RESEARCH ON RECOVERING THE DAMAGED ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS OF THE CHINA YI MINORITY

Wan Qun, Department of Historical Document, Tianjin Library, 300191, and Liu Qiang, Institute for History of Science and Technology & Ancient Texts, Tsinghua University, 100084

ABSTRACT

A number of rare and precious manuscripts of the China Yi Minority, which are collected in the Tsinghua University, are valuable for scientific research. During the last few decades, all these rare materials were covered with dust and had their miserable stories of preservation. They were seriously damaged because of the mildew, rot, smoke and pages were stuck together. In 2004, the Tsinghua University Library received a special budget for sorting out and restoring these damaged ancient manuscripts. In 2005, the Tianjin Library was entrusted with taking full responsibility for restoring these Yi Minority rare manuscripts. Based on the specialty of these manuscripts, the repair workers carried out the daring experience and exploration in this work. In this paper, the authors trace back the collection of precious manuscripts in the Tsinghua University Library, and also introduce these materials’ academic value, and narrate the comprehensive detail of the repair work. This paper also summarizes and discusses the problems of solving and making special treatments during the repair work. The authors also hope to provide and to explore more methods for research and preservation of the Yi Minority ancient and rare books and manuscripts.

KEYWORDS

Ancient Manuscripts of Yi Minority
Yi Minority
Repair and Recovery of Damaged Manuscripts
Study of Ancient and Rare Books.

The Yi Minority is an old nationality with a long history in China. Bimo culture, which is recorded by the ancient Yi language, is the essential part of the Yi Minority culture. This culture has been inherited from generation to generation in various kinds of ancient religious rites in the way of hand-written copies. Bimo cultural documents, as the carrier recorded all aspects of Yi Minority’s society, which include the social politics, economy, philosophy, history, astronomy and calendar, culture and art. The Bimo culture is one of world’s most valuable cultural treas-
ures with speciality in its style, reality in its contents, and its inheritance of rarity and nationality. Therefore, the Bimo culture is really worth being preserved and being rescued. Tsinghua University Library collects a number of these ancient Bimo culture documents of the Yi Minority, which is rarely known to all. These ancient Yi Minority documents were collected by by Mr. Ma Xueliang, who was a great linguistic master of Chinese nationalities in 1940s. These rare and precious manuscripts are rich in content and are full of value for scientific research. But common people could not read them, and were laid in a corner of the stack room for a long time. Therefore, these manuscripts were seriously damaged with mildew, rot, smoke, and were stuck to each other. (see figure 1).

In the fall of 2004, supported by the Tsinghua University Educational Foundation, and working together with the experts of the Yi Minority language in the Central University of China Nationalities, the Tsinghua University librarian had sorted out these documents included all the detail description of the catalogue and made everything ready for repair and recovery.

By the end of 2005, Tianjin Library was entrusted to take the full responsibility for repair and recovery of these Yi Minority ancient documents. Not only did we make full use of traditional skills in the repair work, but we also made attempts and daring to explore the traditional techniques for the specialities of these ancient minority documents. The authors of this paper tried to trace back the hard work of collecting these ancient Yi Minority documents by Mr. Ma Xueliang, to record the whole work of the Tsinghua University Library in collecting these documents, and also to introduce the complete work in repairing and recovering the damaged documents. This paper also wants to sum up the experiences in solving the different problems and the special treatments during the recovery work. The authors hope to present the valuable experiences of preserving and recovering the ancient minority documents for our colleagues to make reference.

1. THE VALUABLE CLASSICS AND CULTURAL TREASURY WERE HANDED DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

Ma Xueliang (1913–1999) was a famous national linguist and national educationist and writer at home and aboard. He went into the Yi Minority region and learned from the Yi Minority people. He studied the Yi language and translated Yi Minority classics. He made great and brilliant achievement on Yi culture. In the early 1940s, Mr. Ma applied for a fund from the Institute of History and Philology (IHP) of Academia Sinica, and with the help of the grant, he went into the Yi Minority region in Wuding and Luquan of Yunnan Province from Sichuang Province. He visited many local inhabitants and inspected Yi Minority’s customs and habits. He also studied Yi classics there. At that time, the common Yi people did not know their own writing materials. The Yi characters were only used by a few intellectual Bimos. Bimos, transliterated from Yi pronunciation, also called Bai-
mao, Baima, Bimu and so on. Bimos were professional teachers who taught Yi classics, and persons who hosted the sacrificial rites. They are the very important persons, who know the Yi history, the different rites and customs, sacrificial ties, divination; they pray for freedom from natural calamities and cure the sickness. In the old time, these Bimos stayed with the tribal chiefs all the time to give correct and valuable advice on events. In 1943, an old Bimo recommended Mr. Ma Xueliang for going to the Feng’s chieftain yamen in Maolian country in Wuding county. Mr. Ma accepted the suggestion and spent six days to get there from Kunming. The Feng’s chieftains took the north area to Kunming in Yunnan Province and even the parts area in Guizhou Province as their sphere of influence in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A.D.). They were devout religious believers and set up schools from generation to generation. They built the library in the local government building and collected many rare and precious Yi books and relics in this library. Therefore, this building was very valuable. The last chieftainess, named Na Anheqing, was well-educated, sensible and enlightened. She knew the Yi history and culture very well. It was great pity that almost all these treasure books and relics were lost in the war disturbances with the only exception of several hundred volumes. In order to collect these scattered books and classics, Mr. Ma made a suggestion to the chieftainess for holding a mass meeting and asking for the Bimos to donate their own books. On January 18, 1944, the mass meeting was successfully held by the chieftainess. Many well-known Bimos from the adjacent counties participated in the meeting on time. The performances in this meeting were in highly skilled with wonderful result, and lasted all night long. People came together in crowds with a warm and enthusiastic, grand scene. The rare and precious books of Yi classics and relics were sent to the local chieftainess continuously like a steady stream for more than a month after the grand mass meeting. Mr. Ma Xueliang’s wish of collecting the Yi classics came true.

In the 1940s, almost none of the Chinese scholars paid attention to the Chinese national linguistics. It was blankness in this field of science research. Mr. Mao Xueliang was upset and felt uneasy in his heart for the great damage of these rare and precious books by the foreign missionaries, and the greed and pandering of the scholars from France, Britain, Germany for these Yi Minority relics. In order to protect these valuable cultural treasures and to avoid their disappearance and damage, Mr. Ma wrote a letter to Mr. Fu Sinian, who was the director of the Institute of History and Philology (IHP) of Academia Sinica in Sichuan then, and asked to collect Yi classics in the name of the central government. At the same time, Mr. Ma persuaded the last chieftainess to sell or donate this collection of rare ancient books to the central government. Finally, the chieftainess sold the rare and ancient books at a low price. Mr. Ma sorted out, checked, and packaged these books personally. The chieftainess also assigned a cavalry to protect the books to go out of the mountains. There were about more than 2,100 volumes in this collection of books, and they were divided into five sections. Unfortunately, these books were scattered in different places of China because of the social disturbance dur-
ing the last half century. At present, these books are collected in the National Library of China, the Institute of History and Philology (IHP) of Academia Sinica in Taiwan, Peking University library, Tsinghua University library and Nankai University library.

There were more than thirty packages of these Yi classics books collected in the Tsinghua University library. These packages had never been unpacked and had kept their original condition since the 1940s, when they were sent from Yunnan Province to Beijing. In the fall of 2004, supported by the Tsinghua University Educational Foundation and working together with the experts of the Yi Minority in the Central University of Nationalities, the Tsinghua University librarian sorted out these rare and precious books, included all the detailed description of catalogue, and made everything ready for repair and recovery. These descriptions included: the title name of Yi, and Chinese languages, the author, edition, abstract, collation (physical description), the feature of the edition, annotations and comments, binding and the broken situation, etc. All of this information was put into the database for retrieval.

After sorting out these rare and valuable Yi documents and books, which were sealed up for more than half century, there are 252 volumes altogether with only one of them in the Ming edition of wood block printing. Others were manuscripts or hand-written books from the late Ming Dynasty through to the early Republic of China. Most of them were the copy of editions in Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 A.D.). Many of the hand-written books have beautiful black-and-white illustrations. One of them has elegant color illustrations. The pages in these books are various in number. There are about 200 pages of two books Yi Han Jiaodian. There are only four pages of the books Xiancha Liyi Jing, Sheli Shizu Citang Jing, Qingjing Xiaozai Jing. The size of the pages is different. The book Chazhi Picture is 90 cm. (H) x 67.6 cm. (W) in each page. If we open the picture, it will extend nearly ten meters long. The size of the smallest books has only 9 cm. (H) x 5 cm. (W), which can be held in the palm is exquisite and lovely.

There are eight categories classified by the following subjects:

– Literature: 7 volumes. 6 of them are poems and rhyme prose; 1 of them is narrative poetry.
– Economy: 7 volumes. 6 of them are account books; 1 of them is a reckoning book.
– Religion: 201 volumes.
  – 23 of them are on divination;  
  – 10 of them are on pray and wishes;  
  – 29 of them are on sacrificial rites;  
  – 67 of them are on how to make a sacrifice;  
  – 5 of them are on the magic arts (or theurgy);  
  – 36 of them are on fasting;  
  – 6 of them are on pray;  
  – 11 of them are on BaiJieJing;
– 3 of them are on the worship;
– 5 of them are on the worship for the ancestor;
– 1 of them is on the directory of the shrines
– 2 of them are collections of drawings
– 1 of them is on the calender
– Geography: 6 volumes. All of them are give the transportation directions.
– Medicine: 3 volumes.
– History: 18 volumes.
  – 2 of them are Biography;
  – 1 of them is on the narrative epic
  – 10 of them are on the historical records;
  – 3 of them are on genealogy;
  – 2 of them are on Bimo history.
– Philosophy: 7 volumes
  – 5 of them are on prediction;
  – 1 of them is on ethics;
  – 1 of them is on explanation.
– Education: 3 volumes.
  – 2 of them are on the quotation;
  – 1 of them is on comment.

If we compared these with the other sections of the Yi Minority Rare books, which are collected in the other five libraries, the Yi collection in the Tsinghua library has its own characteristics.

First, they rare and precious Yi books, which are handwritten have a long history and have high historical value. They came from the Feng’s Yamen in Wuding county, where the Luo Wu culture is popular. These books are the early handwritten copies, which are the exemplars for recopying. There are 32 titles in which we can find the author’s name or and the names of the copier’s. Some of the authors or the copiers were famous Bimos, who really knew the Yi Minority language. It is seldom happened in the ancient and old Yi rare and precious books. Some of the books even have the clear time of recopying. The book entitled Education Theory of Yi and Han 49 Teachers was copied in March, 1756 (21st year of the Qian Long Emperor period, the Qing Dynasty), which is the earliest book. Qiji Zhufu Jing was brought out in 1936 (25th year, Republic of China). This is the most recent book.

Second, this collection of books has special and valuable content, which has the important documents for study and research on the original religion and astronomy of the Yi Minority. For example, there is the huge picture of Chizhi illustration, the Picture of Shrine, the Bimo Collection of Mr. Zhang Wenyuan etc. The seven account books recorded the annual financial situation and tributes and others in the local old society. These records reflect the reformation from the slave society to modern social transformation in the Yi region. It is full of value for us to study and research Yi Minority’s economy history.
Gu Yiwen (The Ancient Yi Minority Words) is the Yi Minority’s original transliteration words. It was ever called Cuanwen, Weishu and Luolouwen, etc. In order to distinguish the ancient words from the new Yiwen, which passed the standard program in 1975, it is generally called Gu Yiwen or LaoYiwen. According to the Yi legend, the Yiwen books were brought down by Bimo, who was dispatched by the God from the heaven to the Yi land. Therefore, the Gu Yiwen books were regarded as Tianshu (the book from heaven). The Bimos put these books in a wooden box and stored them on a high place and burnt the incense to worship. Before they held the theurgy, they had to make sacrifices to these books. Otherwise, it would not be effective. When the books were too old to be used, they would be burnt after being sacrificed in order to avoid getting them dirty and to show respect to these books. The common Yi people could not understand this Yi written language and also could not read them. As the time passed by, and the society changed, there were fewer and fewer Yi people, who could read and understand these Yi classics. Therefore, Ma took these classics as “the book of decline like a sun setting beyond and western hill.”

These Yiwen classics deal with the Yi Minority’s history, philosophy, religion, culture, science and technology, astronomy, medicine, etc. They are the accumulation of ancient literature with precious national cultural heritage and treasury of knowledge.

These rare and precious Yi books collected in the Tsinghua University library, are still kept their original binding formats, and also they provide a good example of binding structure and evidence for scientific research. The most of the writing-style is kept the Yiwen’s tradition. The words are written in the page from up to downward and from left to right in vertical rank. Only some books, which were influenced by Han books, are written from right to left vertically. Most of the binding formats are wrapped up in cloth of a scroll. It is something like the thread binding format. (see figure 2 special binding)

The package method

To put a piece of cloth which is bigger than the book under the folded pages. This cloth was made of sackcloth, cotton or huocao. Three volumes will have a leather cover with it. This cloth was sewed from one edge to another edge and wrapped string. After wrapping, it will be like a scroll. Besides, there also had Mao Zhuang (bind the page together only by 2–3 point, not by thread.) or Jing Zhe Zhuang (bind the book by folding the book with hard cover on the book face and the back cover). In the Yi Minority region, the common people often used the huocao fiber for spinning and weaving. A book of Nanzhao Tongji says: there is a plant named huocaobu, its leaf has 3 or 4 cun (9.9 cm – 13.2 cm) long and crawl on the ground.
People can draw this fiber from the leaf’s back and weave the fiber into cloth... This plant can make fire, so it is named of *huocao*.

Besides the special structure, the paper of Yi books was also different from the Han ancient books. The Yi paper was made by Yi people who used the local methodology to produce the paper called *Goupi paper*. The fiber of this kind of paper is coarse and long. These books were used to sacrifice and were often exposed to smoke in the shrine. So, the colors of these books were getting darker and darker.

There are different completeness of these Yi ancient and rare books. Some of them are intact. Others are seriously damaged and needed repair and recovery urgently. The techniques of the Yi Minority book materials production were rarely handed it down or spread. The work of repair and recovery of these minority books had never even been heard of. Through the hard work of investigation and detailed discussion, the librarian of the Tianjin library and the specialists of Tsinghua University decided to take the principle of “Repairing the Old One Should Be Like the Original One” for executing this significant work.

### 3. REPAIRING SCIENTIFICALLY AND RESTORING REVERSIBLY.

According to the existing repair experiences, we carried on the repair of these old Yi Minority rare and precious handwritten books in the Tsinghua University library scientifically.

First, we established a complete repairing file on the basic of the archive in Tsinghua University. And also in-put these catalogue items into the computer’s database for retrieval. We recorded every part in our repairing working process detail. We analyzed the paper of each book. We recorded the physical descriptions of the book’s appearance, broken or worn-out circumstances, and also the plan of repair. We took the photos of every repair step too. All of the information will provide the original data for further repair work.

Secondly, we set up the repair principle. After making tests again and again, we decided to accept the principles of “Repairing the Old One Should be Like the Original One”; “Give Emergency treatment first and then cure;” “Reversible Repairing.” The following picture shows this repair case.

#### 3.1 Method of Special Folding of the Pages.

Call number 136. The book of *Shizu Jizu Dadian (A Dictionary of Sacrifice the Clan Ancestor)*, was not damaged seriously. When we opened the pages, we found the pages were folded specially. A big page folded into some small pages and than bound together. The bottom of the pages was in a line and the foreedges were separated. (See figure 3) We just patched the damaged parts and then folded and bound them as the original one.
3.2 Wash or not wash.

As the reasons we described above the Yi rare and precious books were heavily smoke damaged and hard to read (See figure 4). Some papers were stuck together and were very difficult to separate. Therefore, we had to steam it in order to make it soft, and carefully, slowly separated it, and then using the pure water of 70–80°C to wash it until the characters on the paper are clear. Later on, we had to put it in a shady place to dry.

Some books were written in red ink. (See figure 5) Some pages were tattered as cotton fiber or crisp. If they are washed, these papers will be dyed and spoilt. So, they cannot be washed.

3.3 Repairing and Recovering the Book Cover and the Pages, Which Have the Words in Double Sides

Call number 70. The book of *Jitan Qingshen Jing (A classic for Inviting the Divinity)* is a folded book with pages of the words in double sides. (See figure 6) We soaked the book cover and the pages and separated it. Then, we let it dry in a shady place. We patched each page and membrane to make it like the original one.

Call number Yi-168. The book of *XianShui Jing (Classic of Devoted Water)*, its cover was stuck together with the first page. We separated it and patched it and recovered them as the original book cover and the first page of the book. (See figure 7 and figure 8)

3.4 Flexible Using the Traditional Skills of Repairing, Patching, Mounting and Inlaying

During the repair and recovery work, we made full use of the Chinese traditional techniques. We tried in every means to keep every page of the damaged book in its original style.

To some of the particular circumstances, we have to treat them flexibly. For example, the call number Yi-49, the book of *Shishuo Jidian Nongruo Jing* had serious damage, but it was only in a few pages, which were very thin. We decided to mount the whole page in order to bind it beautifully. (See figure 9)

Another example, the call number Yi-250, a book of *Baijie Daochang Ji Weirong Shenzun Jing* was made of white cotton paper, which had became rot like wad. The bottom of the page was incomplete. (See figure 10) We treated this book like this.

- To put the page on the working table and cleaned the stains on the paper with a writing brush lightly.
- To clean the stains on the paper, we have to use the warm and pure water with the Chinese writing brush to clean several times.
- To use the absorb water paper and tried to make the paper dry.
- To use the inlaying repair method to patch the damaged area with white cotton paper.
After binding, this book looks very beautiful with the new book mark. (See figure 11)

### 3.5 To keep the Original Yi Book Binding and Bring Forth the New Binding format

The collection of these Yi Minority rare and precious books in Tsinghua University library were kept in original form. Therefore, we can learn the variety of ancient Yi Minority book binding formats. Before starting to repair these books, we had the prerequisite to obey and keep the principle of “Repairing the Old One Should Like the Original One”. The overwhelming majority of these Yi documents were recovered with the original binding formats finally, with the only exception being of those books that were wrapped up in cloth of a scroll. Because it will be inconvenient to store them in the book shelves, we had to make a little change and gave a bigger cover, which was twice the size as the page for each book. Anyway, we still kept the trussing gunny rope. (See figure 12)

Besides, we also made some attempts of giving the different colors for these book covers in accordance with the book’s quality and its contents. More than 80% of these books were about the religion. The books of Zuoji Jing (On how to make sacrifice) and Zuozhai Jing (Books on Fast) have 103 volumes. So, we selected the different colors and materials for the different book’s contents. For example, the color for the book cover of geography and history was dark green, the color for the religion and economy was brown, and the color for literature was reddish brown. Thus “it will be convenient for us to classify these books easily from the different colors of the book covers.” (See figure 13).

Almost all the Yi books were handwritten. There were only a few of them that were the editions of wood block prints. The book of Quan Shanjing (A Classic for Persuade People Doing Good Things) had two editions. The call number YI-244 that is collected in the Tsinghua University library is the earliest one. It was engraved and printed in the late Ming Dynasty by Feng’s chieftain. The surviving engraved wood blocks were stored in Na’s Yamen and were donated to the China National Library. The title of this book is Taishang Ganying Pian (A Famous Daoist Moral Book), which has 22,900 words, and was translated into the Yi Language and was popular and easy to understand. From this book, we can easily understand the influence of Han’s Taoism thought in the Yi Minority region, and the cultural communication between the two nationalities in ancient time. Therefore, we adopted the patching repairing skill to save this book and choose the original thread binding format, (see figure 14) and used a blue cover to highlight its speciality. (see figure 15)

The ancient Chinese Minority’s books are full of knowledge. They enrich Chinese history and culture. These Yi Minority ancient and rare books describe the Yi Minority’s history and culture, and also reflect an important part of Chinese history. The contents of these Yi ancient and rare books are broad and profound with many aspects and have strong local characteristics, and the minority speciality.
Much of them are fresh to the Han Nationality. With the help of the Yi fellow countrymen, Mr. Ma Xueliang tried his utmost to rescue these Yi precious and rare books, which will be handed down from generation to generation. He made a great contribution to Chinese history.

We are moved and inspired by Mr. Ma’s spirit, and worked to repair and recover these Yi Minority precious and rare books. It is necessary to summarize the recovery experience and the weak points for improving our work. It has also great significance for preservation of and research in the ancient and rare books in China as well as for our colleagues around the world.

Figure 1: The original state.  
Figure 2: Special binding.  
Figure 3: Folding method.  
Figure 4: Books need to wash.  
Figure 5: Pages not to wash.  
Figure 6: Pages wrote in two-sided.
Figure 7: Pages not to tear off.

Figure 8: Pages torn off.

Figure 9: Page mounted.

Figure 10: Pages before recovered.

Figure 11: Pages after recovered.

Figure 12: Book after binding.

Figure 13: Books after binding.

Figure 14: Book before restoring.
REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Wan Qun is with the Department of Historical Document, Tianjin Library, 300191; E-mail: wanqun2005@163.com
Liu Qiang is with the Institute for History of Science and Technology & Ancient Texts, Tsinghua University, 100084; E-mail: roselau@tsinghua.edu.cn

Figure 15: Recovered book.