

Article

Community Heritage Linking Place and Mobility: A Case Study of “Bangbei” in Ethnic Bai Villages of Yunnan Province, China

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Abstract: Is there any kind of community heritage that links individuals and homes within the context of increasing mobility? In this study, the unique Bangbei system of the Bai ethnic group in Dianbei District of Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China is examined. In-depth interviews have been employed to assess the evolution of Bangbei and the dynamic nature of its development. We find that Bangbei has become an important “place-making” tool for linking people and their “homes”, thus serving as a spatially unbounded place-based community heritage mechanism that sees community as not only place-bound, but as increasingly dispersed and mobile. This case prompts us to rethink the spatial boundedness of particular community heritages and their role in making and maintaining placeness in the context of increasing globalization and associated mobility. Thinking about Bangbei helps us conceptualize community heritage in a more spatially expansive and unbounded way.

Keywords: mobility; place; community heritage; bangbei; Bai; Yunnan; China

1. Introduction

Place is a core concept of human geography, especially cultural geography [1]. In recent years, however, the “mobility turn” has shifted the focus of research on place. With the continuous development of technology and social media, often considered to be “distance-demolishing technologies”, distance is no longer as major a factor in restricting communications between people as it once was and contact between different people is becoming increasingly easy. This being the case, it is not surprising that the social scientists are paying more attention to people and information flows, concerns associated with “mobility” [2,3].

In that human mobility has become increasingly easy and common, individuals are travelling more and going farther away, to work, pursue educational opportunities, or for various other reasons. However, this increased mobility can result in individuals losing their sense of place over the long-term. Attachment to place is becoming less important due to the increased mobility associated with globalization.

It is important to recognize that communities are contextualized in their histories, but that their relationships are rapidly changing, especially in relation to cities [4]. How, therefore, can contact be maintained between mobile individuals and communities centered in particular places? Who will take the role to maintain connectivity? How are such roles facilitated? How should we see the role and spatiality of communities' heritage organizations? What role do they have in linking mobile individuals to particular places? These are some of the questions raised here. We focus on "Bangbei", a well-established type of mutual support organization found in Dianbei District, which is in Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, on the border with Lijiang City-level Prefecture, in Yunnan Province, southwest China. We do this because of Bangbei's crucial role, as a part of community heritage, in facilitating connectivity between mobile individuals and particular places or homes. We argue that Bangbei is a community institution that on the one hand is place-based, but on the other hand has effectively evolved to adapt to increased societal social mobility. The main take-away message from this paper is that thinking about Bangbei helps us to conceptualize institutions linked to community heritage as being more than simply spatially bounded entities. Community heritage institutions such as Bangbei are crucial, we argue, for helping mobile individuals create a sense of "place".

In the next section we review the literature linking community and mobility. In Section 3, we then introduce the study area and explain the methods used. Section 4 describes the formation and transition process of Bangbei and the mechanisms associated with this process. Section 5 is the discussion part of the paper, where we show how social organization associated with Bangbei links mobile communities with particular places. Finally, we provide some concluding remarks in Section 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Community and Community Studies

Community studies have a long history in the social sciences and can be traced back to the early 20th century [5]. Localized community studies, which were especially popular among social anthropologists, have, however, long been criticized for viewing villages as insular, primitive and relatively simple. Modern western societies, which were previously believed to be more complex, did not become the subject of investigations, including by geographers, until much later, but they too have faced criticisms for failing to grapple with such processes as increasing industrialization, geographical mobility, and urbanization. In addition, communities have often been problematically thought of in binary terms, as either stable or unstable [6]. However, beginning of the 1980s and 1990s, community studies experienced somewhat of a revival, due to increasing interest in the rapid changes being experienced by rural people, especially in the face of increasing industrialization and urbanization. Rather than seeing communities as ahistorical, immobile and static, as was frequently the case in earlier studies, more emphasis was put on their dynamic nature [7]. However, criticisms continued, including that community studies tended to emphasize unity rather than difference, and often romanticized community life [8]. Defilippis et al. have more recently, however, pointed out that these debates about community were often overly polarized, with authors either glorifying community studies or simply dismissing research on communities. They advocate for more middle-of-the-road approaches, ones that both recognize outside impacts but without denying bottom-up influences as well [9].

As geographers, we would add that communities often continued to be thought of as spatially bounded, and as "the smallest spatial system which encompasses the principle features of society" [5]. Until more recently, there was inadequate consideration of the role of outside linkages and mobility in shaping communities. However, more recently geographers and other social scientists, such as McDowell et al. have challenged older static and ahistorical ideas about attachment to place, and have explored different forms of communal attachment, including what they call "elective belonging" [9]. Most recently, understandings of community have further expanded, and recent studies have considered a broad range of communities rather than just bounded villages, including those

based on social class, race, gender, sexuality and disability, just to name some of the possibilities [10]. There has also been movement towards thinking of contextual community differences, as has been the general trend in recent years in the soft social sciences and humanities more generally [11].

2.2. Mobility

Mobility is an important feature of modern society and has become one of the most important concepts in the contemporary social sciences. Prior to the 21st century, interdisciplinary research on mobility was rare, but with the emergence of a series of studies over the past couple of decades, the “mobility turn” has become well established [12,13]. The body of research that has emerged does not take mobility as only a critical tool or an abstract concept but relies on continuously innovative dynamic methods and includes several figurative studies on mobility [14].

Although the present new “paradigm of mobility” comes more from the social sciences generally than geography specifically, cultural geography has also tracked the quite fruitful research on mobility in the humanities [15]. Although not always situating their studies within the paradigm of mobility, many human geographers can be classified as appliers and practitioners of mobility theory [16].

Mobility studies have critiqued the view that “the world is composed of fixed things” [17]. Moreover, the relationship between mobility and globalization is now seen as increasingly complex. Because the mobility of people, information and capital results in the “constant changing” of places, all places tend to be seen as potentially nomadic and fundamentally rootless. Any given space is no longer the only place, but is attached with the liberation of mobile individuals, rather than the superposition of some abstract features [18]. At the same time, mobility can be understood as being analyzed using a fixed and static approach [19–22]. During a study by Favell, it became evident that a lot of time is needed to study some supposedly static things: for example, borders, national territories, and peoples’ senses of place in relation to homeland [23]. This is also the focus of this study.

2.3. Place, Community and Mobility

The literature on place and community has often been seen as contrary or certainly not complementary to globalized space flows [24]. For this reason, research on place and community is sometimes considered outdated or conservative, and lacking in terms of in-depth theoretical construction and discussion [25,26].

Research on place and community under the background of the mobility turn has tried, however, to compensate for this deviation from globalization, at least to some extent. Indeed, links between individuals, communities, and mobile places has become an increasingly important field of inquiry for human geographers. Relevant work is mainly being conducted in relation to two dimensions: emotional and functional connections. Viewed from the dimension of emotional connection and related to the mobile individual and place, place is closely linked to the formation of individual and community identities [27]; and the existence of original culture, including cultural systems and spiritual senses of place, which also affect memory, emotion and identity of individuals in relation to place. Mobility is generally considered to be the main aggressive force that reduces one’s sense of placeness [28]. Specifically, mobility impedes the ability of individuals to carry out daily life and maintain emotional and daily communications between individuals and communities. It can be explained in three ways. First, reduction in direct contact between individuals and communities; second, changes in an individual’s sense of place and the self-identification with local communities; third, physical (community transformation, relocation, etc.) and social (loss of familiar persons, growth or moving in of new generation within the community) changes of place. Thus, the original identity and sense of place in a person’s memory can dramatically change. The emotions of a mobile individual toward a place often comes from the individual’s own experience, exchanges with others in a social group, and memories of particular interactions with particular social groups or communities. When individual leaves a place, his or her emotions and identity toward it are mainly derived from memory; with changes of place, therefore, the sense of place of a mobile individual also shifts, particularly as

time passes. There is a Chinese idiom that states that: “The things are still there, but men are no more the same ones”. In fact, for mobile individuals intertwined with the process of globalization, “both places and the men will change”.

As Skey points out, the identity and sense of placeness of mobile individuals are gradually deepened and awakened when they interact with other people or cultures in different places; they desire to build a “bounded, familiar and homely place” [28]. When it comes to the relationship between the mobile individual and home, people pay more attention to their contact with fixed homes within certain geographic areas. This process depends not only on the mobile individual, but also relies on community heritage, as with all kinds of organizations. What impact do these community heritages have on the relationship between mobile individuals and place? This is the core topic of this paper.

3. Study Area and Methods

3.1. Study Area

To develop our ideas about the linkages between place and mobility, we needed to find a study area with both stable self-governing community organizations and several emigrants. Bangbei in Dianbei District meets these qualifications. The villages where the research was focused are on the border of Dali Bai Minority Autonomous Prefecture and Lijiang City of Yunnan and include Xiuyi and Potouyi villages in Yunhe Town and all the communities of Caohai Town and Xintun Town (Figure 1), which are the core areas of Dianbei in Heqing. Located in the north of Heqing County Town, the area is an important passage for entering Lijiang and Tibetan areas from Heqing. There are 29 village committees in the region, inhabited by people classified into various ethnic groups, including Bai, Han, Yi, Naxi, Tibetan, and Lisu. People belonging to the Bai nationality constitute the majority ethnic group found in the area, accounting for about 76 percent of the total population; 20 percent of the people are ethnic Han.

The area is at the northern end of the basin of Heqing, where the terrain is relatively flat and there are numerous water bodies. The “Dian horse” is from here and horses are an important means of transportation in the area. Because southwest China is located on a plateau, with many mountains and canyons, the terrain is complex and vehicle transport is extremely inconvenient.

Heqing is one of the important posts on the ancient Tea Horse Road. Since the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, business and trade has flourished in this region. The policy on bureaucratization of native officers during the Ming and Qing dynasties resulted in the area becoming economically linked with other parts of the mainland, and many people moved in from other regions. Thus, advanced means of production entered Dianbei from the lowlands, including new forms of handicraft production; and commerce rapidly expanded. Therefore, in addition to agriculture, many families became actively involved in trade and business, including conducting commercial activities in Burmese and Tibetan areas. After the 1850s, commerce became an important source of income, and between 1895 and 1950 the Dianbei area became increasingly integrated with international markets. On the one hand, businesspeople from the Dianbei area in Heqing sold industrial products or raw materials imported from India, Burma and Siam (Thailand) to local areas, and they also sent them on to Lijiang, Tibet and other places; on the other hand, they transported precious herbs and minerals from Lijiang and Tibetan areas via Xiaguan, Tengchong, Simao and Kunming to Burma, India and elsewhere.

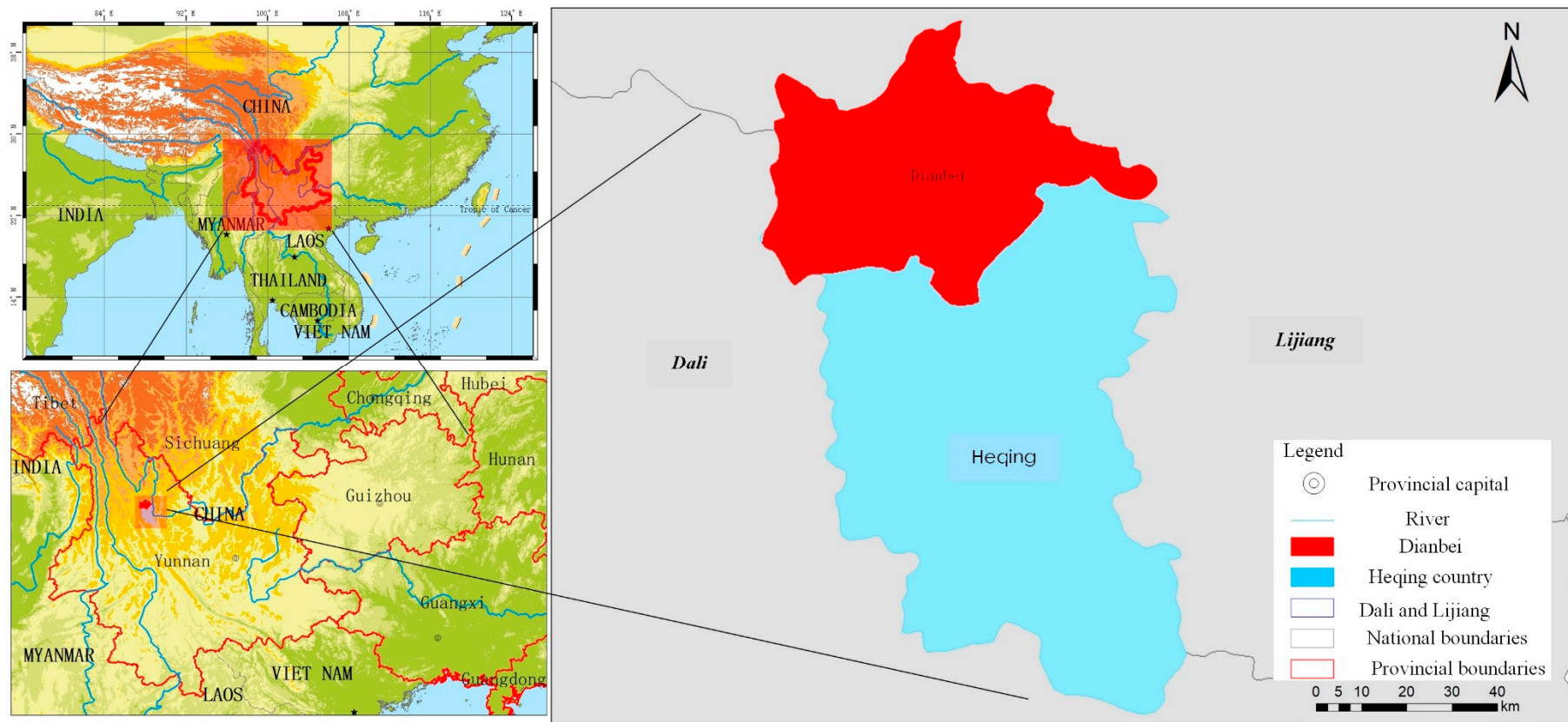


Figure 1. Location map of Dianbei District, Heqing County, Yunnan Province, China.

Since 2005, businesspeople in the villages of Dianbei have spread all over China, and their handicraft products are being exported to the United States, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal and India. Beginning in around 2001, commerce and handicrafts became the major source of revenue in some villages, and agriculture began constituting only supplementary income; this is especially the case in Xiuyi, Potouyi, Xinhua, Banqiao and Mutun Villages, where people who engage predominantly in handicraft and commercial activities now constitute 76 percent of the total population. Practitioners are mainly salespeople or shopkeepers. The center of the handicraft industry is silver forging. In addition, many people have left the region to seek business opportunities in other parts of China and elsewhere. So how do those working and living elsewhere maintain contact with the places where they grew up? What differences exist in this region as compared to others? What roles does community heritage play in maintaining and increasing those connections? This brings us back to Bangbei, the key for answering these questions.

3.2. Methods

Depth interviewing was the main method adopted during this study. To increase the reliability of the interviews, at least two interviewers were present on the site during each interview and the interviews were coded within a week of each interview. Sampling was done using a combination of objective random sampling and typical sampling to ensure that the conclusions are representative and comparable.

Interviews were conducted from February to March 2012, in March 2013, and from February to March 2014. Interviews were mainly done in the villages of Mutun, Xinhua, Sanyinan, Luowei, Hetou, Banqiao, Fengmi, Zhouwangtun, Xiuyi and Potouyi, with 110 people being interviewed in total. This accounts for 10% of the total population in Bangbei areas. Among those interviewed, there were 75 males and 35 females; 53 Bais, 40 Hans, 10 Naxis, and seven from other ethnic groups; and the occupational structure of the interviewees was: 15 government staff, 25 people going out to do the silver business, 20 people working in enterprises and institutions, 15 students and 35 agricultural workers. Forty-five people were interviewed via telephone (mainly business people and employees of enterprises and institutions outside Yunnan Province) and 65 were interviewed face to face. During the interview process, Bais used the Bai language, Naxis used the Naxi language, and Hans and people from other ethnic groups used Mandarin.

The core interview questions asked were: (1) Could you tell us about your personal mobile trajectory? When did you live in Dianbei district? When did you leave your hometown? How often do you return to Dianbei? (2) What is Bangbei? When was it established? (3) Why does the Bangbei system exist in this period of ‘mobility’? (4) Why do you want to join Bangbei and when did you join a Bangbei? (5) What are the prerequisites for joining Bangbei? (6) In your opinion, what are the benefits of joining Bangbei? What are the rights and obligations of members? (7) What is the operating mechanism of Bangbei? (8) What are the rights and obligations associated with Bangbei? (9) In what ways does Bangbei constrain villagers and members? (10) What role does Bangbei play in this period of ‘mobility’?

4. Results: Formation and Transition of Bangbei

4.1. Formation of Bangbei

“Bangbei” (in one dialect of Bai language) is an important community heritage in all the villages of Dianbei District; there are Bangbei in villages of both ethnic Bai and Han peoples, even though Bangbei appears to have originated with the Bai. According to the classification system of social organizations developed by Cooley, Bangbei in Dianbei villages has long existed as grassroots community organizations composed of peers of similar ages and those with close relationships based on family, clan and village community [29]. Bangbei goes beyond the Hukou system, which is a form of population registration and one of the major tools to control migration employed by the state in

China [30]. Once Bangbei membership is confirmed, no matter where the members stay and whether their Hukou are relocated away from one's village, the relationship between members remains intact provided that members follow the rules of their Bangbei.

While mutual aid organizations have long existed in Chinese society, especially in rural areas [31,32], Bangbei is different in crucial ways. Bangbei are unique in that they are designed to exclusively support local villagers in similar age groups. Mr. Li Yingtang (Bai nationality, 92 years old, Sanyinan Village) stated that, "Bangbei refers to a group of people of similar ages engaged to help each other in daily life . . ." In addition, Hong Guoxing (Bai nationality, 50 years old, secretary of the Party branch of Luowei Village) stated, "Bangbei refers to mutual help among peers . . ." Second, Bangbei has specific spatial limitations, ones that insist that members cannot cross villages and only people at the same village can be grouped into the same Bangbei. Third, a person is not allowed to be a member of more than one Bangbei at a time. Fourth, Bangbei have a wider range of functions for helping members and their families than typical mutual assistance associations. Fifth, punishment imposed on Bangbei members who violate rules is confined to family members originating from the same household, and do not relate to more distant relatives that come from other households.

For an individual, the Bangbei organization is linked to specific group identity apart from only family and clan. For these organizations, all members support other members and request members to help each other; and handle village affairs and ward off external threats. Bangbei has strict geographical and age restrictions; only people from the same village and of the same or similar age can form a unified Bangbei.

When did Bangbei originate? Nobody knows, but it has been around for longer than anyone can remember. Mr. Li Yingtang, the 92 years old already quoted above, said, "Bangbei existed before I could remember things . . ." Zhou Zhengshu (Han nationality, 64 years old, villager of Mutun village) explained, "Bangbei existed before we were born, but there is a big difference between Bangbei in my grandfather's generation and that of our generation . . . In the age of collectivization (communes), people knew the members of Bangbei, but they never got together; mostly peers who got along well played together".

Zhang Huanlin (Bai nationality, 40, villager of Hetou Village) said: "When I was a child Bangbei were not so organized and disciplined. Generally, a few good friends who were members of the same Bangbei looked for marriage partners together and went to the temple fair together. Members of Bangbei attended wedding ceremonies of other members . . . Only in the last seven or eight years have Bangbei set up clear regulations and a strict punishment system to regulate members".

Zhao Haiyang (Bai nationality, 21 years old, villager of Fengmi Village) said: "When I was in elementary school, my parents told me about members of Bangbei, and we were organized to celebrate spring ploughing and we went to the temple fair together . . ."

Bangbei also exists in other ethnic Bai parts of China, such as villages around Dali. However, due to differences in dialect, these villages often call Bengbei "Ban'er Huo". "Ban'er" refers to friends or fellows, while "Huo" refers to a group of people. Thus, Ban'er Huo are supposed to bring together groups of friends. According to Yang Guoxing, an ethnic Bai villager from Shangjiu Village, near Dali City, all the villages in his area have long had such organizations.

4.2. The Evolution of Bangbei in Dianbei District

The evolution of Bangbei in Dianbei District has been dynamic; the binding effect, scope, functions and corresponding rules and regulations have varied greatly during different periods. Its formation is not only restricted by historic institutions, but is closely related to materiality, social systems, customs and the overall social and political environment. We found that interviewees had different understandings about Bangbei, but that there is a consensus that Bangbei existed before they could remember; that the basic form remains the same, but that its functions and corresponding system have changed greatly.

Viewed in relation to the function of Bangbei and its mechanisms for constraining members, the development of Bangbei can usefully be divided into three stages of change over the last hundred years, namely the stage of “prosperity-declining” before 1949; the stage of “disappearing-dying out-reappearing” from 1950 to 2000; and the stage of “appearing-maturing” since 2001. Among all the interviews done, 35 people were born before 1949; 45 were born between 1950 and 1970; and 40 were born after the 1970s. People born before 1949 were found to have a deep belief in Bangbei; Bangbei existed during their time and played a role throughout their production cycles and lives. However, people born between 1950 and 1970 tend to think that Bangbei has had little impact on their lives, as it was subject to government restrictions during this period. In their memory, Bangbei meant just parents or people of similar ages who had close personal relationships and who often helped each other. Bangbei gradually became re-established in around 2001, after government restrictions were eased. Many people born after 1970 think Bangbei plays an important role in their lives. Table 1 presents the time division and basic characteristics of the three stages of Bangbei in our study area.

4.3. Dynamic Mechanisms for Forming and Transitioning Bangbei

Bangbei at present are formed by villagers for agricultural production, responding to disasters, and for protecting individual or collective benefits. Second, the power of the individual is extremely limited in relation to Bangbei. Third, an individual is likely to form a relatively stable relationship with peers who grow up together and face similar problems. Fourth, during exchanges with other social groups, in addition to identifying with one’s family and clan, one needs group recognition, including from peers.

During one interview, an elderly man mentioned that the reason for forming Bangbei is to have partners for having fun together when one is young, to spend one’s remaining years together after becoming old, and to go to the underworld together after one dies, to avoid being lonely. In summary, we find that a prerequisite to the formation of Bangbei lies in the recognition from one’s village, as only people from the same villages can form Bangbei. Second, Bangbei are formed to maintain common interests during daily production activities. Third, identities associated with Bangbei include consideration of place; different places give people different identities, but identity is created socially in people’s daily lives [33]. Villager daily production practices occur within the scope of a particular village, and interpersonal communication and help during production needs a common identity. Fourth, the historic institution of village is important for people forming Bangbei since members must be from the same villages. Fifth, change in the function of Bangbei is greatly influenced by material conditions, production, social institutions and the political environment.

Table 1. Comparison of organization, function and system of Bangbei at different stages.

Stage	Forms of Organization	Activities and Scope	Functions	Rules and Regulations
before 1949	With strict forms of organization.	More group activities, mainly related to agricultural production, funerals, marriages, collective worship, individuals, involvement in temple fairs, the organization of ancestor worship, horse racing and other activities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members helped each other regarding human, financial and other aspects of life. 2. Safeguards village interests against external threats. 3. Jointly did collective worship and important villager activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bangbei was formed according to strict ritual requirements. 2. No written rules and regulations existed. 3. The constraint on members relied mainly on mutual trust and understanding, and personal behavior constituted a long-term process of gaming. 4. Social capital played an important role. 5. Several prestigious members were responsible for the operation of Bangbei.
from 1950 to 2000	Existed in name only; activities of peers with good relations; Bangbei began to appear after 1990 but was initially poorly organized.	With limited scope, almost no collective activities; most activities were held by production teams; after 1990 Bangbei were gradually formed; in addition to participating in the temple fair, other activities were generally relied on family and clan.	None	None
after 2001	Strict form of organization, mainly for the benefit of Bangbei members; unconditionally offer help and assistance to families of needy members.	Involved in all aspects of production and life, agricultural production, commerce and trade, funerals, marriages, collective worship, individuals, temple fairs; the organization of cultural and recreational activities; and competitions inside and between villages.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members help each other in terms of labor, finance and various other aspects of life. 2. Safeguards village interests against external threats. 3. Jointly hold collective worship and important village activities. 4. Assists with funerals inside the village and is responsible for organizing other Bangbei in the village to provide better funeral services inside the village. 5. Responsible for cultural and recreational activities inside the village and has the obligation to organize the surrounding villages to carry out the annual folk dance and sports competitions. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bangbei is formed according to strict ceremonies. 2. Bangbei manages members based on mutual trust and help, mainly according to institutional conventions and supplemented by rules and regulations. 3. Each Bangbei has its own specific requirements to define the obligations and rights of members. 4. There are strict rules for members to quit Bangbei; no assistance and help is provided for dropouts, and they are not allowed to participate in any activities inside their previous Bangbei. 5. There are basic requirements for ceremonies and conditions if members want to join Bangbei halfway. 6. There are corresponding punishment provisions and methods of enforcements if members do not participate in the activities of Bangbei. 7. Members take turns being responsible for the operation and management of Bangbei, each for one year. 8. Set up books and disciplinary records of Bangbei, and the current head transfers these during group activities at the end of the year to the next person in charge. 9. There is a clear penalty mechanism if members of Bangbei cannot personally participate in activities of their Bangbei and in their village.

5. Discussions: How to Link Mobility and Place through Bangbei

5.1. Status Quo of Bangbei

Based on our study, currently Xinhua, Sanyinan, Hetou, Mutun and Fengmi Villages have more than twenty Bangbei each. The number of Bangbei are closely related to the number of people in each village. The size of each Bangbei is also directly related to the number of births in a year, with the largest Bangbei of Mutun including 40 people, the smallest in Sanyinan including 18, and a general Bangbei including 25–30 people. Under normal circumstances, if the number of births in a year is only five or six, those people are free to join a Bangbei with an age group one or two years older or younger than them. Bangbei mainly include people aged between 15 and 55 years old. According to our study, young males aged 15–25 tend to initially form Bangbei with those who are of a similar age. Women start Bangbei before they are married, and typically leave their Bangbei and join their husband's Bangbei after marrying. A son-in-law can join a Bangbei of his wife's age or of his own animal sign. These Bangbei groups participate in temple fairs according to their needs, organize celebrations, participate in ritual practices associated with ploughing in the spring and harvesting in the autumn, and attend traditional celebrations; especially when the family of Bangbei members organize a funeral, construct a house, or prepare an important family worshipping event. All members of Bangbei help unconditionally free of charge. Those members who cannot provide assistance under special circumstances are required to pay certain fines to generate funds for the whole Bangbei to organize activities.

Bangbei with members between 25 to 55 years old not only have the above functions; they also have responsibilities and obligations associated with hosting festivals and other village public affairs, which often rotate yearly between villagers. This includes inviting surrounding villages to carry out dance or sport contests, undertaking collective worship in the village, organizing funeral services for families in the village, and jointly safeguarding the interests of the village, as well as other activities. Men aged 55 or older usually join the "society for the elderly" to assist and supervise in the running of festivals, funerals or other affairs in the village; women older than 55 volunteer to join "chant sessions" to provide humanitarian aid, and for holding Buddhist services during festivals, funerals, and for constructing houses.

5.2. Ties between People Outside and Family

Place is linked with the identities of individuals and groups [27], while the identities of individuals and groups are usually created through the communities within the particular scale that people carry out their daily lives. The key scale in Dianbei is the village. Villages provide a place for social activities that help form individual and group identities. Villagers of Dianbei often exhibit this unity of place and village life and production, and this persistent sameness and unity of place continues to be stabilized and strengthened through the daily production practices of villagers, relationships between villagers and their families, and between villagers themselves. Bangbei is the most important institution for connecting production practices and social relations. During daily production, Bangbei connects individuals, families and different groups with villages through organizing them to participate in collective production practices and to become engaged with public affairs. At the same time, the identities of individuals and collectives in the village can be formed through community organizations that facilitate mutual help among members, through their participation in public affairs management in villages, and the organization of recreational activities, worshipping, and eventually the formation of place [33].

Places not only have physical dimensions, but also imagined and emotional ones [34]. Considering this, and the development status and evolution of Bangbei, we find that no matter during what period, the "physical dimension" of place plays an important role. Villagers carry out social construction based on village membership and through individual production practices, and they receive support from Bangbei, in relation to various kinds of agricultural activities, commerce and trade, religious

activities, and cultural and recreational activities, thus forming a unique “social and cultural space”. In this unique space, with Bangbei as the foundation, the organization of groups of different ages can occur, as can the establishment of regulatory constraints. Moreover, through organizing various activities, such as home worship, and public affairs of the village, large-scale competitions, and other entertainment activities, one can distinguish between “we” from “the others”. This shows the unique feature of the “we”—that is, the placeness of village.

During the second stage, people’s production was mainly collective and commune-based, which is similar to Bangbei during the first stage. Both were unified on an organizational basis. However, the role of the commune was mainly to form production teams composed of a few large families, regardless of age, whereas Bangbei is an organization composed of people of similar ages. Limited by historical societal constraints, including material conditions and forms of agricultural production, there were generally few migrants. Considering agricultural seasonality, the scope of mobility of populations was historically limited, with people only rarely being able to travel far or for considerable periods of time. Therefore, at this stage the formation of place in Dianbei and the generation of placeness was the combined result of the “physical dimension” and the “imagined and emotional dimension” of place, i.e., activities that take Bangbei as the core organization, such as daily production practices carried out by villagers, the formation of individual and group identities, the building of various social relations, and the activities shaping and strengthening villagers’ “persistent sameness and unity of place” toward the village were directly affected by the constraints of the local “physical dimension”. At the same time, production practices affected by collective memory and the historic system of village organization, which in turn influenced individual imagination and emotional connection to the village, thus having an important effect on the formation of the concept of village—a unique “social and cultural space”.

During the third stage, Lijiang has become a key international and domestic destination for tourists. The government policy support provided to develop ethnic Bai Xinhua villagers to develop handicraft processing has also been important. As handicraft production and commerce came to dominate livelihoods, the number of “absent” villagers increased dramatically. Therefore, Bangbei in all the villages, and “societies for the elderly” who coordinate affairs between Bangbei, developed rules and regulations to constrain individuals in the villages according to imagined “customary law” combined with the current changing external environment (the impact of globalization and market forces) and specific practices (changes in the mode of production in villages, conversion of agricultural production to handicrafts and business, the increased mobility of the population, and the difficulty of implementing the public affairs of villages, etc.). The “present” individuals are basically continuing to act as people did during the first and second phases, and their ties with place continue to be strong, mainly due to production practices, social relations, and individual experiences.

Massey considered place to not only be composed of internal elements, but also of other parts of the world where there are clear connections with a particular place [35]. Here the “clear connections” between “other parts of the world” and villages in Dianbei are typically based on imagination and the emotions of “absent” individuals who remain connected through social relations between internal villagers and “absent” ones. Bangbei is the medium that directly links the emotions and social relationships of “non-present” villagers with “present” villages, mainly through the various regulations of Bangbei.

Li An is a 67-year old ethnic Bai villager and government official in Sanyinan Village. He is also a former deputy provincial cadre in Yunnan Province. He believes that due to village regulations and non-governmental agreements related to Bangbei, he is still recognized as being a member of his village, even though he is physically “absent”. These connections allow him to remain indirectly involved in village affairs, and this has affected his identity formation. He stated that: “Though a tree grows ever so high, the falling leaves will return to the ground. I was a villager, rather than an official in the village . . . I go back to the village once a year to chat with members of my Bangbei, and

to participate in group activities, and only during those times did I realize that I am still a villager of Sanyinan. They treat me like a member of the village . . . this makes me calm”.

In intuitive terms, Bangbei strengthens links between the village and the villagers through rules and regulations and the identities, imaginations and emotions of the “absent” villagers in relation to their villages. As a grassroots community organization, Bangbei maintains connections with people originally from the village who are now dispersed throughout the country and even abroad.

5.3. “Rootless People” Excluded by Bangbei

Bangbei organizes all “present” and “absent” villagers to participate through “regulations of Bangbei”. On the one hand, the system strengthens contacts between members of Bangbei and the village; but in the process of implementing relevant provisions, some members who do not belong to Bangbei are excluded, and this limits possibilities for their village interactions. They can be considered to be “rootless people” because their daily production and life is detached from the groups and villages that they previously belonged to. “Rootless people” refers primarily to the villagers abandoned by Bangbei due to serious breaches of regulations, or those who move out of the villages to work in enterprises and intuitions elsewhere, and no longer contact with other members. After being dismissed from a Bangbei, these people cannot join other Bangbei. Some come to regret this and attempt to rectify their relations with their Bangbei. In such cases Bangbei can reabsorb them.

According to our survey in Dianbei, this category of “rootless people” is relatively small, including 17 people from Xinhua, 15 from Mutun, seven from Luowei, five from Sanyinan and only two from other villages studied. However, with the increase in the number of villagers engaging in the handicraft business, the number of rootless people is expected to increase. According to our study, there are more “rootless people” in villages where more people are engaged in the handicraft industry, commerce or work in enterprises and institutions in other areas. Li Runfu and Zhou Yancai are villagers from different villages in Dianbei. They were dismissed by Bangbei for violating regulations. When interviewing them we could often feel that they felt helpless and frustrated for being abandoned by their respective groups. Li Runfu (Bai nationality, 65 years old, villager of Luowei, agricultural worker) stated that: “I was dismissed because of being frequently absent from the activities of Bangbei. I rarely participated in their activities . . . I often participated in temple fairs alone . . . I could not participate in their worshipping, funeral services inside the village, sacrifice rituals, and other activities . . . Now I can only get help from family members . . . I feel very lonely”. Zhou Yancai (Han nationality, 37 years old, villager of Mutun, and radio factory worker) said: “I have been living in Xiaguan (the capital of Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture) since I left home at the age of 21. My father died early, later I brought my mother to Xiaguan; I was the only child at home . . . I have not been back to the village . . . My uncle often called when the village held some ceremonies and encouraged me to pay the fine for not being there . . . I never paid nor participated in activities. Now people in the village have almost forgotten me. It does not matter . . . now I am worried whether I will be accepted if I go back to the village when I am old. My mother died, so after I retire I want to move her grave back to our ancestral land. I do not know whether the village people will agree or not”. He showed a melancholy expression on his face when talking about this.

People’s spatial experiences are important for constituting and interpreting places, and placeness is not just a geographical phenomenon, but is rich human experience [1]. After “rootless people” are excluded by Bangbei from the organization or community activities of the village, the geospatiality of their daily lives and production are not affected, but their social spaces become much smaller. Specifically, the daily production practices of individuals in the villages or anywhere else are not affected, but their scope of participation in production practices in the villages are limited to home or family; they cannot participate in group activities inside Bangbei, and a wider range of production practices based on Bangbei can no longer be accessed, thus limiting their social space. These limitations lead to their identities as members of groups and the managers of public affairs not being recognized, so their imagination and emotion toward villages becomes weakened. The restrictions and penalties

of Bangbei to “rootless people” limits their scope to engage in space production. Ultimately, these circumstances decentralize place and weaken one’s sense of place.

6. Conclusions

Place-making is about social relations, and the complex contacts between place and the outside world [35]. In Dianbei, Bangbei are community heritage organizations that play a crucial role in the production and maintenance of place, though linking mobile individuals and places (Figure 2). Bangbei uses internal social relations and relationships in villages and with “absent” people to internalize “non-localized” circumstances outside of villages. Indeed, Bangbei are linked to community heritage, but they are not spatially bounded in ways that such organizations are often imagined.

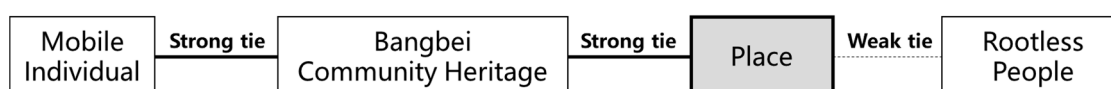


Figure 2. The key idea of this paper.

In the context of globalization, with the fluidity of capital, and the movement of people and goods, mobility has become prevalent. However, increased individual mobility has contributed to the weakening of social life in rural areas. However, in Heqing, this external “non-localized” effect has been localized through Bangbei, which link mobile individuals to unique “social and cultural spaces”—their villages. Bangbei help facilitate the maintenance of senses of places for those not present, at least to some extent, despite dramatic changes in mobility. Thus, Bangbei can be considered to be seen as important forms of spatially unbounded community heritage, ones that play crucial roles in place-making and in the maintenance of a sense of community.

This form has, however, some shortcomings. It excludes members who do not join Bangbei, resulting in their isolation from Bangbei, thereby depriving them of individual contact with groups and places. This affects their emotional ties with places and causes the maintenance of social relationships to gradually weaken, ultimately leading to even less attachment to their original places compared if Bangbei did not exist at all.

Throughout other Han villages in China, in the historical “acquaintance societies” formed, rural work has long been maintained by families, clans and the feudal elite [36], with the latter at least initially disappearing with the great reform that followed the adoption of communism in China. Individuals leave the villages to earn more income or for other purposes. In such cases, community heritage and village structure are reconstructed or risk disappearing under the impact of these external forces. The earlier geographical and kinship-based social structure is replaced by “modern families”, thus causing the self-organizing structures of the countryside to collapse. This unique “social and cultural space” of village is gradually and continuously dying out. The People’s Daily newspaper in China reported that a hundred villages disappear in China every day. This may be an exaggeration, but it does demonstrate a growing concern regarding village communities in China. However, the existence of Bangbei provides an important means for maintaining and even strengthening one’s sense of village placeness. Under the impact and influence of globalization, urbanization, and marketization, villages in minority areas have made innovative adjustments through the realignment of a traditional social system to meet the challenges of their own social needs, and to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Thus, through Bangbei, connections between people and places have generally been strengthened, thus providing the foundation for continuous reproduction and the formation of a particular type of place, which might best be referred to as home.

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