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Cross-Disciplinary Networks of Minnan Baosheng Folk Activities and the Construction of Chinese Emotional Communities

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Abstract: Baosheng folk activities originated from the medical ethics and legendary deeds of Wu Dao, a renowned Minnan physician in the Northern Song Dynasty. During the Southern Song, the cultural activity centres of Qingjiao and Baijiao served as primary sources, and Minnan immigrants from the Minnan region during the Ming and Qing dynasties spread to Southeast Asia, forming a cross-disciplinary cultural network connected by "transmission—exchange—root-seeking". This article investigates how this folk activity continues to function under conditions of geographical isolation and social change today in three ways: historical dissemination, network structure, and emotional practice, evolving from the spiritual support system of the early immigrants into a significant carrier of contemporary Chinese people's emotional communities. Mechanisms such as social activities, cultural festivals, parades, and sharing of traditional Chinese medicine culture effectively activate collective memory, strengthen root-line identity, and promote deep ethnic emotional bonds. In the context of integrated development in Chinese communities, Baosheng folk activities can maintain the cultural inheritance of the same origin and also offer sustainable folk avenues for people-to-people exchange.

Keywords: Baosheng Folk Activities; Cross-Domain Network; Transmission and Exchange; Chinese Emotional Community; Minnan Cultural Exchange

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1. Introduction

Folk activities have always played an irreplaceable role in the deep historical and cultural ties of southern Fujian. They serve as both the spiritual pillar for people to pray for peace and blessings in daily life, and the bond of emotional identification within the Chinese community. Baosheng folk customs, also known as Dadao civic customs or Wuzhen folk customs, are among the most representative traditional medical ethics practices and local cultural activities in southern Fujian. Their origins in the Northern Song Dynasty followed official recognition and folk dissemination during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, eventually forming a cross-regional network rooted in Fujian and branched overseas activity sites [1]. According to relevant statistics, hundreds of venues for Baosheng folk activities are held in Southeast Asia and other regions, with millions of participants, making it an important folk cultural activity in Chinese communities. The dissemination and development of these activities bear witness to the historical overseas expansion of Minnan people, and also testify to the formation of emotional community construction practice spaces in contemporary Chinese exchanges

After the restoration of folk exchanges, Baosheng folk activities quickly revived and strengthened cross-domain interaction. Overseas activity groups formed groups to visit Baijiao and Qingjiao for source exchanges and roots, source teams toured abroad, and the Baosheng Tzu Chi Cultural Festival was continuously held, forming a multi-level cultural network. This network is not simply a ceremonial performance but a combination of multiple elements including culture, medicine, and tourism, serving as a bridge connecting the hearts of the Chinese people. This article mainly reviews the historical context and cross-domain network structure of Baosheng folk activities, analyzes the emotional connection mechanisms and significance of Baosheng folk activities among Chinese people, and explores their practical value in the integrated development of Baosheng folk activities in the new era

2. The Origins of Baosheng Folk Activities and the Transmission Paths of Fujian and the Taiwan region

2.1 The Formation of Wu Da's Cultural Practice and the Establishment of the Source System

The prototype of Baosheng folk activities is the famous Northern Song physician Wu Hui. Wu Hui, courtesy name Huaji and sobriquet Yunzhong, was born on the fifteenth day of the third lunar month in the fourth year of Taiping Xingguo under Emperor Taizong of Song (979), and died on the second day of the fifth lunar month in the third year of Jingyou under Emperor Renzong (1036), at the age of fifty-eight. His ancestral home was Baijiao Village, Jishanli, Tong'an County, Quanzhou Prefecture, Fujian, which is now Baijiao Village, Jiaomei Town, Zhangzhou Taiwanese Business Investment Zone. Wu was skilled in internal and external medicine, acupuncture, and materia medicinal medicine, healing people during epidemics in both Zhangzhou and Quanzhou, earning the reputation of a divine doctor[2]. He remained vegetarian throughout his life and never married, often gathering herbs, refining elixirs, cultivating Taoism, and taking on disciples by the Longqiu Pit in Mingling Mountain, east of Qingjiaoqi. In the third year of Jingyou, Wu Bo fell off a cliff while gathering herbs in the mountains and passed away. The people, moved by his virtue, first built a statue at Longqiu Nunnery in Qingjiao to commemorate him, and later established a shrine in Baijiao to worship him

During the Southern Song period, Wu Wan's cultural practices were officially recognized and gradually institutionalized. In the twenty-first year of Shaoxing (1151), Minister of Personnel Yan Shilu petitioned the court to build activity venues at Qingjiao and Baijiao. In the second year of Qiandao (1166), the court granted the name Ciji, and in the first year of Chunyou (1241), it was decreed to change to palace-style buildings, forming a coexisting layout with the eastern center of Qingjiao and the western center of Baijiao. Qingjiao was the place where Wu Wan practiced alchemy, cultivation, and transcendence, while Baijiao was his birthplace. Together, they formed the main space for folk activities related to Baosheng[3]. Throughout the dynasty, the imperial court repeatedly recognized them, from Marquis Zhongxian and Yinghui Marquis to Baosheng, developing this practice from a local medical virtue practice into a widely influential folk cultural activity. The activities mainly include prayers for peace and medical treatment, consultations on traditional prescriptions, parade ceremonies, and birthday celebrations. The core spirit is Tzu Chi's benevolence, encouraging good and avoiding evil, respecting the elderly and caring for the young, closely connected to traditional Chinese medicine culture, and serving as an important spiritual and cultural practice in the daily lives of Minnan residents

2.2 Spread in the Taiwan region Driven by Minnan Migration

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, Minnan people traveled overseas on a large scale to cultivate and trade, and Baosheng folk customs spread across the sea with immigrant groups. The sea crossing was dangerous, and early overseas conditions such as humid and hot climate, epidemics of miasma, and lack of medical resources made Baosheng folk customs an important cultural carrier for immigrants to express their wishes for health and safety.

The development of overseas Baosheng folk activities is closely linked to the formation of early Minnan immigrant societies. After immigrants settled there, these activities also developed. Local Baosheng folk activity spaces gradually formed. The commemorative statues of related activity centers originated from Baijiao, Fujian, with a Baijiao Pavilion built in front of the center to express remembrance of the original homeland. Since then, local root-seeking celebrations have emerged to continuously transform the immigrant historical memory into participatory and perceptible cultural practices through ritualised spatial alteration and ancestral land pursuit.

During the height of migration in the Qing Dynasty, people from Tong'an and Zhangzhou in Quanzhou set up activity bases at Baijiao and Qingjiao, respectively. Due to the large number of Minnan immigrants in early Southeast Asia, Baosheng folk activities gradually formed a relatively concentrated distribution of venues. As society has developed, the number of overseas Baosheng folk activity venues has increased and changed from cultural spaces with strong ancestral home characteristics to cultural symbols commonly owned by Minnan ethnic groups in all regions.

At the same time, Baosheng folk activities were also spread by Minnan merchants and immigrants, reaching Chinese activity areas in Singapore, Malaysia, and other places, and had some influence. The dissemination structure of Baosheng folk activities is "source—foundation point—transmission point", and various regional activity sites are connected through cultural inheritance and root-seeking exchanges. Transmission is both a cultural inheritance of migration history and a reproduction of hometown memories in new places [4].

2.3 The Cross-Domain Communication Logic of "Distribution — Establishment of Points — Root-Finding."

In terms of dissemination mechanisms, Baosheng folk activities do not spread from the origin to abroad in a one-way manner; rather, they have formed a cross-domain network with continuous feedback. Transmission addresses the problem of building cultural spaces in various places, creating sites for the localisation of cultural organisations, and continuously reinforcing the connection between activity areas and their origins through exchange and root-seeking. Thus, the activity points in different areas have their own features and are connected by common origins, popular cultural icons, and shared performances.

The diffusion mechanism of Baosheng folk activities has strong network expansion. Overseas activity sites complete cultural localisation in the local society and maintain contact with Fujian sources through regular exchanges, celebrations and interpersonal interactions, thus forming a cycle of localisation, reconnection and re-localisation. Thus, cross-domain networks are no longer just static relationships between places, but have become dynamic cultural networks maintained by cultural ties, geographic ties, blood ties, and interpersonal relationships.

3. Composition and Operational Mechanisms of Cross-Domain Networks

3.1 Inter-Point Network Structure Centered on the Source

Minnan Baosheng folk activities are not a closed, one-centered cultural system; over time, they have formed clear origins and layered cross-regional networks. The Qingjiao Tzu Chi Center and Baijiao Tzu Chi Center are the two main source spaces of this activity system. Many overseas venues carrying out Baosheng folk activities maintain contact with the source through transmission and incense sharing, exchanges, and root-searching. National intangible cultural heritage representative project materials show that Baosheng folk activities include celebrations, exchanges, prayers for prescriptions, parades, and many other folk activities. Their transmission has long extended beyond Fujian Province and has extended to Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

From the perspective of network structure, the source serves to "confirm the source" and "impart cultural meaning," while local activity points serve to implement culture, organize participants, and maintain daily practice. The relationship between the two is not a simple hierarchical relationship but continuously generates interaction through cultural carriers, commemorative statues, performances, and personnel exchanges. Places with long histories and significant social influence in Southeast Asia serve not only the function of celebrations in local societies but also venues for organizing participants, preserving performance traditions, and conducting cultural activities. Thus, a network structure has formed with hierarchical levels of source, important activity points, local activity points, and participants.

It should be noted that the stability of this network is not determined by fixed organizational systems, but by relying on shared cultural origins and long-established performance norms. Although different activity sites have their own organizational forms in local society, their shared respect for Baosheng culture, adherence to similar celebration customs, and participation in activities such as exchange and root-seeking continuously strengthen their cultural identity among each other. Therefore, the Baosheng folk activity network is characterized by weak organization and strong relationships, meaning formal organizational boundaries are relatively small, but due to the continuity of cultural ties, source identity, and performance practices, it forms a social network [5].

3.2 The Network Operation Mechanism of "Dissemination—Exchange—Root-Finding."

"Transmission — Exchange—Root-Tending" is the main mechanism for cross-domain dissemination and relationship maintenance of Baosheng folk activities. Transmission refers to the local activity site acquiring cultural resources from the source area and establishing an explicit cultural inheritance for local activities; communication is the movement of people, teams, cultural carriers and performance materials to reconnect previously dispersed activity sites; and root-seeking is returning to the source as a symbolic performance to reassert the existing cultural origins. These three mechanisms do not operate independently but are rather in a cycle of formation, maintenance and strengthening of connections.

Typical examples of the above mechanism are root-seeking festivals. Every year on the same day of the Chinese calendar, a traditional show will be held at the Fujian Baijiao Tzu Chi Centre. Although there is a distance, the origin and dissemination points of the culture can still maintain continuous links via performances. The phenomenon of "seeking roots across the sea" is even more remarkable in that it does not require actual trans-sea travel for cross-domain networks; even if they cannot return to the source directly, performances can use symbolic space transitions to affirm ancestral connections.

As the grassroots exchanges gradually resume, actual visits to Fujian for "root-tracing" have also become a practical way to connect with online relations. Recently, reports from Fujian have shown that the source of Baijiao Tzu Chi has organised numerous overseas activity groups and nearly a hundred visitors; activity sites in Southeast Asia and other places have established real-life connections with the source through celebrations and exchanges. Therefore, traditional cultural exchange is no longer limited to performances but also includes visits to activity sites, cultural exchanges and other forms of interaction.

At the same time, cross-domain networks have strong substitutability and resilience. When real-world human interactions are restricted by objective conditions, remote and substitute connections can help maintain relationships; Once human interactions return to normal, they can strengthen network connections through actual communication, root-seeking, and joint celebrations. Therefore, the continuity of the network is not guaranteed by continuous movement of people but relies on relationships based on shared performance, shared memory, and shared symbolism.

3.3 Cultural Festivals and Multi-Stakeholder Interaction Network Expansion

After entering modern society, the cross-domain network of Baosheng folk activities is no longer just a single line of connections between traditional activity points, but has gradually formed a cultural network involving multiple stakeholders such as activity points, participants, scholars, cultural institutions, and social organizations. Cultural festivals act as a "network amplifier" to spread activities that were previously confined to cultural areas across the public sphere of culture.

Recently, activities related to the Cross-Strait (Zhangzhou · Baijiao) Baosheng Cultural Festival have also drawn the joint participation of experts, scholars, overseas Chinese and representatives from the activity sites. The activities include celebrations, academic seminars, folk customs exhibitions, Chinese herbal science popularisation and free clinic services. There are now more types of cultural festivals and richer contents for these celebrations than before. They are not only the end of a performance but also a place for all kinds of social groups to gather and interact.

Traditional Chinese medicine culture is closely associated with Baosheng folk activities. Baosheng folk activities include medical ethics practice, prescriptions and health prayers. Thus, free clinics and TCM knowledge exhibitions can convert the traditional idea of "saving the world and saving lives" into cultural activities that are accessible to and engaging for the public. The addition of areas for herbal medicine science popularisation and free clinic services at the Baijiao Cultural Festival is an extension of traditional folk customs into modern cultural service functions.

Therefore, Baosheng folk activities have formed a multi-level network structure composed of performances, cultural displays, knowledge exchange, and social services. Online participants are no longer traditional participants but various groups including cultural researchers, local residents, visitors, and promoters of traditional Chinese medicine culture. Traditional folk customs have shifted from relatively closed internal practice points to public cultural practices with functions such as cultural display, social interaction, and local cultural inheritance, making cross-domain networks more open and modern.

4. The Construction Mechanism of the Chinese Emotional Community

4.1 Activation of Collective Memory and Shared Cultural Identity

Baosheng folk activities can continuously serve as cross-regional connections, mainly because the historical memory they carry is continuous. Source architecture, commemorative statues, inscriptions, legends, and historical celebration performances together form a memory carrier that can be repeatedly accessed and reinterpreted. Especially the long-standing cultural relationship between overseas activity sites and Fujian's source has transformed the "source-branch transmission" relationship from a cultural genealogy into local social memory.

Collective memory is not a static preservation of historical materials, but is continuously reactivated through periodic activities such as celebrations, exchanges, and root-seeking. When participants enter the source space, attend celebrations, hear related legends, and view inscriptions, they actually complete the transformation from abstract historical knowledge to concrete cultural experience. Thus, historical memory is re-embedded in real life, passed down through generations and continued.

In 2008, Baosheng folk activities were listed as part of the second batch of national intangible cultural heritage representative projects, with project materials including their historical origins, celebrations, exchanges, prescriptions, and tours within the scope of protection. The identity of this cultural heritage will further deepen the public's awareness of Baosheng folk activities as carriers of historical and cultural inheritance, and provide an all-encompassing presentation of regional memories previously scattered in different places.

4.2 Performance Participation and Emotional Connection with Chinese People

The rise of emotional communities is not based on shared cultural symbols; rather, they are the result of shared participation in physical and emotional experiences. Communication, celebrations, the welcoming of the procession and parades are all highly participatory; participants perform similar actions and expressions at the same time and place in an organised way to create a sense of unity beyond individual experience.

The search for roots is shown in the long trip across the sea. Even if the participants do not travel to Fujian's source in person, their performances symbolically point to the Baijiao Tzu Chi Center and, through celebratory spaces, performance programs, and shared memories, achieve spiritual connection with the source. However, when the actual visit sites overseas are in Fujian for the exchange, the space will change into face-to-face social interaction. Therefore, a gradual process has been created by means of symbols, performance and real life.

Prescriptions, free clinics and cultural exchanges in traditional Chinese medicine have also brought emotional connections into people's daily lives. The "Tzu Chi" concept embedded in Baosheng folk activities itself carries meanings of rescue, charity, protection, and other social ethics. When traditional activities become real social services through free clinics and health culture promotion, these relationships are no longer merely symbolic in cultural spaces but have become social relationships between people. Emotional connections have also evolved from joint participation to joint participation and practice.

4.3 From Literary Connections to the Integration of Multiple Social Relationships

The cross-domain network of Baosheng folk activities has expanded from a single literary connection to multi-layered social relationships. In traditional society, connections between activity points were maintained through transmission of culture, cultural carriers, and shared celebrations. With the development of population movement, cultural exchange, and social organization in modern society, cultural ties are intertwined with geographical, kin, professional, and cultural identities.

A typical change is that the connections between activity points have shifted from "who transmits from where" to "jointly hosting cultural activities, academic exchanges, visits, and social services." In the Baijiao Baosheng Cultural Festival, experts, scholars, activity site representatives, and overseas Chinese all participate together, reflecting the development of the folk network from a single activity point to a multi-stake social network.

Therefore, the cross-disciplinary dissemination of Baosheng folk activities cannot simply be seen as a one-way spread of traditional culture from Fujian to overseas, but should be understood as a continuous process of "dissemination, localization, reconnection, and reproduction" in the social and cultural process. After overseas local activity sites accept the original cultural traditions, they combine with local society to form local celebrations with local characteristics. Practices such as exchange, root-seeking, and cultural festivals re-enter the common cultural exchange network of the Chinese community.

Through repeated interactions, Baosheng folk activities have transformed from traditional cultural networks into modern cultural networks.

On a deeper level, the significance it embodies is not merely expanding the transmission of Baosheng folk activities, but establishing a cultural mechanism that continuously generates shared memories, joint performances, and shared social practice. Shared Memory provides the historical foundation for emotional identification; joint performance offers a space for the expression and learning of emotions; and shared social services further strengthen these emotional connections in daily life. The three have influenced each other, and now the regional folk activities have formed emotional communities with shared memories, common practices, and continuing social ties.

5. Conclusion and Prospects

The cross-domain network of Minnan Baosheng folk activities centres on the sources of Qingjiao and Baijiao, and forms a Chinese emotional community through transmission and contemporary festival exchange. The network is both the cultural inheritance of historical immigrants and a spontaneous expression of contemporary folk identity. Activate shared memories, deepen the strong emotions, and build a platform for cross-domain communication. Baosheng folk activities are examples of cultural resilience and emotional strength in complex social relations, and true community construction begins with a shared spiritual world among the people.

Although the Internet is very active, there are also problems such as social instability, reduced interest among young people, and commercialisation. In the future, the focus of efforts will be on digitalisation, deepening cooperation in traditional Chinese medicine, expanding youth participation, and building cooperative networks with other Minnan folk customs. In the context of integrated development, Baosheng folk activities can serve as an excellent model for “cultural connection” and continuously enhance people-to-people exchanges. Their cross-domain networks show that folk cultural activities have the capacity for integration beyond regional boundaries and serve as an important cultural resource for the future of the Chinese community. By continuously exploring and innovating communication models, employing various channels and forms to motivate more Chinese people to engage in cultural exchanges, and strengthening the sense of belonging and pride in Chinese national culture, the value of folk customs will be further promoted. Baosheng folk activities are living cultural heritage; their cross-domain vitality is an excellent manifestation of the shared roots and origins of the Chinese people, and they also serve as a leading folk force for promoting peaceful development of relations. In the future, combine quantitative data with in-depth ethnography to study new forms of the Internet in the digital age and the corresponding benefits for Chinese communities.

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