequently rubs elbows with strangers through trade, whereas external focus on the physical space is privileged by (some) strong -ties societies, characterized by sharp in-group and out-group distinction due to the centrality of bloodline-based connections in the sedentary agricultural community.

For a concrete example of the externally oriented cognitive style, consider the *Nuosu* Yi in Swancutt's (2012) ethnography. The *Nuosu* Yi are so invested in the in-group and out-group distinction that they made finer distinctions among outsiders by parsing them into two types of guests—the ordinary versus the captive. Consistent with our prediction is the observation that this ultra-strong-ties community also exhibits an ultra-external notion of the soul, which "takes the form of a 'soul-spider' residing *on the outer surface* of the human body" (p. S103, emphasis added). This example helps clarify our conceptualization of cognitive styles:

1. In the framework of ecological rationality, all cognitive styles are equally useful in the ecological niches they evolved to function adaptively and creatively. Thus, internal focus is not necessarily better than external focus. Nor does external focus need to have connotations of superficiality, lack of depth, and so on. For instance, the fact that the *Nuosu* think their souls might fall off the surface of their bodies does not make their souls superficial or lacking depth in any way.
2. While cognitive styles are assumed to be equally useful and adaptive in their respective ecological niches, which initially gave rise to and co-evolved with them, they do have good and bad consequences—due to historical contingencies. For instance, if the river dries up, the

> beaver's dam-building skill will be useless and might even drain cognitive resources that could have been used for other skills. One important contingency in modern times is globalization, which privileges weak-ties rationality, for which some strong-ties societies may not be prepared.

So much for the bird's-eye view. For the rest of this book the worm's eye view will loom large. Each step of the way, as you go down the meandering path of this investigation, the worm's eye view will take you by the hand to meet the research participants, listening to their stories of suffering, and along the way finding out about their cognitive styles and how these impact on their lives and even on those of the researchers.

The Historical Background of Yi and the Native Bimo Tradition

China has 56 ethnic groups and 55 minority ethnic groups (the fifty-sixth corresponds to the Han, more than 91% of the population). According to Wickeri and Tam (2011), most of the ethnic minority groups in China have a very complex religious context and historical lineage. The diversity among them is probably greater than the mainstream (Han) group. In these 55 ethnic minority groups, some have been exposed to other religions besides their indigenous traditions, but some remain untouched, depending on their geography and historical factors. Many scholars (e.g., Wang 2009) use "Original versus Secondary" religion to differentiate between the indigenous tradition and the later acquired traditions.

According to the 2010 census data of China, the Yi ethnic minority made up 0.65% (8,714,393) of the population, with 25.55% (2,226,755) of them living in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province. Sixty percent of them are living in Yunnan province. The Yi ethnic minority is a heterogeneous group, as it consists of six different major tribes which adhere to different linguistic features and subcultures. Actually, most historians and anthropologists would argue that Yi is an amalgamation of several ethnic groups, as there are more variations than commonality between them, but the common denominator shared by the different subgroups is their identification with the Bimo tradition (Wuda 2008; Harrell 2000, 2001).

In contrast to the prominent religions in China (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, and Confucianism), the Yi group has an indigenous religion, which is called the "Bimo"(毕摩) religion (Zhang 2006). According to a prominent scholar, Bamo Ayi (1996), the Bimo religion may be defined as a culture created and inherited by Bimo (the priest), transmitted by scripture and rituals, revolving around the worshipping of spirits, ghosts and witchcraft practices, and containing the Yi group's philosophical beliefs, sociological history, ethics and education, meteorology and calendar, art and literatures, customs, medical knowledge and healing methods. It is rooted in family lineage, and includes the four main elements that constitute religion—belief system, scripture, clergy, and rituals. Suni (苏尼) is another religious figure akin to witches or shamans, who specializes in communicating with the spiritual realms, to conduct exorcism, soul-calling, and ghost-expelling, in order to bring healing and restoration to an individual's wellness (Li 1997). According to Steven Harrell (2000), the Bimo tradition has basically permeated the lifestyle, belief system, and worldview of the Yi people. Although it is displayed in different forms by different subcultural groups, Bimo religion is a strong binding force for the Yi people.

The Introduction of Christianity in Southwestern China

Regarding the spreading and development of Christianity among the Yi group, it has been documented (Long 2012; Dong 2004; Qin 2003) that the gospel of Christianity was first introduced to Yunnan at the end of the nineteenth century through several Western missionaries, such as J. R. Adam and Samuel Pollard, sent by a British missionary agency to the inland part of China. The most influential mission work was done by a British Methodist missionary to China with the China Inland Mission—Samuel Pollard (1864–1915), who built a base at the juncture of Sichuan-Yunnan-Guizhou provinces (*Shimenkan*, aka Stone-Gateway), and created a Miao script that is still in use today. He imported Western civilization, such as education and medical systems, to Shimenkan, and benefited many ethnic minority groups in that area. After his success converting the Flowery Miao tribe (大花苗) to Christianity, many Yi groups in the nearby area also started to practice this new religion (Dong 2002). Till this day, in northeast Yunnan and the northwest of Guizhou, about three quarters of the Miao people believe in Christianity (Wickeri and Tam 2011). However, missionary work never blossomed in the Liangshan mountain area of southern Sichuan, due to its geographical isolation and the strong family lineage of the Bimo culture.[1]

In fact, there has been some cultural conflict between the secondary religion and native religion among Yi groups. Ban Li (2011) attributed this tension between the two religions to their difference in religious structure—Bimo tradition is polytheistic whereas Christianity is monotheistic. Moreover, Christian beliefs—in creation, life and death issues, cosmology, ethics, and marriage and relationships—are radically different from those found in the teaching of Yi philosophy and written traditions. Li (2011) also claims that Christianity would destroy the existing community ties among the Yi people because of its rejection of the rituals of animal sacrifice and the associated feasts of celebration.

Nevertheless, the Yi group in Jinsha River of Yunnan (northern Yunnan) has long been converted to Christianity (since four generations ago), embracing the church traditions in their village. This gives us a chance to compare these two religious systems among Yi groups, and study the difference between them, especially their suffering experiences. Why suffering experiences? Because suffering contains the richness and breadth of human psychological experience, ranging from cognitive appraisal and emotional reactions to help-seeking behavior (see Diagram 1.1). In order to develop an indigenous psychology rooted in Chinese culture, and dealing with the daily lives of its modern generation, we decided to listen to the suffering stories of the Yi using a multidisciplinary approach (to be further elaborated in later chapters).

Research Sites in Yunnan and Sichuan

Since 2014, we have been traveling to Yunnan and Sichuan for cultural immersion and field study with funding from TRI. In order to protect the privacy of our field participants, we would simply name our targeted samples as Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo. These two groups are situated at two different locations—Meigu (Liangshan State, Sichuan) and Luquan (Yunnan). The exact residency of our study is actually in the further remote villages of these two towns, but we will disguise the village names with alphabet symbols. This is to protect the identity of our participants and interviewees. Despite their religious differences, there are some commonalities between the two sites:

- The majority of local Yi people identified themselves as ethnic Yi, and are living below the poverty line.
- They have a unified religion in their community, and have a long history of religious practices (over four generations).
- They each have key informants we could trust and have built a strong friendship with.
- They both welcomed our investigations (gained permission).
- Our team members were participant observers in both communities.

The following is an overview of these two research sites, and their religious practices.

Meigu Town (美姑)

Liangshan has been labeled the "most impoverished land" in China. Meigu is a town situated at the northeast side of Liangshan state, which is also a historical hub of the inner Liangshan area. It covers an area of about 2731.6 square kilometers and contains a population of about 200,000, 97.89% of whom are Yi ethnic people.[2] The highest altitude is about 4000 meters, and the rest of the areas range from 2000 to 3000 meters. Therefore, there is a drastic temperature change at night, with drops to below freezing from October to March. When we paid our first visit in October 2014, we saw that most of the Yi people cover themselves in sheepskin cloth to keep warm, which is a unique local custom called "Cha-er-wa," and that there is no heating system indoors. According to our local informant, the value of a sheepskin cloak exceeded 1000 RMB, and these came in blue, white or mixed colors (Fig. 1.1).

The options for public transportation to Meigu are limited. On our first trip, we had to take a local bus from Xichang (six hours drive from Chengdu, Sichuan) to Meigu (two departures per day) and bypassed many mountain ranges. Due to the poor road conditions and some ongoing road constructions, what was supposed to be a four-hour journey became six hours, and we failed to catch our connecting bus in Zhaojue. Hence we stayed overnight at Zhaojue to catch the early bus to Meigu the next day. During the trip, we witnessed an escalating verbal fight between two local Yi people over a seat on the bus, due to its having been overbooked. As it was near the Yi New Year festival, there were many Yi workers returning to Meigu to celebrate with their families. This was the reason so many

Fig. 1.1 Our pilot study team. Our local translator lent us sheepskin cloaks as it was below 10 °C outdoors

people were traveling in the Meigu area, and also explained the overbooking situation. We were told the road-construction situation would not improve for the next two years (and might even get worse), and that at some times of the year there would be roadblocks due to mudslides. The dust on the road was heavy and, after six hours, our clothing and baggage were covered with a thick layer of red sand that had come in through the open window.

In the central market of Meigu, we found modern facilities such as motels, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. However, there was no public transportation available to take people from town to the villages nearby. Local van rental, to destinations within a 15-kilometer radius, cost at least 300–500 RMB per trip. The difficulty in accessing remoter villages might explain why the cost of living is so high in Meigu town. In 2015, the local GDP was 193,350 RMB, the average annual income was 7419 RMB per person, and the average annual expenses were 5850.12 RMB. For rural residents, the annual income was 6246 RMB/year, way below the poverty line set by the Chinese government. According to a media interview with a Yi scholar, Professor Hou Yuangao from Minzu University, in around

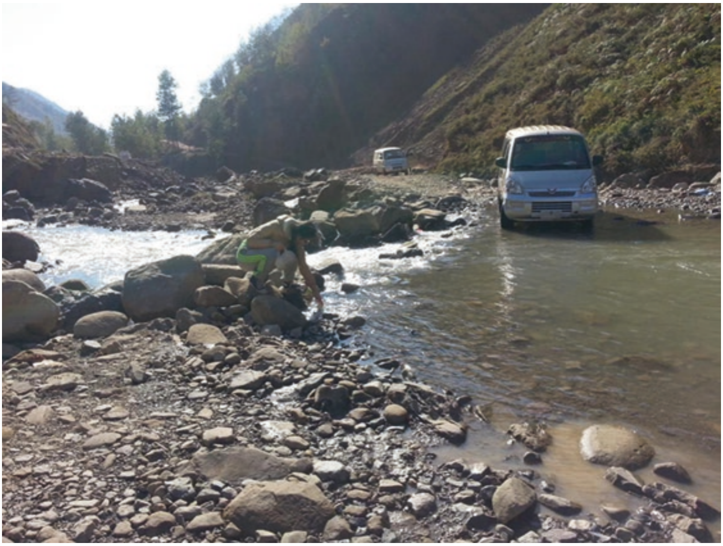


Fig. 1.2 On our way to visit the village, the van had to drive through a creek which is at knee-high water level during October

2007, about 400,000–500,000 Yi people, a quarter of the total Yi population in Liangshan, migrated to cities to work as laborers in the modern factories (Fig. 1.2).[3]

According to the record, Meigu town has retained the greatest number of Bimo practices and rituals, as well as the highest number of Bimo priests (Vermander 1999b). There are about 685 local priests in total, which is 4% of the male population in town. Due to its isolated geographical location, Meigu's traditional heritage and religious structures are still pretty much intact (Bamo Ayi 1999). Although Meigu claims to have a center of Bimo study, this was closed most of the time during our visit there. The local people said the center was no longer active and had relocated to Chengdu, and the government effort to preserve the Bimo tradition uses a top-down approach. Nevertheless, the knowledge and practice of Bimo is still strong at the grassroots level and we were able to participate in and observe various kinds of Bimo rituals in the nearby villages without prior arrangements (Fig. 1.3).

The Yi people in Meigu can be traced back to the village near the riverside that the local people call "Lingmumogu," a historic landmark commemorating their ancestors who emigrated from Yunnan to Sichuan. Later,

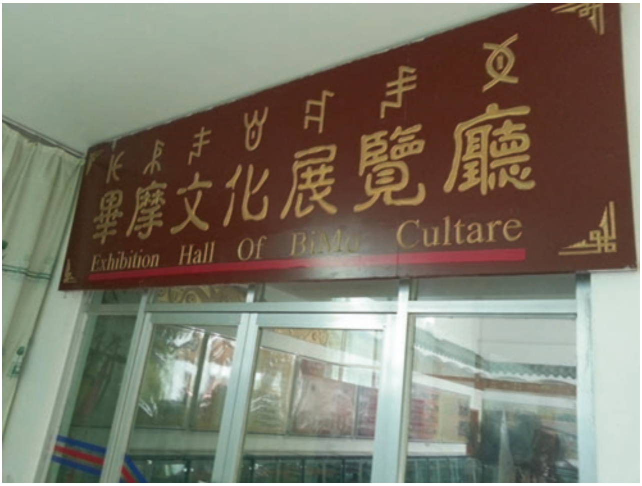


Fig. 1.3 The center of Bimo culture, but it was no longer in use at the time of our visit

those Yi migrants who settled in Liangshan were named the "*Nuosu*" tribe, which was traditionally divided into five different castes (Nzymo, Nuoho, Qunuo, Mgajie, Gaxy) and ranked by social hierarchy (Wuda 2008). However, this social stratification was neither static nor permanent, and changed continually as the society developed (Ma Erzi 2003). The *Nuosu* people were generally referred to, in the works of Western anthropologists until 1949, as "Black Lolos" (Harrell 2001). Stalin's "ethnic group classification" was introduced in 1951, and about 400 tribal groups in China were condensed into 55 ethnic groups, including the *Nuosu* people. Thus, some Western scholars (Harrell 2001; Vermander 1999a) questioned the "Yi nationality" assigned by the modern Chines government. Though, in a public context, the *Nuosu* identified with their labeling as Yi people, in the tribal context, they would still differentiate themselves from other "Yi" and used their own clan (*Cyvi* or *Jia zhi*) as their major cultural identity. Early Han scholars used to differentiate the more powerful Yi groups from the less powerful using the dichotomy of "Black Yi" and "White Yi" (Lin 1947). Till this day, the label of Black versus White Yi is still loosely used in the Meigu area, although the exact meaning is not clear.

In fact, there has been a long debate regarding the definition of "Black Yi" (黑彝) versus "White Yi" (白彝) among scholars. Some Chinese scholars (Wuda 2008; Pan 1990) defined the difference in terms of family lineage (two subcultural groups), because there was no more caste system after the reformation in 1956. Regardless of the dispute and controversy over the caste system among the *Nuosu* Yi, most scholars agreed that "Black Yi" referred to the aristocratic and ruling class among the *Nuosu* Yi (normally nuoho). In the past, they had had the power to capture other ethnic groups, such as Han and Miao, to use as their "slaves" or "laborers." Hence, they were regarded as "capitalist landowners" (地主) by the socialist government, and prosecuted after the land reformation in the 1950s and the Cultural Revolutions in the 1960s (Ma Erzi 2003). However, some Western scholars (Harrell 2001; Vermander 1999a) questioned the imposed socialist label of "the last slave society" on the *Nuosu* Yi.

This clan system (*jia zhi*) was also evident during our first visit to Meigu. In our pilot study, our translator identified himself as "White Yi" because his ancestors were once enslaved by the "Black Yi." He told us it was the mixed blood of the Yi and Han peoples that created the "White Yi." This modern discourse on bloodline difference also created a tension between these two groups, which led to frequent conflicts and mistrust. However, when there were family conflicts that needed mediating, most of the "White Yi" would consult a "Black Yi" descendant as conciliator (Degu), as they still held the latter in high esteem. Even after 1949, when socialism overtook mainland China, and the caste system and so-called "landowners" were being overturned, the prestige of the "Black Yi" (Black bone) prevailed, and has done so right up until the present day. They played the role of the educated, wise, and powerful in the Meigu areas. Our interviewees (all male) also informed us that they were only allowed to marry women at the same caste level (either nuohuo or quhuo), as it is their duty to maintain the family lineage within the social hierarchy. The complex interplay between caste system and blood lineage among the *Nuosu* Yi is beyond the scope of this book. Our focus instead is on the extent to which the discourse on social hierarchy and family lineage is characteristic of strong-ties societies, and how this ecological factor shapes the suffering experiences of the Yi in Meigu areas.

Bimo Religious Tradition

We visited and interviewed three Bimo priests during our pilot study. They were more or less self-sufficient male individuals who had inherited the priesthood from their fathers. The scriptures they recited were written in ancient Yi script, and could only be understood and interpreted by the educated Bimo priests, the ordinary people being unable to comprehend the meaning of the recitations during the rituals. The priests are usually invited to households on the occasions of births, weddings, funerals, illnesses, or other important events (such as harvest and sowing time). They are expected to say blessings, make animal sacrifices, communicate with the spirit realms (ghosts, ancestors' spirits), and expel demonic forces. They also interpret the individual's suffering through fortune-telling rituals. Hence they are not only indigenous healers, but religious leaders, as well as authorities in communal decision-making (Figs. 1.4 and 1.5).

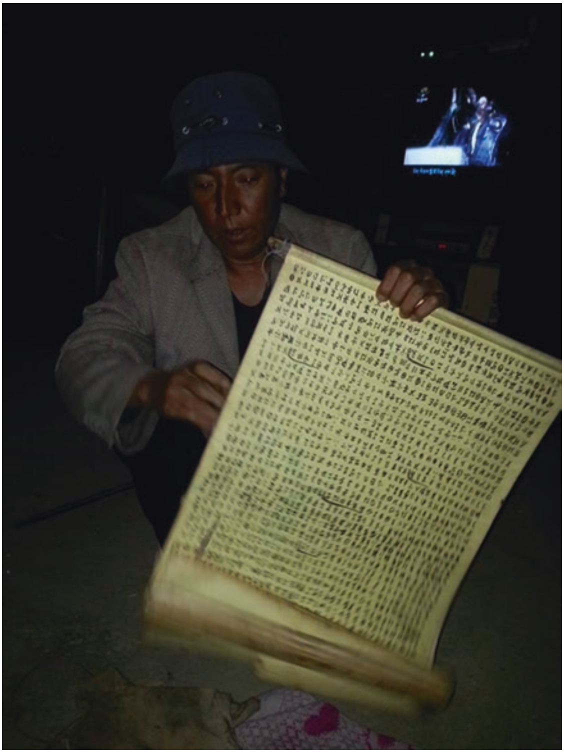


Fig. 1.4 One of the Bimo priests showed us his hand-copied scripture scrolls, which were made from a specific kind of paper and written in ancient Yi script

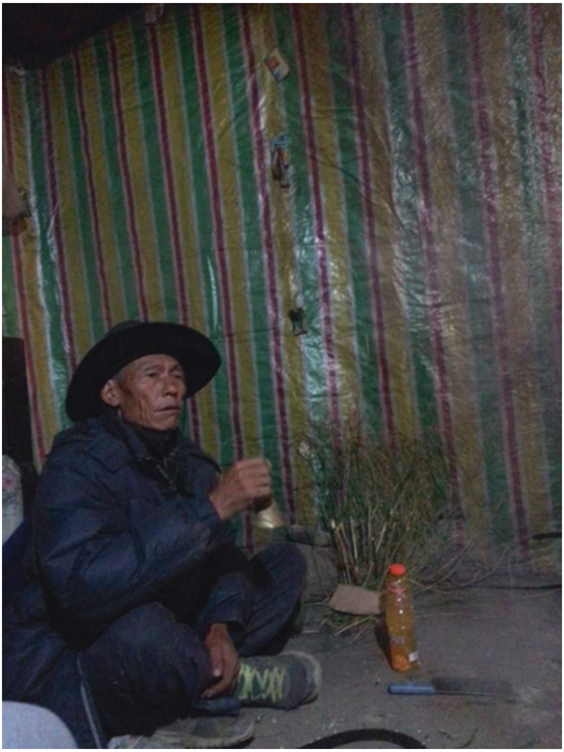


Fig. 1.5 A Bimo priest performing a blessing and cleansing ritual at the household of some newly-weds

In a blessing ritual we participated in, the Bimo priest sat in a specific corner of the household, facing the newly-wed couple, directing the ritual. First, he built a small altar next to him with sharpened branches, each stick representing the ghost of a particular ancestor. Then he rang the bell and chimed as the ritual began. He said he was one of the most popular priests in the area, and was invited to many other cities for rituals because he was more "powerful" than other priests. During the chiming and reciting of Yi scriptures, the priest would sometimes pause and converse with the family members. Friends in the neighborhood would also sometimes come in and out during the rituals. The whole process seemed rather casual for a formal event in the community. He then killed a black piglet as a sacrifice

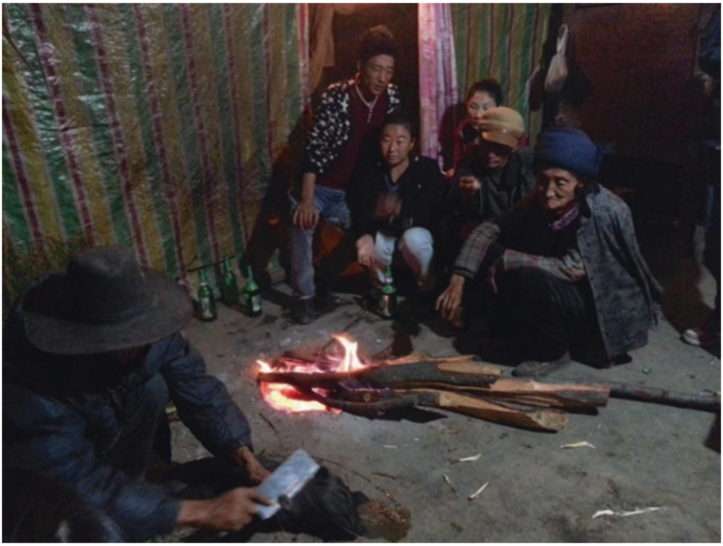


Fig. 1.6 Sacrificial ritual happening alongside the cooking process

and, with the help of the men in the host family, boiled the pig in the pot on the fire pit. They also separated the blood from the meat of the piglets. The ritual ended with a big feast in the family as shown in Fig. 1.6.

During the Cultural Revolution period, many Bimo rituals were secretly practiced underground in Meigu. The modern Chinese government has labeled these religious practices as "superstitious behavior" (干迷信). Although religion has been restored and permitted by the local government since the 1980s, many ordinary Yi people in Meigu had already forgotten the specific language of the rituals and relied solely on the Bimo successor to decide what kind of rituals were needed. When we were there to witness the biggest ritual[4]—*Nimucuobi* (尼木撮毕), a ritual to send off the souls of ancestors and/or deceased family members to heaven, we observed that most of the family members were just going through the motions and playing their roles as casually as doing house chores (see Fig. 1.7). People in the neighborhood would come to eat with the host and extended relatives all gathered together for three consecutive days for this extensive ritual. They would put the names of their ancestors on branch sticks, and line up the sticks according to their status in the family. The branch sticks were usually taken from the pine tree, which symbolized

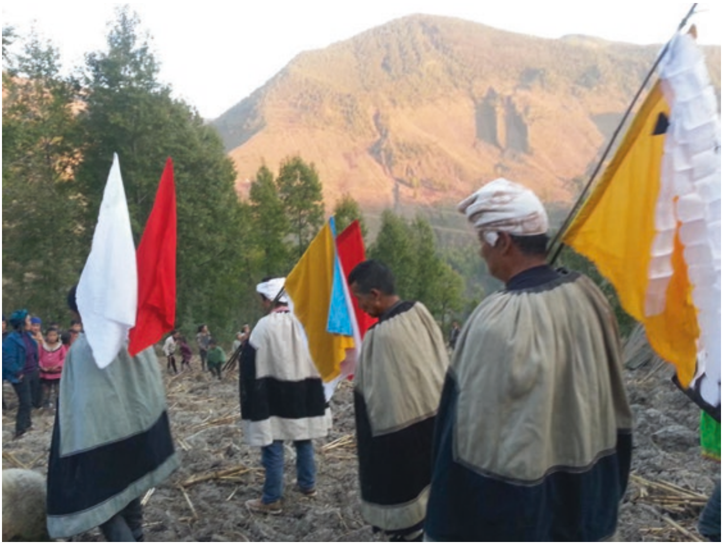


Fig. 1.7 Only the male descendants of the *jia zhi* were permitted to carry the flags in the *Nimucuobi* rituals. Female family members were mainly there as observers

the flourishing and booming of the family lineage. When it came to those ancestors without any offspring, their name sticks would be separated from those who had children.

Since *Nimucuobi* is a big ritual, two Bimo priests were invited, and they would direct the family members as regards what they should do (e.g., cutting the branch, building an altar, sacrificing the animals, and so on). The family members also seemed very familiar with the routines, and would pick up the duties voluntarily without much direction. When the time was right, people knew where to stand in line, where to go, how to act, and what to say. We, as outsiders, by contrast, needed constant telling and directing so that we did not feel "left out." The atmosphere seemed casual, even jolly. The family members surrounded the hut they had built from pinewood, and lit firecrackers while marching around it. Different males in the families carried colorful flags. Women lined up at the side but did not participate in the ritual. The peak of the ritual featured the lighting of firecrackers, loud musical noises, and chit-chatting noises. The emotional climax came when the host threw bills (cash) and candies, and the children and adults rushed to pick them up (see Online Resources for more pictures).

These kinds of rituals are normally out of the reach of ordinary people, as a big one costs up to 30,000 RMB. It requires the family members to use valuable sacrificial animals as contributions to the rituals. For example, a cow is more valuable than a goat, a goat is more valuable than a pig, a pig is more valuable than a chicken, and so forth. The siblings would discuss what share of the sacrifices they would each contribute, and the member who contributed the most would be given more respect and reimbursed with more tokens of appreciation. However, the Bimo priest did not charge much. As one priest put it, "We are all neighbors (都是乡邻乡亲的)." That is why sometimes they were only given a token of appreciation or meal in return. The major expenses of the rituals were the sacrificial animals, the meats for a big feast being divided among people in the neighborhood.

As we observed, the local Yi people normally eat meat (pork = tuotuo rou) as their main food category, and drink beer as their staple liquid. Even women would hold beer bottles during the feast, and smoke just like the men. They even presented alcoholic beverages and cigarettes at the altar, together with the innards of the sacrificed animal. The consumption of alcohol has been a major issue, and even a cultural label attached to the local Yi community (see Fig. 1.8). As we heard, there was also abuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in the nearby towns, where AIDS/HIV was prevalent as well.

According to our guide and translator in Meigu, most of the local Yi people engage in the religious rituals performed by the Bimo priest at least once a year. This was also borne out in our interview with five self-identified Black Yi during the pilot study. Usually they would perform *shobu* once in the springtime and once in the summertime, when they needed blessing or to be cleansed of evil forces and bad luck. They would wait until family reunion time to perform such a ritual (*shobu*), to prevent evil cursing, deception, or criticism from outside, in order to protect the safety of the family. Another big religious occasion would occur at the end of November, which is also the New Year celebration for Yi people in Meigu. Occasionally, they would go to Suni, the fortune teller, when the students were facing big exams, or the youths looking for jobs. However, according to our local translator, the modern Yi family would perform a bigger ritual, such as *Nimucuobi*, if there was some major illness/misfortune occurring in the family, or they would do it simply out of filial piety. Some other families

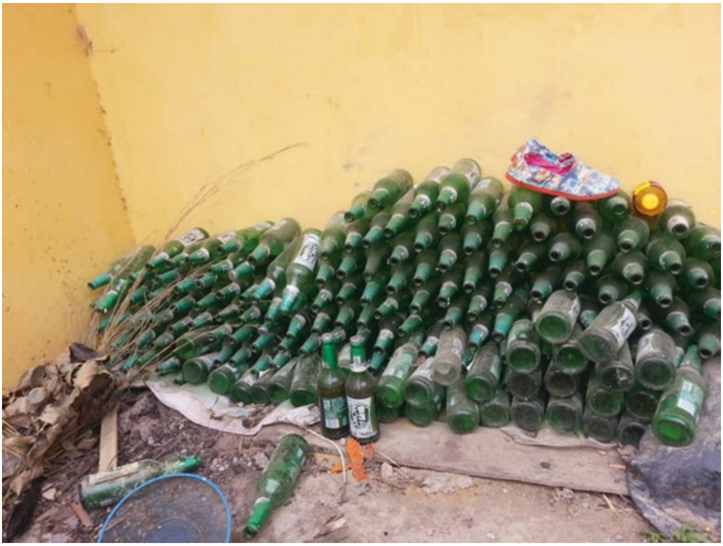


Fig. 1.8 Beer bottles are normally seen outside Yi households

would do it for the sake of "face"—in other words, to keep up with their neighbors.

In conclusion, from both our pilot study and literature reviews, we can see that Meigu contains a rich religious tradition and heritage of Bimo practices, which are embedded in their hierarchical caste or *jia zhi* system. Though their religious narratives are evolving and being transformed gradually through the modernization of China (Vermander 2004), their Bimo tradition is still palpably manifested in their everyday religious rituals.

Luquan Town (禄劝)

The northeast of Yunnan province (near Zhaotong) is deemed the origin of the Yi ancestors. According to ancient folktales, the first Yi ancestor was called "Dumu" (笃慕) and had six sons who became the six major tribes that make up the Yi people nowadays. Two of the tribes (布/慕克克、默/慕齐齐) migrated to Jinsha riverbanks, and became the "Nasu" group (Pu 2009). To this day, there is a Yi population of 4,705,700 (60%) residing in Yunnan province,[5] and there are 102,150 of them residing in Luquan, which is our second targeted research field. Luquan is a town located in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Luquan itself is an ethnic minority town, with 72.56% of its ethnic minority population being of Yi heritage, and the rest being Miao and Han people (Wang 2007). The GDP recorded in 2011 was 386,853 RMB, and the average annual income 9716 RMB/pax.[6]

The Yi tribe in Luquan is different from the Liangshan Yi (*Nuosu* tribe), as many scholars traced their lineage to the "Nasu tribe" (纳苏), which means "from the center of the earth" in Yi language (Yi 2000). Han people also called the Nasu people "the Black Yi," and they possess their own spoken dialect and written scripts, which are different from those of the Liangshan Yi tribe (Wuda 2008). In our previous dialogue with the local contacts, they also proudly presented themselves as "Black Yi" as it symbolizes bravery and aristocracy. In the past, this tribe was called "Luowubu" (罗婺部), as recorded in historical documents (Zhang 2000; Yi 2000). It was one of the strongest tribes during the Tang dynasty (Nanzhao kingdom 南诏国). Their descendants were great warriors, whose leader had a prestigious title bestowed on him by the emperors of Ming dynasty. For 600 years, they were the landowners in the area, and followed the "*tusi*" (土司) structural system set up by the Tang emperors, whereby the leadership (*tusi*) was passed down through the family, giving them the power to govern their own people. However, during the era of the Qing dynasty, they were oppressed and their land was taken away due to the policy of centralized government (Wang 2007; Pu 2009).

Our key informant in the area, Zhang Z. L., did his Master's thesis on the spreading of Christianity in the Luquan areas (Zhang 2007), and identified himself as a descendant of "Black Yi." He found that during the rule of the Longyun and Luhan enterprise from 1912–1949, the missionary activities in Yunnan reached their peak, and there was a lot of freedom for foreign missionaries to build schools in the northeastern Yunnan province. The Longyun armies were fiercely engaged in war against the Japanese from 1938 to1945, and making great sacrifices in battle. They also supported communist armies during the civil war from 1945 to 1949. In other words, the modern Yi in Yunnan had a long history of interacting with the mainstream governors, and took great pride in their ethnic identity.

In terms of religion, the involvement of foreign missionaries (especially Samuel Pollard and Gladstone Poreous) led to the importation of modernized and civil resources for the local Luquan Yi people, such as medical facilities. The missionaries also worked closely with the *tusi* (head of the local clan) there, helping the people to get educations. They first built a church in Salawo (撒米上羅婺), which became the hub of all the mission works, and White Yi were the first to be converted to Christianity due to their marginalized status. Through the 30-year immersion of Gladstone Poreous, the Black Yi were slowly influenced by the success of his education and anti-drug campaigns. The missionaries even built a local seminary (Southwestern seminary, see Fig. 1.16) in Salawo, Luquan, which opened in 1947, with two batches of graduates. However, the seminary was forced to close after the Communist Party took over China in 1949. All foreign missionaries were expelled, and the local churches suffered persecution by different political movements till 1980. Yet, Christianity seems to have been preserved through home churches and underground worship. To this day, there are 386 registered churches in the Luquan area, with a Christian population of 80,000 (80% of the local Yi population). However, there are fewer than 15 trained pastors in the local areas, and they are not being paid by the church for their full-time work. Most Yi-Christians are still at the lower end of the economic spectrum, living in rural areas. Poverty has become a major hindrance for the local churches, as most of the younger generations are now migrant worker in the cities, and might not keep their faith in Christianity (Zhang 2007) (Fig. 1.9).

During our first trip to Luquan in September 2014, we witnessed the thick religious atmosphere in a village on the outskirts (two hours away from town). The first author stayed at the house of our key informant (a lay pastor), and participated in the Sunday services at the local church. Every Sunday, the church holds three services (12.30–1.30 pm, 2.30–3.00 pm, 7.15–8.30 pm), with almost the same group of Yi villagers attending all three services. Before the services, volunteers (mainly senior) would come to clean the church venue (see Fig. 1.10), and the church would broadcast the worship songs through their loudspeaker so the whole village could hear them for half an hour.

The service consists of hymn singing, choir presentation, and preaching. A church leader volunteers to share a sermon from the Bible, and all of these are done in Yi dialect. The church attendees are mainly seniors from the villages, as most of the youths have left their villages to make a living in various urban settings. After the sermon, they pray fervently by either kneeling on the floor, or facing the cross at the front altar, and saying the prayer out loud together. Each service lasts for about one hour, with the afternoon session offering a Holy Communion ritual. At the ser-

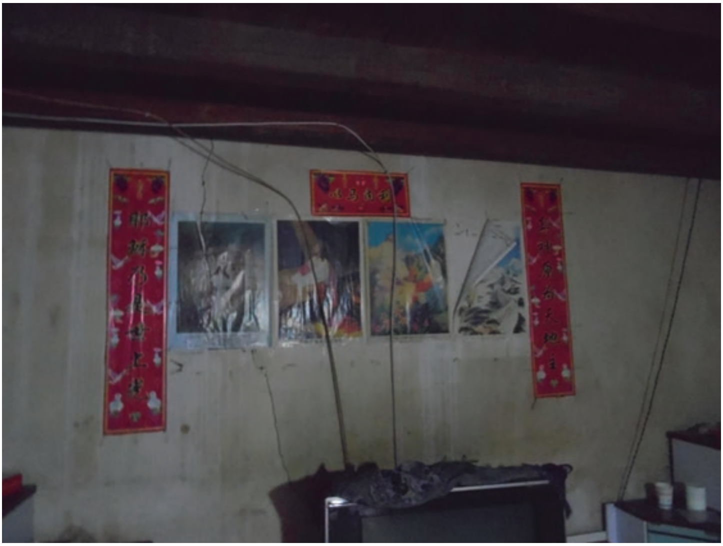


Fig. 1.9 There were many posters of Jesus and writing from the scriptures pasted on the walls of Yi-Christian households

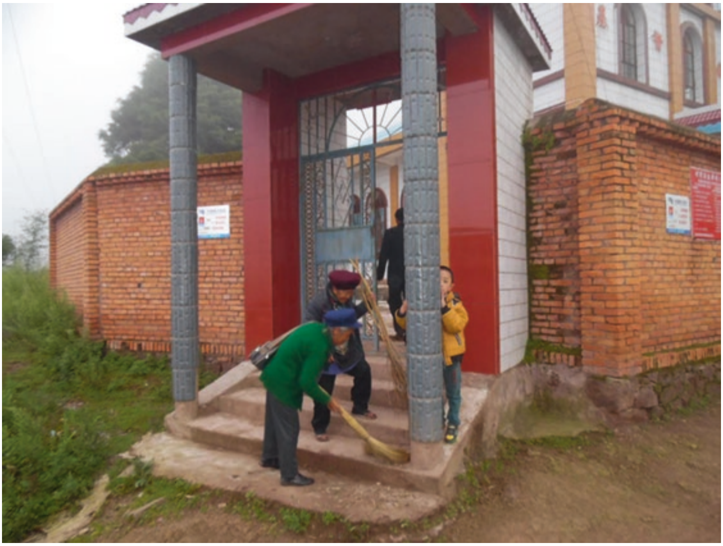


Fig. 1.10 The female seniors helped clean the church building before and after the services in the village

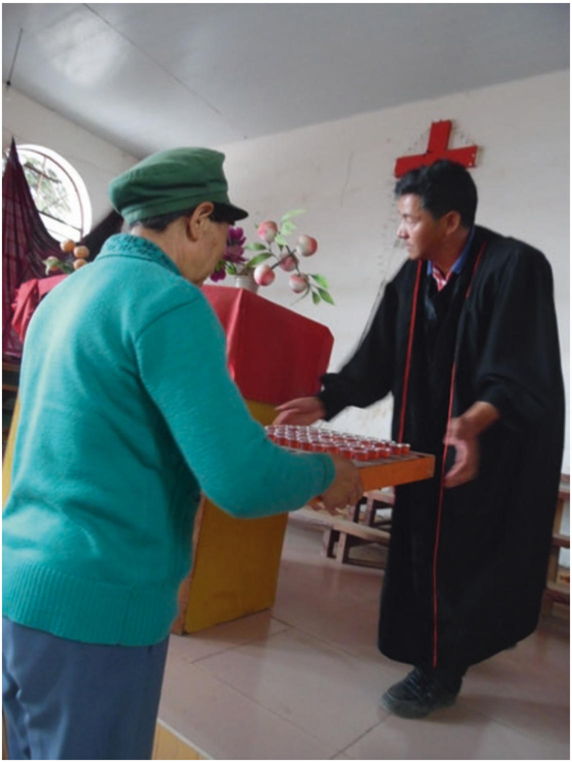


Fig. 1.11 During the service, Holy Communion was conducted by the lay pastor

vice we participated in, a family brought a basket of duck eggs for the congregation, asking everyone to pray for the recovery of their sick grandfather. The first author was treated as an "expert" and a "family member" by the local Christians due to their shared faith (Figs. 1.11 and 1.12).

Similarly to what was illustrated in Zhang's (2007) Master's thesis, the church leaders we interviewed told us religion was prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, and that church activities were banned unless they were registered with the local government under the guise of patriotism. Even so, they were very inspired by the earlier missionaries' work, and persisted in their Christian beliefs. Their grandparents' generation were friends of Gladstone Poreous, who introduced education and medical

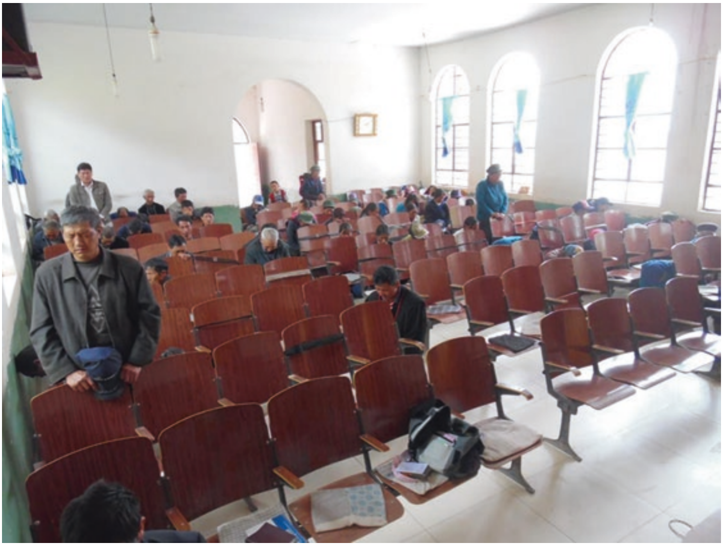
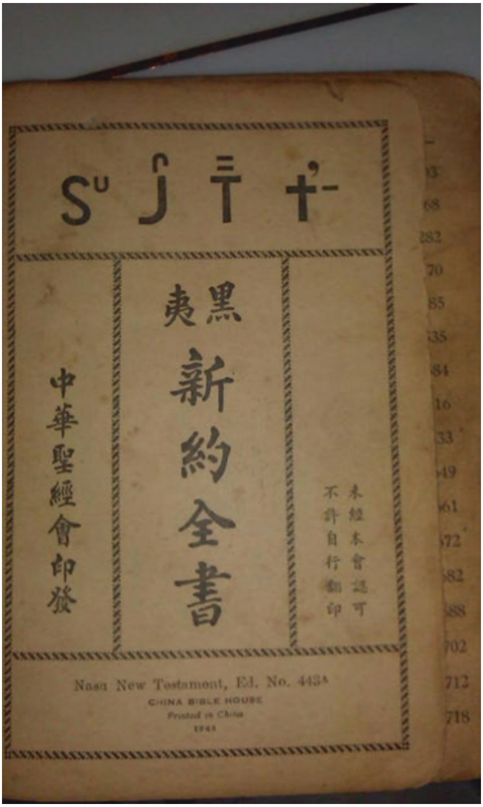


Fig. 1.12 The congregation praying together with some kneeling down on the floor

facilities to the Yi villagers. Their grandparents managed to quit dependency on tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy habits with the help of the missionaries. They also used the scripts invented by Samuel Pollard to record spoken Yi, and translated the Chinese New Testament and hymnals into Yi dialect (Figs. 1.13 and 1.14).

They were all very grateful for the work of Poreous, who died eventually in Luquan after 30 years of serving in the area. He was buried in the first Black Yi church at Salawo, but his tomb has been disguised since the time of the Cultural Revolution. Only the local people who grew up there have seen the tombstone inscribed with his name. I (the first author) was brought to the garden of burial, but it was locked and no access was available. The original church of Salawo had been governed by a closed group of Christians who refused to register with the local religious bureau and hence the church building seemed abandoned (Figs. 1.15 and 1.16).

This introduction, in its broad strokes, fails to cover diversity within Protestant groups, or the fringe groups active in both Yunnan and Liangshan, especially the Church of the Disciples (mentuhui), which the



黑夷

新約全書

未經本會許可
不許自行翻印

中華聖經會印發

Nasu New Testament, Ed. No. 443A
CHINA BIBLE HOUSE
Printed in China

Fig. 1.13 The front cover of the Bible—Black Yi, New Testament

local government refers to as a cult. Since our focus is on the overall group difference between Christianity and the Bimo tradition, our investigation did not go into these details of the Christian group.

Culture and Cognition: Theoretical Predictions

Cognitive styles of information processing differ along two axes: A. experience-near versus experience-distant; and B. external/physical versus internal/mental. Together, these two axes can be used to differentiate the cognitive styles of cultures. For instance, according to Sundararajan (2015), strong-ties societies privilege experience-near, perceptual modes

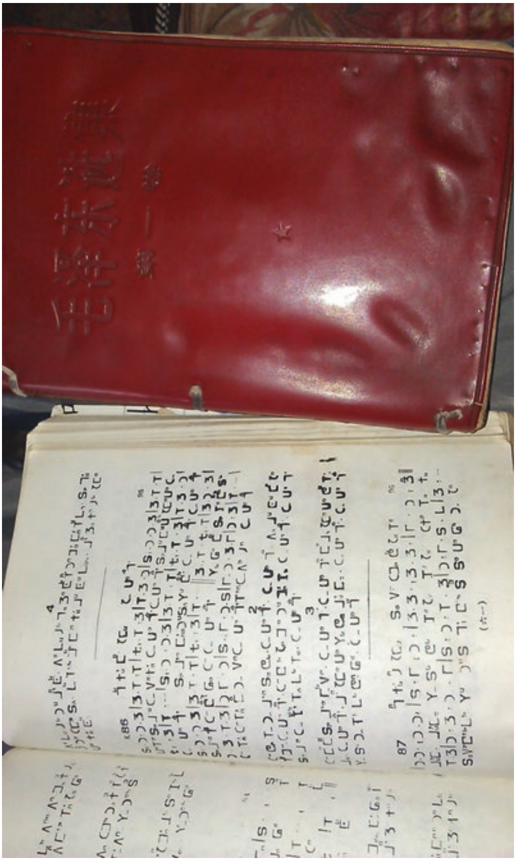


Fig. 1.14 The Yi hymnal, wrapped in the cover of Mao's Red book as a disguise

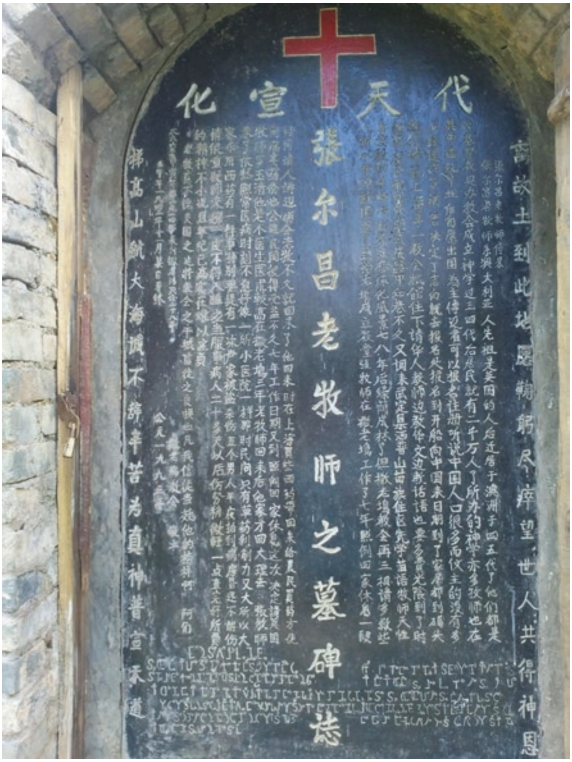

代天宣化
張尔昌老牧师之墓碑志
离故土到此地歷鞠躬尽瘁望世人共得神恩
拂高山航大海誠不辞辛苦为真神普宣天道

Fig. 1.15 The tombstone of Gladstone Poreous was inscribed with his Chinese name—Zhang Er Chang

of processing, whereas weak-ties societies give preference to the experience-distant, conceptual mode. Within the strong-ties societies, we can further differentiate cultures along the divide between internal versus external orientation—Confucianism privileges the former (Sundararajan 2015), whereas Yi-Bimo tradition may privilege the latter. As for Yi-Christians, they may share with weak-ties societies, via Christianity, a tendency to engage in the experience-distant, conceptual mode of processing, with an internal/mental focus. Mapping out the two axes of cognitive processing (see Diagram 1.2), we can formulate our predictions as follows: (a) Confucianism falls in the experience-near x internal/mental quadrant; (b) Yi-Bimo, the experience-near x external/physical quadrant;

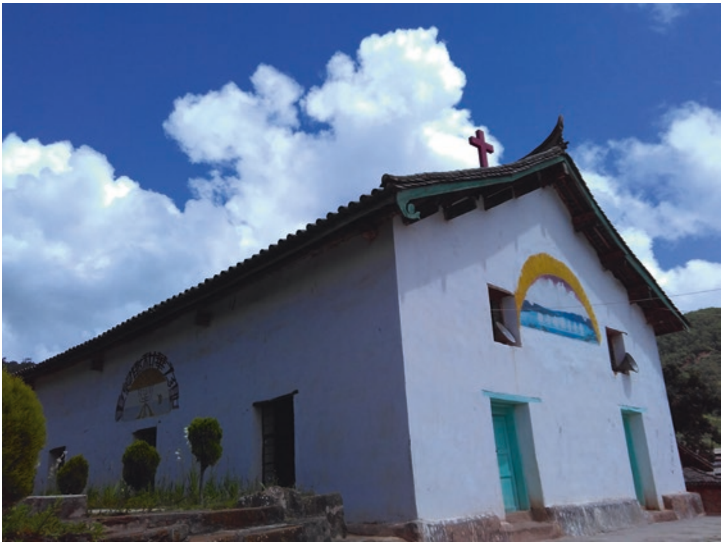


Fig. 1.16 This building was built as the first seminary in Southwest China, but was shut down after 1949

(c) Yi-Christians, the experience-distant x internal/mental quadrant. Only (b) and (c) are tested in this study.

Research Methodology

Building on our pilot study in 2014, this research study was carried out between 2015 and 2016 using a mixed-method approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the suffering experiences within both religious communities. Belzen (2010) called for a paradigm shift in psychology of religion, especially in the cross-cultural setting, which warrants a shift from standard Western quantitative measurements to qualitative research as "religion" entails co-constructed meaning between the researcher and the participants. In our study, we utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods to shed light on our subject matter, which is the holistic experience of suffering events. To be ethically appropriate and culturally sensitive, we also believe that a less intrusive research protocol should be utilized as this is an ethnic minority group that has been mar-

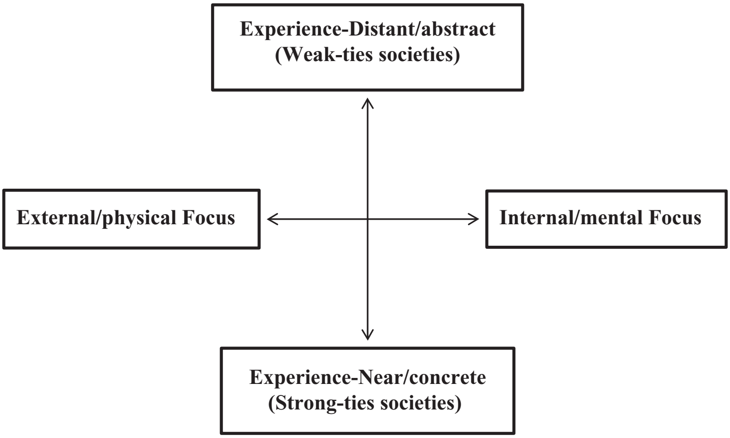

Experience-Distant/abstract
(Weak-ties societies)
External/physical Focus
Internal/mental Focus
Experience-Near/concrete
(Strong-ties societies)

Diagram 1.2 Mapping cultures along the axes of cognition

ginalized in the past. Following our research framework, we decided to proceed in three phases.

First Phase

Using a criterion-selection process, we asked the local informants (usually religious leaders) to refer those religious families with a Yi ethnic background who were currently in "difficulties" or "suffering" to us. During the first visit, we aimed to build rapport and gather basic information. All were accompanied by a local translator, and a token of appreciation[7] was given after the short visit (around 30 minutes in each household). We also conducted focus groups with the religious leaders at both sites respectively, to gain a deeper sense of their religious practices, beliefs, worldview with regard to suffering, and healing resources (see Appendix for interview guidelines). In the following chapters, we will also incorporate the themes generated from the focus-group members, to illustrate the unique cognitive styles and forms of emotional expression among Yi communities.

Second Phase

After three months of follow-up with phone calls, we visited both targeted locations in order to conduct semi-structural interviews. The purpose was to test the validity of the suffering narratives we had initially gathered.

Because some participants withdrew from the study and one died of AIDS, we invited more participants to join the study on our second trip. Twenty-four Yi-Bimo participants from Meigu, and 23 Yi-Christian participants from Luquan were finalized as our interviewees (see Table 1.2). The gender ratio was quite similar in both groups of participants. The average age of the Yi-Christian group was significantly older than the Yi-Bimo group, due to the presence of the (relatively young) migrant workers who had returned home in the latter. Their socio-economic status was also quite similar, as the majority of them were farming their own lands, except that the Yi-Bimo group had some returned migrant workers, whose counterparts in the Yi-Christian group had managed to stay in the city rather than returning home. The level of education in the two groups was also quite similar, as most of them were illiterate and did not attend school. The proficiency in Mandarin was also equally limited in both groups, as 22 out of 23 participants from the Yi-Christian group and 21 out of 24 participants from the Yi-Bimo group needed assistance when it came to translating the Yi language into Mandarin during the interview sessions. In the larger context, however, GDP in Meigu is lower than in Luquan. Thus, although samples from the two groups were both low-income and did not differ significantly, at the level of the general population, economic development between the two towns was different.

Table 1.2 General background information of the participants

	Yi-Christians	*Yi-Bimo*
	N = 23	*N = 24*
	% (n)	*% (n)*
Gender		
Male	39.1 (9)	33.3 (8)
Female	60.9 (14)	66.7 (16)
Occupation		
Farmer	87.0 (20)	54.2 (13)
Migrant worker	0.0 (0)	16.7 (4)
Irregular migrant worker	0.0 (0)	8.3 (2)
Unemployed	13.0 (3)	12.5 (3)
Student	0.0 (0)	8.3 (2)
	Mean (*SD*)	Mean (*SD*)
Age	65.3 (2.7)	44.3 (17.1)
Education (years)	1.1 (2.4)	1.3 (2.8)

Interview Protocol

After gaining verbal informed consent for audio or video recording, we proceeded with a semi-structured interview with three major queries: first, their suffering experiences (past or present); second, their explanations of the suffering; and third, their help-seeking behaviors during the suffering. In order to elicit more natural emotional expression in telling the stories of suffering, it was decided to use minimal probes with empathic, nonverbal encouragement. When the participants became emotional in the process, we continued to listen, and did not pressure them to talk. The interviews normally ranged from 30 to 60 minutes (see Appendix). Some interviews were conducted by the research assistants (RAs) with the assistance of several Yi translators. The Yi translators chosen were fluent in both Mandarin and the Yi language and had gained college degrees. In the process of transcribing the interview sessions, the RAs would try their best to transcribe the Mandarin conversation into verbatim transcripts, and leave the Yi conversation for our employed translators to fill in. In the end, all the translated transcripts were double-checked by the RAs for consistency. All of the participants and translators were remunerated financially for their participation in our study (see Diagram 1.3 for research protocol). After the interviews, we also followed up monthly through phone calls with these 47 individuals for over a year to see how they changed and grew. Unfortunately, during this process, seven more of our participants passed away due to their terminal illnesses.

Data Analysis

After the interviews, all the transcripts were processed using two kinds of textual analysis:

1. *Thematic Analysis*

In order to elucidate the essence of the phenomenon as it exists in participants' concrete experience, we as a research team adopted the thematic analysis proposed by the Duquesne school of empirical phenomenology (McLeod 2001) to do systemic-committee coding of the transcripts. This gives us an overview of the suffering theories embedded in each religious community.

First, we divided up nine RAs into two big groups according to the interview locations, then each RA coded between 10 and 12 transcripts on the basis of four dimensions—suffering types, cognitive appraisal of the

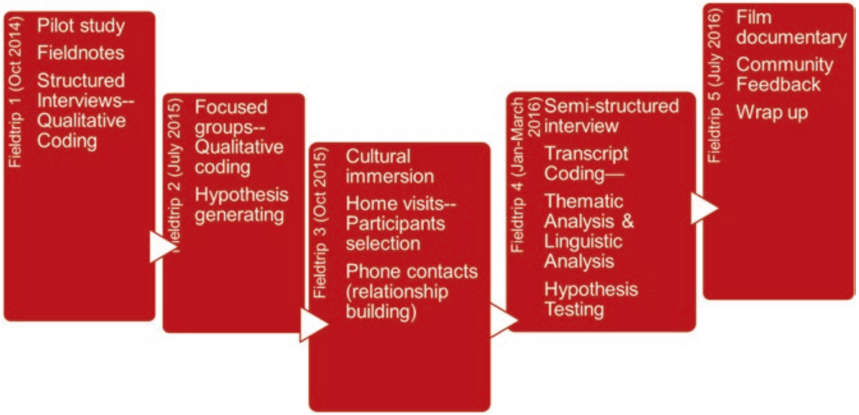

Fieldtrip 1 (Oct 2014)
Pilot study
Fieldnotes
Structured Interviews--Qualitative Coding
ieldtrip 2 (July 2015)
Focused groups--Qualitative coding
Hypothesis generating
Fieldtrip 3 (Oct 2015)
Cultural immersion
Home visits--Participants selection
Phone contacts (relationship building)
Fieldtrip 4 (Jan-March 2016)
Semi-structured interview
Transcript Coding—
Thematic Analysis & Linguistic Analysis
Hypothesis Testing
Fieldtrip 5 (July 2016)
Film documentary
Community Feedback
Wrap up

Diagram 1.3 A schematic representation of the research process suffering events, expressed emotion when talking about suffering events, and attempted help-seeking behavior during those events. They were trained to do qualitative coding by the authors and practiced with trial runs.

Second, each RA then compared the first-tier coding with that of their team member to reconcile the discrepancy in coding tables.

Third, two groups of RAs met separately to discuss the second-tier coding, i.e., the subthemes relating to each of the four dimensions.

Fourth, the first author (PI) met with each RA team to discuss the themes generated from the subthemes developed from those four dimensions.

The results of the thematic coding will be presented in the following chapters, each devoted to a specific dimension of suffering.

2. *Psycho-linguistic Analysis*

In order to test the differences between two religious communities, we employed psycho-linguistic analysis to quantify the interview transcripts. We created linguistic scales that accounted for distinctive thematic categories under four dimensions of suffering narratives—What (suffering types), Why (cognitive attribution), How (emotion expression), Help (help-seeking behaviors). The construction of the scales was based on the themes that emerged from phenomenological analysis of the pilot study and the focus groups.

Due to the novelty and complexity of our linguistic variables, we conducted a comprehensive training in coding using our coding manual (created by the authors for the purpose of this study). All nine RAs were involved in the first round of coding. They were paired in dyads or triads, and assigned to different coding groups. Each group was responsible for coding all 47 transcripts on a specific domain: types of suffering, emotion of suffering, explanation of suffering, and help-seeking behavior.

In the first stage, each RA coded the categories independently by counting the frequency of relevant phrases/words and then comparing them with their teammate to discuss any discrepancy. The RAs would reconcile the difference among themselves, and pass on any unresolved discrepancy in coding to the first author. The first author would resolve the discrepancy in consultation with the second author of this paper. Then we provided feedback for correction to the RA team, until all were in agreement. Prior to the formal phase of coding, we had five practice runs of case coding to increase the inter-rater reliability and accuracy in coding among us. In the inter-rater reliability check, the agreement between the raters averaged over all 37 variables was 68% (range: 9–100%), and the average kappa value was 0.49 ($p < .05$). The results tables regarding this part of the study will also be presented in the following chapters.

In both coding tasks, when RAs encountered confusion regarding the nuance of a specific keyword or context, we would go back to the original translator for consultation regarding semantic accuracy.

Third Phase: Validity Check and Case Study

In hermeneutic research, the researchers' reflection becomes an instrument and their relationship with the local participants is considered a dialogue (Bernard 1988). The RAs were trained to take analytic memos and field notes throughout the study. By the end of the study, each RA had written three case reports based on the longitudinal (one-year) case notes, using individual case study method. These are the cases they deemed as having an "impact" on them and are "representative" of the local cultures. After one and a half years of interaction with the two locations, our research team had gained credentials as community "insiders" with the Yi families we followed up. Our participants constantly invited us to visit them during special festivals and celebrations. In the case report, besides writing objective narratives about their cases, we asked the RAs to reflect on their personal relationships with the participants and the encounter, on any problems with the study, on any ethical dilemmas, and on future directions for the study. A total of 25 case reports will be quoted in the later chapters to highlight the important themes, and the RAs' reflective memos will also be grouped and shared in Chap. 6 as a meaningful tool for future studies in this area.

Cultural psychologist Belzen (2010) proposed that we check the ecological validation, communicative validation, and cumulative validation while performing interpretation of the field data. Following his suggestions, we made an attempt to establish ecological validation through participatory observation, interviews and group discussions during the first phase of our study. The communicative validation involved returning to the research participants for verification of the results, to ensure the interpretation was valid. To achieve this purpose, our team also edited and compiled two short films (see Online Resources) for two different study groups, which highlighted the interviews with each participant. At the end of both films, we also added in our words of appreciation and blessings to the community, as our parting gift. Each of our participants was given a mobile cellphone with the video clip on it. All of them expressed gratitude toward us and there were invitations for us to return in the future.

Structure of This Book

This chapter provides the psychological framework and research orientation, as well as background information on the two Yi groups, that the reader will need in order to understand the research findings in the next few chapters. Chapter 2 narrates the suffering events of these religious communities, using both the case study approach and the comparison approach. Toward the end, readers will have a better sense of the similarity and difference between these two communities in terms of their current predicament and historical trauma. Chapters 3–5 each tackle an independent dimension of suffering experiences (see Diagram 1.1), hence readers do not need to follow the specific order of these chapters in order to go in depth with these topics. They are all organized in a similar format—starting with two case narratives from the respective religious communities, followed by thematic analysis from the interview transcripts, and ending with psycho-linguistic analysis of the interview transcripts from the two religious groups. Readers will learn about attribution styles in Chap. 3, the ecological niche of social-ties in Chap. 4, and psychology of emotion in Chap. 5. All of these theories help shed some light on our data. Readers with a certain empirical research background in psychology will find our arguments and discussion easy to grasp.

The last two chapters of this book contain the reflections of and conclusions drawn by the authors during the research project. Chapter 6 utilizes the reflexivity of the researchers to demonstrate the impact of the research on the researchers themselves in terms of the phases of personal changes in cognition, emotion, and relationships with the participants. Extending the ecological rationality framework to the survey locations as the respective ecological niche for the RAs assigned there, we were able to see the differences in the research team's approach to the participants that mirror the strong- versus weak-ties rationality of their survey sites. In Chap. 7, we conclude the study from a macroscopic viewpoint to further review our methodology and epistemology in this indigenous study, and dialogue with Western psychology on issues of social justice, urbanization, HIV prevention, and community resilience.

Before we end this chapter, we want to acknowledge the research team's feeble attempt to understand "the other"—an ethnic minority different from us, who speak a different dialect and live in a different ecological system. We appreciate the involvement of all the RAs, translators, local informants, and interviewees in this study. Without their persistence and resilience, this project would not have been able to shed light on so many intricate aspects of human suffering. We would like to invite you to venture with us into this labyrinth of human suffering in the following chapters.

NOTES

1. According to Vermander (1999b), there were sporadic sects of "The church of the disciples" (men tu hui), which is secretly evangelizing in Liangshan Yi territory. In our interviews, we also heard someone mention this sect, but could not verify the exact location of this church activity. It is deemed a cult by the modern Chinese government.
2. Bureau of Statistics of Meigu County on the 2015 National Economic and Social Development. Excerpt from the website of Meigu County Council.
3. Excerpt from the online resource http://mzb.com.cn/html/report/1512378318-1.htmHere
4. The ritual was held in a village on the outskirts of Meigu. We were invited by a local friend to participate in the ritual, as outsiders, on the second day. They were curious about us, but not intimidated. We were free to explore and took pictures of the villagers, but not the children, as they believe picture-capturing takes the soul out of the children.
5. Census Data by the Autonomy County Council of Luquan among Yi and Miao Groups: http://www.luquan.gov.cn/01B/2010/4/10425327137002.html
6. Cited from Baidu: baidu.com/link?url=U8kisMxptrVXJtwseGQKQez4t1-qnvD6RW0gZtFVOKx3fPaTcRrjEXkz3F9NJZMiDxNjWohCifVDRLDG-2ZFiewmN9fftUU8k9j6vNg8haGFWHy5mj1MMG7x6ya35DCVjV8naN5UcpO83qqpLcN0FF8tQrjztgIRJL5i8XS1DOw-O
7. We gave 50 RMB in cash on our first visit, 100 RMB of groceries (a box of nutritional drinks and crackers) on our second, and a cellphone worth 200 RMB on the last visit as our parting gift, with the interview video downloaded onto it.

References

English Titles

Bamo Ayi. (1999). The Bimo in Liangshan Yi Society. *The Ricci Bulletin 1999–2000*. 91–106.

Belzen, J. A. (2010). *Towards cultural psychology of religion: Principles, approaches, applications*. NY: Springer.

Bernard, H. R. (1988). *Research methods in cultural anthropology*. CA: Sage.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*, 1360–1380.

Harrell, S. (2001). *Ways of being ethnic in Southwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Liu, S. H. (2011). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ma Erzi. (2003). A new understanding of the old Liangshan Yi social structure and an analysis of "Black Yi" and "White Yi". *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology, 36*, 75–93.

McLeod. (2001). *Qualitative research in counseling and psychotherapy*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Harrison, O., Harold, G. K., & Hays, J. C. (2001). The epidemiology of religious coping: A review of recent literature. *International Review of Psychiatry, 13*(2), 86–93.

Ortony, A., Clore, G., & Collins, A. (1988). *The cognitive structure of emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Sundararajan, L. (2015). *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

Swancutt, K. (2012). The captive guest: Spider webs of hospitality among the Nuosu of Southwest China. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 18*, S103–S116.

Todd, P. M., Gigerenzer, G., & The ABC Research Group. (2012). *Ecological rationality: Intelligence in the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vermander, B. (1997). *Between Han and Tibetans: The Yis of Liangshan. China News Analysis, 1–10*. Taiwan: Socio-Cultural Research Center.

Vermander, B. (1999a). The Nosu of Liangshan: Religion and society. *China Perspectives, 21*, 15–24.

Vermander, B. (1999b). The Nosu of Liangshan: Narratives and practices in Meigu. *China Perspectives, 22*, 28–39.

Vermander, B. (2004). The unfolding narrative of Liangshan Yi religion. In E. DeVido & B. Vermander (Eds.), *Creeds, rites and videotapes, narrating religious experience in East Asia* (pp. 253–280). Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute.

Wickeri, P. L., & Tam, Y. F. (2011). *The religious life of ethnic minority communities*. NY: Oxford University Press.

Chinese Titles

巴莫阿依《关于彝族毕摩文化研究的几个问题》(《美姑彝族毕摩调查研究》美姑彝族毕摩文化研究中心办公室1996年编印，pp. 1–8) [Trans] Bamo Ayi. (1996). A few questions about the research on Bimo culture of Yi nationality. In *The investigation and study on Bimo of Yi in Meigu* (pp. 1–8). Meigu: Bimo Culture Research Center Office in Meigu.

班礼《当基督来敲毕摩的门——彝族宗教文化结构探析》(中央民族大学硕士学位论文 2011年) [Trans] Ban Li. (2011). When Christ knock at the door of Bimo: The structural analysis on Yi group's religious culture. Unpublished master dissertation, Minzu University of china, Beijing.

东旻《基督宗教在我国彝族地区传播研究(1840–1949)》(中央民族大学硕士论文2004年). [Trans] Dong Min. (2004). The study on the propagation of Christianity in yi region (1840–1949). Unpublished master dissertation, Minzu University of China, Beijing.

东人达《在未知的中国》(昆明:云南民族出版社，2002年). Dong Ren Da. (2002). *In unknown China*. Kunming: The Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan.

刘绍华《我的凉山兄弟:毒品、艾滋与流动青年》(群学出版社，2013年). [Trans] Liu Shaohua. (2013). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Taiwan: Qunxue Publishing House.

斯蒂文・郝瑞著, 巴莫阿依、曲木铁西译《田野中的族群关系与民族认同——中国西南彝族社区考察研究》(南宁:广西人民出版社，2000). [Trans] Stevan Harrell, translated by Bamo Ayi & Qumu Tiexi. (2000). *The ethnic relations and ethnic identity in the field: An investigation and research on the community of Yi people in the Southwest China*. Nanning: Guangxi People's Publishing House.

林耀华《凉山彝家》(商务印书馆, 北京, 1947 年). [Trans] Lin, Y. H. (1947). *The Lolo of Liangshan (Liang-shan I-chia)*. Beijing: Shang Wu Publishing house.

李正文《彝族巫文化中的苏尼》(《西南民族学院学报》1997年第5期, p58–62). [Trans] Li Zhengwen. (1997). The Suni in Yi-Nationality's sorcery culture. *Journal of Southwest Nationalities College (Philosophy & Social Sciences Edition), 05*, 58–62.

龙海燕《近代基督教在西南彝族地区的传播及其影响》(《贵州民族研究》2012年第5期). [Trans] Long Haiyan. (2012). The spreading and impact of modern Christianity in southwest Yi region. *Guizhou Ethnic Studies,* (005).

潘蛟《试论凉山彝族社会等级制度的起源》(《中央民族学院学报》, 1990年第05期). [Trans] Pan Jiao. (1990). The origin of social classism among Yi people in Liangshan. *Journal of Minzu College of China,* (05).

秦和平《基督宗教在西南民族地区的传播史》(四川民族出版社，2003年). [Trans] Qin Heping. (2003). *The history of the spread of Christianity in the southwest national area*. ChengDu: Sichuan National Press.

王建新《民族宗教研究的理论创新及拓展》(《宗教与民族(第六辑)》, 中央民族大学哲学与宗教学系编著2009年08版, pp. 136–152). [Trans] Wang Jianxin. (2009). Theoretical innovation and development on ethnic and religious studies. In *The Ethnic and Religion* (pp. 136–152). Beijing: Minzu University of china.

巫达《社会变迁与文化认同》(上海:学林出版社, 2008). [Trans] Wuda. (2008). *Social transformation and cultural identification*. Shanghai: XueLin Publication.

张仲仁《彝族宗教与信仰》(昆明:云南民族出版社, 2006). [Trans] Zhang Zhongren. (2006). *Belief and religions of Yi people*. Kunming: The Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan.

張再亮 《一粒芥菜種—試論基督新教與云南祿劝黑彝族的對話》(南京:金陵協和神學院, 2007年, 碩士論文). [Trans] Zhang, Z. L. (2007). *A mustard seed: A dialogue between the Protestant Christianity and Yunnan Luquan Black Yi*. Unpublished master thesis. Nanjing: Jinlin Union seminary.

普忠良《彝族自称与彝语氏族地名》(《民族语文》, 2003 年第 1 期, 18–25). [Trans] Pu Zhongliang. (2003). Self-naming and location-naming of Yi language. *Minority Languages*, *1*, 18–25

Online Resources

Interview clips in Meigu: https://youtu.be/6mZnGBIQvvU

Interview clips in Luquan: https://youtu.be/ijSEQOvFDKA

More pictures for this chapter: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxcr-yTD_netRU5oX2RpZ01HUm8/view?usp=sharing

CHAPTER 2

Narratives of Suffering

SELF-REFLECTION OF THE FIRST AUTHOR: A PILGRIMAGE TO INDIGENOUS PSYCHOLOGY

As a clinical psychologist, a quarter of my lifetime has been devoted to stories of human suffering. My 23-year journey through psychology is in fact inseparable from these narratives. Yet, why would I focus just on the suffering of the Yi people, to the point of giving up my private practice in an urban setting, and immersing myself in the rural field in order to listen to their song of suffering in another dialect?

In retrospect, I think it is still part of my dream of indigenous psychology. Ten years ago, when I received my PhD in clinical psychology, I thought I had already mastered the foundations, methodology, and critiques of indigenous psychology (IP). I wrote and published some articles on the subject, and even my own doctoral dissertation was about discovering the language of depression among bilingual Chinese. I was quite satisfied with my endeavors, as I read almost all the books I could find on Chinese psychology. My only source of discontent was the absence of “a pair of shoes” to make a print of my model of IP. In Chinese slang, I needed to connect the theory with the “qi” from the ground (*jie di qi*). Hence, when I was serving as a volunteer in 2008 at the Sichuan post-earthquake disaster zone, I was lucky to meet some grassroots Chinese humanitarian aid workers, who embodied the “barefoot psychologist”

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China’s Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_2

I always dreamt of being. To my amazement, I found their relational model of helping much more effective than that of so-called "crisis-intervention experts" or famous counselors, since it is rooted in an appreciation of resilience and empowerment of the survivors, as well as their cultural heritage. Though they were not trained in the West with a formal degree in psychology, they were much more welcomed and accepted by the people who had just been through trauma and suffering. Hence I was determined to follow this kind of grassroots approach in constructing an IP that could give back to the community.

My life has been transformed since then. For about eight years, I participated in a range of disaster relief work, not only in China, but internationally, to expose myself to suffering events worldwide, and in 2012 formed my own team, called "Barefoot Voluntary Services," with some Chinese students with backgrounds in social work and psychology. Together with these students from Beijing, I ventured into the southwestern mountain ranges of China, where most of the earthquakes struck. There, we made contact with many ethnic minority groups, such as Tibetans, the Miao group, and the Yi group, as their living areas are most vulnerable to natural disasters after so many mining and dam-building activities have exhausted the natural resources. Through the Barefoot Voluntary Services, we built friendships with them, even though we did not speak their language and dialect. Personally, I was truly inspired by their communal life, which had already disappeared in the major cities of China and among mainstream Han people. The thick religious atmospheres, rituals and festivities, reverence toward life and death, living practices based on the unity of heaven and earth (*tian ren he yi*), cultural religious totems, ancient sacred characters or scripts, devout lifestyle, and reciprocal social network look so distinctive to the eyes of an outsider. Some of my Chinese friends were saddened that 5000 years of Chinese tradition and heritage have been destroyed and disrupted during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, in the wake of which we see the movement to try and revive Chinese culture in recent years by scholars and cultural practitioners (*guo xue*). I found much to my pleasure that in the deep, remote mountain forests, there are ethnic minority groups who are still proud of their tradition and customs. Though literally having received no formal education, they taught me about the myths of their ancestors, and their ancient cultural roots. They know where they come from, and refuse to let go of their cultural identifications, despite being baptized by political and economic revolutions. They are where the richness of Chinese culture lies.

How do we then construct a Chinese IP from these minority groups? In the past, almost all the textbooks on Chinese IP have been based on the philosophy of Confucius, Taoism, and Buddhism (*ru shi dao*). Some psychologists followed Carl Jung in studying the *Book of Changes* (*Yi Ching*) in the hope of finding the wisdom of Chinese IP. Some took the direction of traditional Chinese medicine, while others attempted to uncover IP from ancient poems or literature. There are so many routes one could take to construct Chinese IP, due to the long history of Chinese civilization. However, many of us only focus on the "utility" (*yong*) of IP in modern life, for example, how to have a successful business using the Sunzi philosophy of war, or how to reduce depression with poetic lifestyles like Su Dong Po. Seldom do scholars ask the question—how would Chinese IP contribute to the epistemology of humanity and to the global knowledge of science? Like a pragmatist, I was once trapped in this "bubble" of treating culture as a "healing factor." My motivation for constructing Chinese IP was confined by my identity as a "healer" or clinician. Following the steps of many recent Western studies, we carried out research, through empirically controlled studies, to see if "medication" or "mindfulness" was "helpful" for mental problems. Once it is proven as an "effective treatment," we try to "manualize" and market the cultural healing factor. However, is that all there is to Chinese IP? How would it help the local people in Chinese society? Or is it serving certain people in a certain context only? How do we avoid becoming healing "experts," and how can we see IP through the lens of the laypeople— as a way of life and death? These were the questions I pondered and struggled with.

That is the second reason I embarked on this journey with the Yi—by listening to their stories of suffering, I hoped to build an epistemology of IP in China. Since everyone is destined to encounter adversities in life, we all have a set of explanatory models that fit our cultural norm. We try to ease our suffering also through solutions appropriated by our cultural settings. Hence we are similar yet different in our discourse of suffering. By examining these discourses, we can find the cognitive styles unique to each culture. Some ethnic minority groups rely heavily on implicit forms of communication via the use of icon and index, while modern Westerners privilege explicit, symbolic modes of communication (Sundararajan 2011). That is another reason I was intrigued by the minority groups in China.

From a psychological perspective, suffering discourses often contain emotional information and expression, cognitive appraisal and worldviews, behavioral outcomes and interpersonal interactions, and so forth. Emotion, cognition, and behavior are always interconnected in a feedback loop. By studying suffering events, we could gradually discover these intricate elements, and build the epistemology of IP from the bottom up.[1] As a matter of fact, in our study of the Yi community, we found that not all interviewees were accustomed to logical causal reasoning, or could articulate the causes of their sufferings, or express their discomfort. Some just could not. Also, the majority of them, though going through so many traumatic events in life, could still strive or thrive in life with positive attitudes. All these phenomena could help us to modify or enrich Western psychology in terms of mental health definitions, healing mechanisms, emotion theory, coping behavior theory, and cognitive-processing models. As many indigenous psychologists point out, ethnic groups should not be approached simply as testing grounds for Western psychological theories. Rather, their indigenous wisdom could be used as a mirror for mainstream psychology to reflect on its own cultural myopia, its inherent hegemony and ethnocentrism.

Third, the suffering history of the Yi somehow touches a chord in me. According to the literature, all "Yi ethnic" are not a "unified" racial group, as there are six different languages spoken within this categorization. Only after 1949 did the implementation of ethnic policy merge all these "uncategorized" clans into one group called "Yi." The word "Yi" (夷) originally meant "the uncivilized others," and now changed into "the people relying on rice and silk" (彝). This new racial label was created for the purpose of ruling, but the original clans still had their own tribal identifications and boundaries.

The Yi used to be a fierce and fearless predatory society. Adopting the eagle as their totem, the Yi people used to take in other ethnic groups (such as the Miao and Han) as their property (so-called slavery). Due to this "slavery system," they were hit the most after 1949 when the Communist Party took over China and started the "land revolution movement" (*tu gai*). Their lands were taken, their slaves "liberated," their social hierarchy demolished, and the chiefs of the family clans punished. Many Yi people became homeless and uprooted. They were forced to participate in the construction of public facilities; some were sent to the border for mining, while some were sent to build dams with bare hands. Not only were they starved to death; some were tortured to death due to their "political incorrectness." During the Cultural Revolution and anti-antiques movement, the priesthood role of the Bimo was also being challenged, and whole families of Bimo were also oppressed. The rituals of sacrifice were considered "superstitious" (*mi xin*) and strictly banned. Their scriptures were burnt, as well as their cultural antiques. Many of the Yi people lost their livelihoods and families during that era.

From the 1980s onwards, after the lifting of the bans, religious activities were gradually allowed and recognized, as well as other cultural arts and heritages. However, those Yi people who lived in remote mountain areas were still trapped in poverty due to underdeveloped transportation facilities, as many of their crops and livestock were not marketable. Many of the villages became islands of poverty, which could barely survive with the crops. In time of drought, there would be no harvest and no food to consume. Most of the time, the local people relied on corn and potatoes as their main food category. Hence, many of the younger-generation Yi have no alternative but to follow the lifestyle of migrant workers. Their adventures in the modern cities away from the mountain became a "rite of passage" where they embraced the challenges of a foreign land (Liu 2011). According to Liu (2011), it was also in this sea of migrant workers that Yi teenagers became addicted to drugs and infected with HIV as a result of sharing needles. Since the first HIV case was discovered in Liangshan in 1994, there have been over 20,000 Yi people affected by HIV in the area. Will the Yi culture eventually disappear due to this rampaging disease combined with drug addiction? Or will this tribe of eagles ascend once again in the future? Whatever the future holds, the suffering of the Yi people is inseparable from the modern world we all live in. As a third-generation Chinese Malaysian, I could identify with their history of poverty, political oppression, and their search for ethnic roots in the sea of migration and modernization.

Lastly, in addition to scholarly investigations, our research team have also lost their peace of mind after witnessing the suffering events and stories in the Yi community (see Chap. 6). Our field notes and memos affected us deeply. As human beings, we share this capacity to resonate with each other emotionally, especially during the painful moments. By either humanistic philosophy from the West, or benevolence (*ren yi*) teaching from the East, we are all conditioned to heed the voice of justice and compassion. As envisioned by the postmodern philosopher Richard Rorty (1989), it is not universal Truth so much as our shared vulnerability in the face of suffering that constitutes the basis of the solidarity that binds us together as human beings. "In particular novels and ethnographies which sensitize one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job [of laying the ground of solidarity]," says

Rorty (1989, p. 94). It is for this reason that this chapter will go into detail about the stories of suffering in two Yi communities.

Narratives of Suffering from Yi-Bimo

Story of EM (Narrated by Xiaorong)

EM is a 52-year-old Yi female and widow. Four years ago, her husband died of a terminal illness, and she is now staying in MG town with her two children and a niece in a rental house. In the past 20 years, EM has gone through the challenges of losing her son and husband, the complicated disease of her daughter, physical pains, poverty, and accidents. It all started in 1998, when her eldest son died of brain tumor.

Before that, her husband was working in a government department with good prospects. When their son was diagnosed, they raised money for his treatment at work and in the public media. Yet the surgery was still a failure, and their son didn't survive after three years of medical treatment. After he died, EM gave birth to another daughter and son. In order to increase their financial income, the couple contracted a bus transportation business, and hired a driver.

However, in the winter of 2003, the bus was involved in a severe accident, and the driver died in the crash. Because most of the passengers on the bus were government officers, and they all suffered different degrees of injury, the compensation liability was very high, and in total they needed to pay 700,000 RMB to the victims. However, the insurance company only paid 170,000 RMB, thanks to some legal loopholes, which left the rest of the indemnity to EM and her husband. Even now, when mentioning the insurance company, EM expressed discontentment by shaking her head and saying, "They are not making sense." In order to pay all the indemnity, EM's husband took up a loan from his employer, relatives, and even usurers. There was nothing else they could do, EM said, because if you don't pay, people would be "watching you." It was not until four years later that they finally solved the problems brought about by this accident.

Unfortunately, in 2010, EM's husband was hospitalized due to chronic liver problems. He was also diagnosed with diabetes, kidney stones, a liver tumor, and liver ascites after checking in at Chengdu. At that time, he was being treated in a specialized hospital for tumors, and the medical bill was skyrocketing. Every month they had to pay about 80,000 RMB, with only minimal medical coverage from work insurance. In order to raise funds for the treatment, EM's husband had to come in and out of hospital to ask for medical reimbursement from his company. After fighting the tumor for three years, her husband finally also passed away in November 2012. According to EM, they also sought help from a Bimo priest in performing healing rituals in addition to hospitalization. They used cows, goats, and other livestock as sacrificial animals for countless Bimo rituals. EM was quite disappointed that there was no healing effect after the rituals.

One month after EM lost her husband, she also accidentally fell down and broke her leg. At that time, she was hoping to get treatment from Xichang hospital, but they told her it would cost 100,000 RMB for the surgery, and they couldn't guarantee full recovery. Hence, she decided not to pursue hospital treatment and just rested in bed for four months, until someone introduced her to a female indigenous healer who was supposed to be very "powerful." In the end, after this woman had massaged her for three days, EM could finally walk on her feet like a normal person, and she only spent 1000 RMB.

While EM was recuperating from her injury, her youngest daughter, who was in secondary school, fainted in class. EM was told to take her daughter for a medical check-up. After seeking help from many famous hospitals in Chengdu, she was diagnosed with allergic purpura. Still, there was no effective treatment for her daughter's ailment, and even hospitalization did not help. While seeking medical treatment, EM also asked the Bimo priest to perform healing rituals for her daughter. On the day we first met, she had just finished the third Bimo ritual for her daughter. They also changed to different Bimo priests if there was no instant recovery. Eventually, someone recommended a traditional herbal doctor in Xichang to her, and EM found the herbal prescriptions helpful in controlling the symptoms of her daughter. Without any stable income, EM said she couldn't afford a Bimo priest to perform even the usual annual blessings rituals. However, she listened to the advice of the Bimo, moving from first- to fifth-floor housing, as they believed it might get them away from the bad luck. Now they are living on the pension of her diseased husband, to pay off the rental and her child's education (Fig. 2.1).

Fig. 2.1 EM, in the middle, and her children

Story of SZ (Narrated by Keke)

I got to know SZ through her dad. SZ's father, QQ, was the first participant to die of AIDS during the process of our study. In October 2015, we first visited the home of SZ in a village. At first sight, SZ's father, QQ, was squatting in the corner, wrapped in a wool blanket and looking very down. He knew some Mandarin but was quite reticent. From the conversation on and off, we learned he had been diagnosed with AIDS three years earlier. He had started off with three sons and one daughter, but his eldest son and his wife had all died because of AIDS, and the other two sons had died in infancy. QQ said they had done "a lot of *mi xin* [ritual]," and been to countless hospitals, but perhaps because of the late diagnosis and lack of money for continuous treatment, I got the feeling he would not last long, judging from his weak mental status. When we bade one another farewell, we gave him some money as a token of appreciation, and he received it in silence. But when I turned to leave, he started wiping away his tears. This left me with a kind of sadness no words could describe. After that, QQ was always in my mind during debriefing sessions. I remembered that he had mentioned still having a daughter, SZ, who was in secondary school. I thought, even though he had a hard life, at least he

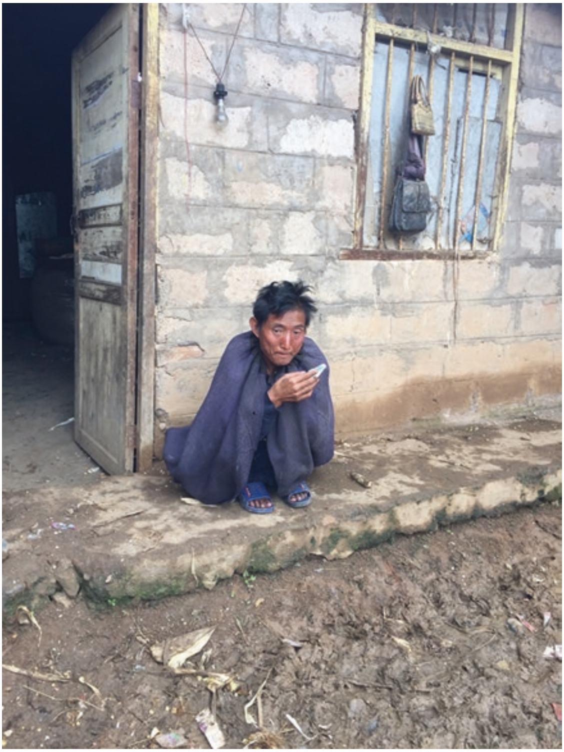


Fig. 2.2 SZ's father, QQ, squatting at the front door when we first met him

had a dear daughter by his side who could support and comfort him (Fig. 2.2).

However, there was no chance for us to meet QQ a second time for a more in-depth interview. He passed away a few weeks after we first met him. His 70-year-old mother told us over the phone, "He is no longer here." Though we sort of knew it would happen one day, we didn't expect it so soon. What lingered in my mind also was the only daughter he left behind—SZ. During our second visit in February 2016, we finally found this teenage girl in her uncle's house. She was waving to us and smiling. But I knew that, underneath that smile, was suffering and grief.

I felt quite bad that we had to talk about such a painful subject on our first encounter. But she was quite talkative and opened up to us, speaking in fluent Mandarin. She was trying to hold herself together while being interviewed by us, and there were tears in the corners of her eyes. I knew she was trying her best to be strong. At a very young age, she had lost her mother and brothers, and the pressure was beyond description. “My dad always got sick, so there is no financial income. So my school tuition fees are always borrowed from others… my dad could only help in house chores and nothing else,” said SZ. When we inquired about her thoughts on her father’s illness, she said the Bimo priest had told her it was because of the disturbance from “ghosts” (*gui zuo sui*). But she said she did not believe in ghosts: “I also don’t understand much about *mi xin* [ritual], normally I just fell asleep when doing *mi xin*… [ritual].” Though supernatural explanations were quite commonly accepted in Liangshan, SZ still blamed her father for her misfortune—“If my dad hadn’t been a drug addict, our family wouldn’t have become like this.”

When her dad was falling ill, SZ was studying in a boarding school in town. Not many people in the villages, especially girls, could actually get into a secondary school in town. From our conversation, we learned that SZ enjoyed studying. Her dream of getting a higher education was the biggest motivation in her life at this point. In the past, she would come home during holidays to help her father in farming activities, as he was quite weak. Luckily, her uncle’s family had shared the burden of looking after her father. The transportation fees and living expenses also came from the generosity of her relatives.

After she lost her father, her school teacher also learned about her predicament, and helped her find a donor to sponsor her tuition fees. However, her living condition was still very poor. As she said, “My weekend only has two meals, so I feel hungry often.” While talking to us, her body was also trembling as she was only wearing a one-layer sweater in the midst of a harsh winter. As an orphan, she knew her mother and brother had got the disease from the father. I could hardly imagine how she had survived until now if not of strong will. Besides facing the pressures of studying, SZ also felt “different” from her other friends in school. She said, “My classmates in school have good family and parents. They are quite well off financially and look worry-free. I couldn’t get along with them.” However, she told me she had a best girlfriend whom she could confide in. This topic made her light up, which made me hopeful about her future, even though the journey ahead of her will be full of challenges and uncertainties (Fig. 2.3).

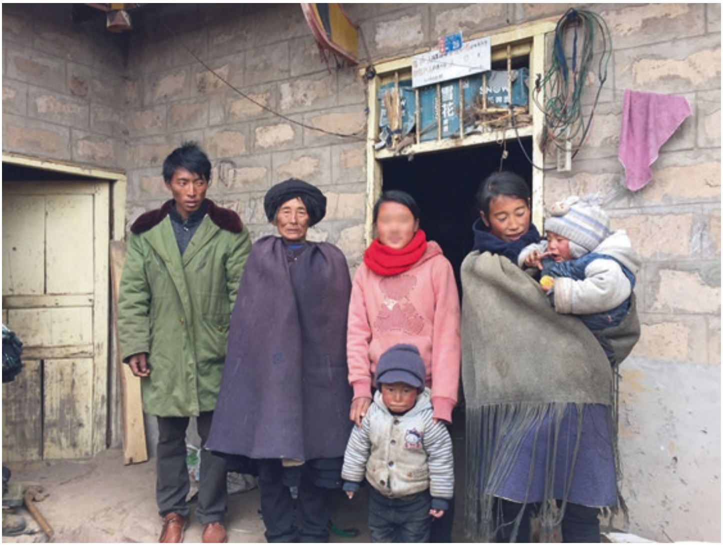


Fig. 2.3 SZ, the girl in the middle, and her extended family—uncle and grandmother

Story of LQ (Narrated by Xiaorong)

LQ is a 37-year-old Yi female, who is living in NB village with three sons. Seven years ago, her husband died of drug addiction, leaving LQ to raise three sons all by herself as a widow. In our conversation, she frequently mentioned that if not for the children, she would have left home seven years ago. Poverty and misfortune are at the root of her suffering. That is how we came to know her.

LQ told us that her husband died of pancreatitis, when their youngest son was only six months old and had just started to learn how to sit. He had a long history of drug addiction, years LQ recalled in tears. At the beginning, LQ found that her husband always felt ill with stomach ache, and she thought it was the common local disease called "sigerguo" (Yi pronunciation). During his sick time, her husband's friends told LQ that taking drugs would cure his disease. After that, LQ told us, her husband fell under the "bad influence" of these friends and became addicted to drugs. At first, LQ did not realize her husband had become an addict, not until he started stealing the crops from home, and her rings, which he sold to buy drugs. She then learned of her husband's addiction, and thought of divorce. But in the end, because of their children, she decided to stay with him. After that, the couple always fought, both verbally and physically. Every time LQ brought up the issue of drug addiction, her husband would beat her. LQ said she was very "sad and heartbroken to the point of being sick." Finally, after four years, LQ's husband decided to stop taking drugs and go through rehabilitation. However, after one month of being clean, her husband started to have bloating in his tummy, and the hospital soon diagnosed pancreatitits. In order to treat the disease, they both travelled to Xichang twice, and then to Leibo for hospitalization. It was in the latter hospital that LQ's husband passed away.

LQ said that her husband's side of family (*jia zhi*) did not provide any help or support during their difficult time. Her husband's parents had already passed away, and his brothers were also addicted to drugs. Even now, she still had some debts from her husband's funeral. LQ complained that "we are tricked by our fate (*ming yun*), other people's husband got a well off background so that they could still take drugs. But our family has no foundation and we couldn't even afford to repair the broken house."

LQ did not seek help from the Bimo until the final stages of her husband's illness. They could not afford to sacrifice a goat, so instead substituted a chicken. LQ felt she should have sought help earlier, and whenever she did not feel good physically, she would ask the Bimo to do rituals for her. From a medical examination, LQ found she had gynecological diseases and heart problems. Because of her health situation and family situation, she decided to stay in the village and do farm work rather than being a migrant worker like others. She is now trying her best to feed her children. Her eldest son is still schooling in an orphanage, and two younger ones are schooling near home. She commented that "it is impossible to be rich again, and I just take one day at a time." Her biggest wish now is for her children to "be free of illness." Though we saw a small iron plate hanging above her doorway, LQ told us it was given by the government only to recognize them as a "low-income family" (*pin kun hu*). The year before, they had been given a barrel of oil, 25 kilos of rice, 8 bags of flour, a bag of fertilizer, and a piece of blanket in total by the government. Since then, no further assistance has been received, and all those groceries have already run out. But their lives still have to go on (Fig. 2.4).

Fig. 2.4 LQ and her sons in their doorway

Thematic Analysis: Yi-Bimo Group

After conducting semi-structured interviews with 24 Yi participants from the Bimo tradition in Meigu, we coded the verbatim transcripts using the thematic coding method introduced in Chap. 1. Below are the 12 themes on suffering types ranked by the total number of reporting interviewees (see Table 2.1).

Theme 1. Financial Difficulties; Theme 12. Climate Problems

Almost all (95.9%) the interviewees in the Yi-Bimo group complained about financial difficulties. As we can see in the stories of LQ, EM, and SZ, poverty is a dominant theme in their lives. There are also different worries about finance. Eleven interviewees talked about lacking tuition fees for themselves or their children. Fourteen of them talked about not having a regular income due to an inability to make money or loss of a business. Ten of them talked about additional expenses beyond their budget, such as medical bills, Bimo ritual (*mi xin*) expenses, or extra-birth fees. Seven of them talked about the inability to pay rental or maintain their dilapidated homes. Five were short of materials such as food and clothing. Three of them are

Table 2.1 Themes of suffering events among Yi-Bimo interviewees (*n* = 24)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Financial difficulties	23 (95.83)
Education fee	11 (45.83)
Income problems	14 (58.33)
Housing problems	7 (29.17)
Additional expenses	10 (41.67)
Shortage of materials	6 (25)
Fine and debt	3 (12.5)
Cultural expenses	4 (16.67)
Family members' illness and death	18 (75)
Family illnesses	8 (33.33)
Family disability	4 (16.67)
Family deaths	12 (50)
Personal medical conditions	15 (62.5)
Terminal illness	2 (8.33)
General sickness	4 (16.67)
Tumor	2 (8.33)
Infection	6 (25)
Disabilities	3 (12.5)
Family problems and burdens	11 (45.83)
Taking care of family members	4 (16.67)
Problems with parenthood	3 (12.5)
Single-parenthood or orphans	3 (12.5)
Aloneness	4 (16.67)
Abuse	1 (4.17)
Refusal	1 (4.17)
Physical pains and discomfort	11 (45.83)
Physical pains	11 (45.83)
Discomfort	3 (12.5)
Lack of social support	3 (12.5)
Refusal to take responsibility	2 (8.33)
Bullying	1 (4.17)
Psychological turmoil	3 (12.5)
Suicides	3 (12.5)
Substance addiction in family	2 (8.33)
Pressures in family lineage	3(12.5)
Conflicts with authority	3 (12.5)
Climate problems	1 (4.17)

currently in debt. Four could not fulfill their cultural roles, such as paying betrothal money or giving monetary token at funerals, both of which are traditions observed by the Yi. There are many perceived reasons for their poverty (these will be explored in Chap. 3). One even talked about the weather (too cold) as a form of suffering (Theme 12), but the consequences of financial difficulties are all similar. The interviewees could not live like normal people who had the security of shelter, food, and education. They do not have access to the right kind of treatment or healing rituals. They also risk losing their cultural status in the community for not being able to reciprocate communal favors such as gift-giving. All of these consequences could create a vicious cycle for our Yi participants, and even the next generation, as we shall see in the following themes.

Theme 2. Family Members' Illness and Death

Our interviewee SZ had lost all her family members by the age of 15. One by one they died of disease, yet she still survives. Half of our interviewees had experienced the pain of losing close family members at an early age. Six of them were widows, two were widowers, four had lost their parents, four their children, and one had lost her sibling. Death was a looming topic in almost all our Yi-Bimo narratives. Eight interviewees talked about close family members being ill, including SZ, LQ, and EM. Four of them had close family members with a disability. We can see how, in stories like those of LQ and EM, where their husbands fell ill and they needed money for medical bills, they suffered not only the loss of their financial pillar, but also someone with whom to share the burden of parenthood. Women in the Yi group have a lower social status than men, and on becoming widows, they might be marginalized in the *jia zhi*, and might even be in debt due to funeral costs. Two of our interviewees told similar stories—when their husbands were still alive with AIDS, they spent all their money on treatments. After the husband died, they owed money for hosting the funeral, and then, when they themselves got sick, they couldn't afford to get proper treatment. This chain of misfortune has happened to quite a few other families in Meigu, claiming as its victim children like SZ.

In summer 2015, when our research team first entered the Liangshan area for our study, it happened that the so-called "saddest essay," written by a Yi girl from Liangshan, was also being posted, provoking a lot of media attention. It was written by a fifth-grade Yi student who told the story of the passing of her mother. The title of the essay was "Tear," and here is a translation of the content:

> My father passed away four years ago.
>
> He always favored me when he was alive. Since his death, my mom tried every day to cook nice food for me; maybe she missed him too.

> Then mother got sick. She went to town, and to Xichang, but did not get better after spending all the money.
>
> One day, mom collapsed. I saw her suffering, and I cried. I told her: "Mom, you will definitely get well soon, I support you. Please eat the meal I made for you. After having some sleep, you will feel better."
>
> The next morning, mom couldn't get up. She looked miserable. I quickly called my uncle who had just returned home from migrant work, asking him to bring mom to town.
>
> The third morning, I visited mom in the hospital. She was still asleep. I gently washed her hands, then she woke up.
>
> She held my hand, calling me by my nickname: "Meimei, I want to go home."
>
> "Why?" I asked.
>
> "It is not comfortable here. Our home is more comfortable."
>
> So I took mom home, sat for a while, then I walked out to cook for her. After I finished cooking, I went to call mom, but she was dead.
>
> The textbook once mentioned about a place called Sun and Moon Lake. I think it is made of the tears of those children who miss their mothers.

When someone posted this essay on social media (see Online Resources link), it went viral and many donations were channeled to this family. A few years later, this kind of "essay" is still repeating in the lives of many of the Yi families we interviewed. The proliferation of suffering is often obscured if we reduce the suffering of a community to an individual level for ease of "management." When our data clearly indicated that 18 of the 24 people we interviewed talked about the deaths and illnesses of family members as a core reason for their suffering, we can't help but wonder whether this is the norm, or an exception in this community.

Theme 3. Personal Medical Conditions; Theme 5. Physical Pains and Discomfort

Along with families' illnesses, 15 of our interviewees also reported struggling with personal medical conditions. Two admitted they had HIV/AIDS (although more than this have been diagnosed, not all will acknowledge it), three reported physical disabilities to a certain degree, four reported general sickness, two reported having tumors, and six others have various internal infections. We also suspected that some of the infections, such as tuberculosis, were complications from HIV, though this was not clarified in the interview. For example, one of the interviewees said the doctor had told him he had rheumatism (*feng shi*), and his blood was "dirty." Only later did we find out that he was HIV positive by reading the medical report from the doctor (and confirmed through rapid HIV screening). Due to a lack of education and the language barrier, many of our Yi interviewees could only use generic terminology to talk about their illnesses. For example, in the story of EM, her husband had suffered with liver problems for 20 years, but they only found out about the tumor at a much later stage. The lack of quality medical facilities in the Meigu town area had also prevented many Yi people from accessing treatment. They had to travel to Xichang, about seven hours' ride away, for a medical check-up. Some would travel further, to Chengdu for a day, just for the "best" treatment they could find. Some had the experience of being rejected by the big hospitals, and some were put off by the expensive medical bills. Although seeking help from the Bimo is relatively less expensive, they still needed to buy livestock for the Bimo rituals. So, not only have they to suffer the Physical Discomfort and pain caused by the illness, but the mental burden of finding the right treatment and paying for it is doubly heavy. That is also why, for widows like LQ and EM, their children having good health is all they wish for, as they have already given up treating their own illnesses.

On the other hand, Theme 5 showed that 11 of our interviewees reported physical pains and discomfort for unknown reasons. These were not the major illnesses addressed in Theme 3 that were diagnosed by medical doctors. The symptoms ranged from headaches to pains in the limbs, heart, stomach, chest, waist, and body parts. Others were dizziness, soreness, or just tingling sensations. Three talked about racing heartbeats and dullness in their "heart." Many of them said the pains started while they were migrant workers in other cities. This could also be a form of emotional expression which we will further extrapolate in Chap. 5. The physical weaknesses were normally triggered by stressors in life, but the interviewees would go to the Bimo priest or indigenous healers for these kinds of unpredictable and undiagnosible symptoms, as in the case of LQ.

Theme 4. Family Problems and Burdens; Theme 9. Substance Addiction in the Family; Theme 10. Pressures in Family Lineage

Eleven of our 24 interviewees reported having family problems as their suffering events. The burdens included taking care of sick family members, older generations, and children, single-parenting, aloneness and isolation, domestic abuse, and rejection from the family members. As we know, in a strong-ties society like the Yi community, sharing family burdens is an obligation for many of them. This is a blessing and also a curse. While family support is important, lack of it is also another form of suffering. SZ told us she felt ashamed of her identity as an orphan. EM and LQ both talked about how, as widows, no one is available to help them. Not only that, but EM had to take care of her sick husband and daughter without any break. This sense of obligation and responsibility confines them to where they are and bonds the family together, especially for Yi women. For instance, LQ also reported being beaten by her drug-addicted husband, yet she still chose to stay in the family for the sake of her children. This is a predicament for many Yi women. Sadly, as Theme 9 indicated, Yi men were found to have problems with addiction in most of our interviews. Although the male interviewees themselves would not bring up the issue of drug addiction for fear of legal problems or exposure, two of our female interviewees talked about either their husband or son struggling with drug addiction. This is another form of family misfortune as we know the consequences of substance abuse are usually health and financial problems.

On the other hand, there is another kind of burden for our male interviewees—worries of not being able to provide for the family financially and to continue the family lineage. Even though some of them had one or more sons, not being able to register them properly (hu kou) because of an inability to pay extra-birth fines (see the story of ET in Chap. 3), or not being able to raise the son to have good prospects, was a cause of psychological turmoil or shame. For example, one Yi father worried his son would not be able to get married because he didn't have any savings to use as betrothal money (a common practice in Yi villages). And not being married at the appropriate age meant they would not be able to pass down the "root" (*gen*) and family lineage as expected of a good Yi father.

This led to the discussion of Theme 10, where three of our interviewees talked about problems with "sons" specifically. Not bearing a "son" seemed shameful, and a great pressure for the Yi interviewees. Hence, they would risk an extra-birth fine, just to have a son. One of our HIV-infected Yi participants even risked passing the virus to his wife and baby by refusing to use sexual protection (a condom) so that they might still have a chance of conceiving a "son" after having two daughters. When we informed the wife of the risk, she remained persistent about trying to get pregnant. Fortunately, her tests came back negative. Yet, there were two interviewees in Meigu who were worried sick that their children had been infected since birth, and they asked us to test their children.

Theme 6. Lack of Social Support; Theme 11. Conflicts with Authority

In the Yi-Bimo group, three interviewees talked explicitly about the lack of support from their workplace (*dan wei*) and government sectors. One said that when they asked for housing welfare, they were turned down by the public officers; when asking for a loan, they were turned down by the bank; when one reported the kidnap of his young sister, he was ignored by the police. Another interviewee also said her house got broken into and she felt that, as a widow, she was being "bullied" by the outsiders. She also said the government had taken away her land for farming, and the compensation had been stolen by corrupt officers.

This is similar to Theme 11, where three of the interviewees reported having conflicts with authority figures and those in power. Like the story of EM. In 2008, after the earthquake, her house was damaged and she spent money with her husband to repair it. Yet the housing authority did not grant them reimbursement, so they got into a "fight" with the property management and, in 2013, filed a lawsuit, which is still ongoing. She is still very angry with the authorities for not fulfilling their promises after her husband died. While her husband was still alive and working in the government sector, they still received benefits. Now her husband is gone, her external support has been cut off. Even though she is certified as having a third-degree disability, she does not receive welfare money or low-income security. She complained to us that "the legal system is incomplete here" and "no one is here to speak on our behalf" (没人帮我们说话).

Another male interviewee, who was infected with AIDS, told us he was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment because of a fight between different family clans (*jia zhi*). This kind of group fight between families is actually quite common in the Liangshan Yi group. Sometimes it is due to financial issues or family conflicts. The male figures would usually become the "advocate" and "justice executor" for the household, and their distant relatives would also join in the gang-fighting. Aggression was often displayed to outsiders who had a conflict of interest with them. One of the interviewees told us he got into a fight with the head of their village who abused his power and charged extra fees for the installment of utilities at the villagers' homes. Though the result of conflict is usually the same, and he still had to acquiesce to the unreasonable demands of the village head, at least he was able to speak up for himself.

There were many more incidents of conflicts and misfortune that occurred as a result of migrant work, which were not reported at the time of the interview, but were observed in our longitudinal case follow-up. We discovered that many Yi teenagers not only contracted diseases and addiction while they were migrant workers, but were often bullied and mistreated in the workplace. One of the participants said he could not have meals at the regular time, and therefore developed an ulcer problem. Others said the employer did not pay them as promised, and they had to drop out of the job. Another young Yi teenager was robbed in the train station and lost all his savings. Not having proper a labor law could be the reason for the lack of protection, as is the case with other migrant workers in China. However, the language barrier and their lack of assimilation with the mainstream Han culture created mistrust between the ethnic groups and sometimes escalated into physical conflicts. The absence of a proper way to channel their frustration and aggression might lead to greater social problems for the younger generation of Yi people in Liangshan. We will further address this in our final chapter when talking about "future challenges for the Yi people."

Theme 7. Psychological Turmoil; Theme 8. Suicides

Though psychological turmoil is an inevitable result of all suffering events, three of our interviewees talked specifically about mental pressures. For example, as an orphan, SZ told us she is stressed about her studies as she sees education as her only way out. But her 67-year-old grandmother, who was also our interviewee, reported that her "biggest problem" was her "heartbrokenness" (*shang xin*) as a result of losing two grown-up sons to AIDS. She said that every time she thought of the disobedience of her sons, her heart would race very fast, and she felt sad. As her son had only recently passed away, about three months earlier, every time she saw the empty house she would feel grief. This grief and regret also affected her health.

YG, our oldest female interviewee, who was aged 75 at the time of the interview, also complained that her biggest suffering was that she "wanted to die" yet was "still alive." She had been laying on the bed for about six months due to arthritis in her knee and could not walk anymore due to incredible pains. She told us she would rather die in peace than suffering physically for the rest of her life. As a widow for years, she had taken care of by her daughter-in-law while her son was working in another city. She enjoyed drinking and would consume one bottle of beer on average, even while she was confined to bed. Though her family treated her very well and we did not spot any bedsores or bad smells coming from her, she still complained that she had lived long enough and dreamt her life might end as soon as possible. After going in and out of hospital several times, her wish to pass away was finally granted six months after the interview. In August 2016, her daughter-in-law called us in tears and informed us of her death. She also sent us some pictures of YG in her early years. We would like to honor her here as well as remembering her suffering (Fig. 2.5).

Along with psychological turmoil, we picked up the theme of suicide as an independent issue worth highlighting. Three of our interviewees mentioned suicide, and one in particular talked about her own suicide attempt. This 73-year-old Yi widow also suffered from deafness and "weakness of the heart." She believed it had all started when she was 50, and some supernatural forces had disturbed her. Even after seeking help from the Bimo and medical doctors, nothing seemed to work for her. After her husband passed away seven year earlier, she lived with her son's family. Just like YG, she felt "it [wa]s better to die than live" as she was "wasting food" that might otherwise be feeding her family. She would purposely starve herself, hoping she would die. In the past, she had had suicidal thoughts about taking poison, or jumping into the river, or getting run over by a truck, whenever she felt this heaviness and stuffiness in her heart. After six months of follow-up, we found that her condition had actually improved a lot, and she could even take care of her neighbor, a 100-year-old woman abandoned by her family.

Another interviewee, JS, talked about her husband committing suicide due to feeling ashamed at not being able to give funeral money to their relatives. But that had been only the last straw in terms of his hopelessness. According to JS, because of the financial burden of having to pay extra-birth fines, the family fell into poverty. In hopes of giving birth to a son, they had kept having babies, which had led to extra-births for which they could not pay the fines. The first four pregnancies had all resulted in baby girls, and it wasn't until the fifth pregnancy that JS had produced a son.

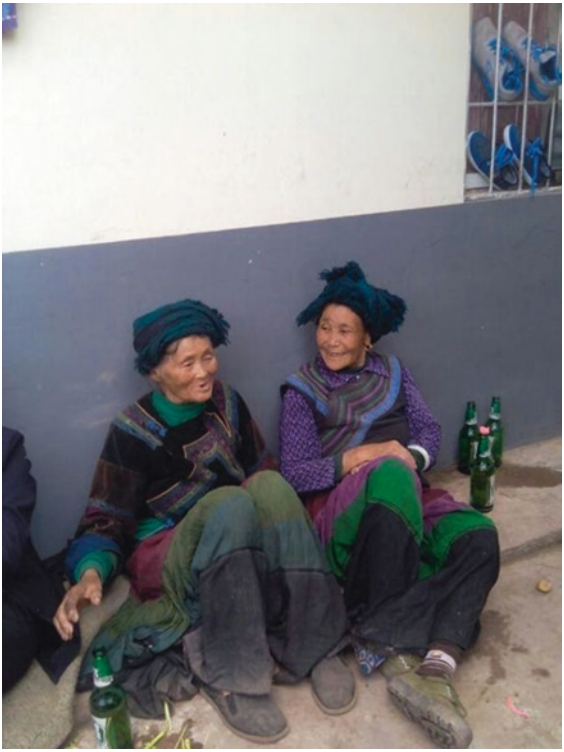


Fig. 2.5 YG on the left, sitting with her sister in earlier years, while she was still healthy

But her husband did not get to see this, as he had already hung himself while she was still pregnant with the baby.

This concludes the summary of suffering events experienced by our 24 interviewees from the Yi-Bimo group, but it is not exhaustive, as each of them usually had more than one kind of suffering occurring in their lives. The profiles of suffering varied from family to family, and each story was worthy of being attended and listened to carefully in a civil society. Unexpectedly, some of our participants died right after their interviews, some persisted, some continued to build a relationship with us, some appreciated our attention, and some actually improved over time. Though financial difficulty was the major type of suffering event they reported, this does not mean poverty is the most traumatic event or the heaviest burden.

The summary of thematic coding here only told us the types of suffering events, not their impact on the individuals and their families. We also caught glimpses of resilience in the interviewees' suffering narratives, as their distinctive religion and culture contains protective factors as well as risk factors. To see the cultural elements as part of a bigger picture, we need now to switch to another religious Yi group for comparison.

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians

Story of Grandpa SC (Narrated by Zhangying)

In October of 2016, we attended a Yi funeral in a Christian community in Luquan (SYP). The deceased, Yi, was a devoted "sister" in the body of Christ (as they addressed her in the church), so the family invited the church members and choirs to host the funeral and memorial service with prayers and hymns sung in the Yi language. Though, as participant observers, we did not understand a word they were saying, there were still signs of distinctive Yi tradition in this funeral event. For example, the family members were all dressed in the Yi custom, the daughters all wept hysterically throughout the funeral, firecrackers were lit as the coffin was carried from home to the graveyard, meals were prepared for all the guests in the community, sons and daughters used their clothes to carry soil and pour it into the grave, and so forth. We therefore concluded that this was a contextualized Christian funeral in this Yi community.

It was at this communal event that I got to know about Grandpa SC, who was talkative and sociable. He was 76 at that time, but still looked healthy and in good shape. Grandpa SC could speak fluent Mandarin, which was why I could communicate with him and build a relationship quickly. He told us he had been a Christian for 38 years, living with his wife and disabled son (lumbar disease), and that he had only managed three years of schooling before being put to work on the Social Construction movement. He helped dig the dam near the village during his youth. Now he reported that his house was quite rundown and he was facing the challenges of aging and shortage of labor, due to his son's disability. Both his daughters were already married and living in other towns. His son's disease had started when he was six, causing deformity of his backbone, and now he could not walk straight. His aging wife also had eyesight problems, and the three of them were living in a broken-down old house.

Grandpa SC told us that what had actually brought him to Christ was the suffering event of his son, after they found no treatment to cure his disease. “The doctor said it was lumbar tuberculosis and needed hospitalization. We gave our best by selling the cows at home to raise money to pay his medical bill, yet eventually our son still couldn’t go back to his healthy condition,” said Grandpa. When we asked him how he viewed this unfortunate event, he said, “It is destined by fate. We can’t really know for sure… God gave everyone gifts, some had health, some had wisdom, some had peace, some became great officers, including those who are nonbelievers, these are all destined by God.” After that, he found peace in Christianity, and said that, after trusting the Lord, he felt “joy in the heart, peaceful, and healthier.” As a matter of fact, we saw that Grandpa SC was an active participant at the funeral. He would pray fervently for the host family, read the scriptures in the public, and attended the regular worship services twice a week.

When we visited his home after the funeral, we saw that Grandpa SC was peeling corn in the front yard. It was the harvest season, and most of the villagers were busy peeling and tying the corns, to be saved for wintertime. His house looked quite worn out as no one was able to fix it properly. Grandpa said they did not receive any welfare or compensation from the government; even his son’s disability did not qualify for welfare. Later on he told us they had changed his son’s disability classification from third grade to fourth grade without any justification (a higher grade means higher functioning). In 2014, he received about 1800 RMB welfare subsidy, but nothing in 2015. Though, in China, there is actually a law stipulating that people with disabilities should have equal access to education and other public services, we did not see it being enforced in many rural counties of China, including Luquan (Fig. 2.6).

The day after the funeral, Grandpa SC invited us to attend his worship service in a small gathering place in the village. They called it the “morning and evening meeting spot” (早晚点), and it was open for the rural peasants to attend before and after their farm work. It was more like a spontaneous small group meeting, with about 10–20 Yi-Christians (mostly older adults) coming together to read the Bible, share testimony, and sing the hymnals. We were asked to say a few words in the meeting, and even presented a song. Grandpa SC also sang a hymn solo for us. Though we couldn’t understand their dialect, we felt it was a happy and merry gathering and we were accepted easily by the community. Grandpa SC acted like the group leader, probably because of his better command of Mandarin.

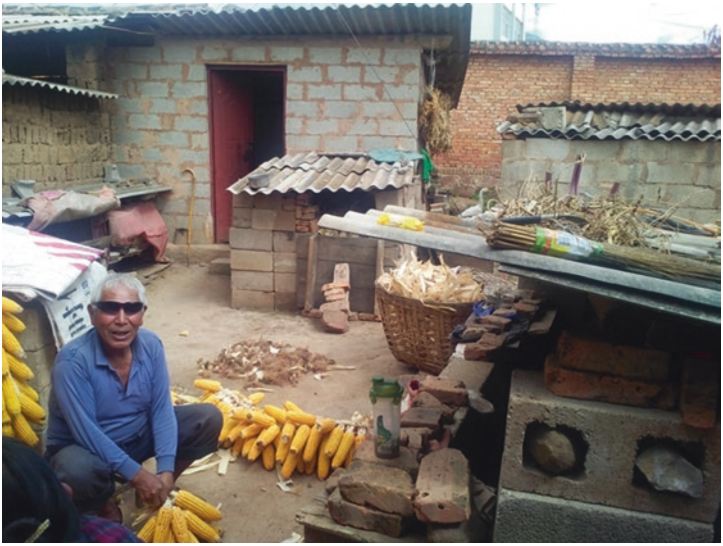


Fig. 2.6 Grandpa SC in his front yard in 2015

On New Year's Eve 2016, during our second visit to Luquan, I interviewed Grandpa SC in more depth regarding his history of hardship. Next to the fire pit, he started unfolding some of the experiences he had suffered since being young. While he was recalling those painful memories of helping the country build roads and dams as free labor, his voice broke up and his mood was agitated…

> During those times, it was very difficult and hard for us. Every time we had to help with construction work, but not a penny was paid for our work, not even water and clothing was provided. Nowadays we have a machine to help dig the grounds, but in the old days we dug by hand. We all had to sleep outdoors under the sky in the mountains, regardless of whether it was was rainy, snowy, or frosty. It was in 1956, we were digging and building the Luquan third road in a very tough situation. The living standard was very simple, and we all got sick with rheumatism, to the point of not able to stand and walk. While we were building the dam at SH village, we were being treated like horses, towing the mud and soil every day. That was very hard and painful. Nowadays, every laborer gets paid for their hard work. But at those times, there were no wages, and we were not allowed to raise our own pigs either, do you believe that? We were given nothing to eat, and slept at

> the place we worked no matter it was dry or wet, raining or snowing, we could only sleep at the spot. They only cooked one or two potatoes for each of us per day, then that's how we survived.
>
> At that time, we were really hurt and traumatized (苦伤了). No wages were given, because people said it was for socialist construction, unpaid construction. We had to break the mountain with hands and hammers, not like now, where you have explosives or machines to help break the mountain rocks. We had to use big hammers to drill the rock, one by one, trying to break the mountain wall. That's how tough it was for us. Now I couldn't do that.

Though he recalled suffering from starvation, hard labor, and lack of shelter, resulting in rheumatism that has lasted till the present day, Grandpa SC did not blame the government for his difficulties. In the interview, he explained, "Our country also had a hard time then." According to the history of modern China, 1958 was the period known as the "Great Leap Forward," when the Communist Party were trying to repair and rebuild public facilities all over China, after the Second World War and civil war. At that time, the construction of water and transportation facilities was the main priority, and there were stringent deadlines and "index of progress" set by the government in place. Hence, everyone was pressured to finish the construction at full speed and with high efficiency. Nevertheless, even after 60 years, Grandpa SC reported that life was still tough for rural residents. "Though the living standard is much better now, our own house is getting worse as we don't have the money to repair it… our family also is poorer than other families, and can't keep up with them as we have no labor force. Luckily the government policy is much better now, we can get by with sufficient food and clothing. The only problem is the place we sleep in…" However, he also expressed gratitude toward the Lord, as he is able to feed himself now.

Grandpa SC also complained his hearing was not as good as before, and his eyes also needed treatment. One of his eyes had gone "blind" after the surgery, and the other eye also had some problems that needed fixing. His teeth were also decayed and he worried he wouldn't be able to eat and talk like before. As is to be expected, problems of aging also involve medical problems. Grandpa SC said he couldn't afford the medical bill, as the insurance only covered the "cheap drugs," rather than the "good and expensive ones." Rather than going to the hospital, people preferred to buy medicines from the pharmacist directly. By the end of the interview, when asked about his perception of his suffering life, Grandpa SC said he was still grateful for the “leading of the Lord,” as he believed “I could go to the Lord, and not care about the earthly things.”

In March 2016, when we called to follow up with Grandpa SC, he told us with great joy that they had finally qualified for the “Precise Poverty Relief Program” and would be able to get some compensation to put toward building a new house. About 100 residents in town had been approved to receive similar welfare payments. He therefore expressed gratitude both to the Party’s policy and to the Lord.

Story of Grandma W (Narrated by Xinli)

In October of 2015, we followed our informant Mr. Tang to a KR village, which is deep in the mountains of SYP town. To get to this village, we needed to transfer into a four-wheel drive and get on the back of a truck driving along a bumpy road. On our way there, Mr. Tang, who is a Yi himself, told us that this village had a violent history, such as a husband being murdered by the wife, or a wife killing herself by drinking poison, or a wife running away with other men. Normally, people did not like to come near this village. But we managed to interview a few Yi-Christians there and build relationships with them. Grandma W was one of the elderly residents we kept in touch with for a year.

During our first encounter, with the help of a translator, I managed to gather that Grandma W was 74 years old, had never been to any school, and had lost her spouse five years earlier. They had two daughters, the younger one married off to someone in a faraway land, the elder having contracted some sort of mental illness, subsequently dying of intoxication. The son-in-law (Mr. Zhang) was the only able-bodied person left at home now. This Mr. Zhang was what they called an “adopted son-in-law” (上门女婿), a man who would stay with his wife’s family and be a son to his mother-in-law. Before his wife died, she had actually given birth to three daughters. The eldest was 21 and had dropped out of school at third grade, suffering from some developmental problems. Judging by our conversation, this might have been undiagnosed developmental delay. The parents had sought medical help for two years but to no avail. Hence, this oldest granddaughter could only help Grandma W with simple house chores and couldn’t live independently.

The second granddaughter, aged 18, had become a migrant worker in another town. The youngest was boarding at a secondary school in SYP and would return home once a week. Grandma W had problems with one eye, and was in poor health. She often suffered from backache, and used to seek medical help and prayers from the pastors. Hence, the burden of farm work and other laboring had fallen on the shoulders of her son-in-law, Mr. Zhang. The major part of the family's income came from selling the crops and harvest from the land, and this provided for the youngest granddaughter's education expenses. Though there were many suffering stories to tell, Grandma W's grief was mostly related to the death of her daughter, and her physical pains.

The daughter had only recently died, in April 2014, and every time she was mentioned, Grandma W would begin crying in silence. It was certainly a heavy topic for our first meeting. During our second visit in January 2016, she felt more ready to bring up the painful subject again. She pointed to her granddaughter and told us, "Her mother just died last year, and my heart is still aching, so the body illness also hit me easily." When asked about her feelings, Grandma W began crying again and said it had happened very suddenly, been "terrible," and that her heart was not "at ease." Although she was not suffering as much anguish as before, every time she thought about her daughter, she would start praying to God for comfort.

It was after her daughter fell ill (mentally) that Grandma W started going to church, and she converted to Christianity at age 40. She was quite a devoted Christian and would attend worship three times a week. When her daughter died, she had doubted her faith: why had God let this misfortune happen when she was so religious? However, now Grandma W said she already felt more relieved, as "we don't know God's purpose, He has his good will to everyone, and we can only rely on God more." She trusted that, by believing in Christ, she would meet her deceased daughter one day when she left this world. She said, "We have everything when we have the Lord," then wiped her tears, and passed us some fruits to eat.

Both times we visited, Grandma W talked about pains in her back and chest, which started about 2013, and had got worse since the passing of her daughter in 2014. She told us, "After my daughter was gone, I couldn't even walk, my hands were too heavy to lift." She had been in and out of hospital for a while, to treat her lumbar problem. Both of her younger daughters had taken turns coming back to take care for her and paid her medical bills. While she was still in the hospital, she would have nightmares that woke her up in fear. She said she saw "horses and cows stomping on her." When she woke up in terror, she would pray and felt much better and peaceful. She took medication to relieve her pain but the

Fig. 2.7 The RA taking a picture in front of the house with Grandma W and her family

side effects included feelings of nausea and acid reflux. She always coped by praying and singing Yi hymnals, in which she found strength and solace.

This was one of the families we interviewed that talked frequently about their Christian faith. Her son-in-law, Mr. Zhang, updated me with her news through our monthly phone call. He also shared with me about his Christian faith and expressed his appreciation toward us for caring about Grandma W. He himself was also busy with church ministry, and found it hard to balance both housework and church work. By our third visit in summer 2016, Grandma W seemed to be over her grief and now paid more attention to her eldest granddaughter, who suffered from developmental delay and obesity (Fig. 2.7).

Thematic Analysis: Yi-Christian Group

Besides case studies, we did a thematic coding of the suffering events touched on in the 23 interview transcripts, and came up with 11 themes (see Table 2.2, ranked by the reporting cases).

Table 2.2 Themes of the suffering events among Yi-Christian interviewees ($n = 23$)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Financial difficulties	17 (73.91)
Housing	3 (13.04)
Food	2 (8.7)
Money issues	14 (60.87)
No income	4 (17.39)
Death of family members and dear ones	16 (69.57)
Loss of parents	6 (26.09)
Loss of children	7 (30.43)
Loss of spouse	9 (39.13)
Loss of siblings	1 (4.35)
Loss of in-laws	2 (8.7)
Loss of dear friend	1 (4.35)
Physical pains	15 (65.22)
Discomfort and soreness	12 (52.17)
Physical deterioration from aging	3 (13.04)
Injuries	2 (8.7)
Physical illnesses	14 (60.87)
Personal illness	11 (47.83)
Family members' illness	5 (21.74)
Family burdens	8 (34.78)
Responsibility to take care of family members	6 (26.09)
Relatives' problems	2 (8.7)
Aloneness	7 (30.43)
No help available	5 (21.74)
Loneliness	2 (8.7)
Social oppression	4 (17.39)
Church was being persecuted	1 (4.35)
Revolutionary and rebuilding	2 (8.7)
The Great Leap Forward	1 (4.35)
Civil war	1 (4.35)
Physical disability	3 (13.04)
Interpersonal conflicts	2 (8.7)
Schooling problems	1 (4.35)
Psychological problems	1 (4.35)
Nightmares	1 (4.35)

Theme 1. Financial Difficulties

Though it was the top-reported theme, in comparison with the Yi-Bimo interviewees, not all 23 participants from the Yi-Christian group reported financial difficulties as their main concern. Seventeen out of 23 of them talked about poverty as causing major suffering, with 14 of them specifically bringing up the issue of not having sufficient income to pay off living expenses. Three were still in debt, four had no money to treat their illnesses, and three could not afford tuition fees for their children. Four said they had no source of income or savings due to being unable to work, and three (including Grandpa SC) talked about poor living conditions. Two were still concerned about not having enough money to buy food. Unlike the Yi-Bimo group, the Yi-Christian group did not report any concerns regarding expenses related to traditional and communal event such as funerals, weddings, or religious events.

However, similarly to the Yi-Bimo group, one of the Yi-Christian parents had also struggled with extra-birth fines, as the Yi ethnic minority has not yet assimilated birth control as one of their cultural norms. Having more offspring and children is actually a symbol of prosperity to many minority groups. Though China now allows those from ethnic minorities to have two to three kids, depending on their location, this birth-control policy still clashes with those patriarchal traditions that value having sons as the main inheritance and root of the family.

Not having financial security also leads to other kinds of individual worries and family problems, as shown in the other themes. However, there are also things money can't buy, such as the lives of their children and the companions of those children. Those who did not complain about financial issues suffered from loneliness, family-related burdens, bereavement, physical pains, psychological pressures, and social oppression. Grandma W, for example, did not have material concerns, but her own pains and the sadness of losing her daughter had caused her much grief.

Theme 2. Death of Family Members and Dear Ones

Sixteen out of 23 of our interviewees reported the deaths of family members and dear friends as causes of their suffering and grief. As our Yi-Christian participants were generally 60 or older, it was reasonable that they should have experienced more losses in life when compared to the Yi-Bimo group (12 of them reporting the deaths of family members). Out of all the deaths, half related to the passing of spouses, and six to children—just like Grandma W, who had lost both her husband and daughter in recent years. Two interviewees talked about losing their parents when they were young, and four of them had grown up in a single-parent household. Four reported losing siblings, in-laws, and a dear friend.

One interviewee claimed she was a "five-generation orphan" as her parents had also lost their parents during turbulent times. This interviewee also lost her younger brother during the Cultural Revolution, when she was 13 years old. She remained single all her life, till age 75, and lived in poverty. Still, her major concern was not money, but her identity as the "orphan," as she was bullied and oppressed due to a lack of family support. Every time she recalled her childhood, she would become very emotional, agitated, with tears flowing down her cheeks. She finally found peace in December 2017, when her neighbor found her passed away at home (see Chap. 6 for her full story).

Another 78 year-old, Grandma BL, also shared with us her grief at losing her eldest son three years earlier. Since losing her spouse 20 years before, she had also lost her daughter and son to terminal illness. She said her biggest suffering was to see people dear to her passing away one by one. She told us that her body had deteriorated quickly after her son was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She explained that his tumor was actually caused by the head trauma he sustained in a car accident. Even with the help of surgery, he suffered from blood clot in his brain vessels. Eventually he died of the brain tumor and left her with much grief. "If I didn't have a Christian faith, I would probably have committed suicide," Grandma BL told us.

Whether losing their parents at a young age, or their children later in life, these interviewees were all suffering from loss and bereavement. Although in the Meigu interview, there were similar themes of family death, the Yi-Bimo interviewees talked about the issue in a more practical way, such as losing their livelihood, or income for the family after a husband had died of AIDS. Expressions of grief and mourning were not that obvious on the faces of the Yi-Bimo participants when talking about the passing of their parents or children. Even in their narratives, such as the stories of LQ and EM from the beginning of this chapter, widows from Meigu (six of them) brought up financial issues more often than widows from Luquan (eight of them). This slight difference might not have any statistical significance due to the small sample size, yet it is worth pondering the different reactions to family deaths between these two religious groups.

Theme 3. Physical Pains; Theme 4. Physical Illnesses; Theme 8. Physical Disability

As aging is a dominant issue for the Yi-Christian group, 15 of them actually talked about physical pain and discomfort as a cause of suffering (compared to 11 in the Yi-Bimo group). The discomforts ranged from flu symptoms, to pains in the limbs, eyes, lower back, and knee. Two of them talked about pain resulting from injuries, and three talked about physical deterioration from aging (e.g., poor eyesight, tooth decay, and hearing loss).

Parallel to the suffering from pains, under Theme 4, 11 of our interviewees also talked about their own physical illnesses related to medical conditions, and five talked about family members suffering with illness. High blood pressure and rheumatism were the two most frequently reported problems. Three interviewees also had the permanent physical disabilities (Theme 8) of blindness and hemiplegia. In the Yi-Christian group, there was not much variation of disease reported in comparison to the Yi-Bimo participants. No HIV/AIDS and liver problems were noticed in the Yi-Christian interviewees.

As we are talking about struggling with both physical pain and terminal illness, we would like to remember our oldest interviewee in Luquan, who passed away in July 2016. She had never received any schooling, and stayed alone in an old house. We called her Grandma Tang. Grandma Tang was a very quiet old lady of slight build, with a gentle smile on her face. She could neither hear nor see well. If one did not make a point of looking out for her, one might totally miss her in the corner. A neighbor told us that Grandma Tang had lost her husband at age 50, and that she used to have seven children, but five had already passed away. The only two children left were daughters, who had married someone at other towns. They took turns to visit their mother every other week. She refused to move into her daughter's home, even though she was invited to do so. A church member who happened to be her neighbor cooked for her and looked after her. Even though Grandma Tang couldn't walk without her cane, due to arthritis, she actually could take care of herself on a good day when not in pain. She still insisted on going to church weekly, the neighbor told us, and sometimes the church friends would visit her and pray for her. Her little room was quite well kept and clean. She said she was quite content presently, as she had enough food and shelter. Her only concern was her grandson, a migrant worker in Kunming. One of her daughters later filled us in about her health condition, saying she had actually been diagnosed with a brain tumor and the doctors had given up treating her already. So Grandma Tang could only take painkillers when she felt discomfort. In July 2016, when we visited her for the third time, she had been resting in bed for about a month.

Fig. 2.8 The first author at Grandma Tang's bedside

Her breath was very weak, and she was suffering from fever, with her eyes closed. When I (the first author) called her and touched her, she opened her eyes and recognized me. She was smiling at me and murmuring something softly. We left the video of the interview with her daughter as a parting gift. Two weeks later, her family informed us of her passing. The church hosted a funeral for her, and her daughters actually felt quite relieved, as their mother was no longer suffering any pain (Fig. 2.8).

Theme 5. Family Burdens

As a strong-ties society, Yi-Christians shoulder the same sense of family obligation as Yi-Bimo. In total, eight of them reported concerns about taking care of close family members and relatives. Three of them in particular talked about the worry of growing grandchildren whose parents had died. It was very common to find older generations taking care of younger ones in rural China, and some of them even "adopted" the grandchildren as their own after the kids' parents passed away. As these elderly people knew they might not live long enough to see the grandchildren grow up, or have the wherewithal to make money to support their education, these grandparents shared their concerns with us. Sister Wang (which is what our informant called her) was one of them.

When we interviewed her, she was 63 years old, living with her husband and two grandchildren in the KR village. She had completed three years of schooling and could therefore communicate minimally in Mandarin with us. The old couple had had two children; the elder (a son) was already married and working in Kunming, but the younger one (a daughter) had died in 2015 at the age of 37. As the son-in-law was a migrant worker, he could not take care of his two young children, aged 11 and 9, and so Sister Wang had to take over the responsibility of parenting them. She was also suffering from arthritis and could barely walk and take care of herself; hence, she felt guilty for being a "burden" to her husband and the family. She said the pain was not treatable, and that she had exhausted both medications and herbal treatment. She also couldn't attend church services since becoming immobile, and could only pray at home. Though some of the villagers told her to do "*mi xin* [ritual]," she refused to follow the advice as it would have gone against her Christian faith.

During our second visit to Sister Wang's home in January 2016, we saw that her husband was actually building a coffin, in preparation for her passing. There was a pile of corn in the corridor, and Sister Wang was infected with blisters from her back to her face (Fig. 2.9). It looked like some kind of skin infection, but the hospital had only given her an IV injection without treatment. She said they had bought a kind of pill, imported from Myanmar, that cost about 70 RMB per bottle, which helped ease her pain a little. But the pills were almost finished. Sister Wang was talking with her head down most of the time, and wiping away tears of guilt when talking about her illness. She said even the 87-year-old lady from her neighborhood had come to help her peel the corn after the harvest. She felt "useless" and "helpless," and did not deserve to live. Her only unfinished business was her grandchildren's future education, as the children's father wanted to put them in an orphanage. In April, over the phone, Sister Wang said she felt better, and her husband told us the government had given them a loan and allowance to build their house. On May 1, we got the news that Sister Wang had passed away a few days earlier, and that her son had returned from Kunming to help out with the funeral and house-building temporarily. We also put them in touch with a resource that would help in sponsoring the children's education. They were thankful toward us. The burden of taking care of family members will always be there, but at least Sister Wang can rest in peace without the worry of being a burden to her family.

Fig. 2.9 The first author interviewing Sister Wang in her front yard

Theme 6. Aloneness; Theme 11. Psychological Problems

The themes of "no one caring" and having "no one to depend on" are also unique to our Yi-Christian interviewees, as many of them struggle with problems of aging, singleness, and widowhood. This might initially be put down to a lack of social support, but actually, in reality, they have quite a good social network, as we learned. It was more a psychological state of loneliness and helplessness that was being complained about by these seven interviewees. In particular, there were two interviewees who were only in their forties, but talked about feeling "lonely" and about how "no one understood" them explicitly. One was a widow, and the other a blind man. Though living with their extended families, the sense of having "no one to talk to" or "no one to care" could still be there for some of them. For example, a 62-year-old female interviewee acknowledged that her bodily weakness and sickness had started "about a year ago, when my son's family moved out from home." She said, "I worried about him a lot, and my neck began to ache… sometimes my mind was battling, whether I could go on like this… since then I started to have fainting spells too." Though she was still living with her husband at home, not having children around made her feeling lonely. We saw the obvious difference when her son came back during Chinese New Year; she was totally alive and smiling at everyone.

Though only one interviewee, Grandma W, talked about having nightmares, we learned that the terror started only after her daughter passed away. This kind of psychological issue, though reported discretely, is still worth noting for further exploration.

Theme 7. Social Oppression; Theme 9. Schooling Problems; Theme 10. Interpersonal Conflicts

The theme of social oppression reflected the historical suffering experienced by our interviewees. Four of them recalled details of happenings in their youth, in the era from 1930 to 1970. Grandpa SC, for example, was still traumatized by the hard work and starvation of the time of the "Great Leap fForward" and "Social Construction." Another older lady ("the five-generation orphan") also recalled that her parents died in the civil war before the Communist Party took over, and her siblings also died of starvation in the revolutionary war. She was also enlisted to do construction as a free laborer, and "had to carry the muds all night long without rest." She said, "At that time, everyone was a civic laborer, running from one place to another all night long, standing by for the orders. We worked mostly at night rather than day times. Sometimes for three days in a row without rest." One can only imagine the kind of hardship those generations went through and be grateful they are still alive to tell the story.

Sister Wang said that, in 1972, when she was 27, someone preached the gospel to her. Before marrying her current husband, she had been brought up in a native religious culture ("*gao mi xin*," as she called it). As her husband's village had an 80-year-old widow serving as the leader of the Christian group, she was inspired by her faith and would join their meetings secretly. It was during the Cultural Revolution, and all religious activities were banned, but the Christian villagers still performed the service in hiding, on a smaller scale. Sister Wang recalled that she carried her daughter to the meeting on her back. They all had to light the candles in the dark, and keep silent during the meeting. When her baby cried, she had to cover the baby's mouth for fear of being discovered by the Red Guard. This part of church history in Luquan was also confirmed by the senior church leaders in our focus group. The churches were shut down at that time. Yet the local Christian believers still carried on with their religious practices secretly, just like the Bimo tradition in Liangshan.

However, under the theme of social oppression, we found that the Yi-Bimo group talked more about "ongoing" oppression, whereas the Yi-Christian group talked predominantly about "historical" oppression. This also led us to wonder if there was a generational gap between the two

Yi groups. As we have learned, there was also a land revolution going on in Liangshan during the 1960s, but the previous Yi generation in Liangshan might not have lived to tell of the historical events after the political movements. On the other hand, in the Meigu area, we could easily find young Yi men returning from the city after working as migrant workers, largely because they were afflicted with terminal illness and not capable of migrant work anymore. Though we do not have official statistical data, just by listening to the suffering stories told by our 47 participants, we know the ratio of migrant workers who got injured or sick during their work and returned home was three to ten, Yi-Christian versus Yi-Bimo.

Theme 10, though we named it a “schooling problem,” is also a kind of social injustice issue, as it was reported by one of our blind interviewees, who couldn’t complete his schooling due to the language barrier. He said he quit going to school as “they were all speaking in Mandarin” and he did not fit in. This barrier to education for the Yi people could be a systemic problem, as educational facilities in remote villages of China are already scarce, let alone ones able to accommodate blind, non-Mandarin native speakers. The same blind man also reported interpersonal conflict (Theme 9) as he felt “hated by others” in the school and also in the city where he was training to be a masseuse. In the end, he could only return home and live with his parents, and is now aged 40. Interestingly, another interviewee suffering from blindness (Grandpa BR, see Chap. 3) also talked about being bullied by the authorities in his nursing home. This made us wonder whether blind members of minority groups, lacking advocacy and protection, were being used as scapegoats in society.

Group Comparison of Frequency of Categories of Suffering Events

In conclusion, these 11 themes, extrapolated from suffering events reported by the Yi-Christian interviewees, might also be experienced by the Yi-Bimo group, but to a different degree. In order to highlight the differences, we merged the major types of suffering events from both groups into bigger suffering categories, as shown in Table 2.3.

Following is the operational definition of each category:

1. Financial difficulties: debt, loans, fines, not enough clothing, housing problems, no income, lack of education fees, etc.

Table 2.3 Comparisons of suffering events reported across two groups

	Yi-Christians	*Yi-Bimo*
	N = 23	*N = 24*
	Sum (mean)	*Sum (mean)*
Financial difficulties	26 (1.13)	55 (2.29)
Physical illness (AIDS)	0 (0)	7 (0.29)
Physical illness (disabilities)	3 (0.13)	7 (0.29)
Physical illness (others)	21 (0.91)	21 (0.88)
Pains	16 (0.70)	30 (1.25)
Mental illness (suicide)	0 (0)	3 (0.13)
Mental illness (abnormality)	1 (0.04)	1 (0.04)
Mental illness (addiction)	0 (0)	2 (0.80)
Family death	28 (1.22)	20 (0.83)
Aloneness	7 (0.30)	4 (0.17)
Systemic problems	7 (0.30)	7 (0.29)
Migrant work problems	3 (0.13)	10 (0.42)
Accidents	4 (0.17)	0 (0)
Family conflicts	1 (0.04)	4 (0.17)
Family burdens	6 (0.26)	6 (0.25)
Interpersonal conflicts	2 (0.09)	2 (0.08)

2. Physical illness: AIDS (including those confirmed by the informant), disabilities (e.g., medically certified blindness, paralysis et al.), other medical conditions (e.g., arthritis, pains, rheumatism, tumor et al.)
3. Pains: pain/soreness over different body parts, aging problems, etc.
4. Mental illness: suicide (self and other), madness (e.g., crazy), substance addiction (e.g., drugs, alcohol, smoking problems, etc.)
5. Family death: losing near family members (spouses, parents, siblings, children, etc.)
6. Aloneness: feeling lonely, isolated, no one caring
7. Systemic problems: historical/political persecution, problems with institutions/policy (e.g., not receiving welfare, discriminatory treatment, etc.)
8. Migrant worker: work-related problems (e.g., being ill at work)
9. Accidents: natural versus unnatural accidents
10. Family conflicts: domestic abuse, running away, etc.

11. Family burdens: need to take care of other family members
12. Interpersonal conflicts: conflicts with others (e.g., bullying)

From Table 2.3, we can see that the Yi-Bimo participants reported a relatively higher number of financial difficulties (money issues) and pains than the Yi-Christian participants. In terms of physical illness, there were basically no AIDS cases reported in the Yi-Christian group, whereas participants from the Yi-Bimo group suffered from this disease at a relatively high frequency. Another noted difference in frequency of report was the suicidal thoughts or actual suicide attempts in the Yi-Bimo group, though those at both sites reported mental illness (madness) and psychological distress. Drug addiction was also a unique problem for participants from Meigu. As there could be the potential legal ramifications of reporting drug addiction, we have reason to believe that this problem is underreported. In terms of problems as migrant workers, we found the Yi-Bimo group had a higher number of incidents than the Yi-Christian group. The return of many Yi migrant workers to the Meigu area might explain why the average age of our interviewees from the Yi-Bimo group was significantly younger than that of our Yi-Christian group.

To date, three of the elderly women (grandma figures) we interviewed have passed away due to chronic illnesses. Five interviewees affected by AIDS in the Meigu area also passed away (four males, one female, with ages ranging from 30 to 40) over the period of our study. In total, eight of the 47 Yi participants we interviewed (six from the Yi-Bimo group, two from the Yi-Christian group) walked with us in the last stage of life before passing. We honored their voice in this study, and hope that this will not be in vain, but will raise social awareness of their multiple facets of suffering. At the same time, there are others who are still suffering from poverty, illnesses and pains, aloneness, family burdens, and systemic problems. While each of these sufferings is worthy of more in-depth exploration by sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists, the aim of our book is to inspire more indigenous psychologists to pay attention to those who have no voice, and to learn to construct a psychological theory that can situate the voices of suffering at the nexus of culture, cognition, and emotion.

NOTES

1. Though our book separates these three elements into different chapters, at the risk of reductionism, we have to acknowledge that they are not as linear as presented here.

References

Liu, S. H. (2011). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Sundararajan, L. (2011). Spiritual transformation and emotion: A semiotic analysis. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health, 13*, 78–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2011.547141.

Richard, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

Online Resources

More pictures for this chapter: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxcryTD_netY2dyNmZ2LWZlRDg/view?usp=sharing

CHAPTER 3

Suffering and Worldviews

Narratives of Suffering of the Yi-Bimo

Story of SX (Narrated by Yezi)

In October 2015, we met SX and her daughter for the first time, in a rented room of less than 20 square meters. Because there were not many visitors normally, the mother and daughter acted quite shyly, yet were happy to see us. The room was quite dimly lit, and all we could see was a simple single bed, and two sets of sofas. Though it was quite simple and old, the room was clean. SX chatted with us while sewing clothes. Her eight-year-old daughter was hugging a teddy bear, as though trying to put it to sleep, while running around us with curiosity.

When we first met, SX's husband had passed away just six months earlier, and she was still grieving. She often reminisced about her happy marital life, and pointed to the family photos on the wall. She told us her husband was very "competent, not only he himself migrated out to work (*da gong*), but also led other young people in the villages to work with him. Sometimes they could make up to 20,000 RMB a year." We could tell he was not only the financial pillar of the family, but also someone SX looked up to.

However, unfortunately, four or five years previously, when SX's husband was working for a utility company in Xinjiang, an illness had befallen him and he had to return home to recover. A neighbor told us in confi-

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_3

dence that SX's husband actually had HIV/AIDS. Nevertheless, either in denial or ignorant of the truth, SX simply told us that her husband had contracted "meningitis." As far as she was concerned, her husband getting sick was a supernatural event:

> while it was raining outside, [he] stood under an electricity pole and suddenly became like this. Suddenly, [he] couldn't speak, nor breathe. According to our Yi's folklore, this kind of ailment was called "si si," like a kind of rheumatism, a kind of stroke. After that, [his] nerve was not acting normally. When people were talking to him, he couldn't get it.
>
> It's like this, his limbs couldn't move, and just hung down like this. His mouth also suddenly became like this [gesturing], we didn't know why, he also couldn't eat. Ehm… everything happened just like this naturally, we also don't know what's the reasons, his nerves became not normal, and confused. I meant my husband, his fingers also couldn't curve, like this [gesturing], and stood there like paralyzed… that's how it began.

SX took care of her husband for two years during his illness. Initially, in order to heal him, they invited a Bimo priest to "perform a ritual" (*mi xin*), but there was no significant effect. Sometimes, her husband was able to start eating after the rituals, but sometimes they didn't work. SX thought maybe this was due to the Bimo priest's incompetence, so they often sought help from different Bimo priests. Overall, they spent almost 80,000 RMB on the rituals. After a while, SX felt quite helpless, and finally sent her husband to nearby cities to get medical help. In Xichang, doctors told SX that her husband had meningitis, and he was hospitalized. Each time his disease was brought under control, she and her husband would return home to Meigu. However, even during the periods of hospitalization, their family never stopped seeking help from the Bimo priests. Throughout the treatment process, SX was hopeful her husband would get better. She was willing to spend all her savings, and even become indebted to others, before giving up. She said:

> We first asked the Bimo to perform *mi xin* [ritual], later we went to hospital for check-up… until we spent all our savings then we stopped… we owed our relatives and friends 60,000 RMB eventually, and could only loan our land at hometown, in order to pay the debt.

Even though she gave her best, SX's husband could not escape his destiny. In the spring of 2014, SX and her daughter witnessed him taking his last breath. The passing of her husband drove her into despair. Since she had lost the pillar of the household, she also fell ill. She said: “After my husband became sick, my heart also became sick, because I worried too much about him.” She complained that her stomach, liver, lungs, and waist area were always in pain, and sometimes she even had difficulty moving. She was now full of grief and worry, and felt lonely and helpless. However, she said she would “fight on” and “persist,” just to survive. She told us: “I never thought that I could lose him after getting married. I had never thought that I was only left with a kid [tearing up]… If I didn’t know how to make traditional clothes, I couldn’t imagine what kind of life I would have right now. I am just a fool and mute [unable to speak Mandarin].” Actually, from what we learned, making traditional local clothes is a tough job. Each piece of clothing takes about two months to finish, and only sells for 2–3000 RMB. Even with the low-income insurance provided by the government, she can barely survive. If her housing rental increased or any unforeseen accidents occurred, her life would become impossible.

Moreover, what frustrated SX even more was that her brother-in-law had spent all the family savings on hosting an extravagant funeral[1] for her husband. She reflected that her husband had been very kind and generous to his brother, but that the brother, rather than sharing the funeral expenses, had used the money for his own wedding engagement instead. She said, “Every time I think of this, that our family is penniless, my heart feels sad… his brother was also poor, but I don’t know why he never considered my future livelihood, and wasted all my husband’s savings [on the funeral].” Subsequently, after her husband passed away, SX kept her distance from her husband’s side of the family. She felt that “even if they didn’t say it out loud, they actually despised me in their hearts.” And her family clan (*jia zhi*) certainly did not provide her with any practical help either.

In summer 2016, during our fourth visit to MG, SX had already been diagnosed with AIDS by the local hospital. Though she did not fully grasp the meaning of this diagnosis, she felt her physical condition was quite affected by her mood: “Usually, when I am happy, and my daughter is well-behaved, my body would feel comfortable the whole day. But when I think about our financial situation, my heart would be sad again, and my body would be uncomfortable the whole day.” Nevertheless, SX had a premonition that she wouldn’t live much longer, so every time she mentioned her daughter she would cry, worried that no one would take care of her after she died. Sobbing, she said, "If I were no longer alive, my dear child would be homeless, nowhere to take shelter… when I think of this, my heart feels very hurt, very hurt!… I become very emotional… if I were no longer here, my daughter might became someone else's slave…"

With our encouragement, SX began to go for the free testing and free treatment of AIDS at the Center of Disease Control. She also started to doubt whether Bimo rituals could actually cure her disease, but continued to practice them. She seldom worried about her own health, but was more concerned about her daughter, who was still in primary school. On our last visit, with her permission, we did a rapid screening test of her daughter's blood sample. When the test strip showed a negative result, she finally heaved a sigh of relief, and kissed her daughter on the cheek. She was still optimistic when we bid her farewell: "I think my body is still quite well, will not die soon." We could see she still held on to a slim hope that she would live long enough to be a mother to her daughter.

Sadly, in December 2016, we received the news that she had finally passed away (Fig. 3.1).

Story of ET (Narrated by Yezi)

It was the autumn of 2015 when we first met ET. At that time, he was only 36 years old, but his physical condition was already poor. Our informant and the local villagers were certain he had AIDS, but he only acknowledged that he got "pains in the chest, lung infections, and kidney problems." He believed he had been possessed by a kind of ghost called "ran" since being young. Therefore, he spent a lot of money asking a Bimo to perform exorcising rituals, yet he was still not well. Four or five years earlier, he had returned from his migrant work in the city to Meigu due to the sickness, and his condition had become worse, to the point that he couldn't even do farm work:

> In our Yi tradition, there was a kind of illness called *ran*, which I got affected and became like this. About 18 years old I got that disease… but could still work at that time. Only in recent years, I became worse and couldn't do anything.

When we asked him why it became worse, he kept saying "I don't know" helplessly. He explained, "I did countless *mi xin* [rituals] already, as I didn't go to hospital for check-up since the beginning. I had always

Fig. 3.1 SX, with her daughter on the right (faces were masked as requsted by the participants)

relied on the Bimo to heal me." Traditional methods seeming futile, he appeared to lose faith in the Bimo priest, and sought help from modern medicines. He somehow felt it was because of the delay in treatment that he was still suffering.

ET had a pretty big family, with six children, and his oldest daughter was only 14 at the time of our first interview. However, the daughter never went to school and is now a migrant worker making money to support the family. ET is still the pillar of the family, and all their savings were spent on trying to cure his illness. "Recently I was hospitalized in Xichang for 28 days, and spent about 18,000 RMB… there is no more money left, and we owed about 20,000 RMB to others for my medicines and hospitalizations." Besides spending money on medical bills, the family is also indebted because of large fines (extra-birth fees) for violating China's birth-control policy. "For example, some of our kids are extra-birth, and we couldn't afford to pay the fees of about 35,000 RMB, so our youngest son is still not registered for his *hu kou* (identity card) yet."[2] At a rough estimate, ET's family had debt of about 50,000 RMB, and he had also lost his ability to work. With only a few dark piglets at home, how were they going to manage? In our conversations, they told us their ways of coping, for example, "My wife would help with the house chores at home. And the heavy fieldwork, my cousins would help me to finish. My brothers also lent me 10,000 RMB, and we also borrowed money from other relatives." Yet, their biggest predicament was ET's inability to work; thus, they were unable to generate any income or savings. In our interview, we often heard the words "There is nothing I can do" ("没得办法咯") (Fig. 3.2).

During our interview, ET would remain silent most of the time. His wife stood there, next to the doorstep, and gazed at him with smiles. Their kids would run around their mother, and the scene looked very peaceful and harmonious. Unlike other families we interviewed, who always interrupted each other while talking, ET's interview was rather smooth. The family were neither talkative nor verbally expressive. However, we were unable to continue our relationship with them after the inititial interview. After May 2016, we lost touch with the family, as their phone number did not work anymore. Finally, during our visit in July, we were told the bad news that he had already passed away.

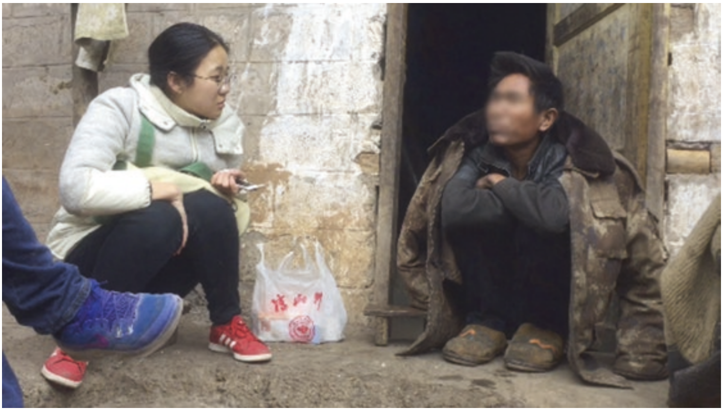


Fig. 3.2 Listening to ET's story in front of his house

This all happened very quickly and suddenly for us. We remembered his last word during our final encounter at the end of winter 2016, when everyone was wrapped up in thick clothing. He said:

> the thing that bothered me the most, is the fact that my only son, out of six of the children, is not registered with *hu kou* yet. In our Yi tradition, if your only son does not have a *hu kou* (identity), it is like you have failed your own son. Plus, all my daughters already have *hu kou*, but only my son is left out. It is like I don't have a root, so it bothers me a lot every time I think about it. Also, the debt problem, the money I owe my brother and relatives, as I can't pay them back since I can't make money.

His story had a sad ending, and his words, "There is nothing I can do," still linger in our hearts.

Why Does Worldview Matter

What makes us different from each other is our unique set of values, worldviews, and idiosyncratic beliefs. This set of core memories comes from our years of learning, socialization, and adaptation to the environment. Different ecological niches endorse different belief systems as being acceptable and adaptive (Sundararajan 2015). For example, a strong-ties society tends to value family togetherness and social capital over individual freedom and expression of discord. A weak-ties society would be concerned about the fair treatment of outsiders, and civility in public space. Such belief systems are deemed "functional and healthy" only by the group members who adopt the same worldviews. Worldviews are not necessarily universal truth or morality; if they were, human beings would not have created so many diverse religious systems or have so many conflicts over religions.

Suffering is difficult to bear, especially unjustified suffering. Religion or culture tends to find a fix for this inevitable pain in our lives, by offering a set of explanations and methods of redemption. Every human being has this innate cognitive ability to perceive, appraise, and explain what is going on in their lived experiences, including their pain. When the suffering becomes unexplainable by the existing cognitive schema, we actively expand our horizon to look for answers elsewhere, probably in religious doctrines or philosophical debates. Undeniably, Confucianism has served this religious function since antiquity among the Han majority group

(Hwang 2014), by providing a moral code to guide the Chinese interpretation of suffering and ways of healing. Yet we are not sure if this applies to other ethnic minority groups in China. In our earlier contact with the Yi community and literature, we did not see any explicit reference to Confucian writing or legends. Yi folklore mainly revolves around their ancestors and animism. Hence, we would like to explore further the dynamics of religious communities within Chinese society, from an indigenous ethnic minority perspective. In particular, we are curious as to how Yi people explain their suffering and painful experiences.

Borrowing from the concepts of culture as a particular evolving ecological niche (Todd et al. 2012) and culture as one mind with many mentalities (Shweder et al. 1988), Sundararajan (2015) proposed a cognition-based model to explain the difference between East and West. As a researcher on emotions, she proposed that Chinese emotion could best be described from a cognitive orientation that privileges "symmetry" (versus asymmetry), a concept adumbrated from Bolender (2010). She transposed the IND-COL hypothesis of culture into two axes of cognition—involvement and differentiation—the former focusing on similarities, the latter on differences. One particular contribution of our study lies in its going beyond the cross-cultural IND-COL dichotomy by showing that, within the collectivistic culture itself, such as that of the Yi people, there are differences that fall along the divide between strong-ties and weak-ties—the former pertain to the traditional Bimo tradition, whereas the latter the influence of Christianity. In the following sections, we will first explore more in depth the worldviews of two Yi communities—Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian. Then we make a systematic comparison, via psycho-linguistic analysis of the interview transcripts, of these two groups in order to shed some light on the cultural/religious differences in causal appraisals of suffering.

Bimo Worldview on Suffering and Healing

As briefly introduced in Chap. 1, traditionally, Yi people believe in animism, shamanism, and ancestor worship. They worship gods in natural form (e.g., fire gods, mountain gods, water gods, sun gods, water gods, etc.), and believe that their suffering and misfortunes come from the evil forces/ghosts. After one dies, one's soul needs to rest in peace and be sent to a better place, otherwise it will turn into a restless ghost harassing humankind. Hence, a Bimo priest is needed to act as the medium between the human and spiritual realms, to mediate blessings, or convert the curse on the family (Zhang 2006, 2008; Bamoayi 1996). According to scholars, Bimo is a kind of “native religion,” different from world religions such as Christianity or Buddhism. “Bimo” comes from the Yi language, in which “Bi” means “scripture recital,” and “Mo” means “a knowledgeable senior person.” Through performing religious rituals, Yi people believe Bimo priests can help alleviate sickness and suffering. Furthermore, Bimo tradition can only be passed down in families through male descendants.

In her interview with the local medical staff in Liangshan, Liu (2007) discovered that medical facilities in the area were not an effective channel for treating the local Yi community. There had been a lack of trust among *Nuosu* villagers toward the mainstream medical staff. On the one hand, there existed a language barrier as they could not communicate fluently in Mandarin with the staff; and on the other hand, unreasonable policies in the clinic also posed a barrier for *Nuoso* people seeking medical help. Hence, the majority of the *Nuoso* would rather go to indigenous healers like the Bimo priest for religious healing. Liu (2007) found that these religious rituals were not merely a healing process, but also a socializing event, because they had the function of mediating the relationships among family members, and improving the unity of the family clan. One Bimo told us in the interview that they also functioned as the “arbitrator” for certain immoral behaviors, such as stealing. If a thief was brought to the Bimo, that person may try to cover things up, but the Bimo has a few lie detecting methods, for instance: A burning hot stone is placed in the hand of the suspect—whether the hand sustains a burn or not determines whether the person is guilty or not.

As with traditional Chinese medicine, *Nuosu* people also inherit some traditional self-help methods from their ancestors, such as herbal medicines, inhalants, smoking, fire needles, etc. These undocumented methods are found to be effective in the prevention and treatment of ordinary health problems (Zhang 2006, 2008). Indigenous *Nuosu* healers can be divided into two groups: one group includes people like the herbalist, the masseuse, the bone setter, etc.; another group includes “witch doctors” like the Bimo priest and Suni (the ghost bouncer). Though the latter were banned during the Cultural Revolution and deemed “superstitious,” the practices were recovered after the 1980s, when the ban was lifted (Bamoayi 1996). Normally, the Suni would use a goat-skin drum to call up a procession of spirits, and they have supernatural powers as regards healing and exorcism. Bimo are usually male, and recite scriptures as a way of healing. There are several rituals of healing that serve the purposes of cleansing, welcoming the spirits, and exorcising the ghosts. Different illnesses also entail different rituals.

From our interviews with five Yi individuals during the pilot study, we also confirmed the above observation. Our participants told us they would use religious rituals if they suspected there was some “unclean spirit” attached to the illness and misfortunes of the suffering event. Especially when there was medical illness, they would attribute it to Supernatural Causes and seek traditional healers (Bimo priest or Suni). Even if there was a medical explanation for their illness, they would also request that the Bimo priest perform rituals of blessing in their households or in the hospitals. We also witnessed a healing ritual where someone working as a medical professional himself had requested help from a Bimo priest after he had suffered knee pain for two years and found no respite from Western medicines. After three consecutive days of healing rituals (where the Bimo cast the ghosts causing his knee pain into the clay models), this young man told us he felt much better, as he believed this Bimo priest was quite “powerful.”

A Focus Group Study with Bimo Priests

To study the worldview held by modern Bimo priests, we conducted a focus group with seven Bimo priests from the Meigu area. They were all well-known in the community, and a pair of them were actually father and son. Their average age was 55, and they had learned the ways of the priesthood from their immediate family members, such as fathers, uncles, or grandfathers (Fig. 3.3).

After analyzing the transcript of this two-hour focus group discussion, we divided the “hot topics” into three categories—types of suffering, explanation of suffering, and treatment of suffering. All the participants agreed that physical illness was the main type of suffering they normally treated, including stomach aches, headaches, rheumatoid arthritis, bleeding, and so forth. They said even Han people asked them for healing. The people coming to them for treatment were not limited to those with lower incomes or villagers, but included professionals and urban dwellers who would also seek their help. One Bimo priest said proudly: “Before modern China was formed, we Bimo were the only doctors who treated people without charging. Now our government gives a salary to the doctors treating illness in the hospitals. But we [Bimo] would respond immediately to help without making money, and make trips to their [patients’] homes.”

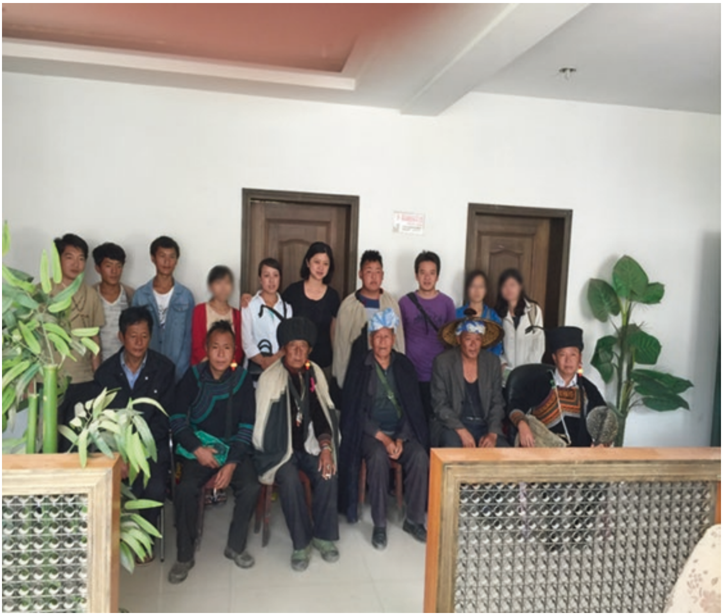


Fig. 3.3 Focus group with Bimo priests

From the group discussion, we found that many Bimo were first responders to local people's emergencies and illnesses. They normally were only reimbursed with a meal or 50–100 RMB per visit.

Besides physical illness, Bimo priests in our focus group also attended to issues related to mental illness, natural disasters, family conflicts (divorce), poverty caused by drug addiction, and so forth. One Bimo priest believed "craziness" was caused by demonic possession, and could be expelled through certain rituals. Another said natural disasters such as earthquakes were caused by the dragon god in heaven, so in order to protect the villagers every summer, they would perform rituals blessing the crops to ensure an abundant harvest. Our Bimo priests also believed that family conflicts were caused by angry ghosts who provoked disturbances within households. These kinds of angry ghosts normally resulted from the unnatural deaths of family members, and would return to harass those still living. Hence, some kind of cleansing ritual would help cut the tie with the ghosts. We also witnessed such a ritual, where the spirits of ancestors were sent off so they could rest in peace.

In terms of their appraisal and attribution of suffering events, the Bimo in the focus group endorsed beliefs in supernatural intervention, medical reasons, and unknown reasons as follows:

1. ***Belief in supernatural intervention***: A Bimo said: "In the ancient time, human beings co-existed with gods and demons. There was no need of Bimo. After humans were separated from the gods and ghosts, the first Bimo priest (Asulaze) appeared from our Yi group. At that time, trees could talk, and we could also hear the ghosts, like the way they heard us talking." This kind of supernatural intervention was still a common belief system among the Yi group, who believe in animism. It seemed like there was demon behind every rock. And it wasn't only demonic possession that was the direct cause of illnesses; sometimes "unclean objects" (e.g., old clothes, an old medal, a ring) could cause adversity. The Bimo could tell if an illness was caused by supernatural forces through a fortune-telling ritual (e.g., using an egg).
   However, not all ghosts are "evil," as some bring good luck, if their ancestors are being treated in the right way. Bimo priests could help to convert an angry spirit into a happy spirit through certain rituals (e.g., sacrificing a piglet). Bimo priests also believed that some suffering was caused curses, as they were invited at times to put a spell on a client's enemy, as a means of revenge. Lastly, Bimo priests also believed in "fate" like most of the Han people. They would refer to "*shang tian*" (heaven) as a supreme being who arranged their fate and destiny. For example, someone became a poor widow because "shang tian" made her that way, and you couldn't change that. It has something to do with the time and date of her birth as well. This belief is similar to the Taoists' belief in *feng shui* and horoscopes *(bazi)*. The Bimo believe you can change your fate through changing the things you wear, and also the arrangement of your household.
2. ***Belief in medical reasons***: Some Bimo priests told us they could not treat physical illnesses that were not caused by demonic possession or harassment. Some sicknesses were actually caused by allergies or an unclean diet.
3. ***Belief in unknown reasons***: In the focus group, some Bimo priests did acknowledge that some physical sicknesses could not be explained, either by demonic possession or Western medicine. Yet

these created somatic discomfort and weakness in the patients. The Bimo told us they also had their own ritual for dealing with this kind of Physical Discomfort, through animal sacrifices and family participation.

Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Interviews with the Yi-Bimo

The above beliefs may well represent the worldview of the Bimo religion as a whole, and they are also documented in Bimo literature. Yet, this may not represent Yi layperson's beliefs. Hence, we conducted a more thorough interview with 24 disfranchised Yi individuals (such as widowers, the terminally ill, drug addicts, HIV/AIDS sufferers, single parents, orphans, the disabled, unemployed, etc.) who resided in the Meigu area. For details of the research protocol, see Chap. 1. The results of the qualitative analysis are presented in the following section. Table 3.1 below details the themes we extrapolated from the interview transcripts:

Theme 1: Physical Reasons and Theme 11: Natural Reasons

Out of 24 interviewees, 19 reported suffering due to physical reasons. They would explain their suffering as the result of terminal illnesses and aging problems. Some would give us relatively vague answers, such as "bodily weaknesses" or "overexhaustion," whereas others would offer specific terminology such as "anaphylactoid purpura" or "rheumatism." Twenty-five percent (6) of them actually identified the root cause of their problems as substance abuse (alcoholism and drug addiction). This suggests most of the Yi participants were aware of the medical or even modern scientific explanations for their predicaments. This is quite different from our focus group's main themes, illustrated above, where most of the Bimo priests tended to believe in Supernatural Causes as the main contributing factor to illnesses. However, as Liu (2007) observed, the Liangshan Yi community has tended to adopt a blend of worldviews, falling somewhere between traditional and modern epistemology. Most of them would seek help in healing from both Western medicine and Bimo rituals. Just as the story of SX illustrated, nowadays the number of Yi people seeking Western medical explanations is increasing. In ET's case, he also felt regret at having delayed his treatment.

Table 3.1 Themes regarding the causal attribution of suffering among Yi-Bimo ($n = 24$)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Physical/medical reasons	19 (79.17)
Sickness	1 (4.17)
Side effects of medication	1 (4.17)
Aging problems	4 (16.67)
Tumors	1 (4.17)
Unable to walk	1 (4.17)
Bodily weaknesses	6 (25)
Rheumatoid arthritis	1 (4.17)
No medication available	1 (4.17)
Overexhaustion	4 (16.67)
Drug addiction	3 (12.5)
Terminal illness	7 (29.17)
Anaphylactoid purpura	1 (4.17)
Alcoholism	3 (12.5)
Supernatural reasons	17 (70.83)
Past-life karma	1 (4.17)
Disturbance of a ghost	14 (58.33)
Luck	2 (8.33)
Fate, destiny	1 (4.17)
Curses	1 (4.17)
Bad *feng shui*	1 (4.17)
Family burdens	13 (54.17)
Husband was crazy	1 (4.17)
Young children	4 (16.67)
Husband was disabled	1 (4.17)
Son is disabled	1 (4.17)
Family conflicts	2 (8.33)
Father is ill	1 (4.17)
Death of family members	5 (20.83)
Spending money in treating family members	1 (4.17)
Betrothal money burden	1 (4.17)
Husband is drug addict	1 (4.17)
Funeral expenses	1 (4.17)
Family member was kidnapped	1 (4.17)
Children left home	3 (12.5)
No insurance coverage/did not receive welfare from poverty reduction program/no compensation	4 (16.67)
Socio-political reasons	10 (41.67)
Legal system inadequate	1 (4.17)
Beaten by public security	1 (4.17)

(*continued*)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Not enough land	2 (8.33)
Poor quality of medical services	1 (4.17)
Uneven distribution of resources in rural areas (education and medical services)	2 (8.33)
Neglect by government/irresponsible employee/public security takes no responsibility/government takes no responsibility	3 (12.5)
Corruption	1 (4.17)
Birth-control policy fine	1 (4.17)
Unknown reasons	9 (37.5)
Don’t know	9 (37.5)
Lack of external support	5 (20.83)
No help is available	5 (20.83)
Financial reasons	4 (16.67)
No money	1 (4.17)
Poverty	2 (8.33)
Indebted	1 (4.17)
Migrant work issues	4 (16.67)
Migration	1 (4.17)
Overexhaustion	1 (4.17)
Poor working environment	1 (4.17)
Unable to adapt to the climate	1 (4.17)
Family clan is not powerful	2 (8.33)
Poor family clan	2 (8.33)
No family member works for the government	1 (4.17)
Interpersonal conflicts	3 (12.5)
Fist-fighting	2 (8.33)
Conflicts with the head of the village	1 (4.17)
Emotional reasons	4 (16.67)
Bad mood	1 (4.17)
Worried about family	1 (4.17)
Feeling sad	4 (16.67)
Mad at son	1 (4.17)
Personal mistakes	3 (12.5)
Did not perform Bimo ritual	1 (4.17)
Delay in getting treatment	1 (4.17)
Did not listen to advice	1 (4.17)
Cultural values	2 (8.33)
Must have a son	2 (8.33)
Ethnic conduct	1 (4.17)
Social influences	2 (8.33)
Peer influences	1 (4.17)
Environmental influences	1 (4.17)

Another similar theme is the belief in natural consequences, such as disasters or accidents (Theme 11), though there was only one interviewee who attributed their suffering to this sort of scientific explanation.

Theme 2: Supernatural Reasons

Needless to say, this belief in the spiritual realm and animism was consistent with our data gathered from field observations, analytic memos, focus groups with Bimo priests, and pilot study interviews. The explanations of our interviewees are not as systematic or informative as those given by the priests, but 14 out of 24 of the interviewees did mention some kind of “ghost” as intervening in their sufferings. Although they could not pinpoint where these ghosts come from (whether from the spirits of their ancestors or elsewhere), they all firmly believed these ghosts could only be exorcised by Bimo rituals, and not by Western medicines. Some mentioned “fate,” “luck,” and curses,” which are similar to Han Chinese beliefs in Daoism, and one mentioned about a supreme being (*Lao tian*), using the same term as the Bimo priests. While Yi-Bimo tradition overlaps with religious Daoism to a point, the former goes further—it sees ghosts behind every bush, as evidenced by HIV/AIDS cases like SX and ET.

Theme 3: Family Burdens and Theme 9: Family Clans Not Powerful Enough

Characteristic of a strong-ties society, the Yi people from Liangshan cherish their family clan (*jia zhi*) and feel obliged to share family burdens with each other. When one family member is down, the whole family is likely to be “bogged down” by it, especially the breadwinner. Five of our interviewees mentioned specifically that the absence of “men or father figures” in the households (due to “craziness”, drug addiction, etc.) was the main cause of suffering. As in the stories of SX and ET, it was quite common for the family to do their best to save the sick husband, regardless of how terminal the illness. Even though SX herself was afflicted with terminal illness, all she cared about was her eight-year-old daughter and deceased husband. She perceived her distress as coming from the loss of a “pillar” in the household. Thus, it was not surprising that 13 out of 24 Yi participants spoke about the burden of taking care of sick family members, or young children, at home. They attributed their suffering to the breaking down of family functions, for instance, paying a huge amount of betrothal money or not having manpower in the household.

Along similar lines, two of our interviewees even “blamed” their family clan for not being “powerful” enough to protect them (Theme 9). There is a belief that their *jia zhi* is obligated to give them shelter in time of need. As we mentioned in Chap. 1, the Yi from Liangshan still inherit some kind of caste mentality, where some *jia zhi* are nobler than others. If a *jia zhi* is strong, it will buffer the impact of adversities in life as it has more resources to share; if a *jia zhi* is weak, then probably they will be hit harder by unfortunate events. This worldview is prevalent among Liangshan Yi, and it is characteristic of strong-ties societies.

Theme 4: Socio-Political Reasons; Theme 14: Cultural Values; Theme 7: Migrant Work Issues; Theme 8: Financial Reasons

Even though not all our interviewees had received a formal education, they could perceive issues of social injustice to a certain degree. Just as in ET’s case, they had failed to pay extra-birth fees, which had caused much difficulty because they were unable to give a proper “identity” (*hu kou*) to their sons. The birth-control policy not only punished them for the extra-birth, but also created many barriers with respect to their children’s future education and identification. As Yi people believe firmly in family lineage and a patriarchal system, having a son to carry their name is a “must.” Not being able to bear a son, or raise a son properly, is a cultural stigma. Theme 14 also echoes this important belief in cultural value.

Besides cultural bias, our participants also perceived the failure of the welfare system as a cause of their poverty. Under Theme 4, four of them mentioned not receiving the welfare or insurance they were entitled to. Three of them talked about being neglected or dismissed by authority figures in the system (e.g., government or *danwei*), and one was even beaten by public security forces. Two of them talked about the lack of public services, such as medical and educational resources, in rural areas. One of them also mentioned corruption. Bureaucratic and systemic problems are evident in many rural regions of China, as the residents often do not know what sort of welfare payments they are entitled to. The resources tend to go to those in power, with the marginalized groups inevitably abused and exploited.

In our daily dialogue with the local informants and translators, they also told us that, nowadays, banks were reluctant to provide loans to those from Yi ethnic groups, as they assumed Yi people were unable to pay the money back. This created a vicious cycle of poverty and social problems for the Yi people, where they were deprived of resources and had no proper access to justice. Under Theme 8, only four interviewees explicitly attributed the root cause of their suffering to financial issues, although all of them complained about poverty. While poverty may be the main predicament among our interviewees, it led to other kinds of suffering, such as migrant workers, sickness, and no access to proper medical treatment. Many interviewees were aware that they were "trapped" in the system and in a discriminatory environment, and that they were exploited in their workplaces (Theme 7), yet they couldn't do anything about it, just as ET had told us. This kind of vicious cycle creates a kind of helplessness and silence which we will further address in Chap. 5, which deals with emotion.

Theme 5: Don't Know

Quite a number of our interviewees gave us an "I don't know" response (nine people), when asked about their appraisal of suffering. This might not have been due to a lack of openness with the interviewer so much as a concrete reflection of their situations. There were times when they would give us supernatural answers, but there were also times when they said they did not know. Our interviewees did not seem to be embarrassed about not having an explanation, a theme which even Bimo priests in focused group endorsed. Settling for not knowing seems to be characteristic of a cognitive style that is relatively easy going—not demanding of cognitive effort (see "low cognitive effort" in Table 1.1) in questioning and explaining things.

Theme 6: Lack of External Support; Theme 15: Social Influences; Theme 10: Interpersonal Conflicts

Five of our interviewees indicated a lack of help from others, saying "no one is helping" out there (*mei ren bang*). Unlike Theme 3, where there was a sense of entitlement when it came to obtaining help from the family, Theme 6 refers to lack of help in the general public space. The tendency to blame others and peers is characteristic of the Yi's mistrust of non-blood-related relationships. Besides governmental welfare, they seldom mentioned seeking help from friends or neighbors as an external support. On the contrary, three interviewees brought up a history of interpersonal conflicts with the head of the village and friends (Theme 10). One person even went to jail because of fist-fighting. According to the ethnographic document in Liangshan, Meigu actually has a history of "rivalry conflicts" (*yuanjia jiufeng* 冤家纠纷), where different Yi clans might be at war with each other when there is a conflict of interest (such as a married daughter being abused by her husband and returning home). Physical conflicts with someone outside the family clan (*jia zhi*) are actually quite common, as the Yi group maintains clear geographical boundaries (Lin 1947).

Theme 12: Emotional Reasons; Theme 13: Personal Mistakes

As explored in Chap. 2, Yi from Liangshan are more concrete and physical in their descriptions of suffering events. However, Internal Attribution is not entirely absent. Some interviewees attributed the cause of suffering to emotional, i.e personal problems. Four out of 24 (17%) of them attributed their illness to excessive sadness, worries, and anger. Three interviewees also internalized the blame for their suffering, which they saw as having been brought about by their own carelessness and/or disobedience.

In summary, the above themes gathered from both the focus group with the Bimo priest and the interviews with 24 Yi sufferers were consistent. The only difference was that the former group were firm believers in supernatural intervention and healing, as informed by their religious identity. The Yi laypersons, on the other hand, adopted a more diverse range of perspectives and explanations for their suffering. Besides believing in medical explanation, they would see systemic problems, family problems, social problems, and even personal problems as the causes of their sufferings. The religious explanation was also informed by their cultural identity, as their belief in supernatural intervention (ghosts) is related to their relationship with their deceased ancestors. Moreover, they could actually "revert" the impact of the spirits through manipulation of external resources (hiring ritual experts) and participation in communal activities. This will be further elaborated in Chap. 4, when we explore their help-seeking methods. Now we turn to another religious worldview within the Yi community as a comparison.

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians

Story of JG (Narrated by Huanlin)

We first met JG, 51-year-old Yi male, one afternoon in October 2015. Guided by the local informant, I entered into an "empty shell," a small, two-story house with almost nothing—only the basic structure of the room was set up, with no windows, and surrounded by rough and unpolished cement walls. Outside the room were some leftover wooden building materials. Inside the room, we found a simple table, a few old, worn-out couches, and some stools that were scattered around. It seemed this was the only space normally used for dining and resting by the family. Once we entered the room, he started relating his life story.

JG worked as a volunteer who dealt with accounting works in the nearby church. He had dark skin and was almost blind in one eye. His back was slightly humped when he walked. Even his foot contained steel nails, which caused him to walk at a slow pace, but he was not lame. There were three suffering stories he told us, the latest incident being in 2014. During the process of building his house, the supporting plank he was standing on collapsed accidentally, so JG fell from the second floor and hurt his waist and leg, in the treatment of which the doctor had left metallic bone screws lodged in there. Due to the debt from building the house, and the failure of his son to make money in another city, he didn't have sufficient savings to go to the hospital to have the metallic bone screws removed. According to JG, "It is all in God's plan. He intends to let me stay at home." This sentence was repeated several times by JG during the interview. Due to the large amount of debt from the house construction, including a government loan and money borrowed from friends and family, JG sometimes pondered "going out to work in order to pay all the debts." However, when the injury happened, he had to change his mind for the third time—"this is all in God's plan."

Many years earlier, when JG turned 30 years old, he'd thought about becoming a migrant worker again. He said to himself, "I am 30 years old, and I want to go somewhere else, get a job, and earn money to support my family." The day before he planned to leave, he went up the mountain to chop wood as usual. However, his eyes were pricked by firewood accidentally and he almost went blind. He said he did not go to the hospital, but kept praying after the accident. There were some local doctors around who gave him an anti-inflammatory injection. He was thinking at that moment, “This is God’s plan to stop me from going out to work, that’s how I perceive it.”

The first time he thought of leaving the village was when he was about 16 or 17 years old. JG’s father had passed away when he was a baby, so he was raised by his mother and grandmother. His grandmother was a Christian, and JG followed her to church services, or when she was praying or worshipping at her neighbor’s home. He was therefore deeply influenced by Christianity from a young age. When he was about 17, 18 years old, both JG’s eyes became painful, without any obvious cause. He prayed together with his grandmother, and went for an injection at the local doctor’s. However, this had no effect. There were some local treatments recommended by different people, especially JG’s mother, who told him to drink a kind of herbal alcoholic drink that she said would ease the pain. However, JG said it was forbidden to drink alcohol as a Christian, “so I told my mother, I am not going to drink, no matter how painful it is.” There was no way his mother could persuade him. JG said his mother was furious and threatened not to care for him any longer. At the same time, JG said he trusted in the Lord, and prayed to Him wholeheartedly every day. He said, “Ever since that day, my eyes were not in pain anymore.” He said, “God loves me.” From that time onward, JG became a devout believer, believing firmly that, whatever suffering he encountered, it came from the Lord’s care and love. He said, “If I went out to work, then I can’t serve the Lord at the church.” He was convinced God didn’t want him to leave the village.

Nowadays, JG’s son and daughter-in-law are working in Kunming. His wife helps with farm work at home, and JG is able to perform some simple tasks at home. The second time we visited him was on New Year’s Day in 2016. We saw him drying the carrots and corn. We intended to visit his home again during our third visit in July 2016, but that day was the farmers’ market day at SYP town, so we decided to meet in the market early in the morning. When he saw me, he ran all the way toward me. He looked completely different from the previous two meetings. Even though he was wearing an old suit and pants, he still looked neat. He told me he had been to the hospital to have the metallic bone screws at his waist and feet checked, and the doctor had told him to wait a little longer before having them removed. He also said his purpose in coming to the market that day was to sell the pigs and fix the corn machine, which was normally used to make food for the pigs. His skin looked more tanned, and his mental state seemed better, as he was occupied with the animals at home, rather than simply being involved with cooking and drying crops.

That day, after he received the cellphone from us and watched the farewell video we made for him, he gave us a big, bright smile. He kept holding my hand and said, “Thank you for coming to visit me.” Even though there were still loans and personal debts to be paid off, he said he was considering planting some tobacco, firstly to pay off the government loan, as the personal debts could wait (Fig. 3.4).

Story of BR (Narrated by Xinli)

Arriving at the nursing home for the second time, we walked upward along the familiar narrow path. On the road, there were a lot more trucks hauling construction materials, with dust drifting everywhere, than the previous time we’d visited. Opening the iron gate of the nursing home, we found it was still clean, quiet, and peaceful. Grandpa BR hadn’t really expected us to come back. He was so glad to see us that he kept fumbling around in the

昆明
交运集团
禄劝汽车运输有限公司撤营

Fig. 3.4 The RA meeting JG in front of the bus station

room, trying to find something for us to eat. After he settled down, we took out the cellphone we'd brought for him, with the farewell video we'd made, and held it up close to his ear. In the video, our conversation from the previous visit was partially recorded: "Come here, little sister. This is the letter Grandpa wrote to you." Watching the video, I couldn't help reminiscing about our last encounter, when I had been touched by the letter he had asked someone else in the village to write for him. In the letter, there were not only his good wishes and blessings to me, but also his own heartfelt feelings and reflections about his life. I read it with a lot of feeling (see Online Resources for a link to the scanned letter):

> Dear Little Sister, I never thought we would meet. After the 'Mass Dining Hall Cooperation' and 'labor camp' (*xia fang*), I grew up sleeping on the floor and almost starved to death. I didn't have clothes to wear. The old folks couldn't do much. I boiled pears to eat. Before the reopening of the churches, I suffered a lot. After the reopening of the churches, [my life] got better gradually. If there was not a God, we would never have met, since one of us is in Beijing, the other in Dega. Ever since there is a God, I came to SYP, and I never imagined you would come to SYP to visit me. We who understand the gospel really believe that it is God's plan for us to meet together.
>
> You can see me, yet I cannot see you. But I am very glad that we can meet together. Although we are far apart, yet our hearts are connected closely together. Little sister, how is everything back home? I shared the peanut milk you bought for me with all the elders who are older than me here. May you have peace. When we were together, I couldn't understand your language. Yet I blessed you with my heart. No matter what you will encounter in the future, you have to be strong. I lost my eyesight when I was four years old. I have lived in this world for over 50, 60 years. In the future, please come to visit me often while I am alive. When you come to visit, please leave me your address.
>
> I will write to you. (translated by the first author)

On the morning of October 3, 2015, the head of the nursing home first introduced me to Grandpa BR. During the conversation, I learned he was totally blind, and had no one to take care of him. Meanwhile, he is also a devoted Christian. I started talking to him to have a better understanding of him, and our paths have continued crossing since then.

From our conversations, I learned that Grandpa BR, who is 62 years old, is of Yi ethnicity. He moved with Grandpa ZY, a fellow villager, to the senior nursing home in 2008. They were among the first batch of residents. Grandpa BR lost his eyesight at the age of four because of an illness. His parents had already passed away. He has no children, only an older sister and a younger sister who visit him at the nursing home regularly. He was converted to Christianity in the 1980s due to feeling moved by it emotionally. He has now been a believer for 30 years and thought he had become "light-hearted" (*xin kuang*心宽) due to his belief. His quality of life got better too. Nowadays, every night he prays in the nursing home. Every Friday, he fasts and prays. Every Sunday morning, he goes with fellow believers to the SYP church for Sunday services and takes Holy Communion. He believes it was God's blessings that brought him to the nursing home. He also credits the government for taking care of him.

As written in the letter he gave us—"You can see me, but I cannot see you," Grandpa BR's life-long sufferings started with an unfortunate incident in his childhood. When he was four years old, he lost his eyesight because of "*Chushazi*" (locally defined symptoms). At the time, a lot of people in the village got this disease. Some lost their eyesight, some died of convulsions. After the "Mass Dining Hall Cooperation"[3] and "*Xia fang*" ("labor camp") in the 1960s, when Grandpa BR was only six or seven years old, he was always starving. He would pick wild pears or fruits to assuage his hunger. Sometimes he looked for a kind of wild grass called "Red Army grass," which could be boiled and consumed even without salt. He also picked up potato stalks to cook and fill his stomach. He struggled to survive. Later, the famine caused by the "Three-year Natural Disaster" inevitably affected his little village in Yunnan. Hunger became the common suffering and shared memory of people living in that era. Grandpa BR's blindness added another layer of difficulty to his hardship.

Because of his blindness, Grandpa BR couldn't use his hands to make a living. He could only help people grinding crops, binding corns, and sifting beans. His blindness not only limited the things he could do, but also made him dependent on others to take care of him in his daily life. In the past, his parents had taken care of him. But in around 2000, his mother and father had passed away in rapid succession. There were no other relatives besides an older sister who was married and lived far away, and a younger sister. At first, the younger sister tried to look for a husband who would marry her and live together with them so they could take care of him. But her husband, a Han Chinese, was reluctant to do so. Then Grandpa BR had to ask his friends to help by carrying some water from the river for him. Later, the friends who got along with him well went to

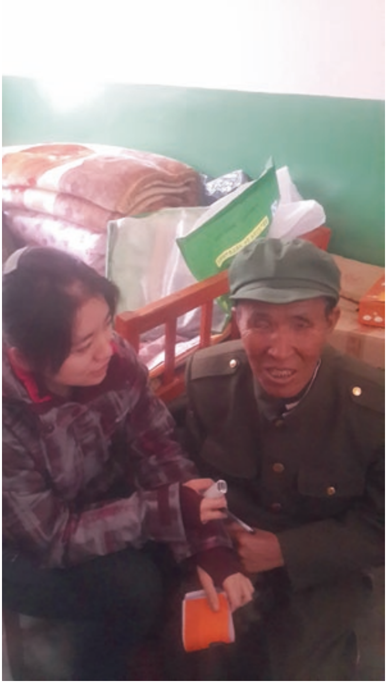


Fig. 3.5 The RA listening to BR in his room

Kunming. He then started carrying water by himself. Because he was shy, sometimes he went out to carry water at night. Because he couldn't see, he often got pricked by the thorns on the road, fell down, and hurt himself.

After the church opened, the brothers and sisters from the church would help carry water for him. He spent seven or eight years like this. Later on, the nursing home was built in SYP, and he moved there with other senior villagers (Fig. 3.5). In his heart, this was purely "God's grace."

Every Friday, Grandpa BR fasts and prays as a devoted Christian. He told us, "We all must have sincere faith in God. No matter what we encounter in the future, we must never give up our faith, then we can meet and see each other again in heaven." Grandpa BR cannot speak fluent Mandarin Chinese. He is also a bit deaf. If not for a face-to-face conversation with the help of a translator by his side, we wouldn't have been able to communicate verbally. Even when we talked in person, Grandpa

BR often felt it was a pity he could hear our voices but couldn't see our faces because of his blindness. Every time we left, Grandpa would pray to God that we would meet again according to God's plan. God became the most important source of his spiritual support, the object of his spiritual inquiry.

After the "Reform and Openness" in 1978, the churches were allowed to reopen their doors. Grandpa BR said that, after Deng Xiaoping took over, church activities resumed. From then on, he gradually started having enough food to eat. There was also more joy in his life. In his eyes, coming to the SYP senior home actually constituted an "enjoyment." To him, there was nothing that made him happier than being cared for by, and in the company of, other people. Grandpa BR credited the resumption of church activities and the opening of the nursing home partly to the policy of the government. He also believed it was "God's grace." Moreover, he also attributed our encounter as "God's grace and God's plan." He thought that if he had still been in his hometown, he would never have met us. Although he couldn't see our faces, he was very glad to hear our voices: "It feels like I can totally see you already."

In fact, Christianity was not only becoming a spiritual support to Grandpa BR, it also changed his mentality and cognition. Before he became a Christian, Grandpa BR believed that all the sufferings he experienced were due to the bad "*feng shui*" of his family. There were quite a few blind people in the nearby villages. But they all had certain skills to support themselves. Some of them knew how to weave baskets and sell them for a living, but BR did not have these skills. Yet after he became a believer, he didn't think this way. He became more accepting of his disability. Grandpa BR bought an audio player to listen to the Bible. He heard a piece of scripture that went like this: "It is better to lose an eye or a foot than your whole body being thrown into hell." Grandpa BR felt there were several types of blindness, and his disability was deemed a mild case, so he felt very grateful to the Lord. In the past, Grandpa had had rheumatism and stomach ache, but he was still feeling positive as the Lord still granted him the ability to walk, eat, pray, and worship. No matter how much he had gone through, Grandpa BR was always able to see sunshine in the midst of his sufferings. At the end of our visit, because we had seen with our own eyes that the head of the nursing home rebuked some of the other elderly residents in public, I secretly asked Grandpa BR if he was ever bullied by the head. However, Grandpa told me that, because this head was also a Christian, he treated them much better than his predecessor. He does not run into much difficulty nowadays in the nursing home.

Christian Worldview of Suffering and Healing

How does the Christian community interpret suffering? There seems to be no consensus, even among theologians, when it comes to the value and cause of suffering (Dearing 1985). But they all agree that suffering has been portrayed in different ways in the Bible, and that the meaning of suffering differs according to the context (Bromiley 1988; Freedman 1992). The diversity of interpretation in biblical narratives makes generalizations about the purpose of suffering impossible. Voster (2011) compared the Augustinian's theodicy the Iranean's theology of suffering, and argued that problems of evil could be interpreted as stemming from the Fall of creation, as well as the free will of humankind. Integrating both theological campaigns in theodicy (theology of suffering) issues, we can conclude that Christians normally agree that suffering can be the result of a sinful nature, total deprivation of humankind, a test from God, temptation by evil, punishment from God, a necessary product of the growth of faith, and a mystical experience (e.g., Job's suffering). Looking at the theology of the Luke-Acts, Cunningham (1997) proposed that religious persecution could be interpreted as the following: It is part of the plan of God; it is the rejection of God's agents by those who are supposedly God's people; the persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God's prophets; it is an integral consequence of following Jesus; it is the occasion of the Christian's perseverance and of divine triumph.

Chao (1984) divided the history of the Christian church in China since 1949 into five periods, on the basis of China's major political developments. During the first period (1949–1957), communists took control of the government in China and many church leaders were accused of imperialist crimes. Those who refused to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM)—a political movement aimed at controlling the Church's activity by mixing Marxism and Communism into Christianity—were condemned as being anti-revolutionist and were put in prison. In the second period (1958–1966), there were a few TSPM churches that were supervised by the state through the Religious Affairs Bureau. Some small underground house churches met clandestinely. Because the house-church activities were considered illegal, violators were persecuted and often condemned to imprisonment. The third period began in 1966 when the Great

Proletarian Cultural Revolution exploded and all Christians went through a baptism of suffering and humiliation. After a short breathing space and revival following the death of Mao in 1979, the 1980s saw a return to the pre-Cultural Revolution state of affairs. Though these stages give us a quick glimpse of the historical backdrop of religious affairs in China, the reality of religious persecution is not always linear and predictable.

In China, according to Zhang's (2009) doctoral dissertation, based on anthropological research on the Christians in Shan Dong province, the worldviews on suffering of her participants are not only impacted by Christianity, but also colored by the Confucian moral tradition. The Christian interviewees would emphasize the value of "endurance" and "patience" in times of suffering. Most of the Christian interviewees talked about the purpose of suffering as being to show God's salvation, as well as a testing and disciplinary action for Christians. In the first author's previous study on persecuted Chinese pastors living through the 1950–1970 Cultural Reformation period, we found similar themes to the Christians' worldviews on suffering—testing of faith, disciplinary action, and cleansing for the church. This cultural emphasis on the virtue of endurance *(ren)* is similar to Mencius' teaching: "When Heaven is about to place a great responsibility on a great man, it always first frustrates his spirit and will, exhausts his muscles and bones, exposes him to starvation and poverty, harasses him by troubles and setbacks so as to stimulate his spirit, toughen his nature and enhance his abilities (*Mencius*, Chapter *Gaozixia*)."[4] This is quite a common explanation of suffering and hardship among the Han Chinese, that suffering could shape one's character and bring greater good to the society. However, is it applicable to Yi-Christians? To answer this question, we also conducted a focus group among Yi-Christian leaders in the Luquan area during the summer of 2015.

Focus Group Study with Yi-Christian Leaders

The members of this focus group consisted of four senior Christian elders whose age ranged from 43 to 96, self-identified as first- to third-generation Christians. They were all male, of Yi ethnicity, and two of them (aged 89 and 96) had survived the Cultural Revolution period and were also related as biological brothers. The youngest participant was also currently serving as a deacon in the church, and the rest of the elders all had church-planting experiences and had attended seminary training.

Two of them told us that they were "moved by the Spirit" to believe in God: one of them came to Christ after his son got sick, and the other simply inherited the Christian tradition passed down to him. One of the group gave the following testimony: "After my daughter died, I became an alcoholic and always got drunk. One day I heard my brother singing a Christian hymn, and I was deeply moved by the lyrics, so my heart was touched, and turned to the Lord." They talked about family conflicts, physical sickness, unfilial behaviors or disobedience of children, and natural disaster (fire) as the personally experienced suffering events. On the topic of family conflicts, they mentioned the family members' disagreement on religious identity as the main source of conflict. For example, some female believers were being persecuted by unbelieving husbands, and some children would also object to their parents going to church. As Christianity was associated with Western imperialism in mainland China, this kind of discord within families is not uncommon, especially for the Yi minority group who had their own roots in the Bimo tradition.

When discussing their perception toward suffering events in life, these four religious leaders often referred to biblical scriptures and hymns to shed light on these themes—"Suffering is allowed by the Lord," "Experiencing God's love in the suffering," "Suffering is good for you," "Suffering might come from the demon possession."

One of the leaders said that when they visited some of the church members who were sick, they would try to help them solve problems or prevent future harm. They believed that "God allows suffering to happen, but as human beings, we can do something to prevent it." Another said they could "experience God's love" through suffering as Jesus Christ had overcome suffering Himself, and God would never abandon the sufferers even they went through "fire and water" (as in the hymn). The leader who had been in a labor camp said that suffering was "good" for him, because there were blessings in Christian faith—"I am still very grateful that things are better now in our country." Lastly, the leader used a story from the New Testament, about Jesus exorcising the demons in Gerasenes, to prove that they also prayed for the believers, in the hope that they would throw away "superstitious" (*mi xin*) objects and stop their ghost-worshipping behaviors. The believers would normally come to them for confession, as they believed some of their sins were the cause of their suffering.

Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Interviews with the Yi-Christians

Similar to what we did in Meigu town with the Yi community there, we also carried out semi-structured interviews with the Yi-Christian participants we selected and followed for about a year. Below (Table 3.2) are the themes related to their perception of suffering (ranked by frequency):

Theme 1: Physical Reasons

Seventeen out of 23 interviewees attributed their suffering to physical reasons, as many of them were facing some kind of illness ($n = 10$) and aging problems ($n = 8$). These are also phenomenal themes in JG and BR's narratives above. One had been blind since the age of four due to some unknown sickness; the other had been injured in an accident. Because of their illness, they could not work or make a living, which caused hardship in life. Some got cancer, some got rheumatism, and some got high blood pressure. As stated in Chap. 1, the Yi-Christian interviewees in general were much older than the Yi-Bimo interviewees (age 65.3 versus 44.3). Hence, their predicaments, in terms of aging alone, might have exposed them to modern medicine and modern knowledge about the nature of their illnesses. It was interesting to see that both sites had a similar ratio of physical illnesses, but that the types of illnesses were quite different. Both sites had equal educational background (mean = one year of schooling), and their worldviews were highly influenced by the communal tradition and religiosity. Both sites had three Yi participants (a slight difference in percentage) who suffered the consequences of alcoholism; however, only the Yi-Bimo group brought up the issue of drug addiction as the cause of their problems.

Theme 2: Family Burden/Lack of Family Support

In a strong-ties society like the Yi group, the connection with close family members is equally important in both the Luquan and Meigu areas. The percentage of Yi-Christian interviewees (11 out of 23) who talked about the burden of family was similar to that of the Yi-Bimo participants (13 out of 24). A common phenomenon in modern China is for older adults to be left behind in the country, while the younger generation move to suburban or urban areas to earn a living. This separation from children after they got married and had families was also a common complaint of our Yi-Christian interviewees. These are the people known as "gu lao" (an

Table 3.2 Themes regarding the causal attribution of suffering among Yi-Christians ($n = 23$)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Physical reasons	17 (73.91)
Being ill	10 (43.48)
Aging problems	8 (34.78)
Heredity	1 (4.35)
Alcoholism	3 (13.04)
Pains	1 (4.35)
Smoking	1 (4.35)
Difficult childbirth	1 (4.35)
Overexhaustion	1 (4.35)
Family burden/lack of family support	11 (47.83)
Separation from children	5 (21.74)
Family conflicts	1 (4.35)
Disabled children	1 (4.35)
Taking care of family members (children/ grandchildren)	3 (13.04)
Death of family members	3 (13.04)
Family members falling sick	2 (8.7)
No labor power in family	1 (4.35)
Religious explanation	10 (43.48)
Sin	2 (8.7)
God's will	1 (4.35)
God's arrangement	2 (8.7)
God's blessings	1 (4.35)
Disbelief in God	1 (4.35)
God's reminders	1 (4.35)
God's protection	2 (8.7)
God's care	1 (4.35)
God's guidance	1 (4.35)
Insufficient faith	1 (4.35)
The returning of the Lord is near	1 (4.35)
Personal weakness	8 (34.78)
Weak characters	1 (4.35)
Psychological pressures	2 (8.7)
Language barrier	1 (4.35)
Bereavement	2 (8.7)
Preoccupation with church work	1 (4.35)
Delay in treatment	1 (4.35)
Financial difficulties	6 (26.09)
Borrowing money	1 (4.35)
Lack of competitive power	1 (4.35)

(*continued*)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Making a loss in business	1 (4.35)
No money	3 (13.04)
No income	1 (4.35)
Too many expenses	1 (4.35)
Socio-political reasons	6 (26.09)
Gap in policy implementation	1 (4.35)
Birth control	2 (8.7)
Nursing home problems	1 (4.35)
Medical coverage problems	2 (8.7)
Lack of regulation in medical system	1 (4.35)
Did not receive retirement fund	1 (4.35)
Restriction in religious freedom	1 (4.35)
Historical reasons	5 (21.74)
Backward medical skills	1 (4.35)
Great Leap Forward	3 (13.04)
Construction of new China	2 (8.7)
Ending of people's commune	1 (4.35)
Revolution	1 (4.35)
Supernatural reasons	4 (17.39)
Fate	3 (13.04)
Curses	1 (4.35)
Natural reasons	4 (17.39)
Accidents	3 (13.04)
Weather	1 (4.35)
Migrant working problems	2 (8.7)
Poor working environment	2 (8.7)

elderly person who is alone) in China, and they are not supported by their children. The process of urbanization has created a generation gap in rural China, including Luquan town, and added an additional burden for the unproductive older folks, who not only have to take care of themselves, but also their grandchildren, who have been left in the country while their parents work in urban settings.

For instance, one of the interviewees told us that two of her sons were unfilial and had moved away from home after getting married. Unfortunately, the youngest son, who was a good boy and lived with them, had died in an accident and his wife had become crazy after remarrying another man. This son had two young children who had therby become homeless and had to take shelter in their grandparents' home. So, our interviewee had to pay the school tuition fees for these two children, and had basically adopted them. Yet, she was an illiterate old woman, and basically had to live on welfare from the government. She became tearful while telling us her predicament, and was very upset about the other two sons, who not only did not support her, but often came to take welfare money from her, and wanted her to take the two grandchildren out of school and put them in an orphanage. She felt very alone in this battle with her family, and could only sell some bamboo baskets in the market to earn some side income.

Theme 3: Religious Explanation

Unlike the church leaders in the focus group, who talked mainly about God's purpose in causing them to suffer, only 10 out of 23 Yi-Christian interviewees used religious doctrines or knowledge to explain their life-suffering events. In explaining the cause of their suffering, they used the "Life Review" perspective, rather than giving a direct answer to the "why me?" questions posed. In contrast to the Yi-Bimo group, who would blame almost everything on ghosts or evil spirits, this Christian group tended to bestow a new light on their suffering by assuming God loved them and allowed the bad things to happen to them. How could a loving God allow bad things to happen? This kind of paradoxical thinking might be attributable to Christian faith (as the idea of grace is paradoxical), and demand a higher abstract level of thinking. As we can read in BR and JG's stories, they would say that it is "God's grace, protection, guidance, care, glory, and mercy" that caused them to experience suffering. They would blame themselves for lack of faith, disbelief, or sinful nature, in the midst of adversity. Similar themes occurred in the focus group, and were consistent with the biblical teaching the participants had experienced. One also talked about the possibility that "the end [of the world] was near," which explained why disasters or tragedies happened. This kind of positive outlook on life, and "turning a negative into a positive" discourse was only seen in the Yi-Christian group. Even though they acknowledged God in the equation of suffering, they didn't attribute blame to Him, but give Him thanks. They even considered our meeting as part of "God's plan."

Theme 4: Personal Weakness

Like their Yi-Bimo counterparts, the Yi-Christian interviewees also attributed some of the causes of their suffering to personal weakness, including emotional and psychological issues. Two interviewees used the phrase "psychological pressure" (*xin li ya li*) in their discourse on suffering. One talked about a delay in medical treatment as being his own fault because of impaired decision-making, one talked about his weak character, and one talked about his preoccupation with church work as the cause of his low productivity. Whereas there were nine Yi-Bimo interviewees who said they "didn't know" the reasons for their suffering, none of our Yi-Christian interviewees gave such a response.

Theme 5: Financial Difficulties

Though all of our interviewees had some kind of financial difficulty, only six of them used this to explain their suffering. For example, in the story of JG, he attributed his failure in business to competition and his son's low income. He strove very hard to make a living by trying different kinds of business, yet the injury sustained in his accident limited his choices. He remained indebted to others and could not follow up with his treatment to have the metallic bone screw inside his leg removed. Though three of the interviewees stated explicitly that they "had no money" to improve their living situations, most of them felt grateful.

Theme 6: Socio-political Reasons

There is a popular saying that "only a rich man can afford to get sick in China," as the medical system is privatized and the cost of medical treatment is high. When a poor man gets sick, not only is there physical suffering, but it plunges the household into debt as money has to be borrowed to fund treatment. And then the debt cannot be paid off, as the sick person has no income. Two of our interviewees complained about difficulties with the medical and insurance systems. Two of them had also attributed their suffering to a lack of security in old age. One talked about how religious policy had restricted his career choice, as he was a devout Christian. Similar to the Yi-Bimo from the Meigu site, the Yi-Christian group also had two interviewees who were struggling with the birth-control policy, as the Yi minority group tends to favour big families and many offspring. The bureaucratic and systemic problems attributed by the Yi-Bimo participants were also evident in the Yi-Christian group. Many elders could not advocate for themselves when injustice happened, due to the language barrier and a lack of access to legal advice. So, even though they were aware they were falling through the cracks of the welfare system, they didn't dare complain about it.

Theme 7: Historical Reasons

Though this theme is similar to the socio-political background mentioned above, we decided to list it separately as several interviewees talked about some political movement that had happened in the past and was out of their control. In their narratives of suffering, some of the life events clearly happened during the revolutionary era post-1949. At least five of our participants talked about how the construction of the new China between 1950 and 1960 brought about starvation, physical turmoil, and even the death of family members. One of our interviewees said she was born a "fifth-generation orphan," and that her parents had died in the land revolution. She had to raise her siblings by herself, and was publicly beaten when she was 13 year old, during the Cultural Revolution. This was not hard to understand, as the old Yi society used to practice farming labor based on the landlord (*tusi*) system, and these were labeled "slave drivers" after the communists took over (Lin 1995). Hence, during the movement of "fighting the landlord" (*dou di zhu*), many Yi land masters were persecuted and oppressed, together with their family members. Their children were also labeled "bad seeds," and were deprived of privileges. Our interviewees had survived this dark period and recalled the hardship at that time. Another top-down policy implemented at that time that greatly affected the Yi people in Luquan was the Great Leap Forward, which demanded that all citizens participate in hardware construction, especially metal, in order to reach certain targets and qualify as an industrialized society. Hence, one of our elderly interviewees talked about how he and his peers had been forced to dig dams using their bare hands, day and night, until exhaustion took over (see Chap. 2). Though they acknowledged the physical and emotional scars left from that time, they all still gave thanks to the Lord for His protection, and for helping them survive the hardship.

Theme 8: Supernatural Reasons

Though most of our Yi-Christian interviewees in Luquan believed in God's guidance, five of them also mentioned about their cultural belief in "fate" (*ming*), *feng shui*, and curses as causes of their suffering events. For example, one elderly man tried to explain the physical disability suffered by his only son since the age of six. He said it was his "destiny" (*ming zhong zhu ding*) to suffer this kind of disease, as there was no medical cure at that time. Though he worried about having no one to rely on should he become ill, he just had to accept the fact that his 40-year-old son was still single and unable to take care of himself. Another young widow talked about her fate after she suffered an injury at work: "How did my life become like this? Why was my *ming* (fate) so bitter? I always thought, why do other people have such good life, but mine is so poor? I wonder why my *ming* became like this?" Though she did not receive compensation from her employer, she didn't blame injustice, but attributed it to her bad fate. However, there was no mention of ghosts in the Yi-Christian narratives, which was an obvious difference from the Yi-Bimo ones.

Theme 9: Natural Reasons

There were four interviewees who perceived the cause of their hardship as arising from natural accidents or weather problems. In the case of JG, though he concluded that his injury might be a message from God to stop him from leaving his home, he also rationalized it as an accident without feeling bitter. There was also an accident that had happened at work, where one of our female Yi interviewees got buried under the sand and injured her waist. Since then she could not perform hard labor, but helped out with chores in the house.

Theme 10: Migrant Working Problems

Similar to the accident that happened at work, one of our interviewees suffered from tuberculosis as a result of working long hours in a chicken-egg carton factory. He said the air was very dusty and he got "choked" all the time: "It was very smoky and dusty, like we were in a tile furnace, very filthy and dirty." After getting sick, he was sent home by his employer, without receiving any compensation. He also did not have enough saved to treat his ailment, and therefore delayed seeking medical help. Another widow talked about the loss of her young daughter as a result of poor working conditions. She said the daughter was working in a chemistry lab at the time, and "the formula was toxic in there. So she suffered some kind of brain disease and died from it eventually." In contrast to the Yi-Bimo participants who were angry about unfair treatment in the workplace, our Yi-Christian interviewees simply accepted this.

In summary, the above ten themes generated from the interview were quite consistent with the focus group study and longitudinal case study. All these themes are not discrete, but interconnected. Our interview was more or less an open-ended and exploratory study, as we did not control the types of suffering specified in the interview. Hence, the themes above were quite diverse and exhaustive, and could be representative of Yi-Christians' general worldview toward suffering, regardless of the situation. Yet, the downside of these interviews were also due to their open-ended nature, as the weight accorded to each theme (number of cases/ frequency) might not be generalizable to specific kinds of suffering among Yi individuals. We could only say that the themes were all the possible explanations we had generated from all kinds of sufferings, ranging from financial hardship to terminal illnesses. From these theological and other explanations of suffering, what can we learn about the worldviews of Yi-Christians? How about the cognitive styles that are shaped by, as well as shaping, their worldviews? To answer these questions, we turned to quantitative analysis by making a cross-sectional comparison of causal attributions of suffering between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians.

Comparison Between Religious Groups on Causal Attributions of Suffering

Methods We created a Why Scale to quantify the above phenomenological analysis of causal attributions in both Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian narratives of suffering. Derived from the themes of the interviews with those at both sites, the Why Scale consists of eight items—Systemic Factors, Social Factors, Natural Causes, Supernatural Causes, Psychological Causes, Internal Attribution, Life Review, and Don't know. The operational definitions of these Why categories are as follows:

1. Systemic Factors: political persecution, racial discrimination, economic problems, work-related (migrant work environment), social injustice, poor medical conditions, historical trauma, etc.
2. Social Factors: traditional values, family stress (lack of family support, family death), or interpersonal problems.

3. Natural Causes: disasters, Medical Causes, physical fatigue, etc.
4. Supernatural Causes: ghosts, curses, impurity, *feng shui*, etc.
5. Psychological Causes: personal emotional problems, grief, depression, anxiety, trauma, craziness, fear, stress, etc.
6. Internal Attribution: sin, immoral behaviors, moral judgment, etc.
7. Life Review: existential reflections, conclusions or complaints about one's life, as evidenced by terms such as fate, God's plan, God's will, God's grace, etc.
8. Don't know: Have no answer.

We coded each transcript following the protocol in Chap. 1. We then counted the frequency of each category and divided this by the total word count of each interview transcript to convert the raw scores into percentages for further statistical analysis.

Hypotheses According to Sundararajan's (2015) framework of ecological rationality, cognitive appraisal of emotional experiences such as suffering can be expected to differ along the divide between perceptual and conceptual modes of processing. The perceptual mode of processing is concrete and experience-bound, which is privileged by strong-ties societies, whereas the conceptual mode of processing is relatively more abstract and privileged by weak-ties societies. This difference in processing mode has its correlates in cognitive orientation. Concrete processing is oriented to the external, physical environment, whereas abstract processing is oriented to the internal, mental environment. This external versus internal difference in cognitive orientation can be expected to lead to differences in attributions of causation. For instance, in our interviews, Yi-Bimo seemed to attribute their suffering to external causes, such as supernatural forces, which require close observation of the environment, and making inferences about forces external to the self. By contrast, Yi-Christians seemed to emphasize God's guidance and lack of personal faith as causes of suffering. Although both groups relied heavily on physical and Natural Causes in explaining suffering, and both shared family burdens as strong-ties societies, Yi-Christians seemed to be accustomed to and immersed in another worldview that utilized relatively more abstract and conceptual modes of processing in comparison to Yi-Bimo.

Table 3.3 Differences between causal attributions of suffering between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo

	Yi-Christians (n = 23) (%)	*Yi-Bimo (n = 24) (%)*	
	Mean (SD)	*Mean (SD)*	*t value*
Systemic Factors	0.17 (0.12)	0.19 (0.16)	−0.54
Social Factors	0.29 (0.17)	0.24 (0.19)	−0.94
Natural Causes	0.31 (0.19)	0.26 (0.20)	−0.93
Supernatural Causes	0.00 (0.00)	0.05 (0.04)	−5.43**
Psychological Causes	0.04 (0.05)	0.06 (0.07)	−1.40
Internal Attribution	0.03 (0.05)	0.00 (0.02)	2.13*
Life Review	0.21 (0.18)	0.01 (0.03)	5.22**
Don't Know	0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.05)	−2.10*

Note: *$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

From Ting, S.-K., Sundararajan, L. K. W., & Huang, Q. B. (2017). Narratives of suffering: A psycholinguistic analysis of two Yi religious communities in Southwest China (Table 3, p. 244). *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 28,* 232–255. Adapted with permission from BRILL

Hypothesis: Due to the differences in their religious beliefs and cognitive styles, when trying to explain their suffering, Yi-Bimo would refer more to Supernatural Causes (e.g., ghosts) whereas Yi-Christians would make more Internal Attributions, such as sin and divine testing of one's faith. By contrast, the two groups would not differ significantly in their attribution of non-religious factors, such as Socio-political, Natural, and Psychological factors.

As we can see in Table 3.3, our predictions were fully supported by the results. The Yi-Bimo group attributed Supernatural Causes, such as ghosts, more often than the Yi-Christian group, who made more Internal Attributions, such as sin, but the group difference was only modestly significant ($p < .05$), probably due to the low baseline. There was an unpredicted group difference in the Don't know category. This category concerns the extent to which one is not able to come up with philosophical answers to the "why" question concerning suffering. As was to be expected, the Yi-Bimo scored relatively higher on Don't know and lower on Life Review (abstract reflections on life), in comparison to the Yi-Christian group. Lastly, as predicted, the two groups did not differ significantly on non-religious causal attributions of suffering.

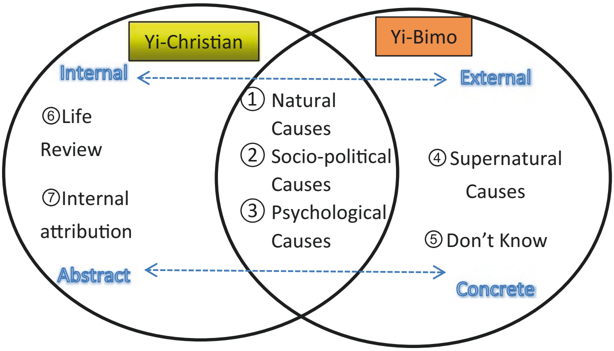

Yi-Christian
Yi-Bimo
Internal
External
① Natural Causes
② Socio-political Causes
③ Psychological Causes
⑥Life Review
⑦Internal attribution
④Supernatural Causes
⑤Don't Know
Abstract
Concrete

Diagram 3.1 Causal attributions of two Yi religions, as indexed by the Why Scale. Note: Items in the overlapping area of the two circles did not show significant group difference

In conclusion, Yi-Christian and Yi-Bimo communities share in common certain secular causal attributions (natural, socio-political, and psychological reasons), but they differ in religious worldviews, the Yi-Christians attributing the cause of suffering internally (e.g., lack of faith) and engaging in abstract reflections on and interpretations of life (e.g., fate, God's guidance, and punishment or testing by God), whereas the Yi-Bimo would attribute the cause of suffering to external forces (e.g., ghosts, evil spirits) and, when no ready answers were available, be content with "not knowing" instead of resorting to abstract speculations (see Diagram 3.1).

NOTES

1. It is Yi tradition that funerals are a communal event where members of the family clan come together with villagers for an orchestrated Bimo ritual and feasting. The family of the deceased is expected to pay for the funeral out of their own pockets.
2. According to our local informant, Meigu Yi people are allowed to have up to three children per family according to the official policy. Any extra birth beyond three children incurs a fee of about 10,000 RMB per registration. Additional information can be found in "The Regulation of Population and Family Planning in Sichuan Province" as a supplementary document for the

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, announced by the 8th standing committee of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture's Congress, No. 2 document, 2003.6.18.

3. A communist political movement, where public cafeterias were substituted for private kitchens. Everyone needed a food ticket in order to receive equal fixed amounts of food or a meal every day.
4. Excerpt from public domain, http://m.cssyq.com/t/194130.html

References

巴莫阿依 《关于彝族毕摩文化研究的几个问题》（《美姑彝族毕摩调查研究》美姑彝族毕摩文化研究中心办公室1996年编印， pp. 1–8） [Trans] Bamoayi. (1996). *A few questions about the research on Bimo culture of Yi nationality. The investigation and study on Bimo of Yi in Meigu* (pp. 1–8). Meigu: Bimo Culture Research Center Office in Meigu.

Bolender, J. (2010). *The self-organizing social mind*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Bromiley, G. W. (Ed.). (1988). *The international standard Bible encyclopedia* (Vol. 4). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Cunningham, S. (1997). *Through many tribulations: The theology of persecution in Luke-acts. Sheffield*. UK: Sheffield Academic Press.

Chao, J. (1984). Witness of a suffering church: The Chinese experience. *Evangelical Review of Theology, 8*, 73–89.

Dearing, R. N. (1985). Ministry and the problem of suffering. *The Journal of Pastoral Care, 1*, 58–68.

Freedman, D. N. (Ed.). (1992). *The Anchor Bible dictionary* (Vol. 6). New York: Doubleday.

Hwang, K. K. (2014). Dual belief in Heaven and Spirits: Metaphysical foundations of Confucian morality. In B. Turner & O. Salemink (Eds.), *Handbook of Asian religions* (pp. 47–62). NY: Routledge.

林耀华《凉山彝家》（商务印书馆,北京, 1947年) [Trans] Lin, Y. H. (1947). *The Lolo of Liangshan (Liang-shan I-chia)*. Beijing: Shang Wu Publishing House.

刘小幸 《彝族医疗保健——一个观察巫术与科学的窗口》,(云南人民出版社, 2007年). [Trans] Liu Xiaoxing. (2007). *The medical care of Yi people: A window for sorcery and science*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Publishing House.

Shweder, R. A., Goodnow, J., Hatano, G., LeVine, R., Markus, H., & Miller, P. (1988). The cultural psychology of development: One mind, many mentalities. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Theoretical models of human development* (Vol. I, pp. 865–937). New York: Wiley.

Sundararajan, L. (2015). *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

Todd, P. M., Gigerenzer, G., & The ABC Research Group. (2012). *Ecological rationality: Intelligence in the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.

林耀华《凉山彝家的巨变》(商务印书馆,北京，1995 年). [Trans] Lin, Y. H. (1995). *Liangshan Yi Jia de Ju Bian*. Beijing: Shang Wu Publishing House.

张仲仁 《彝族宗教与信仰》(昆明:云南民族出版社，2006). [Trans] Zhang Zhongren. (2006). *Belief and religions of Yi people*. Kunming: The Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan.

张纯德 《彝族原始宗教研究》 (昆明:云南民族出版社，2008). [Trans] Zhang Chunde. (2008). *The study on the primitive religions of Yi people*. Kunming: The Nationalities Publishing House of Yunnan.

张爱辉 《山东省烟台市区的基督教徒苦难观研究》(山东大学博士论文，2009 年). [Trans] Zhang Aihui. (2009). *A study on the Christians' idea of suffering in Yantai city of Shandong Province*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Shandong University of China, Jinan.

Voster, N. (2011). The Augustinian type of theodicy: Is it outdated? *Journal of Reformed Theology, 5*, 26–48.

ONLINE RESOURCES

More pictures for this chapter: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxcr-yTD_netVmZlZ3hqWXVhNlU/view?usp=sharing

CHAPTER 4

Help-Seeking in Suffering

REFLECTION OF THE FIRST AUTHOR: ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MARGINALIZATION

After the field trip in July 2016, I planned to spend a six-month sabbatical in the States while attending conferences and wrapping up the data analysis of this study. However, I went through the crisis of losing my backpack and cash in Paris in August, and losing my travel documents and personal belonging in Vancouver in November due to burglary. This series of unfortunate events not only caused a lot of inconvenience in my life, but also disrupted my plan to rest. My subjective well-being and immune system plummeted very quickly and I sensed a loss of control in my life. I couldn't return to California to continue my exchange scholarship at my alma mater; instead, I was forced to return to my own home country to apply for a new passport. During this process, I felt acutely the pain of being a citizen from a third world country, as well as the power differential between skin colors. In the American embassy, I felt I was being interrogated and discriminated against as a "refugee," and could only "beg" for a chance to get my visa to re-enter the States, though I could provide all the valid and legitimate proofs of my status. The Chinese-looking officer in the consulate literally yelled at me when I was mistaken for another applicant from Vietnam. Meanwhile, the Caucasion-looking officer at the next window was speaking gently to all the applicants. Internalized racial

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_4

discrimination against people from the same ethnic background actually looks more brutal than when it is directed at "others."

While going through this experience of marginalization, I was reminded of the Yi participants and their stories of suffering. Though I was actually traveling in the "tenth most desirable city in which to live" on earth, suffering caused by crime could still happen here. Some said it was the drug addicts that smashed the window of our car and stole my handbag inside. The police officer said this kind of crime had happened quite a lot in the past ten years, and Chinese tourists were easy targets as they always traveled with cash. Some said Vancouver had changed in the past ten years after an influx of illegal immigrants from all over the world. I was thinking that being labeled a "criminal and drug addict" was quite a familiar experience for our Yi people in China. Was it for the same reasons that they were being treated as "illegal immigrants" in the big cities? As we know, when Yi workers from Liangshan lost their "identification" and "support system" after leaving their *jia zhi*, they also became more vulnerable to peer pressures and power differentials. Not only did they face language barriers and culture shocks in the big cities, but they were not treated fairly by employers, and were sometimes misunderstood. When the feeling of frustration built up, without a proper channel to express their anger, the aggression might cause them to commit crimes or take drugs to regulate their emotions. This hypothetical theory became a vivid experience for me after I became a so-called "illegal immigrant" without my own travel documents.

Although I never got a chance to interview the burglar and thieves who stole my belongings, and knew nothing of their ethnicity and background, I did not feel resentful toward them. This was partly because, after I was robbed, I realized I might have become "one of them" if not for the fact that I was being helped and housed by my relatives in Paris and Vancouver. As a foreigner traveling in a foreign land, with everything that could prove my identity gone, and official power not on my side, survival instinct might have made me start "stealing" from innocent people with the justification that I was also "a victim." Luckily I was well supported after the robbery. But what about the Yi people? After their ancestors' lands were taken away in 1949, and their landlords were labeled as the "black five," and their children were deprived of educational opportunity, had they thought, because society had mistreated them, that it was "only fair" they fight for their rights? Or had they been socialized to believe it was their fault for being "Yi," a "lazy and evil" tribe? Were they truly as "ignorant and violent" as the Han government thought? What had they done to seek help in the midst of their suffering?

I remember vaguely, one of my RAs telling me that a 16-year-old Yi male from Liangshan had sent a message to her cellphone reminding her to "beware of burglars" in Chengdu station, as he himself had been robbed there and cheated out of a few thousand RMB. As a young migrant worker, he was also a "victim" in mainstream society, but he cared enough to warn us. Many of our Han Chinese friends actually warned us about Yi people, due to the stereotype they saw in the public media. After getting to know them and making friends with them, I couldn't help but feel badly for Yi people in China. Their drug and alcohol problems were being misinterpreted as "ethnic problem," rather than "social" ones. As is the case all over the world, when terrorism and crimes happen, minority groups and refugees in the big cities always become scapegoats and are deprived of their freedom and dignity. Very often, mistrust from mainstream society is countered by mistrust from the marginalized groups.

We interviewed a mother in Meigu who told us that her husband had committed suicide because he felt "ashamed" of not being able to pay the fine for his extra-birth son. And there was another father with AIDS, who was worried his son would not get his *hukou* (identity registration) because he still had not paid off the extra-birth debt. Without *hukou*, the son couldn't go to school and would in effect be an "illegal immigrant" in his own land. Another Yi mother insisted on having a third child because the first two children were girls, despite her husband having contracted AIDS. And there was a grandfather who had recently lost his son to AIDS, and found out his only grandson was also HIV positive. He and his wife decided he should take a second wife, so he could "breed" another healthy son, to pass down the "root" of the family. How can one say this is an ethnic minority that is "lazy and violent," after witnessing their striving for familial and cultural dignity?

Religious Coping Versus Help-Seeking Behavior

In the previous chapters, we've talked about how different Yi religious groups hold different worldviews and have different experiences of suffering. In this chapter, we will continue to explore the narratives of suffering to look at their help-seeking and problem-solving behaviors within their unique ecological niche. In addition to coping behavior, we are looking at both internal and external manipulations of resources in the environment, including prayers and communal participation. Instead of "healing methods," we will include those help-seeking methods that might not be so effective or adaptive in Western culture (e.g., keeping quiet and accepting fate), and try to interpret them from a Yi cultural standpoint. Without imposing our moral judgment as regards what is "helpful or not," "good or bad," "therapeutic or not," we believe that different Yi religious groups capitalize on different beliefs and available resources in their environment to reduce the pain and suffering of themselves and their loved ones. Hence, in this chapter, we will focus on how traditional and modern resources in Yi communities are being utilized as part of the help-seeking process. Building on the psychological theory of coping, and sociological theory of social networking, we attempt to construct a model of help-seeking that takes into account cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions.

In America, religion has been shown to have far-reaching ramifications for physical health, psychological well-being, health behaviors, and feelings of efficacy. The term "religious coping" has become prevalent within the discipline of psychology of religion over the past decade. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that one of the moderators in facilitating positive growth from suffering is a personal religiosity, including religious practice, religious belief, and involvement in a religious community (Stone et al. 1988; Ganzevoort 1998; Fabricatore et al. 2000; Nooney and Woodrum 2002). There have been many different coping methods explored in Western literature—active versus passive, problem-focused versus emotion-focused, positive versus negative, and cognitive behavioral versus interpersonal and spiritual (Harrison et al. 2001). Yet, all of these results are based on Western samples, which are predominantly Christian.

Kenneth Pargament, an American psychologist, conducted many empirical research on the religious coping styles and their psychological among Christians since the 1990s. Three dispositional styles of Christian coping were proposed by Pargament et al. (1988): (a) a self-directing style, described as a problem-solving approach in which the individual is active and God is primarily passive; (b) a deferring style, characterized as a stance in which a person passively waits for God to take care of everything; and (c) collaborative coping, wherein an individual works in active partnership with God to resolve problems. Some scholars also identified "surrender," an active choice to relinquish one's will to God's rule, as another distinctive style of coping among Christians (Wong-McDonald and Gorsuch 2000). Later on, Pargament et al. (2000) identified 17 types of religious coping methods and grouped them into five categories—finding meaning, gaining control, attaining comfort and closeness to God, gaining intimacy with others and closeness to God, and achieving a life transformation. However, all of these coping styles are using "God," the deity figure, as a reference point. So, what if a religion does not emphasize a "relationship with God" or "unity with the spiritual presence or the universe"?

Therefore, in cross-cultural psychology, scholars have demonstrated that religious coping presents differently across different religious groups and cultures (Putman et al. 2011; Ting and Ng 2012; Abu Raiya et al. 2008), and even resilience after disaster was linked to cultural and religious factors (Fernando 2012). All these literatures point to a clear conclusion—different religious groups employ different sets of coping behaviors. However, past research focuses almost exclusively on the mainstream religions of the world, including Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, while the other indigenous faiths of ethnic minorities have been largely neglected. Especially in Mainland China nowadays, religion is still a taboo subject for many local psychologists. Most of the Chinese researchers still analyze religious behaviors from the point of view of Marxist economic theory or Freudian psychoanalystic theory. The significance of religion has been downplayed as there is an unspoken fear of associating it with "superstitions" (*mi xin*) and "cults." The research on religious coping has not been systematically carried out in China, as its underlying assumptions that religion is important (or even valuable) to humankind would contradict the national socialist-atheist ethos. Hence, it is imperative to examine the role of religion in Chinese daily life, especially as relating to those ethnic minorities living within a strong religious tradition.

The first author also conducted a qualitative interview with ten persecuted Chinese Christian leaders who lived through the Cultural Revolution, and found they had adopted an internal set of religious coping mechanisms—embracing suffering as part of their identification with Jesus (Ting and Watson 2007). The virtue of endurance has been seen as a positive way of coping in these studies of Chinese Christians. However, we are not sure whether the concept of "religious coping" can be generalized across cultures, especially to a minority group that is underserved and understudied. Sometimes the coping might not be an individual endeavor, but a communal response to a disaster. Also, the assumption of "redemption" and "transcendence" is unique to the Christian faith, whereas native religion and a spiritual tradition like Bimo might seek "harmony" with the ancestral ghosts or nature spirits as a way of healing. Hence, in order to avoid imposing the Western value of "individual coping" on Yi minority groups, our study includes the sociological and cultural aspects of help-seeking behaviors, and the problem-solving approach toward suffering.

Religious Communities in the Yi Ethnic Group

As we pointed out in Chap. 1, the Yi ethnic minority belongs to a collectivistic cultural system. In this chapter we want to further inquire about the kinds of social networks the two Yi religious communities rely on in times of difficulty. Would they go to family members or the religious community for relief? Would they seek secular help or religious help in time of difficulty? Although both Yi communities are very much family-based, the Yi-Bimo group has a long history of foregrounding the importance of the "*jia zhi*" (family clan) and "family name," resulting in clear boundaries with regard to outsiders. It would therefore be much harder for them to seek help beyond their clan. In contrast, the Christian tradition emphasizes the "body of Christ," which incorporates non-kin members into the "family," and seeks "communion" with other church members. It seems likely that Yi-Christians would hold similar beliefs and have a greater openness to people not connected to them by blood ties, and draw their social resources accordingly.

According to Granovetter (1973), strong-ties refers to social networking based on kinship, and weak-ties on a community of strangers who are related by some form of membership (of a church, etc.) rather than by blood. Informed by this useful distinction in social networking, we were interested in finding out how the novel elements of Christianity (such as relative openness to strangers) faired in the Yi-Christian community, and whether these uniquely Christian elements were applied by the local population in dealing with suffering. What were the similar and contrasting religious behaviors in the aforementioned Yi religious communities when they experienced suffering? Would Yi-Christians rely more on a weak-ties approach than Yi-Bimo when seeking help?

All six Yi-Christians interviewed for the pilot study utilized a problem-solving style in times of suffering, especially medical illness. They would actively seek medical advice and intervention when they or their family members were sick, and actively seek financial help in times of financial difficulty. Many of them quit school at a young age due to poverty and family hardship, but they did not give up trying to advance themselves, working hard in an urban setting. They would also utilize prayer and endurance when facing hardship. In comparison with their Western counterparts, who often exhibit a sense of entitlement and blamed God for their suffering, Yi-Christians did not expect God to improve their living standards, or expect Him to come and "fix" their problems. Our Yi-Bimo interviewees also utilized personal endurance and made compromises (e.g., quitting school) in response to poverty. All five of them had sought help from Bimo priests to perform religious rituals in times of difficulty. They also sought help from close family members and friends to reduce the financial burden, as did Yi-Christians.

In general, Chinese society favors strong-ties, while Western society embraces weak-ties (Sundararajan, 2015). Our research seeks to further differentiate the Yi Chinese communities along the strong-ties versus weak-ties continum, and to see if a so-called "imported Western religion" changes responses to suffering, even among ethnic minorities. Thus, instead of adopting the set of coping methods found in Pargament's research (2000), which are mainly based on Christian samples from the West, we chose to look primarily at the difference among Yi people in their ways of help-seeking.

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Bimo

Story of YX (Narrated by Xiaoyu)

An apple tree stood in front of the entrance to the home of YX, and after ascending a few steps, we entered a small open-air courtyard. Clothing was hung up to dry, and in one corner the traces of poultry were visible. The first room connected to the courtyard was utilized as a living space. Compared with the Yi ethnic homes we had visited previously, where the connecting rooms functioned to receive guests, as sleeping quarters, and to prepare meals, the layout of YX's home was different. They had already partitioned off the bedroom and placed the kitchen off to the side of the courtyard. The house, being built of cement, seemed simple and crude but was still rather tidy. YX sat facing the interviewer and spoke at a rapid pace when explaining the affairs of her family. She seemed nervous, and the interpreter had to wait for her to finish long paragraphs before linking together what had been said. During the first five minutes of the interview, she rarely made eye contact. Perhaps we were still not familiar with each other; or, she was still quite nervous. However, in part due to the interpreter's participation, the distance between the two parties gradually lessened.

YX was alone at the time of the interview, as she is a widow with three children. Her eldest daughter lived at a famous county boarding school for ethnic students and only occasionally returned home during longer holidays as the cost of transportation was 80 RMB. The younger daughter and son attended elementary school and kindergarten, respectively, returning in the afternoons. According to YX, her husband passed away from leukemia in November of 2015. Up until two years before his passing, he had worked as a construction worker in Beijing, and her family lived well. But then her husband started to suffer from frequent nosebleeds. At first they told themselves, "We Yi [ethnic minority] simply don't worry about nosebleeds." However, after a health check-up in Beijing, he was diagnosed with leukemia. She suggested to him, "Lets sell our land and move to Beijing since their medical facilities are better." He refused, however, saying that leukemia was difficult to treat, and if they sold off their land, their children would have nothing to eat and live in dire poverty. She told us, "At first we thought we had a problem with ghosts and performed some *mi xin* [rituals]. But it didn't help. After seeing the doctor, we knew it was leukemia, but we didn't have money for treatment. My husband said he would find work to pay for the treatment, but the disease was already worsening."

When we asked how the Bimo priest explained her husband's illness, she replied, "The Bimo priest said his relatives [those who had passed away] were bothering him… The priest was speaking carelessly, just irresponsibly. The doctor ended up being right." She continued, "The Bimo priest said the ritual would help him, but it didn't. The doctor said things would not improve, so we simply did what wasn't going to work [by going to the hospital]." However, the treatment in the hospital did not last long. YX first took her husband (YQ) to the Second Hospital in Xichang, but they were unable to treat him and sent him to the First Hospital. Doctors at the First Hospital said something similar and sent her husband to ChangAn Hospital. The hospital rooms were tightly packed, and they were forced to spend the first night in a hotel. Fortunately, a friend who was receiving his monthly shots was able to offer his bed to YQ. After four nights at the hospital, his stomach began to swell. The doctor said a single blood transfusion would cost 3000 RMB. "We were hopeless and couldn't do anything. Our only option was to sell our land for 50,000 RMB [to pay for treatment]," YX told us. Her husband felt better after six days of hospitalization. But soon afterwards, 20 days after being discharged, he passed away.

Whenever she thought of her children, YX became anxious. Before his death, YQ had been able to work for some wages, but they had now sold off their land. Her children still had living expenses, tuition, and other various costs to attend to. Her son began to show symptoms of what the Yi call *niganbo*—an irritated forehead and inflamed corners of the mouth—soon after the passing of her husband. Fortunately, YX's brother got some income from migrant work, and was able to bring her son to Chengdu and Guangzhou for treatment. During our second visit to the home of YX, we could still see the black scar on her son's chin.

YX was worried about the situation regarding her children to the point of not sleeping well. "Those families that have a husband can earn from 100 to 200 RMB every day. I just wish I could work as well, clothe my children, have food to eat and obtain everything we want to get. We survive but can't improve our lives in any way, so my heart still feels quite bad for them." Regarding her children's education, she added, "We are not like the Han [ethnic minority], as when Yi children reach the age of 13 or 14, they will go out and work just to survive. But if they quit school and work, these children will become 'mute' [illiterate]. Right now we are already 'mute.' If they quit school now, they won't learn anything, but only how to work as a laborer. Because I am a 'mute,' I want my children to study, but there are too many obstacles for them to continue. For example, a relative of mine just passed away so we have to give *erpu* [funeral money]. Also, we need to pay health insurance and senior insurance. However, there is no one at home able to earn a wage and, at the same time, we have too many expenses we need to attend to."

We were able to find financial aid for the elder daughter in March of 2016. YX, with the help of her second daughter, who was acting as translator, expressed her happiness and gratitude. She mentioned her elder daughter could now return home any time she wanted, without worrying about the transportation fee. Despite being only a second grader, her second daughter's grades were remarkable and she had won a 300 RMB scholarship. We were occasionally able to talk with the elder daughter when she returned home, and the majority of our conversations were regarding her studies. She mentioned, for example, that it was rather strenuous at the beginning of the semester due to language barrier. When the interviews first started, YX had participated by merely answering our questions, but now she was actively inquiring, via her daughter's translation, about the progress of our work, our own health, or when we would return to Meigu.

When we visited her again in July 2016, YX's status had improved significantly. After undergoing a gynecological procedure, her doctor had suggested she rest. She limited the amount of farm work she did and primarily attended to household chores. At that time, the elder sister had yet to arrive home for summer vacation, so we met with YX, her second daughter, and her son for the better part of a day. Once again, through the help of translation, she remarked, "If you could speak Yi, I would have so many things to talk about with you." While conversing, she walked over to the apple tree in front of the entrance to pick apples for us as a gift (Fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1 YX smiling at us during our second visit in summertime

During our follow-up phone call in August, YX said they were participating in a relative's funeral. When asked who was helping them at home, she replied that her children's uncle (on her side) had helped substantially and the remaining tasks were quite minimal. She continued to worry over the future studies of her children. The elder daughter would progress to junior high school, and the tuition would certainly increase. She shared her disappointment that her youngest son was unable to attend the county's school for orphans—these children were eligible to attend school at no cost. The reasoning was that, at the time of registration for the school for orphans, her son's *hukou* registration had shown his age as a year younger than his real age. The school wouldn't admit the son because of the mistaken birthdate. In order to receive the benefits provided by the county policy, they would have to wait until the following year.

When we called her again in October 2016, YX told us that she had been suffering from headaches recently. Therefore, she had bought a goat for a Bimo healing ritual, and afterwards the headaches got much better. In addition, her elder daughter also called and invited us to celebrate Yi New Year with them in November. Her own studies were proceeding smoothly and she was able to tutor her younger brother in basic Chinese alphabet pronunciation.

Story of HZ (Narrated by LYS)

In 2015, HZ turned 19 years old. He was the second child among three boys. His father was deaf and his mother was often ill. Both of them were unable to work. HZ was the only means of financial support for the family. When he was in second grade, he quit school and started working in the city in order to finance his other brothers' education. He is the only *Nuosu* youth in Meigu I have come across who actually migrated and worked by himself.

Our local informant was the school classmate of HZ's brother. She told us HZ was the most responsible brother in his family. She brought us to his home in a village on the outskirts of Meigu. As there was no one to take care of HZ's sick mother, he quit his job at an electronics company in Guang Zhou and returned home to take care of his mother in September 2015. That was how we came to meet him. He kept a distance during our first encounter, but warmly shared the fresh walnut from the garden with us. After a while, he gradually lowered his guard and started to talk about his experiences and stories:

> My parents are too old to work. They also need to be taken care of because they are sick. That's why I am here. At this moment, I do not know what's next—stay home and do some farm work, or find a job in town? If I come back to take care of my parents, I can't work. I need to borrow money to pay off the school tuition of my brothers… Whenever I think of all these, I get real bad headache… When I worked in Guang Zhou, the factory paid me 10 RMB per hour. There was no salary even if we worked overtime at the weekend. I needed to give 2500 RMB for my brothers every month as school fees and living expenses. I only allow myself to spend 500 RMB every month. If my brothers needed more, I could not do much. I could only give them 2500 RMB even if they called to ask for more.

HZ spoke Mandarin fluently. The talking pace was slow but with good articulation. He gave helpless smiles from time to time. Normally, *Nuosu* Yi from this place would form groups of migrant workers with other villagers, or be introduced to certain jobs by relatives and friends. HZ was the only participant who went out hunting for a job by himself. Eventually we learned his reasons in a phone conversation in February 2016:

> I left home as a migrant worker when I was 14 years old. Even though I was afraid, I chose to be on my own. In our village, my neighbors and their childhood mates all got sick because of drug addiction. When they went out to work together, they got into drug addiction together. Their families had money, so even though they had this bad habit, there was not much of consequence to worry about. In my case, I can't afford the risk. I need to support my brothers' education; my parents are aging and poor. Everyone is waiting for me to get a job.

November is usually the Yi New Year. According to their tradition, Yi people return home to celebrate it with their families. After the New Year, young people leave home and continue their jobs in the city. Yi people in Meigu believe that the Bimo's ceremony protects the health and safety of the whole family. Each year, HZ must participate in the communal "blessing ritual" (*bao ping an*) in the village with his family before he leaves to work again.

Ever since he can remember, this annual "blessing" ritual has been an essential rite for HZ's family, as Bimo ritual and Yi ethnic minority identification are inseparable. Bimo religion is made up of the native beliefs HZ and his brothers' generation have inherited through the family lineage. This constitutes his spirituality and also represents his wish for well-being for himself and his family. He said, "In two days I am leaving to work. On the 25th, we already asked the Bimo to perform *mi xin* [ritual], regarding my mother's health. We waited for my brothers returning home [from school] and do *mi xin* [ritual] together… It is impossible not to do *mi xin* [ritual]. We, as Yi people, must perform *mi xin* [ritual], to secure the health of our family. Every family here performs *mi xin* [ritual]."

In December 2015, HZ transferred from Si Chuan to Jiang Xi province and worked on a construction site. He told us, "One of my friends also stayed here, the food and accommodation were being covered. However, it was cold here. I had worked at the site more than 20 days. This project is ending and I will go back on 20th January." Later it snowed heavily in Jiang Xi, and finally, due to fatigue and coldness, HZ fell ill. He did not recover after taking medicines for about a week. He returned home to Liangshan and asked the Bimo to perform the healing ritual for him.

Within this past year, HZ had worked as a construction worker, electronic gadgets factory worker, and a few other jobs. Because of the unexpected changes in work environment (such as unpaid wages, shortage of working days, being sick, factory closing down), he did not have a stable job. Also, his ethnic Yi identity had caused him some confusion. One time, he said, when he was searching for a job on internet, he read there were people who actually disliked Yi people and would not employ them. He also told me he had often been rejected at job interviews when his potential employers saw his name written in four Chinese characters, and discovered his Yi ethnicity from his identity card. When we asked him what he made of this, he said, "It's okay. In the past when I came to a new place, I did not have friends. Gradually I started to know more people. Even though I am Yi, they learned that I am actually a nice guy. Then they started to make friends with me." Later, HZ told me he used to have a stable job (Fig. 4.2). "The owner was from Hong Kong. It was a toy factory. The owner was very nice and did not discriminate against Yi people. However, the factory was shut down and the owner was not able to offer us another job."

When reflecting on the various obstacles he had encountered doing migrant work, HZ said they had arisen because "I do not have any talent, no proper education, I cannot read." He therefore asked our RA to teach him some Chinese characters. After work, he used the time in the dormitory to read news in order to improve his word recognition.

In July 2016, we visited HZ in Meigu. HZ told me his childhood dream was to become a soldier. "This year I am 20 years old, I cannot

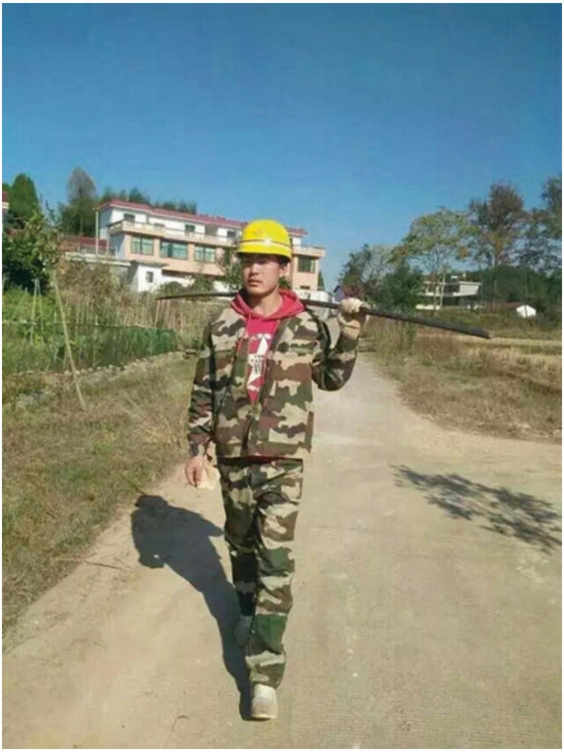


Fig. 4.2 HZ on his construction site

enter the military if I am over 21. Also, my elder brother has graduated. I need to seize the chance." However, he worried he would not be qualified as there was corruption in Liangshan. There were many rich people who used money to buy the soldier quota. HZ finally came to a decision: "Anyway, I should just go for it so there is no regret in future." Therefore, he quit his job to wait for a physical check-up and examination at home. He told me he had used his precious savings to buy a fake certificate from some high school, which cost him 3000 RMB. Only with the certificate of graduation would he be qualified to register for military service. We bought a cellphone as a present for him. In the phone was the video made by us of our interview with him. While he was watching the video, he covered his face twice, the tears dropping between the fingers. We teased him that we had never seen him cry, even though he had faced so many difficulties in the past. He said he was actually moved to tears.

Even after he registered for the exam, HZ still worried whether he would pass the physical check-up because he used to skip meals as a migrant worker and had gastric problems. In August 2016, he got the result of the physical check-up. Unfortunately, he hadnot qualified. He spoke with a tone of disappointment: "The doctor said my heart was not well, but I knew my result from the first physical examination was fine. I know those people want bribery from me, but I could not afford it. The successful candidates were those from well-off families. They took away the quota of others. I blame myself for not being capable, so the chance was taken by others. Now I cannot do the things I always wanted to. Anyway, this is how is it. I can only try my best… As a man, I need to have courage in difficult times. Without courage, nothing is possible. With courage, everything is possible." Eventually, HZ went to Shanghai to find work again.

A Focus Group Study with Bimo Priests

As discussed in Chap. 3, we did a focus group with Bimo priests to inquire about their views on sufferings, but many of them told us how to "cure" the problems using different Bimo rituals. There was also a book published locally in Yi script regarding the procedures by which different rituals dealt with certain problems (e.g., sickness, family conflicts, weddings, funerals). In the group, they also showed us the handwritten scroll of scriptures they would cite on different occasions. In terms of help-seeking behaviors, aside from the Bimo priests, who are predominantly male, Yi people in the Meigu area would also seek help from Suni (a female witch) to solve their problems if they thought there was a supernatural reason for their suffering. In the group discussion, the Bimo priests acknowledged that not all problems could be fixed by them, because some illnesses are not caused by ghosts. They do not oppose the alternative of seeking help from Western medicine if their clients choose to do that. However, they believe that "some of the illnesses are not able to be treated by the doctors," as there had been cases in the past when Bimo priests had successfully treated patients who had dropped out of hospital. They view the relationship between modern medicine and traditional religious rituals as complementing each other. Another topic of discussion in the focus group was the treatment for drug addiction and HIV. Bimo priests said they did have religious rituals for drug addicts, but not AIDS, because the latter problem came from the "outside world." Their traditional scriptures did not document problems with AIDS, hence they concluded it was a modern problem brought back by the returning Yi migrant workers. The group became silent when we inquired about their ways of helping HIV patients. Then a Bimo priest told us that they could function as "supervisors" in the drug rehabilitation process. He said, "We would kill a chicken, and give the blood of the chicken to him [the drug addict] to drink. This is to warn him, if he continues to take the drug, he will end up like this chicken. And we would reinforce this message by getting the whole family to watch him in this drug rehabilitation process." In conclusion, "family" and "rituals" are two inseparable methods of help for the Yi-Bimo community.

Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Yi-Bimo Interviews

Through thematic coding of the semi-structured interview transcripts (see Chap. 1), we consolidated 11 themes relating to various aspects of the problem-solving and help-seeking approaches (see Table 4.1).

Theme 1: Seek Medical Help

All 24 participants in our Yi-Bimo group had experience of seeking help from modern medical facilities and treatment, either for themselves or their family. Two of them had also sought help from a traditional herbalist in the local community. This is consistent with their worldview that most sufferings come down to physical or medical reasons (Chap. 3). Usually, the treatment ranges from outpatient clinics to hospitalizations. As we have read in the story of YX, she resorted to medical help after her husband was diagnosed with leukemia and after the Bimo failed to cure him. In the story of HZ, he also went to a doctor for help when he was a migrant worker, even though he would rather have gone back to seek the Bimo ritual with his family. This dominant theme refutes the stereotype and myth prevalent in mainstream society that "Yi people are superstitious, uncivil, backward, reluctant to seek medical and scientific help."

Yet, when our interviewers brought up the subject of medical help, the response, for the most part, was helplessness. In fact, many of them had had a negative experience with modern medical institutions. When they talked about it, the discourse usually centered around "medical

Table 4.1 Themes from the help-seeking behaviors of Yi-Bimo participants ($n = 24$)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Seek medical help	24 (100)
Western medicine	24 (100)
Chinese medicine	2 (8.33)
Seek help from religious figures (Bimo/Suni)	22 (91.67)
Advice from Bimo	1 (4.17)
Perform rituals	22 (91.67)
Fortune-telling	2 (8.33)
Exorcism ritual	2 (8.33)
Support from family and friends	15 (62.5)
Providing transportation	1 (4.17)
Monetary support	9 (37.5)
Material support	4 (16.67)
Companionship	1 (4.17)
Labor support	3 (12.5)
Daily care	2 (8.33)
Emotional support	2 (8.33)
Disciplinary	1 (4.17)
Seek social welfare	12 (50)
Medical claims	7 (29.17)
Schooling welfare	2 (8.33)
Senior subsidy	1 (4.17)
Housing subsidy	1 (4.17)
Disability subsidy	1 (4.17)
Low-income security	2 (8.33)
Rural construction	1 (4.17)
Individual perseverance	10 (41.67)
Conscientious	1 (4.17)
Hardworking	1 (4.17)
Self-reliance	8 (33.33)
Financial management and saving	2 (8.33)
Support from the neighborhood and community	8 (33.33)
Material support	3 (12.5)
Labor support	2 (8.33)
Seeking medical help	2 (8.33)
Monetary support	4 (16.67)
Emotional support	1 (4.17)
Self-care	7 (29.17)
Exercises	1 (4.17)
Rest	6 (25)
Physical adjustment	1 (4.17)
Migrant work	5 (20.83)

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Daughter	1 (4.17)
Self	3 (12.5)
Husband	1 (4.17)
Drug dependence	3 (12.5)
Smoking	1 (4.17)
Drugs	1 (4.17)
Alcoholism	1 (4.17)
Seek external support	2 (8.33)
Donation from workplace	1 (4.17)
Loan from workplace	1 (4.17)
Fight with the workplace for housing	1 (4.17)
Claim insurance reimbursement	1 (4.17)
Loan from bank	1 (4.17)
Loan from others	2 (8.33)
Charity organization	1 (4.17)
Education sponsorship	1 (4.17)

bills" and "death." Hence, we could not claim that medical help was fully utilized in the Meigu Yi community; though all of them did seek help from the hospital, the drop-out rate was also very high. Many of our interviewees had to travel a long way, to cities outside of Meigu, to find quality treatment, but they were often turned away by doctors as they weren't able to afford the treatment. In Chap. 2, we saw that medical institutions created debt, grief, conflict, and frustration in our Yi participants. After they had spent so much trying to treat their family members (normally the head of the household), the families went bankrupt and the family members died anyway, eventually, in the majority of cases. We seldom heard of anyone recovering fully from the illness, solely as a result of seeking medical help. Instead, we heard that many people had given up on medical treatment due to its high cost (as in the story of YX above). Besides medical treatment, there were a mixture of factors that helped maintain physical health and functioning, as we shall see in the following themes.

Theme 2: Seek Help from Religious Tradition

Twenty-two (91.7%) of the interviewees had sought help from Bimo priests in times of difficulty. Two had also sought help from the Suni for exorcism. Besides healing and blessings rituals, they also looked to the Bimo for advice and fortune-telling. This theme is consistent with the focus group discussion and our observation of the participants. In the story of HZ, he, as a migrant worker, would have preferred to go home for the Bimo ritual after falling sick at the construction site. In the story of YX, both she and her husband went to the Bimo for the healing of illness and pain. Bimo tradition indeed permeated every aspect of the lives of Yi people from Meigu, ranging from moving to a new house to changing their fortune. Though we know for sure that all the Yi from the Meigu villages would participate in the blessing rituals conducted by Bimo priests twice a year, not all interviewees explicitly mentioned help from the Bimo in the interview (two transcripts were not coded for this theme). When reading these two interview transcripts closely, we found it was not because they did not believe in Bimo rituals, but because of the lack of money needed to initiate such a modality of help. For instance, one of the interviewees said, "I did go to hospital once, but then I did not have money, so I only went there once. I thought I got rheumatism, but the doctor didn't confirm that after the check-up. I did not take any medicines, as I was too poor to buy medicines… While other Yi people in our village do *mi xin* [ritual], we did not. Because we have no more money to buy goat, chicken, or pig, so we did not do *mi xin* [ritual]."

Another 18-year-old girl we interviewed also did not mention utilizing Bimo ritual in times of suffering, not because she was unaware of such a resource, but because her major suffering event had been losing her parents. Her father had died as a result of gastric problems, and her mother had run away from home when she was little. While talking about her father's death, she said, "We did bring him to the hospital, because we had no choice. Then he died the next day." However, her family still followed Bimo custom by doing "blessing rituals" two to three times a year in the village.

Among those interviewees who tried both medical and religious methods, they did not have any obvious preference or bias toward one or the other. For instance, one participant said, "I am not sure it is because of drugs, or *mi xin* [ritual], but now my lower back feels much better and not in pain anymore." Therefore the themes concluded here are simply "help-seeking method," not "effective method."

Theme 3: Support from Family and Friends; Theme 6: Support from the Neighborhood and Community

Besides help from religious figures and the medical profession, 15 of our interviewees mentioned support from family and friends in times of difficulty. It is not surprising that in a culture bonded by family clans, relatives are obliged to help each other in difficult times. Most of them provided practical help to our interviewees, including giving or lending money ($n = 9$), giving daily necessity ($n = 4$), sharing the labor at the farm ($n = 3$) and daily care ($n = 2$), and providing transportation ($n = 1$). For instance, in the story of YX, her brother helped out with her children's medical fees and financial aid after her husband passed away. Another participant who was also a widow told us that a relative gave her two piglets to raise. Another said her cousins used to take care of them by giving clothing and food. One participant with AIDS had lost his ability to do farm work, but his brothers would help him with harvesting, and his wife with house chores. Besides practical help, three participants also received emotional support (e.g., encouragement) and companionship from their family members and close friends. One participant also commented on how she, as the mother, disciplined (scolding and beating) her adult son, a drug addict, as a way of "helping" him. This also chimed with what had been said in the focus group discussion—that, in the Meigu Yi area, people deemed "family supervision" as a way of helping drug addicts rehabilitate and recover.

Many interviewees did not specifically differentiate between relatives and friends here, using the noun "family friend" (亲戚朋友) in the conversation. Therefore, in the process of coding, we have combined friends and family into one category, assuming those close friends were the "insiders" of the family clan, and people they trusted deeply. However, we code the category of "neighbor" under Theme 6, as one third (eight) of the interviewees used the term "neighbor" explicitly as someone who helped and supported them. These neighbors also provided material help, and practical help to our interviewees. One participant said, "My neighbors helped me feed my children… they brought noodles and rice for my children… when I don't cook at home, my kids will go to their home and eat there." One elderly interviewee also said that, when she was sick, her neighbor's teenage kid would carry her to the hospital. Another elderly woman also specifically said, "The daughter from AS family in Leibo bought drugs for me, and the daughter from JL family also made rice wines for me." The kind of support received from neighbors was very much an extension of that received from relatives and friends.

This reciprocal network of neighbors was also witnessed during our field trips in Meigu. One villager took our RAs to the home of a "hundred-year-old granny" (百岁老奶奶) who had been abandoned by her sons. Though she was not qualified to be one of our study participants, the RAs still cared for her by leaving their jackets and buying food for her, as she was really in a bad condition. During their visits, they also found that one of our interviewees (the old lady living next door) was actually the main caretaker for this old woman, though both of them were suffering (see Online Resources link). Therefore, neighborhood support was quite common in the Meigu area, as part of the strong-ties network for Yi people (Zhang 2015).

Theme 4: Seek Social Welfare; Theme 10. Seek External Support; Theme 11: Help from Charity Organization

Twelve participants reported seeking help from various social welfare organizations while facing life challenges. The most common form of welfare was medical claims, as medical resources were commonly sought in this group, which is evident from Theme 1. However, as we know, not all treatment could be claimed for or reimbursed; therefore, they often ran into the complication of not being covered sufficiently. In the previous chapter, we talked about a widow who was left with a huge medical debt after her husband's treatment failed. Even during the process of his treatment, he had to be in and out of the hospital in order to comply with the medical insurance policy. This disruption in treatment took an added toll on his health. Eventually he died and the wife had to take care of the medical debt. Insufficient medical insurance policies have always been a sore point for rural people in China. We often heard the locals saying that "minor illness is not curable, while major illness is not affordable" in the hospitals of China (小病治不了,大病治不起). Under the current medical insurance scheme, our participants had to depend on other sources of welfare, besides medical claims.

Some mentioned low-income subsidy (低保), and some talked about subsidies for housing, senior people, people with disabilities, and schooling. However, the amount they received was minimal (200 RMB per month for low-income security; 1000 RMB per year for people with disabilities). Even if they were qualified for it, they might not be fully informed of their eligibility due to corruption in rural areas. One participant said that, because of the rural construction policy, his home had recently been connected to the power line for electricity. He was angry that he was charged differently than others, and that the officer took advantage of their utility payments. As a matter of fact, only 50% (12 out of 24) of our participants received social welfare despite the fact that they all qualified as low-income families and members of a marginalized group. This number is quite revealing of the problems with the policy itself. Some participants were not aware of their right to receive welfare, as the application procedure is dictated by the village officers. Some of them were knowledgeable enough to go and fight for their rights with the authorities, but this caused additional conflicts that might result in other types of suffering.

As discussed in Chap. 3, the problems of injustice and corruption might be a hindrance to our participants when it comes to seeking support from the government, in spite of the fact that they live in a socialist country where they are supposed to have equal access to social welfare, and that the Chinese government claims to have invested over 1.1 billion RMB in 2016 in the Liangshan area for basic development.[1] In recent years, a new policy called the "precise poverty relief program" (精准扶贫) has been launched in all the rural areas; however, we have seen mixed results of this policy, which we will discuss further in Chap. 7.

Besides seeking official help, one participant reported seeking help from their employers and a private insurance company, and one had sought loans from the bank and others (Theme 10). However, there were not many external sources of support available to Yi in the Liangshan area, as we learned that many mainstream Chinese would not loan money to the Yi ethnic minority due to discrimination and stereotyping (fearing they would not pay the money back). As many of them are migrant workers, our participants do not have protection from labor law and work insurance. This also explains why social support outside of the family and neighborhood is minimal. What is even more striking is that only one participant mentioned getting help from a charity organization (NGO) in order to finance her child's school fees (Theme 11).

Theme 5: Individual Perseverance; Theme 8: Migrant Work; Theme 7: Self-Care

When asked what they had done to resolve their predicaments, 10 out of 24 interviewees said they depended on their own efforts and perseverance to overcome suffering events. While there was not much support in their environments they could depend on, eight of them said they would rely on themselves to solve problems. This resonates with the story of HZ, who had decided to drop out of school at age 14 and subsequently worked in various cities to earn money to feed his family. As a middle child, he saw that his parents had no means of paying for the education of his two brothers; therefore, for the past six years, he had taken upon himself the burden of supporting his family. He said, "When I got a problem, I wouldn't tell my brothers because they are still in school and need to focus on their studies. Even if I couldn't save enough money, I would still keep it to myself. I don't want them to drop out of school. So, every time, when I called them, I would share good news with them rather than the bad news." Every month, his brothers would also call him to ask for money, so he had a budget for his own daily expenses. HZ worked very hard as a migrant worker on construction sites and in factories, to the point of skipping meals. He also tried to take military exams and study Chinese in his leisure time. Another interviewee, SX (featured in Chap. 2), told us she could only rely on herself to make money, by sewing traditional clothing and other bits and pieces, after her husband died of AIDS and passed the virus to her. In order to pay for the education of their children or other family members, most of our participants would cut daily expenses (such as eating corn to fill their stomachs) and take on multiple jobs to maximize their income (Theme 8). Five of the interviewees said explicitly that migrant work was their way of alleviating their misery. In our study, we witnessed how Yi from Meigu strove to live and care for themselves and their families, and that, contrary to social stereotypes, there was not one "lazy" participant, but many who were "conscientious" and "sick."

Besides seeking help from the medical profession to deal with their illnesses, seven of the Yi-Bimo participants said they would try to adjust their pace of life by resting at home (Theme 7). A lot of the time, this method of "resting and doing nothing" was actually suggested by doctors, as their illnesses were quite severe. Those participants with AIDS often told us that the doctor did not tell them the diagnosis, but simply advised them to "rest at home" and not go out to work anymore. This is why only two of these six interviewees used AIDS terminology in narrating their suffering events. Under the theme of self-care, one of them said he would do exercises and, another old lady said she would massage her head when she did not feel well.

Theme 9. Drug Dependence

The culture of Yi from the Meigu area involves alcohol consumption and smoking. Three of the interviewees specifically called on those habits when being asked about coping methods. One of them explained her deceased husband had become addicted to drugs because someone had told him it would reduce the pain arising from his stomach problems. Therefore, it was actually a self-help method that later developed into an addiction. Similarly, another interviewee said she would drink until she was drunk when she felt helpless. Yet another interviewee, who was a widow, also used smoking as a way of comforting herself every time she got frustrated with her environment. The testimony of these three participants made us think about the drinking and drug-taking culture in the Liangshan area. Though no systematic study has been done on this topic, it seems that resorting to drinking and drugs shares with resorting to rituals a similar tendency to rely on external quick fixes, with minimal effort to utilize internal/mental resources. To the extent that substance abuse and utilization of the Bimo reflect the same coping style, we suspect that the Bimo tradition serves a vitally important function as an alternative to drug use. Might it not be that the rise of the latter is one of the consequences of the decline of the former?

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians

Story of Mrs. H (Narrated by Zhangying)

Upon entering the courtyard of Mrs. H's home, we caught a whiff of traditional Chinese medicine. The kitchen occupied the corner of the courtyard, with burnt ash filling the stove. It was already sunset, and the lighting in the rooms was dim. Mrs. H was wrapped in a sweater. Her face revealed her exhaustion, but we were still greeted by a smile. That was in October 2015, when we met for the first time through a local informant's introduction. During the home visit,relatives living nearby were also present. The locals call these relatives from the same clan "*jiamen*."

As we sat down, Mrs. H hastily offered us a cup of steeped tea. During this conversation, her voice was low. She did not go into the details of her suffering event. From the interpreted introductions, we learned Mrs. H was 54 years of age at the time and had been converted to Christianity 20 years earlier. Three years prior, while working in Kunming, Mrs. H had unfortunately contracted tuberculosis. She currently stays at home brewing traditional Chinese medicine for herself as her husband was killed several years ago and her children, though still young, are not always around. The financial hardships faced by her family are hard to imagine.

Mrs. H said she had originally worked at a factory processing egg cartons. However, due to the thick dust (produced in the factory), she suffered from severe coughing and had transferred to a new job in a restaurant. Unfortunately, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis shortly afterwards. At first, Ms. H was treated at Kunming, but because she could not afford the expensive treatment, she returned home without being cured. At the time of our interview, she could only take medicine costing about 1600 RMB every month. Mrs. H felt dejected at not being able to continue working after falling ill. She said her family's field land had already been turned over to relatives and she could no longer live on farming like before. Mrs. H's daughter (T) is studying at a secondary school with a yearly tuition fee of 7000 RMB. Her eldest son (Q) is 19 and has been working in Kunming since leaving school. He only makes about 1000 RMB a month for his wages, which is swallowed up by Mrs. H's medicine and his younger sister's tuition fees (Fig. 4.3).

When asked about her medical condition, Mrs. H gave a solemn frown and stated, "I take medicine every day." In the same breath, she talked about the financial burden resulting from the high cost of medicine. She showed us some of her medical records and prescription receipts. Mrs. H said her condition did not qualify for medical insurance, as only inpatients qualified for medical subsidy. Even if she qualified, our local informant said, the hospital facilities in Kunming and Luquan only covered about 10–20% of the total bill. The small hospital in their town (SYP) could cover 70–80% of inpatient costs, but had a reputation for poor treatment and being ineffective. Mrs. H said that thinking about her condition made her the "most sad," considering her underage children, who still need her nurturance.

"While I was in Kunming dealing with inflammation of the throat, colds, fevers or coughing, I would pray. When it is Sunday service time, I would also pray by myself. While staying in the hospital, I prayed in the

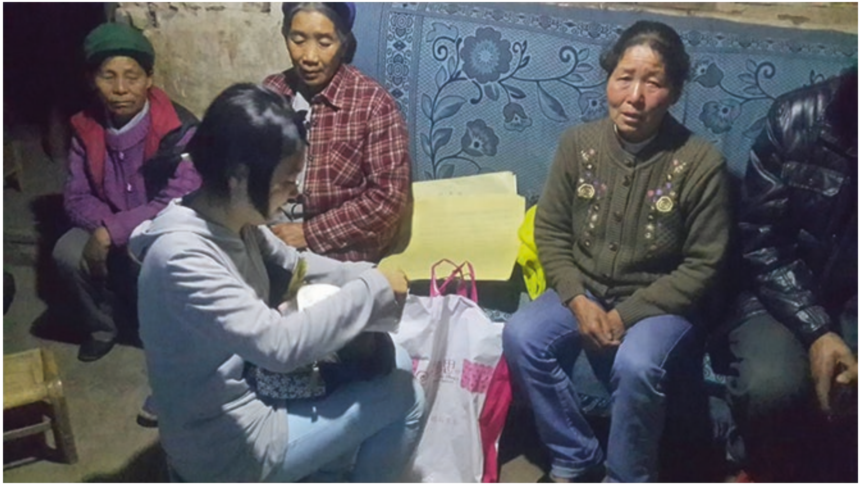


Fig. 4.3 The RA and Mrs. H, on the right, during the interview

room… When my heart is at its saddest, going to church is the happiest thing I can do. Participating in church worship would keep me from falling into despair." Mrs. H began to cry like a burst dam. She started to recall her suffering memories since youth: "When I was 13, my mother passed away. My father also passed while I was getting married." After she became calmer as a result of our listening to her, we left our contact number and prepared for follow-up.

The RA called her in October and asked Mrs. H how she was feeling. She replied, "I take medicine every day, four times a day." But the medicine did not seem to improve her condition. She continued, "It is only me here at home. My two children are away studying, and I can't work at home. I take medicine every day, four times a day." She also continued attending church services and worship on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Sundays, and prayed in silence at home. She said, "I am at my saddest when I am at home and not in church. Attending *li bai* (church services) would lift my mood." She continued, "After waking in the morning, I wash my face, sing a song, and pray. Then I prepare a little food after my morning prayers." Mrs. H particularly enjoys singing hymns, as it cheers her up. The RA invited her to sing over the phone. She happily grabbed the Yi hymnal book and sang hymn numbers 39 and 80 in Yi for me (the lyrics are about relying on Jehovah). These hymnals are actually not written in ancient Yi script as the original form has already been lost; instead, the missionary Samuel Pollard created a phonetic alphabet that could be used to assemble Yi dialect pronunciation. When we called her in November, Mrs. H said she had come down with a cold the week prior. She took the bus by herself to Luquan Hospital to buy a month's worth of medicine. She mentioned that the medicine had helped her cold and that she had to go again for an X-ray. She was thankful, and while conversing with us, her mood and emotional state were noticeably calmer and more stable, despite the weak tone of her voice.

On the last day of 2015, we visited Mrs. H again for a more formal interview. Her daughter, T, was at home as well, and treated with courtesy. Mrs. H's face that day was paler than the last time we met. Despite her daughter's company, Mrs. H's financial difficulties continued to put her under mounting pressure. She complained, "The cost for medicine is extremely expensive, and I could not get reimbursed for 2014 or last year's medicine." As we learned, the reimbursement policy is set by the residential areas, and only 20% of the bill from Kunming was covered.

During this interview, we touched on her most sensitive issue—the cause of her husband's passing. She did not answer our query directly, but looked serious, and murmured softly and quickly: "It was an accident… it was horrible..." After a long pause, she began talking about the experience of raising her children by herself. "Talking about this makes me sad… This…" She pointed toward her daughter. "Her father was not around for 17 years… 17 years. She was just six months old, six months. Her brother was three years old and I was left alone to raise them." She paused for a moment, and repeatedly said, "It is difficult to talk about it, it makes me sad just to talk about this... I don't know how to talk about it." We did not push the topic further, but followed her gaze to the family pictures hanging on the wall, including a portrait of her husband in his younger days.

According to our local informant, T, who happened to be a relative of Mrs. H, Mr. H had actually been murdered. Seventeen years earlier, when Mr. H was drinking and eating with a few friends, they ran into some gangsters at the roadside and began to bicker with them. This escalated into physical conflict and fist-fighting, and Mr H. was stabbed in the chest. He died on the spot and the gangsters escaped. The local police failed to find the suspects and justice was never done. Though we did not experience Luquan as a chaotic and dangerous place, the local informant said about that, about two decades earlier, their town had been quite insecure. It was a place with many migrant workers and a fluid population, living alongside a mix of ethnic minorities. Mr. H had worked as a tractor driver on a farm; after his death, the family's own farm had fallen into disuse because there was no one to work on it. As a widow with two toddlers, Mrs. H could only go to the city and work in a factory, but then she contracted tuberculosis and couldn't afford the medical bill. The support from her family of origin was slim, as both her parents had died when she was young, the same as her husband's parents. She had not seen her only brother for many years.

During the winter break of 2016, we managed to find some financial aid to pay T's education fees. Mrs. H again called us to express thanks, and her condition was showing signs of improvement. She went to Kunming once again for her lung check-up, but did not show bitterness over the medical bill. She also joined the church choir, and when we met her again in the summer of 2016, she had a big smile on her face. She continued to reminisce about her deceased husband, but the grief was less after having found a sympathetic ear in one of our RAs.

Story of Grandma Y (Narrated by the First Author)

Our first encounter with Grandma Y was in October 2015. We traveled to the mountain area of SYP where the road was not fully constructed, so we had to get on the back of a four-wheel-drive truck, rocking for about half an hour till we got near to her home. She waited at the corner of the road, and took us walking through the bamboo bush, hiking down the hill before we reached her house made of mud and wood. There were poultry in the open-air front yard; then we saw a young woman smiling and staring at us blankly from the corner, with unkept hair and poor hygiene. Grandma Y said, "That's my daughter-in-law who just returned home from wandering away… she has gone crazy." We sat on a bench at the front entrance, and two of her grandchildren were hiding in the room. Even before we began our introduction, Grandma Y was agitated, ready to talk about her life full of sufferings.

From the translator, we learned Grandma Y was an ethnic Yi but had been brought up in a village that was predominantly Han Chinese. That is why she did not speak the Yi language well, but conversed in Yunnan Chinese dialect. She had never been educated, and had come to the village when she married her husband. They had three sons, but the two eldest were not filial and had left home upon getting married. The youngest was the most filial, but had died of illness 11 years earlier, after which Grandma Y's daughter-in-law, left with two children, had married someone from another village. However, after she gave birth to another child, she became "crazy" and lost her memory. As she could neither take care of herself nor her children anymore, Grandma Y took her two grandchildren back and assumed the responsibilities of parenthood.

Later on, we learned from her granddaughter that her stepfather obviously preferred his own newborn to them, and would beat their mother at home. We were not sure whether this was the cause of her "madness," to the point of her becoming mute, demented, and losing touch with reality. While Grandma Y was complaining to us about her, she was actually crying silently next door. Even when we tried to comfort her and talk to her, she could only shake her head and give us an empty look like an innocent child.

That day, there were two main things Grandma Y talked about, at a high pitch and full of agitation. The first was the conflict with her sons after she had started going to church and been converted to Christianity about a year ago. She had been introduced to the Christian faith when she rented a room in SYP town for her grandchildren to go to school there. She said her eldest son and daughter-in-law had threatened her by saying, "If you become a Christian, we would not carry your coffin [at your funeral]." As witnessed in our participant-observation, the local Yi followed the burial tradition whereby the offspring of the deceased would carry the coffin to the burial site. It would be considered shameful in the community if none of your children carried your coffin at your funeral, hence Grandma Y felt torn about her decision to become a Christian. As a matter of fact, she was sobbing nonstop when talking about this.

The second cause of conflict with her children was her sense of responsibility for her grandchildren. Though she received insurance money from the government (1000 RMB/year), to which, as a low-income senior, she was entitled, she spent all of that on her grandchildren's school fees. The rental for their small room in SYP town was about 600 RMB/year, and she had to pay the transportation fee (40 RMB/person) to get back to the village. As there was no boarding school for the grandchildren, she had to find a small room in town. She also had to stay with them and take care of their meals. Her two older sons disagreed with her financial support for the grandchildren. They would fight over her insurance money and push her to abandon the kids in the orphanage. Grandma Y refused to back down, and vowed, "I will go out to beg for a living for my grandchildren, even if I have no more money." All the while, her husband listened quietly without making any comment. It seemed he had also given up trying to persuade Grandma Y and just let her do whatever she wanted.

When we looked around the household, there was corn randomly dispersed on the floor, and a few cocks running around the place. Grandma said her "fate was bitter" (*ming ku*), and she could only put her hopes in these two grandchildren. She stayed in town with them, cooked for them, and occasionally sold some family produce at the farmers' market. She still attended church services, as this lifted her mood. But she also had difficulty understanding the sermon, as Yi was not her mother tongue. She also did not fit in with the other Yi elderly. Before we left, Grandma Y asked our local informant to take two cocks to sell in the town market, but one cock escaped (flying out of the truck) during our bumpy ride. That became the only laughing point in our home visit that day.

Over the following three months, Grandma Y was quite cheerful and talkative over the phone. She said she was continuing to go to church, but her grandson sometimes got flu. In our view, Grandma Y, though lonely and poor, was actually quite independent and intelligent. She took all her important documents and belongings with her everywhere she went. For example, she carried a simple cellphone in her pocket, and her ID, insurance card, and bank card were all in one small wallet. She was probably the most organized elderly person we found in Luquan.

On the last day of 2015, we revisited Grandma Y in her small rental room in SYP. This time she was fetching her grandchildren from school, and had just returned from the farmers' market. She said she had been helping her neighbor sell bamboo baskets, with 2 RMB profit for each basket sold. She needed to do this for her grandchildren's education and living expenses (about 70 RMB per month). Recently, her daughter had been bringing some rice for them, but she was getting married soon. Her grandson was quite shy when we met him, and her granddaughter was busy sewing the insole padding for sale. This small room was about 20 meters square, with two single beds, a few benches, and a rice cooker occupying most of the space. Though there was a light bulb hanging down from the wall, it wasn't turned on, in an effort to save power. Grandma Y told us that her grandson would finish junior high school the following year, and would not continue his education after that as they could not afford the tuition (China has a policy of free education up until junior high school). When we inquired about her "crazy" daughter-in-law, she said they hadn't been able to find her again after she wandered off. It seemed her grandchildren did not care much about the whereabouts of their mother either, as if she was long gone. When we left, Grandma Y wanted us to take some of her walnuts from the villages with us, as a gesture of hospitality (Fig. 4.4).

Over the following six months, she talked at times about some aching in her leg, and her financial crisis. We managed to find some financial aid for her grandson's education, and she showed much gratitude for our care. She still stayed in town most of the time, and attended Sunday service occasionally. She could make about 20–30 RMB in a good week, but said her eyesight was getting worse. Her nephew would also give her some rice and groceries. Her granddaughter got flu sometimes and, in June, Grandma Y started experiencing dizzy spells whenever she stood up and walked. She did not seek hospital help due to having "no money." During that time, she was unable to sell any baskets, but she did sell home-grown peas at the market.

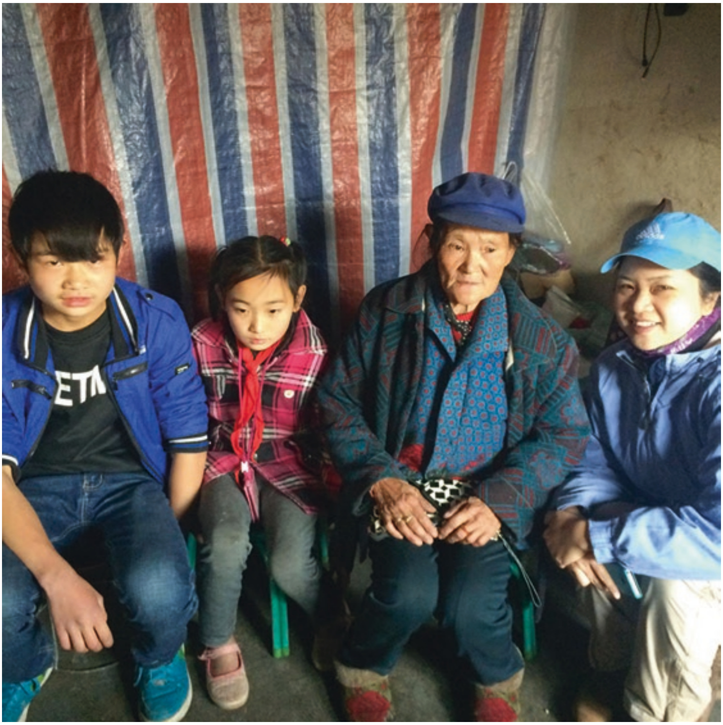


Fig. 4.4 Grandma Y and her grandchildren in their rental room

On our last visit during the summer of 2016, Grandma Y was sewing the bedshoe outside of her rental room. Her neighbor sat quietly next to her under a dim light. She said her grandson had left to work as an intern in the big city during the summer break. She also seldom went back to her village as her eldest son and daughter-in-law would come to harass her. Grandma Y was wiping away tears as she told us this. She said her eyesight and hearing were not as good as before, and she wanted to give us two cocks from her village. We refused politely, but after we left, she called our local informant and reminded us to pick up the cocks from her apartment as she needed to return to the village to look after her husband, who was ill. Though we didn't pick up the cocks in the end, after that we always associated her story with her beautiful and healthy cocks (see Online Resource for pictures).

A Focus Group Study with Yi-Christian Leaders

According to our focus group session with four religious leaders in Luquan, there were four different types of resource utilized by Yi-Christians in time of suffering—religious community, governmental support, relatives and friends, and personal effort or endurance. One Christian leader gave a testimony about a sister (this is the way they address female Christians) who had been diagnosed with cancer and whose non-believer husband was not caring for her. So the church members went to visit and pray for her. They were all inspired by that sister's strong faith, because whenever she felt pain when squatting down (due to a swollen stomach), she would start giving thanks to the Lord. So this Christian leader concluded that "it is different when you have faith in Jesus." Apparently, the church had a system of caring for its sick members through home visits and prayer, and they would also bring material gifts.

One leader said, "We had a senior nursing home here near our church. So we would visit them once a year by bringing donations like shoes for the elder residents there. Sometimes we also organized volunteers to go and help them clean the compounds and cut their fingernails." Another said they would visit those church members suffering not only from poverty, but also family discord. Besides providing for material needs, the pastors would pray and preach during home visits. Sometimes they would provide counseling to couples experiencing conflict, and sometimes they would try to give psychological and practical advice to church members for problem solving. One leader said it was extremely beneficial to preach the gospel to those who were suffering, as they needed more peace mentally.

The leaders also said the government would help those who suffered disasters, and give subsidies to the elderly and low-income families. But they thought personal efforts were more important. For example, there was another sister from the church choir, whose house had been burned down by accident. So the church group members went to visit her, and seeing that she was very hardworking, they tried their best to make up the losses by contracting more land for tobacco (encouraged by the local government). Eventually, after two years, she and her husband managed to recover their home. Finally, regarding personal effort and perseverance, one of the church leaders also stressed that healthy habits and exercise were important. For instance, eating healthy meals, maintaining good hygiene, and having regular medical check-ups were all necessary to prevent future illness. He said, "Some suffering could actually be solved and prevented early on by human effort."

Thematic Analysis of Transcripts of Yi-Christian Interviews

The four resources mentioned in the focus group with pastors and religious leaders surfaced again later on in our interviews with local Yi-Christians during their time of suffering. However, the lay Yi-Christians obviously utilized more diverse and individualized methods of problem-solving, depending on the context of their suffering, as can be seen in Table 4.2.

Theme 1: Medical Help

Similarly to Yi people from Meigu, the majority of our Yi interviewees from Luquan had also sought medical help in the past. Twenty-one out of 23 participants spoke about their experiences of seeking help from medical professionals. As stated in Chap.3, many also attributed their suffering to Natural Causes. Among those seeking medical treatment, 15 took medicines as a way of alleviating their pain, seven had experience of hospitalization, seven had used IV injections to feel better, five had experienced surgery, and four had been for medical check-ups. As in the story of Mrs. H, many of them just took herbal medicines as these were cheaper. Another affordable alternative was IV injection/infusion, which gave immediate relief to patients. This was the most widely sought and utilized method in rural China, based on our observations. As in Chap. 2, we learned that pain and Physical Discomfort were as prevalent as physical illness among our Luquan participants, so it made sense that they would take pain-relief medicines rather than having surgery to deal with the root cause of the problem. Many of them suffered also from problems of old age, which is an irreversible condition, so medical help was the most popular remedy sought, though not necessarily the most effective or favored one. It is worth noting that two of our participants who did not report seeking medical help were not without physical pain and illness. One was Uncle

Table 4.2 Themes from the help-seeking behaviors of Yi-Christian participants ($n = 23$)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Medical help	21 (91.3)
Take medicines	15 (65.22)
Surgery	5 (21.74)
Hospitalization	7 (30.43)
Injection	7 (30.43)
Check-up	4 (17.39)
Personal efforts	15 (65.22)
Farming	2 (8.7)
Income-generating	9 (39.13)
Self-reliant	6 (26.09)
Striving to live	2 (8.7)
Saving money	1 (4.35)
Leisure and hobbies	1 (4.35)
Help from family and friends	14 (60.87)
Depending on children	8 (34.78)
Depending on neighbors	9 (39.13)
Prayers from the family	2 (8.7)
Taken care of by relatives	6 (26.09)
Practicing Christian faith	13 (56.52)
Relying on the Lord	4 (17.39)
Prayer	10 (43.48)
Bible reading	1 (4.35)
Hymn worship	1 (4.35)
Welfare policy	11 (47.83)
Senior subsidy	5 (21.74)
Disability subsidy	1 (4.35)
Contracted land	1 (4.35)
Low-income subsidy	1 (4.35)
Loan from government	1 (4.35)
Reduced tuition fee	1 (4.35)
Medical help	1 (4.35)
Material donation	4 (17.39)
Housing subsidy	1 (4.35)
Support from the church community	6 (26.09)
Prayers from others	1 (4.35)
Communal prayers	1 (4.35)
Worship together	1 (4.35)
Sharing the family labor	1 (4.35)
Medication	1 (4.35)

(*continued*)

Table 4.2 (continued)

Themes	*Frequency (%)*
Emotional support	1 (4.35)
Material support	3 (13.04)
Personal perseverance	3 (13.04)
Endurance	1 (4.35)
Positive attitude	1 (4.35)
Good health	1 (4.35)
External support	1 (4.35)
Support from workplace	1 (4.35)

BR, introduced in Chap. 3, who had been blind since his youth. Another was Sister Wang, who refused medical help and had also been blind for a long time (her story will be told in Chap. 5). These two elderly individuals did not seek medical help, mainly because the suffering events they reported in our interviews were related to historical sufferings, such as losing parents and starvation.

Theme 2: Personal Efforts; Theme 7: Personal Perseverance

In contrast to the Yi-Bimo group, where the second-largest theme was seeking help from religious experts, Yi-Christians (15 out of 23) talked about a variety of self-help methods (Theme 2). Nine of them told us that, in order to raise funds for medical treatment or education fees, they had sold their most precious belongings (e.g., cows, pigs) to generate extra income. One said he would collect recycled bottles to earn some cash, and another knitted hats to sell for extra money. Another participant sold his crops (corn) to pay for treatment with injections. Even though cows are necessary to help in farming, just as crops are a necessary source of food for Yi families in the villages, our participants had to sacrifice these necessities in order to pay their medical bills. In the story of Grandma Y, narrated above, she sold her cocks, her neighbor's bamboo basket, and the shoepads she had sewn to generate as much income as possible, in order to support her grandchildren. Those who did not have things to sell had to sell their labor by working part-time, or else cutting expenses. In the story of Mrs. H, she opted for cheaper medications and spread-out treatment for her tuberculosis. Some people chose to ignore flu-like symptoms and just rest.

Six participants said they would rely on themselves, doing house chores, finding medicines, and waiting for the body to heal itself in times of difficulty. One interviewee said that when he was starving in the past, he would pick wild fruits to fill his stomach. Another said he tried his best to problem-solve. A strong widow said she had to raise her child by herself. A lonely grandmother said she would listen to the radio to assuage feelings of emptiness. All these were creative solutions based on individual intelligence, and efforts to solve problems. Rather than turning outward to seek help, they used all kinds of self-help methods to improve their conditions. Theme 7 also recorded two participants who referred to their inner strength of "endurance, positive attitude, and good health," as a resource that helped them through difficult situations.

Theme 3: Help from Family and Friends

As many of the Yi-Christians we interviewed were senior people, 14 of them reported having to depend on the family and relatives in time of suffering. Nine of them talked specifically about how their adult children supported them, both financially and by helping with farm work. In the story of Mrs. H, she was fortunate that her eldest son, aged 19, was able to work in Kunming and make some minimal income to help with her medication fee. In the story of Grandma Y, she relied on her daughter and nephew to supply groceries. For those whose children were already separated from them, or had migrated to the city, or were married and living in another village, help from neighbors was crucial. Nine interviewees talked about receiving help from neighbors, both physically and practically. One said her neighbor had taken her to the hospital for her injection. Another blind man who was an orphan (Grandpa BR) said his neighbor helped him with all the house chores, such as getting firewood and water from outdoors. This was also true for another blind old lady (Grandma W) whose neighbor brought her food and water. Whenever we wanted to leave a gift for this old lady to express our appreciation, she would want us to give it instead to the neighbor who took care of her, even though that neighbor was quite well-off. Being able to trust their neighbors was important for those who were disabled, isolated, or had no family members left to care for them. Eventually, when Grandma W died at home, it was her neighbor who discovered her body and hosted her funeral. Besides receiving physical care and help, two of the interviewees said praying together with the family members also helped them in difficult times.

Theme 4: Practicing Christian Faith

Thirteen of the 23 interviewees mentioned praying, reading the Bible, and singing hymns as self-helping methods. Ten of them talked about praying in times of crisis and emergency (for example when family members got injured, or needed to go to hospital), as their way of asking God for healing and intervention. Sometimes, they found that "miracles" did happen after praying, as though God had answered their prayers. Some would pray when they felt weak and emotionally down. Four of them said they would "rely on God" when they felt stuck in a predicament and had no way out. It was a case of "surrendering to God's guidance" and believing He would solve their problems eventually. One interviewee said: "Though I have suffering, I already believed God. I will eventually meet the Lord, so the earthly things are not much of my concern now. We could only depend on the Lord to bless us and take care of us in the future." This "internal submission" to God is part of Christian teaching about trusting God's lead and not worrying about earthly things, as those who believed in God would go to heaven, a place where there would be no more suffering and pain. Having this kind of hope concerning what happens after death has far reaching ramifications for the Yi-Christian responses to suffering.

Theme 5: Welfare Policy

Eleven out of 23 participants mentioned seeking and receiving help from government welfare, including senior subsidy (five persons), disability subsidy (one), low-income subsidy (one), governmental loan (one), reduced tuition fee (one), housing subsidy (one), medical help (one), material donation (four), and contracted land (one). Regarding the senior subsidy, when we asked the participants, some said they got 70 RMB each month, while some said 80 RMB each month. We found that, under the title of each policy, the amount of subsidy was not fixed, and could vary from year to year. For instance, three of our interviewees who were blind received nothing at all in the way of welfare payments, and it was only brought up by one Yi from the Luquan group. However, after this disabled man had his status amended from the third level of disability to the fourth, the subsidy stopped. Similar things happened with medical insurance policies and low-income subsidies. These were usually given by quota in the village. We heard some villages only got one family quota per year, and had to rotate this among those who needed it. The power to distribute the quota and subsidy belongs to the head of the village and the government official. When there is no transparency as regards the process of application and distribution, combined with language and education barriers, one can imagine that the implementation of these "good-will" policies can easily be twisted by those charged with interpreting the policy, who may have a bias toward ethnic minorities. Though the centralized Chinese government has been tightening up the policy to prevent corruption, there are still loopholes that are exploited by local bureaucrats in remote rural regions. Thus, similar to the Yi-Bimo group, the Yi-Christian group also faced the problem of not being able to access governmental welfare, even though all of our interviewees came from low-income households with multiple shortages. However, in comparison to the Yi-Bimo group, our Yi-Christian group did not complain much. Instead, they showed more gratitude and appreciation toward the "country" (*guo jia*) and "party" (*dang*). At the same time, the Yi-Christians did not seem to put all their eggs in one basket: their praise for the earthly authority (the government) tended to be accompanied by the giving of thanks to the heavenly authority (God). We believe this two-tiered attribution of causation calls for a relatively more abstract way of thinking.

Theme 6: Support from the Church Community; Theme 8: External Support

Among Yi-Christians, although sometimes neighbors and the church community overlapped, there were still six interviewees who specifically mentioned various types of help they received from the church community ("Body of Christ"). Three of them talked about material support received in times of need, especially monetary donations. One old lady was raising her 13-year-old grandson, who had kidney stones, alone. Due to the kidney problem, the boy could not go to school. They went to Kunming for surgery to remove the kidney stones twice. But somehow the illness kept coming back, and finally they gave up on treatment because the medical bill was too high. This grandson was an orphan who had lost his parents when young, meaning that the burden of raising him had fallen on the aging grandmother's shoulders. When we visited her, she could barely stand and walk with a stick. Without any means of earning a living, she said the church community had been a great help in providing for her material needs, including raising money for the kidney-stone surgery for her grandson. Her own son was an alcoholic and exploited her financially.

Besides material support, one interviewee said that after she fell sick she was very touched when a sister from the church came to help her family with harvest and farm work. The emotional support participants received from church members such as praying and worshipping together was also important. One interviewee said, "There is no loneliness in the church. No one is lonely in the church." One said, when she was sick, she asked others from the church to pray for her. Another said that even when the church was oppressed during the Cultural Revolution, they would still meet and pray together in secret. Hence, being able to practice their faith in a communal setting was as important as individual practice and belief for our Yi-Christians.

Lastly, only one interviewee mentioned external support (Theme 8), with her children receiving some help from the workplace while they were still migrant workers. This 78-year-old old lady was a widow who had lost both her son and daughter to migrant work. She said her daughter had got "brain anemia" (脑贫血) because her working environment was "terrible." She fell sick due to long term exposure to the toxicity of some kind of "chemical formula". The workplace (*dan wei*) had helped with her medical treatment, but she died eventually of medical complications. A similar thing had happened to her eldest son as well. Though employers had provided some medical support for her children, this interviewee was not aware of her children's legal rights and their employers' responsibilities in these sorts of occupational hazard cases. This is a common problem among migrant workers in China, and the help available to them is limited. We also realized that the Yi-Bimo group were actually more aggressive in pursuing their rights than the Yi-Christian group, with the latter never mentioning having conflicts with, or any interest in, authority figures.

In summary, the Yi-Christian group utilized medical resources, family support, neighborhood networks, personal efforts and faith, and church support in times of difficulty. Their problem-solving methods were quite straightforward and simple. When they were at the end of their rope, "submission to the Lord" is a final solution. In contrast to the Yi-Bimo group, they never mentioned using substances such as alcohol and drugs to make themselves feel better. They would "strive" for survival and exhaust every means available to them, and none of our interviewees ever said "there is nothing I can do"—a frequently used expression among Yi-Bimo interviewees. This might be because many of our Yi-Bimo participants had "terminal illnesses" (e.g., AIDS), about which the doctor just asked them to "rest" and do nothing. The Yi-Bimo also utilized religious resources, but they mainly "participated" in the rituals, rather than actively "praying" for themselves. In the Bimo tradition, there seemed to be more reliance on the religious expert (e.g., Bimo priest), whereas religious resources for Yi-Christians seemed to be more internal and abstract. To further investigate the difference between these two groups in terms of their ways of help-seeking in times of suffering, we conducted a psycholinguistic analysis.

Comparison Between Religious Groups in Help-Seeking Behavior

Methods We created a HELP Scale, based on the thematic analysis from the pilot study, to quantify the linguistic categories of help-seeking behaviors in the suffering narratives. This also allowed us to compare the frequency of linguistic variables in both Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian narratives of suffering. The HELP Scale consists of six items inferred from the themes of the interviews from both sites—Strong-ties, Weak-ties, External manipulation, Internal manipulation, Secular self-help, Secular other-help. The operational definitions of these HELP categories are as follows:

1. Strong-ties: immediate family and tribal family (*jia men*), and blood-ties relatives.

    * Code number of family members mentioned in process of helping.

2. Weak-ties: strangers, church members in the community, God. These are the people who didn't have blood ties to the interviewees, yet became close and built a relationship with them in the process of suffering. Friends/neighbors are excluded, because these are the existing relationships that can be found in both Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian communities.

3. Coping based on external and concrete manipulations: the person manipulates his or her external resources to cope, such as religious rituals, magic, exorcism, etc.
4. Coping based on mental action and internal manipulations: the person manipulates his or her internal resources to cope, such as reliance on faith, virtues, prayers, positive self-talk (eg., stop thinking about it), cognitive-restructuring (e.g., detached), etc., which makes them feel better about the situations they are in.

   ** Code frequency of mental actions.

5. Secular help (others): medical treatment, hospitalization, government aid. No prior relationships are included.
6. Secular help (self): efforts/actions attempted by oneself to improve situations, for example: rest, striving. Only non-religious and not moral/virtue-based behaviors are included.

We coded each transcript following the protocol in Chap. 1. We then counted the frequency of each category and divided this by the total word count of each interview transcript to convert the raw scores into percentages for further statistical analysis.

Hypotheses According to Sundararajan's (2015) framework of ecological rationality, strong-ties communities privilege the in-group members for social support (e.g., blood-ties relatives), whereas weak-ties communities include out-group members in the support network. Furthermore, cognition has two orientations—internal versus external. In response to suffering events, those who are externally oriented would employ relatively more concrete action (such as hiring a religious specialist to perform rituals) and exhibit relatively low cognitive effort in problem-solving. In contrast, those who are internally oriented would employ mental action (such as prayer) and exhibit relatively high cognitive effort in problem-solving. Since the Yi community was by nature a strong-ties ethnic minority, we did not expect much difference between the Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christian groups in terms of seeking support from the family clan and relatives (item 1). However, since Yi-Christians were oriented to treat church members as family, we assumed there would be a significant difference between the groups as regards to item 2 (weak-ties) in the HELP Scale.

Hypothesis: When trying to cope with suffering, Yi-Christians would utilize both weak-ties and strong-ties in the community (e.g., church network) and rely on internal manipulation of religiosity (e.g., prayer, surrender to God) as resources, whereas Yi-Bimo would rely on strong-ties in the community (e.g., family, kinship) and external manipulation of religiosity (e.g., Bimo rituals).

To test this prediction, we used the HELP Scale to code suffering narratives collected from the two Yi communities. It was predicted that frequencies for the utilization of weak-ties (non-blood-related support system) and internal manipulations (e.g., prayer, endurance) would be relatively higher for the Christian group than the Bimo group; whereas frequencies for external manipulations (Bimo sacrificial rituals) would be relatively higher for the Bimo group than for the Christian group.

Results As we can see in Table 4.3, our predictions were fully supported by the results. As predicted, the Yi-Christian group utilized weak-ties networking via church membership more often than the Yi-Bimo group. One unique feature of the Yi-Christian group was their inclusivity of outsiders

Table 4.3 Differences in help-seeking behaviors between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo

	Yi-Christians ($n = 23$) (%)	*Yi-Bimo ($n = 24$) (%)*	
	Mean (SD)	*Mean (SD)*	*t value*
Strong-ties	0.28 (0.23)	0.25 (0.22)	0.41
Weak-ties	0.51 (0.41)	0.00 (0.00)	5.90**
External manipulation	0.00 (0.00)	0.25 (0.19)	−6.58**
Internal manipulation	0.58 (0.49)	0.01 (0.03)	5.54**
Secular help (others)	0.70 (0.37)	0.66 (0.43)	0.38
Secular help (self)	0.32 (0.26)	0.23 (0.18)	1.51

Note: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

From Ting, S.-K., Sundararajan, L. K. W., & Huang, Q. B. (2017). Narratives of suffering: A psycholinguistic analysis of two Yi religious communities in Southwest China (Table 5, p. 246). *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 28,* 232–255. Reproduced with permission from BRILL

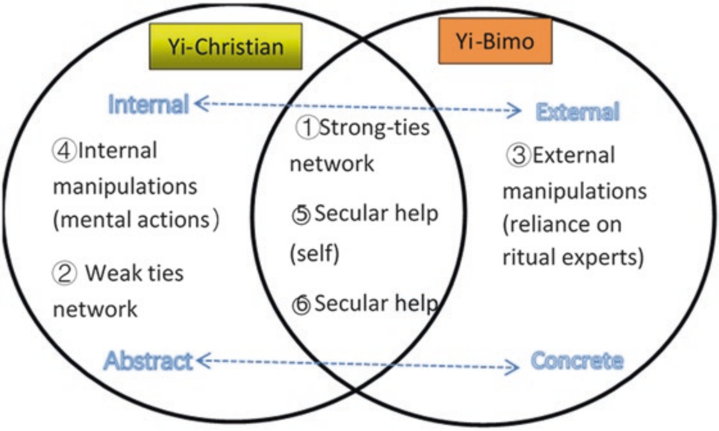

Yi-Christian
Yi-Bimo
Internal
External
④Internal manipulations (mental actions)
② Weak ties network
①Strong-ties network
⑤Secular help (self)
⑥Secular help
③External manipulations (reliance on ritual experts)
Abstract
Concrete

Diagram 4.1 Help-seeking methods of two Yi religious communities, as indexed by the HELP Scale. Note: Items in the overlapping area of the two circles did not show significant group difference

or strangers in their support network, which was an additional asset in times of turbulence and breakdown of the family network due to modernization and economic restructuring in rural China. We reflect on this issue further in Chap. 7.

Also as predicted, the two groups differed significantly on internal versus external orientation in help-seeking. The Yi-Bimo group utilized external manipulation, such as hiring religious specialists to perform rituals, relatively more often, while the Yi-Christian group resorted more often to internal manipulation, such as prayer and faith. The two groups did not differ significantly in seeking help from strong-ties, suggesting that the Yi-Christian group still retained some of their Yi heritage after their conversion to Christianity. The two groups did not differ significantly in seeking secular types of help, such as from the medical profession, workplace, neighbors and friends, and governmental welfare. Both also tried secular self-help methods and relied on positive virtues.

In this chapter, we have looked at help-seeking behaviors through the lens of social-ties, as an alternative to the individualistic Western notion of coping that has spawned various coping theories pertaining to religious coping at the individual level. In a strong-ties society such as that of the Yi people, suffering events are normally shared by family members, as are resources needed to alleviate suffering. We have heard powerful and touching stories of how our Yi interviewees struggled with hindrances and injustice, yet still maintained resilience in the face of suffering. We were also told some tragic stories where help was neither accessible nor affordable, and the individuals from both sites were still suffering. As far as religious support and resources went, we found that Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians access them through different help-seeking behaviors (see Diagram 4.1). The former relied on manipulation of external resources such as ritual experts in order to participate in the communal event of healing, whereas the latter sought manipulation of internal resources (e.g., prayer) or mental action in times of difficulty.

Notes

1. Information source: http://www.scfpym.gov.cn/show.aspx?id=48835

References

Abu Raiya, H., Pargament, K. I., Mahoney, A., & Stein, C. (2008). A psychological measure of Islamic religiousness: Development and evidence for reliability and validity. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 18*(4), 291–315.

Fabricatore, A. N., Handal, P. J., & Fenzel, L. M. (2000). Personal spirituality as a moderator of the relationship between stressors and subjective well-being. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 28*, 221–228.

Fernando, G. A. (2012). Bloodied but unbowed-resilience examined in a south Asian community. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82*(3), 367–375.

Ganzevoort, R. R. (1998). Religious coping reconsidered, part one: An integrated approach. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 26*, 260–275.

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology, 78*, 1360–1380.

Nooney, J., & Woodrum, E. (2002). Religious coping and church-based social support as predictors of mental health outcomes: Testing a conceptual model. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 41*, 359–368.

Harrison, O., Koenig, H. G., Hays, J., et al. (2001). The epidemiology of religious coping: A review of recent literature. *International Review of Psychiatry, 13*(2), 86–93.

Pargament, K. I., Kennell, J., Hathaway, W., Grevengoed, N., Newman, J., & Jones, W. (1988). Religion and the problem-solving process: Three styles of coping. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 27*, 90–104.

Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. M. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: Development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 56*(4), 519–543.

Putman, K. M., Lea, J. C., & Eriksson, C. B. (2011). Cross-cultural comparison of religious coping methods reported by native Guatemalan and Kenyan faith-based relief providers. *Journal of Psychology & Theology, 39*(3), 233–242.

Stone, A., Helder, A., & Schneider, M. (1988). Coping with stressful events: Coping dimensions and issues. In L. Cohen (Ed.), *Life events and psychological functioning: Theoretical and methodological issues* (pp. 182–210). Newberg Park, CA: Sage.

Ting, S.-K., & Ng, L. O. (2012). Use of religious resources in psychotherapy from a tradition-sensitive approach: Cases from Chinese in Malaysia. *Pastoral Psychology: Special Issues, 61*, 941–957.

Ting, S.-K., & Watson, T. (2007). Is suffering good? An explorative study on the religious persecution among Chinese pastors. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 35*, 202–210.

Sundararajan, L. (2015). *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

Wong-McDonald, A., & Gorsuch, R. L. (2000). Surrender to God: An additional coping style? *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 28*, 149–161.

张可佳《族群宗教认同的结构、特点与认同运作机制—基于凉山彝族原生性宗教的研究》中央民族大学博士论文, 2015 年. [Trans] Zhang Kejia. (2015). *The mechanism, structure, and features of the ethnic religious identification: A study based on the native religion in Liangshan Yi group*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation at China Minzu University.

ONLINE RESOURCES

More pictures on: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bxcr-yTD_netal-FoeXZ2MUZGN00/view?usp=sharing

CHAPTER 5

Emotions of Suffering

WHAT ARE EMOTIONS AND HOW TO STUDY THEM?

Emotion can be understood as a multidimensional system consisting of different organismic subsystems—the neuroendocrine system (NES), autonomic nervous system (ANS), somatic nervous system (SoNS), and more. According to Scherer (2001), the best way to study emotion is not to approach it as a whole animal, but rather to break it down to its components. In componential analysis, emotion can be broken down into the following components: cognitive component (evaluation of objects and events, generally referred to as cognitive appraisal), peripheral efference component (system regulation), motivational component (preparation for and direction of action), motor expression component (communication of reaction and behavioral intention, such as facial expressions), and subjective feeling component (monitoring of internal state and organism-environment interaction).

The cognitive component of emotion, in particular, has received much attention in theories of cognitive appraisal, which are concerned with one's subjective evaluation of the emotional stimulus. Scherer proposed a sequential check process of stimulus evaluation (Stimulus Evaluation Checks, SECs), which presumably moves from simple to complex processes: When facing a stimulus, one's emotional system automatically checks to see if the stimulus is relevant, or has implication for one's goal, then checks to see if one has the coping potential to respond to such a

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_5

stimulus, then compares the scenario to one's self-concept and societal standards, and so on. This sequence of emotion appraisal is supposed to be universally valid, as it has been tested across 37 countries (Scherer et al. 1986). However, it is possible that the weighting of the various appraisal checks could be informed by different cultural norms.

A general assumption in mainstream psychology is that the more complex the appraisals, the more developed our emotions will be. Could it be that some cultures actually value a much simpler and intuitive level of emotion processing? For instance, Buddhist mindfulness practices specifically recommend stopping at the early, simple appraisals, and not to pursue complex appraisals (e.g., no judgment) further down the sequential check process. While many cross-cultural psychologists have demonstrated that emotion is closely related to self-construal in different cultures (Kitayama and Markus 1994), the culture theory adopted to explain this connection is largely based on the independent-interdependent continuum, a framework which is limited in scope. Switching from a cross-cultural psychological theory to an indigenous perspective, Sundararajan (2015) offers an account of Chinese emotions that explains much more. According to Sundararajan (2015), Chinese theories of emotion (*qing*) focus on the upstream, whereas Western theories of discrete emotions focus on the downstream of the river called emotion. She argues that a higher level of cognitive appraisal of emotion is not needed in the interpersonal realm, in which it is preferable to have a childlike, intuitive, and implicit mode of emotional transaction, akin to that between infant and caregiver.

Adding another layer of complexity to the culture and emotion debate is our study of the Yi groups. The Yi minority is a population so far neglected in psychology. Not only are they different from the Han Chinese, but there may also be cultural variations within the Yi population—for instance, the two religious groups, Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christan, may differ in social values and cognitive orientation. Since emotional experiences are influenced by religious worldviews and epistemology, it is possible that these two Yi groups may differ in cognitive appraisal, subjective feelings, lexical representation, and other components of emotion. In sum, we would like to know whether the difference in religious background is reflected in the emotional narratives of suffering of the two religious communities of Yi.

With this brief introduction to emotion research, we hope to make it clear that scientific studies of emotion cannot answer the lay questions of emotion. Our analysis of cognitive styles that shape emotion expressions says nothing about "emotion" from the lay perspective. For instance, using less emotional lexicon cannot be interpreted as having fewer emotions. Scientifically speaking, who has more or less emotions is an ill-formulated question. Furthermore, the structural analysis of emotion is not based on the semantic content of words used. This has implications for the language-proficiency question. As long as the two groups were equally impaired as regards Mandarin proficiency (which was the case), the comparison was fair. Our structural analysis of emotion expressions do not answer questions such as: Which group is better at expressing grief? Had they known more Mandarin, would they be able to express their grief better? These are not our research questions. Our analysis focuses on modes of expression, implicit versus explicit—not better or worse, more or less—expressions of emotion. Instead, our research questions are: Do the two groups differ in modes—not content—of emotion expression, when they talk about their suffering? What are the differences in cognitive styles behind the different modes of emotion expression? Can this analysis shed any light on the current predicaments of the Yi community?

In the following sections, we will again present suffering narratives from two different groups of Yi, and introduce an emotion-coding method and scale constructed specifically for this ethnic group. We will propose a two-axis model of emotional expression as an explanatory framework. To further explain the vulnerability of the Yi-Bimo group to AIDS, we consulted the Peircean theory of signs.

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Bimo

Story of QT (Narrated by Keke)

A mud house with dirt walls and a loose mud floor, dim lights, corns hanging from the beams and gathering at the corner of the house. This is a typical picture of a family in poverty in this area. QT, who is 62 years old, is one of the large group of people who left Liangshan to work as a migrant worker. QT's wife is older than him. Because of his poor health, his wife has assumed responsibility for doing the farm work in this household. QT has four sons. Three of them are working as migrant workers, scattered all over China—in Shandong, Jiangsu, and Zhejiang (Fig. 5.1). Talking about his sons, QT said, with both concern and disgruntlement:

Fig. 5.1 QT and his son near the fire pit

"The one who works in Zhejiang is sick but still does not want to come back. He has not been back for five years already."

QT was quite extroverted and talkative. From our communication, I could tell he was an agreeable person who did not like conflict. What made QT worry, besides missing his loved ones, was his sickness, not being able to find a wife for his son, and not being able to build a house because of his poverty. These problems were interrelated. Because of his illness, he could not go out as a migrant worker. This caused poverty. Because of the poverty, he did not have the money to find wives for his sons and build them houses. Regarding his physical problems, QT put them down to rheumatism: "Shoulder pain, hand pain… pains in my bones…" When talking about how they feel about illness, people like him tend to use the word "pain." And when talking about the cause of the pain, they always call it "rheumatism" (*feng shi*). QT believed the reason for his poor physical health was that he hadn't adjusted well when he worked in Tibet as a migrant worker: "I made poles and dug holes… It seemed that I was not used to the weather there. This was probably the reason why I got sick there." QT went to see a doctor. The doctor said it was rheumatism. He also consulted a Bimo priest. The Bimo said his fate was related to the

"Siruo Seruo" (a kind of ghost) of the universe, which meant his sickness was caused by ghosts. To treat his illness, QT spent quite an amount of money. He also tried Bimo healing rituals. Yet, probably because these were not effective, he lost faith in both. He said, with an assertive tone, that the doctor couldn't heal him, and the Bimo rituals didn't do any good either. "I tried the *mi xin* [ritual] at least twice. That was no use at all." He said he would never go to see a doctor or Bimo again.

Although QT had pain all over his body, he was still trying to go with his sons as a migrant worker so he could earn more money to build houses and find wives for his sons. Every time QT contacted his two sons, he always said he was ready to go with his youngest son to find work and earn money. If he couldn't do hard labor, he would work as a night guard or cook. As long as he could make some money, he would do it. Having the money to build a house was a big wish for QT. While the government provided subsidies for building new houses, QT hadn't received anything. QT used to complain about this. He said there were four or five families in his *jia zhi* (clan) in the village that didn't get the subsidy. The reason was that he and the village leader were not on good terms. Although it was unfair, QT didn't go to Degu (the wise elderly in the Yi community) or the head of his clan to seek justice. He didn't want to make a big deal out of it. "Avoid fighting with the villains," he said. "Believe in the government." He did not seek a Bimo's help to resolve this issue either: "I used to seek a Bimo to cast a curse when I had a conflict with others. Now I don't do it anymore. Doing this will hurt myself instead." Endurance and acceptance: these were the qualities cultivated in his long, hard life of poverty and suffering.

Finding wives for his sons was a big issue. It was what caused the biggest headache for QT. He still had three sons who were unmarried: "Finding a wife will cost about 200,000 RMB, 210,000 RMB, or 220,000 RMB." He spent 90,000 RMB when his eldest son got married eight years ago. And it cost less then. "Now we cannot afford it!" QT said with a helpless laugh. Saving such a large amount of betrothal gift money for his son and future daughter-in-law to build their household will exhaust all his means. It's a difficult task even if all five laborers in the household pool their resources. Though their life is difficult, it has to go on. We learned from our conversation that, not long before, QT's two sons had been home for a family gathering. After that they left to work as migrant workers again somewhere else. QT was also waiting for news from the recruiting companies as he is eager to find a job further afield. Whatever the future brings, as head of the household he has to protect his home and sustain his family.

Story of MHWJ (Narrated by Yezi)

MHWJ was 75 years old when we first met him in October 2015. He was living by himself in a mud house close to a cliff and had just come back from doing farm work in the field. He had a dark complexion and deep wrinkles on his forehead. The weather was getting cold already although the fall had just started in Liangshan. WJ made a fire pot. We sat around it and hoped this elderly gentleman would be able to share his colorful life experiences with us. Yet, because WJ's Mandarin was not good, he only sat silently in the corner. His eldest son, MHYB, told us their family stories of suffering.

It was February 2016 when we visited him for the second time. Between our visits, although we kept in contact with his eldest son, we hardly had a chance to talk to MHWJ himself. Fortunately, he didn't forget us despite our lack of communication. There was only his grandson, a sixth-grader, with him when we visited. He seemed very lonely. When he realized that there were people who wanted to hear him talk, he opened up immediately (Fig. 5.2).

At the end of 2014, MHWJ's wife had passed away due to an accident. "My wife was getting old. When she carried the corns up here, she fell and died, just like that. When she fell, my children were all working away as migrant workers. I held her and she leaned on me for a long time. Later on, she was carried to the hospital. The hospital couldn't save her. She passed away just like that." His wife's death was a big blow to him. "My children's mother passed away. After this, my heart was very bitter. I felt very upset on the inside. After that I just lived one day at a time."

Before this, MHWJ had also experienced the loss of other family members. Seventeen years earlier, his eldest son had suddenly become sick. MHWJ recalled, "We took him to the hospital to get treatment. Yet the hospital couldn't cure him. We tried the *mi xin* [ritual] in ethnic Yi tradition. It didn't work either. Then he passed away. It was not the time that people were starving. At that time, people could feed themselves. He didn't fall or anything, yet he got sick. Yes, it was like he was haunted by a ghost." While talking about this, WJ seemed full of regret: "We so wholeheartedly wished to cure him." Probably because he was still in the prime of his life, his pain was not so obvious. "After this one passed away, I thought I still had four sons and a daughter." However, gradually, the trauma of losing a son manifested itself. "I had an eldest son. He also passed away. After he passed away, my heart was just like this… My

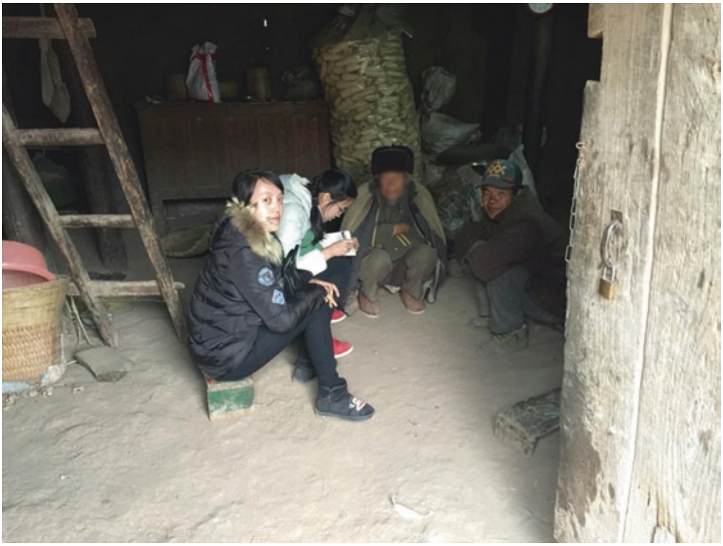


Fig. 5.2 Listening to MHWJ telling his life story

memory is not good anymore. If my eldest son were still alive, I would give the power of this family to him right away and let him be in charge."

The pain of losing his loved ones had made WJ, who was already quite elderly, weaker and more fragile. When he was talking, he would suddenly start crying. He explained: "Sometimes I just cannot help crying. Because when I think about these things, my heart hurts." As for why these things had happened, he said: "My heart is broken. I cannot think of any reason."

Besides the passing away of his loved ones, family financial difficulties had also made WJ very frustrated. Because of his old age, he could barely manage the farm work of the household, even though he really wanted to. "In my heart, I always think about farm work. One day of doing farm work requires two days of rest, because my body cannot endure the fatigue and tiredness anymore." The signs of an aging body were very obvious. "I have a piece of land on this side. I've been working on it for two months. And I have not yet finished turning it over." For this reason, WJ is very worried. At the same time, he feels helpless. "I am very annoyed. My mind is anxious. But it is useless to be anxious since my hands and feet are not nimble now."

According to WJ, his family life is quite miserable. He does not have the ability to change it. Especially when compared with others, he feels strongly about this. “I cannot do farm work, so my heart is bitter. My children have all gone away. Other people have built houses. Our family cannot afford to do it. There are still two sons who have not got married yet. Other people have new houses to live in. Our family cannot afford a new house. Nowadays, my sons won’t come back. We cannot afford cows and sheep. We only have a few chickens and pigs.”

When we asked him why he thought these things had happened, he said he had resigned himself to fate and attributed all the responsibility to himself. “My whole life is like this. I am supposed to encounter these things. In the past, when I was young, I was good at farm work. Now I am old and I cannot do much. If it were not because of this, I could do anything that other people could do. Nowadays, no matter how hard I work, I am still poor. I feel that my fate will always be like this. No matter how much I do I will never get rich. I will always be in poverty.”

Seeing the distress in his eyes and keeping him company as he reflected on his life, we clearly felt how earnestly he wished his family could do better, and how he wished he could help his family members. However, his sons had all left to earn a living as migrant workers. His daughter had married and left. Besides taking care of his grandson and a son with Down’s syndrome, he seemed to have lost his “function.” It seemed nobody cared about his loneliness and sadness. It might have been because of this that he declared: “There will never be a thing that makes me happy again.”

Narratives of Suffering of Yi-Christians

Story of Grandma CZ (Narrated by Xinli)

Compared with other villages we visited in Luquan, the situation of the SH village looked much better. There were not only flat concrete roads here, but also many modern buildings. We could see horse wagons and tractors coming and going, and tobacco-purchase vehicles appearing in the village. The children were all dressed neatly and cleanly. We could tell from all this that the economic situation of this village was quite good.

Grandma CZ lives in such a village. On an afternoon in October 2015, following the lead of Brother T and Brother L, we visited Grandma CZ's home. Grandma CZ's house was filled with corn. The inside of the house was clean. The household items were neatly arranged. Grandma wore a Red Army cap and some clean clothes. Her physical condition seemed quite good. She kept cracking walnuts for us, and accompanied us all the way down the hill. For some reason, Grandma always said she was "tired" (Fig. 5.3).

Grandma CZ was 62 years old when we met her. She is an illiterate ethnic Yi. Her husband is a year older than her and there are only the two of them in the household. Grandma CZ has two sons and one daughter. Her elder son is 49 years old, and lives with his two children. He seldom takes care of his parents. Her elder daughter married and moved away, and they had lost contact with her a long time ago. Her younger son, who is 33 years old, works in Kunming as a migrant worker. According to Brother T, this younger son was in a lot of debt and has remained single so far. Brother T said Grandma CZ had been sick for 13 years. She often went to

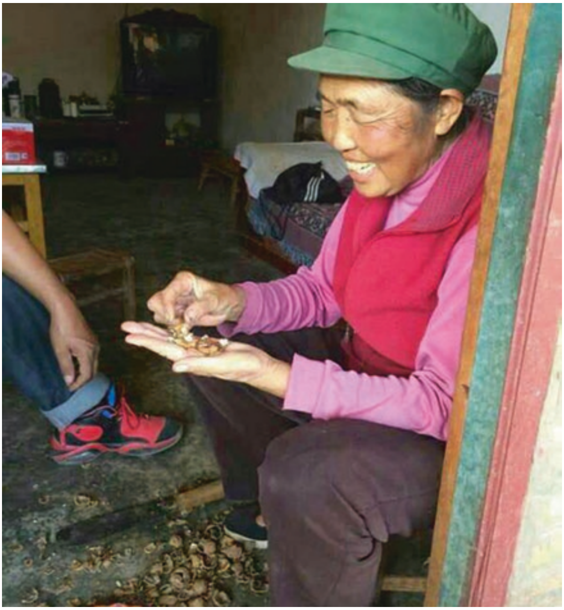


Fig. 5.3 Grandma CZ sharing walnuts picked from her own house with us

the hospital by herself. She also went to Brother T's house as he is a relative of hers. Grandma CZ said she had headaches, cervical spondylosis, lumbar vertebra pain, and so on. She could not walk well or sleep well. She also said that she "has no strength." When she felt really sick, she would ask her younger son, who was working away, to come back and take her to the hospital. However, after being discharged from the hospital, she didn't take Western medicines as she thought they were not effective. Instead, she had started taking Chinese herbal medicines. She had once spent more than 1000 RMB on herbal medicines. It took 36 days to finish the course of the treatment. Grandma has been a Christian since she was 22 years old. She is the only Christian in her family. But no one in the family rejects her faith. Grandma's father was a Christian. He passed away when she was 14 years old. She started attending worship because her father had been a believer. Grandma believed that, after becoming a Christian, she was not as "resentful" (*qi*) as before. Even when she was sick, she did not feel sad. She believed she could only "rely on God's strength" now (Fig. 5.4).

Grandma's sickness and loneliness mainly started with the division of her household 13 years earlier. Her elder son was married, and although he still lived close to her house, he had his own family and household to look after. Her younger son had left to work in Kunming as a migrant worker and did not come back home very often. Grandma missed her younger son a lot. She did not know whether he lived a good life or not. She also worried whether her elder son could support his own family. Grandma CZ thought perhaps she had got sick because she worried too much about these things. One year after her youngest son moved away from home, she started feeling pain at the back of her neck. Sometimes, when the situation got worse, she would even pass out and lose her memory. She felt even more depressed and sadder and had lost much of her hope for the future. When she was alone at home, she couldn't do much work besides tending the buffalo. She felt chest pain when she slept at night. She often felt fatigue and pain all over her body. When she couldn't take it anymore she would go to the hospital in town by herself. She was all alone at the hospital. She could only comfort herself by singing hymns. The songs she liked the most were "The Elite Soldier of Christ" and "God, Please Listen to My prayers." In the beginning, Grandma felt very annoyed and uncomfortable when she was sick. Yet, by praying and singing hymns, she gave everything to God and relied on God for everything. Then she felt somewhat relieved. According to Grandma CZ: "When I sing and pray I don't feel as sad. When I am not singing, I feel sad." From

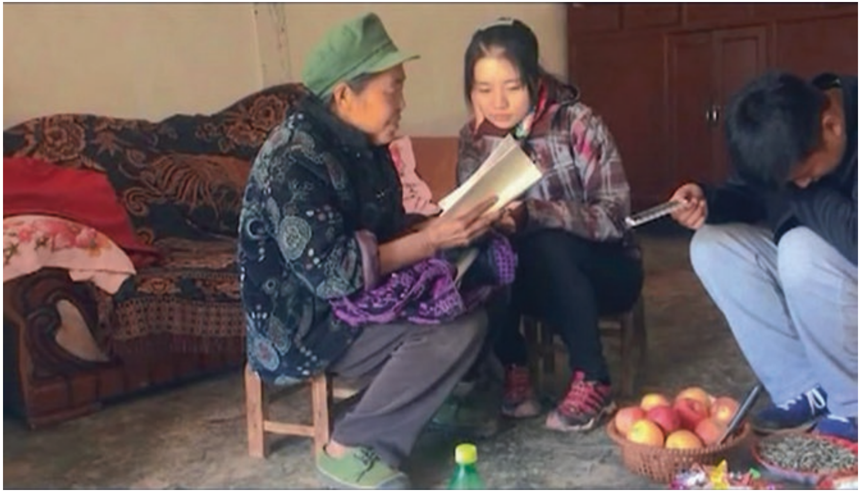


Fig. 5.4 The RA listening to Grandma CZ singing hymns in her living room

this we could tell that the power of her faith helped relieve her loneliness and emotional pain. This lonely grandma is kind and loving. She not only prayed for her sons, wishing for her elder son to have a wonderful family life, and for her younger son to become a believer soon, but also prayed for the peace of the country and for a lot of missionaries in different areas.

As Grandma CZ understood Mandarin, we were able to have some basic communication on the phone. During these phone conversations, Grandma CZ was quite talkative, always asking how the interviewer (RA) was doing and expressing care. In December, Grandma CZ kept asking us to come and spend Christmas with her. Yet, whenever we asked if her sons had been back to visit her recently, her voice started getting lower and lower, and then she shifted the topic, asking us questions instead. We could tell that Grandma still missed her younger son a lot.

In January 2016, we visited Grandma CZ's house again. It was almost time to celebrate Chinese New Year. Her two sons were at home butchering the pig for the New Year celebration (this is a big event for rural Yi families, where they slaughter the pig for the New Year feast and keep the meat for the rest of the year). Grandma looked to be in a very good mood, calling us to come inside the house to rest. She had a happy smile on her face the whole time. Her overall spirits and mood seemed much better compared with the last time we had seen her. As she had told us last time that she felt sick all over her body, we asked if there was anything that had been bothering her recently. Grandma CZ said that she did not have many problems in her life except thinking about us too much. We asked Grandma if the reason she felt so good today was because her sons had both come back. Grandma said she could see her sons often, but she saw us rarely. She also told us that she had wished for us to spend Christmas in her house, but had not known how to let us know about this. She thought we might be able to come when the pig was butchered for the New Year celebration. Then, when we did come, she was very happy. Later on, Grandma sang a hymn for us, a song welcoming guests who had come from far away. That night, we ate a big "annual pork feast" dinner at Grandma CZ's house.

In July 2016, we visited Grandma CZ for the third time at her house. Only she and Grandpa were at home. Their sons were not there. We watched the video clips from the interview together and Grandma CZ was quite shy, saying she could not understand or speak Mandarin well. Grandpa helped with the translation, asking with a smile if Grandma could understand or not. She smiled when she saw herself singing a hymn. After watching the video, Grandma said "Praise the Lord" and told us she liked this video very much. Although her two sons were not at home, Grandma's mood seemed even better than on the previous two visits. The change was obvious. She smiled more often. And she said she did not go to the hospital that often nowadays.

Story of Grandma BL (Narrated by Zhangying)

In October 2015, following a lead from the local informant, we walked into the courtyard where Grandma BL lived. The courtyard and inside of the house were both relatively spacious, clean, organized, and neat. Grandma BL wore clean, Yi-style clothes. Her son, daughter-in-law, and a cute, lively great-grandson were also at home. Grandma was in quite good spirits. During our conversations, I could tell that the daughter-in-law took good care of her. The whole family atmosphere was peaceful, warm, and enjoyable. The little great-grandson was very close to his great-grandma. The local informant took the child to the courtyard to play, at which point we finally got the opportunity to hear Grandma talking about her life story.

Grandma BL was 78 years old when we were first introduced to her. She is an ethnic Yi and has been a Christian for 46 years. Her husband passed away more than 20 years ago. She has a daughter and three sons. Her daughter passed away due to sickness. Her eldest son also passed away because of a brain tumor. Nowadays, Grandma lives in the house of her second son and his wife. Her youngest son also takes good care of her. Her life seems peaceful and satisfactory. Yet, from what she told us, Grandma had been feeling burdened with "huge pressures" (*ya li*). I asked her what these pressures were. Grandma said: "I feel mentally burdened and in pain emotionally since my illness is not cured." It turned out that, as Grandma had very serious rheumatism, she relied on taking medicines and shots to relieve her pain. Grandma told us with a smile: "The doctor said this disease cannot be cured." Even though she was talking about her difficulties, her expression was calm. Grandma cannot walk too much by herself. Every month her son goes to the town hospital in Luquan to buy painkillers and needles for her. Grandma said her son also drives the whole family to church—a place where the nearby Yi villagers gather and do religious activities—for Sunday worship. Her whole family are believers. The filial piety of her children and their support for Grandma's faith make it possible for her to be well taken care of in her old age. Grandma said this is God's grace. She often prays silently at home and gives thanks to God.

"God has blessed me. If there were no comfort from God, I could not live till now; neither could I live a good life like this."

During this visit, Grandma BL also told us why she became a Christian, and how she was worried about her lack of faith. When Grandma was young, she once got sick and had a dream. In the dream, she had two books by her pillow. There was also a crutch. When BL told pastor Li, the village minister at that time, about her dream, pastor Li said: "Come and trust in God. God has selected you. Come and put your trust in Jesus." When asked about suffering events, Grandma BL said that there were not many difficulties at home. She confessed she didn't have enough faith sometimes: "It is just that I am not always steady in my thinking. I waver sometimes" (Fig. 5.5).

Between October and December 2015, during phone calls, Grandma told us her son had been to town to buy medicines for her. She went to church every Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. She said: "I go out by myself. Several other grandmas and I talk and pray together. We sing hymns, both in the Yi dialect and in Mandarin." Grandma BL mentioned that, in her silent prayers, she wished her illnesses (slipped disc and rheumatism) would resolve themselves.

Fig. 5.5 Our first visit to Grandma BL, in front of her house

One morning in January 2016, we went to Grandma's house for a second interview. The weather was a bit cold. When we got there, Grandma BL had just got up. She said that, after she had woken up, she felt her rheumatism had gone worse. She could not walk. She had to massage her legs for a while before she was able to move around. During this interview, although she had just woken up, Grandma was in good spirits and more than willing to talk. She became immersed in her storytelling, talking slowly. The reason Grandma BL's rheumatism was so severe, she said, was because she got it during the Great Leap Forward. At that time, the whole country had been mobilized to produce steel and iron. Grandma, in her twenties at the time, worked at the Maoshan Iron Factory. She could only sleep by the roadside at night. Every day she got exposed to the rain. She told us, "This policy was in place during 1957 and 1958. During the Great Leap Forward nobody was at home. Everyone had to go out. Either to the factory or the field. Whenever you went to work, you had to live there. As a result, few people escaped this disease. At that time, [people] often stayed outside. [They] were not allowed to come back."

Grandma BL told us that, although the government persecuted the church at that time, she and her fellow believers still practiced their faith in secret. They prayed silently in their hearts in order to survive those difficult days: "While we were not allowed to have Christian faith, we would practice our beliefs secretly… while the government persecuted the church, we would go to pray secretly, going up to the mountain secretly to pray… Two or three of us would go all the way up to the mountain and kneel down to pray. After we prayed, we would collect leaves and pick up firewood." Grandma said this without a pause. "Because we believed [in God] secretly, we didn't have Bibles or hymnals. Those old pastors and elders wrote down some hymns themselves and taught us to sing. We didn't dare sing aloud. We just gathered secretly. We were too scared at that time. Some pastors and elders were persecuted and arrested and put into prison." Grandma raised her voice. She said that when she saw they had been imprisoned, she would pray for them secretly. At that time, Grandma felt that "since God is with us, we will not be afraid of anything. I was in good health then. I was bold. And I was in high spirits."

When Grandma was young, with her faith in God, she persisted in praying silently no matter how severe the government persecution. She followed her own heart. "The Great Leap Forward started in 1958. Then it was the Great Cultural Revolution. All kinds of revolutions. At that time, in 1957 or 1958, [people] always did labor with an empty stomach. [They] didn't have anything to eat. When [I] was young I had faith and good health. I was happy too. How people talked about us was not my concern. Everything was in God's hands. No matter what they did, they wouldn't know our hearts. We still believed, yet they didn't know about it."

Yet, as time went by, Grandma BL's biggest source of suffering became the mental burden of seeing her loved ones departing this world one by one. Her eldest son's brain tumor shocked her and made her sick to the point where she couldn't get up. She herself was getting older too. If her rheumatism got worse, it might cause paralysis. Grandma BL said that, if not for her faith in God, she would have committed suicide. "I feel upset every day. Because I do not have good faith, enough faith." It all started when they found out her eldest son had a brain tumor. Then the doctor said the disease could not be cured. It had been more than a year since then. During this time, Grandma had got sicker and sicker. She was very deeply affected by her grief and still in mourning when we met her. Grandma BL told us that, up until three years ago, she had still been able to work: "Till my eldest son got sick. Then I could not do labor anymore. I was not happy. My thinking was heavily burdened. But this is because I don't have good faith, enough faith. If I had faith, I would still be joyful. He was released from all his sufferings and went to heaven. I could not think of these things. Now the younger generation has left this world first, I feel left behind with this mental burden." The tragedy of "the white haired sending away the black haired," as per the old Chinese saying, made Grandma mentally and physically exhausted. She still clearly remembered the days of her eldest son's death. "Yes, his situation got worse. It was terminal… his brain tumor… He used to work in the Luquan Sugar, Tobacco and Liquor Company. So he went to Sichuan to ship fish to Fumin. He fell down from the vehicle. He didn't sleep the whole night. He had an operation at that time. The last time, he had brain blood stasis. His brain had blood congestion inside. This (tumor) was the consequence of that."

Grandma BL said her life story could be made into a book, as her own mother passed away when she was only seven years old. Then her father passed away when she was aged 14. She recalled, "When I was 15, I learned how to knit by myself. I made a living by knitting yarn… Both my mother and father passed away early. When I was 54, my husband passed away too. Last year… the year before last year, my eldest son passed away too. I asked myself how I went through all of these. One went away after the other, one after the other, leaving me alone in this world… My daughter passed away too. It has been six, seven years since she passed away. Four to five years after she was gone, my eldest one passed away too. My health broke down because of the death of these two kids."

As she recalled the death of her loved ones, her voice became lower and heavier. Grandma BL said: "God will not let us be in short. I live till now just like that. My mom, as I heard from the villagers, my mom also became a believer before she passed away. My father was not a believer. So, I am living like this. It is my biggest blessing that God comes and guards me. If I were not a Christian, I would have committed suicide when my son passed away. Because God protects me and loves me, so I live till now." At the end of our conversation, Grandma said she wanted us to pray for her and thanked us for our visit.

In the summer of 2016, it was time for our third field trip. We brought the video clip we had made to Grandma's house. After watching the video together with Grandma BL, she said: "I appreciate your help. I cause trouble for you. I feel very sorry to you and to God. Because I don't have good faith." Then Grandma smiled again, asking us to pray for her. She was at home taking care of her great-grandson. Grandma's rheumatism was still severe. She talked again about doing hard labor during the Great Leap Forward, about sleeping on the ground every day, being exposed to the rain the whole night till dawn. She said she appreciated our care. Her son and grandson would help with buying medicine for her knee pain. She still went to church for worship and prayed silently in her heart every day.

Culture, Cognition and Emotion

Cognitive styles of information processing differ along two axes: A. experience-near versus experience-distant; and B. external/physical versus internal/mental. In the psychology of emotion, the A axis is prominent in the cognitive appraisal theory of Scherer (2001), who posits a sequence of emotion processing from sensory-motor (experience-near) to conceptual (experience-distant) levels of appraisal. The B axis is emphasized in the structural theory of Ortony et al. (1987), who claim that the emotion lexicon has an internal/mental rather than external/physical locus of reference. Mapping out the two axes of cognitive processing (see Diagram 1.2), we can formulate our predictions as follows: Yi-Bimo fall in the experience-near x external/physical quadrant; Yi-Christians, the experience-distant x internal/mental quadrant.

Supporting evidence for our hypothesis has been found in the Help and Why Scales (Chaps. 3 and 4). The Why Scale showed that the difference in causal attributions of suffering between the two groups fell along the divide between concrete and abstract thinking: The Yi-Bimo relied on concrete cues in the environment for diagnoses of supernatural influences such as ghosts or curses, while Yi-Christians gave more existential and abstract explanations (fate, God's will, etc.), referred to as Life Review, for their suffering. Likewise, the Help scale showed that the difference in coping between the two groups fell along the divide between external/physical and internal/mental. Yi-Bimo capitalized on seeking external help from religious experts who would perform rituals, whereas Yi-Christians relied more on their own internal/mental resources, such as prayer or faith. To bring emotion into this mix, we need a theoretical framework that can bring culture, emotion, and cognition together. Enter semiotics—the study of meaning making and representation as a system of signs.

A Sign System of Emotion

A sign is anything that represents something else. According to the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce (Hoopes 1991), a fully developed sign consists of three modes of representation (icon, index, and symbol), each of which contributes uniquely to the overall efficiency of the sign as a system (Deacon 1997):

1. An icon is a concrete expression of experience. It embodies a relationship of spatio-temporal contiguity between the sign and what it represents. Some examples from the above vignettes from the Yi-Bimo group are:

    - $ (RMB). Talking about money is a concrete way of talking about one's financial condition. For instance, "90,000 RMB" ("Now we cannot afford it!") (QT).
    - Somatic expressions (Physical Discomforts such as headache, backache, or detailed descriptions of Aches and Pains). For instance, "shoulder pain, hand pain… pains in my bones" (QT).

2. An index is also an implicit, experience-bound type of representation. The difference between an icon and an index is summed up by

Parmentier (1994) as follows: Whereas an icon provides some information about reality, such as the speaker's suffering and distress, an index "directs the mind to some aspect of [that] reality" (p. 7). An example would be the unconscious automatic display of emotions, such as crying, blushing, etc. Another is the gesture of pointing. A linguistic equivalent to the gesture of pointing is "this" or "that." For instance, "After he passed away, my heart was just like **this**… My memory is not good anymore" (MHWJ, emphasis added).

3. A symbol refers to a linguistic expression, which, unlike an index or icon, has an arbitrary relationship with what it represents. For instance, blushing has a physical connection with the feeling of embarrassment, but the word "embarrassment" does not. The relationship between word and feeling is arbitrarily determined by culture. An example of the use of symbols would be bona fide Emotion Words (such as happiness, anger, sadness), for instance, "miserable inside my heart" (心里面特难受) (MHWJ).

According to Peirce, a fully developed sign system is capable of integrating its multiple functions of representation: subjective experience (foregrounded by the index), concrete expression (rendered visible by the icon), and abstract understanding (rendered explicit by the symbol). For instance, an integration of "my heart was just like this" (index), with "my memory is not good anymore" (icon), and "miserable inside my heart" over the loss of family members results in a fully developed sign that adequately represents the experience of suffering for MHWJ. Now, what if MHWJ is not good at symbolic/linguistic representation of his experience? For instance, what if he is able to talk about his physical Aches and Pain, but not able to verbalize his sadness and grief? His culture can step up to the plate and help out: Instead of using Emotion Words such as "miserable" to articulate his experience of suffering, the folks of Meigu could resort to the Bimo religion, which has a large store of symbols that not only explain the cause of their suffering but also provide the means of solving problems that cannot be solved by secular means. For instance, if MHWJ had enough money, he could pay for a healing ritual, in which every detail of his physical symptoms would receive symbolic elaboration with narratives of ghosts, spirits, curses, and so on. Furthermore, even if his medical condition cannot be improved, his spirit would be lifted by the collective effervescence of the healing ritual to which the entire neighborhood is invited.

A Psycho-linguistic Study of Suffering Narratives

In order to quantify the emotional expressions in the interview transcripts, we constructed a How Scale, guided by componential analysis theory and phenomenological analysis of the pilot study.

Method

The How Scale consists of ten items with specific coding systems, as described below (one item—money, which was predicted to be mentioned with a relatively higher frequency by the Yi-Bimo group—was dropped due to the difficulty of manual coding):

1. Emotion-Laden Events: death, loss of job, no money, school drop-out, illness, etc.

   * Code according to the emotion behind it—if the same event is mentioned with different emotions, count separately.

2. Coping Appraisal: assessment of own ability to cope. It implies the emotions of despair or hopefulness behind the statements, for instance, "After that I just lived one day at a time" (MHWJ of the Yi-Bimo group).

   ** Appraisal of one's ability to cope—this is the appraisal of one's feeling of whether the situation exceeds one's ability to cope or not, so it is an implicit way of talking about feeling hopeful, hopeless, helpless, powerless, etc. Statements that have these feelings are good examples.
   *** Coping Appraisal can be divided into negative and positive: under negative is helplessness; under positive is optimism. The whole thing works the same as assessing hopelessness and hopefulness, except that cognitive statements are coded, not Emotion Words.

3. Emotion Words: feeling lexicons, e.g., happy, sad, grief.
4. Physical Discomfort (reported verbally): headaches, insomnia, fatigue, etc. Do not include disease (AIDS, heart disease, rheumatism, etc.).

5. Graphic description of physical Aches and Pains: “piercing pain, like a knife,” etc.
6. Facial expressions/physical reactions (observed): any actions related to emotion, such as frowning, tearing, cursing, crying, screaming, shaking, jumping, sighing, etc.

* Code by watching the video-taped interview sessions.

7. Emotional expression (self-reported verbally): crying, laughing, etc.
8. External Attribution: adjectives describing the situations (not feelings), such as difficult, lucky, poor, etc.
9. Repression: can’t or don’t want to recall the suffering incidents. Repression is unconscious, resulting in being forgetful. Consciously forgetting, consciously not thinking is coping, not Repression, such as “I don’t remember.”
10. Difficulty in Articulation: can’t say it, or don’t know how to say it.

Two RAs were trained to count the frequency of each of the items above, and cross-compare them with each other for accuracy. After that, we checked the coding again to make sure it was consistent with the definition of each item. After the total frequency for each category was tabulated, we divided this by total word count for each transcript, to take the averaged frequency of each scale category, and convert these into percentages.

Hypothesis

On our hypothetical culture and cognition grid (Diagram 1.2), Yi-Bimo were placed in the experience-near/concrete x external/physical quadrant, and Yi-Christians in the experience-distant/abstract x internal/mental quadrant. How do we translate this hypothesis into predictions of emotion expressions? Enter the “balance of components” theory of emotion (Ortony et al. 1987), which posits that emotion expression has to do with distribution of cognitive resources. Thus, heavy use of one type of emotion expression (say, concrete) might entail light use of another type of representation (say, abstract), and vice versa. This hypothesis makes the following predictions: The Yi-Bimo group will tend to make relatively more use of iconic and indexical expressions, and relatively less use of symbolic expressions of suffering, whereas the other way around is true of the Yi-Christian group. More specifically, the two Yi groups will differ significantly as regards the following items of the How Scale:

Symbol (abstract representation with internal/mental focus)

- Emotion Words
- Self-reported Emotional Expression ("I cried," etc.)

Icon (concrete representation with external/physical focus)

- Physical Discomforts
- Aches and Pains

Index (concrete representation with external/physical focus)

- Observed Physical Reactions (facial expression, tone of voice, etc.)

Results and Discussion

Our hypothesis is partially supported by the results of psycho-linguistic analysis (see Chap. 1 under the Data Analysis section). As predicted, the Yi-Christian group, in comparison to the Yi-Bimo group, had significantly more output on Emotion Words (see Table 5.1). However, contrary to our prediction, there were no significant group differences in the following categories: Physical Discomforts, Aches and Pains, Observed Physical Reactions, and Self-reported Emotional Expression. In addition, there were unpredicted group differences: There was a significant group difference in the frequency of Emotion-Laden Events (narratives of emotional episodes), with the Yi-Bimo group reporting more episodes than the Yi-Christian group. On both Difficulty in Articulation ("don't know how to say it") and External Attribution (words used to describe the environment), Yi-Christians scored higher than Yi-Bimo.

According to the "balance of components" theory (Ortony et al. 1987), relatively low production in the symbolic register suggests the possibility of relatively high production in the icon and index registers, and vice versa. Thus, with the relatively low production of Emotion Words in the Yi-Bimo group, we might have expected to find a relatively high production of concrete and external types of emotion expressions. However, this prediction was not borne out by results in the categories of icon (Physical Discomforts, Aches and Pain) and index (Observed Physical Reactions). One possibility is that, relative to the symbolic/linguistic, explicit expression of emotions, the implicit mode of expression characteristic of the icon and

Table 5.1 Differences in emotional expression between Yi-Christians and Yi-Bimo

	Yi-Christians (n = 23) (%)	*Yi-Bimo (n = 24) (%)*	
	Mean (SD)	*Mean (SD)*	*t value*
Emotion-Laden Events	2.01 (0.77)	2.76 (0.79)	−3.28**
Coping Appraisal	0.16 (0.13)	0.16 (0.15)	−0.05
Emotion Words	0.80 (0.41)	0.44 (0.36)	3.25**
Physical Discomfort	0.50 (0.64)	0.51 (0.59)	−0.01
Aches and Pains	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.08)	−0.33
Self-reported Emotional Expression	0.04 (0.14)	0.01 (0.04)	0.82
External Attribution	0.23 (0.31)	0.09 (0.09)	2.08*
Repression	0.04 (0.05)	0.02 (0.04)	1.32
Difficulty in Articulation	0.12 (0.20)	0.02 (0.05)	2.29*
Observed Physical Reactions	0.14 (0.12)	0.15 (0.14)	−0.34

Note: *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

From Ting, S.-K., Sundararajan, L. K. W., & Huang, Q. B. (2017). Narratives of suffering: A psycholinguistic analysis of two Yi religious communities in Southwest China (Table 4, p. 245). *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 28,* 232–255. Reproduced with permission from BRILL

index poses more of a challenge for the coders. Furthermore, coding physical reaction, such as facial expressions, demands skills that go beyond the textual analysis training we provided for the coders.

Not surprisingly, it is the verbal categories, which can be coded relatively easily, that, albeit not predicted, tend to support our predictions. For instance, Emotion-Laden Events are narratives that call attention, as the linguistic equivalent of pointing, to the emotion-causing event. As can be expected, the Yi-Bimo group scored higher on this indexical category. Difficulty in Articulation ("don't know how to say it") suggests awareness of the language barrier. As can be expected, Yi-Christians scored relatively higher on this category—the more one is invested in explicit expression, the more likely one is aware of difficulties in articulation caused by language barriers. By the same token, since Yi-Christians tend to be more verbal and explicit, they can be expected to score relatively higher on External Attribution, which refers to words used in describing the external environment (hardship, etc.). As for the implicit categories of emotion expression, which manual coding did not capture very well, along with the item "money," which we dropped from the How Scale, machine coding of the transcripts was able to produce the predicted results for them (Sundararajan and Hsieh 2017).

Overall, the major difference, defined as p value <.01, between the two groups is found in Emotion Words and Emotion-Laden Events, which correspond to the two different modes of representation, explicit versus implicit, respectively. This finding is consistent with the major findings from other scales. In Table 5.2, we put together the items from all scales—How, Why, and Help—that highly and significantly (at $p < .01$) differentiated the groups (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.2 allows us to make the following predictions:

a. The two groups differentially privilege (as evidenced by higher output) the various items in accordance with their respective putative cognitive processing (concrete versus abstract) and orientation (external- versus internal-focus).
b. As we placed all items privileged (as evidenced by higher output) by the same religious group in the same column, we predicted that an item would tend to be positively correlated with other items in the same column, and negatively correlated with items in the adjacent column.

Table 5.2 Summary of the cognitive differences in suffering narratives between two Yi religious communities

Religious groups	*Yi-Bimo*	*Yi-Christian*
Cognitive style	**Experience-near** **Perceptual (concrete)**	**Experience-distant** **Conceptual (abstract)**
Cognitive orientation	**External-focus**	**Internal-focus**
Why Scale	***Supernatural Causes*** (ghosts, curses, etc.): capitalizing on perceptual cues for diagnosis	***Life Review*** (fate, God's plan, etc.): abstract explanations
Help Scale	***Manipulation of external resources***: Concrete action (hire a religious specialist to perform ritual) ***Strong-ties***	***Manipulation of internal resources***: Mental action (prayer, faith, etc.) ***Weak-ties***
How Scale	***Emotion-Laden Events*** (implicit mode of expression)	***Emotion Words*** (explicit mode of expression)

Note: ***Bold italics*** = measurement items that showed significant difference between the groups

Table 5.3 Correlation matrix of items that showed significant group differences

		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
1	Strong-ties								
2	Weak-ties	−.12							
3	AIDS	.01	−.27**						
4	Emotion-Laden Events	−.05	−.37**	.18					
5	Emotion Words	−.06	.53**	−.25*	−.22				
6	External manipulation	.17	−.46**	.34**	.38**	−.46**			
7	Internal manipulation	−.05	.88**	−.27*	−.29**	.59**	−.45**		
8	Supernatural Causes	.03	−.41**	.09	.17	−.21	.69**	−.40**	
9	Life Review	.02	.65**	−.27*	−.34**	.54**	−.45**	.67**	−.34**

Note: $^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$

From Ting, S.-K., Sundararajan, L. K. W., & Huang, Q. B. (2017). Narratives of suffering: A psycholinguistic analysis of two Yi religious communities in Southwest China (Table 6, p. 247). *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion, 28,* 232–255. Reproduced with permission from BRILL

We ran a correlational analysis to find out. We also added AIDS from the What Scale to explore the health implications of cognitive differences. Results are presented in Table 5.3.

Both predictions (a) and (b) are confirmed. Variables that differed along the divide between cognitive differences in processing (concrete versus abstract) and orientation (external- versus internal-focus) were significantly and negatively correlated; whereas variables that were privileged by the same religious group were significantly and positively correlated. In sum, the variables that differentiated the Yi groups were related to one another in ways consistent with predicted cognitive differences, suggesting construct and discriminant validity of our scales. For instance, consistent with the claim of Ortony et al. (1987) that the emotion lexicon has an internal/mental rather than external/physical locus of reference, the variable “Emotion Words” was highly significantly ($p < .01$) and positively correlated with variables with mental, internal loci of reference (internal manipulation, $r = .59$; Life Review, $r = .54$), and, conversely, was negatively correlated with external manipulation ($r = -.46$), which refers to the reliance on external help from ritual experts to cope with suffering.

The correlation matrix of Table 5.3 also sheds further light on the group comparison between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians: Whereas help-seeking from family members (strong-ties) was not significantly correlated with any relevant variables, seeking help from church members (weak-ties), characteristic of Christianity, was highly significantly ($p < .01$) and positively correlated with variables (internal manipulation, $r = .88$; Life Review, $r = .65$; and Emotion Words, $r = .53$) that are indicative of abstract, mental processing, and internal orientation on the one hand; and highly significantly ($p < .01$) and negatively correlated with variables (external manipulation, $r = -.46$; supernatural cause, $r = -.41$; Emotion-Laden Events, $r = -.37$) that are indicative of concrete, perceptual processing, and external orientation on the other. Furthermore, AIDS was highly and significantly ($p < .01$) correlated with religious practices: It was negatively ($r = -.27$) related to help-seeking from church members (weak-ties), but positively ($r = .34$) related to external manipulation (Bimo rituals). In addition to its negative relationship with weak-ties, AIDS was also significantly ($p < .05$) negatively correlated with variables—Emotion Words, internal manipulation, and Life Review—that had relatively higher output among the Yi-Christians. How, then, do we understand, in terms of cognitive styles, the relative vulnerability of the Yi-Bimo to AIDS?

Mentalization and Alexithymia: A Western Diagnosis

The linguistic profiles of the Yi groups suggest the following differences in cognitive styles: The Yi-Bimo, relative to the Yi-Christians, capitalized on perceptual, rather than conceptual, modes of processing, and privileged concrete and implicit, instead of abstract and explicit, modes of expression. This resulted in a relatively external, instead of internal, focus, attribution and coping. Cast into the framework of the internal versus external distinction in cognitive orientation, the linguistic profile of the Yi-Bimo bears a striking resemblance to that of alexithymia.

Initially conceptualized by Sifneos (1967) as a difficulty in putting emotion into words, alexithymia is a “multifaceted personality construct that has been associated with various medical and psychiatric disorders” (Taylor 2000, p. 134). The salient features of alexithymia are: difficulty identifying and describing subjective feelings, difficulty distinguishing between feelings and bodily sensations of emotional arousal, constricted imaginal capacities as evidenced by a paucity of fantasies, and an externally oriented cognitive style (Taylor 2000, p. 135). Relevant to alexithymia is the notion of mentalization (Fonagy 1991), which refers to the capacity to represent experience mentally, thereby shifting somatosensory memories from the body to the mind. From this perspective, alexithymia may be understood as a deficit in mentalization, with far-reaching health consequences.

While we do not wish to label the Yi-Bimo as alexithymic, for reasons to be elaborated later, we may pause to ponder the fact that their current plight seems to be predicted by the theory of alexithymia as a deficit in mentalization. According to Taylor (2000), the "externalizing cognitive style" of alexithymia is associated with varying degrees of emotional impairment, ranging from a paucity of affective vocabulary to addiction and acting-out tendencies. Similar problems are found in the Yi-Bimbo population of today. Liu (2011) and others have documented how the Yi-Bimo community is currently ravaged by problems of substance abuse, AIDS, and incarceration due to physical fights.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to use individual diagnosis, such as alexithymia, on cultures, because the former is context-less. To offer a culturally and historically contextualized interpretation of the health implications of our findings, we consult the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce (Hoopes 1991).

Culture, Emotion, and Health: A Semiotic Analysis

The advantage of Peircean semiotics lies in the fact that it broadens the notion of mentalization such that the "mind" is no longer confined to the individual psyche, but extends instead to the community. The mind is in signs, and not the other way around, according to Peirce.

To refresh our memory, a sign is equipped with three modes of representation—symbol, icon, and index—which constitute the triadic structure of the sign (Deacon 1997). According to Peirce, efficient functioning of the sign is contingent upon the integrity of its triadic structure (Hoopes 1991). Peirce further claims that integrity of the sign structure and well-being of the sign-user are intimately related. One important implication of this formulation is that it is in terms of sign structure and sign use, rather than the individual psyche, that deficiencies in well-being can be analyzed and remedies found.

Let us now examine the configuration of sign use in Yi-Bimo narratives of suffering. Their perceptual mode of processing and external orientation in attribution and coping suggest a tendency to use icon and index as preferred modes of emotion expression, as evidenced by their relatively higher output of Emotion-Laden Events. Correspondingly, their relatively low output of Emotion Words suggests a potential weakness in symbolic representation of experience. Consistent with this linguistic protocol are their relatively higher scores on "Don't know" and relatively lower scores on Life Review (reflection on and interpretation of life), in comparison to Yi-Christians. Their relatively higher scores on "Don't know" may be attributable to the relatively low interpretative impetus of representations that privilege concrete experiences, such as iconic and indexical signs. Peirce gave the example of the bullet-hole as an indexical sign of a gunshot, a representation that has a direct physical connection to the signified, independent of an interpreting mind: "for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not" (Peirce cited in Hoopes 1991, p. 240). Similarly, concrete physical experiences such as Aches and Pains are signs that refer to some physiological change, a condition that "truly" exists, regardless of whether it is recognized/interpreted as such or not. From the Peircean perspective, this seeming independence from interpretation explains why iconic and indexical sign use is not invested in symbolic elaborations.

Historically, the Yi-Bimo tradition is able to keep a balance between its sensory-bound reality space, sustained by iconic and indexical sign use, on the one hand, and the virtual space of symbol use, sustained by a rich tradition of myths and rituals, on the other. Sundararajan & Kim (2011) points out that in the healing rituals of many indigenous cultures, the triadic structure of the sign is kept intact by a division of labor: the burden of symbolic representation by means of linguistic expression and interpretation is carried by the spiritual healer, while the client only has the responsibility of avowal ("yes, it hurts"), an indexical function that validates the representations presented by the healer. Through this division of labor, the healing ritual restores the integrity of the sign system, thereby the health of the sign-user. Put another way, since the ritual expert can perform the symbolic function more than adequately, the limited capacity of the clients to express their emotions verbally (symbolically) become inconsequential.

Division of labor is the way all minds work, not simply those of preindustrial societies. A modern example would help. Just as the Yi-Bimbo delegate to the religious experts important mental functions such as manipulation of symbols (myth and ritual), we delegate (via offloading or outsourcing) to the smartphone equally important mental functions, such as memory and spatial navigation. Individuals who depend on GPS to go places, and digital memory to carry on daily routines, will be seriously impaired when they lose their smartphones. Likewise, we can expect disruption in functioning for the Yi-Bimo when they can no longer outsource to religious experts the many important mental functions, such as diagnosing or interpreting suffering.

Cast in the framework of Peircean semiotics, the integrity of the sign system known as the Bimo religion is compromised in modern times. When their myths and rituals are labeled "superstitions" (*mi xin*), and when their ritual specialists decline drastically as a profession and as spiritual leaders of the community, their communal mental space for symbol use will be impoverished. As the communal mental space shrinks, the individual is thrown on his or her own resources to function with limited capacity for symbol use. Now we have a recipe for alexithymia and associated impairments.

Religion as Buffer to Suffering

Contributing to the accumulating evidence that suggests a buffering effect of religious coping (Pargament 2001), the foregoing analysis sheds some light on the cognitive mechanism of such an effect. More specifically, our analysis suggests that religion has a buffering effect only to the extent that its sign structure is intact. For instance, the Yi-Bimo put much emphasis on the virtual space of symbols, as evidenced by the prestige accorded the ritual specialists since antiquity. Thus, the sign structure of their religion is intact only to the extent that their iconic and indexical expressions of affect are nicely counterbalanced by the rich myths and rituals that flourish in the symbolic communal space. When their rituals are branded as superstitions (*mi xin*), however, their religion loses its effectiveness as a buffer. Indeed, it is the breakdown of their symbolic space that renders the condition of Yi-Bimo alexithymic, the hallmark of which is poverty of the symbolic space.

The Yi-Christian group fared relatively better, thanks to their abstract/conceptual mode of processing and internal orientation. This internalization process, according to the theory of mentalization (Fonagy 1991), helps to build cognitive resources and structures in the psyche, thereby rendering the individual relatively less vulnerable to drastic changes in the environment. We may recall that some Yi-Christians were able to continue their worship during the time when their religion was prohibited by the government, because prayer was an internal activity, invisible to outsiders.

By contrast, the mentalization of the Yi-Bimo group entails a very different trajectory, in which symbolic function, along with its cognitive resources, is located primarily in the communal space of the collective, rather than in the individual psyche. To such an embedded community, in which the mind is embedded in the body, which in turn is embedded in the collective life of myths and rituals, the Western individualistic theory of mentalization is not applicable. What we need instead are perspectives from semiotics and community psychology (Kirmayer et al. 2011). The foregoing analysis suggests that one way to help the Yi-Bimo group cope with the ravages of modernization is to promote their unique course of mentalization by restoring their symbolic communal space, and empowering their ritual specialists to revive the myths and rituals that have given life meaning since time immemorial. In our last chapter, we will further explore this challenge in modern China.

References

Deacon, T. W. (1997). *The symbolic species*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Fonagy, P. (1991). Thinking about thinking: Some clinical and theoretical considerations in the treatment of a borderline patient. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 72*(Pt 4), 639–656.

Hoopes, J. (Ed.). (1991). *Peirce on signs*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina.

Kirmayer, L. J., Dandeneau, S., Marshall, E., Phillips, M. K., & Williamson, K. J. (2011). Rethinking resilience from indigenous perspectives. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 56*(2), 84–91.

Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (1994). *Emotion and culture: Empirical studies of mutual influence*. Washington, DC: APA.

Liu, S. H. (2011). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ortony, A., Clore, G., & Foss, M. A. (1987). The referential structure of the affective lexicon. *Cognitive Science, 11*, 341–364. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0364-0213(87)80010-1.

Pargament, K. I. (2001). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Parmentier, R. J. (1994). *Signs in society/studies in semiotic anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Scherer, K. R. (2001). Appraisal considered as a process of multi-level sequential checking. In K. R. Scherer, A. Schorr, & T. Johnstone (Eds.), *Appraisal processes in emotion: Theory, methods, research* (pp. 92–120). New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scherer, K. R., Wallbott, H. G., & Summerfield, A. R. (1986). *Experiencing emotion: A cross-cultural study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sifneos, P. E. (1967). Clinical observations on some patients suffering from a variety of psychosomatic diseases. *Acta Medicina Psychosomatica, 7*, 1–10.

Sundararajan, L. (2015). *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

Sundararajan, L., & Hsieh, S. K. (2017, June). *Culture, cognitive, and emotion: What can the robot tell us*? Paper presented at the 11th annual Sino-American cultural psychology of religion conference, Beijing.

Sundararajan, L., & Kim, C. (2011). Beyond I-you-me: An empirically supported formulation of the triadic self. *The American Sociologist, 42*, 220–231. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-010-9117-7.

Taylor, G. J. (2000). Recent developments in alexithymia theory and research. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 45*, 134–142.

CHAPTER 6

Toward a Reflexive Indigenous Psychology

By adopting a mixed-method approach, we hope to place IP in a wider context, beyond the lab or college setting. We believe IP needs to start from the ground up in any culture, and be rooted in language from the field, in order to break the classism inherent in the hegemony of psychology. Hence, we took an interest in the unique cultural phenomenology of the Yi, and tried to understand it as insiders do. In this kind of social science research, the researchers' reflection constitutes a crucial instrument and the relationship with the local participants becomes a dialogue (Bernard 1988). Just as the great ancient teacher Confucius said, learning without thinking is a waste of time; but thinking without learning something new renders our work a dangerous practice (*Analects*, Book II Chap. 15). Our task as IP scholars is to maintain the balance between "thinking and learning."

As a research team, we acknowledge the existence of the power differential and our own cultural myopia when doing IP with Yi people. None of us is of Yi heritage; furthermore, we all come from an educated, middle-class, Han Chinese background. We were trained by Western psychological institutes and received funding from a Western grant agency. All of this shaped our identity when approaching the participants. Therefore, using our reflexivity in theory construction is crucial, in order to avoid imposing our own judgments and biases on the interpretation process. The following

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_6

are a few principles we adhere to in keeping the balance of "thinking and learning" in our research:

1. *Pick your team.* To maximize reflexivity at the personal and group levels, we intentionally created diversity when picking our research team, which was divided into two subgroups for each Yi field site. We used a multidisciplinary research team that consisted of sociology, psychology, social work, and religious studies major. The team members also came from three different countries with different cultural backgrounds, even though we were all Chinese. All of us (ten in total) are also diverse in terms of age, generation, and level of education (ranging from sophomore students to senior scholars). The heterogeneity among us was stimulating and exciting, because there was never a dull question or boring moment when we shared our perspectives. We, as the primary investigators, took the voices of our junior RAs seriously, as their experiences and field notes could give us a new perspective on cultural difference. For example, someone from an ethnology background would find the semi-structured interview method intrusive; a sociology major would take a more objective stance toward the participant; a junior member of the team would relate as a sort of grandchild to the senior participants; someone from an atheist background would find the Bimo ritual overwhelming; someone who had a previous relationship with the Yi people would find the newbies irritating and regard them as outsiders; someone from a counseling psychology background would empathize with the Yi storytellers at the expense of structure in the interviews; and so on. All our myriad emotions and thoughts during these two years of field work were jotted down in the field memo and shared with each other at debriefing time.
2. *Take your notes.* Ethnography is a useful and powerful method, as it helps build relationships with the local participants, ensure the validity of our study, and overcome the language barrier and impression management on the part of the survey takers. The RAs were trained to take analytic memos and field notes throughout the study. They had to write a diary every day reflecting on their encounters (both in person and on the phone) with the participants, and follow up with five or six of the participants during the year. At the end of the study, each RA had to write three case reports, based on the longitudinal (one-year) case notes, using the individual case study

method. These were the cases that had made an "impact" on them and which they deemed "representative" of the local cultures. In the case report, besides writing about their assigned participants, we asked them to reflect on their personal relationships with the participants, on any problems with the study, on any ethical dilemmas, and on future directions for the study.

For example, when our Meigu RAs encountered a village heavily impacted by HIV, their field memos that day were emotionally laden with cognitive processes that parallel those of the participants. One RA said she felt dissociated when she entered the household of a Yi AIDS patient. She did not know what to ask, or how to ask it, in the interview, though she was a well-trained Master's student from the social work program of a prestigious university. It seems that she had embodied the cultural representation of the Yi group we interacted with, and experienced "speechless moments" (feeling mute) in the same way some of the participants did. Another RA said they were all very hungry at the end of the day, and consumed a larger portion of rice than usual, as if they were trying to "fill up" the emptiness created by witnessing the suffering of the Yi participants. These kinds of reflective memos serve as important data for us when we try to understand culture by listening to vivid and thought-provoking stories of suffering.

3. *Take your time*. We invested half a year before we conducted the semi-structured interviews, because we wanted to ensure that, as "outsiders," we were trusted by the local community. As we were going to be touching on weighty topics (suffering narratives), we wanted to make sure that the participants felt safe enough to talk about these things with us, without feeling intruded upon, or experiencing it as a loss of control. As a result, we found that even a strong-ties society like the Yi could accept us as "insiders," addressing us with familial terms, such as "sister." After 18 months of interaction at the two locations, our research team finally attained the status of community "insiders" with the Yi families we followed up. Our participants frequently invited us to visit them during special festivals and celebrations. This might not sound cost-effective to the modern psychology researcher who is accustomed to lab-controlled experiments or questionnaire-based survey methods. However, if we are to take IP seriously, we must honor the voices of the indigenous people (Bhatia and Priya, in Press), by searching for the most appropriate cultural methodology and epistemology.

In this chapter, we continue to tell stories from both Yi communities, but from the perspectives of the RAs as narrators. There were reflections of collective “we” as well as individual “I”. We first show how, in general, the strong-ties Yi society shaped our approach when doing research (“we” versus “them”), as well as our experiences of being accepted as insiders at the respective sites. There are both external journeys (to the study fields) and internal journeys (heightened self-awareness) in the RAs’ reflective notes. We look at how the RAs constructed the meaning of this research project and their closures with the participants (“I” versus “thou”) at three different stages. Second, from the way they wrote their case reports and self-reflection reports about this study project, we observed that the Meigu and Luquan teams had different cognitive processes as a result of being assigned to their respective research sites. Although we do not have enough samples to do a statistical analysis, the differences are apparent. We purposefully did not standardize the personal pronouns used to address the participants in the vignettes in this book, as they are indicative of the relationship and distance between the writer (the specific RAs) and the study participant.

Narratives of Suffering from Both Sites

Story of DE (Narrated by Huanlin, Luquan Team)

DE is a 41-year-old, single Yi male from Luquan. Only being able to detect small amounts of light, he is practically blind in both eyes and frequently suffers from headaches. DE lives a simple life, but our encounter has caused me to frequently think about him and has moved me emotionally. Of all my interviewees, he was the most difficult one to communicate with as he would become anxious and stutter in Yi dialect during our conversations. DE currently lives with his parents, and helps with simple house chores like carrying water and guarding the cattle. Every week he attends services at the church near his home, where he taught himself to play the piano. Since the age of five, DE has been attending church with his mother. There was a period of time when he served as pianist for the church choir, as he possessed a great sense of rhythm and enjoyed singing very much.

In the eyes of others, he may seem like an unlucky person, who lost his eyesight at birth, failed in education, is jobless, with poor social support, and suffering from sporadic headaches. But he continues to smile. Every time I saw DE, he always had that warm smile on his face. Deacon Z of the church brought us to visit DE for the first time in October 2015. Due to his deep and hollow eye sockets and protruding eye bone, it is basically impossible to see his eyeballs. At first glance, it seemed frightening to me, but that bashful smile made him approachable. At our first meeting, he shyly sat next to Deacon Z and did not face us when speaking. No matter whether he could understood us or not, DE was always smiling. Most likely due to lack of exposure to the outside world, DE was quite reticent and used one-sentence answers a lot to share his story of suffering with us. But he was extremely open to sharing with us when we asked about difficult situations in his life. He timidly mentioned his desire for a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, and said he even dreamed about sex. He shyly lowered his head and his voice. He also told us about the difficult time when his nephew ran away from home; but after he prayed hard, they managed to find him. DE also had a very good memory. During our second visit three months later, DE recalled, "The first time you came was on October 3, and today is January 1, 2016. Two days after you left, on October 5, I had a dream. A woman placed her hand on my shoulder and asked if I was at peace. It was you who brought that good dream." Although his verbal expression was not very coherent, DE's astonishing memory and caring attitude always brought warmth to us, just like his smiles. Despite outsiders seeing him as an unfortunate person, God has seemingly shown particular care for DE, by allowing him to live his life earnestly (Fig. 6.1).

DE also shared his gift for music with us. I remember, during our first visit, he sat with his head bowed, stuttering when he spoke, and not daring to face us directly. It was only when he started singing "The World Is Not Our Home" (*shi jie bu. shi wo men de jia*) that he turned into a different person and turned toward us in good spirits. He also shared his favourite hymn in Yi dialect with us, which is entitled as "My Heart Is Full of Joy and Happiness, Real Happiness." When he started singing, we sensed for the first time DE's confidence and his rarely expressed excitement. He happily gave us permission to record his singing without any trace of anxiety. During the recording, he adopted a formal posture and maintained an air of professionalism that was completely different from the initial impression we had of him. He even walked to his own room after learning of our intention to record, to change into a jacket he felt was more formal and clean.

Fig. 6.1 The RA showing the video clip to DE and his mother

The second time we met was on New Year's Day, 2016. After we finished the interview, we invited DE to sing again. He happily obliged and sang two songs, "Holy Spirit Guides Us" (*sheng ling dai zhe ni wo zou*) and "Love Binds Us Together" (*ai shi women xiangju zai yiqi*). The journey from his first hymn, "The World Is Not Our Home," to his last, "Love Binds Us Together," could be a reflection of the psychological change in DE, as he gradually became socialized to the point of being able to perceive God's love for him. I also think DE believes that God's love is what allows us "outsiders" to come together with him.

When we chatted with DE during our first home visit, his elder sister had already prepared lunch for us. We couldn't resist their hospitality, so stayed to enjoy the lunch, which seemed like a rather luxurious meal for them. His sister had specifically purchased fresh side dishes from town, and they all waited for us to finish the meal before they would let their children sit at the table. After lunch, we needed to continue our journey, and the family of DE accompanied us to the parking site to see us off. Though DE was still shy and timid during the first meeting, after the second meeting, his grabbed our hands like a child, tightly without letting go, even when we were standing next to the door of our van. Before we left, he kept saying, "Thank you, may God look after you." DE's mother gave us some walnuts and crackers as a parting gift. Our third visit took place in July 2016, when we showed him the video clip. Although he was not able to view it, he listened to it attentively. Upon hearing his own voice singing, he began to cheer. When saying goodbye, DE acted just like before, having a hard time letting us go. Though we only met three times, DE has touched the softest part of my heart. Perhaps in living in a world without light, DE is unfortunate. But in God's world, DE is always smiling, living earnestly, loving others wholeheartedly, while being loved by others as well. May God watch over him, and give him smiles to face his future life.

Story of QZ (Narrated by Xiaoyu, Meigu Team)

It was unexpected that QZ became one of our interviewees. We walked around the village and tried to find some interviewees, but found nothing. Subsequently, we heard from some villagers that there was a family living on the hilltop, who might be suitable candidates. They told us that the head of the family had just been released from prison. Therefore, most of the villagers had gone to his house to celebrate, which was why the village seemed empty. The first time we met, QZ told us he was 32 years old. He seemed tall, strong, and young. His house was located on the middle part of the hill, without any neighbors. The house was old and made from mud, but the area around it was tidy. Out front was a separate toilet, and a dog was chained up outside. QZ's face was flushed. He said he had just come back from the celebration banquet, and I wondered if he had been drinking alcohol, not sure what kinds of stories would be forthcoming from this man.

Initially, my dialogue with him was kind of awkward. Although the interpreter and I had explained several times that we just wanted to listen to stories about him and his family, he kept talking about "not having enough money," and complained that his family was very poor. He said he didn't know how to earn money. He spent a long time telling us in detail about the process of applying for loan from the Rural Credit Cooperative, banks, and the local government. He had also tried to obtain financial help from other sources, but to no avail. For example, the bank required fixed assets for loans; the government officer had also told him there were no development programs in his village that he could take part in. After we finished the interview, he asked the interpreter privately whether we were journalists or people from the official poverty relief program.

During the interview, we inquired about topics other than "money issues," but when he mentioned the experience of borrowing money from others, he became very emotional and spoke more slowly. "I want to cry when I think of the situation in my family," he told us. "When I tried to borrow money from others, they always said they didn't want to lend to me, as I wasn't capable of paying it back." He felt sad as a result of being looked down on, and continued, "If ever I am a wealthy man, I won't do this. If someone comes to borrow money, I'll give it to him. I won't treat other people the way these people treated me, because it was wrong."

QZ's father passed away when he was 13. He believed that his father had died because of alcohol overconsumption due to being "broken-hearted." He said, "My father had married twice. In the first marriage, his wife and seven children all died at a young age. There was only one son, who lived until he was 32 years old. The second marriage was with my mother. Same thing happened, four or five children died after they were born. There are only me and my two sisters left." In line with the traditional beliefs of the Yi ethnic group, people said this was because "their land was cursed." Therefore, QZ and his family moved to a new place, which is where they are settled now. QZ believed the poverty in his family had started with his father's generation, because they had paid a lot for funeral hosting, which gradually led them into debt. "Whenever someone died (in the family clan), we had to chip in with money to buy the pigs or wines for the funeral," QZ explained.

In 1997, his elder sister was abducted by someone from their village and taken to Inner Mongolia. As there were no cellphones then, and only two telephones available in the whole village, they completely lost contact with his sister. Eleven years elapsed before his sister was found. Then he spent 8000 RMB to hire four people to bring his sister back. He said, "After my sister came back, I knew the abductor was from our own Yi group. Therefore, I went to the person's house with my relatives to negotiate this issue." QZ explained that they had different ways of dealing with issues than the Han people, who depended on the legal system for redress. In Yi culture, the two parties tend to sit down and negotiate among themselves privately. However, the abductor of his sister refused to compensate QZ's family for their loss, and when they filed a police report later on, there was nobody handling the case. Subsequently, as the "head of the houshold," QZ let his sister, who was in her thirties, marry a 70-year-old man from the nearby village. He told us it was an unspoken rule for a "Yi female to marry another Yi male, just as Han people marry their own people, and have their own law." His sister lived close enough for them to be able to take care of each other easily, and she had given birth to two sons since then. QZ's face finally showed signs of satisfaction. Regarding his own marriage, QZ told us he got married because he needed someone to look after his mother, who was a widow. Therefore, he went to a woman's home and asked her to marry him. He sold his lands and used the resulting 8500 RMB for the betrothal gift. After that, they got married. They have five children now, the eldest of whom is in primary school, and the youngest in kindergarten (Fig. 6.2).

One day, some time after the visit, QZ sent a message to my phone, asking, "Could you please help me pay my daughter's tuition fee?" It seemed like he still regarded us as the people from the poverty relief

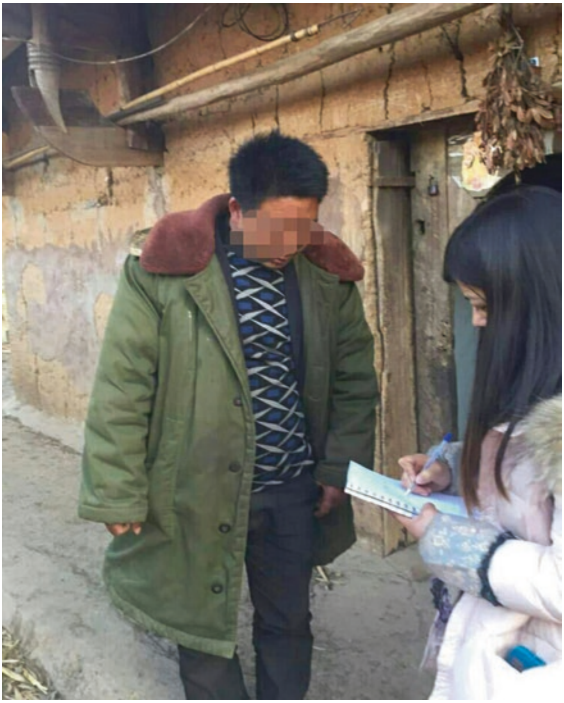


Fig. 6.2 The RA taking information from QZ in front of his house

program. I asked him on the phone how much the tuition fee was, but he said it was not actually the tuition fee he needed, but money for textbooks, which came to about 200 RMB. Later on he said, "If it's not convenient for you, I can figure it out by myself." A week later, he said he had raised enough money, and his daughter was now in school. We could tell he still misunderstood our purpose. Over the following two months, QZ gradually began to understand our roles. He started talking more about his family's health issues, and what he was doing every day. He said he sometimes played the role of negotiator within his tribe as he had some experience with this, as a result of having handled his sister's abduction. Because he had high blood pressure, he could not commit to regular labor force, and had income only from sporadic work. Normally, QZ never contacted me; it was I who called him monthly to follow up with him. However, at the end of May, he called me, sounding happy, and told me he had received the stationery I'd mailed to his children. They liked this very much and had shared it with their relatives. He appreciated what we'd done, and looked forward to seeing us again.

In June, we talked about his financial problems again. He talked a lot about his efforts to improve the financial situation at home for his family. He said he wanted to be a van driver and planned to purchase a van by getting a 40–50,000 RMB loan from the Rural Credit Cooperative (the only public bank in rural China). However, the following month, his tone of voice over the phone was no longer that hopeful. He said the bank had refused to lend him money, and so he could not purchase a new vehicle. He didn't mind working hard if he could have a car and run some private business with it, because he had grown up poor and not received any formal education. Now he needed to shoulder the family responsibilities. At the end of the phone call, he said he would consider borrowing money to buy a second-hand car.

In July, our team revisited him and passed him the cellphone with the video clip and some basic medical supplements for his children and family. He was very appreciative of our caring and the video. He said his mother's rheumatism had improved after taking some drugs from the hospital. His own blood pressure was quite stable as well. But he still had no savings to start his own small business in transportation. When we called him again in August, he told us excitedly that he had just bought a second-hand car. His relatives from both sides had lent him 20,000 RMB to make this dream come true. Now he could work as a driver in town.

He sounded satisfied with his life. Although he was extremely busy every day, he felt this was worthwhile because he was doing it to benefit his family. He asked me carefully whether I would like to listen to a new story. After I expressed my willingness, he said, “One day, when I was driving a passenger somewhere, I saw an old man walking at the side of the road. After I dropped off the passenger, on the way back, I saw that old man still walking in the same direction, and I was heading that way too.” QZ asked the old man to hop in his van, and he would give him a lift. The old man said he would rather not because he had serious motion sickness. But QZ convinced him by saying, “People normally get motion sickness because the road condition is bad and most of the cars jolt badly, but my car doesn’t jolt. I can guarantee that you won’t feel sick in my car.” QZ continued, “After he got in, I turned on the air-con, and drove slowly and steadily, and drove the old man to the town safely. It was actually the first time the old man ever took a car ride. He felt happy, excited, and told me he didn’t feel sick after all!” Then the old man offered to pay for the ride but QZ refused, as he had been on his way to town anyway. I could tell it made QZ happy to help people who were in need. He worked very hard around the clock. Sometimes he left home in the early morning and came home after nine, but he felt happy and content.

Recently, QZ and his family have been doing well without much to complain about. He thanked us repeatedly for our caring for him, and hoped we would keep in contact with him. He said, “Please be our guest someday. Although I don’t have much to eat at home, I’m happy to serve you.” He told us in a confident voice that now he could support his family and pay his children’s school fees. He even cared about my work and studies and said, “Please take care of your own health. Because I’m older than you, from now on you could regard me as your Yi *ge ge* (older brother), and I also have a Han sister. I hope that we can always stay in touch, haha.”

In September 2016, during a phone conversation, QZ still sounded happy. He told me he could only call me at night, as he was very busy during the daytime (Fig. 6.3). He said, “It is better to be busy and to earn more money.” He invited us to join their Yi New Year celebrations, which normally fall in November. He said, “The New Year is very important for Yi people. It would be great if you could join, even during the weekend. Anyhow, I just wish you all good!” However, we couldn’t make it to this big event that year. In February 2017, QZ told me he was driving a passenger from Meigu to Chengdu, from where the man would be leaving to

Fig. 6.3 QZ, standing on the right, met up with the RA at a Chengdu restaurant

work in Guangdong province. Therefore, we met up in Chengdu and had a great meal together, and he looked very different from the first time we saw him (Fig. 6.3). It's his turn now to ask me a lot of "private questions," and what amused me was when he said carefully, "I know you are a Han lady, and normally we Yi people don't interfere in other people's private matters. But I want to advise you to consider finding Mr. Right soon."

Researchers' Changes in Cognition, Emotion, and Relationship

In the two narratives above, the RAs were not only talking about the participants they followed up with, but also their "relationship" with the participants over time. This is not uncommon in the rest of the narratives in this book (25 narratives in total). The eight RAs were all female, in their twenties or thirties, from various educational backgrounds (undergraduate to PhD in social work, sociology, and ethnology), and with different belief systems (e.g., atheism, Buddhism, Christian). However, after two years of cultural immersion in this Yi study project, they all have some commonality as regards their changes in perception and emotion toward the Yi people. Thus, by analyzing the RAs' reports and field notes, we found that their changes and reflections revealed some valuable lessons about the IP research process, and the theories we were attempting to construct. For example, in the stories of DE from Luquan and QZ from Meigu, there was a turning point in the bonding between them and the RAs, from "we versus them" to "I versus thou." Although the time it took to bond, and the process of bonding, was very different in each of the two research sites, and will be explored later, in this section we want to present a composite picture of how the RAs as a collective team described their changes. Here, we present their changes in cognition, emotion, and relationship at different stages of our study.

1. First Stage

- *Cognitive*: Similar to many people's experience upon immersing themselves in a new culture, many RAs expressed curiosity about the Yi people, and held certain stereotypes and assumptions in their minds. One RA said: "When I visited Liangshan the first time, what attracted me was the Yi *Nuosu* people's spiritual world… which stirred my strong curiosity" (KeKe). There was also the surreal feeling of entering a different space and world from the one they had grown up in, and a feeling that the environment and culture they had entered was quite surreal. One RA reported: "Whenever I entered the field, sat and talked with them in their homes, or on the phone (even after I had left the field), I felt once again that I had left the mainstream civilization of the city. Through their narratives, sometimes I passed through histories…" (Zhangying). Besides feeling surreal, there was also cultural shock that created cognitive dissonance among some of the RAs when they realized that poverty could be so close to their life. "As a local Sichuanese, when I entered Liangshan, which is just 12 hours away from Chengdu, I felt I had entered a radically different world… I was eager to learn more and bond with the people on this land, but I had so much confusion and misunderstanding in my mind. Why hadn't I heard about this place and its existence before? Was it due to the barrier of mountain roads, or the psychological barrier between us? Why did so many people here get stomach ache and die suddenly? Why did the news talk about relief and aid, yet the children here still didn't have enough clothing and had mucus hanging from their nostrils?" Similar way to their participants, the RAs were also asking "why" questions when witnessing the suffering, and were overwhelmed by this new information. At the same time, they knew this study was an important mission that needed their open-mindedness.

- *Emotional:* As their beliefs and assumptions were being deconstructed, many RAs reported myriad emotions. There was excitement mixed with some anxiety, and worries about whether they could handle the job. Then there were the feelings of shock, compassion, guilt, and helplessness as they started listening to the participants' stories, and observing the poor conditions surrounding them. The honeymoon period did not last long, and soon the RAs fell into a depressive abyss. An RA said, "As this was my first time visiting an ethnic minority land, my heart was filled with curiosity and excitement. No matter whether it was their food and drinking habits, or clothing customs, this is like a different world for me. When seeing Yi people walking on the street in their local custom, I felt like history was reappearing in front of my eyes. However, as the study progressed, the blood and tears shed behind the beautiful scene started to hit our vulnerable imaginations… whatever suffering event one can imagine, you can find it in this land… the more I get to know this place, the more sorrow I feel in me" (Yezi). Another RA, Xiaorong, who was also in the Meigu team, felt the same, but she found herself avoiding the emotion through Repression—"I felt that we were really powerless and helpless. After our first home visit and listening to all the suffering stories there, I still found myself asking, 'How come there was still such a thing happening'… I felt that I couldn't do anything to change that, hence I felt guilty and ashamed of their hospitality toward us. Therefore, after returning from the field, I became avoidant, pessimistic, and reluctant to keep frequent contact with my participants or to show too much care for them. I was afraid that after all I would become one of those 'city folk' who just disappeared from their lives after the study…"

  At the same time, in the Luquan team, two RAs also expressed similar guilt and shock. One of them said, "My heart was looking forward and excited about the trip, but also a bit worried whether I would fit in… what shocked me then is that, in the mountain area, some people were still staying in the mud houses, with wooden beds, dim light, and dark rooms" (Huanlin). Coming from a rural area of Tianjin, Huanlin always thought of herself as someone from rural China. But after this exposure to the Yunnan rural area, she realized there was still disparity between the provincial areas. Another young RA, who was majoring in social work, said: "The suffering narratives that saturated the interview information had made my heart heavy. The further research progressed, the more I could understand their sorrow and loneliness… After I perceived grandpa's (one of her participants) lonely emotions, I needed to suppress the will to give him guidance and comfort. In order to have untainted interview data, I had to overcome the sympathy toward his suffering. I felt this stir of anxiety within me. I hoped this period of data collection would end soon. I wanted to help, to bring some changes to his life." These feelings of ambivalence and tension were quite commonly reported during the first stage of research, which required them to be merely observing and participating in order to build a relationship with the potential participants. Many of the RAs wished to "do more" than simply lending a listening ear, but they were told not to intervene as a helper until a much later stage.

- *Relational:* Due to their sympathy and identification with the local participants, the first stage of relationship building was quite difficult for the RAs. As the stories of QZ and DE demonstrate, there was a lot of expectation projected toward the research team by the participants. Some of them thought we were a charity organization, some thought we were church fellows (brothers and sisters), and some thought we were from the government. Regardless of the roles they projected onto us, the RAs struggled to find a balance between "friendly" and "professional" and felt anxious that they would disappoint their participants. One RA said: "I told myself this was just a research study, and don't get too emotionally attached to it. But this was easier said than done" (Xiaorong). Another RA said: "I have invested a lot of personal feelings in these seven cases. From the initial contact with them to the monthly telephone contact, I could not intervene in their suffering events as we had to collect as much objective data as possible for research purposes. In those months, I was listening to their suffering, suppressing my sympathy and the strong will to guide and help them" (Zhangying). Hence, the relationship they built with the participants was quite varied according to their personal style and level of comfort. Most of them gradually grew closer to their participants during this period, as is evidenced in their narratives, except for a few instances in which the RAs lost contact with the participants because of their need to protect themselves emotionally.

2. Second Stage

- *Cognitive*: Before the second field trip to conduct interviews, the RAs had some debriefing time, and shared their experiences among themselves. As they were being heard and their feelings being normalized, they became less conflicted, and could make sense from what they were doing. As the cultural shock subsided, the information became more familiar, and was therefore less of a mental strain during the field trip. The RAs reported that they were more accepting of their own limits, and found more peace within themselves. However, they had to invest a high level of cognitive effort on transcribing and coding the interviews, which all of them found tedious and laborious. “Originally, I thought, after the field trip, my mood would become more settled. However, when I was transcribing the interview recording, the stories once again shook me… Sitting in front of the laptop, I found myself laughing and sighing in resonance with the participants’ mood” (Xiaoyu). Xiarong also said, “When I returned to the campus and started the transcribing process, I found it very tough, much tougher even than the interview itself. The team coding process was longer and tougher than I thought. Every time before we finalized the coding for each transcript, we had to do a lot of thinking and discussion. Sometimes I even dreamed of myself coding, which is incredible.” During the debriefing meeting later, we as consultants also found that coding was consistently overwhelming to many of the RAs. Undoubtedly coding the transcripts was a laborious process that involved a lot of teamwork and brainstorming; however, psycho-linguistic coding also required the coder to stay “detached” in order to be objective in the coding. This requires a lot of mental compartmentalization, which is why the RAs found it tougher than usual.
- *Emotional:* After the formal interviews, many RAs expressed feelings of peace and of being moved by their participants’ stories, though some still inevitably felt guilty, compassionate, and helpless. The RA who found it hard to balance her roles wrote in her field notes, “That day, after my first interview, the local translator told me that my questions were pretty ‘cruel,’ like we were scratching the wounds in those people’s memory. But this was the job we had to perform, so even though I didn’t have the heart to hurt them, I still had to proceed with my questions. I had to say to myself, ‘You are a researcher, you need to stay calm, don’t think too much, just ask and walk away.’

Then I hardened my heart to finish the interview task. But I still felt conflicted inside. On one hand I felt relief that the mission was accomplished, yet on the other I felt guilty for triggering sad memories" (Xiaorong). The same feelings of guilt and ambivalence were jotted down by Yezi: "In these two years of study, some of them already passed away, but I often thought of their faces. Hence, every time I revisited those beautiful mountain ranges, my mood would go up and down… I always felt our world owed them so much. As a social work student, I have been troubled by the fact that I couldn't help them much, either in relieving their emotional pain or eradicating their poverty… what I can do is really limited." This identification with the participants' helplessness and pain carried on throughout the project, and became a powerful theme for us in understanding the actual pain of the Yi communities we visited. This was also the price we paid while doing qualitative interviews and case studies. As one of the RAs (Zhangying) reflected: "This state of ambivalence became increasingly intense when we were coding the interview transcripts. With a sympathetic heart, I coded carefully and intensely their suffering events… Doing qualitative research is like drinking a bowl of concentrated bitter soup. My heart was aching for them. They had to face the injustice of the society, and those historical pains and scars were for ever engraved in their life memories."

- *Relational:* During this phase, most of the RAs had been accepted as insiders by the local community and bonded with the participants at a certain level. Some were quite surprised that the participants would actually miss them and update them with news spontaneously. In the story of DE above, he even remembered vividly the dates of our visits and dreamed about us. Another RA also felt bad as her interviewee told her in the interview that she was worried about the RA's health, and that this had become her "suffering event" recently. One of the RAs (Xinli) received a letter from her blind participant, which became an empowering experience for her. She reflected: "All six of my participants were elderly, and they were like my grandparents. As someone being 'cared' for by them, I always felt moved by their optimistic and resilient attitude in the face of suffering." Most of us were touched by the hospitality extended to us during the home visits, as seen in one RA's memo—"Our friends in Liangshan, though living in extreme deprivation, were still very giving, such as offering us their only crops (potatoes) during our home visits. I was always touched by their gestures and kindness" (YS). During the second phase of the study, we lost several participants due to illness. The RAs had to make sense of the losses and see death through their participants' eyes—"Every time I listened to their suffering events, when I saw them tearing up, when I heard of the interviewees passing away one by one, I found my understanding and attachment toward *Nuosu* (Yi) people growing."

3. Last Stage

- *Cognitive*: Toward the end of our study, after one year of following up with the interviewees, most of the RAs had witnessed the cycle of seasons and the resilience of the participants. The change in their belief systems was most remarkable. For instance, they started to reflect on bigger questions, such as theoretical reflection on the source of the Yi people's suffering: "The predicament of Liangshan has a close relationship with social transformation issues. In order to relieve their predicament, we must not forget to rebuild and protect their cultural autonomy and confidence. The public also needs to be respectful and understanding of the value of multiculturalism, and embrace the fact that we are a 'multicultural entity' and 'harmonious symbiosis' with a shared fate" (Keke). Some reflected on how the theory of social work might be applied in order to directly benefit the elderly in rural villages. On RA said, "In the six cases that I have, there are five grandmas and one grandpa. They are all aged. During our conversations, I always felt the loneliness and frustration of these old people. After visiting so many houses, I became more convinced that these old people in their seventies and eighties must all have had very rich life experiences. The sufferings they experienced must be beyond what I could imagine. Reaching this stage of life, they needed even more care, love, and companionship from young people like their grandchildren. Loneliness made them feel more and more depressed. They felt less and less hopeful about life. They were lonely and bitter. If their children cannot be with them, I wonder if there are other opportunities for these elders to get some kind of psychological comfort… To these elders, our companionship might be the best medicine of all."

Besides gaining a wider perspective on suffering among minority groups, many RAs also reflected on their personal values and the meaning of life. One RA said: "Compared to my peers, I know I have gained much from this experience. During the next stages of my graduate degree and career, I wish to keep my childlike heart, and do things I care about and that feel right to my conscience" (Huanlin). A few of them also contrasted the poverty of their participants with the materialism of modern life, and found themselves more content and at peace with their current life status.

All the RAs wrote about their growing commitment to social justice issues, either through their career paths as social workers, or personal advocacy on behalf of minority groups. Here are a few excerpts from their reports:

> I am now more willing to use my profession as a social worker to bridge the gap between suffering elderly people and the resources they need. I want to work hard to improve their living conditions. I hope the whole society will gain understanding of their suffering through my report… I wish to advocate for them, and hope the government can pay attention, and show concern about the well-being of marginalized groups of society. I hope this generation can reflect properly on the past, regarding the pain inflicted on the people of that land during the historical era of fanaticism. I hope that our country will get better, that community will be more harmonious, and there will be smiles on the faces of the Yi elderly who have been through all the vicissitudes of life. (Zhangying)

> This study made me witness the poverty among the mountain villages, and the limits of our country's poverty relief policy. This further affirms my determination to continue my education in social work. (Xinli)

> It has been a growth-enhancing experience for me to participate in this project. It made me understand more about the Yi people around me, and made my dream of serving marginalized children and families become real. (Xiaoyu)

> Suffering itself could be a source of wealth for human beings, because we have to believe in the potential for change so we don't give up too easily. I hope one day, our society will create fewer problems for the people in this land, by not rejecting their religious beliefs, language, gender, and tradition, or by discriminating against their poverty, illness, and ethnicity. I believe there will be such a day, and we are all working hard for it. (Yezi)

Some of them also found their stereotypes concerning Yi people challenged, such that they began to refer to the latter in more positive terms. "When I really witnessed the reality and life of the

Liangshan people, I suddenly felt a sense of guilt and social responsibility. For these kind and hospitable Yi people are also seeking a better life in the future; they are not lazy, in contrast to how they are often portrayed in the media … Because of this study in Liangshan, I began to understand more about their culture, history, music, and poetry, and I discovered the Yi are really an ethnic group full of wisdom," reflected YS. Finally, as someone who has been studying Yi people since her Master's program, PhD student Keke also reflected on her strong will to defend this ethnic group—"Every time, when I come across some critics describing the valuable Yi ancient tradition as 'foolish and backward,' or my esteemed warrior *Nuosu* Yi people as lazy and sinful, my heart feels terrible and sad. Oh yes, this is the group I have spent so many years learning about and understanding, and unconsciously I already have a deep sense of attachment and identification with them. I couldn't see them being hurt in any way."

- *Emotional*: In this phase, as their thinking was more integrated and committed, most of the RAs started to feel more positive toward this study, and expressed gratitude toward the participants. One said, "After being immersed in the field four times, my mood became calmer each time. In this one-year period, I have witnessed the changes in my participants, as they look better and better through time and display more and more smiles. These six participants were happy to see me, and their happiness also infected me. I have never had that kind of feeling, of being missed by someone from a thousand miles away" (Huanlin). Though most of the RAs felt content with their progress, some still mourned the deaths of their participants, and some still worried about the future of their terminally ill participants. "It is difficult to achieve a timely and effective solution to a complex social problem with just a report. The clear gap between my expectations and changes in reality gives me a sense of loss," reported Yingzi, one of the RAs. This unsettled feeling exists in parallel with their participants' uncertainty toward the future.
- *Relational*: After ending the formal study, many RAs chose to keep in touch with their participants, becoming friends with them and their family members. "I sense there are still many problems left behind. Once I left the field, the feelings of connection with them didn't diminish" (Zhangying). "They were like my distant relatives, and genuine feelings connected us. Hence we are still blessing and missing each other" (Yezi). "Though we have different journeys

ahead of us, we have already learned to treat each other with gentleness and without barriers in our hearts" (Xiaoyu). All these feelings resonated with us at the close of our study. While the RAs were transitioning away from having frequent contact with the participants, they still welcomed the latter's sharing of news, both good and bad, and at the same time acted as advocates to obtain for them much-needed services. As long as they are not abusing or exploiting, but honoring and upholding these relationships, we believe the RAs are practicing within ethical boundaries.

Here is one vignette written by one of the RAs: "After leaving SYP for the final time, I still continued to connect with Mrs. H (the interviewee) over the phone. She told me she takes traditional Chinese medicine to treat her illness, but is down to just two doses a day. Besides praying at home every day, Mrs. H told me she watches the video clip we made for her twice a day. She also learned how to take photo with the cellphone we gave her. She has already sent me a photo—a rose covered in morning dew. After thinking back on the progression of our relationship, I am very thankful to see the changes in Mrs. H's life and to see that her youthful appearance and vigor have resurfaced since we first met" (Zhangying).

There is also another layer of relationship growing in parallel—that among the research team, as they all work closely together, either in the field or video-conferencing each other about the coding process. The RAs value the support they gain from each other, and this is another powerful tool for them to use in surmounting all the harsh conditions and high expectations in this study. Some commented that this was a very "serious team," yet they were always full of laughter. Some commented that they were a "niang zi jun" (all-female army). One said, "At the beginning, I was quite sentimental, and couldn't finish the assigned interview within the structure. But through the help and support received from my teammates, I became stronger and calmer… every time I visited Liangshan, I would become homesick and miss my family very much, especially when I saw those orphans whose parents had died of AIDS. I appreciate my family even more now" (YS). This seeking of support from family and peers on the part of the RAs parallels the behavior of our Yi participants in times of crisis and suffering. In the end, the RAs learned to be resilient like their participants, transcending their limits and fears through a strong support network.

Summary After talking about the collective pattern of the RAs as a whole, in the following sections we will use two different narratives written by RAs from different sites, to contrast the difference in their linguistic and emotional expressions toward their interviewees. Then we will use these differences in cognitive styles to gain further insight into our ecological rationality framework. We conclude with recommendations for better theory and practice in IP research.

Suffering Narratives of Yi-Christians

Story of GL (Narrated by Huanlin)

It was on a day in October 2015 that we met Grandma GL Wong in her humble room for the first time. She was thin, but hale and hearty. She didn't have good eyesight, but her eyes sparkled while talking to us. Out of all the households we visited, she was the only one who was resistant to talking to us, even with a local informant acting as our guide. That is why she is so unforgettable to us. Fortunately, the local informant managed to connect with her through a distant relative, so we had the opportunity of getting to know her, and here record her story with respect and appreciation.

GL was a 76-year-old single lady of Yi nationality. She lived alone and was hardly able to see anything. At the time we first met her, she told us that five generations in her family were orphans. One thing that struck us was that GL rejected those who attempted to give her material goods in life. Initially, when we were trying to approach her, she refused to talk with us, as she regarded us as "government people." We then told her we had come for her testimony, and wanted to know her experience of faith. Then she asked us to take a seat outside, in her rundown front yard, next to a pile of the firewood, and started to share her life stories.

Grandma GL had originally been one of several siblings, she was the only one still alive at the time of the interview. She said: "My mother became an orphan when she was six years old. She passed away when my younger brother was only five years old. My elder brother joined the army at 16, participating in the revolutionary war for 27 years, but he ended up being killed by the Chinese Nationalist Party… all my family members either died of starvation, or in the war, or from illness." GL shouldered all the family responsibilities alone, looking after her mother and younger brother. For this reason, she had never been married. She commented, "I am the most miserable person. I haven't felt happy for a single day in my life… I have been suffering too much, my fate is foolish, but yours is full of blessings."

GL recalled vividly that, during the period of the Great Cultural Revolution, when she was only 13 years old, she had to carry her younger brother on her back, while being criticized publicly (*pi dou*) and punished by the radical Red armies in the late night. She didn't even dare to cry out loud when her teeth were knocked out. Then she went through the challenging era of "the reconstruction of nature," when they were forced to dig the local reservoir (at SH village) by hand, working both day and night. She told us, "We seldom had rest even during the night; we used to carry the mud overnight till dawn. Every single day, I only had one meal, which was just a spoonful of vegetables with a bit of soup."

Grandma GL led her mother to believe in Christ when she was 54 years old. She said, "We could only worship the Lord privately, as personal faith was persecuted in the old political society. There were countless sufferings in life, and I could only pray every time the hardship hit." GL described herself as someone "living in tears." She cried as she told her stories to us, the younger generation. She had been politically persecuted since she was 13, losing her family in adolescence and dedicating herself to her country during adulthood, which had led to her being overexhausted, both physically and emotionally. After all the bitterness in her life, she now focused on her faith. She said, "When I can't sleep, I just pray." She attended church services every Sunday, and donated her low-income social security money to the church. She was living with minimal means, but with resilience, all by herself.

There were two highlights among our memories of GL, which made her unique in comparison with the other interviewees. That day, when we finished the interview, we tried to give her a box of milk and crackers as a token of appreciation. Yet she refused it, although we used so many methods in an attempt to persuade her. We had to depart in a hurry, leaving her with the gifts. But she quickly took all the gifts and chased after us through the front yard and along the alley. Finally, when she continued to insist, we had to take the gifts away and "give them to someone who needs them," as commanded by Grandma GL. This occurred partly because we did not know her temperament well enough on that first visit.

After that, we lost touch with Grandma Wong for more than three months as she did not have either a phone or cellphone at home. When we visited her again at New Year 2016, Grandma Wong thought we were people from the government again (as she couldn't see), so she didn't open the door for us. Even though we knocked and waited on the doorstep for ten minutes, she said she was sick and did not want to trouble us. We felt rejected again. That was the second highlight of our encounters with her. After that, the local informant told us to wait in the church on Sunday, because her neighbor would walk her to the service. As expected, she was there after the service, with a walking stick in her hand. Her neighbor told her about our intention to walk her home and interview her, at which point she let down her guard, and finally let us hold her hand to walk her home. On the way, she said, "What the Lord has given me is a heaven. I have low-income insurance from the government, so I don't need extra help. You can help the family living next door who are in need." The local informant also told us that the villagers had wanted to help her fix up her broken house, but she had refused. The only help she accepted was people harvesting the corn on her land for her.

After we realized Grandma GL was set on being self-sufficient and not accepting any extra help from people, we passed our tokens of appreciation to her neighbor, who helped take care of her daily needs. Even then, Grandma GL didn't spend any of the money we left for her, but donated it to the church. She felt grateful enough for our multiple visits, according to the church deacon. In this society full of extravagance and materialism, she was a blind old lady, living independently and minimally on the few hundred RMB given her by the government, without any further assistance from anyone. Yet she still gave to others selflessly, and coveted nothing. She prayed for herself, for other people's hardships, and for our future. After suffering so many misfortunes, she still managed to keep a pure heart like a child.

Although Grandma GL had initially refused to communicate with us or accept our gifts, eventually she opened up and shared her painful story with us, prayed for us, and even followed us out when we left. We had witnessed the change in her and her growing acceptance toward us, and felt touched by it. October 2016 was the last time we visited Grandma GL at her home. The front yard was totally different, clean and with flowers blooming in the pots. She walked out with a walking stick in good spirits, and held my hands throughout the visit. She still remembered our names, and listened to the video clips we had made for her as a parting gift (Fig. 6.4).

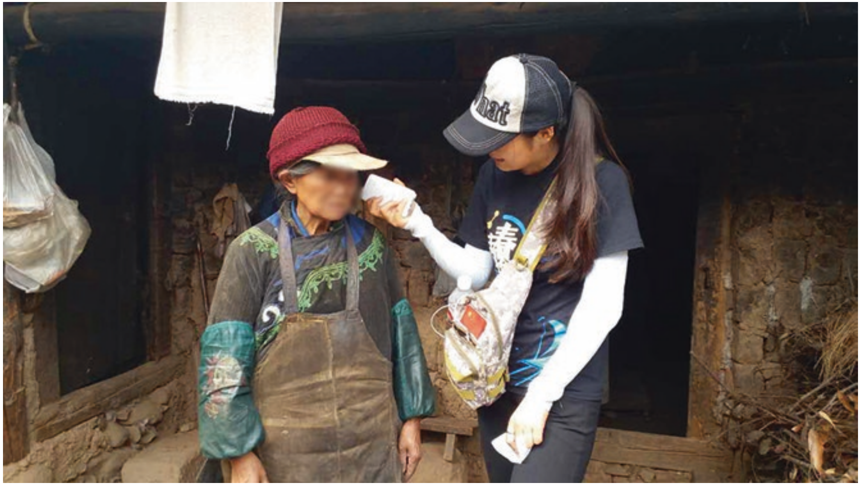


Fig. 6.4 Grandma GL listening to the video clip on our last visit

On the Chinese New Year's Eve of 2017, we received the news that Grandma GL had passed away at home alone. Her neighbor was the one who discovered her body, and the church community decided to chip in to host a funeral for her. GL followed the Lord Jesus with a devout heart, dedicated herself to the Lord, and had compassion toward others. May the Lord receive such a kind and tough soul in His kingdom.

Suffering Narratives of Yi-Bimo

Story of AS (Narrated by Keke)

It had been several years since I last conducted any field studies (as a religious studies major). I used to leave the field with questions to ponder on, but never had any emotional ties or worries. However, the topic of this field study was "suffering," which made the investigation different from others. Toward the end of the field study, I felt worried about several persons, and AS was one of them.

It was October 2015 when we traveled to TM village, where we met AS for the first time. The journey to visit AS was difficult. We took a minibus first, then walked over a shaky old rope bridge with a river running beneath, and took half a day to hike up the mountain. Finally, we saw AS in front of his house. The muddy walls and ground in AS's small house were typical signs of poverty. In his village, people who are well off had already built new houses as part of the New Rural Construction program. However, a new house was an unrealistic dream for AS. All he wanted was to keep living with his five-year-old son, have the strength work on the farm, and possess sufficient food and clothes.

AS raised some chickens in the front yard, and there was no doubt that they were meant for Bimo rituals. His son was very quiet and played by himself in the mud. He didn't show much curiosity about strangers and completely ignored us. AS invited us to come into his house, then we sat around the fire pit and began to talk under a dim light. He didn't speak Mandarin, but could understand a little. We mostly communicated with the interpreter's assistance.

AS was a 45-year-old Yi man who had a five-year-old son. He had married a woman from another village, but she had passed away in the hospital the year before. AS had some health issues of his own. He felt better after being hospitalized for a while, but had relapsed again in June 2015. About his physical condition he said, "There's always ups and downs." We didn't see much emotional fluctuation in him while talking about his wife's passing, but when he mentioned his health, he seemed to talk in more detail and pointed out the parts that were aching. For example, "After I harvested three baskets of corn, I felt painful everywhere on my body, and had panic attacks at night."

In the simple conversation, we learned that his wife had become sick quite suddenly the year before. She had passed away after being hospitalized for four or five months. The family asked a Bimo priest to perform healing rituals numerous times and spent lots of money on it. Although the medical insurance allowed them to get some discounts off the medical fee, AS still owed his cousin more than 2000 RMB. Nevertheless, despite spending money on both medical treatment and healing rituals, his wife passed away eventually. Regarding his own sickness, AS visited the doctor about four times, and also asked the Bimo to perform rituals for him. When we asked him about the cause of his sickness, AS told us the Bimo couldn't tell from the fortune-telling ritual. He thought it could be due to overexhaustion from his labors. He said that if he didn't have as much physical work during the day, he might sleep better at night. But his condition was not improving, and he said it was not easy to find a suitable Bimo priest, besides which he realized that taking medicine could provide relief faster than the rituals.

After our first meeting, we built on the relationship, then followed up by phone over the following three months. AS could only understand a little bit of Mandarin, however, so he could hardly understand me. Therefore we had to ask the interpreter to help us when we called him. As we knew, AS kept looking for help from the Bimo as well as the doctors, but it seemed hard to completely eradicate his illness. I often thought about AS and his only son. When the weather became colder, I always thought of that filthy bed in his house and him in the thin layer of clothing. The image of him shivering in the cold wind often flashed through my mind (Fig. 6.5).

In February 2016, we re-entered the field for an important mission for our study. Meigu in February was extremely cold, but that was also a natural advantage to us because the river to TM village was dried up, and didn't flood the road. We could ride up the mountain smoothly and without much effort. When we had almost reached AS's house, we saw that he was heading to the farm with a basket of fertilizer on his back. He was very happy and friendly when he saw us. I had been worried our relationship with him might have become remote because of the language barrier between us, so I asked him, "Do you still remember me"? He walked to me with excitement and said, "Yes, I remember you." I meant to shake his

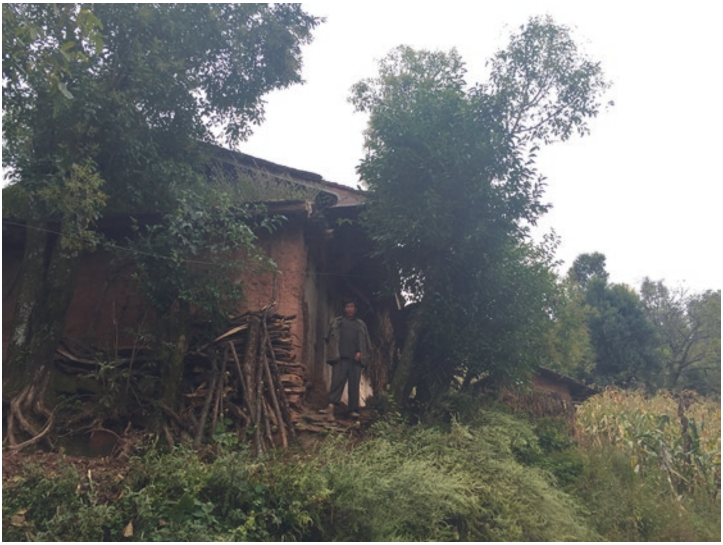


Fig. 6.5 AS seeing us off in front of his house

hands but he was wearing a glove and said his gloves were “very dirty.” He was trying to take off the gloves but without success. Therefore I just patted his arm to express my greeting and warmth.

When we reached AS’s home, he didn’t actively invite us in as on past occasions, but only admitted us when we asked him to. As we walked into the house, he kept saying it was “too dirty” and kept wiping the stools with his sleeves and clothing. At that time, we didn’t understand why AS cared so much about “cleanliness” and so feared the “unsanitariness” of his home during this visit. Subsequently, we interviewed AS as planned. He revealed more about his past life, such as the experience of going to the prison, due to getting involved in a physical fight with someone. We wanted to know more about his experience of being imprisoned. He said, “The life there was not good. I didn’t have money or food. There was no rice, only corn. Later on, my family gave me some money so I could purchase food and stuff for living. In the beginning, the corn was only enough for one person. There was a man named SB who was my roommate on the upper bunk, and we used to persuade each other to take the only piece of potato at mealtimes.” The hardest thing for AS during his period of imprisonment had been hunger. He didn’t use any adjectives to describe how SB had helped him in his most difficult moments, but described only his concrete actions. Yet, somehow, this was much more powerful than any beautiful words for me.

In our conversation, he mostly mentioned his physical pains, which were the main cause of his suffering at the time. He told us several wounds had appeared on his face and head. He said that, at night, he would "go crazy, with pains all over [his] body." He suspected the breakdown of his body might have been caused by his falling off the bed while he slept, but he could hardly remember anything when awake. In this interview, he again told us lots about his health issues using both verbal and non-verbal languages, but didn't mention the death of his wife at all. Toward the end of the conversation, we asked about his plan for his son's future. He said, "Sometimes, when I have enough energy, I have thought about it. Sometimes, when I feel weak, I can't think of anything. I know I have to pay tuition fees when he goes to school… and if I don't buy snacks for my son, he'll be jealous of the other children. When I am short of money, even down to a penny, I can't imagine him going to school." For AS, it seemed he was lacking both money and health. When survival became a problem, the future of his son was just a distant dream for him. He was able to live only in the here and now, taking one day at a time.

We actually learned something about AS's physical condition from the local informant before the meeting. We heard his wife had died of AIDS and, from the physical symptoms he displayed, we suspected AS was also infected with HIV. We were extremely worried about the development of his illness. We tried to read his medical report from the hospital check-up, but he couldn't find it. He just said, "The doctor said my blood was not clean, it could be rheumatism." No wonder he kept saying he was "filthy and dirty," without ever letting us have any close contact with him. The medicine for tuberculosis on his table also confirmed our speculation that his HIV infection was actually at a serious stage. Since AS looked after the child by himself, it was hard to imagine how a little boy could handle the situations when his dad collapsed at night. Every time we bid him farewell, we weren't sure we'd ever see him again.

In the following four months, we kept in contact by phone. AS was in bad shape with lots of ups and downs. How we wished it was just a common illness, and that he could keep on living with his only son. No matter how hard life is, nothing is better than being alive. There was one thing we couldn't understand. Why was AS reluctant to have a physical examination? Why had he never thought of being infected with HIV? Was it because he really didn't know, or did he simply not want to face reality? Or was he just not bothered by it? In September, I visited MG again, determined to take AS to the hospital for HIV testing. No matter whether he agreed or not, he had to do it for his son and for himself. As long as he was still alive, there was still a slim hope his life could be prolonged.

That day, AS came to town to meet me as I had requested. He bought his son two new suits and a blanket which could protect him from the cold weather. Initially the little boy didn't say anything to me, then he started to observe me, and even smiled at me timidly. I took them to the Center for Disease Control to register for a blood test. I didn't tell AS what the examination was really about, just that it was for his health and he could take free medicine if needed. However, AS seemed quite anxious when we mentioned the blood test. He told us he had gone to the city hospital, and the doctors had diagnosed him with rheumatism, and they just performed a Bimo healing ritual the night before. Nevertheless, he still followed through with the blood test procedure with his son. His son cried a bit because of the pain, but smiled again after a while.

When they finished the blood tests, the doctors said that, because of confidentiality, they could only give the results to the person who was being tested. That individual could make the decision whether or not to tell anyone else. If the diagnosis was HIV positive, the doctors in the rural area would perform a few follow-up examinations and deliver medicines to him. The whole process would be kept private, which I thought was quite professional. The doctors told us that the most difficult part of their job was convincing the local people to be screened voluntarily. According to them, even after a propaganda campaign, it was still hard to recruit people for voluntary testing. The doctors said in a tone of helplessness, "We couldn't force them and lock them up for testing." This also answered our question about why there were still many undiagnosed and untreated HIV-affected Yi people in the village area. The people living on this land were dragged into the abyss by diseases and disasters, which made their suffering even more unbearable. After learning about their sufferings through this field study, it left a print in our hearts as if we were suffering together with them. We only wish AS could face his suffering with resilience, and find a better way of coping with the difficulties, so as to be able to watch his child grow up happily.

Ecological Rationality In Vivo: How Field Study Shaped the Differences Between Two Teams of RAs

If you have been paying close attention to the suffering narratives in each chapter, you might intuitively discern a different "flavor" between the Yi-Christian and Yi-Bimo participants. These vignettes were originally written by the RAs who were following up with specific participants, but edited and selected by us for inclusion in this book. The only thing we didn't edit was the pronouns they used to refer to their participants and themselves. Soon, we realized that almost all of the RAs from the Luquan site used "Grandma" or "Grandpa" to refer to those elderly participants, but that this phenomenon was absent in the Meigu RAs. As can be seen in the above stories of "Grandma GL" and "AS," this is indicative of certain cognitive structures and language preferences. Though "Grandma GL" was the most difficult participant in terms of getting her consent to be interviewed and keeping up the relationship, the RA (Huanlin) had no difficulty expressing how "Grandma GL" had influenced her and their feelings toward each other.

By contrast, another RA (Keke) referred to her interviewee AS as someone who seemed far away because of the language barrier, but the memory of whom would flash into her mind frequently. Though she cared for him and even arranged for him to be tested for HIV after the completion of the interview study, the feeling of concern was unilateral, not mutual. Another observable difference is how they end their stories. Luquan RAs had more positive feelings when closing their reports, whereas Meigu RAs often ended their reports with a tone of heaviness and pessimism. Just as the RA (Huanlin) perceived Grandma GL getting much better after the third visit, another RA (Keke) perceived AS going downhill with his positive HIV result. Therefore, we summarized the difference between RA teams into two major dimensions—social ties and emotional expressions, consistent with the ecological rationality framework of suffering.

Social Ties in the Community We Studied Could Shape Our Relationship with the Local Participants

As we argued in the previous chapter, the Yi-Christian group acquired characteristics of a weak-ties society through their introduction to Christianity four generations ago. This was evident in their "brother and sister" approach to other non-blood-tie believers in the community. Thus, they are socialized to welcome outsiders as part of the "brother and sister" community, and to call each other "family" even when biological connections are absent. As our local informants were mainly leaders or deacons in the church, it was very natural for the RAs to be accepted as part of the "fellowship" in the church. This was evident in their invitation to the RAs to attend the church service and prayer meeting at night. The RAs also felt very comfortable in addressing these participants using family-relationship terms (grandpa, grandma, uncle, aunt) (*yeye*, *nainai*, *shushu*, *ayi*) as respectful titles at the onset of the study. The local informants also treated us with great hospitality by inviting us to their homes for meals almost every day, and the RAs also mingled with their children. Almost all the relationships was successfully built after the first home visit without much resistance toward us (except in the case of Grandma GL). The most memorable story from Luquan was of how one of the participants (Grandpa BR) wrote a letter to one of the RAs (Xinli) after our first visit. Here is what she reflected on:

> Besides the three home visits, most of the time, Grandpa lives a quiet life in the nursing home in the small town in Yunnan, while I pursue my college education in Changping District, Beijing. We communicated with each other every month through phone calls. During the phone conversation, every time I had to almost "scream" to send my regards to Grandpa, since he has poor hearing. Because of the language barrier, our conversations didn't always make much sense. I still have to rely on face-to-face conversation to know about Grandpa's life, his sufferings, his thoughts, and his heart… How could I, a Han college student who does not have a religious belief, growing up in the South, understand the heart of a blind elderly man who grew up in a little Yi village in Yunnan? Because of our differences in religious views, I often felt embarrassed when asked if I believed in Christ or not… Yet Grandpa still understood and accepted me. The most important element in human communication is indeed our hearts.
>
> In the letter, based on his most heartfelt feelings and reflections, Grandpa told me that I should be strong no matter what I will encounter in the future. Being strong comes from the heart. It comes from an optimistic attitude toward life, from being positive and upbeat even when facing setbacks and hardships. It is spiritual resilience and a strong heart with the support of a genuine faith. When I typed the letter word by word in the attachment, ***I couldn't help tearing up***. What touched me most is seeing the light of life penetrating through his suffering life, and him being able to smile no matter how much pain and suffering he has been through.
>
> Thank you, Grandpa! I will be strong.

However, this type of relational exchange was not witnessed in the Meigu RA team and their participants. Though there was some familial bonding toward the end of study, most of the relationships with the younger participants remained at "sibling level" (*gege/jiejie*, brother/sister). It was hard at first for the Meigu RAs, as we were seen as the "outsiders" and were rejected by a few potential participants. They seemed to be oblivious toward us. This was obvious when we participated in the Bimo rituals. It might have been due to the language barrier, but even while we were dining with them, we were left alone at a desk, unless we wanted to start drinking beer with them. Actually, that is what the RAs did to blend in during home visits, when they were offered beer. Our local informant told us that there is a local saying that sometimes an outsider brings bad luck or an "unclean" spirit to the household. Hence, our informant was quite reluctant to take us to families afflicted with AIDS, as they didn't want to get into trouble for intruding. However, when we persisted, it was possible to break through the cultural barriers and taboos and be accepted as "insiders." Liu Shaohua, in her famous book *Passage to Manhood: Youth Migration, Heroin and AIDS in Southwest China* (2011) shared that her "breakthrough" in the Liangshan Yi community was when she "saw a ghost" (*jian gui le*) during the execution of a Bimo ritual, and that mystical experience gave her "permission" to join the local community as "one of them." Sharing mystical experiences, meals after rituals, and stories in conversation are all means of building trust within a strong-ties society like the Yi in Liangshan. It took our RAs several trips before their participants knew them well enough to trust them, and before they could be included as insiders. This different trajectory of relationship building between the two RA teams further supports our hypothesis of the co-evolution of ecology and cognition. As we have seen, the strong-ties ecology of Meigu goes hand in hand with a cognitive style that makes sharp distinctions between in-group and out-group. Further reinforced by their religious beliefs, such as the soul-spider and captive-guest (Swancutt 2012), this uneasiness toward outsiders was witnessed by the anthropologist Swancutt, as well as by the RAs assigned to Meigu.

The Research Sites We Studied Shaped Our Emotional Expressions During the Study

In the same way that different RA teams built different kinds of relationship (such as family, friends) in this cultural-immersion process, their emotional experiences were also quite different. As we found in the stories of Grandma GL or Grandpa BR above, the Luquan RAs gained more emotional gratification toward the end of the study when they saw their participants looking better and happier. The RAs could also feel genuine emotion, expressed through tears and verbal expression, from the participants during the interviews. As the RAs would sometimes also disclose bits of personal information (such as being sick, or busy studying) in building relationships with their participants, their participants also had some "emotional transference" toward them, showing concern and care for them. The openness of the RAs toward the participants was thereby reciprocated with trust and care. This reciprocity of emotion between the RAs and the Yi-Christian group created a warm atmosphere in which to carry out the study, and made the suffering stories more bearable. Not only did they bonded closely with their participants; the RAs also used the language of Christian faith in their case study reports, having learned this from their participants. They had started to appreciate religious resources the way their participants did. One of the RAs (Lizi) wrote: "These grandmas and grandpas from Luquan drew their strength from religion, which led me to see the power of faith and their devout hearts. They are so kind, they would always tell me they were praying for me in our phone conversations." Another RA (Huanlin) from the Luquan team also said, "Though the interviewees had been through many hardships, regardless of their religious background, whether Christian or Bimo, their spiritual world has always been rich."

While the RAs from the Luquan team found their relationships with the participants nourishing, RAs from the Meigu team felt more drained by feelings of unspeakable helplessness after the study. There was more heaviness toward the end when the participants in Meigu passed away one by one, and unexpectedly. Though we had hosted debriefing sessions to talk about their loss, in their reflection papers the RAs still expressed a strong identification with the helplessness of their Yi-Bimo participants, such as their ambivalence toward HIV testing. Several RAs told us that they felt incredibly anxious before the HIV testing, and that this was only alleviated when the result turned out negative. When the result was positive, their hearts sank. This emotional reaction paralleled that of their participants. Our RAs in Meigu had vividly re-enacted that emotional experience through their feelings of helplessness and flashbacks to images of the participants in their minds. Emotional reactions are indeed contagious. But this shared emotion lacked a communal space to articulate itself. Had they been participating in healing rituals, the RAs would have been able to share publicly the fears and hopes of those who suffered. Unfortunately, in their interviews, the RAs only felt the burden of the others' suffering, without the means for any communal sharing of that suffering via myths or rituals. It would have been awkward, for instance, for them to say to the interviewee, "I'll pray for you." By contrast, RAs who interviewed Yi-Christians had an easier time, for some of the interviewees would initiate communal sharing by asking the RAs to pray for them. Since symbolic sharing of suffering with non-kin was not customary among the Yi-Bimo, the only solution left for the RAs to express their empathy was to offer concrete help (giving money, etc.), which, unfortunately, was strictly forbidden by the research protocol. This increased the emotional burden and deepened a sense of helplessness among the RAs.

The Meigu team also wrote more about the hardships of the external journey, road conditions, hunger, and fatigue when carrying out fieldwork. Here are some excerpts from their reflection notes: "Though many times I was silenced by the poor and narrow mountain road conditions, I had to constantly remind myself this is the living environment of our Yi people, and the land that gave birth to their culture" (Guozi); "Every time, before I embarked on field study, I always had the feelings of fear and anticipation. When I thought of the long windy road and tiring journey, I would worry if my physical condition would become a burden" (YS); "My body still has memory of the field trip. Until now, the field-trip experience and sensation are still ingrained in my body. I remember the temperature when we went through the peak of the mountain, the cigarette smell during our focus group session with the Bimo priests, the soreness of my legs from hiking to the participants' villages, the moments of my brain going through dissociative blankness upon entering the AIDS village, and the shakiness of our rented vehicle during the early morning ride" (Xiaorong); "After entering the windy mountain road of Liangshan, the ten-hour journey and bumpy road was really exhausting. When we got down from the bus, I couldn't feel my buttocks anymore. Plus, with the dust flying on the road, when we arrived at the destination, all our faces were covered by dust and looked miserable" (Yezi); "What always comes to my mind is the road leading to the heart of Liangshan, which is very long, and dangerous. In the nearly 12 hours of the bus ride, passing through the forest covered by thick snow, I often pondered how the *Nuosu* Yi people walked out from here to the town, to the city, and to the whole country" (Keke).

All these lengthy descriptions of the road conditions actually parallel the linguistic habits of our Yi-Bimo participants, who tend to use concrete examples and external reference to their environment in talking about their suffering. Without using much emotional lexicon, our RAs from the Meigu team painted a very painful and bitter picture of life in that area. Not only did they use their difficult journey to reflect on the reality of their Yi participants, but also as a way to express their fear, fatigue, and anxiety. This kind of somatic and concrete description is less frequent in our Luquan RAs. Though we do not have a big enough sample for a formal linguistic analysis, the striking difference in the writings between these two teams of RAs is consistent with our psycho-linguistic theory of emotion, which posits that emotion expression is shaped by the cognitive style of information processing, which in turn is shaped by the ecological niche in which one finds oneself.

Reflecting on Indigenous Psychology (IP) Research

In this final section, we talk about how our reflections above could contribute to IP in building a theory on resilience, ethics, and boundaries in indigenous research, and advocate for the mission of IP as giving a voice to the voiceless.

An IP Theory on Resilience (jian qiang*)*

In their reflection notes, many of our RAs repeatedly mentioned the strong character (*jian qiang*) of their Yi participants, especially those in Meigu team. The RAs reflected that it had something to do with the family clan (*jia zhi*) and Bimo tradition, as these two resources offered the ultimate answers from cradle to grave. From this reflection, one of the RAs in the Meigu team (YS) further explored this concept in her Master's thesis on HIV/AIDS-affected Yi family members in the Meigu area, to explore their concept of "*jian qiang*" (stay strong) in the midst of adversity, and to trace its roots. In the past, many scholars defined resilience as an inner trait that helped an individual bounce back after a traumatic experience. Through qualitative study in Meigu, this RA found that *jian qiang* (stay strong) for Yi people is quite different from the English definition of resilience. *Jian qiang* is not only an intrapersonal *trait*, but also a *state* dependent on external criteria, such as power of family clan, material possessions, and health conditions (Luo 2017). In her interview, one of the wives of an AIDS patient told a "corn metaphor" to Luo, which is worth repeating here:

> *Jian qiang* for our Yi people is like planting the corn. Before the corn seeds sprout from the earth, we have to clear the weeds, to let the seed grow, bit

> by bit. It's like growing a child, very tough. We have to work on the farm from the time we wake up in the morning till noon time… When you plant the corn, you have to bury the seeds under the soil, then turn the soil over carefully, especially the soil on top of the seed. After turning the soil, you have to pluck out the weeds. You need to do this two times. If you find bugs in your plant, you have to spray pesticide. Then your whole day become restless.

From this metaphor, one can grasp the underlying meaning, that *jian qiang* is not a static trait for Yi people, but a constant interaction with the environment to achieve an optimal outcome; it is more than just "bouncing back in time of adversity." Rather, *jian qiang* is the result of two factors—one is the internal strength to persist under harsh conditions; the other is an external condition (bugs, for instance) with the potential to drain internal strength. Thus, instead of putting all their eggs in the internal strength basket, as is the case with the Western notion of resilience, the Yi talked more about the external conditions that facilitate *jian qiang*, such as relationships (being strong for the sake of their family). This definition is certainly shaped by their external orientation, and concrete perception, which should be taken into consideration by researchers who attempt to construct a universal theory on the notion of resilience. Recently, a similar finding on state-based notions of resilience was reported by Atallah (2017), who did a qualitative study on Palestinian refugee families. Atallah found that the metaphor of cultivating the "family tree" represented the intergenerational resilience of the colonized and exiled refugees, who emphasized resistance to the military, a return to their cultural roots, and persevering through daily activities. These were also the help-seeking behaviors we found in our Yi-Bimo participants, who were more oriented to the here-and-now space, valued problem-solving skills, and actively interacted with their external environment. A major challenge to their communal resilience was the difficulty in passing down cultural roots in the face of urbanization, and the secularization process (having their religion branded as superstition, *mi xin*) from the mainstream culture. We will further explore this issue in our last chapter.

An IP Ethics on Boundaries with the Local Participants

As we have seen in one of the RA's reflection notes, the balance between objective and subjective involvement in this kind of study is hard to maintain. On the one hand, this RA had been taught by orthodox science to be completely "emotion-less" so that she could do a "good job" with the interviews. Yet she felt guilty for being so detached and not able to help with her participants' suffering. When we were doing qualitative research within the minority groups, especially on emotion-laden topics like suffering, we found that those RAs who were more successful in balancing their roles were the ones who had more flexible boundaries with the participants. Instead of keeping a distance, they actually "moved toward" the participants until they felt their pain. They still felt guilty, but were committed to the relationship, knowing they would not "abandon" the participants at the end of the study. Since all the RAs we chose and trained had been oriented to the protocol of the study, and knew there would be a transition from research to service at the end of it, they were allowed to build a friendly relationship with the participants from the first visit. The rule of thumb was that they should cultivate enough trust for the participants to feel safe talking to them about suffering events. Another thing that we found as key to the success of our study project was using "ourselves" as the tool of measurement, becoming an insider in the community and learning to perceive things from the local perspective with an empathic stance. In the end, our parallel experiences with the participants created a richness of reflexivity for further analysis. Therefore, we hope IP as a discipline will consider producing a culturally sensitive research ethics for scholars, one that allows the researcher to address the local participants with familial terms when appropriate, without harboring anxiety about violating the research ethics of "objectivity."

IP Research Driven by Both Practice and Theory

By focusing on the suffering of one specific Yi group, the awareness of social justice and sense of a mission to listen to all minority groups was heightened. This is apparent in our RAs' reflections. After this study, their care did not stop with Yi people, but extended to all those who had no voice. This is the powerful effect of suffering narratives. Once we became attuned to the local suffering, it opened up our perception of global sufferings. This is also why global psychology needs to build its foundation on IP, and why Richard Rorty (1989) said suffering is the basis for human solidarity. We believe it will bring solidarity among global indigenous psychologies as well, especially when the source of suffering is related to socio-political factors and historical trauma. In our study, since the RAs were informed of the purpose and intent of this study, they were able to endure the strain of fieldwork, coding, and case study assignments, because they were convinced that our study could ameliorate the suffering of our participants. One of them wrote, “We are doing something noble and meaningful, by giving voice to a marginalized group in modern China, so that international scholarship will recognize the unique culture, religion, and social structures of Yi people in remote China” (XR). This is the identity of IP in China we are shaping. Hopefully, the research outcome might not only enlighten international scholars, but also bring about change in policy worldwide.

In conclusion, our study not only collected objective data on the participants, but also subjective data from our RAs. Using both our minds and hearts, we as researchers are the witnesses of the suffering of the Yi people. Through the powerful stories we heard, we were also changed by them emotionally, relationally, and cognitively. Cultural immersion in the field over a two-year period yielded productive results for our research team, and the final stage of reflection helps in balancing our thinking and learning. As we exercise our abstract thinking here in theoretical formulations about Yi people, we are also being impacted by their narratives of suffering in an experiential way, including physical fatigue and emotional defenses. For instance, it took me (the first author) half a year, after exiting the field, before I was finally able to put this journey of research into words. There were many times when I would “detach” myself, just like the RAs, when I was writing, or found the suffering narratives overwhelming in the translation process (from Mandarin to English). Just as the RAs did when transcribing the original interviews into Chinese, I also wiped away tears while translating them into English. There is both an emotional and physical price to pay for this study topic and research methodology, yet we hope the collective reflections in this chapter will be a milestone for IP research.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to our research team, local informants, translators, and interviewees for making this study possible. Without their persistence and resilience, it would not have been possible for this project to shed light on so many intricate aspects of human suffering. To our knowledge, this is the first attempt to collect data from the field over a span of two years since the IP movement began. We are all drinking a bowl of “bitter soup,” but as a saying in traditional Chinese medicine puts it—“the good medicines are the ones that taste bitter” (良药苦口). Through the Yi’s harrowing narratives of suffering, our research team has come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of not only the human mind but also the human spirit (Fig. 6.6).

Fig. 6.6 The research team standing next to the SH dam, which was built during the 1960s by our participants from Luquan

References

Analects, Book II Chap. 15. Retrieved from http://www.online-literature.com/standalone-books/analects/3/

Attalah, D. G. (2017). A community-based qualitative study of intergenerational resilience with Palestinian refugee families facing structural violence and historical trauma. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 1*. Retrieved from http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/XIYat8qMWNH5m5BPmtzp/full.

Bernard, H. R. (1988). *Research methods in cultural anthropology*. CA: Sage Publications.

Bhatia, S., & Priya, K. R. (in press). From representing culture to fostering 'voice': Reassessing vistas of indigenous psychology. In K. H. Yeh (Ed.), *Asian indigenous psychologies in global context* (Ch.2). Palgrave series of Indigenous Psychology. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Liu, S. H. (2011). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Luo, Y. S. (2017). *A qualitative study on the resilience factors among Yi HIV/AIDS affected families from Sichuan Liangshan*. Unpublished master thesis, China University of Political Sciences and Law, Beijing.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Swancutt, K. (2012). The captive guest: Spider webs of hospitality among the Nuosu of Southwest China. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 18*, S103–S116.

CHAPTER 7

Challenges and Future Directions

Globalization is no longer an abstract term, but a living reality for many ethnic groups in China. For example, a Yi migrant worker could be working for a Korean company in Guangzhou. And the HIV virus, which originated in Africa, has now spread to Yi villages in the mountains of Liangshan. When we listened to their stories of suffering, we also heard about the ravages of urbanization and globalization for these migrant workers from ethnic backgrounds. Juggling their family traditions (*jia zhi)* with financial demands, their reality is no longer governed by the simple "traditional Yi worldview," yet their cognitive styles are still cast in the mold of the traditional ecological niche of strong-ties societies. For instance, our interviewees used concrete expressions such as "no money" to describe their painful emotions, and they counted the numbers of animals needed for sacrifices in the different religious rituals. If we followed a paradigm of psychology that privilegs abstract thinking in spirituality and cognitive functioning, we would fail to see the "counting behavior" as emotional expression, but instead label their religion as "materialistic" and "superstitious." Therefore, it is important for indigenous psychology (IP) to not only foster the local voice but also tune in to its modes of emotion expressions.

Summing up our findings (see Table 7.1), cultural differences may be understood along the divide between internal and external cognitive orientation. Western psychology that conceptualizes emotion, cognition,

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2_7

Table 7.1 An expanded schematic comparison between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians in terms of ecological rationality, defined as cognition co-evolved with the ecological niche

Ecological niche	*Strong-ties*	*Weak-ties*
Cognitive styles		
Representation of emotion	Implicit Somatic expressions	Explicit Verbal, linguistic, conceptual
Information processing	Perceptual (concrete)	Conceptual (abstract)
Categorizations	Experience-bound In-group versus out-group; natural versus Supernatural Causes	Higher level of abstraction Church as an all-inclusive group; God having sovereignty over all things, natural and supernatural
Cognitive orientation	Physical space (external)	Mental space (internal)
Cognitive effort	Low	High
Psychological variables explored by the psycho-linguistic analyses		
Explanatory model (cognitive attribution of suffering)	Supernatural cause: external (explanatory power is outsourced to religious experts)	Internal causation, reflective, and invested in one's own explanatory power
Social support	In-group	Both in-group and out-group
Religious coping	Concrete action: manipulation of external resources, such as religious experts and rituals	Mental action: manipulation of internal resources, such as prayers and singing hymns

and religious coping in terms of intrapsychic phenomena has much to learn from the traditional Yi, who resort to religious rituals in times of distress, and rely on Bimo priests to interpret this distress—these activities are supported and nurtured by the communal space that lies outside the individual's skull. More consistent with the Western psychology of emotion is the Yi-Christian, for whom God is within, who demands more mental effort in prayers and inward search for answers to suffering. Christianity also encourages forming relationships with strangers, and this is characteristic of weak-ties, in which explicit, linguistic expression becomes important, as the implicit communication used with close family members would not work among strangers. It is not surprising, then, that the Yi-Christian group scored relatively higher on Emotion Words, and seemed to have a more permeable boundary with outsiders, as evidenced by their more varied help-seeking behaviors. By contrast, the Yi-Bimo's narratives of suffering revealed a different emotional landscape, characterized by external-reference in emotion expression, dependence on external resources—such as ritual experts—in religion, concrete cognitive attribution styles, and tight in-group and out-group boundaries in help-seeking. Might this difference in boundaries with outsiders—tight versus permeable—between Yi-Bimo and Yi-Christians impact on their respective vulnerability to modernization? We shall ponder this question in the concluding section.

In the following sections, we raise some social issues and concerns about the future of the Yi ethnic minority. We believe that IP researchers could contribute to the alleviation of local suffering through culturally sensitive theory, research, and the application of scientific insights to local practices, such as social work and the mental health delivery system. We would still use suffering narratives for illustration.

Challenge #1: Problems of AIDS and Drug Addiction in the Liangshan Area: Side-Effects of a Broken Sign That Perpetuate Through Generations in Vicious Cycles

Story of GR (Narrated by Guozi)

My conversation with GR started when we were interviewing another family. He was observing us in his role as an uncle in the neighborhood. His Mandarin was very fluent. To avoid him interrupting the ongoing interview (carried out by my colleague) in that household, I intentionally invited him to come outside the house to chat. My original plan was to get more information about that particular family from him. Unexpectedly, after chatting for just a little while, he told me: “My health is not good either. I’ve also got sick.” Based on our experiences from past interviews, I knew Yi people used “getting sick” to describe having AIDS. In order to confirm this, I asked him what kind of disease he had. He said without any hesitation: “It is AIDS and tuberculosis.” Although our local interpreter had already alerted us to the fact that there were a certain number of AIDS patients in this village, I was still surprised by his frankness. Then I took a closer look at him. It was winter at the time of our visit, and we were all wearing thick jackets, but he was only wearing a thin one, with a shabby red sweater underneath. He held a cigarette between his fingers, looking aimless and bored. There were clearly visible scars on both his hands, in both red and black colors. It looked like the old, unhealed scars and the new ones were present at the same time. Moreover, his complexion was quite dark, like a sick person. When we talked, I could clearly see that there were ulcers in his mouth. Slowly, I pieced all these details together to form a limited impression of AIDS in my brain.

Walking across a bare field, we arrived at GR's home. It was a typical Yi mud house. In front of it there was another small, slanted house. Quite an amount of pig manure was piled up inside. The fences in front of the house seemed to have been damaged a long time ago. The parts that had fallen down were not erect and stayed drooping. Yet, dry corns were harvested and hung neatly from the inside of the eaves. Stepping over the threshold, it took quite a while for my eyes to adjust before I was finally able to see the inside of the house. The household items were scattered around in disorder. Something like grain sacks were piled carelessly in a corner. In another corner, there was a bed and a cold fire pit without heat or fire. Under the pillars and a chest, some medical packages and X -ray photos were strewn about. When I asked GR about his current situation, he answered: "My current situation is that I am by myself. I bought medicines to take on my own. My sisters also bought medicines for me." Because of his sickness (AIDS), he could only feed pigs and raise chickens at home. He couldn't do any other farm work. He also had to entrust his only son, who was five years old, to his parents to be taken care of. His parents also did all the farm work in the field (Fig. 7.1).

He said that he was 35 years old. Five years earlier, he had got married. Yet, when he and his wife went to the government office to apply for a marriage certificate (Yi people don't usually register their marriage officially before their wedding), they were asked to have a physical check-up. That was when he found out that he was HIV positive. He said his son was only five or six months old at that time. "My wife didn't like me anymore, after finding out about my sickness," GR told us. Since then, they had often quarreled. "I was sick. She didn't like me. I also had a bad temper. I hit her." He showed his half-missing front teeth, saying they had been broken by his wife. Later, after he went to Xinjiang to work as a migrant worker, his brother-in-law called him and said, "Your wife wants a divorce. Are you willing to do it or not?" GR said he discussed this issue with his parents as well, who told him, "If you two want to do it, then go ahead and get a divorce." GR said he thought about this. "Even if I had refused to divorce her, she wouldn't have come home anyway." She would only stay at home

Fig. 7.1 GR was holding a cigarette during the conversation

for two or three months, then leave again, taking some corn and items from the household. He said that he had got sick because he took drugs (heroin) when he was "quite well off." Talking about his own condition, he stroked his head with both hands and looked very upset: "What can I think of it? I do not know what to do." He also sought advice from Bimo priests on several occasions. But they didn't know what to do either. "Ah, when I thought about it, a person like me will die anyway. They said to live one day at a time. I thought to myself, let it be, let it be! It is better to be dead. Yet I am still alive." He said this with a stiff and helpless smile on his face.

GR pointed out that the medicines hanging on the pillars were also bought from Xichang. One of the medications had almost no effect and he was about to stop taking it. Yet taking these medicines was still helpful for him, as they meant he could still walk outside; otherwise, he could only walk from the bed to the door (it was about the width of the room, a distance less than ten meters). I asked him where he got the money to buy the medicine. He said he and his son both had low-income subsidies. Each person can get 540 RMB per year, which would be distributed in August and December. When I asked about the physical condition of his family members, he said affirmatively: "They are all healthy." Later on, when we were about to leave, I asked him about this again. He then said: "I heard that, after the divorce, my wife went back to ZJ (where her original family is). They said she also got sick. I don't know if she remarried or not. But my son is healthy."

On February 27, when I called GR, he happened to be with his parents. He himself didn't have a cellphone. The phone number he had given me was his mother's. His mother couldn't speak Mandarin well. As she couldn't understand, she passed the phone to him. He said that his parents were in the field planting potatoes. He was taking care of his kid as usual. Although the kid slept and ate with his parents most of the time, he also took care of him when his parents were too busy with farm work. Recently, his health condition had been relatively stable. He said he was going to go and buy some medicines once he received money from the low-income subsidy in August. On March 21, GR took the initiative and called me to ask for our help in finding a job either in Chengdu or another city. He said it was not enough to depend on the subsidy to live and buy medicine. He said that once he got the money and was able to take the medicines in August, his health would be better; then he could do some light work that was not so physically demanding. He was actually looking forward to our support in ways other than financial. Over the phone, he said: "As for money, I know you guys don't have much either."

On April 10, I called GR for a follow-up about his condition and wanted to know more about his plan to find a job as a migrant worker. When he answered the phone, he sounded in good spirits. He said his health had been a lot better recently. The next day, he would go to the hospital to get some medicines that would last him for the next month. His parents and his kid were fine too. When I asked him about his detailed plan to go and find a job as a migrant worker, he said he had asked his relatives and friends about this. However, he was afraid he wouldn't be fit to work in either restaurants or factories. I also told him my concerns. First of all, what if his health took a turn for the worse? Second, what if he met peers with bad habits and started using drugs again? He said he understood the risk. However, he had been off drugs for 15 years. He would not use drugs again. Yet he appreciated our care. I also told him I had called various AIDS assistance organizations in different districts in Chengdu, but none of these NGOs provided career services for AIDS patients. I was afraid that I could not help him for now. But I would keep this issue in my mind.

On May 20 I called GR's mother several times but the call didn't go through. I then contacted another person we had interviewed to ask about his condition. I was informed he had suddenly passed away on the morning of May 5. Even his family members had been taken by surprise. They had been busy with the funeral and hadn't thought of informing us. Later on, when I phoned his younger sister, who understood Mandarin, she confirmed his sudden death at home. His younger sister had returned home from another province where she worked as a migrant worker because of the sudden death of her big brother. She said GR's son had not been in good health recently either. It looked like he had a lung infection. The lab results had not come back from the hospital yet. I suggested they take the child to hospital for a physical check-up as soon as possible. However, because of the sudden death of GR, his family members were still in deep mourning, and not much attention was paid to the kid.

On July 2016, when we revisited Meigu, the medical team we took with us did a rapid HIV testing on GR's kid. The result turned out to be positive. The facial expressions of GR's parents both changed. They held the child extremely tight. It looked as if they were afraid of losing him too. Two weeks later, when I called, GR's father talked with me in relatively fluent Mandarin over the phone. He said two groups of medical staff had been to his home to check on GR's son, and both had done some testing. He knew his grandson had also been infected with HIV. Although in the past they had always said the kid had a lung infection, now he realized his grandson had the same disease as his son. When he paused, I suggested he take the kid to the hospital again and talk to the doctors to see if there was any free medicine available, in hopes they would be able to control the kid's cold symptoms and the lung infection.

On November 9, when I called GR's father, GR's younger sister happened to be at home. She said she had returned from Shandong where she worked as a migrant worker because it was almost time for the Yi New

Year celebration. Her nephew's condition had not been good of late. He had been having constant nose bleeds, and had just come back from having IV infusion treatment at the hospital. When I asked if her father had taken the kid to get some medicine, she said probably not, because he was worried people would find out about his condition. How would the grandkid find a wife in the future? As a result, they were only dealing with symptom relief for now.

When I heard about this, my heart also felt heavy, like being burdened by a rock. I felt sorry for the unbearable "fate" of this innocent five-year-old kid. I felt helpless to offer any reasonable or gentle advice, because as far as I knew, there was still no effective medicine to cure this disease in China. This old couple in their sixties had just painfully said goodbye to their only son. Now they had to deal with their grandson's terminal disease. In their hearts, they must have been in denial, unwilling to acknowledge their helpless state. However, if the medicine for treating this disease effectively reaches the family in time, and if they and their society can become more open-minded about AIDS, then the fear that haunts this family like a curse might be banished to a certain degree. And as a result, this child and his grandparents will at least spend some more days together (Fig. 7.2).

By the end of November, when we called GR's younger sister, she said that the kid had been brought by his grandpa to the county hospital to get free medicine. At present, the kid's condition was still relatively stable. He also called me "Auntie" over the phone, copying what the adults had taught him to say. GR's younger sister said that, after the Yi New Year, she and her husband would leave to work as migrant workers again, now her nephew was stable. Her parents were a bit more relaxed as well. Yet, in the future, she knew she might have to contribute to the cost of her nephew's upbringing, and this financial burden was already in her mind.

* * *

GR was just one of many deceased AIDS patients in the Meigu area we happened to encounter before their passing. It all started with migrant work for many of them, followed by the cycle of drug addiction, with shared needles resulting in HIV infection. Without being aware of the infection, they continued to work and transmit money back to their families in Liangshan, as well as the undetected virus. Even though the government now has a policy of mandatory blood testing when people

Fig. 7.2 GR's son being held by his grandparents

register for a marriage certificate, many traditional Yi in Liangshan would join with their mate in accordance with their *jia zhi* (clan) tradition, before registering the marriage. Many of them got pregnant before they realized they were infected with HIV. It would have been against their tradition to break the marital engagement due to the disease. Furthermore, it was their obligation to pass down the familial lineage, especially by having a son, before they die. Consequently, many wives of HIV carriers had died of the disease, and some had passed it down to their babies. Then there were "AIDS babies," dying at a young age due to poor immune systems. Even though some children were fortunate enough to stay healthy, they became the orphans of parents who died of AIDS, leaving them behind alone and marginalized in society.

In recent years, many sociologists and anthropologists have studied the vicious cycle of historical oppression—social discrimination—negative ethnic stereotypes—poverty—migrant workers—drug addiction—health issues—death—debt—crime—social discrimination among Yi people from Liangshan. Liu (2011), in her book *Passage to Manhood*, also analyzed the causes of the prevalence of AIDS and the failing of official intervention even at the international level (e.g., the Sino-British program implemented from 2001 to 2006). She attributed the main reasons for such ineffective HIV prevention programs to the incomplete medical system in modern China (e.g., privatization of the medical market, top-down bureaucracy, poor coordination, etc.) and lack of cultural awareness among the national leadership. Our suffering narratives also confirmed such an explanation, of why Yi from Liangshan had not been able to escape the tragedy of drug addiction after decades of anti-drug campaigns. In addition to this proximate explanation, our study offers a higher level analysis through the lens of Peircean semiotics (see Chap. 5).

Our semiotic analysis suggests that the mentalization of the Yi-Bimo group entails a very different trajectory, in which symbolic function, along with its cognitive resources, is located primarily in the communal space of the collective, rather than in the individual psyche. To such an embedded community, in which the mind is embedded in the body, which in turn is embedded in the collective life of myths and rituals, the process of rapid modernization is especially devastating. One extreme form of modernization was the Cultural Revolution, during which time all native religious rituals and folklore practices were banned, and their symbolic expression “silenced” in the public arena. It was not until the 1980s that the government began to accept and restore the Bimo cultural tradition as the World’s Heritage. Yet, there was a generational gap and a vacuum in collective memory. The local Yi people picked up the Bimo rituals, but had lost the language for understanding them. For instance, our local informants and translators found it hard to translate our focus group dialogue with the Bimo priests, as they said they did not have the “right terms” for the stories told by the Bimo, as well as not enough of a knowledge base with regard to Bimo tradition. They said only an expert in Bimo culture would understand the nuances of these conversations.

This “culture amnesia” in the younger generation of Yi people takes a heavy toll, as it deprives the Yi of the collective resources needed to regulate their emotions, while under the stress of migrant work, especially being away in a strange city without the strong support of their clan (*jia zhi*). Without any preparation as regards navigating the complicated social information in their new workplace, they were “lost in translation” when immersed in a modern city culture. We have seen how, in times of stress, the Yi-Bimo tend to capitalize on external manipulation of resources, such as family, religious experts, or drugs—"When the pain feels unbearable, I take medicine," said one interviewee—a coping mechanism that contrasts sharply with the Yi-Christians' use of prayer for pain relief. Not surprisingly, these migrant workers rely on their peers and illicit drugs to cope with stress in the city. Although drug and alcohol consumption is quite a popular habit in Liangshan, using heroin is only a recent trend, induced by the profit-seeking drug dealers and further perpetuating the vicious cycle. Furthermore, without knowing how severe the consequences can be, sharing needles is deemed acceptable within this strong-ties community.

The story of GR did not stop at his generation. Like an organic system that finds ways to repair itself, GR's role was soon replaced by his own father, who married a second wife in order to breed a healthy offspring. After GR's son was diagnosed with HIV and attended to by the government, the grandparents accepted the fact that their grandson was not "healthy," and hence made an arrangement which seemed unwise to us as cultural outsiders—the grandfather marrying (and paying another high betrothal fee) a much younger second wife (allegedly "mentally retarded") so that they could bear another son and pass down the family lineage. This desperate need to continue the family lineage is a recurrent theme that we shall encounter again in the story of M below.

Challenge #2: Barrier in Help-Seeking: Urgent Need for a Culture-Sensitive HIV Prevention Program

Story of M (Narrated by Xiaorong)

Among all of our research participants in Meigu, M—a 38-year-old Yi male—was the only self-identified "Black Yi." He had a quiet, bashful demeanor during our first visits. Due to language limitations, we rarely communicated with each other over the phone, but every time we paid him a visit, he immediately recognized us. M's home was encircled by a stone wall, a bit smaller than others in the vicinity. Upon entering through a small wooden gate, the living space was on the left-hand side, a pile of corn stalks left inside the room, with a separate room on the right-hand side. There weren't any electronic appliances to be found, and the walls, which had never been plastered, were black as a result of a wood-burning stove. The family's bedding and clothing were messily tossed onto the bed. A chicken coop was at one side of their small front yard, and a pig pen sat opposite it, with footprints of animals everywhere on the ground. M's family hung the tip of a small pig's toe—now covered in dust—above the doorframe. The translator told us that the object was a symbol of protection left over from the Bimo rituals.

Thirteen years prior to our interviews, M had lived with his family in ZW village, a location that sits at a much higher elevation with a colder climate. M said that they were unable to tolerate the weather and decided to move to their current dwelling in JK village. It was during that time of relocation that M made two of life's most important decisions: getting married and becoming a migrant worker. M's wife told us that, after the two of them were married, they did not immediately live together due to Yi custom, and instead lived separately in their own homes. After being wed for six years—M was 31 at the time—she finally moved into her husband's home, and the two began living their lives together.

Without his wife at his side, a healthy and younger 24-year-old M began working away from home in GL county with a few companions. M told us earning money at that time was not easy and, when first starting out, he was lucky to receive 10 RMB for working from morning till night. At that time, a pack of cigarettes cost about 70–80 cents. Later on, he was able to earn 30 RMB for one day's labor. M worked in road construction at Ganluo, setting steel bars to reinforce the tunnels. One day, while at the job site, a gas tank exploded, killing five or six people. Fortunately, M was some distance away when the accident happened, and was spared. Afterwards, someone, also of Yi ethnicity, hired him to fix railroads in Lhasa (Tibet), but after 40 days he returned home as the weather was simply too cold for him. Looking at M's work experience, the majority of his time had been spent in construction, specifically on railroads. When agate (*ma nao*), a kind of gem, was discovered in JK village, M began digging for agate in order to sell it, just like many others in the village.

M explained that, due to exhaustion from migrant work, his lungs had become infected three years earlier. As a result, he has been in poor health and unable to work. During these three years of illness, M has been resting continuously at home, to the extent that his wife does the farm work, and he is only able to look after the children. As he is unable to read Chinese and communicate in Mandarin, the doctor did not inform him clearly about his disease. As a result, M still does not know the illness he suffers from is called AIDS. M was only able to share with me the symptoms he suffers as headaches, coughing, infected lungs, body aches, and skin breakouts on the forehead. After looking over his medical records, I learned he had actually been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS three years earlier, but fortunately, because he has been prescribed antiviral medication, the illness cannot be transmitted to his wife or children. Although we had no way of knowing how HIV had been transmitted to M during his period of migrant work, M was pretty convinced it was caused by his "overexhaustion."

At 36 years of age, M was forced to return home from migrant work due to his health condition (Fig. 7.3). Not long after, the couple welcomed their firstborn; and now, their oldest daughter is already three, and their second daughter is seven months old. To avoid further HIV transmission, we suggested some tips on HIV prevention for M's wife after the interview with M. Due to the language barrier, we showed her a video in private about how to use a condom, but she looked at us in surprise and said, "In this way we can't have any more children!" Her response also took us by surprise and we asked for further clarification. M's wife said they were still trying to have another child, "because we still haven't had a son."

Thinking back on the current state of M's family and their continued insistence on having more children often causes me to feel sadness and

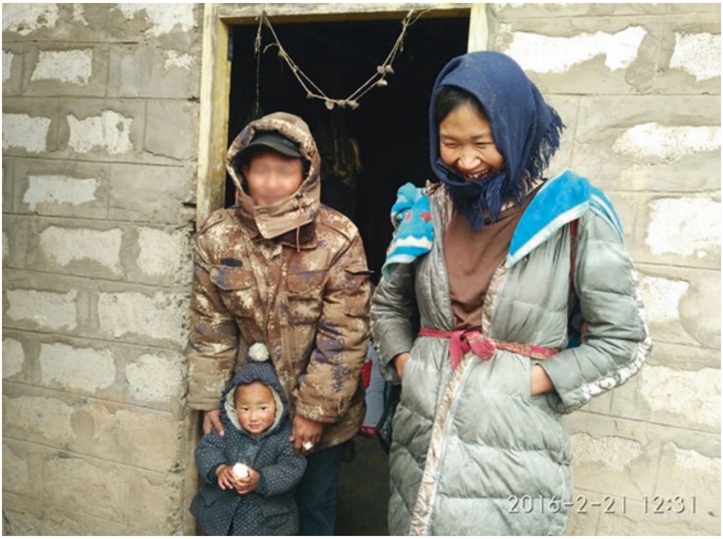


Fig. 7.3 M and his family standing at the front door and smiling

hopelessness. *Jia zhi* (family clan) is the foundation of the social organization of Yi society in the Liangshan area, and originates from kinship; it is the most powerful form of support for every Yi individual. However, the leaders of the family clan can only be male, and only future male generations can be recognized as continuations, via bloodline, of the clan. According to Yi men, specifically Black Yi, not having a son is equated to not having any roots; the succession of one's family clan has been severed. Therefore, the succession and continuation of the family clan is more important to a Black Yi male, such as M, than his own life. So now we can only hope he continues taking the antiviral medication to prevent the transmission of the virus to his wife, and that he will have a healthy son to continue his family clan bloodline.

* * *

HIV prevention has been a worldwide priority in the past 30 years as the prevalence of AIDS/HIV is increasing (0.06%) due to a failure to tackle its root causes. In China, the first case of AIDS was identified in 1985, and since then an estimated 780,000 people are living with HIV in China, according to UNAIDS data.[1] The Chinese government has implemented free screening and free medication for its citizens via the Center of Disease Control (CDC), yet these services are not fully utilized due to the stigma of HIV, and language barrier for the uneducated local Yi. The current prevention model is directed at upper-middle-class citizens who are situated in the big cities and have a certain degree of education or exposure to knowledge about sexual health. Preventive materials (pamphlet/booklets/videos) are primarily available in Mandarin Chinese only, with limited cultural sensitivity in their graphic presentations. For example, the current pamphlet used by the central government for its HIV awareness campaign in the Meigu area simply translates the general version of the education pamphlet used all over China. This pamphlet is written in both Mandarin and Yi, and assumes that the local Yi people are educated enough to be able to read it in their own language. Another shortcoming in this brochure is that the human figures shown don't represent Yi cultures and customs. When we read it from cover to cover, we also could not find the contact information for the free testing and free medication centers.

According to the internal statistics of the Chinese Center of Control and Disease Prevention, in 2014 Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture

(Sichuan province) was one of the HIV-prevalent areas, with about 5584 reported HIV positive cases (0.12% of the total population, which is double the global rate) and many unreported cases due to stigma and lack of awareness. From our field study, we also found that a major source of HIV infection was those young male adults who shared needles with one another while they were migrant workers in the big cities of China. They then brought the disease back to their families in the Liangshan area, who had no awareness or knowledge of HIV. Several villages were known as "HIV villages" by the locals, on account of their high rates of death due to AIDS. Liu (2011) commented that, originally the *Nuosu* Yi did not perceive death from AIDS as an "unnatural death," hence there was no stigma attached to it. However, due to fear of AIDS on the part of outsiders, the stigma of HIV was socialized in Liangshan through public propaganda and medical staff. This created barriers for the local Yi patients when seeking help from Western medicine, as the projection from the medical staff toward HIV patients was always shameful. To our knowledge, right up until the present day, there has been no contextualized HIV prevention program (only translated materials) in Meigu area, and no inclusion of local leaders or indigenous healers (such as Degu or Bimo figures). Though President Xi of China explicitly stated the need for an indigenous approach to HIV prevention, the efforts implemented by the official platform were not well received by the locals, for various reasons. For example, a recent attempt to build HIV awareness involved building a Wechat page (social media app) where local people could access information. While technology is helpful in many ways for modern Chinese living in the city, we wondered how our Yi participants like M would be able to access smartphones, and learn how to use social media to communicate their problems. Even if we donated a smartphone and taught him how to install Wechat, would he even be able to read the Yi or Mandarin characters on the Wechat page? No wonder our participants all went to the Bimo priests for help. The gap between public policy and local needs is much wider than one could have imagined. This is where we hope our study findings will offer some insights to the policy makers in breaking down the barriers to help-seeking.

Of the 24 Yi-Bimo participants we interviewed in the Meigu area, they all practiced Bimo rituals in hopes of getting well and becoming rich and prosperious. Seven of them have been diagnosed with HIV, and have sought Bimo priests for healing rituals if possible. Some still believe that Bimo priests have the power to heal HIV, and some have stopped seeking traditional help because they lack the financial resources. Many of them are not aware of the free HIV testing and antiviral medication provided by the government, due to their lack of education, lack of fluency in Mandarin Chinese, and lack of trust in the Han Chinese government. In addition to the stigma of AIDS, historical tension between the mainstream ethnic group and this ancient tribal group has created another barrier for the Yi HIV patients in seeking proper help.

From the perspective of Peircean semiotics, one way to help the Yi-Bimo group cope with the ravages of modernization is to promote their unique course of mentalization by restoring their symbolic communal space, and empowering their ritual specialists to revive the myths and rituals that have given life meaning since time immemorial. This is not necessarily a Luddite agenda. Successful modernization requires creative energy from the same womb that has nurtured past achievements; replacing the past with a future in which the locals do not recognize themselves (see Fig. 7.4) only produces results that are sterile and barren. To overcome both internal and external barriers to help-seeking, we suggest that local NGOs and healthcare agencies develop an HIV prevention model that aims to integrate the Yi healing tradition of wisdom and resiliency, thus empowering the high-risk Yi communities to seek medical help in times of need. First, this prevention model should honor those members of the community who are elderly and wise (Bimo and Degu), exploring their religious resources so as to empower high-risk families. Second, this prevention model should bridge the knowledge gap between traditional healers and Western medical doctors to increase trust between both groups, and exchange helpful resources in HIV prevention. Third, this prevention model should empower high-risk families (especially women) to protect themselves via safe behaviors (e.g., use of condoms). While implementing the healthcare campaign, one should be mindful of the stigma of HIV/AIDS, as well as the shame felt by members of the Yi community who seek help from outsiders. Lastly, considering the cognitive styles (see Table 7.1) of strong-ties societies, the HIV psycho-education brochure could be contextualized according to the following principles:

I. Using local graphics/symbols/religious icons/family settings
II. Capitalizing on myths and legends of the Yi ancestor (*Asulaze*) as a great hero and model of resilience; restoring their collective memory which is essential for communal mentalization

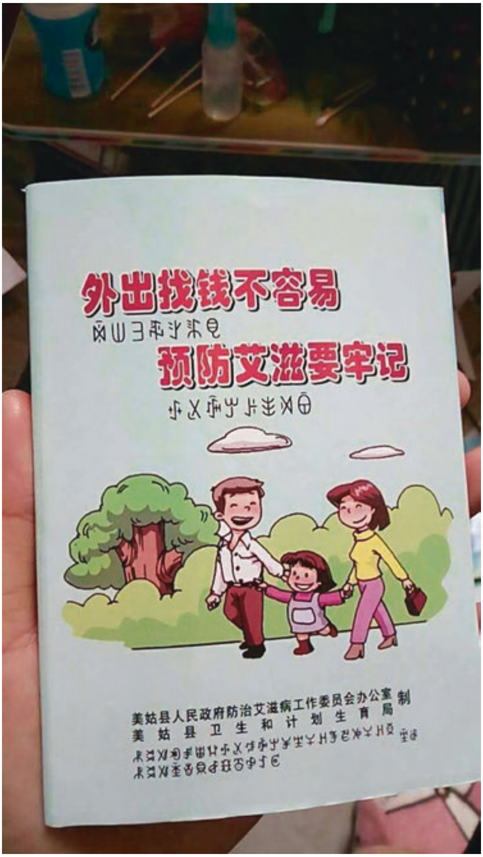


Fig. 7.4 The cover page of the currently available version of the HIV awareness and prevention brochure

III. Developing a sympathetic understanding of Yi migrant workers, with special attention to their habit of using drugs to regulate their emotions while under stress, and as a ticket to acceptance by their peers
IV. Emphasizing, in the context of family lineage, the possibility of HIV mothers to have healthy babies if treated properly with medication
V. Using concrete images such as possession of money and livestock to reinforce the possibility of a happy ending to their story
VI. Including Bimo as one of the help-seeking channels
VII. Listing both supernatural and natural explanations of illness, to enhace normalization and face saving

Challenge #3: Disappearance of the Villages in China: The Voyage of Yi Migrant Workers

Story of KM (Narrated by LYS)

Our encounter with Aunt KM was serendipitous, and her life story is the perfect illustration of Liangshan society.

During February 2016, when we were visiting a senior lady's household, one of the nice neighbors took us to KM's house after learning of our research intention. During our year in Liangshan, we were able to meet many Yi ladies who had very pleasant personalities, wearing dark-colored turbans on their heads and shy smiles on their faces. Both Aunt KM and her neighbor were among those nice ladies. When we first met Aunt KM, she was attending a wedding at the neighbor's house. We greeted each other and then she took us to her house. When we were walking toward her house, she suddenly took the hands of a boy who was sitting on the side of the street. As the boy walked with us, it was quite obvious he was limping. Aunt KM's house was located in a village not far from town. It looked new with a traditional, Yi-style flavor from the outside, but when we walked into the house, it was actually very poor and old. KM told us, "Although the funds for building this house were from the government, we still owe a lot of money. Now we can't fix the interior because we don't have anymore subsidy money." From the initial conversation, we learned that KM was 47 years old, raising three children with her husband. A fourth child, a daughter, had died at a young age. She had another daughter and son who studied at GX primary school. The boy she was walking with was her 19-year-old son GG, who was suffering from blindness (Fig. 7.5).

In the traditional Yi culture, at least one of the children has to be a son. Otherwise, people in the village look down upon the couple. Therefore, her eldest son's future was the biggest concern for KM and her husband. She talked about her son with ambivalence: "I worry about my son's future. His younger brother is probably willing to look after him in the future, but his future wife might not necessarily do the same thing." Meanwhile, KM repeatedly mentioned, "The children of others can go out to work after they grow up, but my son can hardly do anything because of his eye problems."

Through the lens of this Yi mother, I heard about the tragic progress of GG's blindness, as he lost his eyesight due to delayed treatment and

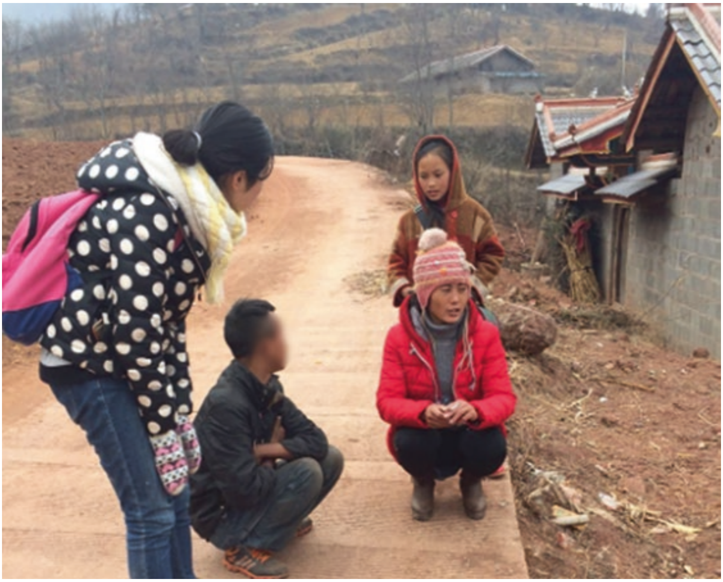


Fig. 7.5 GG and her mother, KM, squatting down on the roadside, talking to the RA

financial difficulties. Poverty has been the main suffering in KM's family. KM told us that GG lost his eyesight since he was three years old. He had never attended school even for one day. KM showed some emotion when talking about her son's story, through gestures and sighing. "His eyes turned red when he was three months old. He could hardly open his eyes, as I mentioned before, there was so much gum in them. Then he was treated for a while, until he was three years old, when he lost his eyesight completely. When we went to the hospital in Meigu, he lost the sight of one eye. We then sent him to the hospital in Chengdu, where the other eye went blind suddenly after 15 days. The doctors in Chengdu said the medical fee for treatment could be more than 20,000 RMB. However, we couldn't even afford 200 RMB at that time."

Apart from being treated in the hospital, native religious figures were also a resource for them in times of difficulty. KM said, "In the beginning, when we took him to the hospital, the doctor couldn't give us an accurate diagnosis. He prescribed eye drops and some pills, but there was no effect. When it got worse, we started to ask Bimo and Suni to do *mi* *xin* [rituals]. We spent almost 40,000 RMB [in rituals] before he was three years old. We sacrificed goats, pigs, and chickens during the rituals." When we inquired about the reasons for her son losing his sight, KM looked very confused. She said, "I don't know. We have tried everything, but nothing was helpful. Yi people seldom go to the hospital for medical checks, so we did the *mi xin* [ritual] called *cuobi*… The Bimo priest said that there was a wood with his name on, then something went wrong with the wood. He said that my son's illness was a result of *Niri* and *Zhangzizi* [ghost]. Therefore, we just kept doing the *mi xin* [ritual]." KM and her family had done everything they could, but her son still lost his sight. They gave up treating the blindness eventually. KM said, "He can only stay at home, because he is not able to go too far. When there is something to eat, he just eats. When I don't cook for him, he just sits there somewhere."

Apart from her son's eye problem, her husband also had physical problems. There was a rumor in the village that this couple had been infected by HIV. The first time we visited KM, she seemed unclear about the situation, which is quite common in a lot of our participants in Meigu. This could be due to the language and cultural barrier, plus the local hospital also withholds their medical reports for the purposes of later medical bill reimbursement. Therefore, we could not verify the rumor about their health condition. KM then told us she was upset that her husband had some "health issues." She explained, "We went to do a health check, then they gave us a diagnosis. It was about five years ago. He kept feeling sore in his hands and legs, having headaches and lacking energy." In September 2016, when we talked over the phone again, KM told me, "My husband is doing alright, and regaining some energy to work on the farm. But I don't know how it will turn out later."

KM and her family subsisted on farm work and migrant work. They happened to be at home in the Meigu area when we first visited them. One month after we left the field, they departed to a factory located in JM, in Guangdong province. KM updated me over the phone: "We work and live together, and also cook for ourselves. My family is fine. The younger boy and girl are being looked after by their uncle and aunt. The blind boy (GG) stays at home, while the other two go to school every day." During the month of May, KM and her husband went back to their hometown because they couldn't stand the hot weather in Guangdong. They stayed at home for a while, then went to work in ZB, in Shandong province.

In June 2016, when I went back to KM's village with my local informant, it was raining heavily in the afternoon. When we entered the room, there were only the three children, sitting in the dark. GG's younger brother then went out in the rain to find some firewood to light the fire pit. Only when the room was lit up could we feel a bit warmer and see our surroundings. It was then that I saw two kids huddling up at the corner of the bed. GG told us their family owed money to some people, which was why their parents went out to work. And that was why they were left alone at home, taking care of each other.

Regarding KM and her husband, their journey of migrant work was not always smooth. KM called me one day in September 2016, and told me a lot of things fretfully. But I could hardly understand what she was saying to me. Then her husband took the phone, trying his best to speak in broken Mandarin. Slowly, I got their meaning. The manager at their construction site wanted to fire five Yi people, including KM and her husband. They once had a deal that every worker would be paid 220 RMB/day; however, the manager didn't follow through on the agreement. Only her husband, WN, could earn 220 RMB every day; KM only got 200 RMB, and another one of their companions just 170 RMB. WN said the manager on the construction site had threatened to beat them if they didn't leave. I could feel WN's anger through the phone. He wanted me to call the manager, but when I did, I heard a different story.

The manager said, "We have no idea. The salary at the construction site is standardized. 220 is for male, 200 is for female, and 170 is for novice. During the first three months, we required them to set the steel bars. The only one who could do this kind of job was WN among all the five people. Others were not capable of doing this, and they were lazy. The following task was about bench work, but none of them was capable in this either. I had no choice but to ask them to leave. Besides, they were so difficult to manage. They used to drink after work every day. When they got drunk, they would fight and make trouble. They even went to the hospital twice because of injury. It was the person who brought them here that told them the salary was 220. It has nothing to do with us."

When I relayed the messages back to KM and her husband, they said, "No way, the deal was 220." Then the five of them went to the police station to file a report. However, they didn't get the response they wanted. Eventually, they left with the low salary and came home to Meigu. I felt sorry for them, because there were so many children left in the cold and dark in Liangshan, waiting for their parents to come back with a little money. If mainstream society were more patient and tolerant toward them, taking into consideration the language and cultural barriers, instead of expelling and threatening them in a violent way, or the police responded to their desire for justice appropriately, the result might be different. I believe that what KM and her peers are fighting for is not only higher pay, but also respect and fair treatment from the urban world.

* * *

In the wake of China's rapid urbanization over the past 20 years, and with the increasing number of migrant workers, social issues such as "left-behind children" (留守儿童) and the "rural elderly" (孤寡老人) started to surface. In the Yi-Christian group, we heard many stories of loneliness among the elderly whose children had settled in the city areas after migrant work. The phenomenon of the lonely elderly is a problem Yi-Christians share with the rest of the population in rural China. By contrast, the problems encountered by migrant workers of the Yi-Bimo group are unique.

As migrant work is a trend in modern China, and not exclusive to ethnic minorities, why is it such a critical issue for Yi people from Liangshan? As the story of KM illustrates, the ethnic identity of Yi people creates not only language barriers and cultural misunderstanding, but social discrimination as well. Under such difficult conditions, it is the Yi-Bimo, the group with a strong-ties background, that is hardest hit. Though our Yi participants from Luquan also mentioned the challenges of migrant work, they never mentioned becoming infected with HIV, nor its transmission to their villages. Among our participants, the rate of returning migrant workers in the Yi-Bimo group was much greater than that in the Yi-Christian group (10:3). The major reasons for returning were usually sickness, injury at work, or being sent away by their employers. For example, KM and her husband traveled back and forth between various cities and their hometown, depending on their health conditions and work arrangements. Unlike other migrant workers who were more settled in the city, we found that workers from Meigu seemed to have a strong attachment to their homeland. Every November, they would return to Meigu to celebrate the Yi New Year. KM and her gang of five used alcohol and aggression to channel their energy at the construction site, according to their manager. However, as outsiders only focus on behavioral outcomes, our study offers some insights that might lead to better interventions.

As the RA (LYS) reflected in her narrative, society could be more understanding and tolerant while trying to understand the language of emotion and need for ethnic pride among their Yi workers. Acknowledging, rather than dismissing, their demands for fairness, attention, and mediation (just as the Degu in the village does) might actually prevent unnecessary tragedy from happening (e.g., resorting to drug use for emotional regulation). The legal system and labor law should strive to protect the welfare and human rights of all migrant workers, not only the Yi ethnic group. However, understanding the cultural diversity among migrant workers would also be beneficial in reducing racial tension and the stereotypes imposed on minority groups. The policy makers involved in "low-income subsidies" and the "precise poverty relief program"[2] could also pay closer attention to cultural practices in the villages (Steinműller 2013), rather than just building a "stylish" house that appears "culture preserving" but has no electricity or water supply (as in KM's case) inside it. So much emphasis has been put on "external appearances" in helping ethnic minority groups improve the GDP of the villages, while overlooking ethnic pride and attachment to their ancestors' land.

Through our participant-observation in the past two years, we have heard many stories like that of KM, of how the villagers came to be "in debt" after the implementation of the "poverty alleviation program," as they were "forced" to borrow money from the government to build brick houses (rather than staying in their mud houses). After the houses were built, the villagers become "bankrupt" and had to go out as migrant workers to save money to pay for the construction fees. But the government officer would "check off" the village from the poverty list, as they all lived in "brick houses" now. This vicious cycle has been perpetuated because many minority groups did not understand the policy, which is written in Chinese, and just followed blindly what the government officer said. As they lived on the land, and made money farming and raising livestock, there wasn't much left over to use for savings. When they got into debt, they had to migrate to the city to work for cash, foregoing the strong-ties support at home; sometimes their left-behind children also quit schooling prematurely under financial stress, rendering this younger generation at risk of exploitation by those corrupt, powerful figures, either in the village or in the city. This vicious cycle of urbanization could and should be broken through multichannel advocacy.

Challenge #4: Toward a Paradigm Shift: Implications for Indigenous Psychology and Western Psychology

Problems in Current IP

Proposed by Hofstede in the 1970s, the cultural model of individualism-collectivism has been used by many cross-cultural psychologists to explain the mentality of the Chinese as "collective" and "interdependent" (Triandis 1995). This binary view of culture has been criticized by Fiske (2002) for its lack of validity in examining the group difference among Asian cultures. Collectivism is a vague construct that lumps all "non-Western" cultures together as a group, and conflate "nation" with "culture." Following the recommendation of Fiske, we have shifted our focus from self-construals to participatory observation in fieldwork.

IP has been a fledging discipline in the past decades. It is an effort to critique the universalism of Western psychology and promote the particularity of cultures. It gives a voice to formerly colonized areas such as India, the Philippines, Canada, and New Zealand, so they can utilize psychology for their own people (Dueck et al. 2007). It points out that the unilateral exportation of American psychology without questioning its construct validity and universality is harmful to the world (Watters 2011). It points out that the approach of individualism-collectivism is not sufficient in explaining the cultural differences around the world, and imposing such an ideology-based paradigm verges on Western imperialism. In recent years, there have been culture-inclusive theories developed to explain several cultural dimensions—such as self-construal, ethics, organization behaviors, healing, and helping relationships—of the Chinese tradition (Hwang 2015). However, these so-called Chinese psychology theories were also built mainly on research samples made up of Han Chinese in the college setting and urban areas. Moreover, there is a tendency for cross-cultural psychologists to misrepresent "Han Chinese" as the only Chinese in their studies (Gergen et al. in press), which risks homogenization and overgeneralization, just as early Western psychology used to be predominantly "white and upper-middle class" (Guthrie 1998).

Some IPs tend to overthrow Western psychology by inflating national identity. A national IP would then impose another hegemony on its local people by neglecting their diversity. It will be increasingly difficult for

Chinese psychologists to build a "singular IP," as the cultural identity of "Chinese" has become even more diverse under the influence of globalization. According to the 2010 census, there are about 113 million people belonging to the ethnic minority population in China (8.5% of the total population), which is more than one third of the American population. At the present time, most of the psychological studies of the Chinese population are based on the Han tradition, which is mainly informed by Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. An ethnocentric psychology could pose a threat to the less dominant ethnic groups by its hegemonic assumptions of self-construal, mental spaces, morality, intelligence, definitions of health, and healing agency. In addition, there has been a history of interracial conflicts in China created by the pressure of unilateral assimilation (汉化) to the Han. Studying minority groups would be a remedy to counterbalance the thrust toward singular Chinese psychology, thereby creating a more diverse and reflexive IP.

Our Remedy

Since the 1980s, most of the Han Chinese in mainland China have gone through the baptism of the "Open Economy Policy," which led to market privatization and industrialization. However, many ethnic minority groups living in remote mountain areas are still deeply rooted in their cultural practices, spirituality, and healing rituals, due to geographic isolation and language barriers. By listening to their life stories, we could contribute to the construction of an IP that is inclusive and conversational, thereby contributing to the de-colonization of ehtnic minority groups and indigenous peoples worldwide.

We agree with Bhatia and Priya (in press) that fostering voices among ethnic minority groups constitutes an important mission for the IP scholars. From a postmodern viewpoint, IP could be "plural" rather than "singular" in its voices, and by attending to all of them, rather than claiming a "universal truth," IP will contribute to the solidarity of mankind (Rorty 1989).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the most devastating consequences of globalization is the loss of community. A case in point is migrant workers. We have seen that migrant workers from the Yi-Christian and Yi-Bimo groups faired differently. We can interpret this difference in vulnerability in terms of the difference in communal space between the two groups. Communal space in the Yi-Christian group is portable and expandable—portable due to the tendency to internalize God such that you do not lose the divine company when you travel; expandable due to the tendency to form ties with strangers. By contrast, communal space in the Yi-Bimo group is not portable, as it is externally located in the physical space of one's hometown. Nor is their communal space expandable to include strangers, due to the clear in-group and out-group distinction of the strong-ties society.

This difference in communal space has far-reaching consequences in the globalizing era, in which weak-ties prevail. Judging by the low percentage of youth returning to Luquan, Yi-Christian migrant workers seemed to assimilate relatively easily in the city, thanks in part to their portable and expandable communal space. By contrast, among the Yi-Bimo, migrant work seems to signify a loss of community, in which guidance, protection, welfare, emotion regulation, and behavioral control are all located in the family and the neighborhood. Thus, most of the problems associated with the returned migrant workers seemed to be symptomatic of a loss of community. Without guidance (the elders were left behind at home), the leaderless peer group (the Bimo migrant workers tend to go to the city together as a group) may be prone to drug use, especially sharing needles; unconstrained by traditional norms and authority, the leaderless peer group may also be prone to regressive behaviors such as drunkenness and fighting. Shall we conclude then that the Yi-Bimo ways are backward and ill-suited for modern life? This conclusion fails to take into consideration the larger context—globalization.

*Two Superstitions (*mi xin*), Modern and Ancient*

Superstition (*mi xin*) may be defined as any collective fiction that lacks the self-reflexivity to see its own underbelly. The old society, such as the Bimo tradition, is plagued with superstitions, so we are told. But the modern world is in thrall to another, more dangerous superstition, namely economic globalization, the ugly underbelly of which is exposed by the suffering narratives of the Yi and many others around the world.

Sundararajan (2015) claims that the modern West and traditional East are ecological niches that are the upside-down universes of each other—one privileging analytical reasoning, the other undifferentiated wholeness.

Consistent with this hypothesis, Bourdieu (2000) claims that it is the "overturning of the table of values [of the traditional societies] which gave rise to the economy as we know it" (p. 26). He explains: "To subject all the behaviors of existence to calculating reason, as demanded by the economy, is to break with … the logic of good faith, trust and equity which is supposed to govern relations between kin and which is founded on the Repression, or rather the degeneration, of calculation" (p. 25). Cast in the framework of Sundararajan's (2015) ecological rationality, the price of economic progress in the globalizing era is the demise of the traditional values of strong-ties societies.

The price of turning the tables on the traditional values of strong-ties societies is steep. As Bourdieu (2000) points out, global economy suddenly renders "obsolete" (p. 40) or "literally unthinkable" (p. 39) the collective representations and dispositions of pre-capitalist societies. Worse yet, the whole process is "submitted to a kind of *historical acceleration* which caused two forms of economic organization, normally separated by a gap of several centuries and making contradictory demands on their participants, to co-exist…" (p. 18, emphasis in original). Adaptation, in the sense of letting go of traditional values, is a form of conversion, according to Bourdieu (2000): "Acquiring the spirit of calculation required by the modern economy entails a veritable conversion via the apostasy of the embodied beliefs that underpin exchange in traditional … society" (p. 17). He claims that it is not an exaggeration to call it conversion, because transformations of economic practices in rural societies entail the change of "a whole lifestyle or, better, a whole system of solidary beliefs" (p. 23) such that one must speak of *conversion* instead of adaptation. In less psychological and more objective terms, Bourdieu (2000) refers to this process as a "mismatch," which is a "*mismatch* between economic dispositions fashioned in a pre-capitalist economy and the economic cosmos imported and imposed, often times in the most brutal way, by colonization" (p. 18, emphasis in original). Our data on the Yi people, especially the migrant workers who did not make it in the city and returned home with severe physical disabilities, including HIV infection, call attention to the plight of "economic agents devoid of the dispositions tacitly demanded by an economic order" (p. 18). The following blog by a Yi writer gives a vivid description of Yi migrant workers as economic agents who are paying the price for the *mismatch* between their strong-ties economic dispositions and the urban economic universe they find themselves in once they leave home:

> Since Yi people are hardworking and can persevere in hardship, they are quite well-liked. However, due to their ethnic identity, lack of fluency in Mandarin, young age, and personal habits problems, they face high elimination rates at job interviews. Even if they get a job in a the factory, they can only do manual labor or low technical work, which is only paid at about 3000 RMB per month. Although the income sounds pretty good, it does not last. Due to their need to gain social prestige (face) by splurging, their sense of social obligation and drinking habits, plus the absence of an elder to exert guidance and control, they spend all their salary very quickly. Very few of them have money left at the end of the month. I once knew a 19-year-old Yi teenager, ShamaXX, who bought his first Nike sneakers right after he received his first month's salary, then treated his friends to dining, drinking, and karaoke. On the third day, he was penniless, and had to depend on his relatives and friends for help.[3]

Our analysis also calls attention to the role experts play as high priests in the conversion process of globalization by diagnosing "backwardness" or deficiencies. What Bourdieu (2000) says about economics applies equally well to cross-cultural psychology: "…economics treats the prospective and calculating disposition toward the world and time … as a universal 'given,' a gift of nature. In doing so, it tacitly condemns in moral terms those who have already been condemned in reality to the fate of economic 'misfits' by the economic system…" (p. 28).

How can IP do better? A place to start would be to recognize that the global economy is the most dangerous superstition in human history:

> …although money builds universal trust between strangers, this trust is invested not in humans, communities or sacred values, but in money itself and in the impersonal systems that back it… As money brings down the dams of community, religion and state, the world is in danger of becoming one big and rather heartless marketplace. (Harari 2011, p. 208)

The history professor Harari (2011) claims that the replacement of family and community by states and markets in the global economy is "the most momentous social revolution that ever befell humankind" (p. 398). This modernization process leaves the Yi people in the middle of nowhere—the traditional family is undermined by the migrant workers who either do not return, or return to burden their family with illness and disabilities, while the Chinese government is not able to resume full responsibility for the welfare and health system as a modern state would, resulting in the utter destitution of the poor that we have witnessed.

How are we to awaken from this intoxicating superstition of modern times? Superstition stems from the human propensity to create collective fictions such as religion, money, and nationality. Harari (2011) argues that collective fiction is the quality that separates *sapiens* from other *hominids*. Yet this gift comes with a huge price tag. As our power depends on collective fictions, humans find it difficult to tell apart what is real and what is fictional, resulting in many disasters, wars, and problems—for instance, the ruthless competition over a fictional entity called money. Is there a way to ground ourselves in the real, so as not to be carried away by superstitions? Harari offered a viable solution in an interview—“the test of suffering”:

> The best test to know whether an entity is real or fictional is the test of *suffering*. A nation cannot suffer, it cannot feel pain, it cannot feel fear, it has no consciousness. Even if it loses a war, the soldier suffers, the civilians suffer, but the nation cannot suffer. Similarly, a corporation cannot suffer, the pound sterling, when it loses its value, it doesn’t suffer. All these things, they’re fictions. If people bear in mind this distinction, it could improve the way we treat one another and the other animals. It’s not such a good idea to cause suffering to real entities in the service of fictional stories.[4]

Cast into our framework, we may conclude with the following observations: Economic globalization signifies the triumph of the conceptual and the abstract over the perceptual, the experience-based, and concrete ways of knowing. It is of vital importance to resist this triumph of the abstract, for without the experiential capacity to feel the pain of our fellow beings, thereby grounding ourselves in the real, humans can be carried away by powerful superstitions of modernity that pose the potential for massive destruction, including global warming, rising oceans, pollution, and ultimately threaten our own survival as *Homo sapiens* (Harari 2011). To end on a more positive note, we share with you a folktale of the Yi-Bimo:

> In high antiquity, humans, gods, and ghosts all live together. No need for Bimo (priest). Later, when humans, gods, and ghosts no longer live together, *Asulaze* became the ancestor of the Yi (the first Bimo priest). In high antiquity, trees can talk; we can hear ghosts talk; and ghosts can also hear humans talk. At that time, trees and stones also perform rituals (*mi xin*).
>
> (Story told by one of the Bimo priests in the focus group)

To this abiding vision of community, and to the memories of our interviewees who passed away during our study, this book is dedicated.

Notes

1. Retrieved from http://www.unaids.org.cn/cn/index/page.asp?id=178&class=2&
2. The idea of "targeted poverty alleviation" (*jing zhun fu pin*) was first proposed by President Xi Jinping during his inspection tour in Hunan Province in November 2013. It means China will continue to fight the battle against poverty, and carry out extensive poverty alleviation and development programs in contiguous poor areas.
3. Retrieved from http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6EE3o7Ng4rMtqK83QW4ekw
4. Emphasis added, retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2017/mar/19/yuval-harari-sapiens-readers-questions-lucy-prebble-arianna-huffington-future-of-humanity?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

References

Bhatia, S., & Priya, K. R. (in press). From representing culture to fostering 'voice': Reassessing vistas of indigenous psychology. In K. H. Yeh & L. Sundararajan (Eds.), *Asian indigenous psychologies in global context* (Ch. 2). *Palgrave studies in indigenous psychology series*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bourdieu, P. (2000). Making the economic habitus: Algerian workers revisited. *Ethnography, 1*(1), 17–41.

Dueck, A., Ting, S.-K., & Cutiongco, M. R. (2007). Constantine, babel, and Yankee doodling: Whose Indigeneity? Whose psychology? *Pastoral Psychology, 56*, 55–72.

Fiske, A. P. (2002). Using individualism and collectivism to compare cultures—A critique of the validity and measurement of the constructs: Comment on Oyserman et al. (2002). *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 78–88.

Gergen, K., Sharma, C., Sameshima, T., Wu, S. -J., & Yang, L. P. (in press). From indigenous culture to cultures in the making: Promises for a prospering psychology. In K. H. Yeh (Ed.), *Asian indigenous psychologies in global context (Ch.3)*. *Palgrave studies in indigenous psychology series*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Guthrie, R. V. (1998). *Even the rat was white: A historical view of psychology* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Harari, Y. N. (2011). *Sapiens: A brief history of human kind*. London: Vintage.

Hwang, K.-K. (2015). Culture-inclusive theories of self and social interaction: The approach of multiple philosophical paradigms. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 45*, 39–62.

Liu, S. H. (2011). *Passage to manhood: Youth migration, heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Steinműller, H. (2013). *Communities of complicity: Everyday ethics in rural China*. New York, NY: Berghahn.

Sundararajan, L. (2015). *Understanding emotion in Chinese culture: Thinking through psychology*. New York, NY: Springer SBM.

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Watters, E. (2011). *Crazy like us: The globalization of the American psyche*. New York: Free Press.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

PHASE I-FOCUS GROUP (3–5 RELIGIOUS LEADERS)

After some self-introduction, verbal consent will be obtained for recording:

> We would like to invite you to do a study with us. This study will help us to understand the suffering in your community. We will ask some questions in this forum, and invite you to interact with each other as a group during this hour and a half. Knowing how you deal with times of *kunan* (suffering) will help us better serve people in this area in the future. We do not think this study will hurt you in any way, but you are free to refuse to participate or stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Even if you choose to stop participating, there will be a token of appreciation (gift) to thank you for your valuable time. If you agree to participate in this study, we assume that you agree to let us record our group conversations. The recording will be kept in a safe place and no one else will hear this voice recording except us and the translators. To protect your identity, you do not have to use your real name in the discussions. Finally, this study has been approved by our university, and you can dial this number, XXXX, if you have any complaints. Are you willing to participate in this study?

After gaining permission for audio taping from our participants, we would proceed with the questions below:

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2

1. Could you share a bit about your background in becoming religious leaders? (Christian pastors versus Bimo priests)
2. Can you share a bit about your religious practices? How often you engage in religious activities? (religiosity)
3. What is the most common kind of suffering happening in your community? (norm of suffering)
4. Why do you think this kind of suffering is happening? (cognitive attribution)
5. When would people come to you for help? When would they not come to you? (decision-making)
6. How would they approach you? (accessibility of help)
7. Normally, how do you help alleviate their suffering? (helping methods)
8. Please share with us a successful story of someone overcoming their suffering.
9. Could you recommend ten individuals who are still suffering in this community who we can visit personally? We would like to see what we can do to help them.

Thank you for your participation in this forum.

PHASE II-INDIVIDUAL SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

After some self-introduction, verbal consent will be obtained for recording:

> We would like to invite you to do a study with us. This study will help us to understand the local ways of life. We would like to chat with you for 30 minutes, asking some questions, and hearing about your life in times of *kunan* (suffering). Knowing how you deal with times of *kunan* (suffering) will help us better serve people in this area in the future. We do not think this study will hurt you in any way, but you are free to refuse to participate or stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable. Even if you choose to stop participating, there will be a token of appreciation (gift) to thank you for your valuable time. If you agree to participate in this study, we assume that you agree to let us record our conversations. The recording will be kept in a safe place and no one else will hear this voice recording except us and the translators. We do not want anyone to know your identity in this study, so please don’t use your real name or use the real name of anyone else in your

stories. Finally, this study has been approved by our university, and you can dial this number, XXXX, if you have any complaints. Are you willing to participate in this study?

Question 1: First, may I ask you a few questions? (Do you mind telling me your age/educational background/family members/major income, etc.?)

Question 2: Could you tell me an experience of *kunan* (suffering) that is vivid in your memory? (No probing—let them finish one story first. If it is shorter than three sentences, then probe for another story.)

Question 3: How do you make sense of those experiences? Why do you think they happened?

Question 4: What did you do at that time to help yourself? What worked? What didn't work?

Question 5: Could you say a little about your religious experiences?

- Probes for Christians: How long have you been a Christian? How often do you go to church/pray/read the Bible? How important is your faith?
- Probes for Bimo: When did you start believing in Bimo? How often do you practice Bimo rituals? What does religious ritual mean to you?

Thank you for your participation in our study.

INDEX[1]

A
addiction, 45, 51, 52, 54, 57, 60, 79, 80, 93, 95, 96, 98, 112, 136, 139, 148, 197, 247–55
alexithymia, 196
aloneness, 54, 57, 70, 76, 79, 80
analysis, x, 1, 2, 4, 5, 31–4, 119, 120, 125, 166, 171, 173, 190, 192, 195, 197, 199, 200, 206, 238, 240, 254, 272
analytic memo, 34, 98, 204
ancestors, 11, 13–17, 19, 42, 90, 91, 93, 94, 98, 101, 126, 260, 267, 273
arthritis, 61, 73, 75, 79, 92, 96

B
barefoot psychologist, 41
Barefoot Voluntary Services, 42
believers, viii, 77, 101, 103, 106, 108, 111, 180, 182, 183, 185, 187, 233
betrothal gift, 175, 211
Bible, viii, 21, 25, 64, 108, 109, 159, 185, 279
Bimo priests, vii, 11, 13–15, 17, 18, 47, 50, 57, 84, 87, 90–5, 98, 101, 131, 132, 139, 140, 142, 143, 165, 174, 229, 237, 246, 249, 254, 259, 264, 273, 278
Bimo rituals, viii, 11, 16, 47, 53, 57, 86, 95, 97, 98, 122n1, 136, 139, 140, 143, 167, 175, 196, 204, 228, 235, 254, 256, 259, 279
Bimo tradition, 1, 6–8, 11, 19, 25, 53, 77, 90, 91, 111, 143, 148, 162, 165, 238, 254, 270
Black Yi, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 255, 258
blindness, 73, 78, 79, 106, 108, 262, 264
boundary, 44, 101, 130, 223, 238–40, 246, 247
brother and sister, 233, 234

[1] Note: Page numbers followed by "n" refers to notes.

© The Author(s) 2018

R.S.-K. Ting, L. Sundararajan, *Culture, Cognition, and Emotion in China's Religious Ethnic Minorities*, Palgrave Studies in Indigenous Psychology, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66059-2

C
case report, 34, 204–6
case study, 34, 35, 69, 119, 204, 219, 236, 240
categorizations, 3, 44, 246
cause of suffering, 3, 72, 98, 101, 109, 122
Christianity, xiv, xxi, 1, 7, 8, 20, 21, 25, 27, 64, 68, 90, 91, 103, 106, 108–11, 129, 130, 149, 153, 168, 196, 233, 246
church, viii, xi, 3, 8, 21–4, 63, 68–70, 73–5, 77, 102, 103, 105–11, 115, 116, 130, 151–5, 157–9, 163, 165–7, 183–5, 187, 196, 206, 207, 217, 225, 226, 228, 234, 246, 279
coding, x, xi, 31, 33, 34, 53, 63, 69, 140, 144, 190, 191, 193, 218, 219, 223, 240
cognitive, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 25, 31, 43, 89, 120, 128, 171, 172, 190, 191, 194, 195, 199, 200, 205, 206, 215, 218, 220, 233, 245, 254, 260
cognitive attribution, vii, 33, 246, 247, 278
cognitive effort, 3, 166, 218, 246
cognitive orientation, 3, 5, 90, 120, 172, 194, 196, 245, 246
cognitive processing, 27, 44, 187, 194
cognitive styles, xiv, 2–6, 25, 29, 43, 119, 121, 173, 187, 194, 196, 197, 224, 235, 238, 245, 246
collectivism, 268
communal space, 199, 200, 236, 246, 254, 260, 270
communicative validation, 34
communist, 20, 109, 117, 123n3
Communist Party, xiv, 21, 44, 66, 77
community, vii–x, xiv, xxiv, 1, 42, 44–6, 55, 56, 58, 63, 64, 80, 90–2, 95, 101, 109, 112, 121, 122, 128, 130, 131, 140, 142, 144, 154, 157, 163, 165–8, 172, 173, 175, 193–5, 199, 200, 205, 206, 219, 221, 228, 233, 240, 254, 255, 260, 269, 270, 272, 273, 278
componential theory, 171, 190
conceptual, 3, 27, 120, 187, 194, 196, 199, 246, 273
conceptual (experience-distant), 27, 187, 194
concrete manipulation, 166
coping, 4, 88, 127–31, 148, 166, 168, 169, 171, 188, 191, 196, 197, 199, 232, 246, 255
coping appraisal, 190, 193
coping behavior, 44, 127, 129
crazy, 79, 96, 114, 153, 155, 231
cross-sectional comparison, 119
cultural identification, 42
cultural myopia, 44, 203
cultural norm, 43, 172
Cultural Revolution, xiv, 13, 16, 23, 24, 42, 44, 72, 77, 91, 110, 117, 129, 164, 185, 225, 254
culture, vii–ix, xxiii, 2, 4, 7, 8, 12, 25–9, 34, 42, 43, 45, 60, 63, 77, 80, 89, 90, 126, 128, 129, 144, 148, 172, 187–9, 191, 197–9, 203, 205, 210, 215, 222, 237, 239, 241, 254, 258, 262, 268
culture-inclusive theory, 268
cumulative validation, 34
custom, 7, 9, 42, 63, 143, 216, 256, 258

D
dan wei, 59, 99, 164
destiny, 84, 94, 96, 118
difficulty in articulation, 191–3
disabilities, 54, 56, 64, 73, 79, 145, 271, 272
disaster relief, 42
discourse, 13, 43, 116, 140
drug problems, 18, 52, 112

E
ecological niche, vii, xiv, 2–5, 35, 89, 90, 127, 238, 245, 246, 270
ecological rationality, ix, 2–5, 35, 120, 166, 224, 233
ecological system, 36
ecological validation, 34
economic globalization, 270, 273
economic misfit, xiv
emotion, vii, x, xi, xiv, xxiv, 3, 4, 33, 35, 43, 44, 80, 90, 100, 126, 171–3, 187–93, 195–8, 204, 214–23, 236, 238, 245–7, 254, 261, 263, 267, 270
emotion coding, 173
emotion laden events, 190, 192–4, 196, 198
emotion words, 189, 190, 192–6, 198, 246
emotional expression, xiv, 2, 4, 29, 31, 57, 173, 190–3, 224, 233, 235, 245
empirical phenomenology, 31
epistemology, 36, 43, 44, 95, 172, 205
ethnic minority, vii, xiv, 6, 7, 28, 36, 42, 43, 71, 90, 127, 129–33, 136, 146, 152, 163, 166, 216, 247, 266, 267, 269
ethnocentric, viii, 269
ethnocentrism, 44
ethnographic, xv, 101
explanatory model, 43, 246
external attribution, 3, 191–3
external manipulation, 127, 167, 168, 195, 196, 255
external reference, 237, 247
extra-birth fee, 53, 88, 99

F
facial expression, 171, 191–3, 251
family, viii, 9, 15–18, 20, 23, 29, 34, 44, 45, 50–2, 54–7, 59, 61–4, 66–71, 73, 74, 76, 80, 83–5, 87–9, 91–3, 95–8, 100–2, 108, 111–13, 116, 117, 122n2, 130–2, 135, 136, 140–4, 147, 149, 152, 154, 157, 159–69, 173, 175, 176, 252, 255–8, 260, 264, 272, 279
family burden, 58, 70, 74, 79, 80, 96, 98, 112, 113, 120
family clan, xiv, 44, 59, 85, 91, 97–9, 101, 122n1, 130, 144, 166, 210, 238, 258
family conflicts, 13, 59, 79, 93, 96, 111, 113, 139
family deaths, 54, 72, 79, 119
family lineage, 7, 8, 13, 17, 54, 57, 58, 99, 136, 255
family name, 130
family root, 71, 127
family support, 58, 72, 112, 113, 119, 164
fate, 52, 64, 94, 96, 98, 114, 117, 118, 120, 122, 128, 174, 178, 188, 194, 220, 225, 252, 272
fictional entity, 273
field notes, 34, 45, 204, 215, 218
focus group, 29, 33, 77, 92–5, 98, 101, 110, 111, 115, 119, 139, 140, 143, 144, 157, 158, 237, 254, 273, 277, 278

G
generation, 8, 9, 21, 23, 55, 57, 60, 74, 77, 78, 112, 114, 136, 186, 204, 210, 221, 224, 225, 233, 247, 267
ghosts, 7, 14, 15, 50, 86, 90–4, 96, 98, 101, 115, 118, 120–2, 130, 132, 139, 175, 176, 188, 189, 194, 264, 273
global economic, 270, 273
globalization, 6, 245, 269, 270, 272
got high blood pressure, 112
grass-root, 11, 41, 42

Great Leap Forward, 66, 70, 114, 117, 185, 187

H

healing, 7, 29, 43, 44, 47, 55, 90–2, 95, 101, 109, 110, 130, 135, 137, 143, 162, 169, 175, 189, 198, 229, 232, 236, 259, 260, 268, 269
hegemony, 44, 203, 268
Help, 2, 33, 165–8, 194
help-seeking behavior, xx, 4, 8, 31, 33, 127, 130, 139, 141, 142, 159, 160, 165–9, 239, 246
hemiplegia, 73
heritage, 11, 19, 20, 42, 45, 168, 203
hermeneutic research, 34
high blood pressure, 73, 212
historical oppression, 77, 253
HIV/AIDS, ix, xi, 56, 73, 84, 95, 98, 238, 257, 260
HIV-prevention program, 254, 255, 259
Holy Communion, 21, 23, 106
Holy spirit, 208
How, 2, 33, 190, 191, 193, 194, 196
hu kou, 88, 89, 99
humanitarian aid, 41
hymns, 21, 63, 64, 111, 151, 180–2, 184, 185, 207, 208, 246
hypothesis, 90, 188, 191, 192, 235, 271

I

icons, 43, 188, 189, 192, 197, 260
illness, xiii, xiv, 14, 18, 31, 46, 50, 52, 54–7, 68, 70–2, 75, 78–80, 84, 86, 87, 92–6, 98, 101, 106, 112, 119, 130, 132, 139, 142, 143, 145, 147, 153, 158, 163, 174, 175, 183, 184, 190, 220, 221, 223, 224, 229, 231, 256, 257, 261, 264, 272
immoral, 91, 120
index, 43, 188, 189, 192, 193, 197
indigenous psychology (IP), vii, x, xiii, 8, 41–6, 80, 203–42, 245, 247, 268, 269, 272
individualism, 268
in group, 3, 5, 166, 235, 246, 247, 270
internal attribution, ix, 3, 101, 120, 121
internal manipulation, 166–8, 195, 196
internal reference, 187, 195
interpersonal conflicts, 70, 77, 79, 80, 97, 100, 101
interview, vii, x, xi, 10, 18, 29–31, 33–5, 36n1, 36n7, 49, 53, 56, 58, 60–2, 66, 67, 69, 74, 87, 88, 91, 92, 95, 102, 112, 119, 120, 126, 131–3, 137, 138, 140, 143, 149–52, 158, 166, 182, 185, 191, 204, 205, 208, 210, 217–19, 223–6, 231, 233, 236–8, 240, 241, 247, 256, 257, 272, 273, 277–9

J

jia zhi, 12, 13, 17, 19, 52, 55, 59, 85, 98, 99, 101, 126, 130, 175, 238, 245, 253, 254, 258

L

labor, 60, 63, 65, 66, 111, 117, 118, 144, 160, 175, 185–7, 198, 229, 256, 272
land revolution, 78, 117
Liangshan, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 20, 24, 36n1, 45, 50, 55, 59, 60, 77, 78, 91, 95, 98, 99, 101, 123n2, 126,

127, 137, 138, 146, 148, 176, 215, 219, 220, 222, 223, 235, 237, 245, 247, 258, 259, 262, 265, 266
life review, 115, 120, 188, 195, 196, 198
Lolo, 12
longitudinal study, 34, 119, 204
low-income subsidy, 162, 250
Luquan, 1, 8, 19–25, 30, 63–5, 72, 73, 77, 112, 114, 117, 149, 151, 152, 155, 157, 158, 162, 178, 183, 206–9, 215, 216, 233, 234, 236, 238, 242, 266, 270

M
madness, 79, 80, 153
manual, 33, 190, 193, 272
Marxism, 109
Meigu, 1, 8–19, 30, 36n4, 53, 55, 57, 59, 72, 78, 80, 84, 86, 92, 95, 101, 112, 116, 122n2, 127, 134, 135, 137, 139, 142–5, 147, 148, 158, 189, 205, 206, 209–16, 229, 233, 235–8, 251, 252, 255, 258, 259, 263–6
mental action, 166, 169
mental illness, 67, 79, 80, 93
mentalization, 196, 197, 199, 200, 254, 260
mental space, 5, 199, 269
methodology, 28–36, 41, 205, 241
migrant work, 56, 60, 78, 86, 119, 133, 137, 141, 146, 164, 252, 254, 256, 257, 264–6, 270
migrant workers, 21, 30, 45, 52, 57, 60, 67, 73, 75, 78–80, 87, 100, 102, 127, 136, 139, 140, 143, 146, 147, 152, 164, 173–6, 178–80, 245, 248, 250–3, 255, 256, 259, 261, 262, 269–72
missionary, 7, 8, 20, 151
mixed method approach, 28, 203
mi xin (rituals), 48, 50, 53, 75, 84, 86, 132, 137, 143, 175, 176, 199, 239, 264, 273
modernization, 19, 45, 168, 200, 247, 254, 260, 272
myths, 42, 140, 198–200, 237, 254, 260

N
narratives, xiv, 4, 19, 29, 33–5, 41, 83, 102, 109, 112, 117–19, 121, 127, 131, 148–56, 165, 167, 172, 173, 178, 189, 190, 197, 205, 206, 214, 215, 217, 224, 228, 233, 240, 241, 247, 254, 267, 270
natural causes, 120, 121, 158
Nimucuobi, 16–18
Nuosu, 5, 12, 13, 20, 91, 135, 136, 215, 220, 222, 237, 259

O
orphans, 50, 58, 60, 71, 72, 77, 95, 117, 135, 160, 161, 163, 223, 224, 253
Ortony, A., 187, 191, 192, 195
other-help, 209
out-group, 5, 166, 235, 247, 270

P
pains, 45, 46, 55, 56, 61, 68, 71, 72, 75, 79, 80, 85, 86, 89, 92, 103, 113, 125, 128, 143, 148, 157, 158, 162, 174–7, 180, 182, 183, 187–9, 191–3, 198, 219, 231, 232, 234, 240, 255, 273
participatory observation, 34, 268
Peircean, 173, 197–9, 254, 260
perceptual, 25, 120, 196, 197, 273

personal weakness, 113, 115
phenomena, 44, 246
phenomenological analysis, 1, 33, 119, 190
phenomenological psychology research, 31
philosophy, 8, 43, 45
physical discomforts, 57, 95, 158, 188, 190, 192, 193
prayers, 4, 21, 63, 68, 128, 131, 151, 157, 159, 162, 166–9, 184, 188, 194, 200, 234, 255
precise poverty relief program, 67, 146, 267
private, 41, 123n3, 146, 212, 214, 232, 257
psycho-linguistic analysis, 33–5, 90, 121, 165, 167, 192, 193, 195
psychological problems, 70, 76
psychology of religion, viii, 28, 128
public, xiv, 9, 10, 12, 44, 46, 59, 64, 66, 96, 97, 99, 108, 123n3, 127, 212, 220, 254, 259
public spaces, 100
purpura, 96

Q
qualitative, xiv, 1, 28, 33, 95, 129, 219, 238
qualitative research, 28, 219, 240

R
rationality, 6, 233–8, 246, 271
reasoning, 44, 135, 270
reflections, 34, 35, 100, 105, 120–2, 125–7, 198, 203, 206, 208, 215, 220, 234, 236–41
reflexivity, 35, 203, 204, 240
representation of emotion, 3, 246
repression, 191, 193, 216, 271
research, xiv, xv, 1–36, 43, 45, 55, 95, 110, 128, 129, 131, 172, 173, 203–6, 215, 217, 223, 224, 235–42, 247, 255, 262, 268
resilience, xiv, 36, 42, 63, 129, 169, 220, 225, 232, 234, 238, 239, 241
responses to suffering, 3, 131, 162, 166
rheumatism, 57, 65, 66, 73, 79, 84, 95, 108, 112, 143, 174, 183–7, 190, 212, 231, 232
rural urban, 41

S
scales, 2, 33, 77, 119, 122, 165–8, 173, 188, 190, 191, 193–5
schooling problems, 70, 77
secular help, 130, 166, 167
self-construals, 172, 268, 269
self-help, 91, 148, 160, 161, 168
self-reflexivity, 270
semiotics, 188, 197, 200, 254, 260
semi-structural interviews, 29
sensory-motor (experience-near), 187
sermon, 21, 154
services, 21–3, 63, 64, 77, 99, 106, 138, 149, 151, 154, 155, 206, 223, 226, 234, 240, 251, 258, 273
shobu, 18
Sichuan-Yi, viii, xiv, 6–9, 11, 41, 186, 259
sign theory, 173
sin, 113, 120, 121
social factors, 4, 119, 121
social injustice, 78, 99, 119
social oppression, 70, 71, 77
social ties, 35, 233–5
somatic expressions, 188
state, 8, 76, 104, 109, 110, 125, 151, 171, 219, 238, 252, 257, 272
stress, 120, 254, 255, 261, 267
strong-ties, viii, 2, 3, 5, 6, 13, 25, 27, 58, 74, 89, 90, 98, 99, 112, 120,

130, 131, 165–9, 194, 196, 205, 206, 235, 245, 246, 255, 260, 266, 267, 270, 271
substance abuse, 58, 95, 148, 197
subthemes, 33
suffering, vii, viii, xiii–xv, 2–4, 6, 8, 13, 14, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 41–80, 83–122, 125–68, 205–7, 216, 217, 219–21, 223, 225, 226, 228, 231–4, 236–8, 240, 241, 245–7, 262, 263, 273, 277–9
suffering discourses, 43
suffering events, 28, 33, 35, 42, 44, 45, 54, 57, 60, 62–4, 69, 70, 78–80, 92, 94, 101, 111, 117, 143, 146, 147, 149, 160, 166, 169, 184, 216, 217, 219, 220, 240
suffering narratives, ix, 4, 33, 46–53, 63–9, 83–9, 102–9, 131–9, 165, 173–87, 190–6, 205–14, 217, 224–33, 240, 241, 247, 254, 270
suffering types, 31, 33, 53
suicides, 54, 60–3, 79, 80, 127, 186, 187
Suni, 7, 18, 91, 92, 139, 141, 263
supernatural causes, 92, 95, 120, 121, 196
symbols, 8, 71, 188, 189, 192, 197–9, 256, 260
system factor, 119, 121

T
textual analysis, 31, 193
thematic analysis, 31–3, 35, 53–63, 69–78, 95–101, 112–19, 140–8, 158–65
themes, 29, 33, 34, 53–63, 69–78, 95–101, 110–19, 140–8, 158–65, 219, 255
Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), 109
totems, 42, 44
tradition, viii, x, xiv, 8, 13–19, 25, 27, 42, 54, 63, 71, 86, 89, 98, 110–12, 122n1, 129, 130, 136, 142, 154, 176, 198, 221, 222, 253, 254, 260, 269
trait, 238, 239
transcripts, 31, 33, 35, 53, 69, 92, 95, 112, 120, 140, 158, 166, 191, 193, 218, 219
trauma, xiv, 35, 42, 72, 119, 120, 176, 240
tribes, 6, 7, 12, 19, 20, 45, 126, 212
tuberculosis, 56, 64, 118, 149, 152, 231, 247

U
universalism, 268
urbanization, 36, 114, 239, 245, 266, 267

V
validation, 34
villages, 8, 10, 11, 21, 22, 36n4, 45, 48, 50–2, 58, 60, 63–5, 67, 75, 77, 78, 83, 101, 103, 105, 106, 108, 135, 136, 143, 146, 153–6, 160, 161, 163, 175, 178, 179, 184, 205, 209–11, 220, 221, 225, 228, 229, 232, 234, 237, 245, 247, 256, 259, 262–7

W
weak-ties, xxiii, 2, 3, 5, 6, 27, 35, 89, 90, 120, 130, 131, 165–7, 196, 233, 246, 270

Western psychology, xiii
What, 2, 33, 195
White Yi, viii, 12, 13, 21
Why, 2, 33, 119, 122, 188, 194
worldviews, xi, 7, 29, 43, 83, 127, 140, 158, 172

Y
Yi ethnic groups, 100, 130, 210, 267
Yi-Bimo, viii–x, xix, 3, 8, 27, 30, 46, 53, 70–4, 77–80, 83, 90, 95, 112, 115, 116, 118–22, 130, 131, 140, 160, 163–9, 172, 173, 187, 188, 190–4, 196–200, 228, 233, 236, 237, 239, 246, 247, 254, 255, 259, 260, 266, 269, 270, 273
Yi-Christian, viii–x, xxiv, 3, 8, 21, 22, 27, 28, 30, 63, 69, 78–80, 90, 102, 110–12, 119–22, 130, 131, 148, 157, 158, 165–9, 178, 187, 188, 191–4, 196, 198, 199, 224, 233, 236, 237, 246, 247, 255, 266, 269, 270
Yunnan-Yi, viii, xiv, xxiii, 6–25, 106, 153, 217, 234