



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Value Reconstruction of Yi Myths in Dian Culture: A Comparative Study of the Myths of "Brother-Sister Marriage After the Flood" Among the Yi People in Kaiyuan, China

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 12, 2024	The myth of "brother-sister marriage after the flood" is a very representative ancient myth type among the Chinese, especially among the ethnic minorities in Yunnan. This study takes the villages of Beige, Zongshe, Pipo, and Laole in Kaiyuan City as the main research objects, with the main research objectives being to analyze the historical reasons for the formation of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths in the four Yi villages and to comparatively study the similarities and differences in the living myths of Yi "brother-sister marriage after the flood" and their related cultural traditions in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City. The main research method is qualitative research, using archival and documentary research methods, ethnographic approach methods (fieldwork and in-depth interviewing), and comparative research methods to obtain a wealth of data. A comparative study was conducted from four perspectives: the contents of the myths, the similar folk belief practices related to myths, the geo-socio-cultural environments, and the transmission of living myths. This multi-dimensional research method ensured the reliability and validity of the research, allowing a glimpse into the unique ethnic culture and aesthetic thinking created by the ancestors of the Yi people over the long years and an attempt to reshape the value of Yi myths in the form of art and culture.
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## INTRODUCTION

The origin of humanity has long been a subject of inquiry, both scientifically and mythologically. Myths about human origins often blend fantasy with ancestral reverence, with many cultures attributing humanity's beginnings to a primordial couple. Notable examples include the stories of Fuxi and Nuwa in Chinese mythology, Adam and Eve in the Bible (Corresponds to Aadam and Hawwaa in the Holy Quran), and Izanagi and Izanami in Japanese lore. Among the ethnic minorities of southwest China, particularly the Yi and Miao in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan provinces, the motif of "brother-sister marriage after the flood" is a prominent mythological narrative. These stories describe a catastrophic flood that decimated human life, leaving a sibling pair to repopulate the earth. Such myths are not merely tales of survival but encapsulate deep cultural values and beliefs about humanity's origins and relationship with nature (Sun & Wen, 1993).

The Yi people, central to this study, primarily inhabit Yunnan, Sichuan, and Guizhou provinces, with a few communities in neighboring Southeast Asian countries. They trace their ancestry to the ancient Qiang people of western China. The "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth holds particular cultural significance among the Yi of Kaiyuan, Yunnan Province, where it symbolizes the origins of Yi culture and expresses reverence for life and nature. This myth has become a cornerstone of Kaiyuan Yi's cultural identity, embodying their national spirit and providing a sense of belonging (Wang, 2007).

Despite the rich mythological heritage of the Yi and other ethnic groups in southwest China, systematic research on these myths has been limited. The discovery of the Human Ancestors Temple in Laole Village, Kaiyuan, by scholar Li Zixian in 2007, marked a pivotal moment in the study of Yi "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths. This temple, one of the few surviving sites dedicated to such narratives, provides valuable material for exploring the intersection of flood myths, ancestral beliefs, and Yi aesthetic thinking in Yunnan's Yi Traditional culture. Subsequent academic efforts, such as the 2010 International Symposium on the Brother-Sister Marriage Myths of the Yi People in Kaiyuan City, have further highlighted the unique narrative structure and cultural depth of these myths, underscoring their importance in understanding Dian culture's pluralistic and aesthetic characteristics (Liu, 2007).

Yunnan, known for its rich ethnic diversity, is home to a wealth of mythological traditions. The interplay of local ethnic groups, historical migrations, and external cultural influences has created a vibrant and dynamic cultural landscape. However, the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths of the Yi remain underexplored, particularly in their cultural and ecological contexts. While myths of this type appear across various ethnic groups in the region, the specific narratives among the Kaiyuan Yi reflect unique adaptations influenced by local environmental and social conditions. This study seeks to fill the gap by analyzing these myths through a comparative lens, examining variations across four villages in Kaiyuan (Beige, Zongshe, Pipo, and Laole). By doing so, it aims to uncover the aesthetic and cultural values embedded in the myths and the socio-historical factors shaping their transmission and evolution (Zhang, 1999).

Through this research, the goal is not only to document these myths but also to contribute to broader discussions on the preservation and reinterpretation of intangible cultural heritage in the face of modernity and globalization. This research can promote a comprehensive and systematic study of the myths of ethnic minorities in Yunnan, establish a cultural protection and inheritance system, Through academic exchanges and joint research, the global influence of Yunnan minority myths can be enhanced, cultural confidence can be improved, and an important contribution can be made to the inheritance and innovation of the outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation.

### **Research Objective:**

1. To analyze the historical reasons for the formation of the "Brother-Sister Marriage after the Flood" myths in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City;
2. To comparatively study the similarities and differences in the living myths of Yi "Brother-Sister Marriage after the Flood" and their related cultural traditions in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Theories and Concepts Related to Mythology**

Mythology, as a discipline, has deep roots in human history, with myths serving as a reflection of early human consciousness and their attempts to make sense of the world around them. Myths were born out of humanity's efforts to understand the supernatural, the natural world, and their place within it. They represent both imaginative constructs and collective beliefs that grew into complex systems explaining the cosmos, social orders, and human experiences. Over time, myths helped humans articulate their understanding of life, death, and the forces of nature, contributing to the creation of cultures and civilizations.

The concept of "myth" itself is highly debated and has many interpretations. One of the earliest and most influential theories is that of Euhemerism, proposed by the ancient Greek philosopher Euhemerus. This theory suggests that the gods of myth were originally historical figures—kings, heroes, or ancestors—who were later deified. According to Euhemerism, myths are not fanciful tales but distorted accounts of real historical events. Some scholars have applied this theory to Chinese myths, suggesting that many deities and legendary figures may have had a historical basis (Zhao, 2019). In Chinese scholarship, figures like the legendary emperor Yu, who is said to have controlled

floods, and Nuwa, who is credited with mending the heavens, are often seen through this lens as historical figures whose extraordinary deeds were mythologized over time (Chang, 2000; Meng & Meng, 2005).

A contrasting theory to Euhemerism is Animism, a concept championed by British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor in his seminal work *Primitive Culture* (1871). Tylor argued that early humans attributed a soul or spirit to all living things, explaining the world through beliefs in supernatural forces. This animistic view laid the foundation for religious and mythological thought by positing that natural phenomena and human actions were governed by spiritual forces. Tylor's ideas have greatly influenced the study of myth, suggesting that myths often arise from the human need to explain the unseen, the unknown, and the divine. In addition, in order to grasp the historical connection between various cultural phenomena of mankind, Taylor believes that old cultural phenomena, such as certain tools, art forms, rituals, customs, concepts, etc., will be transferred from one primary cultural stage to another later stage due to the force of habit and that they are the vivid witnesses or living documents of the primary cultural stage and examples of the evolution of new culture from the old culture. This existing phenomenon of the old culture is "Survival in Culture." Through it, one can trace the old cultural structure and, thus, the whole development history of human culture (Yang, 2009).

In the Chinese context, historical interpretation and comparative mythological analysis have also played a significant role in mythological research. Scholars like Meng Fanren have suggested that the myth of Nuwa mending the heavens, for example, could be seen as a symbolic representation of ancient natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods (Meng F.R. & Meng W.Q., 2005). Such interpretations view myths not only as religious narratives but also as reflections of social, environmental, and historical realities.

## **2. Mythological Motifs and Ancestral Beliefs**

Mythological motifs are fundamental narrative elements, recurring across cultures and time periods. These motifs, which can be elements, themes, or plots, are central to mythological stories and reflect universal human experiences and emotions. These motifs not only appear in ancient myths but also continue to influence modern literary and artistic works. They serve as a mirror of collective consciousness, providing insights into humanity's exploration of nature, self-awareness, and the cosmos (Wang, 2009). Furthermore, mythological motifs have a transformative quality, enabling them to evolve and combine in various forms, thereby reflecting the unique cultural identity of a people (Chen, 1997).

The connection between mythological motifs and ancestral beliefs is particularly evident in the portrayal of ethnic ancestors in mythologies around the world. These ancestors often possess extraordinary power and wisdom, serving as creators and culture bearers. For instance, the myth of Nuwa in Chinese tradition not only positions her as a creator of the world but also as a cultural founder, shaping the identity of the Han people. Similarly, the Lisu people's mythological tales describe the origins of clans, such as the Tiger, Bear, and Monkey clans, through stories of divine marriages and the supernatural transformation of animals into human ancestors (Wang, 2009).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY :**

This study adopts a primarily qualitative approach, aimed at analyzing the historical origins and comparative aspects of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City. The research uses Archival and Documentary Research, Ethnographic Approach, and Comparative Research to ensure reliability and validity.

**1. The study progresses in three stages:**

Archival and Documentary Research: Historical archives and documents were reviewed to understand the evolution, inheritance, and cultural context of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths in Kaiyuan.

Ethnographic Approach: Fieldwork and in-depth interviews were conducted with inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, community workers, and university students to gather insights about the myths and their cultural significance.

Comparative Research: A comparative analysis of the myth of "brother-sister marriage after the flood" in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City explores the commonalities and differences, as well as the interactions and exchanges. The problem is studied in-depth from a holistic, comprehensive, and meticulous perspective so as to obtain more comprehensive research results. This comparative study focuses on four directions of comparative analysis: the contents of the myths; the similar folk belief practices related to myths; the geo-socio-cultural environments; and the mode of transmission of the living myths.

**2. Population and Sample**

**2.1 Main Research Objects**

The research focuses on the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths in four main Yi villages in Kaiyuan: Beige Township, Zongshe Village, Pipo Village, and Laole Village. The study includes local rituals and ceremonies related to these myths, particularly those preserved in the "Human Ancestors Temple" in Laole Village.

The research objects include:

The myths and cultural practices in Beige Township (including variations and related Loong Rituals),

The myth and related folk traditions (including the "Ancestor Woodcarving") in Zongshe Village, Yangjie Township,

The myth and associated funeral rituals in Pipo Village, Zhongheyang Township,

The myth and the Human Ancestors Temple in Laole Village.

**2.2 Geographic Scope**

Fieldwork will be conducted in four Yi-populated villages in Kaiyuan City: Beige Township, Zongshe Village, Pipo Village, and Laole Village.

**2.3 Population Scope and Sampling**

In-depth interviews will be conducted with key cultural inheritors and community members in the villages. Participants will be selected based on their knowledge of local myths, their role in cultural preservation, and their age group (20–40 years and over 40 years). The study aims to balance perspectives from both younger generations and senior cultural experts (Table 1).

**Table 1 Population Scope and Sample Sampling**

Place Interviewed	Total Interviewees and Age Range	Criteria for Sample Selection
Beige Township	1 (over 40 years old)	Myth bearers or those deeply knowledgeable about local mythological traditions.

Zongshe Village	1 (over 40 years old)	Village elders with knowledge of oral myths and "Ancestor Woodcarvings."
Pipo Village	2 (1 aged 20-40, 1 aged over 40)	Myth inheritors with knowledge of local traditions and related worship practices.
Laole Village (Human Ancestors Temple)	2 (over 40 years old)	Myth inheritors and those responsible for the Human Ancestors Temple and its cultural practices.
Kaiyuan Cultural Relics Management Department and the Kaiyuan Yi Society	3 (over 40 years old)	Key figures in cultural relics management and Yi cultural preservation.
Kunming University of Science and Technology	5 (20-40 years old)	Minority students from Kunming University of Science and Technology, including but not limited to Yi students.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS :**

1. The historical reasons for the formation of the "Brother-Sister Marriage after the Flood" myths in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City.

**1.1 Archival and Documentary Research**

The survival of myth is deeply tied to the cultural ecosystem. In Kaiyuan's Laole Village, the Human Ancestors Temple, dedicated to the surviving brother and sister after the flood, stands as a unique cultural site in southwest China. Unlike myths preserved in ancient texts, the Yi people's "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth survives as "living form culture," embedded in daily life. This myth reflects the Yi people's national historical memory and ancestral beliefs, offering insights into the unique cultural and aesthetic thinking developed over time.

Research traces the origins of the myth to the primitive mythological art of the nomadic hunting period, evident in the Xiaolongtan Hongshiyi Cliff Paintings. The natural stability of Yunnan's environment facilitated the migration and creation of various ethnic cultures, including the Yi. The myth is prevalent in two main areas: the high-altitude eastern region of Kaiyuan, which preserves the primitive traditions of Yi culture, and the Yi-Han mixed area in the northwest, where Yi culture interacts with Han and foreign influences. In both regions, the myth's transmission is tied to the local economy and geography, with changes in these factors threatening the continuity of the myth.

The Yi people's mythological system is integral to their religious beliefs, sacrificial rituals, and folk traditions, strengthening their ethnic identity. Despite modern changes and the weakening of mythological worship in the post-scientific era, the spirit of these myths endures, offering insights into ethnic history and philosophy.

In Laole Village, the Human Ancestors Temple, built during the Qing Dynasty, commemorates the brother and sister myth. It hosts rituals like the "Sun Ceremony," showcasing the fusion of ethnic mythology and multicultural values. This temple is an important cultural relic, vital for studying the Yi people's mythology, aesthetic values, and cultural preservation.

**1.2 Data analysis of Ethnographic Approach**

**(1) Beige Township**

Since June 2024, the researcher has visited Beige Township, Kaiyuan City, which is located in the high alpine mountains in eastern Kaiyuan and is a typical Yi ethnic settlement. The traditional Pula language and folk customs remain well-preserved here. The Yi cultural preservation area in Beige is

a provincial intangible heritage project and the only one in Kaiyuan. The township's mountainous landscape, lush forests, and sacred "Loong Forest" play a central role in the local Yi people's beliefs. This forest is considered the domain of the dragon god, and the villagers treat it with deep reverence, contributing to the area's ecological protection.

The Yi people in Beige Township practice totem worship, revering the Loong tree and other natural elements as symbols of ancestral protection. The Loong Rituals, held four times a year, are central to community life. These rituals, involving sacrifices to the Loong tree, include both public and private ceremonies, with only certain families participating in each. The rituals, conducted by men, feature prayers for prosperity and a good harvest, and include sacrifices of animals like pigs and chickens. The ceremony concludes with a communal feast and singing.

The myth of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" in Beige is more complete and complex compared to other Yi regions; variations of this myth, along with the "god-human marriage after the flood" myths, are also passed down in the region. Among the four branches of the Kaiyuan Yi people, only the Pula people of Beige Township have inherited the myth of "brother-sister marriage after the flood," while also telling the myth of "god-human marriage after the flood," which continues to evolve as living traditions. These myths are deeply intertwined with local beliefs, cultural identity, and the region's ecological context.

## **(2) Zongshe Village**

Zongshe Village, located in Yangjie Township, Kaiyuan City, is a traditional village of the Pula people, part of the Yi ethnic group. It is undergoing modernization, with new roads, houses, and fields blending with the surrounding forest. The Yi women in bright traditional costumes continue to work in the fields, preserving the village's cultural identity. Despite this, Zongshe is undergoing significant changes, and the traditional culture is at risk.

Zongshe, like Beige Township, celebrates the annual grand Loong Rituals, but the mythical culture of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" has been eroded, particularly by the influence of Han culture. The Pula people in Zongshe combine ancestor worship with mythology, creating "Nashetang" (ancestor spirit wood carvings), which are used in ceremonies to honor ancestors. According to local myths, the Pula ancestors survived the flood by hiding in a barrel that landed on a Duoyi fruit tree. This tree, like the loong tree, is a symbol of the ancestors and is used to make the "Nashetang."

However, these wood carvings have become rare in Zongshe Village. The construction of new villages has accelerated the obsolescence of traditional Yi housing. Coupled with the fact that traditional "Nashetang" requires burning for sacrifice, this has resulted in the loss or burning of many old wood carvings, and the younger generation has not learned the traditional craft. Additionally, modern cultural influences and stereotypes about the woodcarvings have caused the younger Pula people to distance themselves from the tradition, viewing it as "feudal superstition." This, combined with the decline in craftsmanship, has led to a loss of interest in the ancestral wood carvings and the myths they represent.

The integration of mythology with folk beliefs is a key feature of living myths, but in Zongshe, this tradition is fading due to external influences and modernity.

## **(3) Pipo Village**

Pipo Village, located at the intersection of Zhongheyang, Beige, and Dazhuang Townships, was once a bustling relay station. The name "Pipo" means "a village surrounded by stones" in Yi, reflecting the area's unique landscape. The villagers, mainly Luoluo people of the Yi branch Nisu, still speak their native language, though fewer children can now do so due to modernization and the village's historical role as an ancient postal relay station.

At the village entrance, Qing Dynasty steles stand as silent witnesses to history, marking ancient policies on incorruptibility and environmental protection. The village's unique stone houses, made

from local materials, have been preserved as part of Honghe Prefecture's cultural heritage since 2005. These houses offer excellent insulation, staying warm in winter and cool in summer.

During the visit, the villagers' hospitality was evident as they served a hearty Yi meal, symbolizing the deep connection to ancient Yi customs, including animal sacrifice as part of religious practices. This hospitality echoed the village's continued adherence to traditional Yi culture.

Pipo's history is closely tied to the Yi script, once preserved by Li Caibao, the village Beima. Li dedicated his life to preserving Yi culture and teaching Yi scriptures, passing on this knowledge to apprentices. After his death in 2020, his legacy continues through the Yi Culture Institute, which also displays unique Yi artifacts.

The myth of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" is still practiced in Pipo, intertwined with ancestral spirit worship. The myth tells of a great flood, where the ancestors hid in a barrel that was saved by a sacred tree. This tree is revered today, and wood from it is used in Yi funeral rituals, blending myth and daily life.

#### **(4) Laole Village**

Laole Village, located in the semi-mountainous area of Xiaolongtan, Kaiyuan City, is home to the Gaisu branch of the Yi people, who call themselves Gaisupo or Luoluopo. Since the Ming Dynasty, the blending of Yi and Han cultures has shaped the village's identity. The village is home to the Human Ancestors Temple, the only surviving "Human Ancestors Temple" in southwestern China, dedicated to the siblings who survived a great flood in Yi mythology. This temple symbolizes the fusion of Yi and Han cultures and holds significant cultural value.

In 2023, with support from the Xiaolongtan government, researchers visited Laole Village. The village, surrounded by mountains, is known for its tobacco farming and peach orchards. The villagers are primarily engaged in agriculture, particularly flue-cured tobacco, a major income source.

The Human Ancestors Temple, built during the Qing Dynasty, honors the mythological brother-sister pair who repopulated the earth after a flood. The temple, though small, is an important manifestation of Yi mythology and multicultural values. The temple's walls feature colorful plaques depicting the myth, and inside are statues of the human ancestors. The temple is also a site for annual rituals, including a ceremony on the 19th of the twelfth lunar month to worship the ancestors and another on the 16th of the first lunar month to pray for children.

The Yi villagers also practice the "cigarette box dance," a traditional ritual dance performed during sacrificial ceremonies. After the ritual, the community shares a meal, symbolizing unity and blessing. This sacred meal and the temple's ceremonies offer a vivid reflection of the Yi people's deep connection to their mythology and cultural heritage.

## **2. Comparatively Study the similarities and differences in the living myths of Yi "Brother-Sister Marriage after the Flood" and their related cultural traditions in four Yi villages in Kaiyuan City.**

This comparative study first collected and organized literature and other materials to establish a systematic comparative framework to help organize and analyze the similarities and differences between the comparison objects. The comparative framework mainly includes four directions: the contents of myths as a point of comparison, the similar folk belief practices related to myths as a point of comparison, the geo-socio-cultural environments as a point of comparison, and the transmission of living myths as a point of comparison.

## 2.1 To analyze the contents of myths as a point of comparison

Myths, as cultural vehicles, embody historical memory and collective identity. In the four Yi villages of Kaiyuan, the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth reflects both commonalities and regional distinctions shaped by diverse historical, cultural, and economic influences.

The core themes—flood disaster, sibling marriage, and human regeneration—reveal the Yi people's reverence for nature and philosophical reflections on life. Rooted in nature worship and ancestor worship, these myths intertwine religious and ethical teachings. Regional contexts, such as economic practices and the integration of foreign influences, contribute to their unique narratives. For instance, Beige Township exhibits both "brother-sister marriage" and "god-human marriage" myths, with some scholars suggesting their origins relate to rice farming and dry farming societies, respectively.

Symbolic elements like Duoyi fruit trees, golden bamboos, and tools like millstones and barrels underscore the relationship between nature and cultural heritage. These objects not only drive the story but also reflect the influence of geography and production methods on local perceptions of the natural world.

The theme of sibling marriage conveys moral and ethical lessons, emphasizing respect for nature and collective well-being over individual desires. This narrative embodies the Yi value of self-sacrifice for communal survival, particularly during post-disaster recovery. By extending familial bonds to symbolize ethnic unity, the myth promotes mutual assistance and cooperation among groups, fostering collective survival and cultural resilience.

Although myths are primarily transmitted orally, variations exist due to regional differences and narrators' perspectives. Yet, the core narrative remains consistent, reflecting the unity of Yi culture and its adaptability to changing times. These myths not only preserve cultural values but also offer profound insights into humanity's relationship with nature and community.

## 2.2 To Analyze the Similar Folk Belief Practices Related to Myths as a Point of Comparison

Folk beliefs and customs are deeply intertwined with myths, providing a practical and social extension of their narratives. In the four Yi villages, these practices bring mythological content into everyday life, serving as a means of religious expression, community cohesion, and cultural preservation. Across the villages, ancestor and nature worship emerge as central themes, reflecting the Yi people's reverence for their mythical figures, ancestral spirits, and natural surroundings. Rituals such as Zongshe Village's "Nashetang" ancestor worship, Pipo Village's "Pujida" woodcarving ceremonies, and Laole Village's rituals at the Human Ancestors Temple highlight the enduring cultural importance of these beliefs. Similarly, natural elements like the loong tree in Beige Township and the sharp-blade grass in Pipo Village connect the myth of the flood to the community's relationship with nature.

While the villages share core themes, the forms and interpretations of their rituals vary significantly, shaped by regional history and cultural influences. In Beige Township, loong rituals emphasize the continuity of primitive worship practices, symbolizing the transition from clan to family societies. Zongshe Village integrates Yi and Han cultural elements, as seen in its fire god worship alongside traditional ancestor ceremonies. Pipo Village's practices are closely tied to funerals, with rituals like "Pujida" directly echoing the flood myth. In Laole Village, the Human Ancestors Temple hosts vibrant, inclusive rituals that incorporate dance, music, and symbolic offerings such as Huagao rice cakes, fostering both religious and communal ties.

## 2.3 To Analyze the geo-socio-cultural environments as a Point of Comparison

Myths do not exist in isolation but are deeply rooted in a specific geographical environment and social and cultural context. At the same time, the historical development of ethnic groups in the context of Dian culture, the evolution of ethnic mythological thinking and aesthetic consciousness, the deep-



seated needs of the socio-political context, changes in social and family structures, and the blending of diverse cultures have all combined to shape the formation and evolution of mythological stories.

The geographical and socio-cultural environment of the four Yi villages in Kaiyuan not only contains a common cultural core but also displays distinctive and diverse characteristics. First, the myths of these villages are mostly centered on ancestor worship and nature worship, relying on the traditional agrarian economy and a relatively closed ecological and cultural context, continuing the unique traditions of the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth and proto-culture. Second, due to the differences in the geomorphological characteristics, degree of cultural integration, and social structure of each village, the content of the myths and forms of belief shows great diversity. This diversity not only reflects the specific influence of geography and culture but also demonstrates the process of adaptation and dynamic change of Yi culture in different regions.

## 2.4 To analyze the transmission of living myths as a point of comparison

Living myths refer to those myths that are constantly performed, passed down, and closely integrated into contemporary social life. The transmission of the living myths of the Kaiyuan Yi ethnic group's "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myths not only relies on the traditional oral method but is also deeply embedded in social life and production. The transmission of myths in each village is closely integrated with religious sacrificial activities or family rituals, and through intergenerational transmission, the liveliness and flexibility of the myths are maintained.

In Beige Township, myths are passed down through the recitation of Beima; in Zongshe Village, tradition is maintained through family rituals; in Pipo Village, they are practiced through Yi scriptures and religious ceremonies; and in Laole Village, myths are passed down through activities such as the Human Ancestors Temple Fair. Whether through the addition of variant texts or the simplification of content, each village has retained the core national spirit and cultural symbols in the transmission of myths. Each village has its own characteristics and strategies for the materialization and artistic expression of myths.

In modern society, these mythical cultures continue to evolve with the times. Young local Yi people are passionate about trying to pass on and interpret the spirit of the myths through a variety of modern media and sociocultural changes (such as intangible cultural heritage protection, cultural promotion, and tourism development) so that these ancient cultural treasures can flourish in the modern world.

## DISCUSSION:

The myths of "brother-sister marriage after the flood" in Kaiyuan City's Yi ethnic minority areas serve as cultural carriers, deeply embedding historical memory and ancestral beliefs into the region's identity. These myths symbolize the origin of Yi ancestors, expressing reverence for life and nature while reflecting the social, geographical, and cultural dynamics of their formation. They reveal a profound connection to Kaiyuan's stable natural environment, historical ethnic migrations, and the socio-cultural evolution of its diverse communities.

The myths are distributed across two cultural spheres: the original minority cultural circles in the eastern high-altitude mountains and the Yi-Han mixed cultural areas in the northwest. While rooted in traditional agrarian lifestyles, changes in geographical environments and social structures pose challenges to their transmission. Nevertheless, the myths have adapted, transitioning from oral traditions to encompass rituals, beliefs, and modern interpretations, maintaining their relevance as markers of Yi identity and collective memory.

A comparative analysis of myths across the four villages—Beige Township, Zongshe, Pipo, and Laole—reveals both shared themes and distinct regional expressions. Common elements such as ancestor worship and nature reverence unify the narratives, while differences in ritual forms, symbolic objects, and festival timing highlight regional adaptations. For example, Beige Township emphasizes nature worship through loong rituals, while Pipo focuses on ancestor worship tied to

funerals and mythological woodcarvings. Laole Village uniquely integrates myth with its Human Ancestors Temple, blending Yi and Han cultural influences in vibrant community rituals.

These myths are deeply entwined with folk beliefs, where rituals not only celebrate ancestral and natural connections but also foster community cohesion. The myths reflect the Yi people's creative responses to their environment, their evolving aesthetic consciousness, and their strategies for preserving cultural heritage. Modern efforts by younger generations to reinterpret and promote these traditions through media, tourism, and intangible cultural heritage initiatives ensure the continued vitality of these ancient narratives in a rapidly changing world.

In the context of civilization, the narrative of the Kaiyuan Yi myth about a brother and sister marrying and reproducing offspring does not really accord with modern ethical concepts and social phenomena. However, we do not advocate close marriage through myths but rather use them to convey ethnic memory, spirit, and customs. The myths themselves reflect the Yi ancestors' thinking about the origin of mankind, an idea that can be traced back to the family structure of blood marriage in primitive society—one of the important ways in which early humans solved the problems of survival and reproduction. In subsequent transmission, myths not only assume the functions of cultural inheritance, moral education, and religious belief but also demonstrate the role of cultural adaptation and innovation in the face of the challenges of modernization and globalization.

By examining these myths through comparative and interdisciplinary lenses, this study highlights the dynamic interaction between tradition and modernity, underscoring the resilience and adaptability of Yi cultural heritage in the context of broader societal transformations.

### **Recommendations:**

**Systematic Cultural Protection:** Integrate the Yi "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth into broader intangible cultural heritage protection systems. This includes safeguarding oral traditions, folk rituals, and related artistic expressions. Special attention should be paid to ensuring that these cultural practices are not excluded or misinterpreted as "superstition."

**Modernization and Public Awareness:** Utilize modern communication technologies and multimedia platforms to make the myths more accessible, especially to younger generations. Through documentaries, digital exhibitions, and online platforms, the rich cultural significance of these myths can be communicated in ways that resonate with contemporary society.

**Cultural Tourism and Economic Development:** Leverage the unique aspects of Yi mythology to enhance local tourism. Develop cultural products and tourism projects that incorporate the "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth, helping to create a sustainable model where cultural preservation and economic growth go hand-in-hand.

**Cultural Identity and Education:** Incorporate the themes of these myths into education systems, using them to reinforce national spirit and cultural self-confidence. Promoting these myths in schools and local communities can strengthen cultural identity and intergenerational continuity.

### **Further Research Recommendations:**

**Comprehensive Fieldwork and Documentation:** To better understand the evolution and transmission of the myth, extensive fieldwork, archival research, and collection of oral histories are essential. This will help clarify the mechanisms through which the myth is passed down, especially in the context of the changing geographic, historical, and social environment in Kaiyuan.

**Study of Cultural Integration and Transmission:** Investigate how the Yi "brother-sister marriage after the flood" myth has adapted in the context of cultural exchange with neighboring Han and other ethnic groups. Particular attention should be paid to how the myth has been reshaped through interactions with other religious practices, rituals, and belief systems, especially the case in the northwest of Kaiyuan, where Yi and Han cultures blend.

**Ecological and Ethical Perspectives:** Explore the relationship between the myth and ecological values, such as harmony between humans and nature. Research could focus on how these myths have informed local environmental practices and ethical values, with particular attention to the role of myth in addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

**Interdisciplinary Research Collaboration:** Foster collaboration across disciplines—such as ethnology, anthropology, sociology, and religious studies—to gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism and significance of the myth. Comparative studies with similar myths in other cultures, particularly in the Central Plains of China, would enrich our understanding of the broader mythological themes and their commonalities across regions.

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